

# Introduction to conceptual aspects to validation of non-formal and informal learning: EU practices including legal framework (European, national, institutional)

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# *Objectives*

- 1. To present the notion of VNFIL: validation of non-formal and in-formal learning in a lifelong and life wide learning context*
- 2. To present the framework of Recognition and Accreditation of Prior Learning in general*
- 3. To present different countries approaches to VNIL for Higher Education*

Inspired by the presentation: **Recognition of Prior Learning in French universities**

by **Jean-Marie FILLOQUE**, European University of Brittany and

the article: **RECOGNISING NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING: MODERNISING RUSSIAN HIGHER EDUCATION OR IRRELEVANT?**

by **Dr Jon Talbot**, CWRS University of Chester, Chester (UK).

## Question 1 - who are you?

- I work with recognition of prior learning (RPL)?
  - Yes, it is my responsibility = green
  - A little = yellow
  - No, but would like to know more = red

## Question 2 -perception of RPL

- RPL is mainly connected to recognition of foreign credentials?
- RPL is mainly connected to recognition of formal learning?
- RPL includes non-formal and informal learning?
  - Yes, mostly = green
  - Mostly = Yellow
  - No, we also use it for access or part of a degree = red

## Question 3 Importance?

- Do you think RPL is important in your educational system?
  - Yes, it already is = green
  - Can be important in the future,
  - No, I don't = red

## Question 4 - Where are we at?

- At what stage of implementation is your qualification framework?
  - Implemented = green
  - Under development = yellow
  - Not under development = red

# European Higher Education Area Framework

## Qualifications

- A common European qualifications framework for higher education
- A national qualifications framework for higher education self-certified against the QF-EHEA and, as appropriate, also referenced against the European Qualifications Framework for life-long learning
- Subject specific learning outcomes specifying the generic learning outcomes included in the national qualifications framework
- The higher education institutions design appropriate curricula giving due consideration to the needs and expectations of the stakeholders and embedding employability, sustainable development, entrepreneurship, democratic citizenship
- Programme specifications
- The Diploma Supplement issued on graduation

## Recognition

- A common European framework for recognition of prior formal and non-formal and informal learning in accordance with the Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisbon Recognition Convention
- A national regulatory framework for recognition of prior formal and non-formal and informal learning ensuring fair and equal treatment of every application (full implementation of the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and in particular easy access to the system, timely decisions, a minimal administrative burden) and ensuring easy acceptance of all qualifications awarded in the EHEA provided that the structural reforms have been implemented properly.

## Quality Assurance

- A common European system for quality assurance of higher education: the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG);
- A national system for quality assurance of higher education in compliance with the ESG ensuring that the standards are met in the qualifications awarded – including RPL.

## Recognition is an important topic in the EU Agenda for Modernising Higher Education.

- "(...)a key objective of the 2012 Council recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning, which asks Member States to have national arrangements for validation by 2018.
- **Recognition**, as it has been used in the context of higher education (in the Bologna process and recognition convention, for example) more often than **validation**.
- Within this perspective, the purpose of **validation** and **recognition** are the same: both confirming certain learning outcomes against specific standards, providing proof of learning that can potentially be exchanged into future learning and/or work."



The European Council (2012) called on Member States to enhance their validation practices in several aspects by 2018.

Recommendations refer to:

- the link between **validation** and national **qualifications frameworks** (NQFs)
- The importance of making accessible information, **guidance, and counselling** on the benefits of, and opportunities for validation
- special attention to be given to **disadvantaged groups and individuals** who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment
- **quality assurance** measures that support reliable, valid and credible assessment methodologies and tools
- development of the **professional competences of staff** involved in the validation process
- the **equivalence of qualifications** obtained by means of **VNIL** and qualifications obtained through formal education programmes
- **Key stakeholders** in this process are employer organisations, individual employers, trade unions, chambers of industry, commerce and skilled crafts, national entities involved in the process of recognising professional qualifications and in assessing and certifying learning outcomes, employment services, youth organisations, youth workers, training providers, as well as civil society organisations.

## Validation of VNFIL

- The validation of prior learning or RPL stands for assessment of knowledge, skills and competence that an individual possesses by a competent authority or education institution extending beyond the formal context to include learning
  - acquired in a non-formal or informal setting;
  - that did not lead to a qualification;
  - acquired through professional experience;
  - acquired through unfinished studies at a recognised institution.
- The term **recognition** is often used for formal learning and **validation** for non-formal and informal.

## EU definitions of non-formal and informal learning

- **“Non-formal learning** is understood here as intentional on the part of a learner but not provided by an education and training institution representing the established formal education system.
- **Informal learning**, in turn, is a non-structured learning process that results from everyday activities and experience related to work (but outside formal and non-formal job training), family life or leisure, usually unintentional on the part of the learner”
- (based on definitions proposed by Bjornavold for CEDEFOP/the European Commission)

## Many international stakeholders promotes VNIL

- UNESCO
  - OECD
  - Council of Europe
  - EC/CEDEFOP
- 
- Bologna Process/European Higher Education Area

## **WHY - recognition/validation of prior learning: formal, non-formal and informal learning?**

- UNESCO, OECD and the EU all promote VNIL and consider that there should be more widespread adoption of such practices, to meet the needs of citizens and organisations in a globalised economy.
  - Closely linked to the focus on skills and competence and lifelong and lifewide learning
  - Can be used for access, for credits within education – or to indicate to employers skills and competences that can lead to promotion.
  - It is a waste not to benefit from prior learning for the individual and for taxpayers, (but the HEI funding system might not make it a benefit for HEIs)?

## The spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning

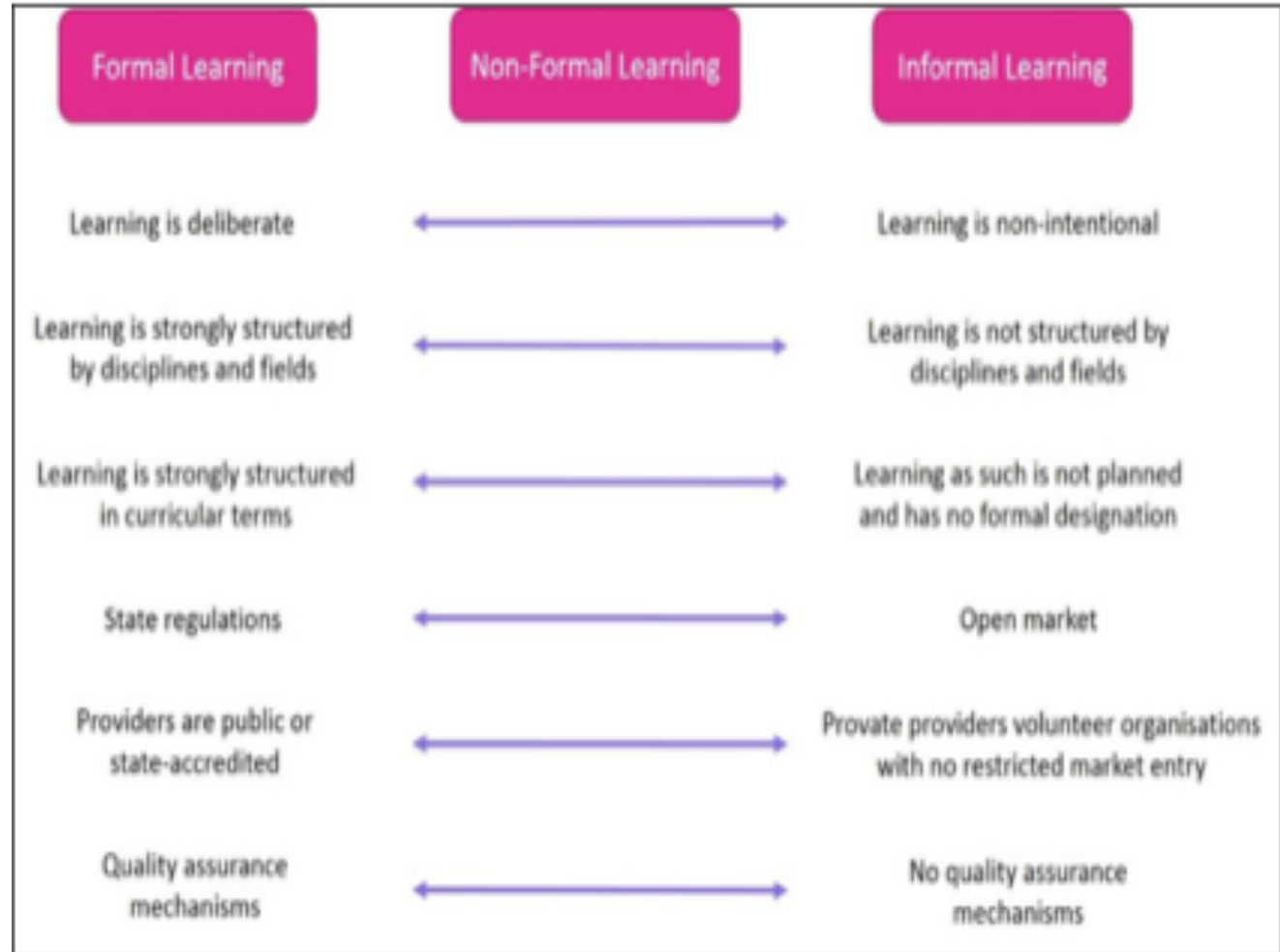


Figure 2: Continuum of formality: formal, non-formal and informal learning (Based on Werquin & Patrick, 2010)

## WERQUIN in "Recognising Non-formal and Informal learning: Outcomes, policies and practices", Paris, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD]

- "Recognition plays an important role in a number of countries by providing validation of competences to facilitate entry to further formal learning. This often involves **exemption** from certain coursework or parts of a formal study programme. This approach lets people complete formal education **more quickly, efficiently** and **cheaply** by not having to enrol in courses for which they have already mastered the content. Allowing people to **fast-track through formal education** by making the most of their nonformal and informal learning can also create a virtuous circle by making it more **attractive for people to engage in self-directed learning.**" (Werquin 2010). Werquin P.

[http://www.oecd.org/document/25/0,3343,en\\_2649\\_39263238\\_371369\\_21\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/25/0,3343,en_2649_39263238_371369_21_1_1_1_1,00.html)

## **Validation is a term that in a national context translates differently**

- The concept of the recognition and validation of prior learning (RVPL) refers to the range of practices enabling individuals to obtain social recognition and/or validation of learning and competencies acquired outside of the formal education system. These processes offer individuals new perspectives for learning and self-empowerment, and in some cases the opportunity to gain certification for a whole qualification or defined units or modules where these form part of a formal qualification.



## **Different names for in different national contexts, some examples**

- **Bologna: RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) and as something new: VNFIL (Validation of non-formal and informal learning)**
- **UK: accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL)**
- **FR: VAE (Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience)**
- **SCO: RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) –(and awards SCQF Credit points)**
- **SE: Validation/ recognition of real competences**

## **VNFIL Not a new concept...**

- Can be traced back to the early 20 century in an American context. The GI Bill after the WW II is a well-known example of how skills and knowledge achieved through work-based learning WBL was recognised in connection with entrance into college.

## National motives for pursuing validation of non-formal and informal learning

- **Education system factors:** *improving access to an deficiency in the formal education system.*
- **Economic factors:** *needs of the knowledge economy also reflected in enterprises.*
- **Social factors:** *providing opportunities for disadvantaged or excluded people.*
- **Demographic factors:** *ageing of the population and increasing migration.*
- **Technological factors:** *development of new technologies accentuates appreciation of technical skills gained through informal and non-formal means.*
- **Increased awareness / acceptance of validation among stakeholders**

## What can an applicant use RPL for?

- Access to HE
- As part of a degree programme
- As “proof of skills and knowledge” to enhance employability

## Current national legislation on recognition (of prior learning)?

- For access
- For credits as part of degree
- For employment

## **EXAMPLE: New OpenCred report on the recognition of MOOCs**

- The report deals with credentialisation, which will afterwards enable the **recognition of learning both by an educational institution or employer**. It documents the validation and recognition of open learning via MOOCs, providing an analysis of current practices and a tool for promoting transparency in the open education offer aiming to **facilitate the recognition process**. It also makes recommendations to European Higher Education institutions (HEIs) and to European policy makers.

<http://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC96968/Ifna27660enn.pdf>



These elements are represented in the OpenCred's open learning recognition traffic light model as follows:

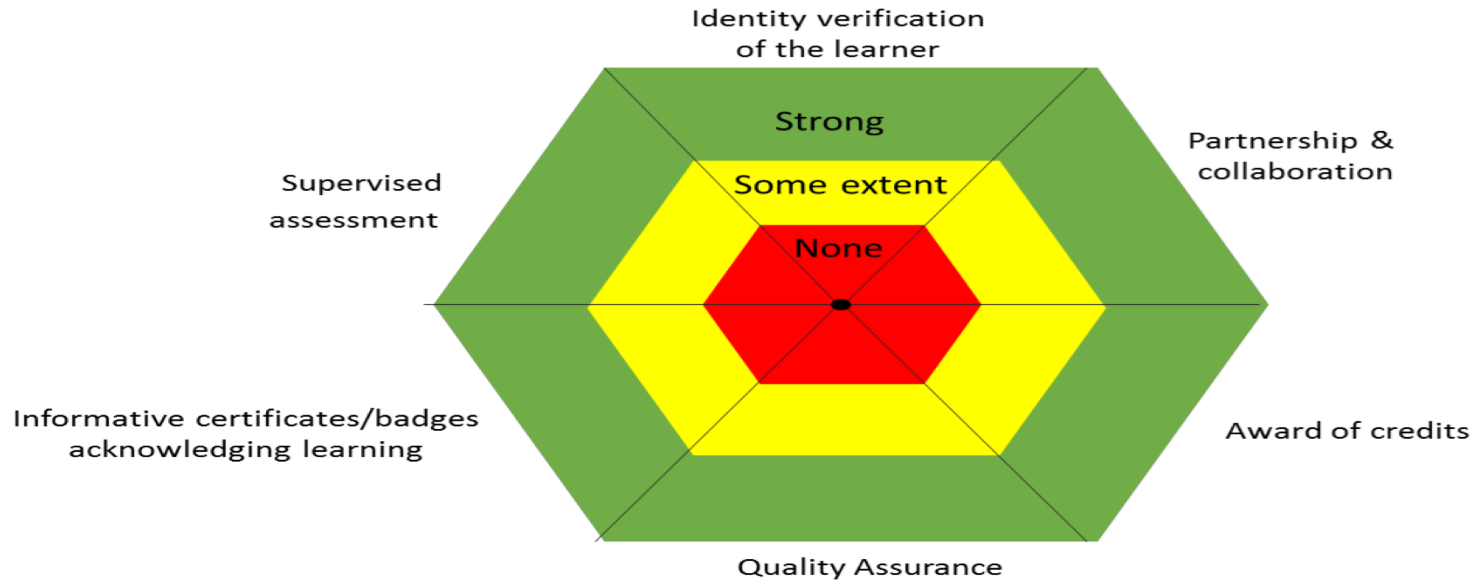


Figure 16: Open learning recognition traffic light model

The elements depicted in the model can be strongly present (the green rim around the edge of the hexagon), present to some extent present (the intermediate, yellow band) or not present at all (the red segments in the centre of the diagram) in a particular open learning offer (e.g. in a MOOC), and therefore be either more or less suitable for future recognition.

The model can be used by open learning providers to help them shape and position their offers for future recognition. It can also be used by institutions or employers that are considering recognising non-formal, open learning outcomes, to evaluate the strength of the credentials awarded to learners. Last but not least, it can help open learners, who want their learning to be recognised, to decide whether a given open learning offer is suitable.

# OpenCred recommendations

- **7.5.1 Recommendations to higher education institutions**
- Validate open learning by offering credentials for MOOCs and free and open online courses
- Offering learners the option of applying for formal credits from learning achievements via open learning is essential. Provide the option for 'free elective courses ' or 'self-study courses' which could include open learning for study progression
- It is recommended that institutions formulate regulations for “free electives” or “self- study” in such a way that they neither exclude MOOCs offered within the same or another Member State, nor forbid conditions under which these are typically provided (particularly off-site assessments with remote proctoring).



# Exemples from the European guidelines for validation



## Validation

A process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard and consists of the following four distinct phases:

1. **Identification** through dialogue of particular experiences of an individual;
2. **Documentation** to make visible the individual's experiences;
3. Formal **Assessment** of these experiences; and
4. **Certification** of the results of the assessment which may lead to a partial or full qualification (Council Recommendation 2012/C 398/01).



## The Lisbon Recognition Convention

The Lisbon Recognition Convention, which entered into force in 1999, provides a legal framework for cross-border academic recognition.

The Convention stipulates:

'36. Qualifications of approximately equal level may show differences in terms of content, profile, workload, quality and learning outcomes. In the assessment of foreign qualifications, these differences should be considered in a flexible way, and only substantial differences in view of the purpose for which recognition is sought (e.g. academic or de facto professional recognition) should lead to partial recognition or non-recognition of the foreign qualifications.

37. Recognition of foreign qualifications should be granted unless a substantial difference can be demonstrated between the qualification for which recognition is requested and the relevant qualification of the State in which recognition is sought.'

The European Area of Recognition Manual (EAR Manual, 2012) gives the following explanation for the interpretation of substantial difference:

'By focusing on the five key elements that together make up a qualification (level, workload, quality, profile and learning outcomes) and by taking substantial differences into account, competent recognition authorities have transformed their approach from expecting foreign qualifications to be almost exactly the same as those offered in their own countries, to focusing on 'recognition' by accepting non-substantial differences.



## Recognition of professional qualifications

EU Directive 2013/55/EU amends Directive 2005/36/EC on the **recognition of professional qualifications**.

It allows ECTS to be used as an additional means of expressing full-time course duration in the case of the seven 'sectoral' professions. The obligation to express course duration in terms of full-time academic years and total numbers of hours will remain for medical doctors, general care nurses, dentists, and midwives. For veterinary surgeons, pharmacists and architects, the obligation covers only full-time academic years.

Similarly, ECTS may also be used in levels (d) and (e) of the qualifications grid used in the **General System**, which covers all other qualification-based regulated professions in the EU and the EEA.

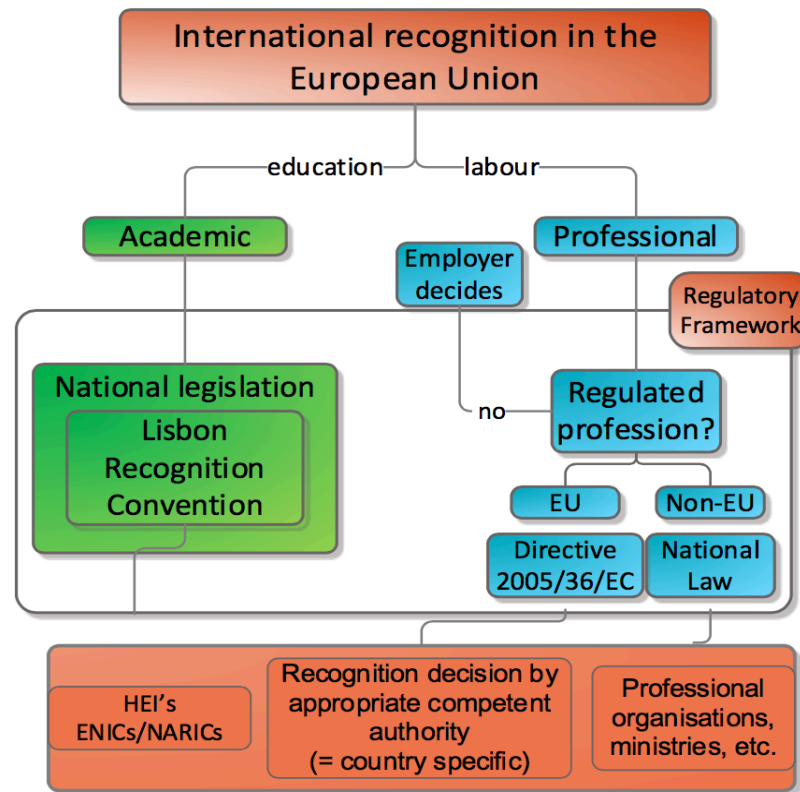
The new Directive has extended its scope to the recognition of **work placements** which are necessary to have access to a regulated profession. These can be undertaken in any EU/EEA member state, irrespective of where the qualification is delivered, and enjoy full recognition. Recital 27 states that the 'recognition of a professional traineeship completed in another Member State should be based on a clear written description of learning objectives and assigned tasks, to be determined by the trainee's supervisor in the host Member State.' Article 55a requires Competent Authorities to 'publish guidelines on the organisation and recognition of professional traineeships carried out in another Member State or in a third country, in particular on the role of the supervisor of the traineeship.'

Finally, the new Directive introduces **common training frameworks** based on 'common sets of knowledge, skills and competences' required in the systems of education and training applicable in at least one third of Member States. These curricula may be proposed by representative professional bodies operating at EU or national level, or by Competent Authorities. They are to be referenced to the European Qualifications Framework and are free to make full use of ECTS.



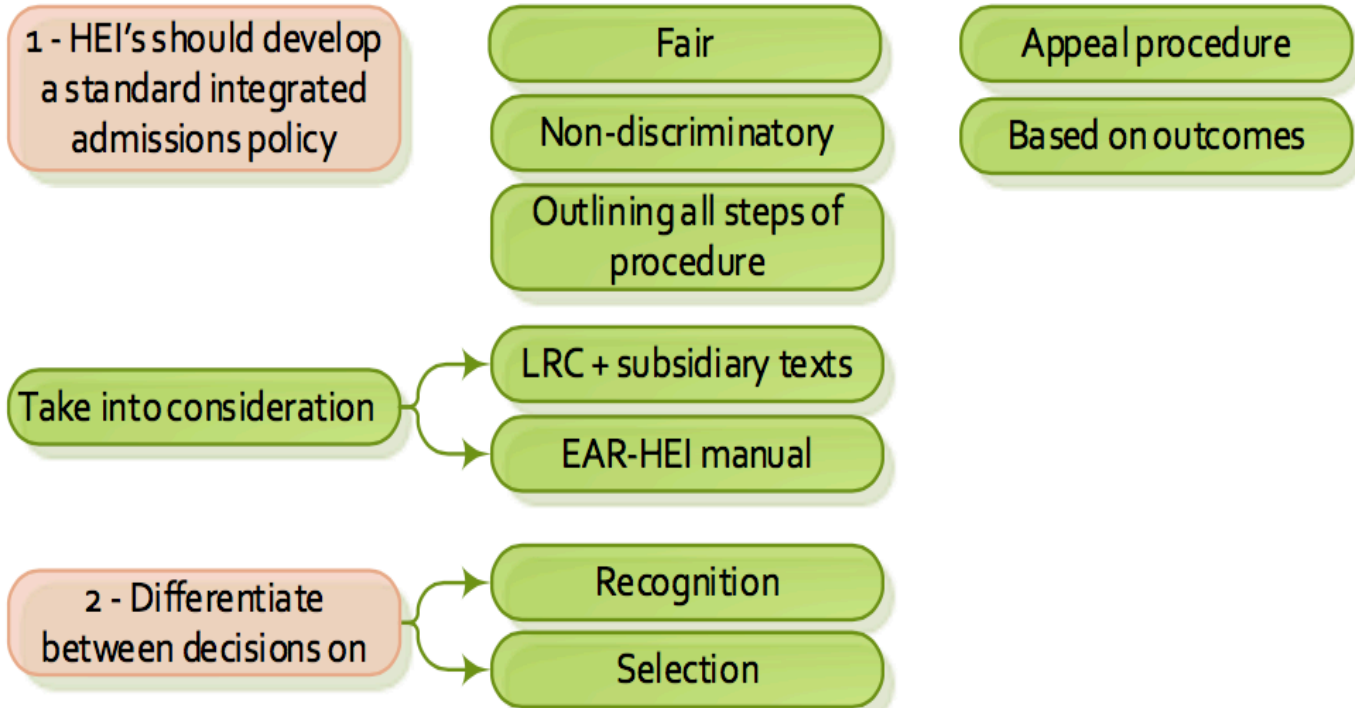
# EAR Higher Education Handbook

*Framework for international recognition in the European Region:*



# EAR Higher Education Handbook

## Chapter 12 - institutional recognition practices



## Chapter 11 - transparency and Information Provision



Across the EHEA, the terms ‘learning outcomes’ and ‘competence’ are used with different shades of meaning and in somewhat different frames of reference.

For the purpose of this Guide:

**Competence** means ‘the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy’ (Recommendation 2008/C 111/01). Competences can be generic or subject-specific. Fostering competences is the object of a process of learning and of an educational programme.

**Learning outcomes** express the level of competence attained by the student and verified by assessment. They are ‘statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process’ (Ibid.). They are formulated by academic staff, involving students and other stakeholders. In order to facilitate assessment, these statements need to be verifiable.



## Portfolio

Nota Bene

There is a wide range of **assessment methods for recognising prior learning and experience**. One of the assessment tools is a portfolio method. Portfolios include documents that learners have collected in order to reveal individual skills acquired in various ways.

A portfolio takes into account a collection of materials that verify skills and knowledge acquired through previous experience in non-formal and informal learning. A portfolio includes references from employers and supervisors; it may include a performance appraisal, CV and other documents. By using a portfolio the assessor analyses a range of information that learners have provided. Learners may require help and advice when preparing their portfolios.