



Recognition of  
Prior Learning  
Your Learning Counts



# Bridging Worlds: RPL as a Driver for Lifelong Learning, Collaboration, and Innovation in Practice

European RPL Network Conference

November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025 (9.00 – 14.00 GMT)

# LLL

Lifelong learning encompasses “all learning throughout life for the purpose of improving knowledge, skills and competences, within a personal, civic, social or employment-related perspective.”

(European Union document “Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality” 2001).

Lifelong learning is therefore understood as all learning - **formal, non-formal, informal** - in all phases of life.

# Evolving Traditional University Models

Transforming a traditional university into an LLL institution requires:

- Identifying key drivers and leaders of change
- Rethinking rigid academic models
- Embedding flexibility and learner focus in all institutional processes



# Comprehensive Institutional Transformation

Transitioning to a holistic LLL model involves:

- Building a learning culture and innovation mindset
- Encouraging experimentation and collaboration among staff
- Integrating LLL principles into governance and curricula



# Bridging the Gap - RPL Linking Academic and Vocational Learning

RPL bridges theory and practice by recognizing real-world experience.

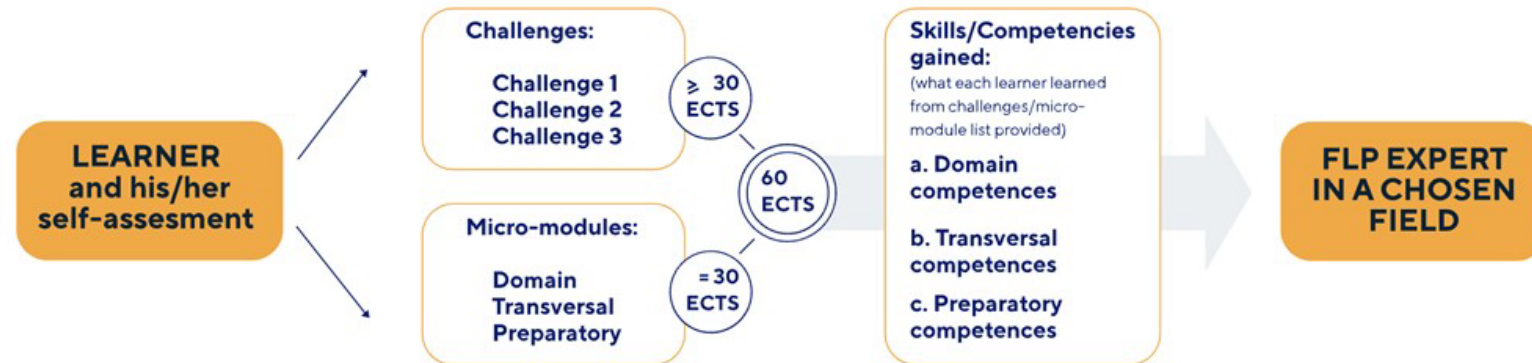
Example: Vocational training in health & safety = academic credit.  
→ Aligns education with job-market skills and strengthens employability.

# Flexible Pathways for Lifelong Learners

Societies need learning paths that are:

- Flexible, inclusive, and quality-assured
- Focused on upskilling and reskilling
- Supported by RPL and micro-credentials to ensure permeability between education and employment

# Vision 2035: Future of RPL



**1**

Do a self-assessment to understand which topics or competence and skill you like to develop further.

**2**

Choose a challenge or micro-module, that intrigues you. You can choose to deep dive into specific skills or develop a wide range of different skills.

**3**

Your learning pathway is being designed to offer flexibility while providing a structure to the learning based on your competences and interests.



# Vision 2035: Future of RPL in higher education institutions

In ten years, RPL will be:

- Standardized through clear guidelines
- Integrated with labour market frameworks
- Widely recognized and promoted among learners and professionals

# From Strategy to Implementation



Bridging the gap between theoretical strategies and practical execution is vital. Embedding LLL into daily university operations requires actionable plans and dedicated efforts to translate vision into reality.

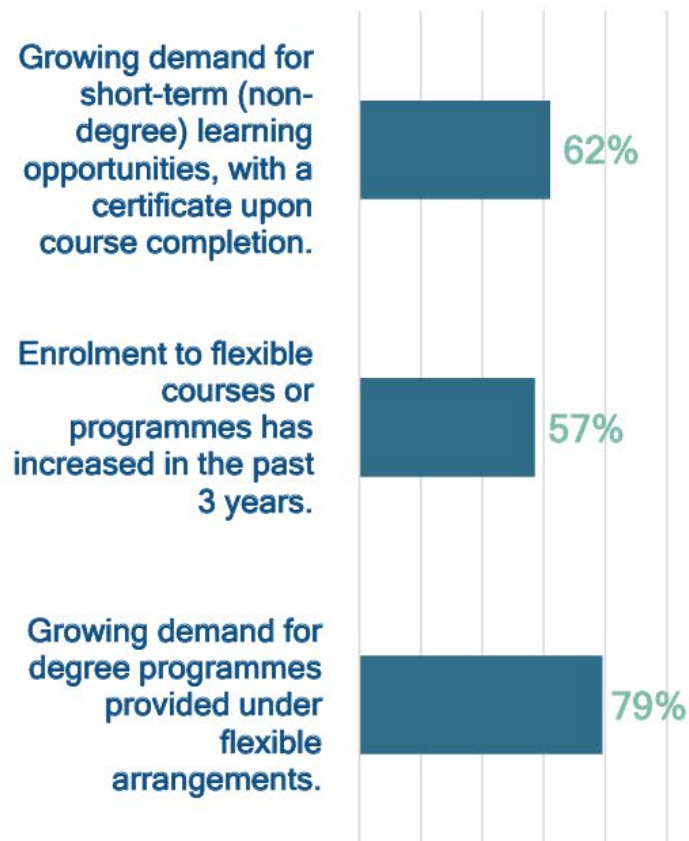
# Promoting more flexible learning pathways

Micro-credentials enable modular learning that fits personal and professional needs.

They remove barriers of cost, time, and location — especially for underrepresented groups.

# Increased Learner Flexibility

## (More) flexible learning?



T2018

■ Yes / To some extent

52% of HEIs increased their flexible learning offer in the past 5 years (Trends 2024)

Complex take up ([EUA report 2024](#) on flexible learning):

- No universally accepted/-able standards
- Little guidance available for HEIs
- Difficulty to identify what works or not
- Different approaches, something within the same institution

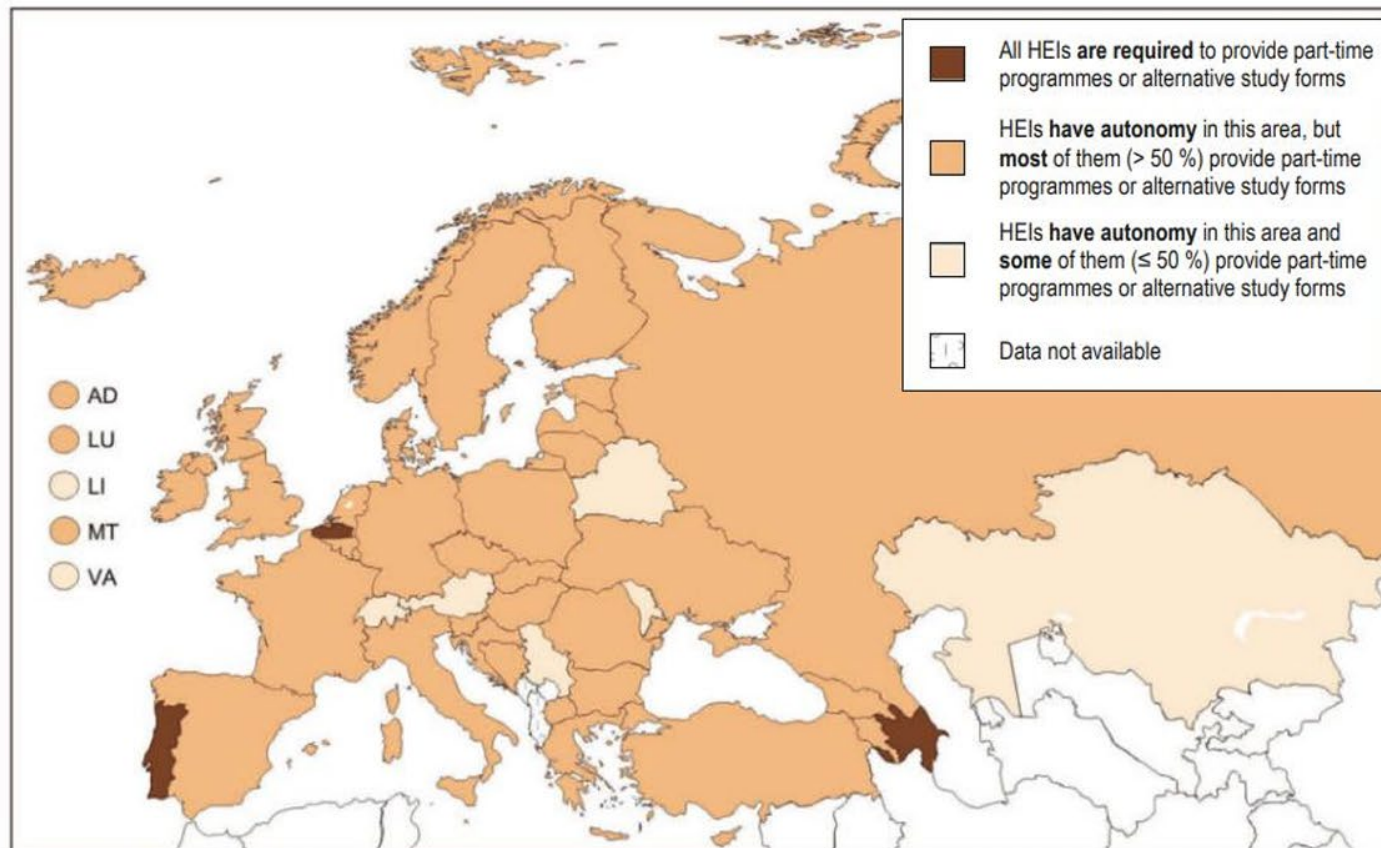
Common denominator: **provide learners with autonomy over when, where and how they learn.**

2 (complementary) approaches :

- Flexibility for learning, incl. within a study programme (**pedagogy and organisation**)
- Flexibility in the format of non-degree credits or learning provision, which may or may not be stackable to a degree (**education offer**)

# Provision of part-time programmes

Figure 2.17: Provision of part-time programmes or other alternative study forms by higher education institutions, 2016/17



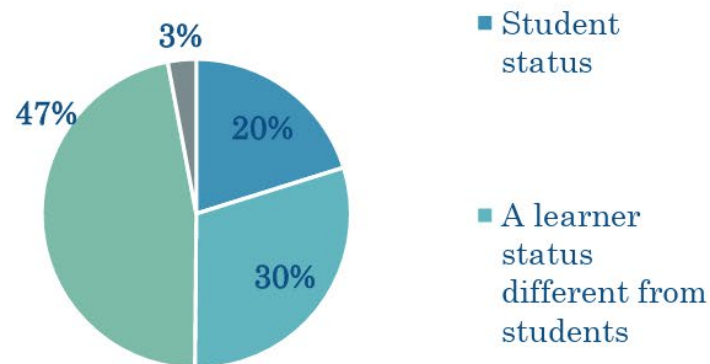
Source: BFUG data collection.

# Students

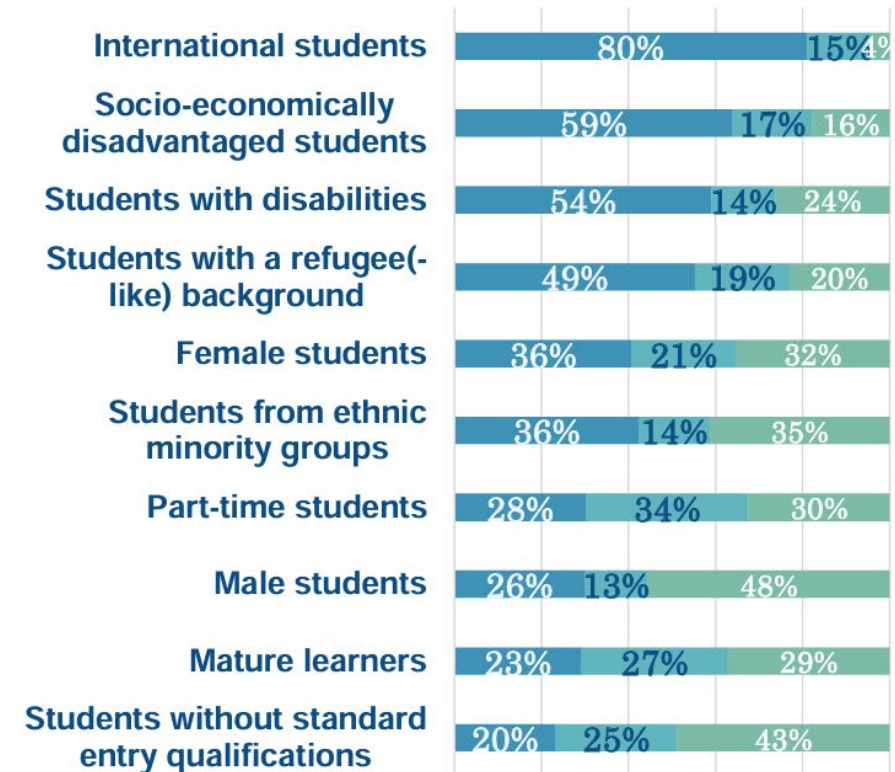
## Student populations

- **General increase** in numbers in the last 5 years, with **significant decreases**, esp. in some Central and Eastern European countries and for B and M.
- Predictions for the next 5 years:
  - ✓ 77% HEIs expect an increase of **international students**
  - ✓ 51% expect an increase of students in **non-degree education**
  - ✓ 41% expect an increase of **mature learners**

Non-degree learners are registered as...

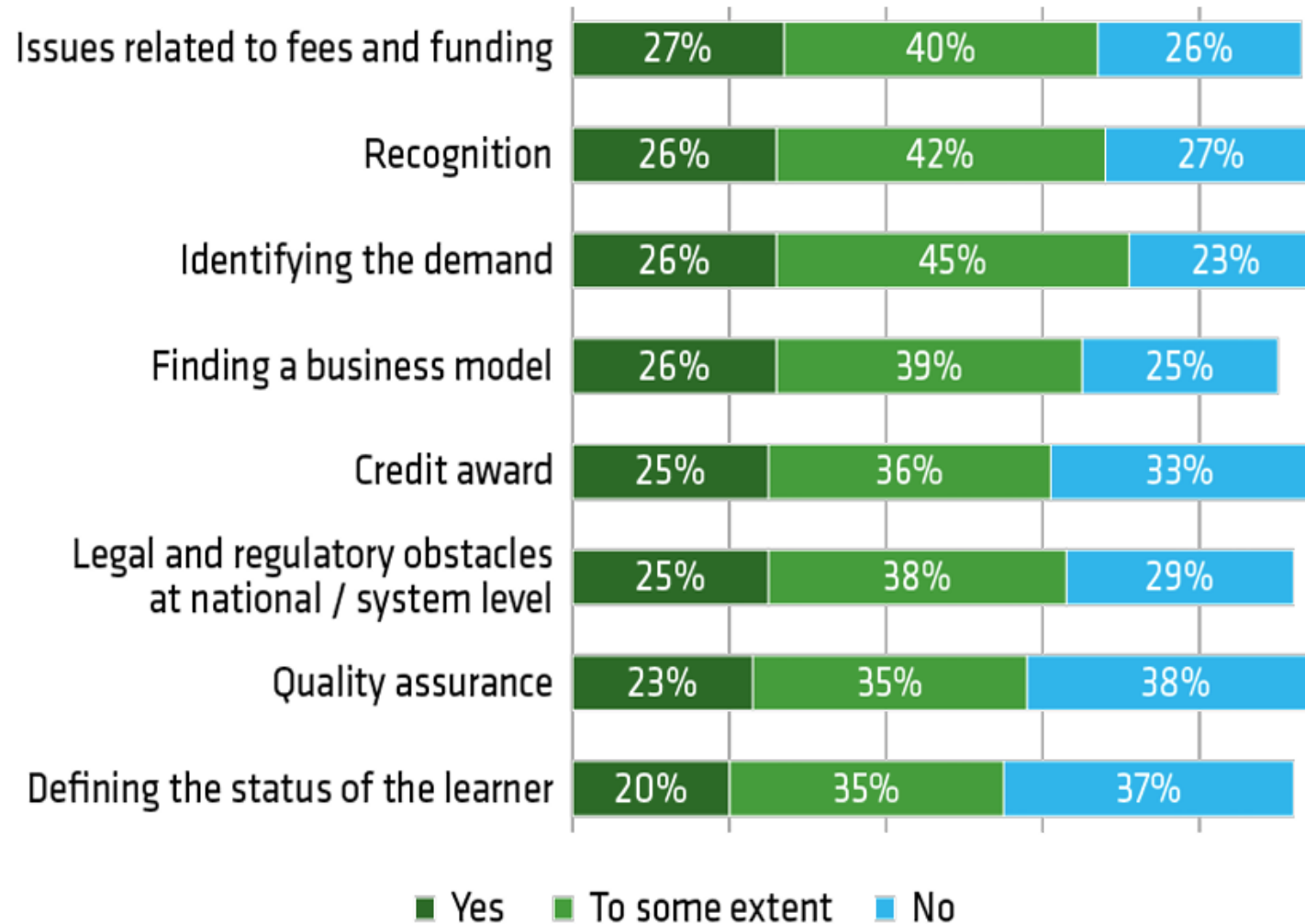


## Targeted strategies to attract...



50

## Challenges for non-degree programmes or courses



# Challenges to Flexibility

Obstacles include:

- Institutional rigidity and unclear recognition mechanisms
- Lack of shared micro-credential standards
- Uneven access across regions and institutions

# Degree vs. Non-degree

Are degree and non-degree education managed in the same way?

72% of HEIs

- Lifelong learning provision is managed differently than other education provision (at least in part)

35% of HEIs

- Lifelong learning is quality assured in the same way as conventional provision.
- Mostly in the UK(75%) and IE (86%).

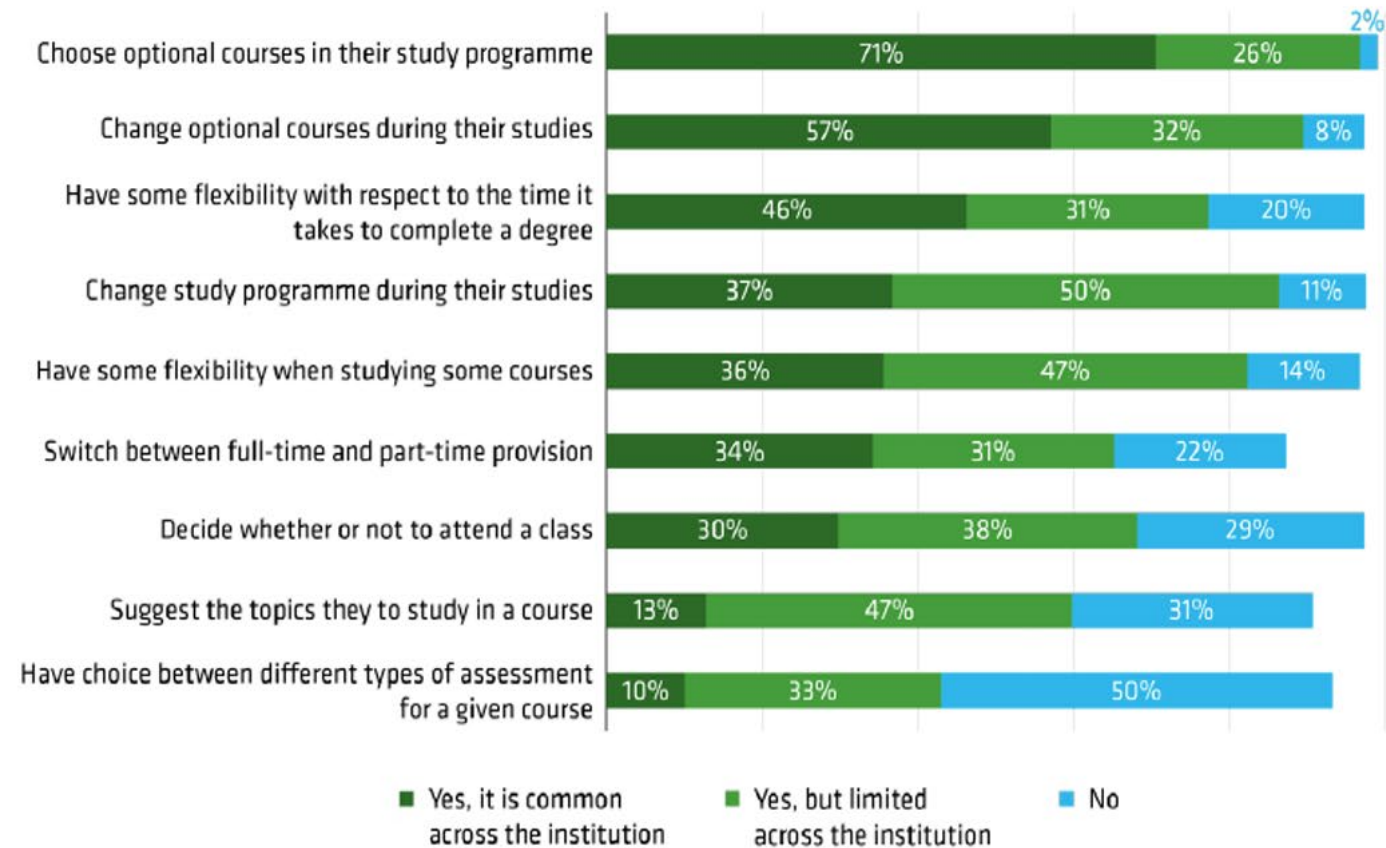
45% of HEIs

- LLL programmes taught by the same (regular) teachers.
- Taught by other teachers, at least to some extent (38%).

# Flexibility for Students

Figure 29: Flexibility for students

Q20. (partial). Is it possible for students to do the following, without any negative consequence (additional cost, time-to-degree, etc.)? Please select one option per line. N= 485.



This raises questions on:

**Strategic and organisation capacities at HEIs** to set orientations and manage flexibility

**Student agency to “manage flexibility”** (autonomy, responsibility, systematic partnership)

# Challenges to Flexible Learning

## Managing it as an institution

- Achieving a shared vision that meets expectations, and resource it?
- Centralized vs decentralized models of LLL/CE
- Organisational issues
- Enabling regulatory frameworks

## Designing FL modes and supporting teachers

- Learning design, organisation
- Cultural shift to various of managing time and infrastructure
- Advocating for the value of each learning mode
- Staff “fatigue” and resistance should not be underestimated

## Managing expectations and demands from society

- Pressure vs lack of appropriate resources to address
- Immediacy of skills demands vs curriculum/course design obligations
- Competition with other actors: advocate for the added value

# The role of Micro Credentials

Micro-credentials formalize specific competencies and make LLL more learner-focused.  
They require:

- Common frameworks for recognition
- Inter-university transfer systems
- Transparent quality assurance

# Showcase Informal Learning by Volunteering





# The Benefits of Volunteering

## Individual

- Increased self-confidence & life satisfaction
- Skills gain
- Personal Growth
- Academic Benefits
- Enhanced resume



# The Benefits of Volunteering

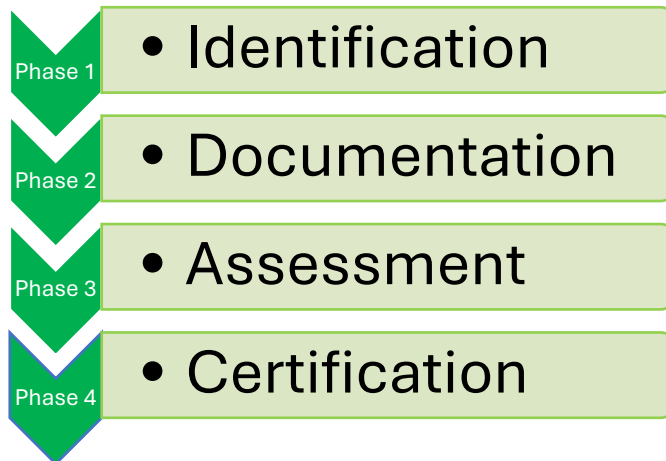
## Societal/Group

- Networking Opportunities & building relationships
- Fostering social identity
- Inclusivity
- Societal Change

# European Quality Standards in Validation of Learning Outcomes from Volunteering

- Volunteering may be used in several ways:
  - Role and responsibility advancement within volunteering
  - Self-empowerment
  - Access into education
  - Validation within education
  - Applying for a job

# How EU standards can facilitate recognition of learning from diverse volunteering experiences



## General Standards:

- Structured Validation
- Volunteer-Centred Design
- Voluntary Participation and Informed Consent
- Inclusivity and Accessibility
- Adaptability and Sustainability

## (Phase-) Specific Standards:

- Support from Tutors/Advisors
- Expert Guidance
- Comprehensive Competence Capture



# Best Practice Examples Germany

Examples:

- Passau: Service Learning as internship
- Cologne: Project seminars
- Freiburg & Göttingen: Recognition of committee work
- HAWK: Mentorship for children

→ Strong networks enhance formal recognition of volunteering.

# Frameworks & EU Regulations

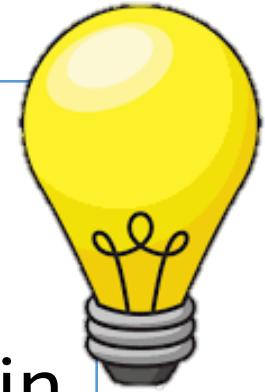


The **P.A.V.E. Agenda** (EYV 2011) promotes a common understanding of high-quality volunteering and its validation. Recognition builds social inclusion and collective empowerment.

**subjects?**

**groups?**

- exchange of experience with other RPL-professionals
- collaborate on RPL related topics and gain a global perspective
- RPL-enhancement on local level



**partners?**



## Session 1

# Creating flexible study pathways at Haaga-Helia UAS

**Dr Marjaana Mäkelä, Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences**



## Bachelor of Hospitality Management implemented with focus on work-integrated learning (1)

- 210 ECTS, part-time studies
- Targeted for applicants with solid experience in hospitality business and a job in the field
- Pedagogical approach
  - [Work & Study](#), a concept developed at Haaga-Helia UAS
    - Recognition of prior formal learning at the beginning
    - Systematic validation of non-formal and informal learning throughout studies
    - Learning in one's own work under supervision of lecturers and guidance counselors according to the personalized Work & Study plan
    - Demonstration of competencies either in teams or individually
  - Intensive days on campus once a month, a lot of individual studies and team work
  - A competence-based curriculum enabling manifold demonstration and assessment modes



## Bachelor of Hospitality Management implemented with focus on work-integrated learning (2)

- Peer support in teams of students in similar positions (restaurants, hotels, travel agencies, marketing)
- A unique possibility to complete a HE degree without interruptions in one's career
- **Endorsement of employers is necessary**
  - Authentic documents created by the student can be part of the demonstration process
  - Confidentiality required
  - A win-win-win scenario
- For the HEI: a dedicated team of lecturers and guidance counselors needed

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# Other resources and guides by different organisations with open access

- A resource for staff in Irish Higher Education Institutions: [RPL Toolkit Resource | Recognition of Prior Learning \(RPL\)](#)
- [Guiding Principles for Artificial Intelligence in Accreditation and Recognition---Feb 13 2025.pdf](#)
- Berlin Declaration on Validation of Prior Learning: [berlin-declaration-on-validation-of-prior-learning.pdf](#)
- Policy brief on statistics about VPL (focus on Nordic countries): [Policy brief on statistics about VPL](#)
- A Eurydice overview: [Recognition of Prior Non-Formal and Informal Learning in Higher Education](#)
- Potential Indicators for the 2024 Bologna Process Implementation Report on learning and teaching: [working doc 3 Chapter\\_4\\_Indicators on Learning and teaching\\_State of play.pdf](#)
- Benchmarking Flexibility in the Bologna Reforms (EUCEN): [Microsoft Word - ExecutiveSummary\\_FINAL100108WEBversion.doc](#)