

Policies for the Recognition of Learning at the University of Oulu

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1. INTRODUCTION

Identification of learning refers to a student striving to understand learning they have acquired and to structure it in relation to the learning competencies of their studies. **Recognition of learning**¹ (formerly known as recognition of prior learning) refers to the recognition of course attainments or learning demonstrated in other ways as part of a student's current studies, based on which an accreditation of a course attainment or part thereof is recorded for the student. The recognition of learning may include accreditation of previous studies, student exchange, practical traineeship, work experience or learning demonstrated in other ways as part of the degree, study module or course being completed for compulsory or optional studies. The identification and recognition of learning at the University of Oulu has been illustrated in Figure 1. The recognition of 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 and the Policies for the Recognition of Learning at the University of Oulu (1 August 2021).

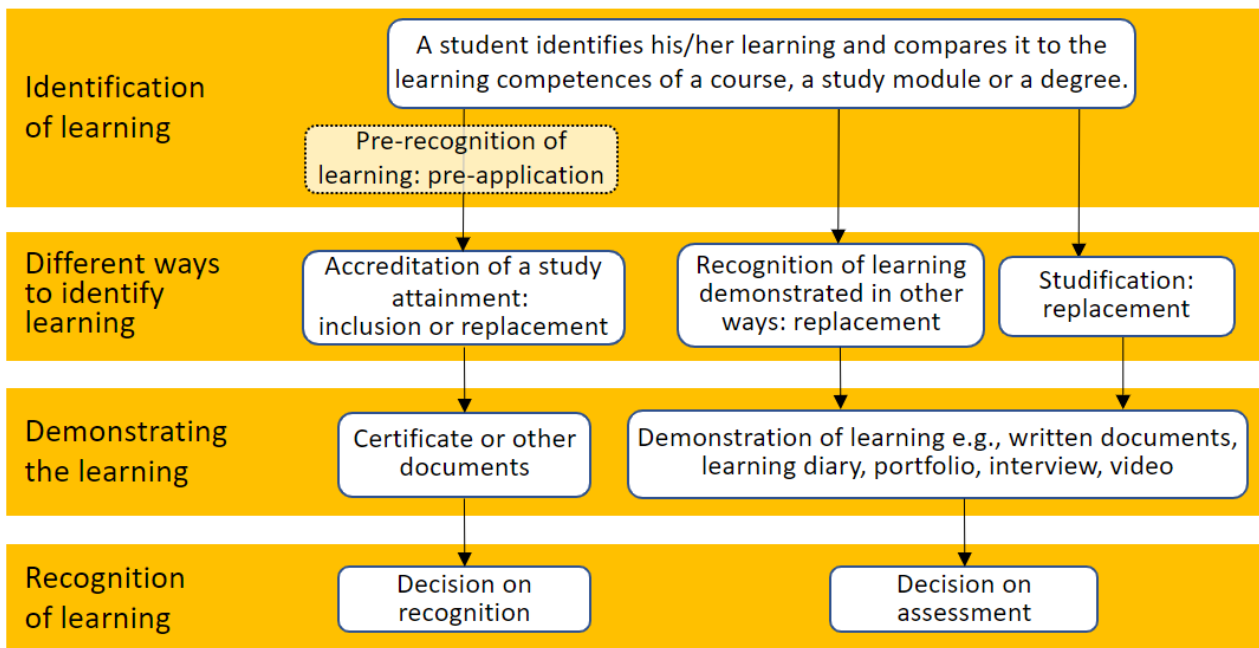


Figure 1. The identification and recognition of learning at the University of Oulu.

A student having the right to study at the University of Oulu and having registered for the academic term may apply for the recognition of learning. The procedure for the recognition of learning applies to all students who have the right to study (degree programmes, separate study rights, Open University students, specialisation programmes, specialist training and specialist training in dentistry). The recognition of learning can only be applied for the studies which the right to study concerns. The recognition of learning is not possible for a student who has been registered as absent or who is not registered. The study principles of international joint-degree programmes are decided in the associated agreements and curricula.

¹ Glossary of Education: 2nd edition, Ministry of Education and Culture, 12 February 2021.

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR THE RECOGNITION OF LEARNING

Only courses that have been successfully completed can be accredited. Students cannot apply for accreditation of courses that they have already completed. The grade of the accredited course can be raised by repeating the whole course.

One and the same course or study module cannot be recorded in more than one place within a degree programme². If one and the same course belongs to several study modules, the curriculum will indicate how a student who has already completed it will proceed in order to achieve its learning competencies and minimum scope. If no alternatives have been described in the curriculum, the form of completion will be agreed in a personal study plan (PSP).

A thesis³ is degree-specific. It is not possible to get accreditation for a thesis that is part of a bachelor's/master's degree or for the associated maturity test; they must be completed at the University of Oulu. However, skills demonstrated by a student in Finnish or Swedish language in a previously completed degree can be accredited. The study principles of international joint-degree programmes are decided in the associated agreements and curricula.

2.1 Expiration of studies

Studies that are over 10 years old or incomplete are not accredited for a bachelor's/master's degree. Applications regarding learning completed more than 10 years ago are not processed. This can be deviated from with a separate decision made by the Education Dean in regard to studies that deviate from this rule, i.e. that have an expiration period longer or shorter than 10 years.

The expiration period of a course is calculated from the course completion date. Completed study modules (such as completed minors, basic, subject or advanced studies, or completed degree programmes for which a certificate or a grade has been obtained and which have been locked) do not expire. Language studies included in a bachelor's/master's degree do not expire.

² One and the same course or study module cannot be part of both a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in 3+2 degrees, i.e. it cannot be part of both degrees within the same bachelor's and master's degree pair. For example, if both of the student's degrees include a minor of 25 credits, the student cannot accredit to the master's degree a minor subject module that is already in the bachelor's degree.

³ 'Thesis' refers to a bachelor's thesis, master's thesis, diploma thesis, licentiate thesis, doctoral dissertation or similar written dissertation.

2.2 Restrictions on the number of credits

No more than a total of **90 credits** may be accepted for a bachelor's degree through accreditation. The corresponding limit for a master's degree is **60 credits** in total. Exceptions to this include transfer students⁴, degree programmes leading to double degrees or open university path studies, the number of credits of which is not limited here. Previous studies forming the basis for the transfer of a transfer student are accredited as fully as possible when the qualification structure and learning competencies allow it.

Studies in one degree programme can be accredited to another degree programme of the same level⁵. Studies completed elsewhere can be accredited from a bachelor's degree to a bachelor's degree, from a master's degree to a master's degree or from a master's degree to a bachelor's degree. Accreditation from a bachelor's degree to master's degree is only possible for courses or study modules that could be part of a master's degree anyway (such as entire minors). Accreditations cannot be made from the degree⁶ on the basis of which the student was admitted, unless the course is compulsory according to the curriculum related to the student's right to study.

Course attainments previously accredited at another university are not accredited as such, but the fulfilment of the learning competencies is examined from the original attainment. However, a student may present the material of the previous positive decision on accreditation of learning as grounds for their application.

2.3 Accreditation of exchange studies

When a student leaves for student exchange, they prepare a learning agreement in advance in accordance with the requirements of the exchange programme and, after the approval of the exchange university, they submit a preliminary application to the University of Oulu specifying the studies they plan to complete during student exchange and how they will be accredited. The student must also update their PSP and have it approved accordingly. The agreement may be updated, and the student must have both the agreement and its update approved by their own faculty.

For studies completed abroad, the student must provide, as a supplementary document of the accreditation application, a transcript of records issued by the exchange university specifying the

⁴ 'Transfer student' refers to students who transfer their right to study to studies in the same or a close field at their own university, and/or exchange their right to study for studies in the same or a close field at another university.

⁵ Basic-, general- or intermediate-level courses cannot be used to accredit advanced courses. Cf. When studying for a degree or when completing a professional specialisation programme, the student may, as determined by the university, have studies that they have completed at another Finnish or foreign higher education institution or other educational establishment, counted towards the degree or specialisation programme; the student may also substitute previous studies for studies in the degree requirements or professional specialisation programme if the prior studies are of an equivalent level. Universities Act (558/ 2009, Section 44).

⁶ Open university path studies form an exception to this.

studies that the student completed acceptably at the exchange university. Studies are accredited according to the learning agreement or preliminary application made before the exchange. Faculties are responsible for the equivalences of course attainments.

In Erasmus student exchange, credits granted by the exchange university correspond to 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 of records provided by the exchange university.

The student must provide, as a supplementary document of the accreditation application, an account of the scope 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 related to the studies, including the indication of the number of study hours required for the credits.

2.4 Accreditation of language and communications studies

Accreditation grounds for the second national language:

- A course attainment of the second national language at a university is replaced if it corresponds to the language studies of the faculties' degree requirements in terms of scope, contents and level.

Matriculation examination grades and the International Baccalaureate diploma programme allow replacement of language studies as follows:

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

3. STUDENT IDENTIFIES LEARNING

The student must always take the initiative in starting the identification of learning process (replacement, inclusion or exemptions). Students are instructed to familiarise themselves with their own curriculum and learning competencies before starting their studies. The student assesses whether they possess learning compliant with the learning competencies of the degree's curriculum, a study module or a course and whether they want accreditations on that

basis. The student has the obligation to prove their learning. The student is entitled to receive guidance on how to apply for the recognition of learning. The student is given such guidance by their personal tutor teacher, the education designer of the degree programme or another member of staff providing academic advice.

It is recommended to apply for the recognition of learning as soon as possible at the beginning of the studies or as soon as possible after the studies to be accredited have been completed or other learning acquired. The accredited studies must be included in the degree programme or study module. In their PSP, a degree student must indicate the studies in which they claim to have achieved learning competencies. The recognition of learning may require supplementation of learning.

Learning can be accredited based on course attainments acquired in formal education (at higher education institutions), for which the student has received a certificate, and learning acquired in other ways (for example, work experience, practical traineeship, positions of trust, language skills). The following describes accreditation with course attainments, identification of other learning and exemption from language studies. The decision-making process for the recognition of learning in different cases is described in Chapter 5.

3.1 Accreditation with course attainments

Studies completed at universities, universities of applied sciences, open universities, open universities of applied sciences and foreign universities can be accredited by both replacement and inclusion. Accreditation of university studies completed elsewhere can be used to replace courses in the degree programme or to include study modules to form part of the studies. Learning to be accredited must comply with the learning competencies of the degree's curriculum, study module or course.

In the case of **pre-recognition of learning**, the student's home university decides whether studies to be completed by the student will be accepted as part of the student's degree programme through accreditation of course attainments. This can be utilised, for example, in exchange studies or summer studies.

Replacement requires correspondence in terms of contents with the learning competencies of a course or study module in the personal study plan. The student must evaluate and compare acquired learning with the learning competencies of the course in question. If the learning competencies have not been defined in sufficient detail, the similarity of the competencies, contents or required literature of the studies, for example, will be assessed. Studies can be replaced in full or part. Replacement refers to recording the completion of a course or part thereof accordant with the curriculum on the basis of the student's previous studies or other learning.

A student can apply for **full replacement** of a course when they have completed enough studies so that the shortfall is no more than one credit between the course attainment to be replaced in

full and the already completed course attainment, if the learning competencies of the course attainments match each other. The replacement is recorded in accordance with the number of credits of the course or study module being replaced.⁷

A student may also apply for accreditation for a course, even if the scope of acquired learning does not meet the full scope of the course to be replaced. The teacher of the course evaluates the possibility of completing the course. In this case, it is a question of **partial replacement**. The student may be required to complete an additional attainment if key learning competencies of the course would otherwise not be achieved. The responsible person of the course agrees with the student on how the student can demonstrate learning of the remaining part of the course.

Inclusion refers to the inclusion of studies completed at another Finnish or foreign university as an integral part of a degree programme, in which case equivalence of contents is not required but the studies must be at a level⁸ that complies with the curriculum and they must correspond to the learning competencies required in the degree programme. A course or study module completed elsewhere is accepted into the degree programme as it is. Course attainments completed elsewhere or previously to be included in the degree programme are recorded in the student's transcript of records in their original scope.

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 scope of the degree being completed. The laws and regulations must always be consulted regarding the inclusion of eligibility-providing accredited courses in a degree.

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 institution⁹. A cooperation agreement between the higher education institutions is needed. Such studies (so-called **cross-institutional studying**) do not have to be processed through the accreditation process; instead, the studies are included in the degree during the approval of the personal study plan.

3.2 Identification of other learning

Learning acquired outside formal education may come about in non-formal education (continuing education, courses, workplace training or liberal adult education) or informal learning

⁷ For example, if a student has completed a course attainment of 4 credits and they want to replace a course attainment of 5 credits, the student's accredited course attainment is recorded as having a scope of 5 credits. Correspondingly, the replacement cannot exceed the scope indicated in the curriculum for the course attainment being replaced. For example, if a student has completed a course attainment of 6 credits and they apply for a replacement of a course attainment of 5 credits, the replacement is recorded with a scope of 5 credits. Transfer students are an exception to this. It is recommended that all their credits be transferred in full.

⁸ The level of studies refers to the requirement level of university studies, such as basic, subject or advanced studies as per the requirement level of the qualification structure.

⁹ Act on Amending the Universities Act (940/2017, Section 7 a).

(work experience, positions of trust, recreational activities). The recognition of learning acquired outside of formal education is always **replacement**.

The methods and demonstration of learning acquired in other ways may have been agreed before the acquisition of learning. In this case, it is a question of **studification**. The starting point of studification is the studification implementation plan, i.e. documenting the demonstration of learning, prepared jointly by the student and the responsible person of the course during the studies. For example, the student can document on-the-job learning by observing work situations, preparing actual process descriptions of the tasks, development plans or reports.

In the implementation plan, it is important to describe learning required in the tasks, and how learning is linked to the learning competencies of the course and the literature used in the course.

From the perspective of the recognition of learning, the key is the knowledge and skills gained through experience, not just experience. The student must be able to describe in the application for the recognition of learning demonstrated in other ways how learning has been acquired and how it compares with the learning competencies of the course, and to prove their learning so that learning can be assessed. If learning is demonstrated with a certificate, it is essential that the student not only presents the document, but is able to describe what learning they possess based on the presented document.

3.3 Exemption from language studies

Exemption¹⁰ applies to language studies. A student may be exempted from the **language proficiency requirement of the second national language** if they have completed their schooling in a language other than Finnish or Swedish, completed their schooling abroad or if the student has been exempted from studying the second national language at lower levels of education (certificate of exemption). In addition, a student, for whom Finnish or Swedish is defined as the schooling language, may be exempted from the demonstration of skills in the second national language if they have, in view of the starting level requirement, a clearly insufficient number of successfully completed general upper secondary school studies in the second national language.

In such a case, the student is exempted from completing the studies in the second national language altogether, and the curriculum defines what studies the student needs to complete instead of these studies in order to achieve the degree requirement. The student must be informed that a person who lacks the course attainment on the knowledge of languages required of personnel in public bodies¹¹ is not qualified for governmental/municipal posts in Finland.

In addition, exemption from the completion of the language studies included in the degree can be recommended for special reasons and organised through individual study arrangements. Such

¹⁰ Government Decree on University Degrees (794/2004, Section 6).

¹¹ Act on the Knowledge of Languages Required of Personnel in Public Bodies (424/2003).

recommendations are based on the opinions of health care experts and an assessment by the study psychologist. The curriculum defines what studies the student needs to complete instead of these studies in order to achieve the degree requirement. The exemption is granted by Languages and Communication.

If a student has already previously completed studies in the second national language at another Finnish university or university of applied sciences, they can apply for accreditation (not exemption) in the normal way.

4. RECOGNITION OF LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

The recognition of learning and the assessment grounds defined by the university are based on a learning-based approach. When assessing accreditation, the focus is on the learning competencies described for the course or study module to be accredited. Learning acquired by the student is compared with the learning competencies of the course, study module or degree to be accredited. If the student's learning matches the learning competencies, the accreditation can be accepted. Curriculum work ensures that if already achieved learning corresponds to a course attainment to be accredited, the student is not required to complete the course attainment. Instead, the curriculum defines what the student can complete as an alternative. The recognition of learning must support the learning of new things and the progress of studies.

If the learning competencies have not been defined in sufficient detail, the similarity of the competencies, contents or required literature of the studies will be assessed.

The assessment of the studies and learning and the allocation of any supplementary studies required, and the treatment of students must be uniform, equal and predictable. The assessment is based on learning, not where or how learning was acquired.

In the ways of demonstrating learning, learning acquired by students can be utilised so that it also benefits other students and generates dialogue between the university, working life and the rest of society. The decision-maker for the recognition of learning defines more detailed procedures for the demonstration of learning.

If the accreditation decision states that the learning partly matches the learning competencies, it will be supplemented in the manner agreed with the teacher responsible for the course. The following methods, for example, may be used in supplementing:

- testimonial of service itemising learning
- demonstration of skill
- writing an article
- written output, e.g. essay, report
- interview, video or some other recording
- competence portfolio or diary and its presentation orally or in writing
- expert speech or presentation in teaching, for example

- written or oral examination
- self-assessment
- method conceived by the student

Based on the materials submitted by the student, the decision-maker can grant the recognition of learning for the study modules, course or parts thereof, require the student to provide further evidence of learning, require the student to supplement their learning or dismiss the application. An application without an appropriate attachment is returned to the student and the student is requested to complete it.

5. DECISION-MAKING PROCESS FOR THE RECOGNITION OF LEARNING

The following describes the decision-making processes for the recognition of learning as a whole (see Figure 2. Decision-making processes for the recognition of learning).

When a student applies for **replacement** (equivalence in terms of contents for studies in their PSP), the responsible person of the course assesses whether learning corresponds to the learning competencies of an individual course or courses. Course replacement is recommended by the responsible person of the course in the applicable faculty. In the case of a study module for which equivalence in terms of contents is applied for according to courses in the PSP, the responsible persons for the courses and/or study modules examine whether learning corresponds to the learning competencies. The accreditation or assessment decision in these cases is made by the person in charge of the student's degree programme i.e. Programme Director of the course in question or, in the case of language and communications studies, by the Service Manager of Languages and Communication.

In the case of **inclusion** of studies of a previous degree, pre-recognition of learning, exchange studies or a study module (which has been graded and locked, or there is a certificate for it) in the student's PSP, the Programme Director examines whether the study module can be included in the student's PSP and the studies accepted in the degree as is. In this case, no equivalence in terms of contents is sought according to courses. Instead, it is examined whether the studies comply with the curriculum and whether the learning competencies correspond to the learning competencies of the degree programme. The Programme Director is responsible for the fulfilment of the degree requirements.

In the case of exemption, the person responsible for the language and communication course recommends the exemption and the Service Manager of Languages and Communication makes the decision.

In unclear cases, the Programme Director may submit the application to the Education Dean, who makes the final decision on the recognition of learning¹². In addition, the education dean

¹² Cf. Education Regulations.

outlines the accreditation specifications of the faculty, indicating any details in deviation to the Policies for the Recognition of Learning at the University of Oulu. These faculty specifications are listed in Chapter 10.

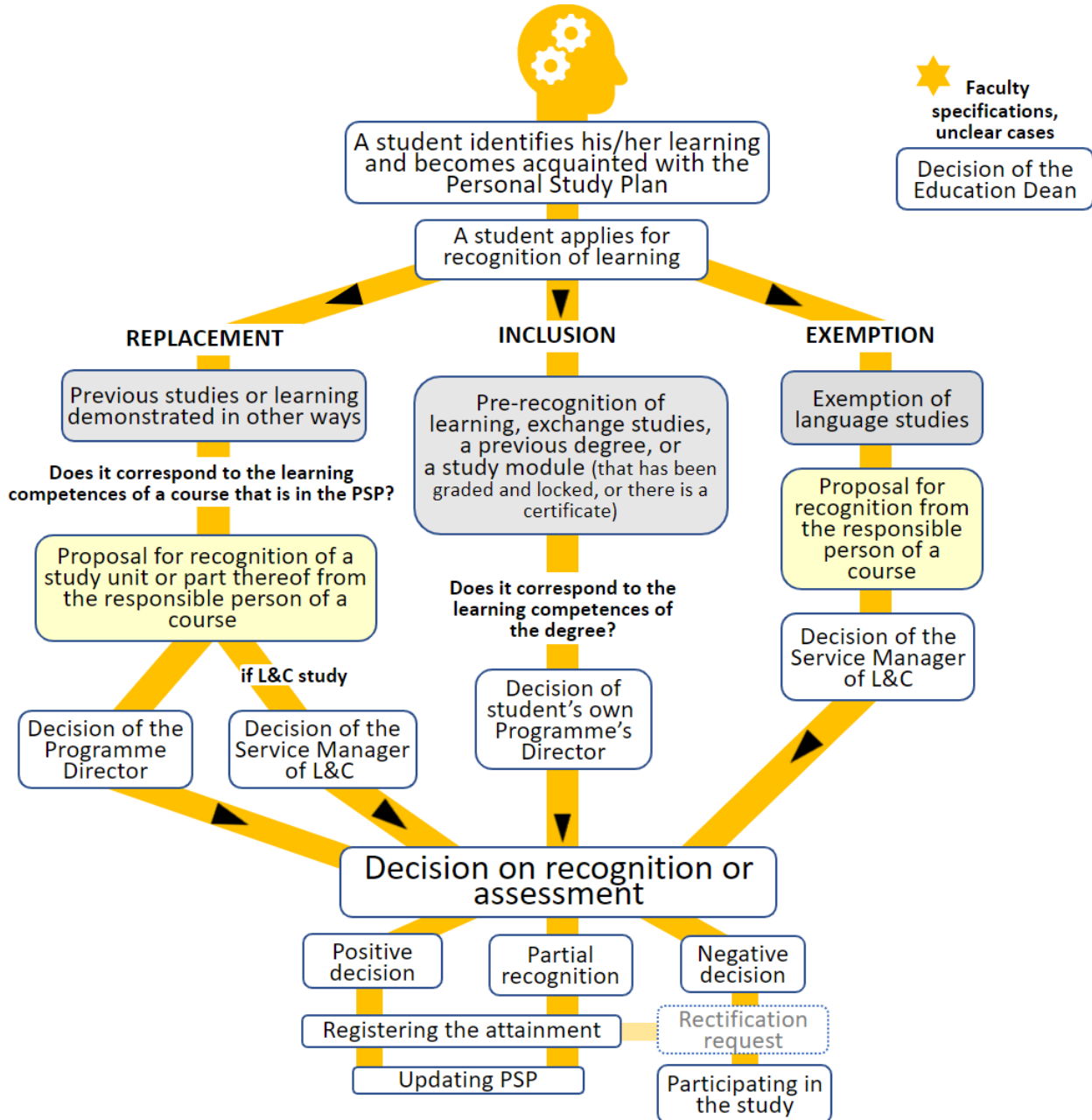


Figure 2. Decision-making processes for the recognition of learning.

6. APPLYING FOR THE RECOGNITION OF LEARNING

Possibilities for the recognition of learning are addressed during the preparation of a personal study plan and, as a rule, the student discusses with their tutor teacher, the degree programme's

education designer or another party providing academic advice. This ensures that the recognition of learning is taken into account in the PSP. Applications for the recognition of learning must be submitted well in advance of the start of the studies to be accredited.

An application for the recognition of learning is submitted electronically. The required attachments must be attached to the application. The required attachments depend on whether the accreditation relates to course attainments for which a certificate has been issued or to the recognition of learning acquired in other ways. Upon request, the student must present the original certificates.

Decisions on accreditation are 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 within one month despite requests to do so will result in a decision to dismiss.

7. PROCEDURE FOR THE RECOGNITION OF LEARNING

A decision on the recognition of learning is saved in the study information system, where the name, completion location, scope and grade of the completed course attainment are recorded. If a student supplements their learning by means of an additional course attainment, this is recorded as a course attainment¹³ of the University of Oulu.

Studies completed at Finnish universities, universities of applied sciences, open universities and open universities of applied sciences can be accredited with the original numerical grade if the grading scale used at the university is the same. Otherwise, the course or study module is graded with a **pass**.

If a foreign education institution uses the exact same grading scale or if the grading principle is clear (e.g. in the case of European higher education institutions, in line with the equivalences of the ECTS system), the original numerical grade may be used. Otherwise, studies at foreign education institutions are always primarily graded with a **pass**. Special care must be taken to ensure that courses and their grades are always accredited in the same way for all students. From the point of view of a student's legal protection, it is safer for the grade to remain exactly the same, or alternatively the course attainment is recorded with a fail/pass if the original grading scale is different.

¹³ A course attainment can also be partially replaced. For more details on this, see the study information system manual.

The second national language is graded numerically. The grades correspond to the attainment markings as follows: 1–3 = **T** (satisfactory skill) or 4–5 = **H** (good skill).

8. RECTIFICATION PROCEDURE FOR THE RECOGNITION OF LEARNING

If the student is discontented with the decision, they can submit a free-form written appeal within 14 days of receiving notice of the decision. The student must submit the appeal at the faculty's service address. The attachments that accompanied the application must be attached to the appeal for rectification. The documents must indicate the previous decision made by the party responsible for the studies. The party that made the accreditation decision prepares a written response to the appeal without undue delay and provides it to the faculty's lead expert for academic affairs.

If the student is still dissatisfied with the decision and/or response, they can appeal it to the Board of Examiners of the University of Oulu within 14 days of receiving notice of the response. Unless the student appeals to the Board of Examiners before the deadline, the decision remains valid and any accreditations and the necessary records are entered in the student's information as laid down in the decision.

The student's free-form appeal to the Board of Examiners is to be sent to:

The Board of Examiners
Registry Office of the University of Oulu
P.O. Box 8000
FI-90014 University of Oulu
Finland

The appeal 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 assessment.

The parties involved are informed of the decision of the Board of Examiners, which enters into force immediately. If an accreditation rectification is made on the basis of the decision, any accredited studies are marked in the transcript of records. No appeal may be lodged against a decision of the Board of Examiners¹⁴.

9. ENTRY INTO FORCE AND TRANSITIONAL PERIOD

The general policies of the University of Oulu are followed unless the faculty has described a deviating specification in this document.

¹⁴ Universities Act, Section 84.

These policies enter into force on 1 August 2021. These policies will follow a transition period until the adoption of the new system and the policies will be binding on the faculties as of 1 January 2022; i.e. the faculties may apply their own existing policies until then if they are more advantageous for students than these policies.

10. SPECIFICATIONS DEVIATING FROM THE POLICIES

The following describes the specifications that deviate from the above policies.

10.1 Faculty of Education

The detailed principles for the recognition of learning at the Faculty of Education are defined separately in the curricula and in the specification updated annually.

The Faculty of Education offers eligibility- and qualification-providing studies and study modules. Accreditation cannot be applied to eligibility-providing studies based on learning acquired non-formally, i.e. outside formal education acquired at a higher education institution. This can be deviated from with a separate decision made by the education dean on how practical traineeships of eligibility-providing studies may be accredited.

At the Faculty of Education, language studies cannot be accredited with grades of the matriculation examination.

10.2 Faculty of Science

Expiration of studies

In the case of the following studies, studies completed over 10 years ago can be accredited:

- Physical sciences: basic studies, common subject studies
- Mathematical sciences
- Biology: basic studies, subject studies, advanced studies and field courses of knowledge of species in the field of ecology

10.3 Faculty of Medicine

In the accreditation of foreign and second national language credits included in the degree at the Faculty of Medicine, it is required that the student has previous higher education level or equivalent language skills in the field of medicine or health sciences. Matriculation examination grades do not allow replacement of language studies.

10.4 Oulu Business School

Expiration of studies

Tax legislation is constantly changing and requires active updating of the subject, which means that the following courses are subject to a 6-year expiration period:

- Tax Law I
- Tax Law II
- Financial Statement and Tax Planning

Accreditation of exchange studies in the B.Sc. (Econ.) degree

Students studying for the Bachelor of Science (Economics and Business Administration) degree and majoring in Economics and Business Administration have the Global Perspectives module, which is scheduled for the autumn semester of the third year. The module can be replaced with exchange studies, if the studies completed during the exchange amount to 25 credits. The studies can be freely selected from among the courses offered by the exchange university. Of these, 15 credits must be in business studies, preferably courses at the subject studies level, and 10 credits may be in other studies such as languages.

Oulu Business School has specifications related to the accreditations of credits completed during the exchange.

10.5 Faculty of Technology

Expiration of studies

The following studies are subject to a 20-year expiration period:

- Chemistry: basic studies

10.6 Accreditation of doctoral studies

In doctoral studies, only compulsory courses defined in the qualification structure can be replaced. Exceptions to this are the doctoral training plan, steering group reporting and meetings and the Introduction to Doctoral Training course, which cannot be replaced with other course attainments. Elective general and preparedness studies cannot be accredited.

A scientific postgraduate course or a scientific meeting completed elsewhere are not accredited, but credits can be awarded in accordance with the process described on the Graduate School's website.

Studies from the eligibility-providing degree cannot be accredited for doctoral studies. Advanced studies not attached to a previous degree can be used to meet the study requirements of a doctoral degree, if the main supervisor and the doctoral student consider them appropriate for the doctoral degree in question. Similarly, licentiate degree studies can be used to replace science field-specific studies of the doctoral degree programme, if the supervisor and the doctoral student consider them appropriate for the doctoral degree. The accreditation process is not applied to the licentiate degree studies, but the studies are agreed upon in connection with the planning of the PSP.

A doctoral student starts the accreditation process by contacting the Graduate School. Accreditations of a postgraduate degree are decided by the dean of the Graduate School.