



**Recognition of prior learning
and other competence (RPL)
at Tampere University, valid
from 1 August 2025**

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Purpose of the guideline¹

This guideline on the recognition of prior learning and other competences at Tampere University specifies the stipulations contained in the Tampere University Regulations on Degrees.

The purpose of this guideline is to:

- 1) describe the procedures whereby the recognition of prior learning and other competences – which are described in the relevant sections of the [Universities Act](#) and the [Tampere University Regulations on Degrees](#) – are applied at Tampere University;
- 2) support research and teaching staff, support services staff and other employees who work in study guidance and counselling as they identify, recognise, assess and accredit prior learning and other competences and perform credit transfer in practice; and
- 3) instruct students to act in accordance with the University's procedures in situations related to recognising and accrediting prior learning.

Faculties and other units that provide teaching may further specify this guideline. In addition to this guideline, concise instructions are prepared for the use of academic personnel and students describing the procedures included in this guideline from the different actors' perspectives.

Legislative background and scope of application

According to the Universities Act:

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 in another Finnish or foreign higher education institution or other educational establishment counted towards the degree or specialisation programme if the prior studies are of an equivalent level. The student may, as determined by the university, have their knowledge and skills attested in some other manner counted towards the degree or specialisation ([Universities Act 558/2009, Section 44](#) subsection 3).

According to Section 23 of Tampere University Regulations on Degrees, a student who is registered as present and holds the right to study at Tampere University may apply for credit transfer and the recognition of prior learning at any time during their studies. The recognition of prior learning procedure (RPL) concerns all students who have a study right (degree education, separate study rights, Open University students, specialisation programmes, and specialist

¹ N.B. This is an unofficial translation. In the event of any discrepancies between the Finnish and English versions, the original Finnish version shall prevail.

training programmes in medicine, dentistry, and veterinary science). Credit transfers cannot be made for students who are enrolled as absent or who are not registered as students. The principles concerning international joint degree programmes are determined in the relevant agreements and curricula.

According to Tampere University Regulations on Degrees, the recognition of prior learning and credit transfer is possible for formal studies completed at Finnish and foreign higher education institutions and competence acquired by other means if they correspond to the learning outcomes of the degree or part thereof. A student's prior learning must always be demonstrated and assessed.

In the accreditation of studies and other competence at Tampere University, the [national recommendations on the recognition of prior learning](#) (in Finnish) are applied (also see the final report, in Finnish). This guideline is based on those recommendations.

The scope of application of this guideline is the same as that of Tampere University Regulations on Degrees (Section 1).

Recognition of prior learning: key concepts and varieties

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) refers to the various procedures through which a student's competence can be assessed and accepted as part of their studies. In order for prior learning to be recognised, it must first be **identified**. The identification of prior learning refers to the assessment of competence in its various forms. Recognition refers to the procedures whereby a student's identified and assessed prior learning or experience is validated and entered in the academic record.

In addition to **formal learning** in formal education, competence can be earned in **non-formal learning** (continuing education, non-formal adult education, etc) or **informal learning** (e.g. work experience, positions of trust, hobbies). The recognition of a student's competence is based on the learning outcomes of the degree and its parts (study modules, course units).

Validation of prior learning means the approval, confirmation and accreditation of a student's previously completed studies, practical training, internships, work experience or other competence as part of the degree, study module or course unit. A precondition for validation is that the studies or other competence to be accredited correspond to the learning outcomes that have been set for the degree or its parts. Accreditation can take the form of inclusion or substitution. When the accreditation is based on formal prior learning, it is completed through **credit transfer**.

Inclusion means the acceptance of a course unit, or a study module completed elsewhere as part of a student's degree as such. **Substitution** means awarding the student a course unit or its part included in the curriculum based on the student's previous studies or other competence.

Preliminary accreditation of prior learning refers to an approach where the suitability of a student's studies completed elsewhere than the home university is agreed before the studies are undertaken, meaning that processing the student's attainments completed elsewhere do not require a separate accreditation procedure. This can be implemented, for example, by including a description of the principles of suitability of courses offered by collaborative networks, which allows students to choose those courses based on their own curriculum. Preliminary accreditation can also be implemented on an individual basis before the completion of the studies through the personal study plan or, in the case of international student mobility, through a Learning Agreement.

Recognition of informal and non-formal learning during studies (in Finnish: *opinnollistaminen*) refers to identifying, recognising, assessing and accrediting competence gained during one's studies. The process differs from the recognition of prior learning in that the agreements on accreditation are mainly made before the student begins gaining the competence and the competence has not previously been assigned a number of credits. Furthermore, the starting point is the achievement of the learning outcomes of a course unit in an alternative manner, e.g. through work experience or by engaging in academic research or teaching activities. In this case, accreditation does not involve credit transfer.

Accreditation of prior learning: key principles and modes

Students may apply for the transfer of credits they have earned by completing course units at other Finnish or foreign higher education institutions and for the recognition of learning that they have otherwise acquired. Prior learning must match the content and learning outcomes of the student's degree or a part thereof. Only successfully completed course units may be counted towards degrees at Tampere University (Section 23, Tampere University Regulations on Degrees). Prior learning is recognised as fully as possible. Tampere University's curricula are competence-based, and the recognition and accreditation of prior learning is always based on the learning outcomes of the curriculum.

From the perspective of credit transfer, it is irrelevant whether the student has been awarded credits for their prior learning in a previous degree. However, it is not possible for credits included in a first-cycle degree to contribute towards a second-cycle degree when those degrees are included in the same university degree.

An example: A student has the study right in the Degree Education in Administrative Sciences. No credits included in their Bachelor of Administrative Sciences degree can be transferred to or included in their Master of Administrative Sciences degree.

Credits included in the degree that gave eligibility for student admission are not accredited unless the course unit in question is compulsory in the curriculum (Section 23, Tampere University Regulations on Degrees). In the recognition of prior learning process, the level of the studies to be accredited may be considered. Tertiary level studies included in an upper secondary-level degree can always be accredited if they have been completed at Tampere University.

Scope and grading of studies in credit transfer

In credit transfer, the number of credits is not limited.

When assessing a request for substitution, primary consideration is given to the learning outcomes of the course and module, not the number of credits (Section 23, Tampere University Regulations on Degrees). When substituting study attainments, credit transfers are entered in the academic record in accordance with the number of credits of the course unit or module to be substituted. For example, if a student has completed a study attainment of four credits with which they wish to substitute a course unit of five credits, the student is awarded the substituted study attainment of five credits.

Correspondingly, the scope of a credit transfer in substitution is not greater than the number of credits defined for the substituted study attainment in the curriculum. For example, if a student has completed a study attainment of six credits and applies for a credit transfer of five credits, five credits will be transferred. Students who transfer from another university (*siirto-opiskelija*) are an exception; it is recommended that all their completed study attainments are accredited in full.

When including study attainments in a degree, study attainments completed previously or elsewhere are entered in the student's academic record in their original scope, i.e. the number of credits remains the same as in the original. Inclusion entries can be made either one course unit at a time or as larger units if the information about the studies in question can be entered in the additional information section in a sufficiently personalised and clear manner.

Based on prior learning, a course unit may also be substituted partly. In such cases, the responsible teacher defines how the student can complement their prior learning to complete the course unit in full.

An example: A teacher estimates that the learning outcomes of a course unit are partially fulfilled by the student's prior learning. In order to verify the attainment of all the learning outcomes, the student, e.g. writes an essay or takes an exam.

All studies that are accredited through credit transfer are graded on the scale of 1–5 in accordance with the initial assessment if it was done using that scale and Tampere University applies the 1–5 scale to grading the course unit. The scale of pass/failed is used in other cases. If the studies have been completed abroad, the grade pass is given in credit transfer. If more than one course unit is recorded in the same study attainment, the passing grade is given.

Restrictions

Credit transfer will not be considered if a student has already completed a Tampere University course for which they are requesting a credit transfer or the recognition of prior learning (Section 23, Tampere University Regulations on Degrees).

Credits earned by completing a thesis or a maturity test cannot be transferred. However, proficiency in the Finnish or Swedish language that a student has demonstrated while working towards a previous degree will be accredited as prior learning (Section 23, Tampere University Regulations on Degrees). A thesis completed and assessed for an incomplete degree may be submitted for reassessment in accordance with the thesis process.

The principles and practices of credit transfer in Open University and other non-degree studies are the same as in other education apart from when a student has the right to complete only a single course unit, in which case the RPL procedure is not applied at all.

Continuous education which has been arranged by a higher education institution and allocated credits can be accredited as defined by the faculty.

Management training completed in Reserve Officer School (RUK) or Non-Commissioned Officer Training (AUK) is not a study completed at a university and cannot be included in the degree as such.

Demonstration of competence (principles, modes)

Procedures for demonstrating and documenting competence are used, where appropriate, to identify, recognise and assess prior learning. The modes of study of a course unit in the curriculum must not restrict the recognition of prior learning. Thus, it cannot be assumed that a previously acquired competence should have been gained in a manner included in the curriculum. What is required is that the student is able to demonstrate that their existing competence corresponds with the learning outcomes of the course unit or module in question.

In the demonstration and assessment of competence, it is recommended that various practices that are in line with the learning outcomes are used. The modes of demonstration may be the same as the modes of study described in the curriculum and teaching schedule, but they may also be different. The teacher decides the modes.

Students' rights and responsibilities

The student is responsible for initiating the process for the accreditation of prior learning. A degree student must not apply for accreditation if they do not intend to include the course units in question in their degree. The student has the duty to make available all the documents required in the processing of the credit transfer application. In order to recognise competence acquired in another way than through formal learning, it is the student's responsibility to demonstrate their competence in the manner determined by the teacher or other person responsible for the studies in question. The student may suggest a way to demonstrate their competence. The student has the right to receive guidance in making an application for the recognition of prior learning and demonstrating competence acquired in another manner.

Effective RPL procedures make it easier for students to begin their studies and to make smooth progress. Accreditation of prior learning streamlines studies.

A student can request a rectification of the recognition of prior learning. A student dissatisfied with the recognition of studies completed at another institution or prior learning demonstrated in other ways can request rectification orally or in writing from the person who made the decision. The student must give a justification for their rectification request. A rectification request against a credit transfer decision must be lodged within 14 days of receiving notification of the decision. A student dissatisfied with the decision taken on the request for rectification may request rectification from the University's Appeals Committee within 14 days of receipt of the decision. The rectification request and its justifications addressed to the University's Appeals Committee must be given in writing and be

- sent by post to Tampere University, FI-33014 Tampere University
- brought to the info desk at Päättalo on the city centre campus (Kalevantie 4) or
- emailed from a tuni.fi address to tau@tuni.fi.

Rights and responsibilities of the University

In order to ensure the legal protection of students in the recognition and accreditation of prior learning, joint principles and procedures are applied. A teacher or another assessors of prior learning has the duty to observe the common principles and the right to make a negative

decision if the learning or competence that has been proposed for approval does not fulfil the principles laid down in this policy (e.g. regarding learning outcomes).

Teachers and other staff members who provide academic guidance and counselling have a duty to supervise the student in the application for credit transfer or in the demonstration of competence acquired in another manner. The University has the duty to process the student's application for the recognition of prior learning.

The person who has made the decision on credit transfer has the duty to process any oral or written rectification requests made by the student. If the student is dissatisfied with the decision made on a rectification request, the decision and its justifications must be presented in writing.

All matters concerning students are to be processed without undue delay, and the decisions should be made within a reasonable time.

The University has the duty to archive all decisions related to the recognition of prior learning and their enclosures.

RPL and the curriculum

The Academic Board has adopted the common principles and objectives of curriculum design at the Tampere Universities community, according to which the preparation of curricula is based on the learning outcomes of the degree programme or education. The objectives included in a curriculum are drawn up by describing the competences that the student must achieve (learning outcomes) at the level of degrees, study modules and course units. The curriculum is drawn up in a way that enables studies to progress smoothly. The competence-based curriculum entails that the learning outcomes can be fulfilled in various ways, including other ways than by completing the course units according to the curriculum. From the perspective of the identification, recognition, assessment and accreditation of prior learning, the learning outcomes defined for degree programmes, study modules and course units form the basis upon which a student can estimate the accreditation of their prior learning.

Curriculum design must ensure that if any prior learning is thought to correspond to the studies to be substituted, the student is not required to acquire the same competence for a second time. No double credits are registered within a degree. Instead, such situations must be solved by curriculum design. If the same course unit is part of more than one study module, the curriculum details how a student who has already completed the unit may build the study module to fulfil its learning outcomes and minimum scope. If no alternatives are described in the curriculum, the study attainment is agreed in the personal study plan. For example:

The basic studies of Bachelor's Programme X (25 credits) include a course unit called Towards a Researching Work Method (5 credits), and the intermediate studies (40 credits) include the course units of Qualitative Research Methods I (5 credits) and Quantitative Research Methods I (5 credits).

The student takes study module Z as free choice or minor studies where the basic studies include the course unit Towards a Research Work Method (5 credits) and the intermediate studies (35 credits) include the course units Quantitative Research Methods I (5 credits) and Qualitative Research Methods I (5 credits).

In this case, it must be determined what other studies the student who has completed the basic and/or intermediate studies of X should undertake to compensate for the course units they have already completed in the field of the course units in programme Z.

RPL and study guidance

The accreditation of studies is part of the student's personal study planning and PSP guidance, in the course of which, among other things, the suitability of prior learning as part of the degree to be completed at Tampere University and the achievement of its learning outcomes is assessed. For students' studies to proceed as smoothly as possible from the beginning, the possibility of accrediting studies is communicated immediately at the admission phase and again in orientation. The goal is to start the RPL procedure before the student begins studying at Tampere University. Later, the recognition of prior learning and credit transfer are encouraged when it is appropriate and justified. In the RPL process, the student's role is active, and the process is usually initiated by the student. Faculties should consider RPL procedures and related guidance and counselling in the planning and implementation of study guidance and counselling as a whole.

Faculties do not have the duty to assess the prior learning of a potential student before the application process. An RPL decision can only be made after the student's right to study has begun and they have enrolled as present at Tampere University.

Exchange studies

An exchange period is planned as part of the degree studies when the personal study plan is prepared. The studies abroad must be planned so that the credit transfer can be easily completed after the student returns to Tampere University. A study plan is drawn up for each exchange period. In an Erasmus student exchange, the plan is always drawn up on the so-

called learning agreement form in which the studies at the host university are noted and agreed upon.

Accreditation of communication and language studies

If a student has completed studies in the second language (L2) and second national language in their prior higher education in the way stipulated by the Government Decree on University Degrees, those studies can compensate the second language and second national language studies in Tampere University's degree structure.

If a student has already completed a Finnish-language bachelor's degree, the communication studies in that degree can be accredited for the communication studies included in the degree structure of their bachelor's degree at Tampere University.

If a student has completed a Finnish-language bachelor's degree, they can get an accreditation for the communication studies included in their degree structure based on their degree.

If a student's oral and written Swedish language skills have not been separately assessed in the communication and language studies of their previous degree, they cannot get an accreditation for the oral and written Swedish language skills in the degree they are completing at Tampere University.

Students do not have to complete the Swedish language course included in their degree if they have completed the basic or equivalent studies in Scandinavian languages. However, the accreditation is not recorded if the studies are included in the degree they are completing at Tampere University; in such cases the student must ensure they can meet the minimum extent of their degree with other studies. Basic studies in Scandinavian languages can be used to demonstrate satisfactory proficiency in the second national language, and intermediate studies good proficiency in the second national language, regardless of the final grade of the study module. (Government Decree on the Demonstration of Proficiency in the Finnish and Swedish Languages in Civil Service 481/2003).

Students do not have to complete the second language course unit included in their degree if they have completed basic studies in the English, Spanish, French, German or Russian languages. However, the accreditation is not recorded if the studies are included in the degree they are completing at Tampere University; in such cases the student must ensure they can meet the minimum extent of their degree with other studies.

Accreditation of prior learning in the joint doctoral studies at Tampere University's Doctoral School

Faculties bear the comprehensive responsibility for doctoral degrees. The responsible supervisor oversees the doctoral student's entire degree studies and supervision arrangements.

Doctoral students plan and agree on the contents of their curriculum and any updates (PSP) with their responsible supervisor. The personal study plan is based on the curriculum of the doctoral programme. The responsible supervisor or another agreed person assesses the suitability of previous learning for the doctoral student's doctoral degree.

Recognition of competence acquired in non-formal education

Competence can also be gained through non-formal learning and informal learning. In addition, competence acquired in this way must correspond to the learning outcomes of the studies in question, and the student is required to provide evidence of their competence (e.g. a certificate of employment, portfolio, diploma, publication or other written document) so that the competence may be assessed. The student may be asked to show evidence of competence, eg by writing an essay or participating in a written or oral exam or an interview. It is recommended that multiple assessment methods are used, but the process must not become more arduous than the assessment of a corresponding regular study attainment.

Competences acquired in non-formal education may also be accredited as so-called personal attainments.

Accreditation process

The accreditation process is described for each actor in separate guidelines maintained by the Education and Learning Unit.

If a student already has an accredited course unit from another university, a new accreditation is made based on the original academic record. There is no need to reassess the accreditation of

competence gained in another manner than formal education as the competence can be accredited as such.