



## D.5.2- Recommendations for the recognition of SLPs within the (renewed) EQF

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## 1. About E-SLP Project

This report is published as part of the E-SLP project: European Short Learning Programmes. The E-SLP project is funded by the Erasmus+ Programme and from 1 January 2018 until 31 December 2020.

Short Learning Programmes (SLPs) are a group of courses (units, modules or other learning building blocks) with a common subject focusing on specific needs in society which can be used as stackable elements of larger formal degrees targeting non-traditional and adult learners. The E-SLP project focuses on online, flexible and scalable SLPs in the European context.

This report forms part of work package 5 and was coordinated by The Open University UK.

### 1.1. Partners

- P1 European Association of Distance Teaching Universities
- P2 Fernuniversität in Hagen
- P3 The Open University
- P4 Open Universiteit Nederland
- P5 Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia
- P6 Universitat Oberta de Catalunya
- P7 Hellenic Open University
- P8 Università Telematica Internazionale UNINETTUNO
- P9 Anadolu University
- P10 Universidade Aberta
- P11 Open University of Cyprus
- P12 Open University of the University of Jyväskylä
- P13 Katholieke Universiteit Leuven
- P14 National Association of Distance Education
- P15 Akademia Gorniczo Hutnicza Im. Stanisława Staszica W Krakowie



## 1.2 Content

The following report provides an overview of the approaches to recognition within and between the partner countries and institutions of the ESLP project, in order to identify similarities and differences and make recommendations for the recognition of SLPs in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The country and institution specific information in this report has been reviewed for accuracy by representatives of the partner institutions.

## 2. Introduction

Short Learning programmes (SLPs) have the potential to make formal degree education more flexible (Moonlite, 2019) and contribute to the modernisation agenda of the European Commission. Initiatives that currently exist for CPD and continuous education at universities are not yet sufficiently scalable to meet the needs of society. SLPs, developed as new educational products and embedded within traditional degree education can contribute to the European Commission target of 25% of the population engaging in learning throughout their lives by 2025 (European Commission, 2017).

According to UNESCO (2012, p. 8) “recognition is a process of granting official status to learning outcomes and/or competences, which can lead to the acknowledgement of their value in society”. In practice this could mean that, outside a single institution “the number of credits gained for compatible learning outcomes achieved in another context will replace the number of credits that are allocated for compatible learning outcomes at the awarding institution”.

Fair recognition of periods of study has been a fundamental purpose of the Bologna process since its development (Chaparro et al, 2017) as have the agreed operating principles of the Lisbon Recognition Conventions (LRC). Fair recognition of SLPs must therefore be established to ensure that smaller chunks of learning are both valued in society and recognised within formal degree programmes. However only a minority of quality assurance agencies overtly consider institutional practices for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) and whether they align with these principles (Chaparro et al, 2017).

One of the complexities associated with the recognition of SLPs, is the varied approaches to recognition that exist not only between partner countries but also between institutions. Furthermore, there are differences in the way in which informal and non-formal learning is recognised and different approaches to quality assurance.

This report documents the approaches to recognition across the partner countries and where applicable their associated institutions. The report then presents recommendations for the recognition of SLPs, paying attention to curriculum design.

### 3. Country specific approaches to recognition

#### 3.1. Belgium: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

##### *General country practices of recognition*

In Belgium, the national policy/framework for recognition, is based on the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). This is “a learner-centred system for credit accumulation and transfer based on the transparency of learning outcomes and learning processes” (European Communities, 2009, p. 9) which seeks to facilitate the recognition of qualifications and student mobility (European Communities, 2009).

##### *Institution approaches to the recognition of credit*

At KU Leuven in Belgium, credits can be transferred into another programme when the same or equivalent course is available, the authority to assess the equivalence and make this decision resides with the relevant professor. At the Flemish level, there is a comprehensive system and database of learning credits which facilitates the recognition of credits earned at another institution within Belgium. Based on bilateral agreements and in the Erasmus Exchange framework, credits achieved at an institution in another European country can also be recognised.

As well as the recognition of formal certificated learning, KU Leuven give students the opportunity to seek exemption based on learning that took place outside of formal education i.e. within the workplace, otherwise known as previous acquired competence (PAC). On successful completion of an appropriate assessment and receipt of an aptitude certificate, students can request exemption towards course units where the certificated competences are taught.

#### 3.2. Finland: Open University of the University of Jyväskylä

##### *General country practices of recognition*

In Finland specifically, no policy or framework exists for the recognition and transfer of credit between institutions, Finnish Universities are therefore autonomous bodies and are free to decide whether they recognise credit for any courses completed in another university. A national database, ‘My Studyinfo’ is available to collect all information on studies completed in the Finnish education system<sup>1</sup> to aid the recognition of qualifications obtained within different Finnish Universities.

##### *Institution approaches to the recognition of credit*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://opintopolku.fi/oma-opintopolku/> Accessed 3rd July 2019

The University of Jyväskylä has guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and these guidelines are followed at the University of Jyväskylä Open University (JYUOpen). However, recognition is based on case-by-case decisions of the person responsible within a given faculty or institute. Students have an opportunity to apply for their prior learning to be included within a different programme, the decision regarding this resides with the relevant faculty. In accordance with the 'Principles of Recognition', JYUOpen allows for the recognition of credits earned in another national or international HEI. No more than 50% of a bachelor's or master's degree awarded by the University of Jyväskylä in Finland can be compensated by previous studies or competences already acquired (University of Jyväskylä, 2019). The proportion of recognisable studies may however be greater, if they have been completed at a Finnish university, and if a major part of such studies is included in the degree.

### **3.3. Germany: Fernuniversität in Hagen**

#### *General country practices of recognition*

In Germany the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) is referenced as the policy framework ratified there in 2007 and converted into federal law. The convention refers to both recognition from another higher education institution (HEI) in Germany as well as international HEIs, and states that the refusal of credit should be based on the published recommendations of the LRC Committee where there are significant differences in learning outcomes or the focus of study programmes. Recognition of credits from another German HEI is widely accepted practice within the country, based on case-by-case decisions of the person responsible within the relevant degree program at the respective institution. According to the Rector's Conference, German Universities have autonomy in deciding whether they recognise credits earned abroad (HRK, 2019).

#### *Institution approaches to the recognition of credit*

As HEIs in Germany are expected to follow the national policy framework and its conventions, FernUniversität has no institutional policy for the recognition of credit. At an institutional level, there are several modules that can be recognised in different degree or master's programmes called 'required elective' modules. Recognising credits earned at another institution in Germany is also widely accepted at a module-level based on comparable study content and learning outcomes, as well as a roughly corresponding number of ECTS. Decisions are made on a case by case basis and delegated to a member of faculty in the respective degree program.

For credit earned within an institution outside of Germany, the "Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs" (*Kultusministerkonferenz*) has provided a database containing

guidance on the recognition of Higher Education (HE) degrees, school leaving certificates, and foreign HEIs. The database uses three categories that document the recognition status of the institutions in their respective country, for example if they are an accredited institution.

### **3.4. Greece: Hellenic Open University**

#### *General country practices of recognition*

In Greece, policy for the transfer of credits is described in the University Law of Greece (Law 4485 of 2017) and is regulated by the Greek Ministry of Education. The Hellenic National Academic Recognition and Information Center otherwise known as Hellenic NARIC is supervised by the Hellenic Ministry of Education and is responsible for the recognition of university or technological degrees that are awarded by foreign HEIs (European Commission, 2019). As part of this law a Training and Lifelong Centre also exists in every Greek HEI which has the objective of delivering professional development programmes, training and lifelong education. The procedure followed is the same in all Universities in Greece providing a consistent system for recognition.

#### *Institution approaches to the recognition of credit*

At the Hellenic Open University (HOU) the internal transfer of ECTS units is possible. For example, the credit earned in a Module from the Program of Creative Writing can be recognised in the Program of Cultural Studies. The credit from a Module in Education Studies can be transferred to the Program of Specialisation for Teachers of Physics. Recognition of modules from other Greek HEIs is also possible and is regulated by the Greek Ministry of Education. The procedure is the same as in all Universities in Greece. At HOU, modules from HEIs in other European Countries can also be recognised but the process is supported by the Hellenic National Academic Recognition Center (NARIC). Once recognition from NARIC is obtained, students will submit a request to the relevant School of HOU.

### **3.5. Italy: Università Telematica Internazionale UNINETTUNO**

#### *General country practices of recognition*

Following the ratification of the LRC in Italy by law number 148, recognition as a concept was introduced in Italy (CIMEA, 2019a). Article 2 of this Law titled 'Academic Recognition' places the responsibility for the recognition of cycles and study periods in the hands of autonomous Universities and HEIs which award degrees in conformity with the respective legislation (CIMEA, 2019b). In the 1999 Italian university reform, university education credits were introduced to support students transferring from one course of study to another. The evaluation and recognition of prior credited learning is however up to each university and HEI. Subsequently, the Ministerial Decree of 22 October

2004, n.270, stated that for each “university exam” a certain number of CFU (“Credito Formativo Universitario”, academic learning credit) is associated which estimates the effort required. Each CFU corresponds to 25 hours of work (regardless of whether these are carried out as personal study, attending lectures, participation in workshops or contributing to project work). In Art.5 of this decree, it is specified that credits corresponding to each educational activity are acquired by the student by passing the final exam or any other verification of the achievement. Furthermore, in the same article, criteria and responsibility of credit recognition is given to each University/HEI. More specifically, the recognition of “the total or partial recognition of credits acquired by a student, for the purpose of continuing their studies in another course of the same University or in the same or other course at another University, is the responsibility of the teaching structure that welcomes the student, with predetermined procedures and criteria established in the “didactic University Regulations” document”<sup>2</sup>.

#### *Institution approaches to the recognition of credit*

At the International Telematic University (UNINETTUNO), credits earned for a module of study can be recognised in more than one course of study at the same level, however the credits are not automatically recognised. A Didactic Commission is mandated to evaluate the recognition of credits taking into consideration the candidate’s CV, ECTS credits previously obtained and the scientific-disciplinary sectors (SSD) as defined by the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities and Research and the program of the module of study.

Furthermore, credits acquired during a course of study in another institution in Italy can be recognised totally or partially by UNINETTUNO. This recognition is based on a comparison between the programs of study at the previous institution and that of the modules conferred by Uninettuno. At UNINETTUNO the credits acquired during a course of study in a European institution can be recognised for other courses. Each faculty manages the recognition process, basing it on the general criteria established at University level by the Academic Senate. The main criteria relate to the number of credits, the scientific sector of the course, the coherence of the course program/objective with one provided by UNINETTUNO, based on the transcript provided by the applicant. The process is managed through standard forms, available directly online; guidelines for students, and for foreign students specifically,

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.miur.it/0006Menu\\_C/0012Docume/0098Normat/4640Modifi\\_cf2.htm](http://www.miur.it/0006Menu_C/0012Docume/0098Normat/4640Modifi_cf2.htm) “Amendments to the regulation containing rules concerning the didactic autonomy of universities, approved by decree of the Minister of University and Scientific and Technological Research 3 November 1999, n. 509.” Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2019 2004 (English translation required).



are available in multiple languages in the “enrolment” UNINETTUNO website sub-section<sup>3</sup>. In the case of agreements with HEIs from ECTS and non-ECTS framework countries, for the provision of common programs, UNINETTUNO established a Didactic commission<sup>4</sup> composed of five members of academics and higher education (HE) professionals that manages courses/credits compliance with UNINETTUNO standards.

### **3.6. Lithuania: National Association of Distance Education**

#### *General country practices to recognition*

Lithuania does not have a national policy/framework regarding RPL between institutions. The principles of the recognition of study results and the procedure of their formalisation in Lithuanian HEIs were approved by the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania in 2003 decree law no. ISAK-1603<sup>5</sup>. These regulations must be accommodated by Lithuanian HEIs, but each HEI is responsible for executing the process. The transfer of credits between institutions is consequently regulated by the academic council Senate of HEIs who enforce the law of the Ministry of Education and Science of the republic of Lithuania.

#### *Institution approaches to the recognition of credit*

In contrast to other partner institutions, The National Association of Distance Education (Nade) does not hold the right to award credits, this right belongs to HEIs. However, in HEIs in Lithuania, it is possible for credits earned for a module of study to be recognised in more than one program in the same institution. In Kaunas University of Technology as an example, the recognition of credits proceeds in accordance with the national principles articulated above and Kaunas University of Technology’s description of the procedure. Procedure documents state that a study module is recognised if it meets not less than two thirds of the essential objectives and the main parts of the module content. This principle is applicable to credits achieved in Lithuanian national HEIs and foreign HEIs and the decision-making responsibility for awarding recognition of credits is delegated to the Faculty Vice-Dean for Studies.

### **3.7. Netherlands: Open Universiteit Nederland**

#### *General country practices of recognition*

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.uninettunouniversity.net/en/iscrizione-studenti.aspx> Accessed 3rd June 2019.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.uninettunouniversity.net/el/comunicatostampa.aspx?ID=118> Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

<sup>5</sup> <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.221576> Accessed 24th July 2019

In the Netherlands specifically, there is no direct governmental regulation for RPL and therefore it is based on an assessment that is conducted by individual HEIs who are autonomous in making such decisions. Committees exist within every HEI to assess prior learning to enable admission onto or exemption from part of a programme. Automatic recognition exists for accredited Dutch degrees or certificates within the national register for educational programmes. Foreign degrees are not automatically recognised and for such qualifications a National Agency, NUFFIC<sup>6</sup>, exists to stimulate mobility and assess the value of qualifications gained abroad. A bachelor's degree gained in a different country is therefore assessed by NUFFIC for it to be recognised within a Dutch bachelor's degree or for access to a Dutch Master's degree. Once assessed and approved by NUFFIC, the final decision to recognise the prior credits is delegated to the admission or exemption committee of the university, the criteria for which is set by the HEI themselves.

#### *Institution approaches to the recognition of credit*

The Open University of the Netherlands (OUNL) has its own institutional policy and an assessment committee of the HEI determines the value of prior formal and informal learning. The policy stipulates that a maximum of 75% of the total credits of a qualification can be achieved through the recognition of previously acquired credits. A student must therefore complete at least 25% of the study directly with OUNL and is unable to receive any exemption against the thesis component of the qualification. The OUNL can also recognise credits achieved in another European country that have been assessed and recognised by NUFFIC.

### **3.8. Poland: Akademia Gorniczo Hutnicza Im. Stanislaw Staszica W Krakowie**

#### *General country practices of recognition*

In Poland, a national policy/framework for the recognition of credits does not exist and instead the legislation referenced is that of the LRC (Delgado, 2014).

#### *Institution approaches to the recognition of credit*

In Poland, the University of Science and Technology (AGH) permits the recognition of 50% of the ECTS for a given programme. At Faculty level, a Board for Learning Outcomes Recognition is given decision making responsibility for such claims. The practice is rare at the University of Science and Technology and other Polish Universities. It is however well-organised for Erasmus students as part of the Bologna process.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nuffic.nl/en/> Accessed 3rd June 2019.

### 3.9. Portugal: Universidade Aberta

#### *General country practices of recognition*

In Portugal, a national policy/framework exists for the recognition of credits. More specifically, decree law 74/2006 defines in its article 45 that HEIs must recognise qualifications obtained in other national and international HEIs as well as professional experience and other training courses. In 2013 the decree law 115/2013 stated that a maximum of 50% of the total credits of a programme can be credited through prior learning obtained through formal or non-formal courses. In 2016 the law was further updated and the decree law 63/2016 defined new rules regarding the number of credits that can be recognised. Specifically, institutions can recognise credit up to two thirds of the total number of course credits through prior learning with 50% being the maximum that can be credited from the Framework of non-formal courses and one-third being the maximum that can be credited for training completed through technological specialisation courses or proven professional experience. Although clear national rules exist in Portugal, each individual HEI is responsible for defining how to apply them.

#### *Institution approaches to the recognition of credit*

As legally defined and imposed, Universidade Aberta de Portugal (UAb) allows 50% of the total credits of a cycle of study to be awarded from previous study completed at a national or foreign HEI, it is also possible that modules can be recognised in more than one qualification. Regulation 39/2017<sup>7</sup> defines the internal procedures that should be followed by HEIs in Portugal for the request of credit and analysis of such requests. Scientific committees (nominated by the scientific council) exist to evaluate applications for recognition. The committee proposes a decision that is approved by the scientific council. Requests for recognition of credit at UAb are therefore analysed carefully in order to credit prior qualifications where possible.

### 3.10. Spain

#### *General country practices of recognition*

In Spain, no policy or framework exists for the recognition of credit between institutions. Article 6, paragraph 3 of the Royal Decree 1393/2007, does however state that official university degrees in Spain may allow a maximum of 15% of the credits of the curriculum to be based on lifelong learning (LLL) through professional or work experience and/or unofficial university education (UNED, 2019). As

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<sup>7</sup> <http://portal.uab.pt/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/regulamento-creditacao-competencias.pdf> Accessed 8th April 2019 (English translation required)

well as signing the LRC in 2009, the Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education has been included in Spanish legislation and it is currently applied by Spanish universities (Delgado, 2014).

Although Spanish HEIs may allow a maximum of 15% of the credits of the curriculum to be based on LLL, to recognise the credits, modules must belong to a similar area and be at the equivalent level and therefore recognition is not possible for every module (UNED, 2019). Teacher Training courses are however regulated in Spain<sup>8</sup> (Ministry of education, 2011) and as a result recognition falls under “articles 21 and 29 of order EDU/2886/2011 of October 20, which regulates the recognition, certification and registration of the permanent training activities of teachers (UNED, 2019).

### **3.10.1. Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia**

#### *Institution approaches to the recognition of credit*

At UNED, there is no institutional policy for the recognition of credit nationally or from another European Institution. Despite this however, it is possible for up to 15% of the credits obtained in permanent training to be recognised in official studies, depending on each Faculty. Recognition of credits for qualifications completed within social and legal science for example will only be considered if completed within 10 years with a maximum of 6 ECTS being recognised. If the qualification belongs to a different subject area but fulfils some of the requirements a maximum of 3 ECTS can be recognised (UNED, 2019).

### **3.10.2. Universitat Oberta de Catalunya**

#### *Institution approaches to the recognition of credit*

HEIs within Spain such as The Open University of Catalonia (OUC) translate Article 6, paragraph 3 of the Royal Decree 1393/2007 into their own regulations through the possibility of certifying the knowledge acquired in another institution. It is also possible for most modules of study to be recognised in different programs. For example, a course of 5 ECTS could be part of a bigger program (specialisation of 10 ECTS) and can be recognised. OUC therefore has clear regulations that permit the recognition and inclusion of credits earned within another University to count towards an official UOC qualification. However, despite credit from other European Universities being recognised, UOC legislation stipulates some restriction on the recognition of foreign qualifications. This is however only for the purposes of legality of the title abroad.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-2011-16923> Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> March 2019 (English translation required).

### **3.11. Turkey: Anadolu University**

#### *General country practices of recognition*

The national policy/framework of Turkey for RPL is integrated with the LRC and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTs). Based on bilateral agreements and in the Erasmus Exchange Framework, credits achieved at an institution in another European Country can be recognised. The National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (NQF-HETR) is compatible with the three-cycle system within the Bologna process facilitating the ability to recognise qualifications from different countries. In accordance with Anadolu University (AU) (2019) RPL is one of the most important elements of the Turkish Education System. In Turkey, the Council of Higher Education is the central authority for the recognition of foreign qualifications; therefore, the application for the recognition of foreign diplomas is submitted to the "Equivalency Unit" structured under the Council of Higher Education. The HE system is centralised and managed by the Council of Higher Education which is a non-political and autonomous supreme corporate body.

#### *Institution approaches to the recognition of credit*

At AU in Turkey there is a clear policy regarding RPL. Newly registered students can be exempted from the intensive foreign language preparation program along with other mandatory courses if they successfully pass a language proficiency exam at the University. Students in receipt of an associate degree can also be placed on a BA programme as a continuation of their previous studies. This is based on their vertical Transfer Exam (DGS) scores which is administered by the Student Selection and Placement Centre (ÖSYM) (Anadolu University, 2019). Within the institution, undergraduate and associate degree programmes can be successfully transferred but courses that are taken from the certificate programmes cannot be transferred to associates or bachelor's degrees.

### **3.12. United Kingdom: The Open University UK**

#### *General country practices of recognition*

According to Hawley (2016) RPL has been used for many years in the UK as a way of widening access to HE and developing LLL opportunities. There is however a devolved nations system of governance for LLL with each country having their own strategy (Hawley, 2016). At HE level, the decision-making process regarding what will be recognised and the degree to which RPL is applied remains the responsibility of the individual institutions and is at their discretion. Institutions must therefore formulate their own policy for RPL and determine their position on the underpinning principles; the amount of credit which can be transferred between qualifications and/or accepted by a HEI for

inclusion in one of its awards; whether general or specific credit is used and the currency or shelf-life of credit. It is thus likely that a qualification might be recognised in different ways by different institutions.

Despite the absence of a national policy for RPL, the regulatory body for HE in the UK, the Office for Students (OfS) emphasises the need for student choice and mobility and section 38 of the Higher Education Research Act<sup>9</sup> (2017) places the responsibility for monitoring arrangements for student transfers in their hands. UK HEIs which award credit for prior study and informal learning obtained through work or other experiences must align their procedures to the mandatory requirements of the Quality Code<sup>10</sup>. The approach to recognition adopted by UK HEIs can be either specific or general. Specific approaches recognise learning on a partner by partner basis through a process of curriculum mapping and credit assessment. General approaches on the other hand recognise qualifications that are on the FHEQ<sup>11</sup> or SCQF<sup>12</sup>, from any recognised UK HEI or approved international provider verified by UK NARIC<sup>13</sup> or that is regulated by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations (Ofqual)<sup>14</sup>.

#### *Institution approaches to the recognition of credit*

The Open University UK (OUUK) has an RPL policy for recognising and accepting credit for modules earned at other UK HEIs or that sit on the Ofqual register for regulated qualifications. Credit achieved at another HEI is recognised at the OU through the award of module or general credit exemption at or below the level and credit value of the prior study. The maximum amount of credit that can be recognised from prior study is 2/3rds of a qualification. For example, for a BSc Honours Degree that requires 360 UK credits, a maximum of 240 UK credits can be accepted from prior study (subject to individual assessment). RPL is operationalised centrally within the University's Credit Transfer Centre.

Similar patterns are evident when the recognition and acceptance of credit from an institution in another European or International Country is considered. The RPL policy at the OUUK allows the institution to recognise and award credit for prior study that does not already bear UK HEI academic

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/29/part/1/crossheading/student-transfers/enacted>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>

<sup>11</sup> The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of Degree-Awarding Bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

<sup>12</sup> Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.naric.org.uk/naric/> (Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> March 2019) The national agency for the recognition and comparison of international qualifications and skills in the UK

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual> (Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> March 2019) The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulations who regulates qualifications, examinations and assessments in England

credit, including overseas qualifications or professional qualifications. This is however restricted to those institutions and qualifications recognised by UK NARIC.

A summary of country and institution approaches to recognition can be found in table 1 in Annex 1.

## **4. Conclusions**

### **4.1. Key observations**

One of the core themes that has emerged from this report is that within all countries the responsibility for making recognition decisions is delegated to HEIs. Each institution is therefore autonomous in deciding what prior learning can be recognised. The recognition of SLPs will therefore be down to the discretion of each institution and not governed by national policy. Having this devolved responsibility should be viewed as a key strength because it will facilitate the capacity for us to develop an agreement of mutual recognition between partner institutions.

### **4.2 Problems and solutions**

One of the fundamental issues with recognition is that there is no single European level framework for the process of recognising credit. The presence of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area should however provide a reference point to facilitate mutual recognition and enable the levelling of SLPs. The National Qualifications Frameworks of all partner countries have been referenced to the EQF and therefore a solution to the absence of a national framework for recognition is that partner institutions enter into reciprocal recognition arrangements for their SLPs.

Another problem area is the size variance of SLPs. This might be acceptable in a mutually arranged consortium framework, but if a fundamental aim is to facilitate the recognition of SLPs within the EQF, two fundamental issues arise. Firstly, although the EQF can aid the levelling of SLPs, the levels of this framework do not have a credit value, raising the question of whether it would be more appropriate to align SLPs to the Qualifications Framework for the Higher Education Area and its cycle descriptors which do have a credit range. In addition to this, unlike other countries, the UK already has exit qualifications that sit on their framework (FHEQ) at a size of 30 ECTS. This includes the Graduate certificate at level 6 and the Postgraduate Certificate (PGCert) at level 7. It is therefore important that there is consistency in the size of an SLP. An SLP can be any size but multiple versions of the same concept cannot be positioned within a framework. An SLP can be made up of different size chunks of learning which could be viewed as micro-credentials, but the overarching SLP must be consistent. An SLP of 15 ECTS would therefore facilitate the inclusion of three chunks of learning at 5 ECTS each in

alignment with the Common Microcredentials Framework (CMF)<sup>15</sup> or of one chunk at 10 ECTS and one at 5 ECTS. An SLP of 30 ECTS would facilitate the inclusion of four chunks of learning at 7.5 ECTS each or six chunks of learning at 5 ECTS each or combinations of different variations all of which align to the CMF.

## 5. Recommendations

In response to the points raised within this report the following recommendations have been made.

### 5.1 Curriculum design

To support the recognition of SLPs and ensure alignment to the EQF it is recommended that the following ‘principles of recognition’ are embedded into curriculum design.

- SLPs should be designed at EQF levels 5-8.
- SLPs should be no larger than 30 ECTS and should document the volume of workload involved in terms of directed and self-study hours.
- SLPs should consist of a coherent set of learning building blocks or micro-credentials.
- SLPs should have clear and transparent learning outcomes that are aligned to the learning outcomes of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) (See Annex 2).
- SLPs should be written in line with the cycle descriptors of the Framework for Qualifications in the European Area (See Annex 3).
- The development, delivery and assessment of SLPs should be subject to usual internal quality assurance processes, and only if required also by an external body, in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).
- SLPs should have clear and transparent assessment methods to assess achievement of the learning outcomes.
- The language of tuition and assessment should be clearly stated in the SLP description.
- SLPs should identify where and how they could be ‘stacked’ into a larger qualification.
- The identity of students should be checked to ensure authentication of assessment to reduce the risk of misconduct.

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<sup>15</sup> The CMF is developed by the European MOOC Consortium and provides a set of principles to support the creation of portable credentials for lifelong learners. In order to qualify as a microcredential within the CMF, a course must adhere to its core principles.



- Where possible involve employers or other stakeholders in the design of SLPs.
- On successful completion of an SLP the student should receive a certificate of completion, or credentials, that details the following:
  - a. Full Name of the student
  - b. Details of the SLP, including breakdown of any individual units
  - c. The level of the SLP.
  - d. The ECTS size of the SLP
  - e. Date
  - f. Institutions stamp

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# Annex

## 1. Summary table on recognition practices

Country	National policy/framework on recognition of credit	Institution approaches to recognition of credit	Qualifications framework referenced to the EQF
Belgium: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven	The national policy on the recognition of credit in Belgium is based on ECTS (KU Leuven, 2019a).	<p>Credits can be used in other programmes when the same or equivalent course is available. The professor is responsible for assessing the equivalence.</p> <p>There is a comprehensive system and database of learning credits at the Flemish level to support the recognition of credits between institutions.</p> <p>KU Leuven has a PAC procedure at the University level: (KU Leuven, 2019b)</p>	Yes
Finland: Open University of the University of Jyväskylä	There is no national policy for RPL. Universities are autonomous.	Institutional policies in RPL differ (RPL typically in faculty or department level).	Yes
Germany: Fernuniversität in Hagen	Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) referenced as the framework.	HEIs in Germany do not formulate their own policies.	Yes
Greece: Hellenic Open University	No national policy for the recognition of credit, however it is embedded in the University Law of Greece, more recently the Law 4485 of 2017. Regulated by the Greek	There is no national validation system and no comprehensive national framework for the certification of non-formal education and informal learning.	Yes

	Ministry of Education. The procedure is the same as in all Universities of Greece.		
Italy: Università Telematica Internazionale UNINETTUNO	No national policy/framework. The ratification of the LRC and introduction of University credits during the 1999 Italian University reform helped to facilitate student transfer.	Has its own institutional policy.	Yes
Lithuania: National Association of Distance Education	No national policy. RPL is regulated by the academic council in each HEI.  Recognition is done by HEIs authorised by Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania in 2003 November 12th decree law no.ISAK-1603.  Each HEI is required to define their own procedure for how it is applied.	Has its own institutional policy, as defined by law no. ISAK-1603.  Framework exists for recognising credit modules gained in other institutions.	Yes
Netherlands: Open Universiteit Nederland	No national policy for RPL.	Has its own institutional policy. An assessment committee of the HEI determines the value of the prior formal and informal learning.	Yes
Poland: Akademia Gorniczo Hutnicza Im. Stanislawia Staszica W Krakowie	Poland has a national policy for recognising credits.  The current, new Law on Higher Education (2018) has updated the procedure on recognising learning outcomes achieved outside the formal system (par.71 <a href="https://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20180001668/U/D2018168Lj.pdf">https://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20180001668/U/D2018168Lj.pdf</a> ).  It specifies that: No more than 50% of ECTS for a given study programme can be recognised.	Implemented as part of the ECTS system. Rare and uncommon practice.  According to the New Regulation of Study at AGH (will be applied from October 2019) there will be a possibility to recognise learning outcomes / ECTS achieved outside the university.  The detailed procedure on recognising learning outcomes is established locally at University level. Polish HE system is in a moment of transition from old to the new Law on Higher Education.	Yes

	<p>A HEI can recognise credits under conditions that it has been positively evaluated by the Polish Accreditation Office or has achieved A+, A or B level in discipline that refers to the study which should be recognised.</p> <p>A person asking for recognition can prove his/her experience at labour market and can deliver evidence of his/her level of qualification (according to Polish Qualification Framework. Experience at Labour Market – 2-5 years depending on the level of study the person is willing to enroll.</p> <p>The number of students positively enrolled for the study in result of recognising learning outcomes cannot exceed 20%.</p>		
Portugal: Universidade Aberta	Decree law 63/2016 establishes the limits for the maximum number of credits that can be recognised. Each HEI is required to define their own procedures for how it is applied.	Has its own institutional policy, as defined by regulation 39/2017	Yes
Spain: Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia  and  Universitat Oberta de Catalunya	No national policy/framework but legislation compliant with LRC.	Some institutions have policies. UOC yes, UNED no.	Unknown
Turkey: Anadolu University	No national policy for RPL. National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education in Turkey (NQF-HETR) is	Has its own institutional policy in scope of TQF.	Yes

	compatible with the three cycle system of the Bologna process.		
UK: The Open University UK	No national policy for RPL.	Has its own institutional policy for RPL.	Yes

The table provides an overview of the practices that exist across the partner countries and institutions in relation to recognition .

## 2. Descriptors defining levels in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

	Skills	Knowledge	Responsibility and autonomy
<p><b>Level 4</b></p> <p>The learning outcomes relevant to Level 4 are:</p>	Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study.	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study.	Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable but are subject to change; supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities.
<p><b>Level 5</b></p> <p>The learning outcomes relevant to Level 5 are:</p> <p><u>FQHEA</u></p> <p>Short cycle</p>	Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge.	A comprehensive range of cognitive skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems.	Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change; review and develop performance of self and others.
<p><b>Level 6</b></p> <p>The learning outcomes relevant to Level 6 are:</p> <p><u>FQHEA</u></p> <p>First cycle</p>	Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles.	Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study.	Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts; take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups.
<p><b>Level 7</b></p> <p>The learning outcomes relevant to Level 7 are:</p> <p><u>FQHEA</u></p> <p>Second cycle</p>	<p>Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research.</p> <p>Critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields.</p>	Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields.	Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches; take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams.
<p><b>Level 8</b></p>	Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields.	The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research	Demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas

<p>The learning outcomes relevant to Level 8 are:</p> <p><u>FQHEA</u></p> <p>Third cycle</p>		<p>and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice</p>	<p>or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research.</p>
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<https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en/content/descriptors-page> Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2020



### 3. Level descriptors of the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area

	Credit value	Level descriptors
<p><b>First Cycle</b></p> <p>Qualifications that signify completion of the first cycle (e.g. Bachelor's degrees) are awarded to students who:</p> <p><u>EQF</u></p> <p>Level 6</p>	<p>This cycle typically include 180-240 ECTS credits.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study.</li> <li>• Can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and have competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study.</li> <li>• Have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgements that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues.</li> <li>• Can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences.</li> <li>• Have developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Second Cycle</b></p> <p>Qualifications that signify completion of the second cycle (e.g. Master's degrees) are awarded to students who:</p> <p><u>EQF</u></p> <p>Level 7</p>	<p>This cycle typically include 90-120 ECTS credits, with a minimum of 60 credits at the level of the 2nd cycle.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with the first cycle, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context.</li> <li>• Can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study.</li> <li>• Have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements.</li> <li>• Can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously.</li> <li>• Have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Third cycle</b></p> <p>Qualifications that signify completion of the third cycle</p>	<p>A typical amount of credits is not prescribed for this cycle.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have demonstrated a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field.</li> <li>• Have demonstrated the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity.</li> <li>• Have made a contribution through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work, some of which merits national or international refereed publication.</li> </ul>

<p>are awarded to students who:</p> <p><u>EQF</u></p> <p>Level 8</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Are capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas.</li><li>• Can communicate with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise.</li><li>• Can be expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge based society.</li></ul>
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[http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area](http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Framework_for_Qualifications_of_the_European_Higher_Education_Area) Accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2020



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