

arQus

European University Alliance

Recognition of prior learning (TF 2.5), non- formal and informal learning (TF 3.8)

Guidelines – January 2022

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1. INTRODUCTION

The ARQUS European University Alliance brings together 7 multidisciplinary higher education institutions. The universities of Bergen, Granada, Graz, Leipzig, Lyon, Padua and Vilnius intend to develop their internationalization and intensify their experience by working together on numerous projects.

ARQUS is one of the 17 alliances selected in 2019 by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ "European Universities" call for projects.

The ambitions of ARQUS are to strengthen the collaborative links between the partners, to test new models of cooperation and to develop the mobility of students, PhDs, researchers, teachers or administrative staff.

The partners are working together on clearly identified themes including "accessibility, inclusion and diversity" (Action Line 2) and "student-centered frameworks for quality learning" (Action Line 3). Recognition of prior learning, non-formal or informal learning is a challenge that goes well beyond national borders. Some countries have adopted more or less developed legislation to provide a framework for such recognition.

The ARQUS application (Detailed Project Description) initially envisaged the setting up of two separate working groups:

- 2.5 "Recognition of prior learning" (AL2)
- 3.8 "Recognition of non-formal and informal learning" (AL3)

When these groups were set up and activities started, the partners proposed a merging in order to work together on recognition and credit transfer.

Overview of planned activities

TF 2.5 RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

- Shared **guidelines** for a credit recognition and transfer system for accredited professional and work experience.
- **Recommendations** for national authorities.

TF 3.8 RECOGNITION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

- Agreement on **common structure, methodology, and guidelines** for recognition of non-formal and informal education for the purposes of credit accumulation.

Full description

TF 2.5 RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

The partners will set up a Task Force to build on experience and expertise particularly at the Université de Lyon to draw up and implement, where possible, **guidelines** on credit recognition and transfer for accredited professional and work experience, thus facilitating access of older students with work experience to university.

The Recognition of Prior Learning – RPL (or *Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience* – VAE) is a national system to facilitate the equivalence of professional experience with university credits. **The guidelines will represent the possible adaptation of the French procedure to the other six university systems.**

As this is still an undeveloped field in most of the universities, and national or local regulations are an obstacle in some cases, partners will also develop **recommendations** for national authorities on how to progress in this area.

TF 3.8 RECOGNITION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

An agreement on the **common structure, methodology, and guidelines** for recognition of non-formal and informal education for the purposes of credit accumulation will be drawn up and implemented.

Setting up and launching respective structures and procedures at universities will allow students to apply for recognition of informal/non-formal learning in any ARQUS university.

Expected outputs

TF 2.5 RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

- Task Force set up
- **Guidelines** on credit recognition and transfer for accredited professional and work experience, thus facilitating access of older students with work experience to university.
- **Recommendations** for national authorities on how to progress in this area.

TF 3.8 RECOGNITION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

- **Joint methodology** for non-formal and informal education for the purposes of credit accumulation will be developed.
- Agreement on one entry point application for recognition of informal/non-formal learning will be developed.

The following developments are therefore the result of the activities planned and the results expected in the application file "Detailed Project Description".

2. DEFINITIONS

Types of Skills

The TF retained for its work a division into **2 main types of skills:**

- **Hard skills:** any skills relating to a specific task or situation and that involve both understanding and proficiency in such specific activity, procedure or technique (DuBrin, 2008).
- **Soft skills:** a combination of interpersonal people skills, social skills, communication skills, character traits, attitudes, career attributes and emotional intelligence, among others (Robles, 2016).

Types of learning

The TF retained for its work a division into **3 main types of learning** (with a fourth one, "prior-learning" being considered here as a combination of informal/non-formal learning):

- **Formal learning:** *"a curriculum-based and intentional, with all activities offered to learners within this framework having learning as an objective. Within this system, learning outcomes are measured by means of tests or other forms of assessment"* (Council of Europe, n.d).
- **Non-formal learning:** learning taking place *"outside formal learning environments but within some kind of organizational framework. It arises from the learner's conscious decision to master a particular activity, skill or area of knowledge and is thus the result of intentional effort. But it needs not follow a formal syllabus or be governed by external accreditation and assessment. Non-formal learning typically takes place in community settings: swimming classes for small children, sports clubs of various kinds for all ages, reading groups, debating societies, amateur choirs and orchestras, and so on. Some non-formal learning arrangements become increasingly formal as learners become more proficient; one thinks, for example, of graded exams in music and other performing arts"* (Council of Europe, n.d).
- **Informal learning:** learning taking place *"outside schools and colleges and arises from the learner's involvement in activities that are not undertaken with a learning purpose in mind. Informal learning is involuntary and an inescapable part of daily life; for that reason, it is sometimes called experiential learning. Learning that is formal or non-formal is partly intentional and partly incidental: when we consciously pursue any learning target we cannot help learning things that are not part of that target. Informal learning, however, is exclusively incidental"* (Council of Europe, n.d).

Methodology

to identify the type of knowledge

Type of knowledge	Experience	Context	Environment	Profil
 Formal learning	learning (intentional)	organized & structured	educational institution, working place	students, workers
 non formal learning	planned activities that have a strong learning component (intentional)	organized & structured	related to leisure (sports lessons, book club, choirs)	anybody
 Informal learning	activities of daily living (unintentional)	neither organized nor structured	related to work, family or leisure	anybody

3. GUIDELINES – METHODOLOGY PROPOSAL

A methodology based on 3 pillars

The methodology adopted for the elaboration of the guidelines is based on 3 pillars:

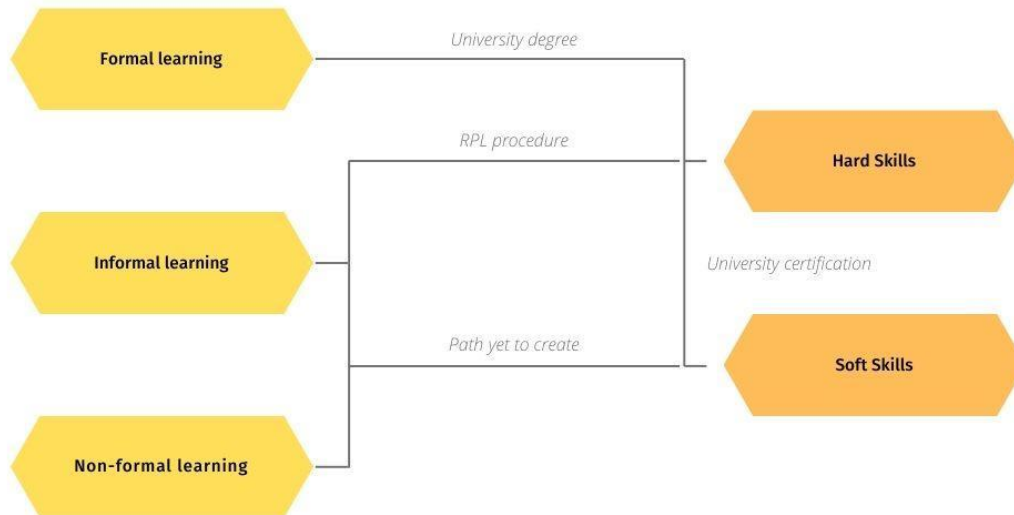
- First of all, the **French experience** and in particular that of the University of Lyon – and more particularly the Jean Monnet University (UJM) and the University of Lyon1 – which coordinates this working group. As mentioned above, the French model of RPL is the most successful model of validation of prior learning and experience among the ARQUS consortium partners. It is therefore an opportunity for the other partners of the consortium to draw inspiration from this model and to try to adapt it to their own national system.
- Benchmarking on **European practices**: the working group produced an initial report (see Annexes) on recognition of prior learning in 2021. This report provides an overview of the existing regulatory frameworks in Italy, Lithuania and France. It also presents the procedures, the services offered, the actors involved, the costs of the system, the duration of the procedure, the statistics, and finally the strengths and weaknesses of the systems in these three countries.
- Implementation of new **projects** and strategic partnerships such as ECSTRA¹ (Employability Competences for Students Through implementation and Recognition of Activities) among others: this project, once concluded, could serve as an example, or a basis for further implementations. Indeed, it aims at promoting and certifying soft skills, also known as non-formal competencies, in the context of student community involvement and/or student entrepreneurship. First and foremost, students must carry out some relevant canvassing events in order to obtain a certification. As a result of these innovative initiatives, they will have to complete a self-assessment (called “auto-approval” in the ECSTRA project) grid to determine which competences have been acquired or still need to be improved. If so, students will have the opportunity to attend specific courses or workshops to continue their training.

The guidelines and its 2 main aims

¹ Website that will include all the necessary documentation once the project will be complete:
<https://ecstra.lt/>



THE DIFFERENT PATHS AND THEIR OUTCOME



As illustrated just above, depending on the type of learning, one can only learn some specific skills. Formal learning, as the historical aim of universities, is the most comprehensive and covers hard skills as well as soft skills. Indeed, currently formal learning enables students to learn both hard skills through the pursuit of a university degree, and soft skills through university's specific certifications or transversal courses any student can follow next to its degree. Thus, formal learning does not need much development and that is why the TF focuses mainly on informal and non-formal learning.

Indeed, if the recognition of the acquisition of hard skills through informal or non-formal learning started to be acknowledged through the RPL procedures, the acquisition of soft skills through such means is yet to be equally recognized.

Hence, to have a comprehensive recognition system of both hard and soft skills through all the different paths possible (formal, informal and non-formal ways), the TF decided to focus on 2 main aims, expanding the RPL procedure and develop a new path to enable the certification of soft skills learned through informal or non-formal ways.

In that aspect, the guidelines will first focus on how, through the recognition of prior-learning (RPL) procedure, informal and non-formal ways to acquire hard skills can be recognized. It will then, in a second focus, try to adapt that same methodology to soft skills and try achieving the same result for soft skills.

Toward a common approach between formal, informal and non-formal learning

Despite merging the two distinct task forces, and after taking into consideration the institutional constraints of different universities within the ARQUS Alliance, the TFs decided to adopt a two-speed model. Indeed, if in the long run, a common approach to the recognition of formal, informal and non-formal learning could be applied, with the creation of a unique procedure merging the 3 ways, institutional constraints refrain some universities from doing so from the very beginning.

As a result, two models will be developed. From one side, a more formal model based on the RPL French framework directed to agents with a strong professional background wishing these previous experiences to be recognised with a university degree. On the other side, a more flexible model aiming to recognise informal and non-formal knowledge directed to students placed in different contexts (voluntary work, political engagement, etc). Both models share a common set of values and procedures, but they tend to have a different approach when it comes to recognition procedures, the institutional responsibilities and the methodology deployed. The table below summarizes those differences.

	Target	Institution in charge	Methodology	Results
Prior Learning	Professionals: employees/ employers, jobseekers	Recognition of Prior Learning Departments	Highly structured, personal assistance needed	Recognition of a full/partial degree
Informal/Non Formal Learning	Students	- Career center - Educational service - Campus life Services	Loosely Structured. Based mostly on self- assessment and ePortfolio approaches	Recognition of competencies in certificates, badges, diploma supplement, credits etc...

See [appendix 1 Methodology proposal \(see Annexes\)](#)

4. THE STEPS OF THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING



Initiative taking & information

The very first phase of the validation procedure is that of taking the initiative. This comes primarily from the candidate, who wishes to make the most of his or her professional experience.

But the initiative depends above all on the promotion of the system to potential candidates. It can come from the employer who wishes to foster the professional development of one or more employees, or from structures dedicated to employment and professional integration: governmental structures such as Pôle Emploi² (the French national agency for employment) or associations, private organizations and universities. Promotion can be done through specific events on the RPL given by universities, or included in broader forums or events on higher education or professional insertion (such as the universities' Open House Day).

TARGETS

Any student or person (employee, civil servant, volunteer, job seeker...) with at least 1 year of paid, unpaid or volunteer activity directly related to the diploma or certification in question wishing to obtain (or be recognised by) this credential.

Some statistics on the profile of applicants:

² Accessible at <https://www.pole-emploi.fr/accueil/> (only in French).

Of the 15.265 applications examined in France in 2020, 67% were submitted by women (33% by men). 15% of applicants were under 29 years old, 70% between 30 and 49 years old and 16% 50 years old or more. Regarding their professional situation, 79% were employed, 20% were looking for work and 1% were inactive. Finally, 10% had already graduated from higher education, 41% had a baccalaureate, 27% had a vocational training certificate and 22% had no qualifications (DARES, 2020).

SUPERVISION

In France, the bodies authorized to deliver a certification are: a ministry, a public training establishment (such as a university), a private establishment, a professional branch, a consular chamber. They check the admissibility of the application and deliver the final certification (Côté Formation, n.d). The professional certifications that may be the subject of an application for RPL are listed in the *Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles* (RNCP). The candidate can consult this directory via an online government service³.

All French higher education institutions have departments dedicated to continuing education and the RPL system.

At the Université Jean Monnet (UJM), the steering and management of the RPL system is entrusted to the University Continuing Education Service (SUFC), which is the contact for candidates (except for the courses of the IUTs of Saint-Etienne and Roanne and Télécom Saint-Etienne, which are responsible for receiving and organizing the procedure for their diplomas). The rules applicable to all the national diplomas offered by the University for the RPL (experience, personal and professional) are specified in the study regulations. The UJM's General Study Regulations (n.d) summarize, in a single document, the provisions common to the various Faculties and Institutes in terms of the organization of courses, the organization and validation of examinations and the awarding of diplomas. It applies to all Jean Monnet University courses leading to the award of national diplomas as well as certain university diplomas.

The Recognition of Prior Learning System is aimed at all adults who have left the initial training system and wish to progress in their professional and/or personal life by obtaining a diploma or acquiring new skills. It is also aimed at all companies wishing to develop the skills of their employees.

In companies, the human resources department is the employee's main contact for support in this process, hence the importance of cooperation between those departments and universities through awareness campaigns. It is in the employer's interest to examine the request to better understand the motivations. The company can set up three support measures: informing the employee about the essentials of the process (stages, procedures, regulations, funding), guiding him or her in identifying the certification to be sought, and supporting him or her throughout the procedure (adapting the employee's schedule to attend appointments, providing resources/tools to help him or her, making a member of staff available for progress reviews).

It is important to note that an employee who wishes to undertake a RPL procedure is not obliged to inform his employer.

CHALLENGES

Communication and dissemination of the information toward the potential targets :

In France, the RPL approach is promoted by various ministries and institutions involved in the implementation of the scheme at national level; by the Regional Councils or the Centers for Animation and

³ Service is accessible at: https://www.francecompetences.fr/recherche_certificationprofessionnelle/

Information Resources on Training at regional level; and by skilled operators specialized in a specific sector (industry, media, tourism, health, etc.)⁴.

Their role is to provide information on the system and the steps to take. They can also provide information on the various RPL advice centers and on the bodies authorized to certify according to the geographical area of the potential candidate.

The involvement of the State's public services, and the relay at local level, is therefore an essential element in promoting the scheme to individuals, employers and continuing education professionals.

Advise and feasibility

In French universities, the reception and the sending of general information to the public as well as the contact details of the RPL referent or diploma manager are carried out by the university service in charge of the RPL.

Applicants identify the university and the right contact through a variety of means:

- they find out for themselves (research on the internet).
- by word of mouth
- via government bodies for adult guidance (ex: Insertion and Orientation Center, Skills Assessment Center, Professional Development Advisors)
- via companies/employers

SUPERVISION

The potential candidate makes a request for pre-advice by sending a detailed CV and a letter of motivation.

The feasibility of the project is studied by the RPL agent at the university who examines the candidate's level of study and professional background in order to suggest the most appropriate diploma.

If the candidate has already identified the diploma in question and contacted the course leader, the latter informs him/her about the diploma but must refer him/her to the RPL department, which centralizes the requests and deals with the administrative aspects. If the candidate commits to the process, the RPL referent informs the diploma manager of the progress of the file.

CHALLENGES

3 challenges are present in the information phase:

- Identify the type of knowledge to validate: professional or personal experience?
- Identify the programme: which diploma to aim for? The abundance of diplomas and certifiers sometimes makes it difficult to identify the most suitable certification. This can be a cause of abandonment at the beginning of the process.
- The advice and support of potential RPL candidates must be supervised by professionals with specific skills in both professional integration and continuing education.

⁴ An exhaustive list was established by the French ministry of labor and can be found at the following link: <http://www.vae.gouv.fr/espace-ressources/sitographie/>

Eligibility

SUPERVISION

The eligibility phase is also supervised by the RPL referent and is divided into two stages:

- Firstly, **administrative admissibility** is studied. The RPL service checks that the candidate meets the conditions for admissibility of the application for validation of prior learning: "activities carried out for a period of at least one year, whether continuous or not, directly related to the diploma are taken into account..." "This period is calculated on the basis of a number of hours corresponding to the actual full-time working time in force in the company..."
- Study of the **educational feasibility**: If the candidate is administratively admissible, the admissibility file is transmitted to the person in charge of the diploma in question (head of study programme) or the RPL referent of the component who issues an opinion on the adequacy of the candidate's knowledge and aptitudes with the diploma.

The continuation of the RPL procedure is subject to the signature of a contract or a tripartite agreement specifying the pedagogical and financial terms of this process.

TOOLS

Template of "Recognition of Prior Learning – Admissibility file":

This document, published by the Continuing Education Department of the University Lyon1, lists the following information.

- Targeted diploma: the candidate indicates the exact title of the targeted diploma.
- Candidate Identity: personal data, professional status, RPL support (yes/no).
- Motivations-goals: cover letter with the reasons that lead the candidat to this RPL
- Résumé: CV
- Employee and/or voluntary experiences: the candidate completes a table for each of its experiences giving exhaustive details.
- Trainings: the candidate completes a table for each of its training sessions.
- Personal works: documents such as reports, studies, surveys, diplomas, scientific articles
- English certification: level language certification and international experience (except for engineering studies).

Once the file has been validated by the RPL service, the candidate receives a delivery receipt. The candidate must also indicate the name of the person or structure covering the cost of the RPL (Job center, other financial actor or the candidate). A table mentioning the costs of the process (feasibility, support, jury, registration) is included in the file.

See [appendix 2](#) "RPL process- Admissibility file" (see Annexes)

EXPECTED CHALLENGES IN APPLICATION IN NATIONAL SYSTEM

2 main challenges can be underlines under the eligibility phase

- **ECTS limitation** : In France, all certifications listed in the RNCP (National Directory of Professional Qualifications) are concerned. Students can validate a whole study programme except for medicine studies. However, in some other countries, such as Italy, the limit of ECTS (12 for Bachelor and Master degree) is a major constraint and does not favor the establishment of a complete procedure.
- **Cost**: The applicable fees vary greatly depending on the professional situation of the candidate (jobseeker, employee), whether or not a third party is responsible for the cost, and the diploma targeted (DUT/Bachelor/Master or engineering diploma/Doctorate). The cost also varies according to each phase of the procedure: management fees linked to admissibility, support, jury, diploma registration fees. Finally, there are also variations depending on the support organization (public or private).⁵

DURATION

The information, feasibility and admissibility phases last between one and seven weeks.

Support

SUPERVISION

Accompaniment:

The candidate has the possibility to be accompanied, usually by a professor, in the elaboration of the "2nd Booklet" of the RPL application file. This support enables students to reflect on the theoretical knowledge they acquired through their practical experience. Indeed, through his/her expertise, the professor can characterize the knowledge and the applicant, for him/her to realize the theoretical aspects of his/her work experience. This process is key for the applicant to clearly underline the skills related to the degree requested acquired in the application, but also to present them orally. This support is optional.

Support is usually provided by a professor, but can also be provided through different actions and tools: MOOC, flipped classroom, record review... The RPL department and professors work on the records to identify and develop legally binding documents based on the applicant's skills to align it with the content of the diploma. In addition, they also prepare the candidate for the oral presentation (jury).

⁵ In order to help candidates finance their RPL, several arrangements have been put in place: unpaid job seekers are exempt from paying fees to the jury, regardless of the diploma sought. A candidate whose RPL is not paid for by a third party (for example an employer) will benefit from a reduction in the fees for support and the jury. The RPL support actions are eligible for the Professional Training Account (CPF). This is an individual public funding scheme for training that is available throughout one's professional life. It is open to employees but also to job seekers. Beneficiaries accumulate a certain amount in euros each year, which they can use whether or not they are in employment.

Let's take two examples according to the rates defined by the Jean Monnet University:

- A jobseeker, not on benefit, who wishes to validate a bachelor will have to pay a total of 1370€, that is 200€ for management fees, 1000€ for support fees, 0€ for the jury (instead of 1000€) and 170€ for the diploma registration fee.
- An employee who applies for an engineering degree will pay up to €4101, which corresponds to €500 administration fees, €2000 support fees, €1000 jury fees and between €426 and €601 depending on the degree and the academic year.

When the candidate has received an unfavorable educational opinion, the referring teacher is not forced to accept the request for support. In this case, the candidate writes the file himself or herself or is accompanied by an external organization like the "Centre interinstitutionnel de bilan de compétences" (CIBC)⁶, or in english the "Interinstitutional Center for Competences' Review".

The content of the booklet 2 may differ in order to take account of the specific requirements and procedures applicable to the various types of diploma.

Registration for the diploma

To be able to appear in front of the RPL jury, the candidate must register for the diploma and pay the national registration fee.

CHALLENGES

Time and dedication: The sequencing of the RPL in many phases adds complexity to the process. Time is a major factor in demotivation and abandonment during the process. The support phase is crucial and can take between 12 and 24 months.

Cost: The candidate must pay the fees related to the different phases of the procedure as well as the National Registration Fees set annually. The amount of the services is specified in the contract or the tripartite agreement specifying the educational and financial terms of the RPL process. The challenges are mentioned in the "Eligibility phase" section of this document.

Record: The file submitted to the jury is a document containing a lot of information and must respect a structured form. Cover page, summary, CV, introduction, education and training, synthesis of achievements, job description, highlights, conclusions, solemn declaration and appendices (proofs of work, diplomas and training, for instance). The RPL file is about fifty pages long: Job description (10 pages); Highlights professional situations (40 pages); synthesis of achievements (2 pages).

Follow-up of the candidate: The support includes help in drawing up the validation file, preparation for the interview with the jury and, if necessary, training for a professional situation.

Despite the information, advice and support received by the candidate during the process, it appears that he or she sometimes finds himself or herself alone when writing the final report or when appearing before the jury. In order to avoid abandonment, certain procedures are being developed.

In order to make the process more secure, the collective RPL procedure, initiated by the company, allows the employee to carry out the process through reinforced support, which begins during the information phase and ends with the total validation. This support also makes the system more secure for the employer. If an employee achieves partial validation, the employer can accompany and support him or her to follow a training course that will enable him or her to acquire full validation.

Finally, it is not so much the duration of the RPL process as the follow-up and the degree of support that can slow down or discourage a candidate.

Preparation for the jury (training for candidates to be able to explain their skills and know-how used in work situations) : the information and advice phase is important, but what is crucial is preparation for the

⁶ Accessible at <https://cibc.net/> (only in French).

jury. The candidate must learn to explain and write down the skills and know-how used in the course of his/her professional experience.

TOOLS

We do not have access to a template of the booklet 2.

Jury

Composition of the jury:

The jury is composed of a majority of teacher-researchers as well as people whose main activity is not teaching and who are competent to assess the nature of the prior learning, particularly professional, whose validation is requested. The jury for the validation of prior learning is appointed by the highest authority of the university, on the proposal of the person responsible for the degree concerned or the RPL referent of the component.

The professional members are chosen according to the profile of the candidates. The RPL jury always includes at least one professional from the sector concerned by the certification. It must respect a deontological charter which requires it to be neutral, objective and to respect confidentiality. Certification bodies/institutions can offer training for professionals who wish to participate in a jury in order to guide them on the role they take on.

It is made up of at least three members (two teacher-researchers/teachers and one professional).

In theory, the jury chairman/chairwoman is a teacher member of the diploma's teaching team other than the teacher who provided the support.

Rules of operation:

- The decision must be taken by consensus between the members of the jury; failing that, the decision will be taken by a majority of the members present.
- The jury is sovereign; its decision is irrevocable.
- The highest authority of the university notifies the candidate of the jury's decision and any prescription.

Procedure:

- Candidate's presentation (20 minutes)
 - Personal presentation and motivations.
 - Highlighting one or more professional situations.
 - Parallel skills/diploma.
- Questions & answers (20 minutes)
 - In depth study of the record and the oral presentation.
- Deliberation (20 minutes)
 - Decision making : it is based on the RPL records and the oral presentation. It allows the jury to review the acquired skills and those that may be lacking to validate the diploma.
 - Immediate communication of the decision : total, partial delivery or refusal.
 - Motivation and advice for the future.

During the deliberation, the jury draws up a statement of decision including, where appropriate, the prescriptions and their implementation and validation elements. This statement of decision, signed by all the members of the jury, will be sent to the highest authority of the University for notification to the candidate.

Prescriptions for candidates who did not succeed:

The jury can make prescriptions for the candidate who did not succeed, by taking complementary courses in a higher education institution, by taking modules in another organization, by acquiring other/new experience, or by writing a thesis.

In order to validate the diploma, it is mandatory to follow the prescriptions of the jury which are very detailed. If the jury asks for a simple certificate of attendance, then the candidate will only have to provide the document. If the jury asks the candidate to follow a course and validate the exam, then the candidate must follow this prescription if he/she wants a validation. It is possible that the candidate will have to go back to the jury but again, this must be included in the jury's decision.

CHALLENGES

Full or partial recognition:

The jury may :

- Either fully validate the achievements and award the full diploma.
- Or partially validate the learning outcomes. It then decides on the extent of the validation granted and on the nature of the knowledge and skills to be validated further. The jury's ruling is equivalent to authorisation to enroll if it requires additional training at the university (subject to compliance with the administrative conditions in force).
- Or refuse all validation.

Nevertheless, after partial validation, the majority of candidates (employees) give up, particularly in view of the difficulties of reconciling training with their work. Hence the importance of making companies aware of RPL, which will enable the candidate to benefit from adjustments and go through with the process.

Find external stakeholders:

It might be challenging to identify professionals from the sector concerned by the certification. In France, the person responsible for the degree uses its professional network which allows him to find the most suitable members to form the jury.

TOOLS

Template of the jury decision

The template of the jury's decision includes the result as to whether the qualification was awarded in full, in part or refused. In some cases, at the University of Lyon1 for example, it also sets out the channels and deadlines for appeal in the event that the candidate wishes to contest the decision.

An appendix justifies either:

- partial award: the jury describes which competences it considers to have been acquired and which have not. It indicates the deadline for validating the requirements (the date on which the diploma is no longer valid).
- refusal to issue: the jury justifies its decision.

The decision and its annex are signed by the Chair of the jury and the highest authority of the University.

[See appendices 3 & 4 - Jury decision – Draft \(see Annexes\)](#)

Recognition

Highlighting graduation

- On the CV: the candidate who has validated his or her knowledge and experience can include the diploma on his or her CV and mention it in a cover letter.
- During a recruitment interview: the candidate can explain to the recruiter the process he/she has initiated, his/her motivations, etc.
- Continuation of studies: total validation has the same value as a diploma. There is no problem integrating a Master's degree with a Bachelor's degree acquired via an RPL. At UJM, the diploma does not mention that the candidate obtained his diploma via an RPL. However, the candidate will not have a transcript of records.

What effects for the candidate?

Professional or salary promotion:

- Change of professional status with salary increase.
- Move from a fixed-term contract to a permanent contract.
- Return to employment.
- Professional retraining.

CHALLENGES

Social recognition of the diploma:

Even if the law has legally placed initial training and continuing training on the same level, one may wonder whether obtaining a diploma via the RPL process has the same value as that obtained via the "classic" completion of a training course.

The lack of recognition by the employer can be the object of frustration on the part of the candidate who will have devoted many months to this process. This is where the interest lies in making companies aware of the RPL process and including them in the process of supporting candidates.

5. THE STEPS OF THE RECOGNITION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING



Initiative taking & information

Soft skills developed through extracurricular activities are considered as part of informal and non-formal learning. French legislation has recognized the place of soft skills in the labor market and the change of paradigm it entails: some relevant example are the modifications on the Professional Training Law of March 2014, the Labor Law of August 2016 and the 2018 Law of Professional Career freedom⁷ ...

As for the previously described RPL model, the very first phase of the recognition procedure is initiative-taking. This comes primarily from the student, who wishes to make the most of his or her extra-curricular

⁷ The 2018 Law on Professional Career Freedom obliges universities to publicly certify and include in the National Registry for Professional certification all the modules and courses provided by them.

experiences. However, an intense communication strategy must be developed for them to know the possibility. This dissemination strategy should be determined by the same bureau who will coordinate the process, such as the Career Center or the Campus Life department, who are able to offer this type of recognition to the student.

TARGETS

Any student involved in any extracurricular activity wishing to certify his or her soft skills acquired during a student-led initiative.

SUPERVISION

Any department from the University⁸.

CHALLENGES

Communication and dissemination of the information toward the potential targets:
The involvement of universities, more specifically of the Career Center, Campus Life, Educational Service or RPL department is, therefore, a key element in promoting this process among students, by providing information on the recognition process and the steps to undertake it. As a consequence, the administrative staff must communicate as much as possible about the procedure so that students can manifest themselves and show some valuable interest in it. If the university communicates in a flawed way, students will continue to get involved in volunteering activities only to obtain a bonus on the overall average of the semester and without knowing the existence of a valuable certification on the labor market.

Advise and feasibility

In French universities, the reception and the transmission to the public of general information, as well as the contact details of the referent for Informal and non-formal learning are carried out by the university service in charge of the RPL. However, soft skills as unquantifiable competencies cannot be formally assessed the same way hard skills are (prior professional experience for instance). Hence, students' competence development process must be replaced in a particular context.

That is why an alternative methodology must be provided to deal with this type of competence, in order to offer an *ad hoc* methodology for each situation coordinated or assisted by an administrative agent.

During this phase, the student should meet with a Career Center/Educational Assistant/RPL Assistant to discuss his/her extracurricular activities. The agent needs to use a different list of competencies such as the Tuning or the EntreComp frameworks⁹, but can also adopt its own institutional list of competences to define the skills developed in the specific context defined by the student¹⁰.

⁸ At UJM, the contact person in charge of the Accreditation of Professional and Experiential Learning department could be able to inform students about the non-formal competencies recognition as well. At this stage, the counselor will guide the student by informing him or her about the essentials of the process (stages, procedures, certification).

⁹ Accessible at <https://entrecomp.com/>.

¹⁰ University of Vilnius already defined its own list taken here as an example (see [Appendix n°5](#)).

Ad hoc lists are useful for universities having the experience of dealing with more formal and structured recognition systems. These lists are also accurate when it comes to universities having their recognition practices based on a bottom-up approach oriented toward a more individualized follow-up of students. On the other hand, institutionalized-defined competency lists are for universities wanting to follow a homogeneous policy in recognition of competencies throughout all their degrees and activities. This system encourages autonomy of students and the possibility of creating self-assessment standards when appropriate.

Whether through an ad hoc list or a vertically defined one, the definition of these competencies should thus be progressive and contextualized.

When it comes to progressiveness, each indicator used to judge if the competence is acquired or not should be split into 3 different levels of proficiency. The number of indicators could vary depending on the competence evaluated. Taken all together, those different levels for indicators would divide the competence itself in 3 different levels of proficiency (as shown in the table below).

Basic model for a progressive approach

Competence A	Level 1 of Competence A	Level 2 of Competence A	Level 3 of Competence A
Definition of Competence A	Indicator 1 of Level 1 of Competence A	Indicator 1 of Level 2 of Competence A	Indicator 1 of Level 3 of Competence A
	Indicator 2 of Level 1 of Competence A	Indicator 2 of Level 2 of Competence A	Indicator 2 of Level 3 of Competence A

As an example (see the table below), **Organizational skills** can be indicated (among other things) through one's ability to understand the larger goals of a task, structure the work to be done and organize schedules according to it. Thus, at least two indicators can be emphasized: **ability to think and plan ahead** and **ability to organize schedules**. Though, those two indicators can be divided into 3 levels: the ability to do it for oneself, the ability to do it for oneself in relation to the other team workers and finally, the ability to do it for others.

Therefore, 3 levels of organizational skills can be highlighted: the first level of **Self organization**, where one can understand the aim of his/her tasks inside the team objectives and establish a personal schedule to do it; the second level of **Self organization in relation to others**, where one is able to adapt his/her organization to the work of others as to make the whole process more efficient; the third level of **Team organization**, where one is able to structure not only his/her work, but also the one of others.

Example Progressiveness of the competence: Organizational skills

Organizational skills	Level 1: Self organization	Level 2: Self organization in relation to others	Level 3: Team organization
One's ability to use his/her time, energy,	Understand the role of one's daily activities in	Ability to envision one's work as a part of a	Ability to split a larger mission into daily

resources etc in an effective way so that he/she achieves the things he/she wants to achieve (Cambridge dictionary).	achieving the original objective.	larger teamwork.	tasks related to each other.
	Ability to organize one's own schedule.	Intuitively use appropriate tools to create one's own schedule automatically shared with teamworkers.	Ability to create one's own schedule in relation to teamworkers.

Based on this definition, students will be given a personalized questionnaire based on the chart defined by the agent. This questionnaire must be contextualized using the information of the extra-curricular event/activity. Different formats could be adapted: an e-portfolio, a paper questionnaire, etc.

Evaluation of Competence A		
Indicator 1 of Level 1 of Competence A	Question 1	A mention of the event/activity itself.
Indicator 2 of Level 1 of Competence A	Question 2	

The evaluated student will have to answer the sample questions on his/her personalized questionnaire in a random order so that he/she cannot easily deduce the progressive aspect of the competence. After completing these questions, being or not on an ePortfolio, the student will have to ask online for peer or referent review.

SUPERVISION

Recognition services.

CHALLENGES

Several challenges are present in the information and feasibility phase:

- Identify the type of knowledge to validate: professional (RPL) or personal experience (Informal and/or non-formal learning)?
- For Universities using the ad hoc model, agents need to have access to all the existing list of competences.
- For Universities using the ad hoc model, identify the most appropriate non-formal competencies according to the student needs and extra-curricular initiatives. The self-assessment standards must be set up in context and not from scratch so that students can get the most out of it.
- The advice and support of potential recognition of informal and non-formal learning candidates must be supervised by professionals with specific skills in both professional integration and continuing education.

- For Universities using the ad hoc model, some technical concerns might be raised as well regarding the ePortfolio approach. Which platform would be the most relevant and how to implement it in a sustainable way?

TOOLS

- List of institutionally defined competences, if existing
- Self-assessment questionnaire for students.

Development & Support

SUPERVISION

After the identification of the concerned soft skill context and steps of progressiveness, these elements need to be assessed using an assessment grid. This assessment grid would be based on the progress scheme developed in the feasibility phase. Each assessment grid is subdivided into three levels of progress following a logical scaling. The evaluator will check if the criterias (or indicators) are fulfilled or not, all the indicators of a level having to be validated for the level to be granted.

The evaluator can vary, according to each university's constraints, or even be open to applicants' will. The TF highlighted 4 possible evaluators: the applicant itself (self-assessment review); another student (peer review); other students (student jury) or a professional (professional review). Whoever the evaluator is, the assessment grid below can apply.

Evaluation of Subject 1 :

Evaluation of Competence A		
Answer positively to	Referring to	Validation
Question 1	Indicator 1 of Level 1 of Competence A)	Yes / No
Question 2	Indicator 2 of Level 1 of Competence A	Yes / No
Question 3	Indicator 3 of Level 1 of Competence A	Yes / No

Depending on the chosen model, either ad hoc or institutionally-defined, the human resources and the technological tools used (such as the e-portfolio), the evaluation and the development phase could be adapted. For the ad hoc model, an administrative agent could accompany the student to clarify and understand the questions directed to him in an interview format. This agent would be responsible for filling up the assessment grid and for making a personalized feedback on the needs (or not) for development of such skills. When the student has received an unfavorable evaluation, or stated that one or several of his/her skills could be improved, the recognition agent would go back to him/her to make a review together.

For universities who have adopted a closed list of skills, candidates can answer the questions on paper or use an ePortfolio. After doing this and depending on resources available, they can have an external agent or a peer to assess their answers. In the first case, the agent does not accompany the student in the process,

he/she only analyzes the questions in the eportfolio and gives the results. Written feedback is optional. On the contrary, other students can assess his/her responses in a crossed way. This system, known as peer review, is a functionality predefined by a functional administrator on the ePortfolio platform. "Peer review" is thus based on a predefined competency framework (although some flexibility may be considered). Then, the student can share his/her portfolio with a peer to get a review.

Depending on the existing state of the art and the results of the assessments, the student will be referred to the Career Center. The latter will then show him/her the training courses available according to his/her weak points in order to overcome them. These courses can take different forms: MOOCs, workshops, hybrid courses, etc.

These courses need to address the competence development as a whole. Taking them means improving from one range to another. If a candidate with a "Level 1 acquisition" takes a development course on competence A, by the end of this, the student can appeal to obtain a "Level 3 acquisition" of competence A. Nevertheless, when possible and necessary, the agent can repeat an evaluation interview with the candidate after the development course.

CHALLENGES

The process could be time consuming and long. Students may leave the process in the middle.

The evaluator (external or peer-review) needs to be trained to evaluate the student

Availability of development courses.

If the student wants to engage in the process, they need to spend time in the development of these courses.

TOOLS

- Assessment grid for the reviewer.
- Development of training courses (seminars, MOOC, etc).

Recognition

Following the evaluation and the development phase, candidates can finally recognise their skills acquired in extracurricular activities. The certification issued at the end of the evaluation consists in awarding an open badge on the student's ePortfolio which could be included, whether in his/her CV or their Europass or a certificate for each competence acquired.

This system can be adapted to the "microcredentials" framework, based on the "Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability" (Council Recommendation, 2021). These microcredentials are defined as "record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning. These learning outcomes have been assessed against transparent and clearly defined standards" (Council Recommendation, 2021).

These microcredentials need to fulfill three features :

1. Portability

2. Stockability
3. Assessment

As a result, a mechanism based on the microcredential scheme allows the holder to store the microcredentials in a system of their choice, share and exchange them, combine logically their accumulation and would be certified by an assessment phase.

In order to adopt this framework, the certification must contain the following information :

- (1) identification of the learner
- (2) title of the micro-credential
- (3) country/Region of the issuer
- (4) awarding body
- (5) date of issuing
- (6) learning outcomes
- (7) notional workload needed to achieve the learning outcomes (in European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, wherever possible)
- (8) level (and cycle, if applicable) of the learning experience leading to the micro-credential (European Qualifications Framework, Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area), if applicable
- (9) type of assessment
- (10) form of participation in the learning activity
- (11) type of quality assurance used to underpin the micro-credential

Following the recognition of formal and informal learning framework presented in this document, the recognition badge or certificate can be adopted in such format.

Candidates should be strongly encouraged to highlight this skill acquisition in different formats :

- On the CV: the candidate who has certified his/her soft skills can include his or her certification or badge on his or her CV and mention it in a cover letter.
- During a recruitment interview: the student can justify his or her soft skills acquisition during his or her volunteering experience. The student may also give some details about the training courses he or she had to follow after the self-assessment to the recruiter, the process he/she has initiated, his/her motivations, etc.

CHALLENGES

Social recognition of the certification:

Even if the law has legally placed initial training and continuing training on the same level, one may wonder whether obtaining a certification via a self-assessment and peer reviewed process has the same value as that obtained via an academic or staff supervisor. Among others, the lack of recognition by the employer can be the object of frustration on the part of the student who will have devoted time and energy through this process. Nowadays, some companies have already put in place questionnaires, serious games and

specific assessment software in order to test the candidate's soft skills. Consequently, this can raise the issue of the relevancy of "official" certification from universities. This is also where the interest lies in making companies aware of the value of soft skills recognition.

TOOLS

Badges on ePortfolio

Certificates Model

Europass

Suggestion: A special procedure to mitigate the challenges highlighted

Next to the general procedure described above, an additional special procedure with specific attributes to mitigate the challenges underlined could help broaden the recognition of non-formal and informal skills through certification. This procedure would include multiple **"predefined paths" to fast-track the process** for some clear-cut cases that are sure would get approved through the general path.

To do so, universities have to establish a list of specific cases, associating precise requirements with clear certifications. By tying a specific extracurricular activity to a specific certification, universities would **reduce the risk and uncertainty in entering the process**. Students would get certainty about the value of this procedure, but even more, about the value of undertaking extracurricular activities (leading to an increase in demand for certification, but also an increase in extracurricular activities).

Hence, next to the general model presented above, Career centers (or any other department involved in the process) would present a number of predefined links between extracurricular experiences and university reward (whether specific certifications or ECTS to be included into wider diploma). As those models would require to tie in advance some more or less specific experiences to specific skills with a binding effect, a fairly important error margin should be taken into account.

Such a model would mitigate the main challenges emphasized:

- It would **shorten the administrative process** (made almost automatic), reducing the risk of students dropping out during the process.
- It would simplify the outreach to students by **illustrating the model through clear schemes** they can relate to, possibly increasing the number of applicants.
- It could **push students to actually undertake extracurricular activities**, as it would be rewarded inside their curriculum.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS (RPL ONLY)

Initial steps

- Develop new Recognition of Prior Learning Services in Universities as in French Universities.
- Create interuniversitaria (national and European) networks to develop quality practices and support their exchange. Universities alliances should be laboratories for them. They can work as facilitators to create these networks at the European level. Endeavor to make a promotion of existing practices (Lithuania recognition of Prior Learning example).
- Universities must adopt clear procedures in different languages (especially in English) in accordance with their national specificities (with templates adaptable to national educational demands, like in Italy).
- Monitor the quality of the services provided, whether internally, or externally as in France (where the monitoring is part of a broader audit on the compliance with the institutional label Qualiopi).
- Identify four targets for quality assurance mechanisms: candidates for recognition of prior learning mechanisms, national agencies, interuniversitaria networks, socioeconomic stakeholders (employment agencies, companies) and others.
- Promote benchmarking on previous/similar initiatives (not only French RPL model, but other national models of RPL, non-formal and informal learning).
- Promote pre-existing practices and new innovative approaches of recognition with Human Resources departments of different companies to make them aware of this alternative path of recognition.
- When adopting an internal or a national fee for the process, identify the sources of funding according to the profile of the agents and the type of recognition demanded (social security, regional, national, European funds).
- Reinforce cooperation with socioeconomic partners to bolster the possibilities of the RPL procedure.

Information and feasibility phase

- Provide recognition frameworks for all kinds of knowledge, not only formal, directed to a specific diploma (as the French RPL model).
- Publish clear information on existing diplomas and on the possibilities to obtain them through this alternative recognition pathway.
- Create a demand for those recognition practices by making this procedure well-known throughout Europe.

- Prepare administrative services and trained staff to offer a wide range of recognition services according to the different profiles and the types of recognition suggested.
- Provide personal assistance services when identifying the degree obtainable, drafting the proposal, especially within the RPL.

Eligibility phase

- Reduce, and where possible remove, quantitative credit limitation to the recognition of prior/formal/informal/non-formal learning.
- Develop different sources of funding for those wishing to enter a recognition procedure to ensure the economic stability of the applicants.

Development

- Reduce bureaucratic barriers or create simple administrative procedures, with "to do lists" and clear pathways to guide candidates during the whole process.
- Ensure transparency in the formation of the jury, and in its decision process.
- Duration of no more than 1 year for the recognition process.
- Provide personalized assistance to the candidates: 5 people (administratives) for about 100 files/year.
- Ensure the continuing support of accompanying companies until the very end of the process.

Recognition

- The jury must apply a 60% rule when assessing candidates' application to create some leniency in the evaluation of the candidates experience and knowledge.
- Ensure the legitimacy and the recognition of these degrees, both nationally and throughout the European Union member states.
- Promote the social recognition of these recognition practices.

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9. APPENDICES

All the Annexes can be found here:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1HyA_26kf3_QJEvNxETZ8LpywV03NPzml?usp=sharing

1. Methodology proposal
2. RPL process - Admissibility File
3. RPL template Jury decision (UJM)
4. RPL template Jury decision (Lyon1)
5. List of non-formal & informal competences established by University of Vilnius
6. Initial report

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