

## Annex to R1-R5: RPL from VET to HE in Finland

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**LEONARDO DA VINCI Transfer of Innovation Project**

**“RELATE – PROMOTING THE RECOGNIZABILITY OF LEARNING OUTCOMES FROM VOCATIONAL EDUCATION TO HIGHER EDUCATION”**

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For more information on the project “RELATE” go to our website  
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## 1 National legal framework, system or policy on validation

Validation of non-formal and informal learning has relatively long and established roots in Finland and the legislation and policies are well developed and detailed. However, there is no one single law regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning, but laws and regulations for each field of education define validation separately. These fields include general upper secondary education, vocational education and training (including adult VET) and higher education (HE).

A committee report of the Ministry of Education (2007) states the following: Prior learning is recommended to be assessed at two instances:

1. when evaluating the higher education eligibility of applicants
2. when evaluating the prior learning of admitted students”

(Ministry of Education 2007:4).

The core message of the legislation in Finland is that validation of non-formal and informal learning is a subjective right of the individual and the competences of an individual should be validated regardless of when and where they have been acquired.

Main aims of RPL as common are:

- supporting and promoting Lifelong Learning and increasing motivation for it
- increasing flexibility between the education & training system and the labor market
- enhancing the qualification level, mobility and employability
- improving the functioning of the labor market by transferring the scientific research results to the economy and by fostering the efficiency of utilizing individuals as a resource for society.

In Finland the Ministry of Education is responsible for qualifications structure, strategic planning and guidelines in Education and Research. The Ministry of Education is in charge of development of legislation regarding validation. A Research and Development Plan, outlines national priorities

in education, including validation, and is carried out every four years. (Ministry of Education and Culture. 2012. Education and Research. A Development Plan 2012-2016). <http://www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/OPM/julkaisut/2012/liitteet/okm03.pdf?lang=fi>

The first Government Proposal to the Parliament for an Act on the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Learning was prepared in 2010 based on a Committee Report National Framework for Qualifications (NQF) and Other Learning (2009). In May 2012, the Government submitted to the Parliament the second proposal for an Act on the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Learning. The proposals are yet to be confirmed (enforced). The proposed law on National Framework for Qualifications and Other Learning (2012) is yet to be enforced. However, the proposal is relatively well known and used by VET and HE practitioners in Finland despite the delay in the enforcement. The NQF “has led to new and intensified discussions about validation of prior learning in the country” and “it has meant that learning outcomes (in terms of knowledge, skills and competences) have been defined for all levels”. Recognition of Prior learning can be counted towards the qualification both in VET education and HE.

The Finnish NQF consists of eight levels and thus corresponds with the EQF levels. All upper secondary qualifications (general and vocational) and further vocational qualifications are placed on level 4. All these qualifications grant access to HE irrespective of whether qualifications are gained through validation or education. Specialist vocational qualifications are placed on level 5, also grant access to HE. The HE qualifications are placed on levels 6-8 respectively according to the three cycle HE qualification framework.

## 1.1 Laws and regulations

In Finland each field of education has separate laws and regulations regarding validation in VET and HE institutions. In Finland there have been no changes in legislation since 2010 regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning.

**The Vocational Education Act (630/1998)<sup>13</sup>(FI)** (Laki ammatillisesta koulutuksesta) is similar to the General upper secondary education Act with regards to validation, but in addition there is a reference to skills demonstration in case there is no documented evidence to support the possession of the required competences. In Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET),

validation of non-formal and informal learning has increased substantially recently. There are no national statistics about it, but there have been several projects enhancing the validation in the IVET and many systematic developments.

In vocational education students may include prior competence in the qualification and use it to replace compulsory, elective or free-choice studies. If necessary, the equivalence of the competence must be demonstrated by a vocational skills demonstration, for example.

**Vocational Adult Education Act (631/1998)<sup>14</sup> (FI)** (Laki ammatillisesta aikuiskoulutuksesta) has the most detailed descriptions and decrees regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning. This law refers to the Competence Based Qualifications (Näyttötutkinnot). The law describes the CBQs as “qualifications independent of the acquisition method of vocational skills or competences”. The Act was strengthened by the Personalization Regulation in 2007 (FI). It defines the validation process in three stages: identification phase, assessment phase and documentation phase.

**The University of Applied Sciences Decree (352/2003 §14)** (Valtioneuvoston asetus ammattikorkeakouluista) states that a student may - according to the decision of the University of Applied Sciences - accredit or substitute studies linked to the degree in question, also through competences gained in non-formal or informal contexts.

**The Universities Act (558/2009 §44)<sup>17</sup>(EN)** (Yliopistolaki) states that:

“The student may, as determined by the university, have knowledge and skills attested in some other manner counted towards the degree or substitute studies in the degree syllabus with knowledge and skills attested in some other manner.”

However, many universities in Finland still opt for recognition of prior formal learning, if any.

Legislation grants a subjective right for validation of non-formal and informal learning in the different fields of formal education. In general, in upper secondary education, in higher education and in initial vocational education; validation procedures are constantly being developed and they are becoming more widespread and popular. However, the only systematic approach that is nationally used by all VET education providers is the CBQs (Competence Based Qualifications, ammatilliset näyttötutkinnot) system.

In Finnish Higher Education it is not possible to carry out the entire qualification/degree through validation. Practically all vocational qualifications/degrees can be obtained partially and/or fully through validation. Validation as a procedure is not used for access purposes.

MUUTA: The following statutes and regulations shall be complied with in the planning, organization and completion of degrees and studies:

- Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (2008/C 111/01)
- Polytechnics Act (Act 351/2003) with subsequent amendments (12.8.2011/953 and 14.11.2014/932)
- Government Decree on Polytechnics (Decree 352/2003) with subsequent amendments
- National framework for qualifications and other learning, Ministry of Education and Culture 2009:24 (draft)
- Administrative Regulations and Operational Regulations at Savonia University of Applied Sciences
- Degree Regulations at Savonia University of Applied Sciences

#### Reference:

Nevala, A-M, 2011. European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning 2010. Country Report: Finland.

Karttunen, A, 2014. European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014. Country Report: Finland

<http://www.finlex.fi/fi/esitykset/he/2012/20120038.pdf> (12.1.2015)

Opetusministeriö 2007. Aiemmin hankitun osaamisen tunnustaminen korkeakouluissa. Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2007:4

Opetusministeriö 2008. Korkeakoulujen aikuiskoulutuksen nykytila ja kehittämiskohteet. Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2008:38

Opetusministeriö 2009. Tutkintojen ja muun osaamisen kansallinen viitekehys 2009. Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2009:24.

## 1.2 Standards and curricula

The contents of education are described in the curriculum. VET and HE curricula in Finland are competence-based. Competence-based curricula define the competence targets and the learning outcomes of the degree and the studies. Competence targets indicate the kind of competence is expected from each student. Learning outcomes indicate what the student knows, understands and is able to do as a result of the learning process.

In the Finnish VET system (both IVET and CBQs) **there are national qualification requirements** that are described in learning outcomes and include assessment targets, criteria and methods.

Finnish Higher Education has strengthened the competency-based approach of the education curricula. In Higher Education there are **no national standards**, but the institutions are responsible for the curriculum development. Some HEIs, who have adopted validation procedures, have started developing learning outcomes based curricula, which makes validation procedures easier and more transparent.

The recognition of prior learning in Finland in the context of RPL from VET to HE have two different purposes: **firstly**, to allow students to gain admission to a higher education institution and, **secondly**, to allow students to demonstrate that they have met, partially or completely, the requirements of a higher education programme.

In higher education institutions (e.g. Savonia University of Applied Sciences) in which validation procedures are provided, the process consists of application, identification (evidence), assessment and accreditation. In case there is no documented evidence, RPL-demonstration (AHOT-näyttö) is used.

In Finland the validation procedures are embedded into formal education, in which the objective is to achieve a qualification or a qualification unit or units. Therefore it is not common that the individuals take advantage of the different stages of validation separately, i.e. for identification purposes. However, there is evidence from the non-formal sector, third sector as well as from working life that identification and documentation are used to make an individual's competences visible (Karttunen 2014, 7).

The Finnish HE Institutions, based on their autonomy, can set up regulations on how the RPL is used. They can define the accreditation criteria and the professional experience required for different degrees and study programs.

The purpose of recognizing prior learning is to ensure that the student is not required to complete studies whose learning outcomes he or she can demonstrate to have achieved in a manner defined by the HE. Prior learning may be a result of the student's earlier studies or it can have been acquired in some other manner.

## 2 Validation of prior learning and access to Bachelor level education in health care sector

In Finland there is no central institution responsible for validation as a whole, although “the Ministry of Education and the National Board of Education are the two authorities leading work in this field”. In Finland validation procedures are embedded in formal qualification structures in VET and in HE. The VET system is governed by the National Board of Education and the HEIs decide on their RPL procedures and organization independently.

Education sector specific guidance polytechnic education: specific recommendations have been produced in the RPL project schools to organize sectoral working groups in 2009-2011. The working groups consisted of representatives of the Finnish universities and polytechnics .

[www.tunnistaossaminen.fi](http://www.tunnistaossaminen.fi)

## **2.1 Criteria for recognition of VET diplomas (Internationally)**

Recognition of qualifications refers to a decision on the eligibility a foreign qualification provides when applying for a job or a study place in Finland. The decisions are made by different bodies for different purposes. The two main authorities in Finland are the Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE) and The National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health (Valvira). Both authorities give statements for professions which are regulated in Finland. Regulated professions are positions for which the law gives specific and certain qualifications requirements. Regulated professions include both public sector posts and positions and professions requiring professional practice rights. Also HE institutions and other educational institutions decide on the eligibility of foreign qualifications for further studies.

## **2.2 Recognition of Foreign Degrees & VET Qualifications**

To be able to use foreign HE or VET diplomas/ qualifications in Finland, they have to be recognized. The responsible body is the Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE). Recognition of qualifications refers to a decision on the types of eligibility that a foreign qualification provides for a job or a place of study in Finland.

The FNBE can provide statements on foreign VET qualifications, including information about the level and content of the qualification and the competence provided by the qualification in the country of origin. In providing these statements, the FNBE will essentially compare, where possible, the content of the qualification with the corresponding Finnish qualification. FNBE gives

statements on foreign vocational qualifications and also Finnish qualifications for international use.

The statement describes the official status of the awarding body and the qualification, the level of the qualification, the professional competence provided by the qualification in the country of origin, and the content and scope of the studies.

### **2.3 Licenced & authorised professionals in Social and Health Care Sector**

The National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health (Valvira) is the national licensing authority for social welfare and health care in Finland. It gives right to practice as a healthcare professional in Finland. When degree or qualification has been undertaken outside Finland Valvira decides, according to application, for the right to practice or gives statement of the foreign qualification with the corresponding Finnish qualification.

### **2.4 Academic recognition, eligibility to Higher education**

Natural study track for further studies for the holder of VET diploma is HE. In Finland eligibility to apply for HE depends on having completed at least one of the following VET diplomas:

- vocational qualifications of three years or more in duration
- a foreign qualification which provide eligibility for university entrance in the country in which they are awarded.

Higher education institutions and other educational institutions decide on the eligibility conferred by foreign qualifications for further studies. They also decide on the recognition of studies completed abroad towards a qualification to be taken in Finland. On request, the FNBE advises higher education institutions on questions relating to academic recognition.

A manual for the academic recognition for higher education institutions, the so-called European Area for Recognition - EAR HEI Manual, has been published. The manual supports the academic recognition of qualifications in higher education institutions. It is based on the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its annexes. You can download the manual from: <http://eurorecognition.eu/Manual/EAR%20HEI.pdf>

## 2.5 Credit systems

In Finland ECTS have been in use in all HE institutions since 1.8.2005. The corresponding laws and regulations relating to recognition of prior learning (including formal learning) support the use of ECTS points especially in mobility. Many HEIs have developed or are in the process of developing learning outcomes based curricula, which will further enhance linking validation and the ECTS points. In HE it is not possible to obtain a full degree<sup>23</sup> via validation, but the number of credits obtained through validation is not limited. In Finland validation is not commonly used for access purposes, but the validation procedure begins after enrolment.

## 3 Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Finland, Vocational Qualification in Social and Health Care

In Finland there is a national curriculum in Vocational Qualification in Social and Health Care (EQF level 4). All the Finnish colleges educating practical nurses apply the same curriculum. The curriculum has been designed by describing the learning outcomes/requirements - knowledge, skills and competences.

The Vocational Qualification in Social and Health Care consists of modules. There are three compulsory vocational modules for all students, optional vocational modules and in curriculum-based vocational upper secondary education and training there are also the core subjects and free-choice subjects. Additional modules can be included in a qualification when that is necessary in view of working life sector or local vocational requirements.

([http://www.oph.fi/download/140436\\_vocational\\_qualification\\_in\\_social\\_and\\_healthcare\\_2010.pdf](http://www.oph.fi/download/140436_vocational_qualification_in_social_and_healthcare_2010.pdf))

There are two ways to reach the diploma and the learning outcomes/requirements of Vocational Qualification in Social and Health Care:

1. Curriculum-based upper secondary vocational education and training (school based education for mostly young students after Finnish comprehensive school) In curriculum -based education there are also students aiming at double degree - Vocational Qualification in Social and Health Care as well as diploma from upper secondary general education and matriculation exams.
2. Competence-based qualification (for mostly adults with previous studies and previous work experience). The competence-based approach has been used in VET in Finland since the early 1990s'. A student in competence-based qualification can study preparation training at the college and at the work place or he/she can study in an apprenticeship training while being employed by an enterprise in social and health care sector.

All students will prepare their individual study plans in the beginning of their studies in cooperation with their group tutors. The study plans will be revised at least once a year or when necessary. Recognition of prior learning and prior competences as well as the intensity of the learning process will reduce the length of the studies. Until 1st of August 2015 the Diploma will be worth 120 credits/study weeks, but after that the diploma will be worth 180 learning/competence points. The change will cover both studies of students who have started their education before 1.8.2015 as well as those who will start their studies after that.

Vocational Qualification in Social and Health Care, practical nurse education in Finland provides a good example of how to accomplish an all-embracing evaluation. At the end of the study modules the students will carry out skills demonstrations in curriculum-based education, mostly in real working life. The student will plan himself/herself how he/she will demonstrate his or her knowledge, skills and competences in nursing and care situations. The skills demonstration can be realized in many different ways according to the work place where he/she has been at the work placement period. During the skills demonstration process the student will show his/her abilities according to his/her plan and he/she will also recognize his or her strengths and weaknesses. The final evaluation session always starts with self-evaluation. The student, work place tutor and the tutoring teacher will be present at the evaluation meeting. The tutoring teacher and work place tutor will give the grades from 1 to 3. If the student doesn't have competences the skills demonstration can be failed.

If the student takes part in preparatory education for competence-based qualification, he/she demonstrates his/her knowledge, skills and competences during competence tests at the end of the study module in the same way as the students in skills demonstrations. The final evaluation session always starts with self-evaluation. The student, evaluating teacher, work place evaluator and the manager of the work place will be present at the evaluation meeting. The evaluation team will make an evaluation suggestion and the student will hear the results.

The college will issue the diplomas for students in curriculum-based education. The college will give evaluation suggestions for students in competence -based education, but the national qualification committee makes the final decision on the assessment and issues the diplomas.

Vocational upper secondary studies grant the student eligibility to further his/her studies in universities or universities of applied sciences.

### **3.1 RPL in Savonia University of Applied Sciences, briefly**

In 2010 Savonia University of Applied Sciences carried out a development project together with HE institutions of Eastern Finland. The aim of the project was to develop curricula, student counselling, practices and processes related to recognition and accreditation of prior learning. RPL practices, terminology and process used in Savonia today were developed during the project and was based on experience gained in the project.

The Degree Regulations of the **Savonia University of Applied Sciences** govern the principles relating to the recognition of prior learning (Section 24: Transfer of credits and RPL) as follows:

“A student enrolled for attendance at Savonia University of Applied Sciences can apply for transfer of credits (RPL) earned at another Finnish or foreign higher education institution or competence corresponding to the degree objectives acquired by other means. There are three ways to transfer credits: substitution, inclusion or recognition and RPL demonstration (so-called AHOT evidence). There are separate instructions for the recognition and accreditation of competences acquired previously or elsewhere during the current studies.

In degree studies the student may count studies completed in a Finnish or foreign university or university of applied sciences or some other educational institution towards the degree and replace studies included in the degree with other studies of a corresponding level.

The learning outcomes of the curriculum are of an essential importance for the RPL procedure. Well-functioning RPL practices are of key importance for the promotion of lifelong learning. It is the right of the student to have his or her prior learning recognized if that corresponds to the learning outcomes of the curriculum.