

Recognition and accreditation of prior learning (RPL)

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1 Summary

This guideline is based on Universities of Applied Sciences Act and the Degree Regulations of HAMK. This guideline defines and describes the process of the recognition and accreditation of prior learning as part of studies leading to Bachelor's and Master's degrees provided by HAMK University of Applied Sciences (HAMK). This document covers the concepts, principles, processes and responsibilities related to the RPL process. The students' instructions on how to fill in RPL application and the instructions for teachers and guidance counsellors on how to process the RPL application complement the principles of RPL mentioned in this document.

The document covers credit transfer of higher education level studies completed elsewhere during or prior to studying at HAMK, skills demonstration of learning acquired in some other than formal way and exemption from compulsory language studies.

To the extent appropriate, the guideline applies also to Open University and Study Path studies. The guideline does not apply to the School of Professional Teacher Education.

2 RPL definitions

Recognition and accreditation of prior learning (RPL) - The RPL process considers each student's prior learning, which corresponds to the learning outcomes described in the degree programmes' curricula and modules. The RPL process consists of recognition of prior learning, or lack thereof, and subsequent exemption from the compulsory language studies, validation of learning through skills demonstrations or transferring credits. How and where the student has acquired the learning is irrelevant in terms of starting the RPL process. The forms of acquiring learning (higher education/learning acquired in some other way) influence the ways in which learning is to be reliably validated. Recognition and accreditation focus on the student's actual competence and its verification.

FiNQF - National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules - The Finnish National Framework for Qualifications (FiNQF) classifies the qualifications, syllabi and other extensive competence modules on an eight-level scale. Bachelor's degrees are at level 6 and Master's degrees are

at level 7. Provisions on the Finnish National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules are laid down in Government Decree on the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules (120/2017).

Recognition of learning - Recognition of prior learning refers to measures that make it possible to accept knowledge, skills and competences acquired by students in different situations as part of their studies and degrees. It can also mean the recognition of the need for exemption from compulsory language studies when learning has not accumulated.

Accreditation of learning - Accreditation of prior learning means measures, and practices used to uncover, document and assess the student's recognised courses and learning achieved in other ways than completing higher education studies.

Higher education studies - Higher education studies mean studies and qualifications completed at another higher education institution (i.e. university or university of applied sciences) as verified by reliable documentation, such as certificates. Higher education studies belong to FiNQF level 6 (Bachelor's degrees) or level 7 (Master's degrees).

Competence acquired in some other way - Includes i.e. vocational upper secondary education and training. This also includes systematic and intentional studies in liberal adult education organisations, in-service training, etc., where studies are not included within the formal education system. Learning can also take place in daily activities related to work, family or leisure. In this case, learning is not systematic in terms of learning objectives, time spent on or support available for learning. Such learning is not usually certified.

At HAMK, we recognise and accredit leadership training in The Finnish Defence Forces and the scout training of The Guides and Scouts of Finland in all our Bachelor's degrees. The students demonstrate their acquired competences with skills demonstrations.

Work-based learning - Work-based learning is achieving the degree's learning outcomes through working alongside studies and doing this according to a plan to gain credits. The aim of work-based learning is the degree's learning outcomes. The work and the student's reflections from the work will be directed at those learning outcomes. Work-based learning is an optional way to study. In the field of technology, they have also used the term workplace learning to describe this learning method.

Credit transfer - Credit transfer means acceptance of knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through formal learning as part of a qualification being completed. The subordinate terms of credit transfer are substitution (of core or profiling competence studies in the curriculum) and inclusion (in personal profiling studies, optional studies/professional skills module). Inclusion is also used for partial credit transfers of modules.

Higher education level studies completed elsewhere may be transferred as credits towards the Bachelor's or Master's degree on the basis of a certificate. In addition, studies completed at the former post-secondary or higher vocational level may also be transferred as credits towards Bachelor's degrees if they match the learning outcomes of the degree.

Skills demonstrations - Skills demonstrations allow students to validate their knowledge, skills and competencies in line with degree objectives irrespective of where these were acquired. Competence could have been acquired e.g., in work placement or in scout training of The Guides and Scouts of Finland or in leadership training of The Finnish Defence Forces. The student creates a plan for the skills demonstration that the teacher must accept before the skills demonstration. Methods of skills demonstration include portfolios, work samples, interviews, or written or oral examinations. Learning validated through skills demonstrations is assessed as specified in the Guideline on Assessment of Studies.

Exemption from compulsory language studies - HAMK may grant exemption from the compulsory language studies (English or Swedish) if there are special grounds for it. For example, if the student has never studied that language in primary or secondary school, high school or in vocational upper secondary education and training. Also, if a student has studied the language, but the knowledge is so

poor that they cannot achieve the goals HAMK has set for languages, the student can apply for an exemption.

3 RPL process

The starting point for assessing eligibility for credit transfer is to fulfil the requirements of the specific degree learning outcomes/curriculum outcomes. The following chart shows the principles and the process of recognition, accreditation and exemption of learning.

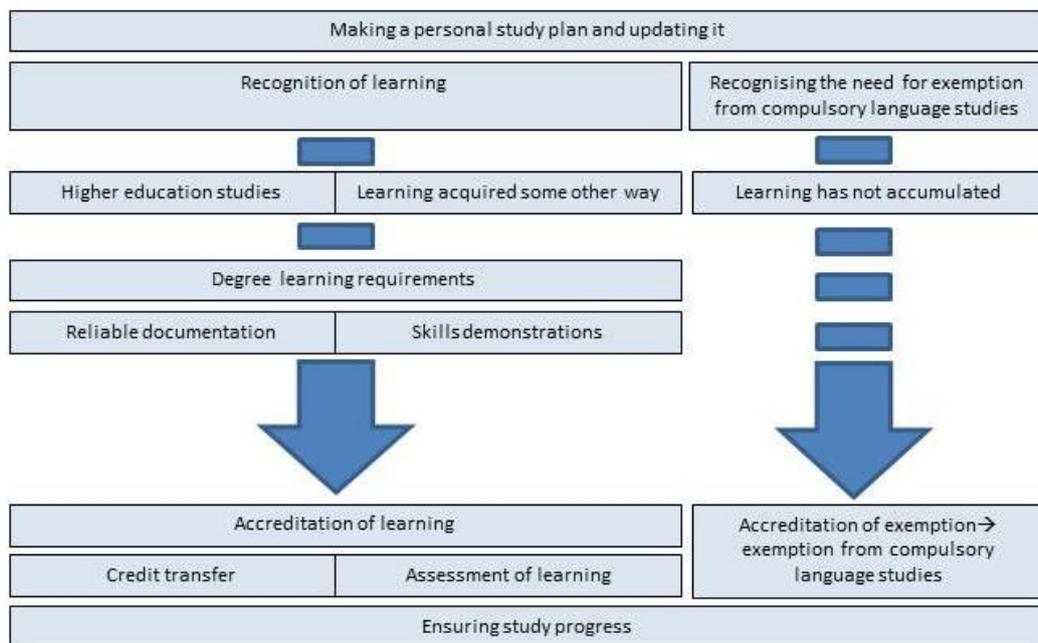


Figure1. Recognition and accreditation of learning

The RPL process starts as a part of each student’s personal study plan (PSP) process, when students assess whether they have any knowledge, skills and competences in line with the learning requirements of the degree being completed and whether they wish to have these recognised. As part of PSP guidance and performance appraisals, a counsellor appointed by the degree programme (guidance counsellor or teacher tutor) guides the students to assess their prior learning and the ways in which this could be considered as part of their personal study plan. Where necessary, the guidance counsellor guides students to make an RPL application in the RPL system of Pakki (student desktop).

The personal study plan outlines the studies to be completed at HAMK, the prior learning accepted as part of the degree through credit transfer or skills demonstrations and the competences that the student will acquire through work-based learning during their studies. The student will complete an RPL application for credit transfers, completion of studies through skills demonstrations and/or exemption from compulsory language studies. The student must enclose all necessary attachments to the application. If the application is for a skills demonstration, the student must attach a skills demonstration plan to the application. The student will complete the RPL application in the RPL system of Pakki (student desktop).

The transferability of studies taken elsewhere while studying at HAMK must be confirmed in advance by the guidance counsellor who will ask for approval from the head of degree programme, if needed.

During the RPL process, both the student and the guidance counsellor must make sure that studies are progressing, and the student is gaining enough credits every academic year.

The processing period of the RPL process shall not exceed 1 (one) month from the date of submission of the application to be processed. If the application has to be returned to the student for correcting or supplementing the information, the processing period shall be considered as starting when the application has all the information and attachments required for processing.

4 Credit transfer of higher education studies taken elsewhere

Studies taken elsewhere may be accepted as part of the students' degrees. These studies may be completed at another Finnish or foreign higher education institution or at some other educational institution if they are at the level of higher education.

Studies to be transferred must be assessed and completed to an acceptable standard. Students are obliged to prove the level, scope and contents of the studies. Students are also obliged to prove that studies taken abroad are comparable with the Finnish education system. Credit transfer is assessed in terms of the scope, requirement level, contents and completion time of studies and their correspondence with the learning requirements of the degree being completed. Degrees do not expire, but your skills and competences may become outdated unless you maintain or update them.

The student may apply for a credit transfer to substitute a whole module or a part of a module with their prior higher education studies. If the degree programme grants a partial substitution, the student will complete the rest of the module during module implementation or in another way agreed with the module teachers. HAMK will not award numeric grades for credit transfers. The guidance counsellor or teacher tutor will record studies taken elsewhere with the grade HYV and add a reference to the record that tells whether the credit transfer is a substitution or an inclusion, and what kind of studies it is based on.

Substitution refers to studies that students have already completed or are currently taking outside HAMK, which substitutes modules in the degree curriculum.

Inclusion means integrating studies completed elsewhere into the student's PSP as complete modules. The studies in question do not exist in the degree curriculum. In addition, HAMK uses inclusion for partial module substitution.

An exception to the above mentioned are CampusOnline courses, whose grades and credits will be transferred into the credit record as such via Puro credit transfer service. The student will make sure that these courses are suitable for his/her PSP by discussing it with the guidance counsellor before taking the courses.

The student fills in an RPL application with information about their previous studies. The student must enclose all necessary attachments to the application. When the application is ready, the student submits the application to the degree programme's guidance counsellor. In some cases, the guidance counsellor may return the application and ask for further information. The final decision on RPL will appear in the RPL system of Pakki (student desktop). If necessary, the student can file an appeal against the decision.

For further instructions on processing RPL applications (giving an opinion on a proposal, decision making and grading), see RPL processing instructions in HAMK Intra.

4.1 Communication and language studies

There are no field specific requirements for the RPL of language studies. If the student has completed compulsory Swedish studies (virkamiestutkinto) with accepted grades, the studies will substitute Swedish studies at HAMK as such, regardless of the year when these studies were completed. If the prior studies include fewer credits than Swedish studies at HAMK, the student must take other studies to replace the missing credits.

There are no field-specific requirements for the RPL of English or other communication studies. All higher education level credits for English and communication studies will be transferred towards the student's current degree being completed. If the prior studies include fewer credits than English or communication studies required for the degree, the student must take other studies to replace the missing credits.

Also, Finnish as a second language studies have no field specific requirements. If they are higher education studies, the credits must be transferred towards the degree as such.

4.2 Thesis

The Bachelor's thesis or Master's thesis cannot be substituted with credit transfers or skills demonstrations. However, the student does not have to redo the whole thesis, if a prior thesis is related to the learning outcomes of the degree being completed. In that case, the student may create a new thesis by complementing the prior version.

4.3 Studies completed during international exchanges

Before going on exchange, the students apply for approval of studies using the Learning Agreement form or they apply for approval of work placement with the Work Placement Agreement form. The students must keep their Learning Agreements updated during the exchange period and apply for approval whenever there are changes to their plans. The student is responsible for applying for credit transfer and the updated Transcript of Records must be attached to the application.

5 Skills demonstration

Students assess whether they have any knowledge, skills or competences in line with the learning requirements of the degree being completed and whether they wish to have these recognised through skills demonstration. The requirements of such demonstrations are based on the objectives in the curriculum / degree learning outcomes. Skills demonstrations may be given in written or oral form or as practical work assignments.

The student fills in an RPL application and depicts how they want to demonstrate their skills. The student must enclose all necessary attachments to the application. The student submits the application to the degree programme's guidance counsellor. The guidance counsellor may forward the application to the teacher responsible for the studies. Based on the RPL skills demonstration application, the teacher responsible for the course/module issues a favourable, partly favourable or opposing statement.

If a student gets a favourable or partly favourable statement from the teacher responsible, they demonstrate their skills according to the skills demonstration plan. If the student gets an opposing statement for their application, they take the module/course according to the curriculum.

During the skills demonstration, the assessor documents the demonstration material for assessment purposes and compares the student's knowledge, skills and competences with the learning objectives determined in the curriculum/ degree learning outcomes. Skills demonstrations are assessed according to the same criteria as module implementations. Courses completed through skills demonstrations are assessed in the same ways as any other studies. The teacher keeps the assessment material for one year after the skills demonstration.

The student fills in the skills demonstration application according to the student's RPL instructions. For further information on how to process the RPL application, see the teacher's RPL instructions in HAMK Intra.

The teacher uses the Guideline on Assessment of Studies for the assessment and archiving of skills demonstrations.

6 Exemption from compulsory language studies

HAMK may grant exemption from the compulsory language studies (English or Swedish) if the student has never studied the language or there are some other special grounds for the exemption. Also, if the student has severe dyslexia or they have studied the language, but the knowledge is so poor that they cannot achieve the goals HAMK has set for languages, the student can apply for an exemption. If the student is granted exemption, they must take other studies to replace the credits of the language studies.

If the student participates in the modules' language studies but cannot achieve the level of language skills required for the higher education degree i.e., get satisfactory grades from the coursework and/or pass exams, the student may apply for an exemption and also get the credits and a HYV grade from module participation.

The student fills in the exemption application according to the student's RPL instructions.

7 Reassessment and filing an appeal

Students not satisfied with the decisions concerning credit transfer, assessments of skills demonstrations or exemption may request reassessment or file an appeal against the decision. The student will ask for reassessment of skills demonstration from the teacher who assigned the grade. Reassessment of an exemption or credit transfer will be asked from the person who made the decision. Such requests must be made orally or in writing within 14 days of being informed of the grade/decision. The student shall be considered to have received the decision 24 hours after it was entered into the RPL system.

The degree programme processes all appeals and reassessment requests without delay. A student not satisfied with the reply may appeal to HAMK's Board of Examiners. Such an appeal must be made within 14 days of being informed of the decision or the teacher's reply to a reassessment request.

For further instructions on filing an appeal to the Board of Examiners, see the Degree Regulations.

8 Guidelines and instructions that complement this RPL guideline

- RPL instructions for students are on page www.hamk.fi >Students > Studying with us
- Instructions for teachers and guidance counsellors are in HAMK Intra
- Assessment of Studies -Guideline