Recognition issues with regards to SLPs

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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 focusses 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   Universita Telematica Internazionale UNINETTUNO

P9   Anadolu University

P10   Universidade Aberta

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P12   Open University of the University of Jyväskylä

P13   Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

P14   National Association of Distance Education

P15   Akademia Gorniczo Hutnicza Im. Stanislawa 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 Bolognal 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 to 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 and quality assurance across the partner countries and where applicable their associated institutions. Section 3 outlines the country specific approaches to recognition, section 4 covers the validation of non-formal and informal learning and

section 5 provides a summary of internal and external quality assurance practices. The report then presents recommendations for the recognition of SLPs, paying attention to curriculum design and the recognition of prior formal, non-formal and informal learning.

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 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[1] to aid the recognition of qualifications obtained within different Finnish Universities.

Institution approaches to the recognition of credit

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 Jyvaskyla 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

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[1] https://opintopolku.fi/oma-opintopolku/ Accessed 3rd July 2019

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: Universita 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"[2].

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

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[2]   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 3rd June 2019 2004 (English translation required).

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, are available in multiple languages in the "enrolment" UNINETTUNO website sub-section[3]. 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[4] 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[5]. 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

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[3] https://www.uninettunouniversity.net/en/iscrizione-studenti.aspx Accessed 3rd June 2019.
[4] https://www.uninettunouniversity.net/el/comunicatostampa.aspx?ID=118 Accessed 15th March 2019.
[5] https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.221576 Accessed 24th July 2019

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

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[6], 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. Stanislawa 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).

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[6] https://www.nuffic.nl/en/ Accessed 3rd June 2019.

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.

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[7] 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.

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

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 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[8] (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

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

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.

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[9] (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[10]. 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 [11] or SCQF[12], from any recognised UK HEI or approved international provider verified by UK NARIC[13] or that is regulated by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations (Ofqual)[14].

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

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[9] http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/29/part/1/crossheading/student-transfers/enacted
[10] https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code
[11] The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of Degree-Awarding Bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
[12] Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework.
[13] https://www.naric.org.uk/naric/ (Accessed 15th March 2019) The national agency for the recognition and comparison of international qualifications and skills in the UK
[14] https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual (Accessed 15th March 2019) The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulations who regulates qualifications, examinations and assessments in England

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

4. Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNIFL)

Throughout the completion of desktop research exploring approaches to recognition within partner countries, a significant theme that emerged is the concept of validation (as opposed to recognition) of non-formal and informal prior learning (VNIFL) and the approaches used within the context of each country.

According to Laudenbach and Lis (2019) validation of Prior Learning (VPL) is fundamental to the EUs approach to LLL and is used by some universities in response to 'economic and labour market needs' and for others as a way of widening access and participation within HE (Duvecot et al, 2014). Validation is therefore mostly used for gaining exemptions, accessing educational programmes or awarding parts of a qualification or credits (Calleja & Eckert, 2016). According to the European Commission (2011) cited by Sava, Borca and Danciu (2013) VPL takes place for one of two purposes in HE; to allow admission into a programme or to allow learners to validate that they have met (either partially or completely) the learning outcomes of a HE programme. HEIs should therefore be proactive in developing policies for the VNIFL and should be able to award credit for learning that has been acquired outside formal education (EU Commission, 2015).

In 2012, the European Commission (EU) passed a recommendation that required all European member states to implement procedures for the VNIFL in line with their national education systems by 2018 (Laudenbach and Lis, 2019). Despite this however Haasler et al (2018) cited by Laudenbach and Lis (2019) rightly acknowledge that some countries have still not achieved this making it clear that Europe presents a very disjointed picture of VPL.

To empower VPL Further, the 3rd VPL Biennale that took place in May 2019 resulted in the development of the Berlin declaration15 which is not only intended to drive policy makers and stakeholders to make validation policies more inclusive but also seeks to be an international benchmark for validation systems establishing a common language amongst stakeholders, practitioners and policy makers (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2019).

4.1. Belgium

In French-speaking Belgium a new regulatory framework on the VNIFL has been in place since 2014 in the Decree on the organisation of HE (Mathou, 2016). VNIFL is now a fundamental component of employment and education policies and two types of VNIFL currently exist (Mathou, 2016). According to Mathou (2016) the different types of VNIFL include valorisation of prior experience (VAE) which leads to potential exemptions from parts of a study programme in either adult or higher education and the validation of competence (VDC) which leads to the award of a recognised certificate within continuous vocational education and training. In response to the new regulatory framework identified above, VAE in HE is now more officially recognised. Despite being deemed as effective, work is still needed to improve the value that VDC has in the labour market as well as raising awareness of VAE to adult and HE users (Mathou, 2016).

As previously alluded to, the validation system in French-speaking Belgium is somewhat fragmented and as a result of there being four systems for VNFIL relevant to the different sectors of education, there has not been a consistent development of VNFIL in Belgium with each system having its own governance and steering arrangements (Mathou, 2016). As of 2016, the anticipation from Mathou (2016) is that Belgium is unlikely to move towards an integrated framework for the different stages of validation, however it is important to acknowledge that VAE is now regulated by a single regulatory framework in HE (Decree of 7 November 201315). It is also important to acknowledged that in Belgium, one of the key objectives of the National Qualifications Framework is to support the recognition and VNIFL (Mathou, 2016).

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.

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[15] https://vplbiennale.org/berlin-declaration-on-validation-of-prior-learning/ Accessed 23rd May 2019.

4.2.   Finland

According to Karttunen (2016) VNIFL is well established in Finland and embedded in the formal training and education systems. Despite this however, no single law exists regarding the VNIFL and alternatively they are defined within the laws and regulations for each field of education. Within all fields, a fundamental message within the legislation is that the VNIFL learning is a right of the individual and practices should be in place to validate such competences irrespective of where they have been acquired (Karttunen, 2016). A clear strength of the Finnish validation system is cooperation between all stakeholders and inclusion of key social partners in the design of qualification content and validation procedures which helps to ensure the opportunities for validation are well articulated within society.

4.3.   Germany

According to Ball (2016), a national validation system has not yet been established in Germany. However, in HE, the federal state and Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) laws provide the legal basis and coordination of various validation processes. HE Initiatives within this context are then under the responsibility of the autonomous universities and implemented primarily by individual HEIs and partnerships (Ball, 2016). Both national and individual procedures can be employed in Germany or in some cases a combination of the two. According to Ball (2016), individual procedures require applicants to provide proof of their prior learning that is compared to the curriculum of a degree programme. In accordance with Stamm-Riemer, Loroff and Hartmann (2011) cited by Ball (2016) global procedures involve a comparison of HE and vocational curricular to identify equivalent global qualifications that can be recognised. In both countries it is however apparent that all education sectors have different approaches to validation but all support the transition from one educational sector to another (Ball, 2016). Despite being a learning outcomes approach, placing emphasis on the knowledge and comprehension of the learner as opposed to the length and place of learning, the German Qualifications Framework (DQR) has not yet referenced learning achieved through non-formal and informal means.

4.4.   Greece

In contrast to practices that exist in other countries, Manoudi (2016) makes it clear that VNIFL is not yet developed in Greece. The fundamental reason for this is that such learning is not adequately recognised and valued in society despite representing the majority of pathways in Greece (Manoudi, 2016). In addition to planned legislative changes, it is important that a cultural move in favour of learning outcomes is required to support steps towards the validation and recognition of non-traditional learning (Manoudi, 2016). It is important to note however that non-formal learning does

not have the same definition in Greece as that provided by the Council Recommendation for the VNIFL (2012).

A comprehensive national framework for the certification of non-formal education and informal learning is therefore not present in Greece (European Commission, 2018). Despite this, law 4115/2013 along with the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance is the key administration body of the network for LLL with the purpose of developing and implementing a comprehensive system to certificate non-formal education (European Commission, 2018). Although HE in Greece has academic freedom, Law 4009/2011 specifies the primary requirement of HEIs beyond their educational focus is to contribute to LLL with VNIFL being fundamental to this. The referencing of the Hellenic Qualifications Framework (HGF) to the EQF in 2015 was an important first step towards the creation of a framework for the VNIFL. The LLL law (Law 3879/2010) recognised non-formal and informal learning as part of the National Framework for LLL.

4.5. Italy

In 2013, the national legislative decree on the certification of competence and VNIFL was affirmed in Italy. This led to the development of a national legal framework on the VNIFL (Perulli, 2016). This framework established a mechanism for mutual recognition amongst regional qualifications along with procedures for the VNIFL and certification of competences (Perulli, 2016). The institution holding authority for the implementation of this system in Italy is the National Technical Committee. The national policy on the VNIFL, linked to law 92/2012 establishes a clear "systematic top-down approach" (Perulli, 2016, p. 5) to this subject by defining a national system for the certification of such learning. However, this is mainly applied in the national Vocational Training framework and consequently, despite national movements towards more defined validation procedures, there remains a lack of regulatory tools for validation in HE. In HE, post-secondary, non-academic education activities, professional experience, professional certificates (such as language certification, or ECDL) can be recognised for exemption by a University (within the process of recognition/admission of a student to a Bachelor or Master's Degree programme) with the strict limitation of a maximum of 12 CFU (ECTS credits), as per Law no 240 of 30th December 2010[16].

Although Italy's national qualifications framework was only adopted in January 2018 ("Quadro nazionale delle qualificazioni" established with the Decree of Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and

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[16] http://www.camera.it/parlam/leggi/10240l.htm "Rules regarding the organization of universities, academic staff and recruitment, as well as the Government's delegation to promote the quality and efficiency of the university system" Accessed 3rd June 2019 (English translation required).

Ministry of Education, University and Research[17]), clear links have been identified between validation processes and qualification systems. However, decree 13/2013 states that only competences that belong to qualifications within the National Repertory of Qualifications can be certified and/or validated, by the authorised body for its respective territory (Perulli, 2016). It is clear however that every qualification can be formally certified after education, training or validation from a minimum of one competence up to a whole qualification (Perulli, 2016). Furthermore, decree 13/2013 requires each institution who is entitled to provide study titles and qualifications in the national framework, to provide information about competences and professional profiles, in order to link educational programmes to the "National directory of education and training titles and professional qualifications" established by Law no 9, 28th June 2012. While this means that Bachelor and master's degree programmes must "declare" in their specification which professions their students will be able to do once achieved, it does not provide a specific framework for recognition of professional activities or prior learning within a formal University study programme[18].

4.6.   Lithuania

According to Beleckiene (2016), there are multiple legal frameworks covering validation in Lithuania with it forming part of broader education and employment policies and supporting the development of LLL. Regulations for validation arrangements differ across the different educational sectors and therefore it is clear that a national policy for the VNIFL does not exist in Lithuania. Results of validation are however recognised within the education system and do lead to formal qualifications (Beleckiene, 2016).

Despite the absence of a national strategy for the VNIFL, it is possible for qualifications at all levels of the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework to be obtained through both formal education and professional experience or independent study (Beleckiene, 2016). 75% of the total study volume in

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[17] https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2018/01/25/18A00411/sg Establishment of the national framework of qualifications issued in the framework of the national system for the certification of skills pursuant to legislative decree 16 January 2013, n. 13. (18A00411) (Official Gazette No. 20 of 25-01-2018) Accessed 3rd June 2019 (English translation required).

[18] https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2013/02/15/13G00043/sg Definition of the general rules and essential levels of the services for the identification and validation of the non-formal and informal learning in accordance with article 4, paragraphs 58 and 68, of the law 28 June 2012, n. 92. (13G00043) (Official Gazette n.39 dated 02-15-2013) Accessed 3rd June 2019 (English translation required).

Lithuania can therefore be obtained through validation (Ministry of Education and Science, 2010 cited by Beleckiene, 2016). Despite this generous allowance and clear recognition of the importance of validation, Lithuania lacks a national system for the harmonisation of validation across the different sectors requiring greater inter-institutional collaboration to facilitate further validation development (Becleckiene, 2016).

4.7. Netherlands

Based on a vision of LLL, VPL became a fundamental part of the cultural and historical context of the Netherlands and is now deemed as necessary to take account of the Dutch LLL setting (Duvecot, 2016). With this is mind, a National system for VNIFL exists in the Netherlands and was established in 1998 making it possible that non-formal learning can lead to partial exemption from a HE programme based on assessment by specialised committees (Duvecot, 2016). There is normally however, no recognition for informal learning. Non-formal learning offered by Dutch HEIs is predominantly classified according to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) however because informal learning is not normally recognised, a link has not been made within this type of learning and the qualifications framework.

Despite being relatively organised in the Netherlands questions about the accessibility of VPL to users lead to the development of a new policy on the VNIFL in 2014 with the aim of broadening validation opportunities to Dutch citizens (Duvecot, 2016). This policy also enabled a national and sectoral approach to validation with the national approach using the formal pathway to VPL and sectoral approach using the more informal pathway (Duvecot, 2016).

4.8. Poland

In Poland, there are no central regulations addressing validation (Duda and Gruza, 2016). Despite this however, the need for such regulations relating to all contexts of education at all levels is stated in government policy documents (Duda and Gruza, 2016). However, the development of a uniformed validation system in Poland has not been completed. It is evident that the culture for learning in Poland is dominated by education that takes place in a formal environment and as a direct consequence participation by adults in LLL remains low stimulating the importance of VNIFL gaining greater recognition in Poland (Duda and Gruz, 2016).

4.9. Portugal

According to Guimaraes (2016), the VNIFL is available through two mechanisms in Portugal. These mechanisms include the accreditation of learning in HEIs and the national system for the recognition, validation and certification of competence (RVCC). Details about the accreditation of non-formal and

informal learning in HE is however limited with very little sector change since the 2014 country update on the VNIFL (Guimaraes, 2016). Despite this however, HEIs have consolidated validation processes that take place to ensure some level of consistency in line with legislation published in 2013.

In Portugal, validation within HE, was therefore the result of legislation changes in 2013 namely Decree law 115/2013 section 07/08 (Guimarares, 2016). Each institution is responsible for setting their specific validation procedures, but they require approval by the Scientific Board of Universities and Polytechnics. Formal rules must therefore be published by each institution within the government's official journal. A limit of up to one-third of the total number of ECTs relating to a degree can be claimed through validation.

Since 2009, VNIFL has been part of the National Qualifications Framework in Portugal with the aim to increase the number of working age Portuguese people who are certificated (Guimaraes, 2016).

4.10. Spain

In Spain rules for validating learning are well established and responsibilities for such processes are set within Royal Decree 1224/2009 on the recognition of professional competences acquired through work/professional experience (Carro, 2016). The procedures are then established by each regional authority, however only 9 out of 17 regions have developed their own regulations/legislation (Carro, 2016). This is interesting because the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Spain, provides an alternative route for individuals to gain the qualifications of the ministries of Education and Labour (Carro, 2016). Although well established, a unique system for validating prior learning does not exist in Spain and instead different processes exist with varying objectives and target audience's (Carro, 2016). These have been present in Spain since 2012 which has allowed large volumes of people to enter to achieve a qualification without completing an educational programme from scratch (Carro, 2016). It is important to note however that Decree 1224/2009 does not cover validation of skills and professional/work experience developed through LLL but since the establishment of procedures for the validation of learning acquired through non-formal and informal contexts, LLL has become more accepted within Spanish society. The Spanish National Qualifications Framework for LLL also integrates VNIFL with qualifications acquired through formal education as a mechanism to further support LLL. Specific to HE, the Royal Decree 861/2010 developed the concept of the recognition of work experience in Spain as a mechanism to achieve academic credit towards a degree. This however cannot exceed 15% of the total number of credits that make up the qualification.

4.11.   Turkey

According to Akkok (2016) the 2014-2018 LLL Strategy document of MoNE, promotes widespread use of validation in Turkey. The VNIFL within HE was legally introduced into the Turkish HE system in 2011 by an amendment in Law No 2547 (article 44/b) which delegates responsibility to senates of HEIs to specify their own regulations (Akkok, 2016). Despite this however, it is still in its infancy and it is important to note that article 44/b in Law Number 2547 only allows this recognition for registered HE students (Akkok, 2016).

Validation in Turkey has been defined in the legislation for the Turkish Qualifications Framework and as previously stated is prioritised within the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) LLL Strategy Paper (AKKOK, 20916). Despite this however there is room for more developments in HE so that the validation process can become more visible. The Vocational and Qualifications Authority (VQA) and the LLL department of the Ministry of National Education are actively working to widen the VNIFL in Turkey. Turkey has implemented a system to assess, evaluate and certify skills of adults against national vocational qualifications. The validation processes in the scope of LLL aim for the definition and the recognition of all knowledge, skills and competences achieved in informal and non-formal learning contexts in all TQF levels. The Turkish Qualifications Framework is fundamental to the creation of the validation system (AKKOK, 2016). Thus, the TQF was designed to allow for certifying the qualifications achieved as a result of the learning in a non-formal and informal learning environment[19].

4.12.   United Kingdom

VNIFL is commonly known as recognition of prior experiential learning (RPEL) in England and Northern Ireland and is used for access, exemption and award in higher education (Hawley, 2016). As there is no specific strategy devoted to RPEL, the offer will depend on the provider themselves, the disadvantage of this however is that without a stronger drive at national level, the number of individuals who benefit from RPEL opportunities will remain relatively low (Hawley, 2016). Qualifications awarded through RPL both certificated and experiential, are trusted by stakeholders as they are deemed the same as those awarded through formal learning opportunities but without the same graded outcomes (Hawley, 2016).

According to Duvecot, Kang and Murray (2014), VPL provides a method for identifying how one's prior learning reflects the learning expected through National Qualifications Frameworks. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the FHEQ is based on the premise that qualifications are awarded for the

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[19] https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/tk-cr2016.pdf Accessed at 24 July 2019

achievement of learning outcomes as opposed to years of study (Hawley, 2016). Qualification descriptors describe the expected outcomes for the award of individual qualifications and are used in the development of courses at a specific level. In 2008 a credit framework for HE was developed and used by all degree-awarding institutions who award academic credit within their programmes of study. The use of RPL for the award of academic credit is recognised by the QAA[20] with the FHEQ guidance on academic credit arrangements acknowledging that HEIs must reference the credit volume and level when determining the level and quality of what they might formally recognise as prior learning as part of a particular programme (QAA, 2008). The Quality Code for HE does not stipulate a limit to the amount of credit that can be awarded for RPL both certificated or experiential in the same way as Italy and Portugal, but it does stipulate that such limits must be clearly articulated within the regulations for each individual HEI.

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

5. Quality assurance practices

The quality assurance of SLPs is fundamental to their recognition and must be considered as a core component of curriculum design. As part of work package 5, partner institutions were asked to provide details of internal and external quality assurance practices within their country and specific institution (if applicable). The information received can be found in table 2 in the Annex. On review of the approaches to quality assurance the following points can be made:

- Internal Quality Assurance:
  - All institutions (where appropriate) are accountable for the quality of their own provision and its assurance.

  - The process for quality assuring provision is defined within the governing committees of the HEI.

  - A reliable approach to internal quality assurance exists.

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[20] The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the UK. The independent body appointed to check the standards and quality of Higher Education in the UK.

- External Quality Assurance:
  - All countries have a national agency responsible for the external quality assurance of HE provisions.

  - Some countries i.e. Spain have multiple bodies who have responsibility for accrediting HE provision. Others i.e. England, have one overarching regulator (OfS).

  - Some countries i.e. UK, Spain and Portugal, have a quality code/guideline that identifies the standards of quality provision in HE. It provides transparency to stakeholders involved in HE and supports the internal quality assurance of qualifications.

  - Some countries i.e. UK and Finland are subject to external quality reviews/audit checks to monitor the quality of their provision.

To ensure the quality of HE provision, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) provide a common Framework for national and institutional quality assurance processes across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) to help build mutual trust, enhance recognition of qualifications and create greater cross-border cooperation [21]. These standards should be fundamental to the design of SLPs.

6. Conclusions

6.1. 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.

With regards to less formal education, most countries understand the value of non-formal and informal learning to the labour market and as a means of developing a culture of LLL. However, despite

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[21] ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE, EQAR, BUSINESSEUROPE and EI (2015). ESG: Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. Belgium: EURASHE.

this, and irrespective of the presence of European Guidelines on the VNIFL, not all countries have developed a system to implement it. This raises issues if prior learning is considered as a means of exemption against components of an SLP. It would seem unjust to only consider formal certificated learning here given the role SLPS have in developing LLL opportunities and particularly if a learner has completed a part of an SLP through this mode of learning. This however would be dependent on the institutions ability to recognise this learning within individual learning building blocks (LBBs). The decision regarding this and the nature of non-formal and informal learning that will be accepted will have to be delegated to the institution that owns the SLP and their underpinning policy on RPL.

Although different processes exist for VNIFL, an appreciation of the value of informal and non-formal learning is present to help the European Commission meet the target of having 25% of the population engaging in learning throughout their lives by 2025. This is supported by the growing prevalence of Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) with a more recent emphasis on the development of Micro-credential's as a means of upskilling the current work force facilitating personal growth without the need to commit to a formal qualification. To ensure Microcredential courses are developed to a high standard, the European MOOC Consortium (EMC) launched a Common Microcredential Framework (CMF) in April 2019 to facilitate the 'creation of portable credentials for lifelong learners' (O'Grady, 2019). Fundamental to this framework is the requirement that Microcredential courses are developed within the National Qualification Framework (NQF) and in line with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) to support the recognition of these credentials across different countries. The release of this framework was timely for this project but what it does raise is the need for consistency with the size of SLPs. Although SLPs in the ESLP project do not fit the size description of micro credentials within the CMF of 100-150 hours, a suggestion is that the individual programmes that create an SLP could.

6.2   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 partners 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 fundamental issue as alluded to above 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 CMF 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.

7. Recommendations

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

7.1 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 3).

- SLPs should be written in line with the cycle descriptors of the Framework for Qualifications in the European Area (See Annex 4).

- The development, delivery and assessment of SLPs should be subject 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 plagiarism.

- 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. Name and surname of the student
    b. Details of the SLP and individual units within the programme.
    c. The level of the SLP.
    d. The ECTS size of the SLP
    e. Date
    f. Institutions stamp

7.2   Recognition of prior formal, non-formal or informal learning

To widen access to higher level study and value the range of learning opportunities that are available within society, it is recommended that all SLPs provide opportunities for the recognition of prior formal, non-formal and informal learning that:

- Is at or above the level of the SLP.
- Has been completed at a recognised HEI (formal learning only).
- Is assessed for relevance against the learning outcomes of the SLP or LBB.

Recognition of prior learning should be considered at curriculum design stage and the following principles approved within the SLP regulations:

- The maximum amount of prior learning that will be recognised within an SLP.
- The maximum age of prior learning that will be considered for recognition.
- The inclusion of an assessment only option as a mechanism to recognise prior non-formal or informal learning against an LBB within an SLP.

To support the mutual recognition of SLPs a memorandum of understanding should be developed and signed by the European Open and Distance Teaching Universities contributing to the E-SLP project.

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Annex

1. Summary table on recognition practices including the validation of non-formal and informal learning

Country	National policy/framework on recognition of credit	Institution approaches to recognition of credit	Validation of non-formal and informal learning – National perspective	Validation of non-formal and informal learning – Links to National Qualifications Framework	Validation of non-formal and informal learning – 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).	Credits can be used in other programmes when the same or equivalent course is available. The professor is responsible for assessing the equivalence. There is a comprehensive system and database of learning credits at the Flemish level to support the recognition of credits between institutions. KU Leuven has a PAC procedure at the University level: (KU Leuven, 2019b)	For the Flemish region, the Decree on the flexibilisation defines PAC as a previously acquired competence being the whole of knowledge, insight, skills and attitudes acquired through learning processes that are not ratified by study certificates. The following definitions are used: APL: A previously acquired competence, being the set of knowledge, insight, skills and attitudes acquired through learning processes that were not validated with proof of study. EVK: A previously acquired qualification being any domestic or foreign study	Unified accreditation organisations with the Netherlands: https://www.nvao.net/en	Yes

		certificate that indicates that a formal learning trajectory, whether or not within education, has been successfully completed, insofar as it is not a credit certificate that was obtained within the institution and study program within which the qualification is to be applied. https://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/edulex/document.aspx?docid=14650		
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).	National validation system has not been established.	No links to National Qualifications Framework. Validation of non-formal and informal learning is possible; usually at department level.	Yes
Germany: Fernuniversität in Hagen	Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) referenced as the framework.	HEIs in Germany do not formulate their own policies.	National validation system has not been established in Germany but in HE, the federal state and KMK laws provided the legal basis and coordination of such processes.	Learning achieved through non-formal and informal learning has not been referenced to the DQR.	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 Ministry of Education. The	There is no national validation system and no comprehensive national framework for the certification of non-formal education and informal learning.	There is no national validation system and no comprehensive national framework for the certification of non-formal education and informal learning.	The National Qualifications Framework established in 2015 does not include any validation procedures for non-formal and informal learning. The Lifelong learning law (Law 3879/2010) recognised non-formal and	Yes

	procedure is the same as in all Universities of Greece.			...informal learning as part of the National Framework for Lifelong Learning.	Yes
Italy: Universita 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.	National legal framework on the validation of non-formal and informal learning was developed in 2018.	Clear links have been identified between validation processes and qualification systems.	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. Procedures and principles for validating learning are organised according to the decree law no. V-289	National validation system has not been established. It is embedded within the legislation of the individual education sectors.	Validation of person's competences acquired through formal, non-formal, vocational or informal learning is executed by low no. V-15 of Minister of Education and Science.	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.	Non-formal learning can lead to partial exemption for programmes of HEI based on assessment by specialised committees of the HEIs. There is normally no recognition of informal learning.	Non formal learning offered by Dutch HEIs is almost always classified according to EQF. There is normally no recognition of informal learning and hence no link to the EQF.	Yes
Poland: Akademia Gorniczo Hutnicza Im. Stanislawa. The current, new Law on Higher Education (2018) has updated	Poland has a national policy for recognising credits.	Implemented as part of the ECTS system. Rare and uncommon practice.	Procedures on validation of non-formal and informal learning is a part of an integrated Qualification system developed in 2016.	Clear links between integrated Qualification System and validation procedures has been established and clearly	Yes

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Staszica W Krakowie	the procedure on recognising learning outcomes achieved outside the formal system (par.71 https://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU201800 01668/U/D20181168Lj.pdf).	According to the New Regulation of Study at AGH Higher Education (will be applied from October 2019) there will be a possibility to recognise learning outcomes / ECTS achieved outside the university.	The current, new Law on Higher Education (2018) established a procedure on recognising learning outcomes achieved outside the formal education system.	described at Integrated Qualification System webpage.
	It specifies that: No more than 50% of ECTS for a given study programme can be recognised.	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 Eductaion.		The current educational system based on qualification framework makes SLP (and micro-programmes) possible and HE as the integrators for Lifelong Learning.
	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.			
	A person asking for recognition can prove his/her experience at labour market and can deliver and 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 wiling to enroll. The number of students positively enrolled for the study in result of recognising learning outcomes cannot exceed 20%.			

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	Validation within HE, was the result of legislation changes in 2013 namely Decree law 115/2013 section 07/08. Each institution is responsible for setting their specific validation procedures but they require approval by the Scientific Board of Universities and Polytechnics.	Validation of non-formal and informal learning has been part of the National Qualifications Framework in Portugal since 2009.	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.	Procedures and responsibilities for validating learning are organised according to the Royal Decree 1224/2009.	The Spanish National Qualifications Framework for LLL integrates validation of non-formal and informal learning with qualifications acquired through formal education.	Unknown
Turkey: Anadolu University	No national policy for RPL. National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education in Turkey (NQF-HETR) is compatible with the three cycle system of the Bologna process.	Has its own institutional policy in scope of TQF.	The TQF Regulation describes the duties and responsibilities of HEIs regarding validation, learner mobility and the validation of informal and non-formal learning.	The TQF is central to the establishment of the validation system. The alignment of VET with national occupational standards and work to support the link between education and employment are goals of the TQF.	Yes
UK: The Open University UK	No national policy for RPL.	Has its own institutional policy for RPL.	RPEL aopporunities in the UK – No national strategy.	The use of RPL/RPEL for the award of academic credit is recognised by the QAA. The FHEQ guidance on academic credit acknowlededes that HEIs	Yes

The table provides an overview of the practices that exist across the partner countries and institutions in relation to recognition and the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNIF).

	must reference credit volume and level when determining what they might formally reconise as prior learning within a specific programme.

Organisation	Quality Assurance Agency	External Quality Assurance processes	Internal Quality Assurance processes
Belgium: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven	NVAO	Since the decree of June 10, 2015 institutions have two options: (1) an institutional review combined with an external quality assessment of the study programme(s) or (2) an expanded institutional review in which an institution can have an additional review performed on the way they direct and safeguard their own internal quality review which gives them a reprieve of external quality assessment visitations. For Flemish Universities, and KU Leuven specifically, the process is as follows: (1) Self-evaluation report is made: The programme writes a critical, analytical, and future oriented reflection taking into account three standards: (1) intended qualification level (2) educational environment (3) realised qualification level (2) An external quality assessment commission is composed by the VLUHR (Counsel of Flemish Universities and Graduate Schools) taking into account the self-evaluation report and a previous visit. The commission comprises of 4 members: 2 domain specific experts, a member with experience in educational matters, and a student. (3) The actual visitation takes place. Interviews with the different stakeholders are held,	The internal Quality Assurance within KU Leuven is called COBRA. COBRA stands for Cooperation, Reflection and Action, with attention for Checks & Balances. With COBRA, students, teaching staff, staff and their external peers; all contribute to the quality of education at three levels of the institution. At three levels of the university (education programme, faculty and institution) COBRA engages in a substantive dialogue about education and the necessary preconditions to support good education. Throughout three cycles, COBRA ensures preconditions are adjusted at the appropriate level and feedback is given to adjacent levels. COBRA has adopted a '2x2 cycle'. Within a four-year's cycle we integrate a moment of 'adjustment of preconditions' at faculty and university level every two years.

		study and graduation materials are investigated, and a provisional oral report is made (4) The actual visitation report is published publicly. The basis for accreditation of a programme is the visitation report or a previously received foreign accreditation that has been recognised by NVAO. The programme does not automatically receive the accreditation following the visitation report, but must take the extra step of requesting it within the allotted time. More information can be found in Dutch here: https://www.kuleuven.be/onderwijs/onderwijskwaliteit/visitatie-accreditatie/visitaties-en-accreditaties	
Finland: Open University of the University of Jyväskylä	The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) https://karvi.fi/en/fineec/	Based on the Universities Act, the Finnish universities have to take part in external evaluation of their activities and quality assurance systems on a regular basis. Essential for the quality management is the link between the strategic and operational management: how the goals are defined and followed and how the output is measured and the actions improved. FINEEC evaluates the quality management system of each HEI in an audit every 6 years. The audits assess how well the quality system meets the strategic and operational management needs of the HEI as well as how comprehensive and effective the quality management of the basic duties is. Moreover, the HEI's quality policy, development of the QMS and how well-functioning and dynamic entity the system forms are studied. After passing the audit, the HEI will receive a quality label valid for six years.	Each higher education institution (HEI) develops the quality management system (QMS) from its own needs and goals. The QMS is based on The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The QMS of the University requires internal quality audits on a yearly basis. Audits concern a variety of topics one at a time. Additionally, self-evaluations of education, management or organising services are arranged systematically and frequently.

Country / University	Agency / Body	Description
Germany: Fernuniversitaet In Hagen	Accreditation Council (since 01/01/2018)	The Accreditation Council (AC) is the overarching body for accreditation within German higher education.

The AC commissions agencies to conduct the quality assessment and decides on award of the accreditation seal based on the filed accreditation reports. In the accreditation process, a distinction is drawn between program and system accreditation.

Given that German states have the legal authority over education, the "Study Accreditation Interstate Treaty" (Studienakkreditierungsstaatsvertrag) (2017) mitigates between national and state level and serves as a reference for the states' higher education laws, while also indirectly establishing the duty for accreditation of bachelor and master study programs.

The national law requires ongoing quality management systems, which are specified in the individual states' higher education laws – owing to the federal structure of Germany and its education system.

At the FernUniversität in Hagen, the overall responsibility for quality assurance lies with the Rectorate. It is delegated to the faculties for implementation, which are supported by the administrative unit for accreditation and quality management. |
| Italy: Universita Telematica Internazionale UNINETTUNO | ANVUR – Agenzia Nazionale di Valutazione del Sistema Universitario e della Ricerca (National Agency for the evaluation of University and Research System) https://www.anvur.it/ | AVA (Self-assessment, Periodic Evaluation, Accreditation) is the name of the Italian Higher Education Quality Assurance system, operational since 2013.

AVA sets standards for the self-assessment by programmes and institutions, concerning their internal procedures and the outcomes of their activities, and for the external assessment of the quality assurance systems. External evaluation is based on peer review, is carried out by experts appointed by ANVUR through on-site visits and document analysis. It addresses the following activities:

- Accreditation of new Universities and programmes

As defined by AVA, in each University the Quality Assurance (QA) key actors are the following:

- the Nucleo di Valutazione (Independent Evaluation Unit – NdV),
- the Commissioni paritetiche docenti-studenti (Joint Teaching-Student Committees – CPDS),
- the Presidio di Qualità (Unit responsible for the internal QA system – PQA).

NdV provides external feedbacks on Degree programs design, implementation, evaluation. Taking into account the objectives and choices of governance and direction defined by the governing bodies of the University, the Evaluation Committee:

- performs the functions of guarantor of the evaluation system adopted by the University, |

- Periodic accreditation of Universities and their programmes

Initial Accreditation

Degree (Bachelor and Master) Programs are subject to initial (ex-ante) accreditation, based on criteria set by ANVUR, about:

- Transparency: verification of the completeness of all the information requested in the SUA-CdS (the full application form name for activating a new degree program);
- Teaching requirements: verification of the consistency of the teaching staff and its qualification;
- Limits to the fragmentation of educational activities and the diversification of the CdS: they establish the minimum units of duration of the training activities.
- Structural resources: these include the structures made available to individual CdS (classrooms, laboratories, etc.) or CdS related to the same reference structures (Departments, Connection Structures), such as libraries, study rooms, etc.

PhD Programs are also subject to a different set of criteria, and are evaluated ex-ante.

The process involves three external actors:

- CUN, National University Council, for a first approval of the new program general framework;
- ANVUR, for checking the compliance to the defined requirements;

through the verification of the methodologies used and the uniformity of the applied criteria;

- formulates proposals concerning the most appropriate and effective measures, instruments and parameters for evaluating teaching, research, services and any other activity managed by the University;
- acquires the results of the evaluation initiatives developed, which analyzes and presents to the bodies directly involved, providing its own indications for improving the levels of efficiency, effectiveness and quality of university activities;
- can promote or participate in research projects on evaluation issues, at national and international level;
- provides its own representatives and the other governing bodies of the University with any opinion that is requested on the subject of evaluation;
- also carries out all the formalities required, at the scheduled deadlines, by the Ministry of the University and by ANVUR, if and as requested also for the telematic universities

CDPS's tasks are:

- monitoring of the good functioning of the University's educational activities;
- comparison and connection with the student representation elected on the Committee (whose election takes place via computer);
- monitoring of communications received by students from the presidency secretariats of Faculty;
- analysis of data relating to student opinions.

- Ministry of HE, for final program approval. **Periodic Accreditation** The periodic accreditation consists of the verification by the ANVUR, through remote documentary examination and site visits, of the persistence of the requirements that led to the initial accreditation and the possession of further quality, efficiency and effectiveness requirements of the activities carried out , in relation to the quality assurance indicators as defined in the ministerial Decree 6/2019 (https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2019/07/01/19A04296/sg) **Other programs (1-year Professional Master courses, Short Learning programs, etc.)** Once a University is accredited, it has the autonomy to develop its own short program; no ex-ante or ex-post accreditation is currently performed on these programs.	PQA (Internal Quality Assurance body) implements the following activities: ● promote the culture of Quality in the University; ● implement the Quality Policy defined by the central bodies of the University; ● supervise the adequate and uniform performance of the University's QA procedures; ● propose common tools for quality assurance and adequate training for the purposes of their application; ● guarantee the capacity for continuous improvement of primary processes (provision of research) of the University as well as the effectiveness and efficiency of the structures that supply them and the teaching and non-teaching staff related to them; ● ensure the monitoring of QA procedures to ensure their adequacy and uniformity to the Psycho-pedagocical didactic model of the University. These bodies cooperate in the initial and continuous accreditation process for each of the "formal degree" programs: Bachelor, Masters and PhD. Other programs (1-year Professional Masters, Short Learning Programs, etc.) follows a different process; they can be proposed by professors or executives or other partners; then, after the completion of the Program design accordingly to UNINETTUNO models, these programs are finally: 1. Proposed by the faculty council

		evaluation/accreditation: mandatory evaluation / accreditation of ongoing first-, second- and long-cycle programmes in all fields of study including the fields of Nursing and Midwifery. Polish Accreditation Committee (PAC) conduct both types of evaluation ex-ante or initial programme evaluation and obligatory ex-post programme evaluation. Aside from ex-ante and ex-post programme evaluation, PAC conducts **so-called overall institutional evaluation**, covering quality assurance activities of an HEI in all domains where it offers programmes. The evaluation process is conducted upon a request of the institution given positive ratings in previous overall institutional evaluation and / or programme evaluation. The Bill also provides for evaluation **of doctoral schools or quality assessment of education in doctoral schools** (third-cycle programme), to be conducted by a Research Evaluation Committee (Komisja Ewaluacji Nauki). Criteria for quality evaluation of education in doctoral schools will be laid down by the Minister based on the provisions coming into force on 1 October 2019. First quality evaluation process will be conducted in academic year 2024/2025 as the school can be evaluated after at least 5 years since its launching.	
Portugal: Universidade Aberta (UAB)	Evaluation and Accreditation Agency of Higher Education (A3ES - (formal degrees)	All the formal programs (1st, 2nd and 3rd cycles) have to be accredited by the agency. There is a set of guidelines that institutions must follow for quality assurance to deliver higher education programmes (formal degrees)	In Portugal HEI have responsibility and accountability for developing internal quality assurance processes. The internal processes have to follow requirements of the Agency to ensure the overall quality of the HE and of the study programmes.

https://www.a3es.pt/e n)	Two procedures exist: - **Prior programme accreditation**: for each programme applications are submitted by the HEI and assessed by the agency. If application is successful then HEI has permission to offer the specific programme. - **periodic programme evaluation**: mandatory evaluation of ongoing programmes of all cycles. The full evaluation cycle is of 6 years but the Agency can also decide to grant authorizations of 1 and 3 years and impose conditions to be fulfilled on that period; after that time the HEI must submit a report showing the fulfillment of the conditions. Agency can close down programmmmes based on poor evaluation. A3ES nominates external commissions to conduct both types of accreditation/evaluation. The evaluation commissions integrates an expert from another country. A3ES also conducts i) the overall institutional evaluation, covering quality assurance activities of an HEI in all domains where it offers programmes. ii) audits of internal systems of quality assurance, upon request of the institution. It should be noted that so far no particular attention has been given to online learning and the evaluation criteria are exactly the same as for face to face institutions.	Teacher performance appraisal is mandatory and HEI define internal regulations for that purpose. Detailed arrangements for internal quality assurance are laid down in internal regulations.

Spain: Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia	Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación (ANECA)	Members of ECA (European Consortium for Accreditation, where ANECA participates) agreed a Good Practices Code where 17 quality standards have to be applied. -It provides transparency to skateholders involved in HE. -Defines the requirements needed for Accreditation Agencies, and guarantees the reliance in HEI -All of the members have to fulfill the requirements, and regularly contrast their procedures with the Code. -Supports internal quality assurance of Accreditation Agencies and provides recommendations for the continuous improvement of quality. -Avoids the predominance of just one point of view and promotes good practices. -Has to be updated when needed to be adapted to International regulation of good practices.	ANECA is in charge of the internal quality assurance processes, implementing two programs : VERIFICA (evaluates the proposals of new plan studies in accordance with the European Higher Education Area); and ACREDITA (evaluates the renewal of the initial accreditation on official titles). The new "Institutional Accreditation" favors and alternative way to ensure quality procedures which have to be compulsory applied by Spanish Universities: processing the renewal of official titles, and certifying the implementation of internal quality assurances systems. The implementation of internal quality assurances system has been mainly embodied on the evaluation program AUDIT (which UNED applies on all the titles offered and its education centers). http://portal.uned.es/portal/page?_pageid=93,2588452 48&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL AUDIT favours the start-up of Internal Quality Assurance Systems (SAIC), focused on the revision and improvement of the education in HEI, consequently, a coherent integration of resources and proceedings related to the quality assurance of the studies offered, take place. And also, making SAIC recognition possible, through their certification. UNED ensures SAIC by a document certifying the university commitment: link
Turkey: Anadolu University	Higher Education Quality Council Turkey (THEQC/YÖKAK)	The THEQC is a public legal entity with administrative and financial autonomy and special budget founded with the aim of evaluating the quality levels of higher education institutions' education and research activities and administrative services in accordance with the national and international quality standards, and coordinating the	In line with the University's strategic plan and objectives as well as the rules and procedures set by the Higher Education Quality Council Turkey, "Anadolu University Quality Commission" is charged with building the internal and external quality assurance system, identifying key performance indicators specific to the institution, assessing the programs and submitting

		processes of accreditation, internal and external quality assurance, and authorization of independent external evaluation organizations. The primary duties of the THEQC are: • Performing external evaluation of higher education institutions, • Coordinating the authorization and recognition processes of accreditation agencies, Ensuring the internalization and dissemination of quality assurance culture in higher education institutions.	reports on quality assurance to the Senate with a view to evaluating and monitoring education and research activities, community services and administrative services and improving the quality of these activities and services. The head of the Quality Commission is Anadolu University's Rector, or a Vice Rector in the absence of the Rector. The commission consists of members from faculties, institutes, schools and vocational schools selected by the University Senate – maximum one member from each unit, and each member representing a different scientific discipline. The secretary general of the higher-education institution, a student representative and the head of strategy development department are also among members of the Quality Commission.
The Open University UK (OUUK)	Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)	Registration to the Office for Students (OfS) is required to be a degree awarding body in the UK. The OfS delegates quality assurance responsibility to the QAA to ensure parity of HE provision across the sector. The QAA work with all Universities and colleges across the UK who deliver higher education programmes to assure the quality of the student experience. For institutions registered with the OfS, the quality of HE provision across the sector is assured through quality and standards reviews (QSR) for monitoring and intervention which provides evidence to the OfS about whether registered providers referred by the OfS to the QAA meet one or more of the Core practices of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.	UK Universities have responsibility and accountability for developing internal quality assurance processes to meet requirements of the UK Quality Code and to ensure the standard of their provision. The quality of academic provision at the OUUK is the overall responsibility of the University Senate who delegates responsibility through a hierarchical governance structure.

The table provides an overview of the internal and external quality assurance practices that exist across the partner countries – The information was provided by the institutions of the ESLP project.

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

	Skills	Knowledge	Responsibility and autonomy
Level 4 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 4 are:	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.
Level 5 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 5 are: FQHEA Short cycle	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.
Level 6 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 6 are: FQHEA First cycle	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.
Level 7 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 7 are: FQHEA Second cycle	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. Critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields.	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.

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Level 8	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 and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice	Demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research.
The learning outcomes relevant to Level 8 are:			
FQHEA			
Third cycle			

https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en/content/descriptors-page Accessed 3rd February 2020

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

	Credit value	Level descriptors
First Cycle Qualifications that signify completion of the first cycle (e.g. Bachelor's degrees) are awarded to students who: EQF Level 6	This cycle typically include 180-240 ECTS credits.	• 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. • 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. • 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. • Can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences. • Have developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy.
Second Cycle Qualifications that signify completion of the second cycle (e.g. Master's degrees) are awarded to students who: EQF Level 7	This cycle typically include 90-120 ECTS credits, with a minimum of 60 credits at the level of the 2nd cycle.	• 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. • 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. • 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. • Can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously. • Have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous.
Third cycle Qualifications that signify completion of the third cycle	A typical amount of credits is not prescribed for this cycle.	• Have demonstrated a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field. • Have demonstrated the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity. • 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.

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are awarded to students who:	
EQF Level 8	• Are capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas. • Can communicate with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise. • Can be expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge based society.

http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Framework_for_Qualifications_of_the_European_Higher_Education_Area Accessed 3rd February 2020

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