

# Aalto University General Guideline on Credit Transfer (in force until 31 July 2018)

[Suomeksi](#) | [På svenska](#)

The Vice President has decided on a [new policy for credit transfer](#) on May 25, 2018. The new instructions will enter into force on 1 August 2018.

*Approved by the Academic Affairs Committee of Aalto University on 14 June 2011. Amendments approved 12 November 2013.*

[Aalto University General Guideline on Credit Transfer \(pdf\)](#)

- 1. Introduction
  - 1.1 Background and purpose of the guideline
  - 1.2 Definition of credit transfer and related policies
  - 1.3 Definition of credit transfer in Finnish legislation
  - 1.4 Credit transfer at Aalto University
- 2. General instructions:
  - 2.1 Which studies may be included or substituted for?
  - 2.2 Credit transfer for otherwise demonstrated learning
  - 2.3 Amount of transfer credits
  - 2.4 Credit transfer procedure
    - 2.4.1 Applying for credit transfer
    - 2.4.2 Decision regarding credit transfer
    - 2.4.3 Entry of credit transfer into student register
    - 2.4.4 Entry into force and transitional provisions
- References

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background and purpose of the guideline

The Aalto University Academic Affairs Committee has, at its meeting of 20 December 2010, adopted the Aalto University General Regulations on Teaching and Studying (hereinafter OOS). The regulations enter into force on 1 August 2011.

Pursuant to OOS Section 36, the Aalto University Academic Affairs Committee will issue further provisions regarding credit transfer.

The present guideline shall apply to credit transfer at all levels of Aalto University degree education unless otherwise specified.

The scope of application of this guideline is limited to only the credit transfer of students pursuing a degree at Aalto University. The guideline does not cover the recognition of prior learning in student admissions.

### 1.2 Definition of credit transfer and related policies

Credit transfer refers to the recognition of studies, work placement, work experience or learning as part of a degree or a course, either as obligatory or elective studies (Higher Education Glossary 2005). In Finnish higher education institutions, the commonly used subcategories for credit transfer are substitution and inclusion (Ministry of Education 2007:4). In the present guideline, credit transfer refers primarily to the recognition of studies completed elsewhere in the degree pursued at Aalto University.

*Inclusion* means that studies completed elsewhere or learning gained elsewhere is included in the degree, for instance, as elective studies. Although inclusion does not require correspondence of contents, the level of the included studies shall correspond to the degree requirements in force.

*Substitution* means compensating compulsory studies included in the degree requirements with studies completed elsewhere or with other learning gained elsewhere. Substitution requires that the contents and level of the studies or learning gained elsewhere correspond to those of the studies substituted for. In addition, substitution requires that the extent of the studies or learning gained elsewhere correspond to that of the studies substituted for.

In this general guideline, credit transfer refers to both inclusion and substitution unless otherwise specified. The term 'substitution' is used to refer specifically only to substitution.

The credits transferred may have been completed either before starting to pursue the current degree, or during them, for instance, during a student exchange. Thus, this guideline uses the expression '*learning gained elsewhere*'.

Credit transfer (*recognition*) is closely linked with the identification of learning gained elsewhere. Identification of learning does not, however, always lead to its recognition (substitution or inclusion). Identification may also be related to the prerequisites for granting a right to study.

The recognition of learning gained elsewhere is part of the policy of lifelong learning. According to the policy of the Finnish Ministry of Culture and Education, we have to be prepared for genuine lifelong learning, which entails updating one's skills and recognising that learning may be gained outside formal education. The focus is on the type of learning the student has gained, not where and how it has been gained. (Ministry of Education 2007:4, p. 22)

According to the Ministry, the central tools in lifelong learning and in the recognition of prior learning in higher education institutions are outcome-based curricula, personal study plans (HOPS) and diverse ways of demonstrating learning. (Ministry of Education 2007:4 p.11 and 22).

The statement of the Finnish Council of University Rectors (since then renamed Universities Finland UNIFI) stresses that since the university degree is not a competence-based qualification, a competence-based qualification system currently used in upper secondary vocational education should not be set up for higher education. Higher education institutions shall, however, require students to demonstrate the learning gained outside formal education in order to be able to verify it. (The Finnish Council of University Rectors 2009 p. 2 & 22).

### 1.3 Definition of credit transfer in Finnish legislation

Credit transfer has, since the adoption of the new Universities Act (Yliopistolaki 558/2009) been provided by law. A provision corresponding to Section 44 (3) of the current Universities Act was previously included in the Government Decree on University Degrees (Valtioneuvoston asetus yliopistojen tutkinnoista 794/2004).

The provision of the Universities Act on the transfer of credits for studies or otherwise demonstrated learning has not been justified in more detail in, for example, the government proposal. The main purpose of the provision is to express that the authority to make decisions regarding credit transfer and substitution rests with the university. (Miettinen et al. 2009:242)

Section 44(3) of the Universities Act states the following regarding credit transfer:

*"In studying for a degree, the student may, as determined by the university, have studies completed in another Finnish or foreign higher education institution or other educational establishment counted towards the degree and substitute studies in the degree syllabus with other studies of the same level. The student may, as determined by the university, have knowledge and skills attested in some other manner counted towards the degree or substitute studies in the degree syllabus with knowledge and skills attested in some other manner."*

### 1.4 Credit transfer at Aalto University

In accordance with the Aalto University strategy, students are required to commit to their studies but they are also cared for. The teaching of the university is based on high-quality research on its fields of education. As an inspiring, professional community, the university encourages life-long learning. Thus, transferring credits for such earlier studies as are applicable to the current degree is justified in the extent specified in Section 2.3 of the present guideline.

The principles of credit transfer are intended to motivate students to learn more, not to make them revise what they already know. No additional study attainments are required for substituted courses.

While legislation allows credit transfer, different upper secondary and higher education institutions vary in their practices. Also the different Aalto University schools have varying regulations and practices regarding credit transfer. The goal is to harmonise the principles of credit transfer in all the Aalto University schools. The equal treatment of all Aalto University students must be ensured even though the schools may have varying processes related to credit transfer.

Pursuant to Section 36 of the Aalto University OOS, students may transfer credits awarded by other Finnish or foreign universities or institutions as well as compensate for requisite studies with other studies of the same level by decision of the school. Transferring credit on the basis of demonstrating requisite knowledge by other means is also possible. Credits for a thesis may not be transferred.

## 2. General instructions:

### 2.1 Which studies may be included or substituted for?

Students may only transfer credits for studies that are integrated into the degree being pursued. The student may transfer credits awarded by other Finnish or foreign universities or institutions, provided the studies fulfil the learning outcomes of the degree pursued. As a rule, the advanced studies central for the degree programme or similar entity (for instance for the thesis) shall be completed in accordance with the curriculum confirmed by the school.

Credits for studies completed at universities may be transferred to both bachelor's and master's degrees. Credits for studies applicable to licentiate or doctoral degrees may be transferred to them. Credits for studies completed at a polytechnic may primarily be transferred only to a bachelor's degree. However, credits earned for a four-year bachelor's degree or a master's degree awarded by a polytechnic may be transferred to a master's degree provided the studies meet the learning outcomes of the degree pursued.

In all cases, credit transfer requires that the learning outcomes of the degree or degree programme are met. The studies for which credits are transferred shall be relevant in the light of the degree requirements and curricula of the school, and from an applicable field.

Language studies completed in accordance with the degree requirements of a university or other Finnish higher education institution may substitute for the language studies required for another degree. If the other degree requires more compulsory language studies or language studies in more languages, or the language studies have other learning outcomes specific to the school, the student shall complete the requisite language studies. The student may demonstrate his/her language proficiency by taking an examination, or by another manner specified by the teacher or evaluating body.

Students who have been admitted to the school to pursue only a master's degree and have not completed any language studies for their prior degree must complete the requisite language studies.

The maximum time within which credits for studies or learning gained otherwise may be transferred towards bachelor's and master's degrees is identical to the period of validity specified for study attainments in the degree regulations in force at the time. On reasonable grounds, credits for also older studies or learning gained otherwise may be transferred to the degree. The maximum time referred to above is calculated as of the original date of completion of the credits or prior learning.

**Example: Courses or study modules may be included degrees for a maximum of 7 years after their date of completion. In such cases, learning gained otherwise may be included in the degree for a maximum of 7 years after its date of completion.**

## 2.2 Credit transfer for otherwise demonstrated learning

Both Section 44(3) of the Universities Act and Section 36 of the Aalto University OOS allow the transfer of credits not only for studies completed at other Finnish or foreign universities or institutions but also for otherwise demonstrated learning.

The schools may decide how credits may be transferred to their degrees for learning gained outside formal education and issue further provisions on the transfer of credits for such learning as necessary.

Learning applicable for the degree may be gained in various ways also outside studies, for instance, in positions of responsibility. The university provisions on the learning gained through activities of the university may be more specific than those on learning gained elsewhere. A position of responsibility held for a minimum of one year in a student union or in a school- or university-level administrative body may be recognised as credits transferred to the degree by decision of the school. For learning gained through university activities to be recognised, the student shall demonstrate, for example, by writing a learning diary, what s/he has learnt and how it corresponds to the learning outcomes of the degree.

Before otherwise demonstrated learning may be assessed, it needs to be verified by the student. The purpose of the verification is to demonstrate the learning gained by the student. The verification may be done through certificates, exams, portfolios, essays, interviews or other applicable procedures. The evaluator will decide the best procedure for verifying the type of learning in question. The central factor in the verification of learning is that the student does not simply present a document of his/her learning, but also demonstrates what type of learning supporting the aims of the studies s/he has gained, and how it corresponds to the learning outcomes of the degree.

## 2.3 Amount of transfer credits

The award of a degree certificate by an Aalto University school requires that at least one half of the studies counted toward the degree, including the thesis and the associated maturity essay, have been completed in accordance with the curriculum of the degree programme of the student.

An exception to this are, e.g. the degree programmes leading to double degrees, and doctoral education, which may allow for a larger share of transfer credits.

Credits for courses applicable to doctoral degrees earned before the start of the doctoral studies but not included in the bachelor's or master's degree or credits for applicable courses earned at other Aalto University schools or other universities may be transferred to the licentiate or doctoral degree.

Credits for a thesis or maturity essay may not be transferred. This applies to bachelor's, master's, licentiate and doctoral degrees.

## 2.4 Credit transfer procedure

### 2.4.1 Applying for credit transfer

The application for credit transfer is only submitted at the initiative of the student, and applying for credit transfer is voluntary for the student. Schools issue further provisions on the filing of an application on credit transfer and in them, note the fact that students may always choose to visit the school, for example at Student Services (one-stop policy). As the application is filed, the school verifies the authenticity of the documents, reviews the amount of transfer credits (see Section 7) and checks whether the application concerns inclusion or substitution of courses. Pursuant to OOS Section 36, the credit transfer shall be applied for in writing and all documents necessary to verify the prior learning of the student shall be appended to the application.

The responsibility of verifying the prior learning rests with the student. The application shall include an adequate number of documents to allow the assessment of the prerequisites of credit transfer; the documents may be, for instance, diplomas, portfolios, learning diaries, publications or other written reports or other documented proof of gained learning. Learning gained through studies is primarily demonstrated by presenting a certificate or transcript of records from the credit-awarding institution. Students shall be guided in appropriate and adequate documentation and instructed if additional proof of prior learning is necessary.

It is recommended that the transfer of credits be applied for as early as possible at the start of the studies leading to a degree, at the same time as the personal study plan is being prepared. Also in cases where learning has been gained for instance during degree studies abroad, credit transfer should be applied for as soon as possible after the end of the student exchange, or after the studies have been completed or the learning has otherwise been gained.

Students leaving for a student exchange or otherwise completing studies elsewhere prepare a plan of the studies (e.g. a Learning Agreement) they intend to take and how the credits for them may be transferred. The decision on credit transfer should be made following the plan as closely as possible while also considering possible changes of plans. The plan may be specified later on. The preparation of a plan does not however, necessarily mean that a decision or agreement on credit transfer will be made.

### 2.4.2 Decision regarding credit transfer

Processing the application for credit transfer shall be done in accordance with the related provisions and principles of good administration set forth in the Administrative Procedure Act (434/2003). Students shall be informed of the possibility of transferring credits for learning gained elsewhere in connection with the preparation of the personal study plan and, as necessary, on other occasions.

The decision is made in connection with the preparation of the personal study plan and will remain valid for the period of validity of the study plan. As necessary, there shall however also be a possibility for consideration on the basis of contents, for instance, a statement may be requested from the teacher of the course in question. Substitution applications, in particular, may require a more detailed explanation of the learning to allow the university to determine whether the preconditions of substitution are met.

Decision-making at the schools is organised in a purposeful manner so as to ensure the equal and just treatment and the consistency and transparency of decision-making. The decision-making process shall also consider the assurance of the degree programme quality and the meeting of the learning outcomes of the degrees. Decisions regarding credit transfer are made at the proposal of a relevant official. The presenting official is selected from the Student Services of the school. The schools shall issue further provisions on the organisation of the decision-making regarding credit transfer.

Decisions regarding credit transfer shall be given in writing and they shall expressly state the grounds for the decision. The decision may be appealed in accordance with Section 37 of Aalto University OOS. A student dissatisfied with the decision regarding credit transfer may appeal against it either orally or in writing to the person who has made this decision. The appeal shall be made within 14 days of the receipt of notification of the decision. Students dissatisfied with the decision regarding the appeal may appeal the matter to the Aalto University Academic Appeals Board within 14 days of receiving notification of the decision.

### 2.4.3 Entry of credit transfer into student register

The credit transfer described in the decision is noted in the student register in accordance with Section 36 of Aalto OOS. The credit transferred for a course or a study module is marked into the student register so that the original place of earning the credits is visible. The original grades given for the transferred courses are converted to comply with the grading scale applied to the degree programme of the student and used in the course or study module substituted for, if correspondence can be clearly demonstrated. If correspondence cannot be unambiguously demonstrated the course is graded 'Pass'. Students always have the right to receive the grade of 'Pass' for a transferred course. The credit transfer is marked in the student register in accordance with the following principles:

- substitution: if the study module substitutes for a study attainment included in an Aalto University degree, it is noted in the student register in a manner that shows the place and date of completion of the original study attainment and the date of the decision on credit transfer. The register shall also specify which study attainment of the school has been substituted for.
- inclusion: the included study module is registered as studies completed elsewhere in a manner that shows the place and date of completion of the original study attainment and the date of the decision on credit transfer.

### 2.4.4 Entry into force and transitional provisions

These regulations enter into force on 1 January 2014. The applications of students who have applied for credit transfer prior to 1 January 2014 are processed in accordance with the regulations regarding credit transfer in force at the time of application.

In case of conflict between the present guideline and any earlier regulations and guidelines issued by the Aalto University schools on corresponding matters, the present guideline shall prevail. As necessary, further provisions on credit transfer shall be issued by the schools.

## References

- Miettinen et al. 2009:** Tarmo Miettinen, Matti Muukkonen, Matti Myrsky & Teuvo Pohjolainen: Uusi yliopistolainsäädäntö, Lakimiesliiton kustannus, 2009
- Ministry of Education 2007:4:** Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2007:4: Aiemmin hankitun osaamisen tunnustaminen korkeakouluissa. (Summary available in English, titled 'Recognising prior learning in higher education institutions')
- The Finnish Council of University Rectors 2009:** Suomen yliopistojen rehtorien neuvosto, Ammattikorkeakoulujen rehtorineuvosto: Oppimisesta osaamiseen: Aiemmin hankitun osaamisen tunnustaminen ja tunnustaminen, työryhmäraportti, maaliskuu 2009.