

# Credit Transfer for Open/Online Graduate Programs: Full Report

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## Author's note

The following paper (of 50 pages) is the Full Version of the report on *Credit Transfer for Open/Online Graduate Programs*, completed in response to a request in 2016 from Thompson Rivers University, Canada, for a study on the topic of “Residency Requirements for Graduate Programs”, taking a global perspective on the matter across a range of countries seen as relevant to the Canadian situation. This Full Report was accompanied by a separate Annex consisting of a series of detailed reports on countries (or groups of countries) and institutional practices, including for specific programs.

The Concise Version of the report was presented as the “PLAR Benchmark Report Executive Summary” to the March 2018 meeting of the **Planning Council for Open Learning** (item 4.a) along with the Full Report and a Briefing Memorandum from a senior TRU staff member contextualising the Report to the situation in the university, the province and Canada.

The document that follows this Author's Note is the Full Version. It, the Concise Version, the Briefing Memorandum, and the Minutes of the Meeting of the Planning Council can be found in the 83-page public document at [https://www.tru.ca/\\_shared/assets/2018-03-12PCOLagenda29801.pdf](https://www.tru.ca/_shared/assets/2018-03-12PCOLagenda29801.pdf)

TRU senior staff confirmed to the author in November 2023 that these documents are public – but copyright to TRU.

A few very minor changes have been made, such as correcting some typos and layout issues.

It should be noted that the documents were written by a UK-based author in what he hopes is a good approximation to Canadian spelling and stylistic approaches – he apologises for any remaining infelicities. However, the issue of reconciling North American PLAR approaches and European/UK APL approaches is complex and out of scope for the report.

Nor does even the Full Report provide a detailed bibliography of Canadian-originated research on PLAR – that would have required an even fuller report.

For more on this topic readers are referred to the web site of the *Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment* (<https://capla.ca>) and a number of papers with Christine Wihak as an author or co-author, such as the influential paper by her and Norm Friesen, “From OER to PLAR: Credentialing for Open Education” in *Open Praxis* (Volume 5, Number 1, January 2013).

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## 0. Client Brief

This document is to be a benchmarking report for key aspects of open/online graduate programs including master's, graduate certificate and graduate diploma programs, with a focus on the following elements:

### PLAR [Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition]

- Amount permitted for graduate credit
- Used/not used for “residency” and how much
- For theses, capstones, other graduation projects
- Practica where relevant

### Entrance requirements

- Admissions tests
- PLAR use for resumes, letters of intent, letters of reference
- Degrees/ equivalents.

The report will be based on a sample of relevant and credible comparator open and/or distance higher education institutions internationally, both single mode and dual mode.

Comparator institutions are proposed to include the following ten:

<i>Institution</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Institution</i>	<i>Country</i>
TÉLUQ	Canada	FernUniversität	Germany
Athabasca University	Canada	Open Universiteit	The Netherlands
Penn State University	US	OU Catalonia	Spain
Central Florida State U	US	Massey University	New Zealand
UK Open University	UK	Charles Sturt University	Australia

The report is to include comparison tables as well as summaries and brief analyses to frame the information provided within the context of the needs of TRU, Open Learning. The report will be submitted in draft form with a review for feedback followed by a final copy. *(This was done in May-June 2017.)* The process may include various forms of discussion such as phone and Skype calls. *(It did.)* The contractor may be requested to participate in one PCOL meeting to clarify or amplify points discussed in the report. *(This was not needed.)*

The primary contact for this project is Dr. Irwin DeVries, Interim Associate Vice President, TRU Open Learning.

### Modifications

*In the event, a larger set of institutions were consulted. This was especially the case for the UK, which now has a well-developed route for PLAR-type entry especially to MBA from a range of vocational qualifications.*

Note that this report is written in Canadian English (to the best of the author's abilities and those of the UK edition of Microsoft Word).

# 1. Introduction and Summary

## Structure of the report

Chapter 0 (before this chapter) is the client brief.

Chapter 1 (this one) is an introduction and Executive Summary

Chapter 2 is a brief description of the work undertaken.

Chapter 3 provides tabulations of the case studies. For the details and context the reader is referred to the full case studies in the Annex. It then describes good PLAR practice at graduate level from 15 institutions and one national scheme (Sweden).

Chapter 4 provides a set of recommendations for TRU.

Chapter X is an appendix of 10 country overviews, setting the scene for master's programs in each country.

## Notes on nomenclature and style

This report is written in Canadian English. The technical terms it uses are wherever appropriate the standard terms used in Canada, such as PLAR, residence and practicum. The local equivalents [in each country] to these are explained.

## Executive Summary

### *Conclusions on PLAR for graduate programs*

First, the answers to the questions in the brief:

1. **Amount permitted for graduate credit:** The answer to this is complicated because master's programs vary in credit value, much more so than undergraduate programs – from 30 to 60 credit hours (1 to 2 equivalent full-time academic years). It can vary from less than 1/4 to around 2/3 – depending on the internal structure and length of the master's qualification.
2. **Residency:** There is always an irreducible minimum of credit hours that must be earned at the award-granting institution, typically no less than 1/3.
3. **Capstone, thesis, dissertation, project report:** no instance has been found where PLAR or transfer credit can be used for such a module.
4. **Practicum:** no such entities were discerned in the programs reviewed. In the likely event that a practicum would be a capstone-type module at the end of a program, it is unlikely that PLAR or transfer credit could apply.
5. **Admissions tests:** there was little sign of these in PLAR processes – however portfolios were often featured and would be scrutinised.
6. **PLAR use of resumes etc:** Many documents may be required for PLAR processes including resumes, letters of intent, research plans and portfolios. The narratives in section 3.2 give good practice examples.
7. **Degrees:** In countries (such as Australia) which offer both bachelor ordinary and bachelor with honors degrees, it is not uncommon for applicants with an ordinary bachelor degree to be unable to apply to join a master's program without going through some kind of bridging program. In other countries (such as Netherlands) with a two-tier system of institutions, students with bachelor degrees from the lower

tier also had to undertake a bridging program. In a third type like US with tiers of accreditation (in the US, regional accreditation is higher than national accreditation), degrees were required (at least in theory) to have to come from regionally accredited institutions.

In terms of more general considerations:

8. As noted earlier, master's programs vary in credit value, much more so than undergraduate programs – from 30 to 60 credit hours (1 to 2 equivalent full-time academic years).
9. The internal structure of master's is not consistent across the world, with two or three subdivisions the most common, above the level of individual modules.
10. The sub-structure of certificates and diplomas (if one can be discerned) varies even more.
11. The credit value of a dissertation/project element varies from 5 to 15 credit hours and in some institutions/departments/routes this element does not exist.
12. Many institutions do not seem to accept entry to graduate programs other than via a recognised degree – but this is more flexible in some countries like UK.
13. There is much less standardisation of entry aspects at master's level – much more autonomy is left to departments.
14. There is much more focus at graduate level on **transfer of credits from other institutions** than recognition of informal/non-formal/vocational learning.
15. Only in rare exceptions (such as Royal Roads University) is there evidence of proceduralisation of credit transfer and PLAR, such as standard progression routes.
16. Many institutions/departments have a “time-out” on credits – a point after which they are not valid – though there can be procedures to re-accredit such credits such as portfolios detailed recent relevant study/work.
17. Only in the UK and in New Zealand is there a clear route into graduate programs from higher vocational qualifications. Only in the UK is there evidence of proceduralisation of such routes between higher VET and Master's providers.

#### *Methodological issues encountered*

1. There is a lack of traction of the ISCED levels across the world. In particular there is significant inconsistency of the numbering of levels in the national/international schemes.
2. There is a lack of sufficient granularity in the ISCED scheme, with just one level (7) for Master's rather than two or three, and one level (6) for all varieties of “degrees” – honours, ordinary, research, vocational etc.
3. There is clear evidence that in some countries and institutions the relevant national or EU credit schemes are not always used in program descriptions on university web sites, or the information is tucked away in random-seeming locations. Even in distance learning programs, there is a nomenclature of “years” inappropriate in many cases.
4. There is a lack of standardisation of university master's programs' web sites even from the same university.
5. There is significant lack of visibility of detailed information on entry requirements – with a gap between the general university PLAR information, if any (usually focused

on bachelor degrees) and the specific information for each Master's program. Non-standard (i.e. non-degree) entry routes are rarely featured explicitly.

6. In addition to the obvious language barriers to Anglophone researchers at non-English-speaking institutions, at many institutions in non-Anglophone countries offering Master's programs in English, even though the promotional material is in English, much of the administrative material relevant to admissions may not be in English or even exist.

### *Recommendations*

1. TRU should consider a focus at graduate level on specific percentages of credit transfer/ recognition.
2. TRU should consider ensuring a more consistent approach to master's credit values and structure, recognising that there may be provincial and professional recognition issues requiring specific credit amounts.
3. TRU should consider the introduction of a clearer more systematic structure into graduate offerings – a certificate/diploma/master's trinity is suggested, as is often used in other Commonwealth countries
4. For master's/program routes with a major dissertation element, TRU should consider offering direct entry to that level from students who have pre-approved graduate diplomas from other institutions.
5. TRU should consider building up a bank of pre-approved credit transfer pathways from specific institutions that it receives students from.
6. TRU should consider a move towards the practice in some advanced Commonwealth countries of offering procedural PLAR routes to those with higher vocational qualifications, especially those accredited by respected professional associations. Some of the associations who offer such routes in other countries (such as the Chartered Institute of Management in UK) have reciprocity with associations in Canada (such as Canadian Institute of Management), as well as in Australia (Australian Institute of Management). Several of these institutes are increasingly active in online education.

## 2. Work done

The work was done predominantly by documentary review of web sites. Apart from reasons of efficiency and confidentiality, the web site is usually the main initial channel of information to students enquiring about a program. A number of unattributable conversations were had with experts, but no approach was made to institutions for non-public information.

The work was split into:

- ground-clearing
- literature search
- policy overview
- institutional studies.

In addition, in order to understand the current policy environment of TRU, a considerable amount of work was done in analysing the PLAR situation for master's programs at TRU. Interested readers are referred to Annex Section 2.4.

### Ground-clearing

It was early on decided that the only feasible basis for making international comparisons was to adopt fully the International Standard Classification of Education from UNESCO, 2011 version.<sup>1</sup> This has nine levels, as follows:<sup>2</sup>

0	Early childhood education
1	Primary education
2	Lower secondary education
3	Upper secondary education
4	Post-secondary non-tertiary education
5	Short-cycle tertiary education
6	Bachelor's or equivalent level
<b>7</b>	<b>Master's or equivalent level</b>
8	Doctoral or equivalent level

The ISCED classification has a number of weaknesses – the most significant for our purposes being that the numerical levels are not followed by several of the nationally-specific classifications including in Australia and New Zealand. The second most significant is that several levels are insufficiently granular: level 6 does not differentiate between “bachelor” and “bachelor with honors” and level 7 takes no account of the fact the majority of master's programs have an internal structure with three or sometimes just two levels.

For more see Annex 2.1 and the country reports in Chapter X (copied from Annex).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/isced-37c-fos-review-222729e.pdf> page 3

<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/International\\_Standard\\_Classification\\_of\\_Education\\_\(ISCED\)](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/International_Standard_Classification_of_Education_(ISCED))

The situation with credit hours is more complex. Most countries have nationally-specific systems except that EU member states (except the UK) use the ECTS system. In the tabulations in Chapter 3 all credits are converted to notional “North American” credit hours (as used in US and Canada) but readers are warned both that the conversion factors are disputed and that the amount of teaching to deliver one credit hour varies widely (and even wildly) between and within countries (and not only to reflect delivery mode).

### The literature

The literature search revealed that despite the extensive literature on PLAR (and synonyms) there was very little of relevance to PLAR for *graduate* programs. Most useful were a number of papers which were essentially case studies of institutions at particular points in time, but with little coverage of online programs. The most important of these were:

- **OISE, Toronto:** Case Study of the Innovative M.Ed. in Higher Education Leadership Cohort initiative: “The most risky innovation was the admission of some very experienced professionals – “middle management” staff in colleges and universities – into the program for a Master’s in Higher Education degree – even though they had not earned the normally required four-year or honours undergraduate degree. Students were admitted by one of three routes: standard admission, non-standard case consideration, or the certificate route, depending on their past academic achievements and professional experience.”<sup>3</sup>
- **Middlesex University, UK:** This described “the extensive and innovative use of RPL by Middlesex University”.<sup>4</sup>
- **University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa:** The Graduate School of Business in 2007 “admitted seven students onto the MBA program on the basis of RPL”.<sup>5</sup>
- **University, Queensland, Australia:** A case study “relating to e-portfolio-style RPL for entry into a Graduate Certificate in Policy and Governance at a metropolitan university in Queensland” (believed to be Queensland University of Technology).<sup>6</sup>

At the national level, only one paper was found of relevance, *Recognition of Prior Learning in higher education in Ireland*,<sup>7</sup> which is discussed in more detail in Annex Section 3.9.1.

### Policy overview

Country-specific policies are covered in the country reports in the Annex. At supranational level, the **European Union** has not produced any material with focus on PLAR at graduate level. In any case in the area of education the European Commission can produce only *recommendations* – not directives or laws – and so many Member States in reality pay little attention. Furthermore, in many topic areas in education, such as credit transfer, the

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<sup>3</sup> <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/handle/1807/66925>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/JWAM-10-2015-001>

<sup>5</sup> Singh, M. a. (2011). Let the Doors of Learning Be Open to All--A Case for Recognition of Prior Learning. South African Journal of Higher Education, 25(4), 803–818

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/conceptualising-recognition-of-prior-learning-processes-in-the-age-of-open-learning/135637>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301623790> Recognition of Prior Learning in higher education in Ireland

European Commission is required to work with all the 48 European countries (including Russia) of the European Higher Education Area<sup>8</sup> – so progress tends to be slow.

UNESCO pays some attention to PLAR – see for example the UNEVOC page on Recognition of Prior Learning<sup>9</sup> – but again there seems to be nothing specific to graduate programs.

### **Case studies**

Ten institutions studied in detail were the original set of ten institutions across eight countries – Canada, US, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, The Netherlands and Spain – proposed by TRU. These are listed in bold in the table below. However it was quickly found that the 10 institutions originally proposed did not give the coverage needed, especially since several had very few online graduate programs and/or very limited documentation in English on PLAR. Consequently on an incremental basis an additional 14 institutions were covered, listed in normal text in the table. (The abbreviations are used in Chapter 3.)

<i>Institution</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Institution</i>	<i>Country</i>
<b>TÉLUQ</b>	Canada	<b>FernUniversität (FernU)</b>	Germany
<b>Athabasca University (AU)</b>	Canada	Wismar University	Germany
Memorial University (MU)	Canada	<b>Open Universiteit (OUNL)</b>	The Netherlands
Royal Roads University (RRU)	Canada	Maastricht University	The Netherlands
<b>Penn State University (PSU)</b>	US	Fontys University	The Netherlands
<b>Central Florida State U (CFSU)</b>	US	<b>OU Catalonia (OUC)</b>	Spain
UMUC	US	UNIR	Spain
<b>UK Open University (OU)</b>	UK	<b>Massey University</b>	New Zealand
University of Derby	UK	Open Polytechnic (OPNZ)	New Zealand
Anglia Ruskin University (ARU)	UK	Otago Polytechnic	New Zealand
Higher vocational (HVET)	UK	Universal College (UCOL)	New Zealand
<b>Charles Sturt University (CSU)</b>	Australia	RMIT	Australia

However, it became clear from the literature and the author’s earlier work, confirmed by conversations at various events, that additional countries were of great relevance, namely Ireland (literature and author’s experience),<sup>10</sup> South Africa (literature and conversations) and Sweden (author’s experience).<sup>11</sup> Thus Cork Institute of Technology (CIT), University of Limerick, Dublin City University (DCU), Institute of Technology Sligo, UNISA (the one in South Africa), Uppsala University and University of Gävle were also briefly studied. The country overviews for the eight countries, plus shorter overviews on Ireland and Sweden, have been brought together in the Appendix (Chapter X) of this report. For the original country reports see Annex Chapter 2 at the start of each section.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.ehea.info/pid34250/members.html>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.unevoc.unesco.org/go.php?q=Recognition+of+Prior+Learning&context=>

<sup>10</sup> see for example <http://www.teachingandlearning.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Infrastructure-Review-Data-Collection-rubric-and-methodology-1.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> see in particular [https://www.academia.edu/13057630/International\\_benchmarking\\_the\\_first\\_dual-mode\\_distance\\_learning\\_benchmarking\\_club](https://www.academia.edu/13057630/International_benchmarking_the_first_dual-mode_distance_learning_benchmarking_club) (TRU was involved in this)

### 3. Tabulations and exemplars

#### 3.1 Tables

The first of the two sections in this chapter is a set of four tables whose rows are the requested information from TRU plus other criteria judged relevant, and whose columns are the 30 institutions checked.

The requested information is on **PLAR** and **entrance requirements**, as requested by TRU:

<p><b>PLAR</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amount permitted for graduate credit</li> <li>• Used/not used for “residency” and how much</li> <li>• For theses, capstones, other graduation projects</li> <li>• Practica where relevant</li> </ul> <p><b>Entrance requirements</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Admissions tests</li> <li>• PLAR use for resumes, letters of intent, letters of reference</li> <li>• Degrees/equivalents.</li> </ul>
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To provide context additional data is collected. This leads to a tabulation as follows:

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Typical value</i>
#onlineM	Number of online full Master’s programs in English, but in some cases all Master’s	from zero to over 100
credits-natl	Credit value of program in the national credit hours scheme – see country overviews for these	
credits-NA	Credit value of program “converted” to the North American credit hours scheme	30
PLAR-grad	Is there a PLAR process (including credit transfer) for graduate programs?	Yes, but usually much more restrictive and program-specific than at bachelor level
max transfer	The maximum amount of credits that can be transferred in	33%
Residency	The minimum amount of credits that must be offered by the Master’s-granting institution	over 50%
Capstone	Whether PLAR of any sort can apply to a capstone course and in particular a thesis	PLAR never allowed
Practicum	Whether PLAR of any sort can apply to a “practicum” such as work placement	No such programs were revealed
Degrees	Whether applicants must have a bachelor degree and if it has to be honors	honors only in those jurisdictions that make a difference
Types	Whether there are institutions from which bachelor degrees are typically not accepted – in dual-system countries like Netherlands	typically institutions have “only” to be nationally accredited

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<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Typical value</i>
Recency	How recent do an applicant's qualifications have to be in order to be accepted	Within the last 7 years, but depends much on subject
ChallengeG	Whether there is any challenge/test subprocess with in the PLAR process for entry to graduate programs	Not usual for graduate programs

It should be noted that the tabulations give only fragmentary and summary information and the reader is then referred to the specific full entries in the Annex. At most universities there is not full standardisation of entry requirements to Master's programs.

Now follow four tables. The column headings give the country code of the country (e.g. CA for Canada) followed by the Annex section or subsection where a full description can be found.

In order to allow each table to fit on one page, footnotes have been kept to an absolute minimum.

**Table 1: Canada and US – institutions**

<i>Section</i>		<i>CA 2.4</i>	<i>CA 3.1.1</i>	<i>CA 3.1.2</i>	<i>CA 3.1.3</i>	<i>CA 3.1.4</i>	<i>US 3.2.1</i>	<i>US 3.2.2</i>	<i>US 3.2.3</i>
<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Typical</i>	<i>TRU</i>	<i>AU</i>	<i>TÉLUQ</i>	<i>MU</i>	<i>RRU</i>	<i>PSU</i>	<i>CFSU</i>	<i>UMUC</i>
#onlineM		5	18	3	5	20	46	25	43
credits-natl		28, 33	33, 48 (MBA)	45	30				
credits-NA		28, 33	33, 48	45	30		30-38	33-36-42	30-36
PLAR-grad		Yes	Credit transfer, no PLAR	Yes		credit transfer lists			no, but
max transfer		25% (on-campus)					33% but 20% for MBA		6 for some; 3 for GC; 0 for others
Residency	50%								
Capstone	PLAR not allowed								
Practicum	PLAR not allowed								
Degrees	honors only		degree (mostly)		degree (mostly)	degree			
Types	nationally accredited						regionally accredited institution		regionally accredited institution
Recency	5 years		5, 7 or 10 years						
ChallengeG			not available						not available

**Table 2: UK, New Zealand and Australia – institutions**

Section		UK 3.3.1	UK 3.3.2	UK 3.3.3	UK 3.3.4	NZ 3.4.1	NZ 3.4.2	NZ 3.4.3	NZ 3.4.4	AU 3.5.1	AU 3.5.2
Criterion	Typical	UKOU	Derby	ARU	HVET	Massey	OPNZ	Otago	UCOL	CSU	RMIT
#onlineM		34	20	20	some	107	Zero	7	1	80	5
credits-natl		180 CATS	180 CATS	180 CATS	180 CATS	120-240		120-240	180	96	96
credits-NA		45 <sup>12</sup>	45	45	45	30-60		30-60	45	60	60
PLAR-grad		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
max transfer		30 (16%) to 60 (33%)	60 (33%)	120 (67%)	120 (67%) – e.g. MBA top-up	25%		30-60 (16-50%)	120 (67%)	50%	
Residency	50%	see above			no info	75%			33%		
Capstone	PLAR not allowed	no credit transfer	no credit transfer	no credit transfer	no credit transfer	no credit transfer		no credit transfer	no credit transfer		
Practicum	PLAR not allowed	no info									
Degrees	honors only	no info	degree at 2:2 level	degree at 2:2 level						bachelor is sufficient	bachelor is sufficient
Types	nationally accredited	accredited institution	accredited institution							Australian Bachelor	Australian Bachelor
Recency	5 years	7-16 years		5 years; more with portfolio		no credits for informal learning				10 years	10 years
ChallengeG			Yes							no info	no info

<sup>12</sup> The correlation to the US credit hours at the “official” 4:1 exchange rate – which works out at 45 credit hours for 180 CATS and 60 credit hours for 240 CATS – is implausibly high to many people who have worked or studied in both systems

**Table 3: Netherlands, Germany, Spain and Sweden – institutions**

<i>Section</i>		<i>NL 3.6.1</i>	<i>NL 3.6.2</i>	<i>NL 3.6.3</i>	<i>DE 3.7.1</i>	<i>DE 3.7.2</i>	<i>ES 3.8.1</i>	<i>ES 3.8.2</i>	<i>SE 3.9.3a</i>	<i>SE 3.9.3b</i>
<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Typical</i>	<i>OUNL</i>	<i>Maastricht</i>	<i>Fontys</i>	<i>FernU</i>	<i>Wismar</i>	<i>UOC</i>	<i>UNIR</i>	<i>Uppsala</i>	<i>Gävle</i>
#onlineM		14	55	9	12	a few	over 40	2	over 40	14
credits-natl		60-120		60-90	mostly 120		60	60	60-120	60
credits-NA		30-60		30-45	60		30	30	30-60	30
PLAR-grad		Partly	Unclear	Info only in Dutch	unclear	unclear	appears not	ECTS credit transfer	ECTS credit transfer	ECTS credit transfer
max transfer					none		n/a	limit unknown	high %	high %
Residency	50%				n/a		n/a		at least one course	at least one course
Capstone	PLAR not allowed				n/a		n/a			
Practicum	PLAR not allowed				n/a		n/a			
Degrees	honors only	university degree	<i>universiteit en degree</i>	relevant Bachelor	strict	any	recognised university	University Degree	bachelor degree	bachelor degree
Types	nationally accredited	hogeschole degree & bridging	<i>hogeschole degree &amp; bridging</i>	any	see above	any	see above			
Recency	5 years									
ChallengeG					n/a	n/a	n/a			

**Table 4: Ireland and South Africa – institutions**

<i>Section</i>		<i>IE 3.9.1a</i>	<i>IE 3.9.1b</i>	<i>IE 3.9.1c</i>	<i>IE 3.9.1d</i>	<i>ZA 3.9.2</i>
<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Typical</i>	<i>CIT</i>	<i>Limerick</i>	<i>DCU</i>	<i>Sligo</i>	<i>UNISA</i>
#onlineM		1 studied	1 studied	7	10	147
credits-natl		60 <sup>13</sup>	unclear	90	90	180
credits-NA		30		45	45	45
PLAR-grad		RPL Service	available	comprehensive	RPL process	RPL process
max transfer						
Residency	50%					
Capstone	PLAR not allowed					
Practicum	PLAR not allowed					
Degrees	honors only	graduates with experience	2:2 honors degree	honors degree	2:2 honors	honors degree
Types	nationally accredited					
Recency	5 years					
ChallengeG						

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<sup>13</sup> Ireland uses ECTS

## 3.2 PLAR narratives

There is no substitute for reading the Annex but this section provides 16 key narratives to inform the details of PLAR procedures at TRU. These are extracted from the Annex.

### Athabasca University, Canada (Annex 3.1.1)

There are three ways to gain credit so as to allow the completion of fewer modules in the graduate program:

- Credit for previous education
- Credit for what you already know (PLAR)
- Challenge for credit.

#### Credit for previous education

There is a comprehensive credit transfer tool which lists a set of universities within and beyond Canada and has awareness of the programs offered by these universities. This system is just a guide and students have to apply for credit transfer, which could be from universities not listed in the credit transfer tool.<sup>14</sup>

#### *Time limits on credit transfer inwards*

The following is a precis of the key page:<sup>15</sup>

Usually, courses will be considered for transfer credit regardless of when they were completed. There are some exceptions.

Depending on the program, AU will not award transfer credit for some administrative studies courses (e.g., law, senior-level accounting, management science, marketing or finance courses), information systems courses, or science courses that were completed more than **10 years ago**.

Athabasca University will not award transfer credit in the following programs for nursing courses that were completed more than seven (7) years ago, or for non-nursing courses that were completed more than **10 years ago**...

In addition, AU will not grant transfer credit in the following programs for computer science courses that were completed more than **five years ago**...

Students transferring credit completed within a Canadian Information Processing Society<sup>16</sup> (CIPS) accredited diploma or who have completed a science-related diploma program from a college or technical institute, and who are enrolling in the Bachelor of Science Program, *may* [our italics] not be eligible for a block transfer of credit if the diploma is more than five (5) years old. Consequently, if student diplomas are more than five (5) years old and students are currently active in their

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<sup>14</sup> For example many UK universities are not listed in the tool

<sup>15</sup> [http://calendar.athabascau.ca/undergrad/current/page06\\_08\\_i.php](http://calendar.athabascau.ca/undergrad/current/page06_08_i.php)

<sup>16</sup> It should be noted for later use that CIPS has mutual recognition agreements with similar societies in other advanced countries including the British Computing Society and the New Zealand Computer Society – <http://www.cips.ca/mutual>

field of study, **they should arrange to provide evidence of this activity...**

The procedures for arriving at a final credit transfer statement are complex,<sup>17</sup> and depend on where the institution is located. In particular,

If you have credentials from an institution outside of Canada or the United States and you would like AU to consider them for transfer credit, you'll follow a different assessment process. This assessment must be done by an international assessment agency – for example, the International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS).<sup>18</sup>

#### **Credit for what you already know (PLAR)**

*This does not apply to graduate programs.*<sup>19</sup> However there seems to be one small loophole: “If you’re planning to pursue graduate study, check with the graduate program you want to enter to see if your PLAR credits will be accepted. **Get this in writing.**”

#### **Challenge for credit**

*This again is not available for graduate programs.*<sup>20</sup>

### **Penn State World Campus, US (Annex 3.2.1)**

The World Campus has a comprehensive policy on transfer credit but at graduate level the decisions are largely devolved to departments. It is useful first to understand the undergraduate transfer credit rules:<sup>21</sup>

Prospective undergraduate students may transfer credit from college-level work done *at a regionally accredited institution.*

*There is no limit to the number of credits that you may transfer into Penn State; however, it is likely that not all of your transferred credit may count toward your intended degree program.*

***The academic department in which you enroll will have the final say on what credit can be accepted toward your degree.***

Additionally, you must earn a minimum number of credits from Penn State to earn your degree through World Campus:

To earn an associate’s degree, 18 of the last 30 credits [60%] that you take to earn your degree must be from Penn State.

To earn a bachelor’s degree, 36 of the last 60 credits [60%] that you take to earn your degree must be from Penn State.

For a course to qualify for credit:

*the course grade you earned must be equivalent to a grade of A, B, or C (2.0) at Penn State*

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.athabascau.ca/admissions/get-credit-education/>

<sup>18</sup> This is an agency of the Alberta government – <https://www.alberta.ca/iqas.aspx>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.athabascau.ca/admissions/get-credit-work-life-experience/>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.athabascau.ca/admissions/challenge-credit/>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.worldcampus.psu.edu/admissions/transfer-students>

**there must be an equivalent course at Penn State**

**the transferred course credits must be useful to your program of study**

The actual letter grade received will not be transferred – only the credit – so your Penn State grade-point average (GPA) will not be affected. Transferred credit is not recorded on your transcript until after you have completed at least one 3-credit course at Penn State. Your GPA will be calculated starting from the completion of your first World Campus course.

***At graduate level the rules are more restrictive:***<sup>22</sup>

Transfer of graduate credit is on a case-by-case basis by the respective department to which you are applying. To be considered:

- courses you wish to transfer must appear on a **graduate-level transcript** from a **regionally accredited institution**<sup>23</sup>
- credits must have been earned with a “B” or higher grade **and not have been used to complete a graduate degree at any university**
- **credits appearing as undergraduate level on your transcript cannot be transferred to a Penn State graduate degree program**
- you will need to submit official copies of your academic transcripts to the academic department hosting the degree program to which you are applying for admission

A maximum number of credits may be accepted into a new graduate degree program at Penn State depending on the source. A maximum of:

- 10 credits from graduate coursework completed *at an external institution* may be transferred into a degree program
- 15 credits from non-degree graduate coursework completed **at Penn State** may be applied toward a degree program

***Approval to apply any credit toward a graduate degree program must be granted by the student’s academic adviser and the Penn State Graduate School.***

For a typical master’s (30 credits), these limits in percentage terms are 33% (1/3) and 50% (1/2); for the MBA they are lower (20% and 31%).

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.worldcampus.psu.edu/admissions/transfer-students> again

<sup>23</sup> In other words, accredited by one of the six Regional Accreditation Associations (as listed in <http://www.nj.gov/education/educators/license/usaccred.htm>); in the US there are also national accreditation bodies, which are commonly regarded as of lesser status – see e.g. <http://blog.tesu.edu/national-vs-regional-accreditation-why-does-it-matter>

### University of Maryland University College, US (Annex 3.2.3)

There is a Transfer Credit process with some applicability to graduate programs:<sup>24</sup>

If you've taken courses at an approved four-year college or university and earned a C or 2.0 GPA or better, you could be able to apply these credits toward an associate's (for military and veteran students) or **bachelor's degree**.

You can transfer up to 45 credits toward an associate's or up to 90 credits toward a bachelor's from approved four-year colleges or universities or from other combined sources (including credit by examination, military education and training, or other fast paths to credit).

We also accept up to 9 credits toward undergraduate certificates, **up to 3 credits toward graduate certificates, and up to 6 credits toward select master's degrees**.

Yet it appears that PLAR and Credit Challenge do not apply to graduate programs:<sup>25</sup>

Academic credit may be earned for any UMUC **undergraduate** course for which a suitable examination can be prepared and administered.

*Some "select" examples*

- The Master of Science in Accounting and Financial Management consists of 36 credit hours. There are nine 3-credit core courses, two 3-credit specialisation courses (chosen from a range of options) and a 3-credit capstone. Yet **transfer credits are not accepted**. Furthermore students must have completed 15 credits of undergraduate accounting courses with a grade of C or better in each course.<sup>26</sup>
- On the other hand the Master of Science in learning design and technology, another 36-credit program, *accepts up to 6 transfer credits*. However, this program has a different structure, with six 6-credit courses to be taken in a specific order and no capstone.<sup>27</sup>
- Many programs do accept up to 6 transfer credits but the differences are not clear. For example Cybersecurity Technology accepts them<sup>28</sup> but Data Analytics<sup>29</sup> does not, yet both programs have a capstone.
- Even some shorter programs like the MA in Teaching (30 credits) accept 6 transfer credits.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.umuc.edu/transfers-and-credits/transfer-credits/credit-from-colleges.cfm>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.umuc.edu/current-students/degree-requirements/prior-learning/course-challenge/index.cfm>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.umuc.edu/academic-programs/masters-degrees/accounting-and-financial-management.cfm>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.umuc.edu/academic-programs/masters-degrees/learning-design-technology-ms.cfm>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.umuc.edu/academic-programs/masters-degrees/cybersecurity-technology-ms.cfm>

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.umuc.edu/academic-programs/masters-degrees/data-analytics.cfm>

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.umuc.edu/academic-programs/masters-degrees/teaching.cfm>

### University of Derby, UK (Annex 3.3.2)

The University of Derby is a leader in the UK approach to PLAR – in the UK called APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning). The relevant page<sup>31</sup> is linked from the main *Choose your online course* page. Extracts from that are below:

Have you already studied at another institution, completed a training course or does your work experience appear equivalent to one or more modules on your chosen course? If so, you may be able to translate this prior learning into credits towards your course modules so that you don't have to study them again. This is called Recognition of Prior Learning or RPL. There are two types of RPL:

- Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning or RPCL: Recognises learning for which you have been formally assessed and awarded a certificate.
- Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning or RPEL: Recognises your knowledge and skills developed experience, including your work and voluntary activities.

For postgraduate courses you can apply for up to 60 credits [typically 1/3] of the total requirement for your course. We will need appropriate evidence that your prior learning matches the course content/module you wish to be exempt from.

**RPCL** is a process whereby academic credit for learning that has been previously assessed and/or accredited at Higher Education (HE) level, through a formal course of study could be used towards the credit requirements of a UDOL award. Evidence to support a claim will involve the *submission of a formal qualification or award or part of an award, with formal documentation* such as a results transcript or formal certificate and/or evidence of assessment, as appropriate, from a University, College or Professional and/or Regulatory Body.

For **RPEL**, assessment of a claim is based on *documented evidence of the learning achieved*. For such claims you are eligible for academic support in evidencing your knowledge and skills. The University is responsible for assessing if the learning is valid and matches the level of learning required, if the learning is current and if sufficient evidence has been provided to demonstrate the learning.

#### **MBA Global Finance**

The MBA Global Finance is another sector-standard MBA with the usual three 60-CATS phases. It is accredited by the Chartered Management Institute (CMI): thus MBA graduates also gain the CMI Level 7 Diploma in Strategic Management and Leadership.

Because this academic qualification is so closely linked to vocational qualifications there are specific additional credit transfer routes from the vocational qualifications hierarchy....<sup>32</sup> [for more see Annex Section 3.3.4]

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.derby.ac.uk/online/course-credits-past-study-and-experience>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.derby.ac.uk/online/course/online-mba-global-finance-master-business-administration-degree-course/exemptions>

### Anglia Ruskin University, UK (Annex 3.3.3)

#### *Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL)*

Highlights are:

- Credit transfer of up to 2/3 of CATS value (thus in theory 120 CATS on a Masters)
- The marks or grades obtained from accredited prior learning do not contribute to the determination of the classification of your Anglia Ruskin award.
- Check on compatibility and relevance of syllabus
- Previous programmes completed within the last five years; or if not, submission of a portfolio with CV, list of completed CPD, employer reference and reflective statement of 750–1000 words

#### *Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)*

This section is very brief. Highlights are:

- Credit transfer of up to 1/2 of CATS value (thus in theory 90 CATS on a Masters)

### Massey University, New Zealand (Annex 3.4.1)

Massey University has an informative page on *Recognition of Formal and Informal Prior Learning*<sup>33</sup> – some highlights are below:

2. A student shall be required to complete at least the following through Massey University to be awarded a Massey University qualification:...

(c) For a postgraduate or graduate qualification, **three-quarters of the credits required.**

**18. No credit from informal learning towards a graduate or post-graduate qualification is permitted.**

19. Credit for Massey University quality assured professional development courses may be awarded towards a qualification....

20. Students may be awarded credit to the following maximum values...:

(d) a Postgraduate Certificate or Post-Graduate Diploma, one-quarter of the credits required for the qualification, up to a maximum of 30 credits;

(e) a Master's Degree, one-quarter of the credits required for the qualification, up to a maximum of 60 credits.

The upshot appears to be that for a 120-credit master, at least 90 credits (75%) must be studied through Massey University – for a 180-credit Master, at least 135 credits (also 75%).

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/about-massey/calendar/qualification-regulations/recognition-of-formal-and-informal-priorlearning.cfm>

### Otago Polytechnic, New Zealand (Annex 3.4.3)

There appears to be no program-specific material referring to PLAR (Recognition of Prior Learning) but there is a comprehensive document at the university level on this matter.<sup>34</sup> [which specifically refers to master's programs] Highlights of this 10-page document are:

Advanced standing applies where an RPL applicant has been assessed for courses, qualifications and/or an APEL process in which the outcomes equate to at least 60 credits towards an Otago Polytechnic qualification. An exception is the Masters of Professional Practice [180 credits] where Advanced Standing can be awarded for outcomes that equate to at least 30 credits. (page 2)

**Responsibilities of Heads of School.** Determining which courses RPL will not apply to and ensuring this is included in the approved programme documents. The rationale for not allowing RPL in a programme must be clearly articulated in the programme document, for example where external agency requirements place limits on RPL such as those the Nursing Council of New Zealand has in place. (page 5)

### Universal College of Learning, New Zealand (Annex 3.4.4)

*Entry, credit transfer and PLAR [for Master of Design]*

Applicants *may* be asked to provide a portfolio of original, developmental and finished work. Each successful candidate *will be required* to submit a professional portfolio and a research proposal.

Up to **two-thirds** of the qualification (120 credits) may be credited via Recognition of Prior Learning. *In exceptional circumstances, this amount may be increased by the Faculty Board of Educational Improvement.*

Applications for Recognition of Prior Learning, including Cross Credit, Credit Transfer and Assessment of Prior Learning may be made on the Recognition of Prior Learning Form<sup>35</sup> where a student believes they can demonstrate specified competencies.

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<sup>34</sup> <https://www.op.ac.nz/assets/policies/AP0501.09-Recognition-of-Prior-Learning.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> This is usefully available – see <http://www.ucol.ac.nz/Documents/Recognition%20of%20Prior%20Learning%20Application%20Form.pdf>

### **Charles Sturt University, Australia (Annex 3.5.1)**

*Entry, credit transfer and PLAR [for Master of Human Resource Management – other programs are different – see Annex]*

This takes account of various kinds of prior experience:<sup>36</sup>

Credit for prior learning and credit for current competencies will be granted to eligible applicants.

Students who have completed CSU's Graduate Certificate in Human Resource Management or the Graduate Diploma of Human Resource Management will receive full credit for the subjects studied.

*Applicants who have successfully completed the Australian Human Resource Institute Professional Diploma in Human Resources or the AHRI Practising Certification will receive four subjects' credit into the Master of Human Resource Management program.*

*Candidates may receive transfer credit for up to 50% of the course for prior study if they can demonstrate that such study was completed at a recognised higher education institution within the last 10 years at postgraduate level.*

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<sup>36</sup> <http://www.csu.edu.au/courses/master-hr-management>

## Maastricht University, Netherlands (Annex 3.6.2)

### Enrolment for Master's

Maastricht has a comprehensive set of regulations for students enrolling for all programs including master's.<sup>37</sup> However the web page states a key restriction:

Please note: *Legally*, [our italics] you can only start a master's programme once you have successfully completed your bachelor's programme.

This does not bode well for PLAR. In addition there are additional requirements for students whose first degree is from a university of applied sciences. In particular:

Article 7 Throughflow from higher vocational education to a university master's programme (bridging programme)

1. The OER [enrolment regulations] for a number of UM master's programmes set down how students who have completed a bachelor's programme at an institute for higher vocational education can continue on to a related master's at UM **by following a bridging programme**.
2. Participants in the bridging programme are enrolled as non-degree seeking students, which means they are ineligible for study financing on the basis of the WSF 2000.
3. Depending on the number of credits (ECTS) of the relevant bridging programme, pursuant to the WHW the following fees are charged: [omitted]

In a nutshell, graduates from an HBO may have to take an additional 60 ECTS (equivalent to one year of full-time study) to even **begin** a master's program at Maastricht University!

Even more intriguingly the bridging program is delivered by the Open University in the Netherlands and still offers no guarantee of entry. As one example:<sup>38</sup>

#### *Bridging Programme: Sustainability Science and Policy (SSP)*

If you do not meet the requirements for the master's programme Sustainability Science and Policy (SSP), then the so-called Bridging Programme might be a solution for you. The Bridging Programme consists of a collection of tailor-made courses that offer you the chance to tackle a deficiency in knowledge of sustainable development and/or a deficiency in research methods.

The Bridging Programme is in English. **You can study the courses, and take the exam at home.** It is possible to complete the bridging program within 10 weeks.

**The Bridging Programme is not a guarantee that you will be admitted to the Master programme**, but it increases your chances significantly – if you also fulfil all other requirements.

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<sup>37</sup> <https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/support/your-studies-begin/admission-registration/applying-masters-programme>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/bridging-programme-sustainability-science-and-policy-ssp>

## Cork Institute of Technology, Ireland (Annex 3.9.1c)

### [Masters in Cloud Computing]

... On the Computer Science departmental site things are a little more optimistic.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, the Department has a specific page on Recommended Prior Learning<sup>40</sup> with specific mention of the Master's program:

For the BSc/Master's Programmes RPL can be used to gain:

- An exemption or grade for a module or for a number of modules on a programme;
- Entry to a programme in first year where an applicant may not meet the standard entry requirements;
- Advanced entry to a programme at a stage other than first year based on learning equivalent to the prior stage of entry [omitted]

### For Non-Certified Learning

You may present a prior learning case which demonstrates how you meet the learning outcomes of a module in a learning portfolio. This material will be assessed and graded. You must present against each learning outcome backing up your claim with appropriate evidence. Assistance is available with this task. [omitted]

### THE RPL SERVICE:

- Recognises certified learning and learning gained at work formally.
- Offers an alternative route to those with appropriate experience.
- Compares your learning directly with the learning outcomes of a module.
- Provides assistance with preparing the portfolio.
- Frees up study time for other topics.
- Ensures your case is formally assessed by the academic lecturer responsible for the module.

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<sup>39</sup> <http://cs.cit.ie/postgraduate.msc-in-cloud-computing.programme-overview2>

<sup>40</sup> <http://cs.cit.ie/undergraduate/current-students/rpl>

### Dublin City University, Ireland (Annex 3.9.1c)

Dublin City University is the heir to the former OSCAIL/NDEC, the Republic of Ireland national distance learning provider, and as such it would be assumed that it would have a forward-looking PLAR policy – in particular “Recognition of prior learning can be used to access both undergraduate and post graduate awards”.<sup>41</sup> [omitted]

As an example the Management of Information Systems Strategy programme<sup>42</sup> is a 90-ECTS programme with a 15,000 word dissertation of 30 ECTS (the standard credit value). Entry requirements are flexible, comprising four non-standard routes as well as one standard route:<sup>43</sup>

- A Level 8 [honours bachelor degree] or higher degree in a *relevant discipline* (Engineering, Science, Business or Information Technology) from a recognised higher education institution.
- A level 8 qualification in a *non-relevant discipline* along with at least three years relevant managerial work experience
- *Chartered membership* of an institution such as the Institute of Engineers of Ireland or a professional body such as the Institute of Chartered Accountants.
- A Level 7 qualification [*ordinary bachelor degree*] in a subject in a relevant discipline or non-chartered membership of a professional body, along with at least three years relevant managerial work experience.
- Evidence of *substantial relevant managerial work experience*. Such applicants will be required to submit a CV and Personal Statement in support of their application and may be required to attend for interview.

This is one of the best and most openly documented set of admissions routes that we have seen.

### Institute of Technology Sligo, Ireland (Annex 3.9.1d)

The **MSc in Marketing** is a 90 ECTS course (equivalent to 180 CATS in UK), spread over 3 semesters, and includes a dissertation. Entry requirements are summarised as:<sup>44</sup>

A Level 8 Honours Degree (2.2) or equivalent professional qualification in a business related area or Higher Diploma in Business (Level 8) with a minimum of three specialist marketing modules at Level 7 and/ or 8.

Applicants who do not have a relevant Level 8 qualification may be considered for admission *where they have minimum of seven years relevant business/marketing experience* through IT Sligo’s RPL process.

IT Sligo is working with nearby institutions on a common RPL toolkit.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> [https://www4.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/policy/97%20-%20recognition\\_prior\\_learning\\_ovpaa\\_v1.pdf](https://www4.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/policy/97%20-%20recognition_prior_learning_ovpaa_v1.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> <https://www4.dcu.ie/courses/Postgraduate/openeducation/Management-Information-Systems-Strategy.shtml>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www4.dcu.ie/courses/Postgraduate/openeducation/Management-Information-Systems-Strategy.shtml#tab5>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.itsligo.ie/courses/msc-in-marketing-onlineblended/>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.itsligo.ie/2016/03/14/myexperiencecua14032016/>

## UNISA (Open University of South Africa), South Africa (Annex 3.9.2)

There is a specific document on RPL for master's and doctoral studies, with a very useful flow diagram<sup>46</sup> and an application process with 19 steps. It is a comprehensive but complex process – some highlights are given below.

### *3.a NO, you do not meet the admission requirements. RPL is required.*

You do not have a prerequisite degree (in other words, you might have an incomplete honours or master's degree, or an honours degree and no master's degree, and so on), but you do have considerable relevant experience in the field.

The qualifications you already have – when coupled with your relevant experience in the field – must meet the SAQA-level outcomes specified for a master's student, as well as those laid down for entry into a doctorate if applying for admission to doctoral study. These claims must be supported by relevant evidence.

In deciding on the appropriate qualification for your master's and doctoral studies, [you should] take into account your previous work experience, relevant prior learning and research experience in the field.

### *4. Do the RPL self-assessment*

You are strongly advised to reflect on your prior learning and then do a self-assessment exercise before applying for the RPL process. You do this by using the exit-level outcomes for a master's and/or doctoral degree to establish how your prior learning meets the requirements.

...Your prior learning should be appropriate to the academic context of the specific qualification, and your learning as a result of experience must still be current, valid and applicable.

### *5.a YES, you satisfy the criteria to apply for RPL*

If you want to apply for RPL access to postgraduate studies (master's and doctoral studies), you should prepare for your RPL application process by doing research on the area in which you have relevant experience and prior learning. Before you apply, you need to ensure that your intended research falls within the research area of the department, school and/or college where you intend to register for your qualification.

### *9. Complete and submit the RPL application form and all supporting documents to the RPL specialist*

Your application form should be posted/couriered or delivered to the RPL office.

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<sup>46</sup> [http://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/Apply-for-admission/Undergraduate-qualifications/Recognition-of-Prior-Learning-\(RPL\)/RPL-for-master%27s-and-doctoral-studies](http://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/Apply-for-admission/Undergraduate-qualifications/Recognition-of-Prior-Learning-(RPL)/RPL-for-master%27s-and-doctoral-studies)

### Swedish national credit transfer guidelines (Annex 3.9.3)

Sweden has an effective and pervasive credit transfer system at/before first degree level. These are described in the publication *The Higher Education Ordinance*<sup>47</sup> of the Swedish Council for Higher Education (Chapter 6, Sections 6-8) as well as being embedded into many universities' own admissions guidelines. For convenience we reproduce these in full.

#### Credit transfer

##### Section 6

If a student at a higher education institution in Sweden has successfully completed a higher education course or study programme, she or he is entitled to transfer the credits awarded for a course or study programme at another higher education institution. *This does not apply, however, if there is a substantial difference between these courses or study programmes.*

The same applies for students who have successfully completed a course or study programme

1. at a university or higher education institution in Denmark, Finland, Iceland or Norway or a signatory to the Council of Europe's Convention of 11 April 1997 on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Swedish Treaty Series 2001:46), or
2. at *Nordiska högskolan för folkhälsovetenskap* (NHV — The Nordic School of Public Health). Ordinance (2006:1053).

##### Section 7

A student is entitled to transfer credits from a course or study programme other than that laid down in Section 6 if the nature and extent of the knowledge and skills cited by the student are such that they correspond on the whole to the course or study programme for which the credits are to be recognised. *A student may also be given credit for corresponding knowledge and skills acquired in a vocational or professional capacity.* Ordinance (2006:1053).

##### Section 8

The higher education institution shall assess whether credits can be awarded for the prior course or study programme or professional or vocational experience.

Credits may only be awarded to those who are students unless otherwise provided by statute or ordinance. Ordinance (2010:1064).

While this covers graduate programs also, less is known generally about this, and there is more discretion given to the institutions and entities or people within it. In particular "If you wish to continue studying at Master's level, it is the HEI that makes decisions regarding eligibility and admissions".<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.uhr.se/en/start/laws-and-regulations/Laws-and-regulations/The-Higher-Education-Ordinance/#chapter6>

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.uhr.se/en/start/recognition-of-foreign-qualifications/before-you-apply/i-want-to-study-in-sweden/credit-transfers/>

### Uppsala University, Sweden (Annex 3.9.3a)

... The university has a Transfer of Credit Form<sup>49</sup> which covers Master as well as Bachelor degrees and a useful summary of their transfer credit rules:

Transfer of credits is always made towards a degree. There are two types of degrees; Professional degrees<sup>50</sup> (a special list applies)<sup>51</sup> and General degrees (*högskoleexamen, kandidatexamen, magisterexamen*<sup>52</sup> and *masterexamen*).<sup>53</sup>

Uppsala University, according to a Vice Chancellor's decision from July 1 1993 and February 19 2008, applies the following local regulations towards transfer of credit:

#### A) PROFESSIONAL DEGREES

- 1) If you want to transfer credit for a part of a course within a professional degree, the lecturer/teacher who acts as the examiner of the course makes that decision. Contact the department in charge of that particular subject.
- 2) Decisions towards transfer of credit from any Swedish higher education for a whole course are taken by the Faculty Board of the particular course, but may also be delegated.
- 3) Decisions towards transfer of credit from any foreign higher education are decided by the Graduation Office within the Student Affairs and Academic Registry Division, following a delegation from the Vice Chancellor. Contact the Graduation Office directly (see below for address).

#### B) GENERAL DEGREES

- 1) Transfer of credit towards a part of a course is decided by the examiner of that particular course. Contact the department in charge of that particular subject.
- 2) Transfer of credit for a whole course as part of a general degree is decided by the Graduation Office, following a delegation from the Vice Chancellor. Contact the Graduation Office directly.

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<sup>49</sup> [https://www.uu.se/digitalAssets/274/c\\_274702-l\\_1-k\\_tg-eng-webb.pdf](https://www.uu.se/digitalAssets/274/c_274702-l_1-k_tg-eng-webb.pdf)

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.studera.nu/startpage/road-to-studies/i-have-an-academic-degree-what-do-i-do-now/professional-degree-and-recognition-in-sweden/>

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.uhr.se/en/start/recognition-of-foreign-qualifications/before-you-apply/i-want-to-work-in-sweden/regulated-professions/>

<sup>52</sup> <https://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magisterexamen> – magister degree – 60 ECTS, like a postgraduate diploma

<sup>53</sup> [https://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masterexamen\\_\(svensk\\_examen\)](https://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masterexamen_(svensk_examen)) – masters degree, 120 ECTS

## 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

### Conclusions

#### *Conclusions on PLAR for graduate programs*

First, the answers to the questions in the brief:

1. **Amount permitted for graduate credit:** The answer to this is complicated because master's programs vary in credit value, much more so than undergraduate programs – from 30 to 60 credit hours (1 to 2 equivalent full-time academic years). It can vary from less than 1/4 to around 2/3 – depending on the internal structure and length of the master's qualification.
2. **Residency:** There is always an irreducible minimum of credit hours that must be earned at the award-granting institution, typically no less than 1/3.
3. **Capstone, thesis, dissertation, project report:** no instance has been found where PLAR or transfer credit can be used for such a module.
4. **Practicum:** no such entities were discerned in the programs reviewed. In the likely event that a practicum would be a capstone-type module at the end of a program, it is unlikely that PLAR or transfer credit could apply.
5. **Admissions tests:** there was little sign of these in PLAR processes – however portfolios were often featured and would be scrutinised.
6. **PLAR use of resumes etc:** Many documents may be required for PLAR processes including resumes, letters of intent, research plans and portfolios. The narratives in section 3.2 give good practice examples.
7. **Degrees:** In countries (such as Australia) which offer both bachelor ordinary and bachelor with honors degrees, it is not uncommon for applicants with an ordinary bachelor degree to be unable to apply to join a master's program without going through some kind of bridging program. In other countries (such as Netherlands) with a two-tier system of institutions, students with bachelor degrees from the lower tier also had to undertake a bridging program. In a third type like US with tiers of accreditation (in the US, regional accreditation is higher than national accreditation), degrees were required (at least in theory) to have to come from regionally accredited institutions.

In terms of more general considerations:

8. As noted earlier, master's programs vary in credit value, much more so than undergraduate programs – from 30 to 60 credit hours (1 to 2 equivalent full-time academic years).
9. The internal structure of master's is not consistent across the world, with two or three subdivisions the most common, above the level of individual modules.
10. The sub-structure of certificates and diplomas (if one can be discerned) varies even more.
11. The credit value of a dissertation/project element varies from 5 to 15 credit hours and in some institutions/departments/routes this element does not exist.
12. Many institutions do not seem to accept entry to graduate programs other than via a recognised degree – but this is more flexible in some countries like UK.

13. There is much less standardisation of entry aspects at master's level – much more autonomy is left to departments.
14. There is much more focus at graduate level on **transfer of credits from other institutions** than recognition of informal/non-formal/vocational learning.
15. Only in rare exceptions (such as Royal Roads University) is there evidence of proceduralisation of credit transfer and PLAR, such as standard progression routes.
16. Many institutions/departments have a “time-out” on credits – a point after which they are not valid – though there can be procedures to re-accredit such credits such as portfolios detailed recent relevant study/work.
17. Only in the UK and in New Zealand is there a clear route into graduate programs from higher vocational qualifications. Only in the UK is there evidence of proceduralisation of such routes between higher VET and Master's providers.

#### *Methodological issues encountered*

1. There is a lack of traction of the ISCED levels across the world. In particular there is significant inconsistency in the numbering of levels in the national/international schemes.
2. There is a lack of sufficient granularity in the ISCED scheme, with just one level (7) for Master's rather than two or three, and one level (6) for all varieties of “degrees” – honours, ordinary, research, vocational etc.
3. There is clear evidence that in some countries and institutions the relevant national or EU credit schemes are not always used in program descriptions university web sites, or the information is tucked away in random-seeming locations. Even in distance learning programs, there is a nomenclature of “years” inappropriate in many cases.
4. There is a lack of standardisation of university master's programs' web sites even from the same university.
5. There is significant lack of visibility of detailed information on entry requirements – with a gap between the general university PLAR information, if any (usually focused on bachelor degrees) and the specific information for each Master's program. Non-standard (i.e. non-degree) entry routes are rarely featured explicitly.
6. In addition to the obvious language barriers to Anglophone researchers at non-English-speaking institutions, at many institutions in non-Anglophone countries offering Master's programs in English, even though the promotional material is in English, much of the administrative material relevant to admissions may not be in English or even exist.

#### **Recommendations**

See the next page.

TRU should:

1. Consider a focus at graduate level on specific percentages of credit transfer/ recognition.
2. Consider ensuring a more consistent approach to master's credit values and structure, recognising that there may be provincial and professional recognition issues requiring specific credit amounts.
3. Consider the introduction of a clearer more systematic structure into graduate offerings – a certificate/diploma/master's trinity is suggested, as is often used in other Commonwealth countries
4. For master's/program routes with a major dissertation element, consider offering direct entry to that level from students who have pre-approved graduate diplomas from other institutions.
5. Consider building up a bank of pre-approved credit transfer pathways from specific institutions that it receives students from.
6. Consider a move towards the practice in some advanced Commonwealth countries of offering procedural PLAR routes to those with higher vocational qualifications, especially those accredited by respected professional associations. Some of the associations who offer such routes in other countries (such as the Chartered Institute of Management in UK) have reciprocity with associations in Canada (such as Canadian Institute of Management), as well as in Australia (Australian Institute of Management). Several of these institutes are increasingly active in online education.

## X. Country notes Appendix

### X.1 Canada

In a report for a Canadian university it would be unnecessary and impertinent to describe the structure of the university system in Canada. So we merely note that *Universities Canada* has 97 members, with the vast majority being public institutions.<sup>54</sup> There are reported<sup>55</sup> to be 21 private universities in Canada, with a few being members of Universities Canada. It is our understanding that the few private universities, even those in Universities Canada, are not seen, or not seen yet (things change, as in recent years in the UK), as relevant sources of good practice for public institutions such as TRU.

After several years of apparent quiescence (as judged by outside observers) online education appears to be growing and in particular the province of Ontario is rapidly increasing its activity levels.<sup>56</sup>

### X.2 United States

#### US universities

Wikipedia states that:

Higher education, also referred to as post-secondary education, third stage, third level, or tertiary education occurs most commonly at one of the 4,726 Title IV degree-granting institutions, either colleges or universities in the country.<sup>57</sup> These may be public universities, private universities, liberal arts colleges, community colleges, or for-profit colleges.

Title IV is the US federal government's main aid program to students.<sup>58</sup> (Note that there are a few universities who do not seek Title IV aid for their students.)

#### Master's programs

A Master's degree in the US may be earned through a series of courses or a combination of courses and a research thesis or project. For example, a typical MSc degree in computer science, information technology or related areas will have approximately 30 (US) credits. These 30 credits may include 15 credits of required core courses, 6 of which may be the research thesis or final project,<sup>59</sup> and 15 credits of elective courses. Electives are courses the student may choose on their own, generally within related topic areas and at a designated level.

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<sup>54</sup> <http://www.univcan.ca/universities/member-universities/>

<sup>55</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_private\\_universities\\_in\\_Canada](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_private_universities_in_Canada)

<sup>56</sup> e.g. <http://www.ontariolearn.com> and <http://cou.on.ca/key-issues/education/online-learning/>

<sup>57</sup> 3,026 4-year institutions and 1,700 2-year institutions – see [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/tables/dt12\\_005.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/tables/dt12_005.asp)

<sup>58</sup> See e.g. <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/types>

<sup>59</sup> that is, one fifth of the program – a much smaller fraction than the one third typical in the UK

*A note on “credits”*

US educators use a variety of formulas to calculate, record, and interpret the amount of earned academic or training credits that students accumulate *en route* to earning certificates, diplomas, degrees, and other qualifications. In most cases, the earned credits are identified by the term *credit hours* or *credit units*.

Several important points need to be understood about credit:

- Credits are a convenient numerical way to assess tuition and fee charges and determine student status.
- Credit hours or units represent a mathematical summarization of all work completed, and are not the same as the actual instructional hours.
- US institutions use credit formulas to record all types of academic work, not just taught courses. A US doctoral student’s academic record, for example, will contain credits earned for independent research, often expressed as if the student had been enrolled in classes, even though the actual work was independent research.

Most US higher education institutions operate on an academic year divided into two equal semesters of 15-16 weeks’ duration, with a winter break of 2-3 weeks and a summer session of 10-12 weeks, plus additional shorter breaks. The actual amount of academic work that goes into a single semester credit hour is often calculated as follows:

- One lecture (taught) or seminar (discussion) credit hour represents 1 hour per week of scheduled class/seminar time and 2 hours of student preparation time. Most lecture and seminar courses are awarded 3 credit hours. Over an entire semester, this formula represents at least 45 hours of class time and 90 hours of student preparation.
- One laboratory credit hour represents 1 hour per week of lecture or discussion time plus 1-2 hours per week of scheduled supervised or independent laboratory work, and 2 hours of student preparation time. Most laboratory courses are awarded up to 4 credit hours. This calculation represents at least 45 hours of class time, between 45 and 90 hours of laboratory time, and 90 hours of student preparation per semester.
- One practice credit hour (supervised clinical rounds, visual or performing art studio, supervised student teaching, field work, etc.) represents 3-4 hours per week of supervised and /or independent practice. This in turn represents between 45 and 60 hours of work per semester. Blocks of 3 practice credit hours, which equate to a studio or practice course, represent between 135 and 180 total hours of academic work per semester.
- One independent study (thesis or dissertation research) hour is calculated similarly to practice credit hours.
- Internship or apprenticeship credit hours are determined by negotiation between the supervising faculty and the work supervisor at the cooperating site, both of whom must judge and certify different aspects of the student’s work. The credit formula is similar to that for practice credit.

Thus a master’s degree program requiring at least 33 credit hours and including a research thesis or project could represent over 4,000 actual hours of supervised and unsupervised (independent research) study.

## X.3 United Kingdom

### UK universities

The university sector in the UK has a complex structure, with at least four components:

- Established public universities and specialist public institutions of university rank, virtually all of whom are members of UUK (Universities UK).<sup>60</sup> UUK report that “in 2014–15 there were 164 higher education providers (excluding further education colleges) in the UK in receipt of public funding via one of the UK funding councils. 135 of these are Universities UK members.”
- A very small number of small public HE providers not yet upgraded to universities, but this was a category that was large until recently and may possibly grow again. Many of these are members of *GuildHE*.<sup>61</sup>
- Thirdly, there are a large number of public Further Education colleges teaching some HE. There are in total 371 FE colleges in the UK,<sup>62</sup> a number that has shrunk in recent years due to mergers. The *Mixed Economy Group*<sup>63</sup> is a collection of 41 large colleges which offer Higher Education in an FE setting.
- The *alternative providers* (private providers, both foundations and a few commercial companies). A few are quite large and well-known like Regents University<sup>64</sup> (now a member of UUK) and BPP University<sup>65</sup> – and others, like the Interactive Design Institute<sup>66</sup> and Open College of the Arts,<sup>67</sup> are well known for innovative delivery – but the vast majority are small and unknown, yet numbering in the hundreds. These are sometimes called “challenger providers” and the innovative ones sometimes called “game changers”. This sector is said to be popular with the current Conservative government,<sup>68</sup> yet actually started under the Labour government in the previous decade.

Key facts on alternative providers are:<sup>69</sup>

- 115 alternative providers have specific-course designation.
- A third of APs have fewer than 100 students, and only 11 have more than 1,000.
- 60 per cent of students at APs are studying for first degrees.
- 33 per cent of students at APs are from ethnic minorities.

It might be thought that restricting the issue to graduate programs would simplify this picture. It does, but only to an extent. Virtually every institution with “university” in its title offers graduate programs, and many others also, under “validation arrangements” where a

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<sup>60</sup> <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk>

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.guildhe.ac.uk/members/>

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.aoc.co.uk/about-colleges/research-and-stats/key-further-education-statistics>

<sup>63</sup> <http://www.mixedeconomygroup.co.uk>

<sup>64</sup> <http://www.regents.ac.uk>

<sup>65</sup> <http://www.bpp.com>

<sup>66</sup> <http://idesigni.co.uk>

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.oca.ac.uk>

<sup>68</sup> Elections on 8 June

<sup>69</sup> <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/HEinEngland/providers/aps/>

more established provider assures the quality of the provision of the smaller, newer provider.

For example the non-profit foundation The **Open College of the Arts** (OCA) offers 12 bachelors and one master's degree, but all are validated (accredited) by the University of the Creative Arts.<sup>70</sup> Interestingly OCA also has a PLAR policy which is highly visible and clearly explained,<sup>71</sup> much more so than many UK institutions.

### **Complicating factors – home nations and fee levels**

The UK is not a federation like Canada (or the US or Australia) but is divided for governance purposes into four “home nations”: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. England is governed directly by the UK government – the other three home nations have varying degrees of devolution, but in education the devolution is absolute. The most visible symbol of this is that in Scotland the undergraduate degree program takes four years; whereas in the other home nations it takes only three (short by international standards).

The second most visible symbol is that in Scotland there are no fees for students (on undergraduate full-time courses) whereas in England the fees (for undergraduate full-time courses) are around £9000 per year (\$16000 Canadian).<sup>72</sup> (Other home nations have unstable compromise positions. England's is now getting unstable too.)<sup>73</sup>

However, for graduate programs the fee regime is more uniform. Universities can charge what the market can bear, and typically charge even higher fees for “international” students than for UK/EU students,<sup>74</sup> whether for campus-based or distance programs.

The high level of fees and increasing lack of government regulation of fee levels or quotas at universities (especially in England) leads to a highly competitive regime especially for graduate programs.

As the devolution pressures build there are fewer and fewer “national” (i.e. UK-wide) institutions in the education and culture sphere in the UK. In fact the BBC and the Open University are two of the remaining ones. A few other universities operate cross-border for distance learning and a very few have campuses in more than one home nation (usually a Scottish or Welsh university with a campus in London).

### **A note on CATS credits**

Study time at universities in the UK is measured under a scheme called *CATS* (Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme). In typical British fashion there is a lack of clear definition of this scheme at a detailed level, thus we are forced to rely on the Wikipedia article to give the flavour – we have italicised and/or footnoted some typical British words to demonstrate the tentative aspects of the scheme:<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> <https://www.oca.ac.uk/creative-arts-degrees/>

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.oca.ac.uk/studying-with-the-oca/gaining-exemptions/>

<sup>72</sup> Exchange rate on 11 May 2017

<sup>73</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/aug/29/uk-universities-chief-pushes-back-against-critics-system>

<sup>74</sup> The EU fee area includes a somewhat wider range of countries than just EU Member States – for the tedious details see <https://www.ukcisa.org.uk/Information--Advice/Fees-and-Money/England-fee-status>

<sup>75</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Credit\\_Accumulation\\_and\\_Transfer\\_Scheme](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Credit_Accumulation_and_Transfer_Scheme)

Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) is used by *many* universities in the United Kingdom to monitor, record and reward passage through a modular degree course and to *facilitate* movement between courses and institutions. One credit is equivalent to 10 *notional* hours of study (contact time and allocation for self-study). For example, a university course of 150 estimated study hours would be worth 15 credits, and a university course of 300 estimated study hours would be worth 30 credits. A full academic year is worth 120 credits and a full calendar year (normally only at postgraduate level) 180 credits....

Credits are associated with a level at which the learning took place. At universities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, this will be one of Levels 4 to 8 on the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ),<sup>76</sup> representing the first, second and third year of a bachelor's degree (levels 4 – 6),<sup>77</sup> master's level (level 7)<sup>78</sup> and doctoral level (level 8).<sup>79</sup>

In Scotland this will be at one of level 7 to 12 on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), representing the first, second, third and fourth year of a bachelor's degree (levels 7 – 10), master's level (level 11) and doctoral level (level 12).<sup>80</sup>

*Typically*, in England, Wales and Northern Ireland,

- a bachelor's degree with honours requires 360 credits, with at least 90 at level 6 of the FHEQ;
- an ordinary bachelor's degree requires 300 credits with 60 at level 6;
- a foundation degree requires 240 credits with 90 at level 5;
- an integrated master's degree requires 480 credits with 120 at level 7;
- a postgraduate taught master's degree requires 180 credits with 150 at level 7
- and a professional doctorate requires 540 credits with 360 at level 8.

*Degrees in medicine, dentistry and veterinary science are not normally credit rated, nor are PhDs or master's degrees by research...."Fast track" two-year bachelor's degrees at the University of Buckingham make use of the full calendar year to fit a 360 credit course into two years.*

The international comparisons are interesting if suspect:

UK Credits are the same at a nominal 10 hours of learning per credit unit across CATS, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (covering higher and further education, vocational education and school qualifications in Scotland), the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (ditto for Wales) and the Regulated Qualifications Framework (further education and vocational education in England and Northern Ireland and school qualifications in England).

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<sup>76</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/qualifications-frameworks.pdf>

<sup>77</sup> Level 6 is as in ISCED, level 5 is vaguely aligned with ISCED 5, and level 4 is not

<sup>78</sup> As in ISCED

<sup>79</sup> As in ISCED

<sup>80</sup> Completely misaligned with ISCED. This lack of alignment is typical of the British approach to international norms, though the Scots normally take more care than the English

There is an **official equivalence** with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) of two UK Credits equals one ECTS Credit, based on there being 120 UK Credits to an academic year and ECTS Credits being defined as there being 60 to an academic year.

Four CATS points are *equivalent* to one US credit hour.<sup>81</sup> Rather than award fractional credits, US universities will sometimes consider a typical British 10 credit module to be worth 3 (rather than 2.5) US credit hours, similarly rounding 15 UK Credit modules to 4 US credit hours and 20 UK Credit modules to 5 US credit hours.

### **Master's programs**

The innate conservatism of universities has led to a surprising similarity in the structure of master's programs right across the UK despite 25 years of devolved administration of education.<sup>82</sup>

Master's degrees may be either "research" or "taught", with taught degrees being further subdivided into "specialist or advanced study" or "professional or practice".

Taught degrees (of both forms) typically take a full calendar year (i.e. three semesters, 12 months), although some may be completed within an academic year (i.e. two semesters, 8 months), while research degrees often take either a full calendar year (rather tight) or two academic years. Typically a taught master's has 180 CATS points (90 ECTS) and a research master's 240 CATS points (120 ECTS). This is rather short by EU standards, though not the shortest.<sup>83</sup> The correlation to the US credit hours at the "official" 4:1 exchange rate – which works out at 45 credit hours for 180 CATS and 60 credit hours for 240 CATS – is implausibly high to many people who have worked or studied in both systems, but there is a lack of expert information on the comparisons.<sup>84</sup>

The UK integrated master's degree is combined with a bachelor's degree for a four (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) or five (Scotland) academic year total period – one academic year longer than a normal bachelor's degree.

A relatively standard structure for a taught master's program (180 CATS) is as follows:

- Postgraduate Certificate (PgC) – 60 CATS
- Postgraduate Diploma (PgD) – 60 CATS
- Dissertation or individual project – 60 CATS

In some cases the final element shrinks but it is rare in the UK for the individual project element to be replaced completely by coursework.

This three-tier aspect seems to be part of the mechanism which facilitates transfer between institutions, often at the pre-dissertation level, as we shall see.

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<sup>81</sup> Much debate about this

<sup>82</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Further\\_and\\_Higher\\_Education\\_Act\\_1992](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Further_and_Higher_Education_Act_1992)

<sup>83</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Master%27s\\_degree#Comparable\\_European\\_degrees](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Master%27s_degree#Comparable_European_degrees)

<sup>84</sup> But see for example <http://www.studyacrossthepond.com/uk-vs-us-degrees>

## Seeking for examples

As general guidance, when researchers look for the most innovative practice in pedagogy and accreditation in the UK it has been standard practice to look more at newer entrants to the HE sector. As a well-known example it was the former polytechnics (so-called “new universities”, “modern universities” or “post-92s”)<sup>85</sup> who were the early developers of business schools with MBA programs, in some cases years ahead of traditional institutions.<sup>86</sup> Similarly in more recent years it has been the post-92 institutions which have been most active in both work-based learning and distance learning (until quite recently, when MOOCs started to appear in elite institutions).

Many would argue that the UK Open University (founded 1969, not long after many other institutions such as Warwick and East Anglia) long ago joined the conservative ranks. Thus we shall spend some time looking at the OU but also at some post-92 institutions active in online learning and some new private providers.

## X.4 New Zealand

The population of New Zealand is 4.5 million, so in Canadian terms it is about the same as that of British Columbia, with some geographic and climate similarities also especially in respect of South Island.

### University sector

There are eight universities in New Zealand. These, represented by their Vice-Chancellors, make up the membership of *Universities New Zealand – Te Pūkai Tara*.<sup>87</sup> With the exception of Lincoln they are all of reasonable size (over 10,000).

<i>University</i>	<i>Students (EFTS)</i>	<i>Staff (FTE)</i>
Auckland	32,657	5,019
Auckland University of Technology	19,117	2,106
Waikato	10,371	1,513
Massey	19,704	2,972
Victoria	16,787	1,824
Canterbury	13,171	1,787
Lincoln	3,717	618
Otago	19,197	3,755
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>134,721</b>	<b>19,594</b>

Of these, Massey University is the one best known for distance learning, but most universities have at least a few online courses.

The New Zealand universities receive approximately 40% of their annual income from government grants – NZ\$1.3 billion of the combined total income of NZ\$3.1 billion recorded

<sup>85</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New\\_universities\\_\(United\\_Kingdom\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_universities_(United_Kingdom))

<sup>86</sup> See for example [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cambridge\\_Judge\\_Business\\_School](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cambridge_Judge_Business_School)

<sup>87</sup> <http://www.universitiesnz.ac.nz>

in 2010. The remaining income is split evenly between student fees and other sources – principally research contracts and trading income. Nearly 60% of the sector’s expenditure of NZ\$3.0 billion went on staff salaries and related costs.<sup>88</sup>

However, there are around 20 other higher education providers. The largest group are the 16 Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITPs).<sup>89</sup> Of these the most notable in terms of online learning are the Open Polytechnic (an equivalent in some ways to the UK Open University) and Otago Polytechnic (which is the host of the OER university).<sup>90</sup>

In addition, there are three *Wānanga* (Maori community HE institutions).<sup>91</sup>

### The New Zealand Qualifications Framework

The New Zealand Qualifications Framework has a non-ISCED-compatible set of 10 levels: of which for higher education the most important ones are:

3	University entrance/school-leaving exams
4&5	Tertiary certificates and diplomas
6	Graduate diplomas and certificates and Bachelor ordinary degrees
7	Bachelor degree with honours
8	Postgraduate diplomas and certificates
9	Master’s
10	Doctoral

Typically an honours degree takes four years, as in Canada; but New Zealand (as does Scotland) still has the general bachelor’s degree (called “ordinary degree” in the UK).

#### Credits

It seems that one year of full-time university study is equal to 120 credits.<sup>92</sup> Thus an honours degree is 480 credits and a bachelor degree 360 credits, just as in Scotland.

#### Master’s

The NZQA site has a clear description of the Master’s Degree in New Zealand.<sup>93</sup> It is considerably more prescriptive than in many comparator countries such as UK or US.

Master’s Degrees usually build on a Bachelor’s Degree [ordinary], Graduate Diploma, Bachelor Honours Degree or a Postgraduate Diploma. *They may also build on extensive professional experience of an appropriate kind.* Their outcomes are demonstrably in advance of undergraduate study, and require individuals to engage in research and/or advanced scholarship.

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<sup>88</sup> A New Zealand dollar is worth around 90% of a Canadian one

<sup>89</sup> <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/about-education-organisations/itps-in-new-zealand/>

<sup>90</sup> <https://oeru.org>

<sup>91</sup> <http://www.tec.govt.nz/Learners-Organisations/Learners/performance-in-tertiary-education/performance-by-type-of-tertiary-provider/about-wananga/>

<sup>92</sup> Worked out from 15 credits = 0.125 EFTS (effective full-time student) – <http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/future-students/apply-and-enrol/transfer-credit-from-a-nz-tertiary-institution/>

<sup>93</sup> <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/studying-in-new-zealand/understand-nz-quals/masters-degree/>

Master's Degrees are constituted in one discipline or coherent program of study. They may be undertaken by taught courses or research, or by a combination of both.

The Master's Degree is at least 240 credits<sup>94</sup> except where:

- it builds on a Bachelor's Degree with Honours or an equivalent qualification, or significant relevant professional experience, in which cases it can be fewer than 240 but no fewer than 120 credits
- it builds on a three-year Bachelor's Degree or an equivalent qualification, in which cases it can be fewer than 240 but no fewer than 180 credits.

The Master's Degree must comprise a minimum of 40 credits at level 9 (master's)<sup>95</sup> with the remainder at level 8 (postgraduate diploma/certificate).

### **Structure of a Master's**

Master's Degrees are structured in three principal ways:

**By thesis or primarily by thesis:** Entry to a Master's Degree by thesis is normally based on a Bachelor *Honours Degree* or a Postgraduate Diploma in the same field of study. The degree includes 120 credits, of which at least **90 credits** (at level 9) consist of a research project presented in the form of a thesis, dissertation, substantial research paper or scholarly creative work.

**By coursework and thesis:** Entry to a Master's Degree by coursework and thesis is normally based on an undergraduate [ordinary] degree in the same field of study. The degree includes 240 credits, of which at least 90 credits at level 9 are in the form of a thesis, dissertation, substantial research paper or scholarly creative work, and of which up to 150 credits are from coursework.

**By coursework:** Entry to a Master's Degree by coursework is normally based on an undergraduate degree achieved at a specified level of attainment. The degree is at least 120 to 240 credits and is achieved through coursework consisting of courses, project work and research in varying combinations. It may build on undergraduate study in the same academic field, or it may build on the more generic graduate attributes of an undergraduate degree in other fields, or in some cases on relevant professional experience.

Thus the third option looks considerably less prestigious than the first two.<sup>96</sup>

## **X.5 Australia**

The population of Australia is just under 24 million, so about 2/3 that of Canada. Like Canada, Australia is divided into political entities, the states, with rather similar populations to several of the Canadian provinces. For example, Queensland has a population rather similar in size (4.9 million) to British Columbia.

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<sup>94</sup> As compared with typically 180 for a practical masters in UK, but read on

<sup>95</sup> One could regard that as the "dissertation" level

<sup>96</sup> "Master's Degrees that build on generic attributes and/or experience (often called 'conversion Master's') are usually in professional fields and are recognised as appropriate professional preparation by the profession or industry concerned."

## **University sector**

Australia has a unified University sector, typically described as having 40 public universities, two international universities and Bond, a private not-for-profit university in Queensland.<sup>97</sup> These are all self-accrediting. However, this is not the end of the story. The National Register of Higher Education Providers,<sup>98</sup> which handles overseas accreditation of all higher education providers, lists one self-accrediting *Australian University of Specialisation* – the University of Divinity<sup>99</sup> – and 11 self-accrediting *Higher Education Providers other than universities*. In addition, it lists 113 higher education providers accredited by the national government or one of the Australian states. Some of these 113 offer graduate programs: for example MIECAT<sup>100</sup> in Melbourne offers a Master’s and a Professional Doctorate in Therapeutic Arts Practice.<sup>101</sup> There are clear similarities to the complex ecosystem of higher education providers in England.

## **Fees**

Undergraduate fees vary according to course but average out at around AU\$10,000. For international students these rise to at least AU\$15,000 and for a Master’s degree AU\$20,000.

The Australian dollar is roughly equal in value to the Canadian dollar<sup>102</sup> so for the rest of this section we shall just use \$ for both currencies.

FEE-HELP<sup>103</sup> is a loan scheme that helps national students to pay all or part of their tuition fees. It cannot be used for additional study costs such as accommodation or text books.

## **The Australian Qualifications Framework**

This is similar to the New Zealand framework (see Section 3.4) with a Master’s degree at level 9 (whereas it is level 7 of ISCED). In Australia, level 7 is the bachelor degree and level 8 the bachelor with honours.<sup>104</sup>

Typically an honours degree takes four years to complete, as in Canada; but Australia (as does Scotland and New Zealand) still has the general bachelor degree (the one called “ordinary degree” in the UK).

## **Credits**

The Australian credit system seems unique in its quantum of credit. A 3-year bachelor (ordinary) degree takes 144 credits, making each year worth 48 credits. A master’s degree

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<sup>97</sup> See for example <https://www.studyinaustralia.gov.au/global/australian-education/universities-and-higher-education/list-of-australian-universities>

<sup>98</sup> <http://www.teqsa.gov.au/national-register>

<sup>99</sup> <https://www.divinity.edu.au>

<sup>100</sup> <https://miecat.edu.au>

<sup>101</sup> [http://www.teqsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/decision/PRV12136%20Re-accreditation%2029%20Jan%202015\\_1.pdf](http://www.teqsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/decision/PRV12136%20Re-accreditation%2029%20Jan%202015_1.pdf)

<sup>102</sup> Statement valid on 20 September 2017.

<sup>103</sup> <http://studyassist.gov.au/sites/studyassist/helppayingmyfees/fee-help/pages/fee-help->

<sup>104</sup> <https://www.aqf.edu.au/aqf-qualifications> – see also <http://www.studying-in-australia.org/undergraduate-studies/>

takes 96 credits, in other words two undergraduate years, according to the document *Academic Credits in Australian Universities – Things to Know before Applying*.<sup>105</sup> The same document notes that “Credit transfer is available in both undergraduate and postgraduate programs”.

### Master’s degrees

The *Australian Qualifications Framework* states that there are three main forms of master’s degree. In more detail:<sup>106</sup>

The purpose of the **Masters Degree (Research)** is to qualify individuals who apply an advanced body of knowledge in a range of contexts for research and scholarship and as a pathway for further learning.

The purpose of the **Masters Degree (Coursework)** is to qualify individuals who apply an advanced body of knowledge in a range of contexts for professional practice or scholarship and as a pathway for further learning.

The purpose of the **Masters Degree (Extended)** is to qualify individuals who apply an advanced body of knowledge in a range of contexts for professional practice and as a pathway for further learning.

The volume of learning of the first two types is officially estimated as 1 – 2 years and of the third as 3 – 4 years (following a level 7 – ordinary – degree).<sup>107</sup>

### Structure of a master’s degree

The Implementation Handbook has useful summary of master’s degrees.<sup>108</sup>

Entry to the Masters Degree is based on evidence of a capacity to undertake higher degree studies in the proposed field. *There is a wide range of entry pathways*, varying according to the program methodology and the discipline involved. Predominantly research-based programs normally have a research prerequisite whereas predominantly coursework-based programs may be accessed more broadly.

Typical programs and entry pathways include:

- the typical coursework Masters Degree program comprising coursework, project work and research in varying combinations, may be entered from a Bachelor Degree, a Bachelor Honours Degree or a Graduate Diploma. Coursework Masters Degrees are often structured in a three to four-semester nested arrangement with the Graduate Certificate (one semester), Graduate Diploma (a further semester), and Masters Degree (a further two semesters);
- the typical research Masters Degree program comprising at least two-thirds research with a substantial, often externally assessed thesis outcome, entered

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<sup>105</sup> <http://www.mastersportal.eu/articles/1115/academic-credits-in-australian-universities-things-to-know-before-applying.html>

<sup>106</sup> <https://www.aqf.edu.au/aqf-qualifications>

<sup>107</sup> <https://www.aqf.edu.au/faqs> – “What are the changes to the Masters Degree specification?”

<sup>108</sup> <https://www.aqf.edu.au/sites/aqf/files/aqf-implementation-handbook-fourth-edition-2007.pdf> page 70

from a Bachelor Honours Degree or Masters preliminary year, a research-based Graduate Diploma or equivalent research experience;

- a professional coursework Masters Degree program, which may involve a work based project, specifically designed for entry on the basis of a relevant qualification and professional experience or *extensive relevant professional experience*.

### Online learning

The “sandstones” (the Australian equivalent of UK Russell Group universities) like Sydney and Melbourne use largely traditional teaching methods. Others, such as the University of Technology Sydney, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and Charles Sturt University, are more progressive in their use of technology. Perhaps the most innovative of all is Deakin University in Victoria, where they are trying out a wide range of models in the creative blend of campus, online, MOOC and all other mixes to suit different student needs.

Many Universities are developing “flipped classroom” campuses,<sup>109</sup> with the University of Technology Sydney at the forefront, having spent \$1.2billion on a new campus build without creating any conventional lecture spaces.<sup>110</sup>

Exclusively online learning is less strong, with Swinburne University of Technology being perhaps the most creative, having outsourced their entire online operation to a third party corporate which has developed it impressively.<sup>111</sup>

Open Universities Australia,<sup>112</sup> previously known as the Open Learning Agency of Australia, is an effective consortium, offering study units and courses with 12 leading Australian universities.

Among the other leading players in online learning are: Central Queensland University, Charles Sturt University, University of New England, Curtin University, Deakin University, University of Southern Queensland, University of Tasmania and Edith Cowan University – all have at least 90 online programs, several have over 200 and one (USQ) has over 300.<sup>113</sup>

### Online Master’s

According to the Distance Learning Portal,<sup>114</sup> Australia offers 780 blended or online master’s with 584 fully online, so there are plenty to choose examples from. (There are even 9 fully online doctoral programs!)

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<sup>109</sup> see e.g. <http://www.uq.edu.au/teach/flipped-classroom/what-is-fc.html>

<sup>110</sup> [http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Hepi\\_Rebooting-learning-for-the-digital-age-Report-93-20\\_01\\_17Web.pdf](http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Hepi_Rebooting-learning-for-the-digital-age-Report-93-20_01_17Web.pdf) page 38

<sup>111</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swinburne\\_Online](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swinburne_Online)

<sup>112</sup> <https://www.open.edu.au>

<sup>113</sup> <http://www.distancelearningportal.com/countries/202/australia.html#tab:institutes>

<sup>114</sup> <http://www.distancelearningportal.com/search/#q=ci-202|lv-master|mh-online&start=0&length=10&order=relevance&direction=desc>

## X.6 Netherlands

The population of the Netherlands is 17 million, about half that of Canada. However, the Netherlands has no equivalent to the Canadian structure of provinces – the whole country acts as one entity in education terms, and in all other matters.

### University sector

This material comes from several sources including the standard Nuffic document.<sup>115</sup>

The Netherlands has a strict binary divide in its public higher education sector: universities (research universities, *universiteiten*) and universities of applied sciences (UAS, *hogescholen*). In addition the lengths of degree programs vary more than in UK (3 or 4 years depending on subject) and advanced entry (direct to year 2) is possible for students with appropriately high grades in school-leaving qualifications. This affects many issues including the amount of credit offered towards further qualifications.

(In this context it should be noted that despite its apparent egalitarian approach the Dutch secondary school system has a 3-track system of schools, though with some scope for pupils to change tracks at certain points.)

The Netherlands also has a number of private universities, of which the best known is Nyenrode Business School. Some like Nyenrode are “approved” (*aangewezen*) – they receive no government funding but may award officially recognised bachelor’s and master’s degrees. Others are fully private (*particuliere*), like campuses of foreign universities, but there are others.

### Fees

Standard tuition fees in 2016/17 are EUR 1,984 (C\$2920)<sup>116</sup> for most courses, at both undergraduate and master’s level. However, there are needs-based grants and merit-based grants: around 75% of students at both levels get such grants. There are also loans.

International students pay higher fees, determined locally by each institution.

Private universities almost always charge much higher fees.

### The Dutch qualifications system

The Netherlands, like all EU Member States (in theory at least) uses the ECTS system. The following material is summarised from Wikipedia<sup>117</sup> and other sources.

- A university bachelor’s program requires the completion of 180 credits (3 years). A UAS bachelor’s program requires the completion of 240 credits (4 years).
- Master’s programs at the University level mostly require the completion of 60 or 120 credits (1 or 2 years).

Some programs require 90 (1.5 years) or more than 120 credits.

In engineering, agriculture, mathematics, and the natural sciences, 120 credits are always required.

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<sup>115</sup> <https://www.nuffic.nl/en/publications/find-a-publication/education-system-the-netherlands.pdf> – surprisingly this is the latest version

<sup>116</sup> Conversion is €1 = C\$1.47 on 20 September 2017

<sup>117</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education\\_in\\_the\\_Netherlands](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_the_Netherlands)

In (veterinary) medicine or pharmacy the master's phase requires 180 credits (3 years).

Other studies that usually have 60-credit "theoretical master's programs" sometimes offer 120-credit technical or research masters.

- Master's programs from UAS require the completion of 60 to 120 credits.

### *Language of study*

There are well over 1500 English-language study programs offered at Dutch universities<sup>118</sup> – the University of Amsterdam has many. Indeed, Maastricht University does almost all of its teaching in English and it is said that several other Dutch universities are considering following their example.

### **Online learning**

In general terms the Netherlands is seen as an advanced user of e-learning at HE level. However, with the obvious exception of the Dutch OU this is used mainly as on-campus blended learning. Many universities run Blackboard.

Most Dutch universities are rather conservative. Earlier successes in online distance learning such as the University of Twente seem to have faded, at least relative to the EU state of the art. However, there are around 130 online courses now offered (apart from at OUNL), including from Delft as well as Twente and indeed from a few of the hogescholen (such as Fontys).

The Universities of Applied Sciences – like Fontys – are less conservative and more innovative in teaching methods (especially practice-based) but most have not yet built up much impetus in online learning. They have a very strong regional focus and little interest in recruiting students from beyond their region; thus few are interested in MOOCs either.

MOOC activity is quite widespread, with Coursera having 4 members, FutureLearn 3, iversity 1 and the Open Education Consortium 4.

Despite most Dutch speaking English and the large number of foreign students studying courses in English, there is a substantial lack of relevant documentation in English.

## **X.7 Germany**

Germany is a federal country comprised of 16 states (Länder). Higher education policy is fully the responsibility of the Länder. In this sense Germany is similar to Canada.

### **Types of institution**

Higher education (HE) studies in Germany are offered at three types of Higher Education Institutions (HEI):

- Universitäten (Universities) including various specialized institutions such as Technical Universities, offer the whole range of academic disciplines. In the German tradition, universities focus in particular on basic research so that advanced stages of study have mainly theoretical orientation and research-oriented components.
- Fachhochschulen (Universities of Applied Sciences) concentrate their study programmes in engineering and other technical disciplines, business-related studies,

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<sup>118</sup> <https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/international/europe/netherlands/>

social work, and design areas. The common mission of applied research and development implies a distinct application-oriented focus and professional character of studies, which include integrated and supervised work assignments in industry, enterprises or other relevant institutions.

- Kunst- und Musikhochschulen (Universities of Art/Music) offer studies for artistic careers in fine arts, performing arts and music; in such fields as directing, production, writing in theatre, film, and other media; and in a variety of design areas, architecture, media and communication.

While most HEIs are public institutions, there are around 80 private HEIs and 40 church-run HEIs. On the whole, these are not well regarded and educate only a few percent of all students.

The FernUniversität in Hagen is the only state-maintained distance teaching university in Germany. It is a member of EADTU.

### **Fees**

Germany enabled Länder to introduce tuition fees in 2007. However, those Länder that introduced fees have been abandoning this practice in recent years, and now there are no tuition fees anywhere in Germany for national/EU students for any level of program. There are some caveats e.g. for master's not a direct follow-on to a bachelor's.<sup>119</sup>

There are also no fees for international students. However, this is set to change.<sup>120</sup>

Small administrative fees may be charged in Germany (the situation differs between Länder).

Some Master's programs charge fees.

Private universities do charge fees.<sup>121</sup>

### **Online learning**

On the whole, Germany is not advanced in online learning. A number of studies have been done to determine how to foster flexible learning, but until recently there were only a few large-scale interventions, such as the Bavarian Virtual University (VHB).<sup>122</sup>

In Germany the German Open University (*FernUniversität in Hagen*) is the main public provider of HE distance learning, but over a very limited range of vocational subjects. The German government is aware that there is inadequate provision of DOL: a study on this topic, OPULL,<sup>123</sup> was completed a few years ago. StudyPortals records 211 DL programs offered at higher education level.

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<sup>119</sup> <http://www.mastersportal.eu/articles/358/university-tuition-fees-and-living-costs-in-germany-low-cost-german-degrees.html>

<sup>120</sup> See for example <https://www.topuniversities.com/student-info/university-news/tuition-fees-reintroduced-some-german-universities>

<sup>121</sup> <http://www.mastersportal.eu/articles/358/university-tuition-fees-and-living-costs-in-germany-low-cost-german-degrees.html>

<sup>122</sup> <https://www.vhb.org/en/homepage/>

<sup>123</sup> <http://www.leuphana.de/en/institutes/ipm/research/opull.html>

The federal structure is seen as an inhibitor to innovation, with four states having fewer people than Northern Ireland (and in particular, Bremen well under a million).

There is a national MOOC provider **iversity**, with 12 German members. There are also two German members of Coursera.

However, as was the case with Pisa reforms in schools, the German federal government can, with care, large sums of money and arm-twisting, achieve nationwide programs by spending federal money to match or enhance state-based interventions. This is currently in progress with three strands:

- A large program to fund ICT-based delivery of vocational HE
- A large program to fund ICT-based delivery of academic HE
- A set of working groups of the German Rectors Association on e-learning matters.

#### *Vocational*

The German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) is spending 15 million euro to fund innovative approaches to future-oriented vocational training. Responsible for the implementation of the 3-year funding program, the Federal Institute for Vocational Training (BIBB), has approved 34 projects in 62 institutions. Represented are universities, extramural research institutions, educational institutions, industry associations, chambers of commerce, chambers of crafts, social partner organizations and companies.

The funded projects are active in the following areas:

- Labour markets and skill development
- Professional development and professionalization
- Continuing Education Research.

#### *Academic – “open universities”*

With the competition<sup>124</sup> “Advancement through Education: Open Universities” the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) is currently funding in the first nationwide contest 26 projects and in the second round of the competition 47 projects from universities and university networks, to develop study programs for working adults and other target groups. The study programs will contribute in particular:

- to secure the supply of skilled workers permanently;
- to improve the permeability between vocational and academic education;
- to ensure a more rapid transfer of knowledge into practice;
- and to support the profile of the universities in the field of lifelong learning.

The funded projects are based on a variety of formats, including part-time courses, sandwich courses, study modules and certificate offers.

Scientific support and evaluation of the this competition is headed by the FernUniversität in Hagen, plus the University of Oldenburg, the Technical University of Dortmund and the Centre for Higher Education Development.

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<sup>124</sup> See for example <https://vdivde-it.de/en/conference-joint-federal-government-lander-advancement-through-education-open-universities>

## X.8 Spain

Spain has a population of nearly 47 million. It has a semi-federal constitution – many matters including higher education are devolved to the autonomous communities (groups of provinces) but the central government still has considerable power over the education sector, much more so than in Canada, the UK or Germany. There are 17 autonomous communities ranging in population from 8.5 million (Andalusia) down to 300,000 (La Rioja), thus every Canadian province apart from Ontario can find a match – with British Columbia’s analogue being the Valencian Community (south of Catalonia), which even faces some offshore islands even if facing the wrong direction (east).

### Universities in Spain

Wikipedia reports that there are 76 universities in Spain, most of which are supported by state funding. 24 Spanish universities are private, of which 7 are affiliated with the Catholic Church.

It is well known that there are also two public distance teaching universities: UNED<sup>125</sup> (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia) in Madrid and OU Catalonia in Barcelona.<sup>126</sup> It is not so well known that there are other universities in Spain with active distance teaching programs, in particular UNIR (International University of La Rioja).<sup>127</sup>

### Master’s degrees

The Master’s Portal reports that:<sup>128</sup>

According to the Institute of International Education, Spain ranks in a top position on the list of European countries by number of English-taught Master’s programmes. With more than 370 Masters offered in English, and many official bilingual academic programmes (taught in English and Spanish), Spain is a friendly destination for international students.

The Distance Learning Portal reports that there are 198 distance learning degrees in Spain<sup>129</sup> of which 177 are at Master’s level.<sup>130</sup>

## X.9 Ireland

The 2015 overview report on PLAR in Irish Higher Education<sup>131</sup> is a comprehensive document of 77 pages but contains only six mentions of master’s-level activity. The use of PLAR varies between institution, level and discipline (our italics):

While all respondents reported that *RPL is theoretically possible* across all disciplines; several reported restrictions that apply in practice, such as:

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<sup>125</sup> [http://portal.uned.es/portal/page?\\_pageid=93,1&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://portal.uned.es/portal/page?_pageid=93,1&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL)

<sup>126</sup> <http://www.uoc.edu/portal/en/>

<sup>127</sup> <http://www.unir.net>

<sup>128</sup> <http://www.mastersportal.eu/countries/24/spain.html>

<sup>129</sup> <http://www.distancelearningportal.com/search/#q=ci-24|mh-blended,online&start=0&length=10&order=relevance&direction=desc>

<sup>130</sup> <http://www.distancelearningportal.com/search/#q=ci-24|lv-master|mh-blended,online&start=0&length=10&order=relevance&direction=desc>

<sup>131</sup> <http://www.teachingandlearning.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Project-2.pdf>

- Limits applied in response to external professional body requirements
- Limitations in capacity and capability for assessment of evidence of prior learning
- Limitations due to collaboration with another international provider on an award
- Specific exclusion of RPL in relation to elements of programmes (e.g. RPL is not allowed for practical placement elements of some programmes)
- Specific exclusion of RPL entirely from some courses (e.g. *Masters course for which no RPL claims will be considered*)

When considering the application of RPL at various levels on the NFQ there was a considerable diversity in the responses. In general, it emerged that RPL is rarely facilitated in award stages and, while in some institutions RPL is theoretically possible up to Level 10 (doctoral: ISCED 8) on the NFQ,<sup>132</sup> it has seldom, if ever, been used to this extent. (p.33)

There are several examples of good practice listed, but only one at Master's level: "A cloud technologies Master's programme developed by CIT in collaboration with EMC and other industry partners – a response to industry demand". See below for more details.

On staff development, the picture is of a system in its early stages: "A number of Postgraduate Diploma and Master's courses are now available for higher education staff and while they do not all include specific modules on RPL, they include consideration of learning outcomes evidence of learning attainment and assessment methodologies" (p.12). At an unnamed institution, "Staff development on RPL is supported through regular workshops and a module on a Masters in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education". (p. 31)

## **X.10 Sweden**

Sweden has an effective and pervasive credit transfer system at/before first degree level. These are described in the publication *The Higher Education Ordinance*<sup>133</sup> of the Swedish Council for Higher Education (Chapter 6, Sections 6-8) as well as embedded into many universities' own admissions guidelines. For convenience we reproduce these in full.

### **Credit transfer**

#### *Section 6*

If a student at a higher education institution in Sweden has successfully completed a higher education course or study programme, she or he is entitled to transfer the credits awarded for a course or study programme at another higher education institution. *This does not apply, however, if there is a substantial difference between these courses or study programmes.*

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<sup>132</sup> <http://www.nfq-qqi.com/index.html>

<sup>133</sup> <https://www.uhr.se/en/start/laws-and-regulations/Laws-and-regulations/The-Higher-Education-Ordinance/#chapter6>

The same applies for students who have successfully completed a course or study programme

1. at a university or higher education institution in Denmark, Finland, Iceland or Norway or a signatory to the Council of Europe's Convention of 11 April 1997 on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Swedish Treaty Series 2001:46), or
2. at *Nordiska högskolan för folkhälsovetenskap* (NHV – The Nordic School of Public Health) – Ordinance (2006:1053).

#### *Section 7*

A student is entitled to transfer credits from a course or study programme other than that laid down in Section 6 if the nature and extent of the knowledge and skills cited by the student are such that they correspond on the whole to the course or study programme for which the credits are to be recognised. *A student may also be given credit for corresponding knowledge and skills acquired in a vocational or professional capacity* – Ordinance (2006:1053).

#### *Section 8*

The higher education institution shall assess whether credits can be awarded for the prior course or study programme or professional or vocational experience.

Credits may only be awarded to those who are students unless otherwise provided by statute or ordinance. Ordinance (2010:1064).

While this covers graduate programs also, less is known generally about this, and there is more discretion given to the institutions and entities or people within it. In particular “If you wish to continue studying at Master’s level, it is the HEI that makes decisions regarding eligibility and admissions”.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> <https://www.uhr.se/en/start/recognition-of-foreign-qualifications/before-you-apply/i-want-to-study-in-sweden/credit-transfers/>