



Enhancing student mobility
across educational boundaries
through recognition



Recognition of Prior Learning

RPL in Germany: quick start in basics,
procedure and examination

In the German higher education system, a distinction is made between "**Anerkennung**" and "**Anrechnung**". "**Anerkennung**" is translated as "**academic recognition**" and refers to competences acquired at higher education institutions (HEIs), while "**Anrechnung**" is translated as "**recognition of prior learning**" (RPL) and refers to competences acquired in any other context.



Basics

Recognition of prior learning facilitates individual and flexible learning and life paths in the education system. It prevents multiple testing of competences that one has already acquired, supports equal opportunities, and increases the permeability between vocational and academic education.

RPL refers to competences acquired outside of higher education. This includes competences from vocational training or continuing education (formal), other learning contexts (non-formal) as well as from work or other areas of life (informally acquired competences).

The **legal basis** for RPL is provided by the higher education acts of the *Länder*. In addition, two resolutions of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) as well as accreditation requirements provide orientation. Some general administrative principles apply as well: Applicants must participate in the process, procedures must be completed within a reasonable period of time, and reasons must be given for rejections.



Procedure

The HEIs regulate the practical implementation themselves, for example in their examination regulations or ideally in the form of a consistent, easily understandable statute. Apart from the process, it should bindingly regulate responsibilities, time limits and the handling of grades.

Certain **principles** should be observed:

RPL takes place **upon application**, i.e. students can decide whether they would like to receive recognition. **Consistent examination standards** and a **transparent procedure** are also required.

In practice, the RPL process takes place in several stages. Students, advisors, teachers and administration work hand-in-hand. In advance, the HEI should provide students with **comprehensive information** and advice. For general information, HEIs can refer students to the website "AN!" (www.an.hrk.de). The actual procedure begins with the application. The **formal examination** should take place after the application has been accepted in the examination office: Is the application filled in completely and correctly? Are the documents submitted authentic? Does information need to be submitted subsequently?

The **content-related examination** is carried out by the examination board or a recognition officer.

The decision should be made **promptly** and **communicated in writing**. Reasons must be given for rejection and possible **legal remedies** should be pointed out.

The entire procedure, including the recognised achievements, should be **documented**.



Examination

When examining the content of applications aiming at RPL, the learning objectives of the study programme or module are compared with competences already acquired. The decisive factor is not whether the contents are identical – but whether they are **equivalent** in terms of content and level. Two principles must be observed in the evaluation:

First, the extent of RPL is **limited**: As a rule, a maximum of 50 % of a study programme can be replaced by competences acquired outside of higher education. Second, acquired competences **do not expire** and can also be recognised more than once.

The central test criterion is **equivalence** in terms of content and level. The learning outcomes are the basis for this. Qualification frameworks, in particular the Qualification Framework for German Higher Education Qualifications (HQR), or other reference systems such as generic learning objective taxonomies (e.g. according to Anderson and Krathwohl) can be used for the assessment of equivalence.

For the **assessment**, applicants submit documents as evidence of their **learning outcomes** and assign them to the learning objectives of the modules to be recognised. The type of documentation depends on the type of acquisition of competences, whether formal, non-formal or informal. **Portfolios** are often used, in which evidence and learning outcomes are presented in a structured way and compared with the learning objectives of the module.

In addition to **individual RPL**, in which assessment and decisions are made on a case-by-case basis, there are also **lump-sum procedures**, which can simplify the recognition process. In this case, experts first compare a specific qualification, e.g. a vocational training programme, with a study programme in a structured manner and determine its potentials for recognition. Applicants with the same qualification can then receive recognition for the corresponding modules with the help of a simple proof. German HEIs can decide whether they offer lump-sum RPL.

RPL must not affect the quality of the study programme. However, minor differences should be accepted in order to support individual and flexible learning ways.

For more information, explanatory films and web seminars on academic recognition and RPL, please visit our website:

www.hrk-modus.de/en

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