Recognition of prior learning

Internal guidance on the recognition of prior learning as prescribed in the Training Quality Assurance Framework

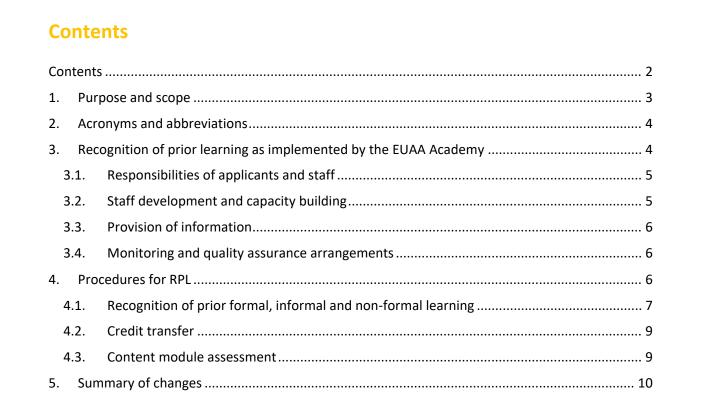IG Reference No: IG-017-01

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European Union Agency for Asylum
www.euaa.europa.eu

Tel: +356 2248 7500
info@euaa.europa.eu

Winemakers Wharf
Valletta, MRS 1917, MALTA

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1. Purpose and scope

This Internal Guidance is rooted in a broader policy framework of the European Education Area and the European Higher Education Area. It complies with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)[1] and the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA) National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education (2015, 2017)[2]. It supports the implementation of objective (vi) of the EUAA's Training and Learning Strategy (2022)[3], which is to promote recognition of prior learning (RPL) and is part of the EUAA's Training Quality Assurance Framework (2022)[4].

This document introduces a comprehensive RPL system that intends to capture and certify skills and knowledge, acquired informally and non-formally, that are relevant to learners' paths towards the EUAA's qualifications and awards. The RPL system is based on the European Sectoral Qualification Framework for Asylum and Reception Officials[5] (ESQF) and learning outcomes listed within the European Asylum Curriculum module syllabi as the basis for recognition.

This guidance outlines the scope and nature of the recognition of prior formal, non-formal and informal learning[6], how this process may be used to gain access to, or exemption from specific modules as part of courses or programmes of study within the EUAA's Training, what learning may be recognised, and the extent of recognition allowed. Moreover, it underlines the responsibilities for these processes and procedures within the Academy, and the arrangements for staff development and capacity building in the area of recognition. It describes how the recognition processes are monitored and quality assured, how the information about recognition procedures is made available to applicants and it outlines steps and procedures for different types of recognition.

The procedures that the EUAA puts in place to ensure compliance with the wider European policy framework and the relevant external regulatory framework are based on the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012/C 398/01)[7], European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (Cedefop, 2015, 2023)[8]. It is in line with the MFHEA National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education (2015, 2017) and it follows the Recognition of prior learning (RPL) – Definitions, Principles and Guidelines, issued by the MFHEA[9].

This document helps to ensure that there is a reliable, transparent and consistent approach taken by the Training Academy in line with these overarching principles that are made available online to all relevant stakeholders. The Quality Assurance and Accreditation Sector (QAAS) has the obligation to ensure that all Training and Professional Development Centre staff, students enrolled in the study

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[1] Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). (2015). Brussels, Belgium (weblink: https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf).

[2] Malta Further and Higher Education Authority National Quality Assurance Framework (weblink: Publications - Malta Further & Higher Education Authority (mfhea.mt).

[3] Management Board Decision No 102 of 7 March 2022 on the EUAA Training and Learning Strategy.

[4] Decision of the Executive Director No 59 of 1 April 2022 on the Training Quality Assurance Framework.

[5] European Sectoral Qualifications Framework for Asylum and Reception Officials (weblink: European Sectoral Qualifications Framework | European Union Agency for Asylum (europa.eu).

[6] As defined in EUAA Glossary of Training Terms (europa.eu).

[7] Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (europa.eu)).

[8] European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning | CEDEFOP (europa.eu).

[9] Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) – Definitions, Principles and Guidelines (mfhea.mt).

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www.euaa.europa.eu

Tel: +356 2248 7500
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programmes, learners enrolled in European Asylum Curriculum modules, and training national contact points are familiar with the content of this policy

This Internal Guidance shall be regularly reviewed in order to reflect new developments in the area and to adapt to the needs of the EUAA Academy. Monitoring and regular review shall be an inclusive process involving internal and external stakeholders and is the responsibility of the QAAS.

2.   Acronyms and abbreviations

ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
ESQF	European Sectoral Qualification Framework for Asylum and Reception Officials
MFHEA	Malta Further and Higher Education Authority
QAAS	Quality Assurance and Accreditation Sector (within the Training and Professional Development Centre)
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
TPPS	Training Planning and Programming Sector (within the Training and Professional Development Centre)

3.   Recognition of prior learning as implemented by the EUAA's Training Academy

Recognition of prior formal, non-formal or informal learning may be used to access study programmes or to be exempt from (a) particular module(s) within study programmes or training courses. The Agency may exempt learners and students from parts of a study programme or a training course/module by recognising their skills, knowledge and competencies acquired through prior learning, education, work and general life experience. Different types of recognition are envisaged by this Internal Guidance. Unless otherwise stated, reference to 'RPL' in this document encompasses the three types detailed below:

- **Recognition of prior formal, non-formal and informal learning** – Recognising a person's skills, knowledge and competencies acquired through previous education, non-formal[10] and informal[11] learning, work and general life experience in order to be exempt from up to 50 % of a programme or course (predefined set of modules);

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[10] Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. Examples include in-company training to update and improve skills of workers (such as ICT skills), structured on-line learning (such as open educational resources), and courses organised by civil society organisations.

[11] Informal learning is unintentional from the learner's point of view. Examples include skills acquired through leisure or hobbies. These activities are not explicitly designated as learning activities.

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- **Credit transfer** – Recognising a person's award or qualification or European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) in terms of learning outcomes that are at the same level in the Malta Qualifications Framework, and that closely match the learning outcomes of (a) particularmodule(s), in order to be exempt from parts of a study programme;

- **Content module assessment** – Recognising a person's skills, knowledge and competencies, exempting them from the requirement to follow the content of a module, but authorising them to participate in the assessment of that module in order to receive certification.

3.1. Responsibilities of applicants and staff

Applicants are responsible for requesting recognition of prior formal, non-formal, or informal learning, either individually (if enrolled in the study programmes), through their training national contact point or their line manager (for the EUAA's staff), following the application process, and providing all required supporting documentation as outlined below. Applicants are required to provide adequate and accurate information and documentation on their achieved learning in good faith.

The QAAS is responsible for providing information about the application for RPL, assisting applicants, and ensuring that all applicants are treated equally throughout the process.

RPL assessors are content experts involved in the RPL experiences. They are required to have at least basic training in RPL and experience in assessment procedures.

The RPL Panel, composed of representatives from the various Training and Professional Development Centre's sectors, is responsible for deciding on the application and the outcome of the recognition process. The RPL Panel confirms (or otherwise) and validates all recognition decisions based on recommendations made by the RPL assessors. In cases where the RPL Panel disagrees with the recommendations submitted by the RPL assessors, it may request additional clarifications or information from the applicant. RPL assessors who have participated in a specific RPL process for a particular applicant cannot participate in the RPL Panel to confirm and validate recognition outcomes for that applicant.

The QAAS is responsible for recording all recognition procedures and results, and the Training and Learning Technologies Sector is responsible for storing all documents in the EUAA's information technology systems. The Training Planning and Programming Sector's (TPPS) secretariat, with the advice and support of the QAAS, is responsible for advising and assisting RPL applicants on how to use the resulting credits to gain access to or exemption from programmes of study or training courses prior to registration and enrolment.

3.2. Staff development and capacity building

To ensure fair, reliable, and quality-assured RPL procedures, all TPDC staff involved in the process need to be trained and continuously follow developments in recognition. General arrangements for initial and ongoing staff development and capacity building are included in the Internal guidance on lecturers

European Union Agency for Asylum
www.euaa.europa.eu

Tel: +356 2248 7500
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and trainers as prescribed in the Training Quality Assurance Framework[12]. RPL Panel members and assessors who are content experts, are required to regularly attend training in their specific areas of expertise and follow developments in that area.

All EUAA staff involved in RPL are supported by the Agency to continuously develop their own specific competencies related to recognition. This includes, among others, the application of the learning outcomes approach, the selection and application of the most appropriate types and methods of assessment, the recognition of prior formal education and training, the provision of information and guidance to applicants, the further development of institutional recognition policy in line with the Maltese and European policy frameworks, and the quality assurance of different types of recognition.

3.3.   Provision of information

The Agency ensures that information about RPL procedures is made publicly available online. Clear communication on how recognition procedures are used, information on timeframes for different procedures, what outcomes are possible and how to apply for RPL is available to all learners, students, training national contact points and staff via the EUAA's learning technology systems.

All teaching and training staff are informed about the basics of the procedure so that they know how to inform learners about recognition opportunities, how a request for recognition is linked to an offer of admission to the programme or to a training course/module, about the possible outcomes of a recognition procedure, including the maximum number of credits and thus exemptions possible through recognition, who is responsible for processing recognition requests and how the request for recognition should be submitted.

3.4.   Monitoring and quality assurance arrangements

The QAAS is responsible for recording all recognition procedures and results, and the Training and Learning Technologies Sector is responsible for storing all documents in the EUAA's information technology systems. Recognition procedures are subject to the controls of the quality assurance system under the current institutional arrangements for quality assurance. The QAAS is responsible for monitoring the recognition procedures.

The individual recognition requests and the institutional recognition procedures are part of the internal quality assurance system and are subject to regular external evaluation.

4.   Procedures for the recognition of prior learning

In line with provisions outlined in the Training Quality Assurance Framework, learners who claim that they have achieved the intended learning outcomes of an EUAA module through informal or non-formal learning or through prior education and training, may apply for recognition of those learning outcomes. Requests for recognition include all types of prior learning as specified in this Internal Guidance and are free of charge to the applicant.

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[12] Reference number IG-015.

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www.euaa.europa.eu

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Recognition options are equally open to all applicants for admission to study programmes or training courses/modules. They are individualised, flexible, and designed to put the learner at the centre of the process.

Applications for recognition are submitted online in a secure area to which only those directly involved in the process have access, ensuring that individual privacy is maintained. Applicants' records are stored securely. The application for recognition has to be submitted with the registration for specific modules/courses/programmes of study.

The applications, in principle, follow the steps set out by the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012/C 398/01):

1. **Identification** of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;
2. **Documentation** of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;
3. **Assessment** of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;
4. **Certification** of the results of the assessment of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning in the form of a qualification, or credits leading to a qualification, or in another form, as appropriate.

Depending on the type of recognition (recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning, credit transfer or content module assessment), these four steps are adapted to the context of the EUAA and implemented as outlined in the following subsections.

Applicants shall be duly informed of the results of their application for recognition in a clear and coherent manner and shall receive information on the next steps in the procedure, regardless of the outcome.

4.1. Recognition of prior formal, informal and non-formal learning

This procedure is used for candidates who request RPL in order to be enrolled in a programme of study or training course and to be exempt from parts of the programme/course. A learner may request exemption from a maximum of 50 % of the ECTS leading to a degree or a course (a predefined set of modules) based on RPL. The four steps mentioned above are applied and adapted to the scope.

In the first step (*identification*), applicants use the information available through the EUAA's Learning Management System and the online applicant self-assessment guidelines to identify the skills and knowledge they already possess that correspond to the learning outcomes of the study programme or training module. The TPPS secretariat, with the advice and support of the QAAS, provides assistance to applicants during the identification phase and prior to application submission.

The second step (*documentation*) involves listing learning outcomes, finding evidence, and organising that evidence for evaluation. The applicant applies to the Training Academy for an exemption and provides evidence of their prior learning which may include extensive professional experience. The TPPS secretariat, with the advice and support of the QAAS, shows the applicant how to demonstrate

European Union Agency for Asylum
www.euaa.europa.eu

Tel: +356 2248 7500
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and document the learning outcomes achieved and what is considered sufficient and valid evidence for admission to a particular programme or course and how to submit it. In the case of informal (experiential) learning, applicants are advised to detail how the prior learning can be mapped to the learning outcomes of the module and when the prior learning took place (start and end date). In line with MFHEA RPL guidelines, the types of evidence that may be acceptable depending on the subject area may include but are not limited to the following:

- Malta Qualifications Framework certified learning;
- other certified learning or open badges;
- references;
- authenticated reports or outputs;
- project work;
- blogs or video diaries;
- witness testimony;
- volunteering records;
- observation of practice or simulation;
- assessment on demand;
- structured interview;
- authenticated presentations.

Applicants should provide contact information for each reference cited so that the EUAA can verify the source and, if necessary, ascertain the reliability of the evidence provided.

The third step (*assessment*) constitutes the evaluation and recognition of competences acquired through professional experience, as well as learning outcomes achieved in previous education/training. It is carried out by RPL assessors appointed by the RPL Panel. They assess the evidence submitted with the application and/or assess the achievement of the learning outcomes for which recognition is sought. When assessing an application, learning outcomes listed in the ESQF educational standards and in the module syllabi are used.

Competencies acquired through professional experience and study results achieved in prior education/training are recognised if the following criteria are met:

- the documents submitted contain clear, unambiguous and complete information on the learning outcomes achieved;
- at least one credit point can be awarded for the study outcomes achieved;
- the applicant meets the admission requirements for the respective study programme;
- the applicant has demonstrated in the examinations (if applicable) conducted as part of the prior education/training knowledge, skills and competences that meet the requirements of the relevant study programme or its part.

Competencies acquired in professional practice and learning outcomes achieved in a previous education/training cannot be counted as a final examination, capstone project or dissertation of the relevant study programme.

The RPL Panel validates the results and its decision is final.

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www.euaa.europa.eu

Tel: +356 2248 7500
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The last step (**certification**) is the validation of the identified, documented and assessed learning. If the result is positive, the applicant receives the ECTS associated with the respective learning outcomes.

If an application is rejected because the knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired do not meet the learning outcomes, the rejection will be justified in writing. Decisions made are carefully and clearly documented to ensure consistency and to make the process transparent.

4.2. Credit transfer

This procedure is used for candidates who request recognition of their previous formal education for which they have earned ECTS in order to be enrolled in a programme of study or course, and to be exempted from parts of that programme/course. The abovementioned steps are applied and adapted to the scope.

In the first step (**identification**), applicants identify learning outcomes from their prior education that closely correspond to the learning outcomes of the study programme or training module.

In the second step, the application for credit transfer is submitted with appropriate evidence (**documentation**) to the TPPS secretariat. Evidence includes an academic transcript and/or diploma supplement or other documentation clearly indicating the learning outcomes achieved, the respective European Qualifications Framework[13] level and the accrediting/validating authority.

The third step (**assessment** of the application) is performed by the RPL assessors appointed by the RPL Panel. They evaluate the correspondence of achieved learning outcomes identified in the application with the learning outcomes listed in the module(s).

If the outcome is positive, the applicant's credits associated with the respective learning outcomes are transferred. The applicants are exempted from the parts of the programme for which the credits have been recognised and transferred without issuing additional certificates.

If an application is rejected, the reason for the rejection is communicated in writing. Decisions made are carefully and clearly documented to ensure consistency and to make the process transparent.

4.3. Content module assessment

This procedure is used for applicants requesting an assessment of their prior knowledge to obtain certification without having to complete a training module. The abovementioned steps are applied and adapted to the scope.

In the first step (**identification**), applicants use the information and online applicant self-assessment guides available through the EUAA's Learning Management System to identify the skills and knowledge they already possess that correspond to the learning outcomes of the training module(s). They can apply for content module assessment by submitting their application and indicating the learning outcomes of the modules for which they are requesting assessment.

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[13] The European Qualifications Framework: supporting learning, work and cross-border mobility (europa.eu)

European Union Agency for Asylum
www.euaa.europa.eu

Tel: +356 2248 7500
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Applicants do not need to submit evidence of their prior learning and experience as required in the second step (**documentation**) in other procedures described in the previous sub-sections.

The third step (*assessment* of competences acquired) is carried out by assessors appointed by the RPL Panel, in the same way as for learners participating in the corresponding training modules. Applicants are exempt from the obligation to complete the content of the module(s), but will still have access to the module content (learning), which includes instructions and examples of assignments.

The last step (*certification*) is performed as a validation of the identified and assessed learning. If the result is positive, the applicant receives the credits associated with the respective learning outcomes and a certificate is issued.

If an application is rejected, the rejection will be justified in writing. Decisions made are carefully and clearly documented to ensure consistency and to make the process transparent.

5.   Summary of changes

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01	New IG.

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