Policies for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) at the University of Oulu

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1. DEFINITIONS

RPL refers to recognition of prior learning based on which a completed study unit or a part thereof is credited for a student. Recognition refers to a procedure for approving previous studies, practical traineeship, work experience or other prior learning as part of the degree, module or course being completed, for compulsory or optional studies. Recognition of prior learning is governed by the Universities Act (558/2009, Section 44), Act on amending the Universities Act (940/2017, Section 7 a), the Education Regulations of the University of Oulu, the policies for RPL at the University of Oulu and faculty-specific specifications to the policies.

Recognition may involve either substitution or inclusion. **Substitution** requires equivalence of contents, and studies can be substituted in part or in full. **Inclusion** refers to inclusion of prior learning as part of a degree as it is, in which case equivalence of contents is not required but the studies must be at a level that complies with the curriculum and they must correspond with the learning required for the degree.

Prior learning can be credited based on studies acquired in **formal** education (at higher education institutions), for which the student has received a certificate. Prior learning can also be credited based on learning acquired **non-formally** or outside formal education (for example, work experience, practical traineeship, positions of trust, or language skills).

The university can organise instruction that is part of the student’s degree in cooperation with another higher education institution or acquire it from another higher education institution\(^1\). Such studies (so-called **cross-institutional studying**) do not have to be processed through the recognition process; instead, the studies are included in the degree during the approval of the personal study plan (PSP).

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

The student always has the initiative in launching the RPL process (for credit transfer or direct substitutions). The student assesses whether they possess prior learning compliant with the degree’s learning objectives and whether they want recognitions on that basis. The student has the obligation to prove their prior learning. The student receives help from their designated teacher, personal study plan instructor or another party providing academic advice. It is recommended to apply for recognition as soon as possible at the beginning of the studies or as soon as possible after the studies to be recognised have been completed.

The studies to be recognised must be included in the degree or its module. The prior learning to be recognised must comply with the learning objectives of the degree curriculum or one of its modules or courses. Recognition may require supplementation of the prior learning. Students cannot apply for recognition of prior learning of courses that they have already completed.

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\(^1\) Act on amending the Universities Act (940/2017, Section 7 a).
Only students who have the right to study at the University of Oulu and have registered for the academic term may apply for recognition. Those who have been granted a right to study at the Open University or complete separate studies can apply for recognition based on previously completed studies (prior learning acquired in formal education) according to the policies approved by degree programmes, but only for the studies to which their right to study applies.

The recognition of prior learning for minor studies must be addressed to the faculty of the studies in question, except in case of a compiled module that can be attached to the degree as it is. Faculties only process credit transfer for students completing a minor subject module; in other cases, recognition of individual courses are processed in the student’s own faculty as other studies.

‘Minor’ refers to a module in a field or subject, usually basic and/or intermediate studies that are part of the degree. A minor subject module is usually 15–35 credits in extent and is compiled into a single module in the student’s degree.

A thesis\(^2\) is degree-specific. It is not possible to get credit transfer for the thesis that is part of the bachelor’s/master’s degree or for the associated maturity test; they must be completed at the University of Oulu. The thesis/dissertation of medical or dental degree programmes is an exception to this, and it can be credited in a manner separately specified in the curriculum. The rule does not apply to transfer students\(^3\). The study principles of international joint degree programmes are decided in the associated education contracts and curricula.

Recognition cannot be applied for eligibility-providing studies\(^4\) based on prior learning acquired non-formally, i.e. outside formal education. This can be deviated from with a separate decision made by the Education Dean on how practical traineeships of eligibility-providing studies may be credited.

Studies that are over 10 years old or incomplete are not credited for a bachelor’s/master’s degree. This can be deviated from with a separate decision made by the Education Dean regarding studies that deviate from this rule, i.e. that have an expiration period longer or shorter than 10 years. The deviation decision specifies the studies and their expiration period\(^5\).

The expiration period of a course is calculated from the course completion date. The expiration period of a module is calculated from the completion date of the most recently completed course of the module. Applications regarding prior learning acquired more than 10 years ago are not processed unless the Education Dean has made a deviation decision on a longer expiration period.

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\(^3\) ‘Transfer student’ refers to students who transfer their right to study to studies in the same or close field at their own university and/or exchange their right to study for studies in the same or close field at another university.

\(^4\) For more details, see the separate decision of the Education Dean of the faculty in question on the recognition of prior learning principles of eligibility-providing studies.

\(^5\) Courses with a longer expiration period may include, for example, a course in basic mathematics. Courses with a shorter expiration period may include courses with contents that change quickly due to new research.
of studies. Completed modules (such as entire minors) do not expire. The prior learning expiration period does not apply to non-formally acquired learning.

3. RESTRICTIONS ON THE NUMBER OF CREDITS

No more than a total of 90 credits worth of studies not previously attached to another degree may be accepted for a bachelor’s degree through recognition of prior learning. The corresponding limit for a master’s degree is 60 credits in total. The rule does not apply to transfer students.

No more than 25 credits (one module) of study modules (or similar) that are already part of another degree can be credited for a bachelor’s/master’s degree. Studies used for another degree can be credited for another degree at the same level6 (bachelor’s degree to bachelor’s degree or master’s degree to master’s degree) or from master’s degree to bachelor’s degree. Credit transfer from bachelor’s degree to master’s degree is only possible for courses or modules that could be part of a master’s degree anyway (such as entire minors). However, in 3+2 degrees, the same module or course cannot be part of both the bachelor’s degree and the master’s degree.7

4. RECOGNITION OF EXCHANGE STUDIES

When a student leaves for student exchange, they prepare a learning agreement in advance specifying the studies they plan to complete and how they will be credited. The agreement may be updated, and the student must have changes to the agreement approved by their own faculty.

For studies completed abroad, the student must provide, as a supplementary document of the RPL application, a transcript issued by the exchange university specifying the studies that the student completed acceptably at the exchange university. Studies are credited according to a learning agreement made before the exchange. Faculties are responsible for the equivalences of completed study units.

In Erasmus student exchange, credits granted by the exchange university correspond with the credits granted by the University of Oulu. Not all higher education institutions use the same ECTS grading scale. The grading scale used and its comparability with the ECTS grading scale is usually given in the transcript provided by the exchange university.

The student must provide, as a supplementary document of the RPL application, an account of the extent of the studies in credits and the number of study hours required for the credits, the grading scale used at the university and a link to an explanation of the exchange university’s grading scale on the university website. The student must keep all materials connected to the studies, including information on any credit conversion factor or the number of study hours.

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6 Universities Act (558/2009, Section 44).
7 For example, if both student’s degrees include a minor of 25 credits, the student cannot get credit transfer for a minor subject module that is already in the bachelor’s degree for the master’s degree. Advanced courses cannot be credited with courses from general, basic or intermediate studies.
required for the credits. If you need advice regarding conversion factor matters, please contact: international.office@oulu.fi.

5. RECOGNITION OF LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES

Language and communication education is also subject to the beforehand guidelines. In addition, matriculation examination and International Baccalaureate diploma programme grades can be substituted for language studies as follows:

- Matriculation examination grades ‘laudatur’ and ‘eximia’ can be substituted for a reading comprehension course (1.5–3 credits) in the language in question that is part of the degree.
- Students who have graduated from an International Baccalaureate diploma programme can substitute for the number of credits of English required in their degree programme (up to 8 credits).
- Language studies completed in general upper secondary school or International Baccalaureate diploma programme cannot otherwise be substituted for university language studies.

6. RECOGNITION OF STUDIES COMPLETED IN FORMAL EDUCATION

Studies can be substituted with studies completed at universities, universities of applied sciences and open universities. A student can apply for substitution when they have completed enough substitute studies that their extent equals the extent of the studies to be substituted, with a tolerance of one credit.

Eligibility-providing modules can be included in a degree such that they are mentioned in the degree certificate even if they have been attached to a previous bachelor’s/master’s degree. However, in such a case, they are not counted in the minimum extent of the degree being completed. The laws and regulations must always be consulted regarding the inclusion of eligibility-providing courses that were credited in a degree.

Recognition for studies for third-cycle degrees only applies to studies intended for the initial degree, which are appropriate for third-cycle studies and which the student did not include in the initial degree.

7. RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING ACQUIRED OUTSIDE OF FORMAL EDUCATION

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8 For example, a student completed a module of 5.5 credits at another university that has equivalent learning objectives as a 6-credit module of the University of Oulu. In such case, the 5.5-credit module can be credited for the 6-credit module at the University of Oulu. The principle also applies in the direction of fewer for more credits.

9 Decisions on the recognition of third-cycle degree courses are always made by the Graduate School, however.
Prior learning acquired outside formal education may come about in non-formal education (continuing education, courses, short workplace programmes or liberal adult education) or informal learning (work experience, positions of trust, hobbies or language skills).

The student must be able to describe and prove their prior learning so that it can be assessed. The prior learning to be recognised must comply with the learning objectives of the degree curriculum or one of its modules or courses. The prior learning acquired by the student is compared with the learning objectives of the courses or modules proposed to be credited. If the prior learning and learning objectives are equivalent, credit transfer can be granted partially or fully. Based on the materials submitted by the student, the decision-maker can grant credit transfer directly for the courses or modules or parts thereof, require the student to provide further evidence of the prior learning, require the student to supplement their prior learning or reject the application.

The further evidence can include, for example, an essay, presentation (to other students, peer review), interview/oral examination, portfolio and its oral presentation, writing an additional report/self-assessment, a written examination or RPL test.

8. APPLYING FOR RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

Opportunities for recognition of prior learning are addressed during PSP consultation and primarily discussed with the student’s designated teacher, PSP instructor or another party providing academic advice. This ensures that the recognition is considered in the personal study plan. Applications for recognition should be submitted well in advance of starting the studies to be substituted.

Applications for recognition if prior learning are submitted in the student’s e-services system (OSAT). Login to the OSAT system takes place at https://osat.oulu.fi with the university’s username and password. The required attachments, which depend on whether the recognition is connected to studies completed in formal education or non-formally acquired prior learning, must be attached to the application. All such attachments must be in PDF format.

For studies or prior learning completed/acquired abroad, the student must, in addition to the RPL application, submit an account of the extent of the studies in terms of credits or amount of work as well as the grading scale used at the exchange university.

Upon request, the student must provide the original certificates.

The recognition decision is made by a person designated by the Education Dean. The recognition decision-maker is the Education Dean of the faculty of the target of studies, the person in charge of the degree programme or the person in charge of the large module. Decisions on recognition must be made within one month of the submission of the application. Applications submitted in the summer months receive a decision by the end of September. The decision must indicate the portion of any further evidence as well as give a deadline for the presentation of further evidence. The final decision is made within one month of the presentation of further evidence.
An incomplete application that is not amended despite requests to do so will lead to a dismissing decision within one month.

9. NOTIFICATION OF RECOGNITION AND CREDIT TRANSFER

The student can see the recognition decision and its justifications in the OSAT system, and it is also sent to the student’s e-mail address. An approved or partially approved recognition is entered in the student information system, wherein the name, completion place, extent and grade of the completed study unit are entered in an extra field. If the student supplements their prior learning with an additional study attainment (such as a written or oral examination, essay, presentation, portfolio), it is recorded as a completed study unit of the University of Oulu.

Recognised courses and modules are marked ‘credits transferred’ in the transcript. A course or module is primarily graded pass. If the grading principle of the course or module to be credited is clear (for example, in case of an equivalent course at another university, graded on a similar scale), a numerical grade, which is the same as the grade of the course based on which transfer of credits is applied for, can also be used. However, special care must be taken to ensure that courses and their grades are always credited in the same way for all students.

The second national language is graded T (fair skills) or H (good skills). Transferred credits only stand out in the degree certificate when they are attached to the new degree as a module (for example, a minor: name, completion place and grade, if any, of the minor).

The student can see a decision dismissing or partly dismissing recognition, its justifications in the OSAT system, and notice of the decision is sent to the student’s e-mail address.

10. RECTIFICATION PROCEDURE FOR RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING DECISION

If the student is discontented with the decision, they can submit a free-form written request for rectification within 14 days of receiving notice of the decision. The student must submit the request at the faculty’s service address. The student must enclose with the request for rectification a PDF summary of the application exported from the OSAT system using the ‘Application summary’ function as well as the attachments previously attached to the RPL application. The documents must indicate the previous decision made by the party responsible for the studies. The party that made the RPL decision prepares a written response for the request without undue delay and provides it to the faculty’s Lead Expert for Academic Affairs. The student receives notice of the response.

If the student remains discontented with the decision and/or response, they can request a rectification to the Board of Examiners of the University of Oulu within 14 days of receiving

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10 In special cases, a student may be credited for part of a completed study unit: for example, the student is credited 3 credits for a 5-credit unit and must complete the other 2 credits. For more details, see the study information system manual.
notice of the response. Unless the student appeals for rectification to the Board of Examiners before the deadline, the decision remains valid and the necessary records are entered in the student’s information as laid down in the decision.

The student must submit the request for rectification to the Board of Examiners using an RPL request for rectification form. The form and the attachments must be sent to the address:

The Board of Examiners
Request for Rectification for Recognition of Prior Learning
Registry Office
P.O.Box 8000
FI-90014 University of Oulu, Finland

The request must clearly specify which point of the decision is being appealed and on what grounds. The Board of Examiners process the case and make a written decision without undue delay. The Board of Examiners may request an opinion from the party that did the grading.

The parties involved are informed of the decision of the Board of Examiners, which enters into force immediately. Any recognised studies are marked in the study records. No appeal may be lodged against a decision of the Board of Examiners (Universities Act, Section 84).

11. ENTRY INTO FORCE AND TRANSITIONAL PERIOD

These recognition policies of the University of Oulu supersede previous faculty-specific policies unless stated otherwise in the policies.

The decision will enter into force on 1 January 2019. The decision will be binding for faculties as of 1 August 2019; faculties can, if they so desire, apply their existing faculty-specific policies until then if they are more advantageous for the student than this decision.

Helka-Liisa Hentilä, Vice Rector for Education