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## VALIDATION IN ART TEACHER AND PROFESSIONAL TEACHER EDUCATION CURRICULA IN FINLAND

Joona Saari<sup>1i</sup>,

Timo Halttunen<sup>2</sup>,

Sanna Brauer<sup>3</sup>,

Marjaana Mäkelä<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Turku University of Applied Sciences,  
Finland

[orcid.org/0000-0003-2280-3683](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2280-3683)

<sup>2</sup>Brahea Centre at the University of Turku,  
Finland

[orcid.org/0000-0002-3489-7958](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3489-7958)

<sup>3</sup>Oulu University of Applied Sciences,  
Finland

[orcid.org/0000-0002-5303-6600](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5303-6600)

<sup>4</sup>Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences,  
Finland

[orcid.org/0000-0002-8666-7863](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8666-7863)

### Abstract:

Intention and opportunity for validation of competences acquired in different contexts are considered influential to meet the incremental changes in the world of work. Positioned in the universities of applied sciences delivering art and professional teacher education in Finland, we study emergence of validation of prior learning in the intended, or planned, curricula. The Nordic Quality Model for Validation was employed as the empirical frame of reference. Data were collected from the institutions' open websites. The critical discourse analysis revealed differences in curricular discourses between and across the institutions. Texts with more indicators of validation were found within larger providers of professional teacher education, whereas those were more scarce in texts from smaller institutions. Validation texts are shorter in length and more fragmented in art teacher curricula. Despite its centrality in educational policy, validation remains in the margins of art and professional teacher education curricula. It is unlikely that the intended curricula facilitate teacher trainers' efforts to form a shared repertoire of a community of practice in validation of non-formal and informal learning. We suggest further study on the enacted and experienced curricula to examine the role of validation in art teacher and professional teacher education.

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<sup>i</sup> Correspondence: email [joonasaari@outlook.com](mailto:joonasaari@outlook.com)

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## 1. Introduction

Educational institutions are encouraged to rethink approaches to learning and teaching and to modernise higher education (European Union, EU, 2017). Educational reforms involve seeking alternatives to the traditional and expensive realisation of degree programmes through options like the competence-based approach (Ordonez, 2014). Sustainable ways to plan and implement professional teacher education and related vocational programmes are also in demand, to meet the incremental changes in the world of work and the related drive for global economic growth. In a broader view, the European Union promotes the provision of competence-oriented education, training and learning, establishing related good practices and better support of educational staff (EU, 2018). The adoption of the Bologna Process (international collaboration on The European Higher Education Area, EHEA) advocates a flexible curriculum approach, whilst intense efforts towards a unified system emerge to facilitate mobility, transparency and recognition of qualification from one educational sector to another (Karseth, 2006). Competence-based approach links authentic working life experiences to learning occurring at an educational institution (Jonnaert et al., 2007) and promotes validation of competences acquired in different contexts. The recent shift towards competence-based curricula (UNESCO, 2019) reflects this desire for pedagogical change integrating professional competences across higher education (HE).

In Finland, Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) are intended to bridge the demands of modern education and workplace learning. There is a practical problem at the heart of this work: a lack of clear instructions and standards for competence of validation. Professional or vocational teachers are in a key role in the practice of validation of prior learning in both UASs and institutions of vocational education. Teachers' pre-service training should provide individual experience of competence-based approach, and the necessary knowledge and tools to recognise, document and assess prior learning. New standards call for clear understanding to meet the efforts towards validation of prior learning. Furthermore, the research gap concerning validation competence in professional teacher education is evident.

The curriculum forms the benchmark for all learning, whether it is gained inside or outside formal education. Standardised curriculum is a set ideal of curriculum with specific content and skills (Karseth, 2006), aimed to enhance the learning outcomes and to provide equal and egalitarian prospects on personal development. A variety of constructions, such as the ECVET (European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training) and the ECTS (European Credit Transfer System in Higher Education), have been introduced to facilitate evaluation processes (Lee et al., 2017), and to provide coherent and compatible frameworks for assessment (Karseth, 2006), regardless of the type of the curricula or the method of acquiring competence (Brauer, 2019). Validation of prior learning (VPL) or validation of prior non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL)

have become key concepts within the discourse of lifelong learning (Laudenbach & Lis, 2019), referring to the very idea that learning may occur almost everywhere and is not restricted to the temporal and spatial boundaries of formal education and classroom. Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is broadly used as a parallel concept.

Despite its centrality in the discourse of lifelong learning, VPL has been integrated to the educational systems in Europe to a varying extent (Cedefop, 2019), raising a critique aptly voiced by Colardyn and Bjørnåvold (2004): *“Without a comprehensive validation system at a national level, lifelong learning remains theoretical”* (p. 69). Mulder and Winterton (2017) describe developmental efforts in terms of *“continued confusion and diversity in approaches to competence”* (p. 7) that complicate efforts to design and implement coordinated policies for competence-based approach. The Bologna Process and EU legislation are neither fully integrated into educational planning, nor are they geopolitically congruent (Davies, 2017). The discourse and terminology of competence-based orientation are heterogeneous and inconsistent, preventing the development of consistent competence validation and of process quality assurance (Brauer, 2021). Hence, in order for individuals to have their competences taken into consideration in education, EU member states are encouraged to develop their validation systems and to ensure coherence, transparency and credibility in evaluation of non-formal and informal learning (Colardyn & Bjørnåvold, 2004). Rooted in the seminal academic views on learning from the experience (Eraut, 2003), and situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), validation as an educational policy emphasises the need to give value to competences, despite the source where they were obtained in. These challenges in mind, our research explores the curricula of Finnish art teacher and professional teacher education, with aligning documentation concerning competence-based approach and validation of competences acquired from formal, informal or non-formal sources.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 The Concept of Competence as an Organising Principle of Curriculum

Defining “curriculum” is a challenging task, due to the manifold representations of the concept and to the broadness of its use. According to Karseth (2006), *“curriculum is more than the aims and the syllabus of education (cf. Squires, 1987) and pedagogy includes more than the processes of teaching and learning”* (p. 257). Further, she suggests to consider the curriculum *“as a social construction where the process of decision-making is seen as a socio-political and cultural process”* (p. 256). Despite the variety in perspectives, curriculum research has not inspired researchers on higher education in Europe in the 20th century (Karseth, 1994; Squires, 1987), nor has the launch of the Bologna process increased significantly the number of studies in the 21st century (Brauer, 2021). Notwithstanding the abundance of academic publications on the nature of curriculum as a general concept, there seems to be less discussion about higher education curricula (Bovill & Woolmer, 2019; Mäkinen & Annala, 2012). However, recent developmental efforts have increased the value of the curricular work amongst policy makers, although higher education actors regard the documents and related processes more private and aimed for internal use only

(Karseth, 2006). Nonetheless, the agency of academics in curricular work is changing in higher education (Annala et al., 2020).

The change related to the Bologna process has introduced the concepts of competence, performance and learning outcomes, characterising the process. Recent educational research examines the domains of knowledge, skills and abilities (Nichols et al., 2017) outlined as “competences” in The European Reference Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (European Union, 2007). The concept of “competence” can be understood as the ability to apply learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities) adequately in both educational and working life contexts, as a result of personal or professional development (Cedefop, 2014). According to Mulder and Winterton (2017), competence is simply “*a set of characteristics which enable performance*” (p. 13). These qualities are key factors in processes related to identification, recognition and accreditation of competences acquired from different sources. Schaffar (2019) notes that when appointing a position, a person's competence has generally been assessed by two comparisons; to begin with, through a comparative assessment at the end of an education (e.g. exam) and then when stepping into the service or employment. The validation of competences acquired differently at different stages of studies adds a new dimension to the evaluation process and to accreditation practices. Despite the years of shift towards competence-based curriculum, few descriptions of assessment systems specifically designed for a competence-based approach in higher education have been reported (Brauer, 2019).

The concept of competence can also be considered as an “*organising principle of curriculum*” (UNESCO, 2019, n.p.) that has to be well structured for efficiency and effectiveness in teaching and learning (Musingafi et al., 2015). Mäkinen and Annala (2010) emphasise that the competence objectives are “*not to diminish the inherent value of knowledge and research, but rather a new kind of curriculum thinking in which knowing, acting and context-dependent generic skills are perceived as a part of competency and domain-dependent knowledge*” (p. 17). They explain differences and tendencies in the development of the HE curricula and also point out that attention should be focused on the purpose of higher education and its curricula, on how they will be used and on what kind of theoretical framework they offer for planning and implementing teaching.

## **2.2 Curricula in Universities of Applied Sciences**

The higher education curriculum work has been seen to be based on two discourses: 1) the disciplinary model, and 2) the vocational/professional model (Karseth, 2006). The previous has been considered as predominant in university education, and the latter as more appropriate for vocational education and training (VET) and undergraduate professional programmes. Mäkinen and Annala (2010) argue that the development of curriculum is driven primarily from extra-institutional norms. Still, curricular discourses can be considered as both sectoral and vocational in nature (Karseth, 2006; Mäkinen & Annala, 2012) and require disciplinary efforts to determine achievement levels and update assessment (Barman & Konwar, 2011). In Finland, the notions on competence began to emerge with the advent of polytechnics (later Universities of Applied Sciences)

in the 1990s. The production of expertise as knowledge-based competence was seen as the specific role for polytechnics - to bridge the division between the scientific and professional traditions (Mäkinen & Annala, 2010). Current UAS have the mission to train professionals with emphasis on labour market needs and to conduct research and development, which supports instruction and promotes regional development in particular. UAS institutions (UASI) confer both Bachelor's and Master's degrees (BA, MA). The education in UASI emphasises co-operation with business, industry and service sectors, at the regional level in particular. These premises also set guidelines for the curricula in these institutions. UASI decide individually on the curricula and content of their education. Thus, education leading to a degree with the same name in different UASI may consist of different content, objectives and orientation options.

The expectations towards a HE curriculum in UASI are manifold and the very definition of the concept remains heterogenic. Roberts (2015) distinguishes between five dimensions of expectations or requirements, which trigger diverging and occasionally also controversial aspirations in curriculum design.

According to Roberts (2015), a HE curriculum is construed with a:

- discipline-based orientation, to enhance disciplinary knowledge;
- professional and academic orientation, to ensure future professional and academic roles;
- personal relevance orientation, providing meaningful learning for an individual;
- social relevance orientation, engaging with social issues and a critical mindset;
- systems design orientation, molding the curriculum to an efficient way to learn.

Orientations of disciplinary and personal relevance are most pertinent in the present observation. The form of the activity determines four levels of curriculum (Van den Akker, 2004): *macro* (system level such as nation), *meso* (institutional level), *micro* (classroom level) and *nano* (individual level). In this study, the focus is on the *meso* level, given that curricular texts and related documentation are observed as such, without knowledge of their application or the student's experience. This aligns with the level of an *intended curriculum* of the distinction provided e.g. by UNESCO on the three dimensions of a curriculum: "*intended, implemented and attained*" (UNESCO, 2020). A corresponding, albeit slightly dissimilar distinction is made with the widely cited triad of "*planned, enacted and experienced*" curriculum (Marsh & Willis, 2003). The first dimension unfolds as the official documentation on a study entity and the structures supporting it, such as delivery and assessment, and the expectations set to those processes by the authorities in charge. However, if the HE curriculum is perceived as an intentional and a dynamic *process*, rather than a set of documents with a somewhat static nature (as suggested e.g. in Mäkinen & Annala, 2012), those dimensions become more intertwined and the scrutiny of validation becomes interesting in the light of processual thinking. Nevertheless, VPL is a co-creational process where the student's initiative for validation meets the prerequisites and regulations of the institution, mostly in a framework of nationally or sectorially set standards. On the level of curricular discourse, observations can be made mostly on intentions and opportunities of VPL, whilst the implementation and experiences remain in a minor role.

This study is positioned on the level of an intended - or planned - curriculum and aims at presenting the status quo of the emergence of validation discourse in UASI delivering art teacher education (e.g. Degree Programme of Dance Teacher Education) and professional teacher education (vocational teacher programmes see Isacson et al., 2018) in Finland, rather than investigating outcomes of validation processes in these institutions.

### **2.3 Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning in Europe and Nordic Countries**

The Nordic Network of Adult Learning (NVL) has explored validation from a multitude of viewpoints, e.g. by identifying common Nordic challenges for recognising prior learning (2010) and by mapping quality in validation (Grunnet & Dahler, 2013). Based on a reciprocal inquiry on policies and practices, NVL also defined Nordic competence profiles for validation practitioners (2015) and identified main challenges and recommendations for guidance in validation of prior learning (2015). In order to advance use of validation in the level of educational institutions, the network developed a Nordic Quality Model for Validation (2013) and initiated a multi-organisational study in Denmark, Sweden and Finland to test the use of the quality model in VET institutions. Through an action research approach, Nistrup, Andersson and Halttunen (2017) brought to discussion the different perspectives for quality in validation. On the one hand, concepts like flexibility, individualisation and judgement are essential when recognising individual knowledge and skills. These are often developed in varying modalities of social interaction, in different contexts and situated in specific practices. On the other hand, standardisation, reliability, and measurement are concepts that speak for quality in validation. Here, the perspective of quality pays attention to comparability, and assures that results of validation in an educational process are comparable within the larger system of education. Validation should lead to fair ranking and selection processes, e.g. in relation to transition to higher education or in selection for an occupation in the labour market. (Nistrup et al., 2017.)

For the researchers, NVL provides a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) of validation professionals across scholars in the Nordic countries. It aligns moreover with objectives and research orientations of the global community of Validation of Prior Learning (VPL). This epistemological positioning foregrounds the methodological choice of the Nordic Quality Model as the frame of reference in the empirical study.

### **2.4 The Nordic Quality Model on Validation**

The Nordic Quality Model for Validation (2013) structures ways for canvassing the current situation in validation at an institutional level. The eight factors, namely Information, Preconditions, Documentation, Coordination, Guidance, Mapping, Assessment, and Follow-up are each connected to a number of indicators, enabling the user to explore the notion of quality in different levels, from the more general questions in organisational and procedural levels to specific questions in guidance and assessment.

According to the report "Quality Model for Validation in the Nordic countries" (2013) by NVL, information is a key factor for development of quality in validation and

it must include the dimensions of “*who, what, how why, where and when*” (Grunnet & Dahler, 2013, p. 21-22). These dimensions are explained in Table 1:

**Table 1:** Dimensions of information regarding quality of VPL

Dimension of information	Explanation
What	“It is explained what validation is.”
Who, how, when and where	“Expectations towards the candidate regarding time spending, work effort, and procedure.”
Why	“It is explained who validation is relevant for and what it can lead to”
Forwarding	“Adapted to the target group – accessible in multiple forms.”
Dialogical	“It is possible to ask questions about the information, it is dialogical.”

Based on Grunnet and Dahler’s dimensions of information explained above in Table 1, the research team compares and evaluates information about VPL on the basis that it should include the following indicators of quality explained in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Quality indicators for information about VPL

Quality indicator	Explanation
What	What is validation of prior learning? Including introductions and precursors towards VPL.
Who	Who does what? Expectations towards the student and role of the teachers/administration.
How	How does validation work? Steps that help students to start and finish the process.
When	When is validation relevant for me? When should/can I start the process?
Where	Where can I gain prior learning to validate? Where can I apply my validated prior learning?
Why	Why should I know about validation? Why should I validate my prior learning?
Forwarding	What other information might be relevant for me? What is the source of this information?
Dialogical	Whom do I contact for more specific information?

## 2.5 Study Aim and Research Questions

This study examines the emergence of validation in curricular discourse in the intended curricula of UASI that offer art teacher education (hereon ArTE) and professional teacher education (hereon ProTE) in Finland. The research team has chosen the “information” factor as the lens through which to analyse the content of curricula and of their related documents. The analysis draws on the narratives of validation in curricular texts: how the concept is presented, what topics are connected to it, and how it co-occurs with normative or declarative statements: what, when, who, how, where and why? This spectrum gives insights into the values behind curriculum development: what is the weight of validation therein and how much emphasis is given to VPL processes in the construction of an individual learner’s trajectory. Taking into consideration these aims of



the study, the research questions steer the study towards a more in-depth analysis in the future.

**Research question 1:** How often do quality indicators stemming from the *Nordic Quality Model on Validation* emerge in discourse of the intended curricula of ArTE and ProTE in Finland?

**Research question 2:** What information do the intended curricula of ArTE and ProTE in Finland convey about VPL, when evaluated by the emergence of quality indicators for information?

With the Nordic Quality Model on Validation (2013) as our conceptual and theoretical frame of reference, we aim at examining whether the intended curricula are able to equip future art teachers and professional teachers with the necessary knowledge and understanding of validation for developing their own professional identities and careers, and those of their students.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1 Data Collection

Conducted in the context of Finnish higher education, this study focuses on ArTE provision in UASI, and ProTE in the schools of professional teacher education located across the country. The data were collected explicitly from UASI, whilst research universities providing teacher education, as well as the universities of arts were excluded. The data collection was limited to discourse fragments in Finnish and English to avoid linguistic misinterpretations and to maintain compatibility in the analysis.

The data were downloaded from UAS websites or from the relevant curricula-hosting online outlets and services during November and December of 2020. A close reading of the websites was performed with the aim of discovering information about VPL in the intended curricula for ArTE and ProTE. The data were collected from the UASI listed in Table 3 below.

**Table 3:** Universities and programmes included in the study

University of Applied Sciences	Art Teacher Education programme (240 ECTS)	Graduates	Professional teacher training (60 ECTS)	Graduates
Centria University UAS	Bachelor of Culture and Arts, Music Pedagogue	21		
Haaga-Helia UAS			Professional teacher	303
Häme University UAS (HAMK)			Professional teacher	414
Jyväskylä UAS (JAMK)	Bachelor's Degree Programme in Music	39	Professional teacher	393
Metropolia UAS	Degree Programme in Music: Music Educator	54		
Novia UAS	Degree Programme in Music and Stage Art	12		
Oulu UAS (OAMK)	Music Pedagogue Degree Programme	21	Professional teacher	246

	Dance Teacher Education Degree Programme	18		
Savonia UAS	Degree Programme in Music Dance Teacher Degree Programme	27 18		
Tampere UAS (TAMK)	Degree Programme in Music, Music Pedagogy	24	Professional teacher	261
Turku UAS (TUAS)	Degree Programme in Music Degree Programme in Performing Arts	12 9		
10 Universities	11 ArTE programmes	255 graduates	5 ProTE prog.	1617 graduates

The data collection was performed in two steps: preliminary and main. The preliminary data collection was randomly aimed at one of the UASI websites (JAMK), and it was completed in order to see how well the required data are available and how they could be extracted. After the preliminary findings, it was clear that a substantial amount of information about VPL was mentioned in sources not directly defined as a “curriculum” by the UASI. By consequence, in order to take into consideration all the information available about VPL, the data collection should include supporting documents like e-study guides, degree charters, and relevant sections from the websites as well.

The main data collection was performed for one UAS at a time, to enable a close reading of each website. All documents referred to as “curriculum” were downloaded for analysis, alongside with additional information relevant to VPL. The collected data were categorised differently depending on whether they were downloaded from the curriculum, the e-study guide or from other sections on the websites. The data were categorised as being a part of the curriculum only if they were clearly referred to as “the curriculum” in the information itself. By categorising the data into different pools: curricula, e-study guides, degree charters and websites, it was possible to analyse how the information regarding VPL is spread. Furthermore, this categorisation increases the usability of the data for a more in-depth analysis in the future.

In colloquial discourse at educational institutions, one may moreover refer with “curriculum” to various syllabi, guidelines, instructions or supporting documentation on- and offline. The variety of these documents, representing several textual genres, are categorised in this paper as “supporting documents”, whereas “curriculum” is used here to refer to a formally approved discursive entity outlining a specific education or course. Combined, they merge into a landscape of “curricular discourse”, where emergence of validation themes are identified and analysed by the present authors, in order to understand how the UASI interpret and manifest their standing to validation within the larger educational discourses of lifelong learning. By using the Nordic Quality Model for Validation and its indicators, we are also able to examine variations between ArTE and

ProTE institutions and across the institutions, and make judgements of how coherent representations of validation are within the intended curricula.

### 3.2 Data Analysis

Critical discourse studies (Fairclough, 2015; Wodak & Meyer, 2016) are selected here as the primary methodological orientation, since they are anchored in a problem-oriented approach of discourse studies, rather than in a discipline-oriented stream of analysis (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Moreover, a critical view enables scrutiny of underlying societal structures in discourse such as - in the present research - hegemony, power, authority, and value ascription in educational institutions. Shedding light on actualisations of language in our social reality (Fairclough, 2013; Thurlow, 2018), the critical paradigm in the broad cluster of discourse studies focuses on phenomena that are perceived as controversial, sensible or problematic (Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

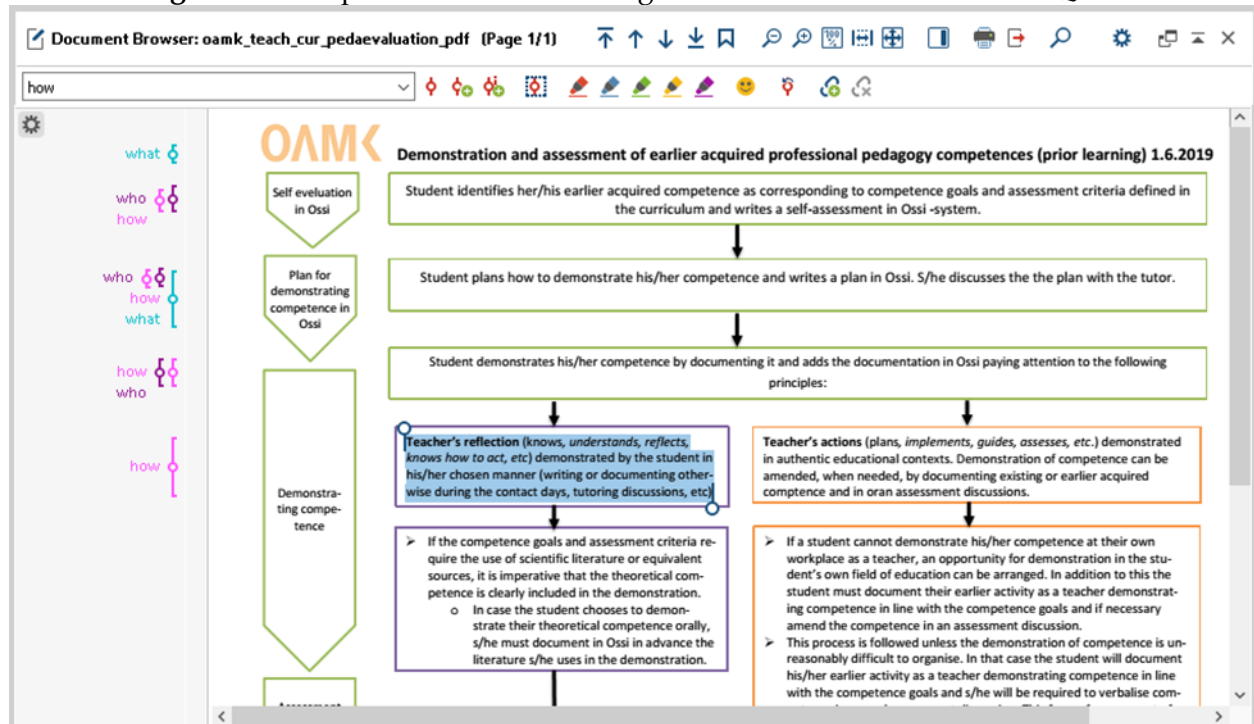
In the view of the present authors, validation is a highly meaningful topic where administrative, curricular discourse also has underpinning, sensible dimensions: it unfolds narratives of educational meaning-making that has repercussions in learners' trajectories and in policy making. In this domain, the authors also position themselves as contextually involved, hence socially committed (Lin, 2014), with the exception of the corresponding author who keeps an outsider's position concerning validation processes and the UASI providing the data. As researchers, we position ourselves epistemologically in the framework of validation initiatives of the Nordic Quality Model, as well as in the broader cooperation networks of the VPL community (VPL Biennale, 2019), that are enacted as a broad community of practice (Wenger, 1998).

When analysing heterogenic discursive entities such as curricula with their supporting documents, a qualitative approach conducted with close reading is an imperative: each textual fragment must be analysed in its context (Fairclough, 2015), in order to grasp the nuances of discourse that can be categorised with indexes such as *what*, *how* and *where*, and moreover. Those can be expressed with a variety of linguistic cues and synonymic expressions. After this initial close reading, the analysis was complemented with the methodological aid of MAXQDA software program. (MAXQDA is designed for computer-assisted qualitative and mixed methods data, text and multimedia analysis in academic, scientific, and business institutions. Version 20.3 of the software was used for data analysis.) The software was used to tag the discourse fragments with relevant indicators, and to categorise them. This dimension of analysis resulted in quantified findings on emergence percentages of indicators and the overall achievability of the relevant information.

The analysis of data followed the same pattern for each data source. After downloading the relevant documents from the UASI websites, the data were uploaded to the MAXQDA software. The quality indicators (*what*, *how*, *where* etc.) were all added in the software as individual "codes" which can be used to tag text fragments from the data. While performing the close reading of the documents, only those phrases and words which conveyed information about VPL were tagged. After identifying that a section of the data is taggable, the corresponding author decided which quality indicator emerged

in the selected data, tagged the selection, and continued the close reading. Because a phrase or a sentence can include multiple different indicators regarding VPL, the analysis was performed by enabling tagging of the same data fragment several times with different indicators, if necessary. This process was repeated for each document in each data set. An example of the method of analysis can be seen below in Figure 1.

**Figure 1:** Example of a document being coded with indicators in MAXQDA



An important aspect of the analysis is that each tagged fragment represents one quality indicator. This means that an entire chapter about VPL could be equal in value with a one-word-mention about VPL. To obtain a trustworthy and transparent analysis, a second close reading was performed. During this phase, the attention was focused on the sections of the data already tagged. These sections were scrutinised and re-tagged, to better represent the weight of the information. For example, an entire chapter about VPL would now be assigned with two or more indicators if deemed necessary. This approach of discourse analysis is inherently critical, as it weighs the value of the data fragments compared to others and recognises the ones that convey information of quality on validation.

After applying the described methods to the data, the analysis revealed that curricula had 250 indicators in 33 sources (of which 5 had 0 indicators) while other relevant sources (website, e-study-guide, degree charter) had 398 indicators in 26 sources (of which 2 had 0 indicators). It is also noteworthy that a hundred indicators categorised as being found in curricula were located in the OAMK website. This part of the website has been defined as a curriculum since it is referred to as the curriculum, and it is the only centralised source of information a user is forwarded to. Because most of the quality indicators emerge in other sources (61,4 %) than the “official” curricula (38,6 %), the

research also includes these supporting documents as a part of the analysis. All of the different analysed source material are hereon referred to as “documents”. See Table 4 below for the exact number and prevalence of quality indicators in all analysed documents.

**Table 4:** Prevalence of quality indicators in document sources

Document source	Quality indicator in document								Total
	How	What	Who	Where	Forwarding	When	Why	Dialogical	
OAMK	56	34	30	6	12	5	3	0	(146)
OAMK ArTE	15	14	6	3	7	0	1	0	46
OAMK ProTE	41	20	24	3	5	5	2	0	100
HAMK ProTE	54	26	13	24	8	10	0	1	136
JAMK	34	24	26	10	18	9	3	6	(130)
JAMK ArTE	18	19	17	4	13	8	3	3	85
JAMK ProTE	16	5	9	6	5	1	0	3	45
TAMK	14	23	9	6	4	6	4	1	(67)
TAMK ArTE	5	9	5	5	4	3	1	1	33
TAMK ProTE	9	14	4	1	0	3	3	0	34
Haaga-Helia ProTE	11	16	2	10	3	4	3	1	50
Centria ArTE	15	9	6	5	3	4	0	0	42
Metropolia ArTE	9	6	0	2	5	4	2	0	28
Savonia ArTE	3	12	9	0	1	1	0	0	26
TUAS ArTE	2	14	1	0	0	1	0	0	18
Novia ArTE	1	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	5
	199	166	97	63	54	45	15	9	648

Table 4 shows that a majority of the quality indicators are found from OAMK ProTE and HAMK ProTE documents. Overall, OAMK, HAMK and JAMK clearly have the most indicators when compared to the rest of UASI. Also, it is noteworthy that JAMK ArTE documents have significantly more quality indicators than the other ArTE document sources. Metropolia, Savonia, TUAS and Novia form the group that have the fewest quality indicators in their documents.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 All Documents

The corresponding author tagged 648 indicators in 52 documents in total (7 documents had 0 indicators, hence the overall number of analysed documents is 59). Their comparative analysis shows that there are apparent differences in the overall number of indicators, as well as in the spread of different indicators between ProTE documents (365 indicators in 25 analysed documents) and ArTE documents (283 indicators in 34 analysed documents).

The UAS websites usually discuss VPL in the context of indicators *what*, *how* and *who*, while *when* and *where* are more frequent in curricula, and *why* in degree charters. It is noteworthy that the indicator *why* is clearly under-represented in the analysed material overall. From a total of 648 indicators only 15 have been tagged as *why*.

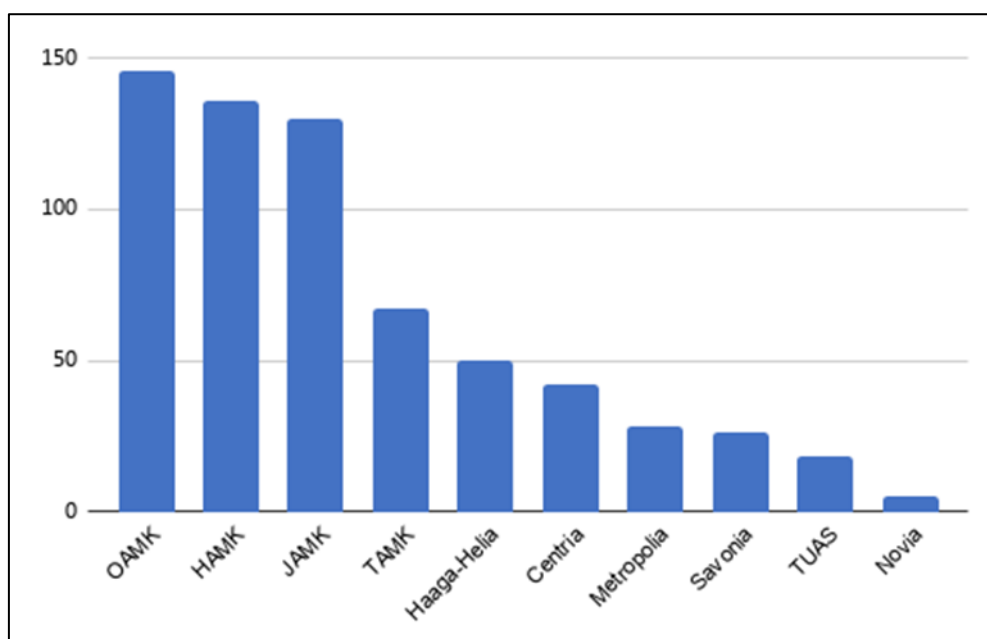
*How* (30,71 %) and *what* (25,62 %) are the most common indicators whilst *when* (6,94%) and *why* (2,31%) are among the least frequent. The number of *forwarding* (8,33 %) indicators is surprisingly high, and it reveals how fragmented the information is. The

prevalence of *forwarding* is not only a negative factor, since it is also a sign of a thorough and informative curriculum or study guide. The quality indicators *who* (14,97 %) and *where* (9,72 %) also emerge relatively often. The indicator *dialogical* (1,39 %) is the least frequently appearing indicator, and this result reflects the overall dictating nature of the documents.

#### 4.2 Comparison of Curricular Discourses

This study approaches a wide selection of curricular discourses, where boundaries are not clear-cut. A description on intended learning outcomes refers to “curriculum”, whilst guidelines on where and how to enrol to courses or on how to submit an application for validation are defined here as “supporting documents”. The fact that most documents are currently located in digital outlets accentuates their hybrid nature. Moreover, they evolve across various updates conducted by an undefined group of actors, whereas a “curriculum” most often must be submitted to an official approval and hence has a more stable nature. Below, explanations will be provided to increase transparency of the analysis process, by specifying the nature and genre of the documents whenever possible: e.g. institutional websites, degree charters, or practical instructions such as study guides.

A close reading of art teacher and professional teacher curricula and relevant documents highlights the variation in how VPL is discussed in different UAS institutions’ curricula and relevant documents, as seen in figure 2. Some institutions have their own sections about VPL on their websites or e-study-guide which forward to the curriculum and from there on to the degree charter. The information seeker is forwarded from casual information towards more official documents which makes it possible for a student to identify why one is presented with information about VPL.



**Figure 2:** Number of quality indicators in documents mentioning validation of prior learning

Some institutions do not have VPL information easily available, and in these cases curricula are often mere lists of courses and their descriptions, lacking discussion about competence development and study personalisation. However, although the “official curricula” might lack mentions of VPL, this information can sometimes be found in the UAS study guides or websites. On that note, some websites were not updated or were difficult to navigate, sometimes even forwarding the visitor in circles while searching for information about VPL.

### 4.3 Comparison of ArTE and ProTE Documents

This comparison shows how many of each quality indicator have been tagged in ProTE documents and ArTE documents. These numbers can be found below, in Figure 3 and Figure 4 respectively. The number of indicators represents what type of information about VPL is conveyed in these documents. ProTE documents discuss VPL primarily through the dimension of *how* (35,9 % from a total of 365), while ArTE documents discuss it through the dimension of *what* (30 % from total of 283). ProTE documents discuss validation in more depth, while ArTE documents are not as extensive and sometimes even lack any mentions of VPL.

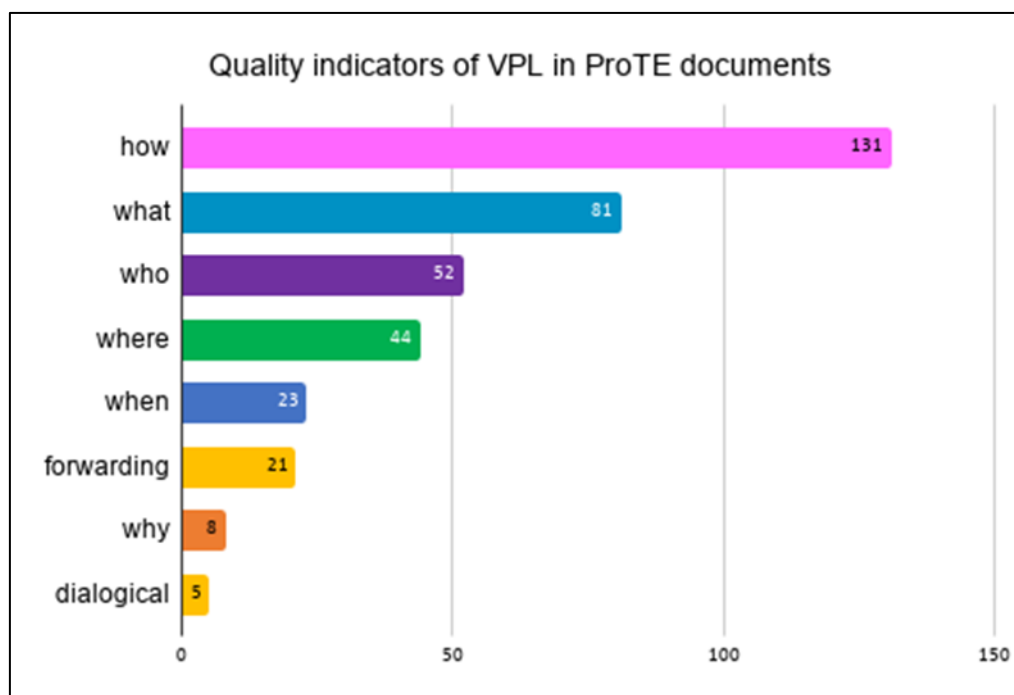


Figure 3: Quality indicators of VPL in ProTE documents

The *how* indicator is the most common indicator in ProTE documents, and the *what* indicator in ArTE documents. Forwarding is more prevalent in ArTE documents, which signals that the information is very fragmented. ArTE documents have less indicators than ProTE, and they are scattered across multiple sources compared to ProTE, where the information is more centralised.

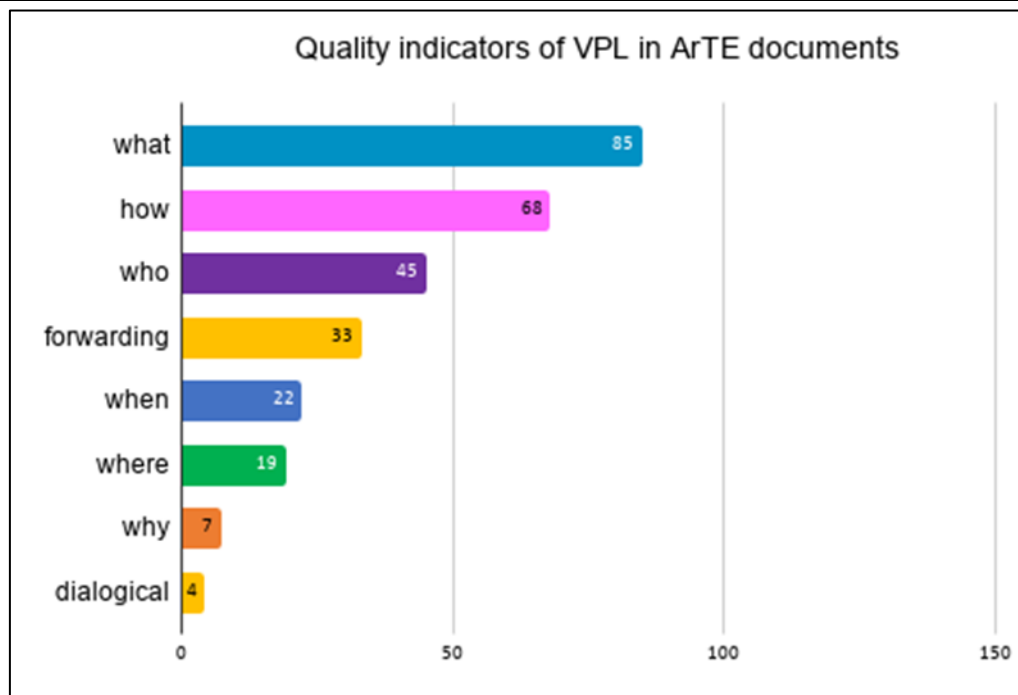


Figure 4: Quality indicators of VPL in ArTE documents

Overall, VPL is evidently discussed much more in ProTE documents, although only five ProTE programmes and 11 ArTE programmes were included in the study. One reason behind the difference in the prevalence of VPL quality indicators could be the yearly graduate numbers of the programmes. ArTE programmes in the study have had only 255 graduates in the year 2020 compared to ProTE programmes' 1617 graduates (Vipunen, 2020). Validation as an educational process requires a variety of resources, such as coordination, guidance and assessment. The more graduates a UASI has, the better resources it has to cater for the development of quality in validation. However, this does not take away the fact that art teacher students may find themselves in unequal positions regarding the information available for them about VPL via the curriculum and other supporting documents of their university.

## 5. Discussion

The need to validate non-formal and informal learning in educational programmes is a central aim in current educational policies (UNESCO, 2019). In our study, we examined how this policy has been addressed in Finnish art teacher and professional teacher education curricular texts and how functional are the tools for analysis provided by the Nordic Model for Validation (Grunnet & Dahler, 2013). Our analysis focused on studying the intentions and opportunities that the curricular texts contain for validation as a perspective of lifelong learning. We argue that this perspective is crucial for professionalisation of future vocational teachers and their students, and instilling validation as a reality in education.

The spread of quality indicators identified in the data unfold an instrumental understanding of validation in ArTE and ProTE curricular texts. The purpose, *why*



validation is an important educational process, is underrepresented amongst curricular texts, when compared to other descriptions of practical procedures of validation. Another indicator, scarcely mentioned in the data, is *when*, referring to timeliness and timeframes of validation of validation processes. The prevalence of indicator *forwarding* also described the fragmental nature of the curricular texts on validation. The indicator *why* was mentioned mostly in degree charters. The most frequently used indicators, *when* and *where*, were found in UASI websites. Combined with the notion that the indicator *forwarding* was frequently used, we can argue that discourses of validation remain in the margins within the intended curricula, and their temporal and spatial dimensions are not clearly defined in the governing documents. It remains questionable to what extent the intended curricula examined here are able to construe coherence, transparency and credibility in evaluation of non-formal and informal learning (Colardyn & Bjørnåvold, 2004).

Our study brought to attention the variety of curricular texts, thus questioning the exact definition of "curriculum" in higher education. Mäkinen and Annala (2010) point out that "*fragmentary curriculum refers to the splintered nature of the content of studies*" (p. 15) and it reflects the discrepancy between higher education and working life. Due to the fragmental structure of curricular texts addressing validation, we argue that it is unlikely that future vocational teachers are able to build a comprehensive understanding of the meaning of validation within a larger framework on development of professional identities and careers. Validation should be embedded in ArTE and ProTE curriculum in a systematic, transparent and dynamic manner. A common terminology for validation concepts and practices would facilitate validation as a core competence of future vocational teachers. A more structured integration of validation as a policy and practice into the curricular discourse would enable teacher trainers to form a shared repertoire of validation, and understand the perspectives of flexibility, individualisation and judgement for the individual learner, and perspectives of standardisation, reliability and measurement for the educational institution. Understanding of these perspectives of quality is crucial for the development of a community of practice in validation of non-formal and informal learning, and it would contribute to validation competence to become an overarching expertise for vocational teachers (Mäkinen & Annala, 2010).

This understanding is pivotal for future teachers for a number of reasons. Firstly, to enable students in professional teacher education to develop their learning trajectories in the crossroads of their own initial vocation, the teacher education at hand, and the future teacher profession. Secondly, to identify and make use of vocational teachers' prior experiences is significant for the development of quality of their own teaching. Thirdly, to help art teachers and professional teachers to expand opportunities for more flexible pathways for their own students, and to facilitate lifelong and life-wide learning in a broader scope. In this perspective, the intended curricula examined unfold professional and academic orientations, whilst giving less importance for personal relevance, social relevance and systems design orientation (see Roberts, 2015).

The data also contain significant variation on how validation has been integrated in the curricular texts across the institutions examined. Curricular texts with more

indicators of validation were found within larger providers of professional teacher education, whereas less mentions could be found in texts originating from smaller institutions. Do the larger UASI position themselves more favorably towards the discourse of validation of non-formal and informal learning, and the opportunities it beholds for lifelong learning? Validation is more scarcely mentioned in ArTE curricular texts, shorter in length and more fragmented, when compared to those of ProTE. Do ArTE providers make full use of prior learning of their students? Our data do not yield answers to these questions, since the curricular texts speak of intentions, and the implemented and attained curriculum needs to be examined by interviews and observations among teachers and students.

### **5.1 Limitations and Topics for Further Study**

This multi-organisational study was carried out by a team of researchers involved both in validation and in professional teacher education. To avoid bias, data collection and coding was conducted by a researcher outside the domain of teacher education. Data were retrieved from publicly available resources in the UASI websites. Within the scope of curricular studies, our analysis brought into discussion what is actually meant by curriculum as a governing factor in education. This question is twofold, as firstly there is a need for clarification on what textual categories can be included into the concept of a curriculum. Secondly, we need further explanation on what is the weight of those texts - degree descriptions, curricula, and supporting documents, in governing art teacher and professional teacher education.

This study aims at presenting the status quo of the emergence of validation discourse in UASI delivering ArTE and ProTE in Finland, rather than investigating outcomes of validation processes in these institutions, which will be a topic for further studies. Additional studies would benefit from expanding the scope towards experiences of teacher education students and graduates. Intended, implemented and attained curricula display convergences, but also divergences, and in-depth research on experiences from students would yield more thorough understanding on how validation is carried out in institutions and how it supports studies, which is eventually the mission of all VPL actions. Moreover, a study on transparency, equality and comprehensibility factors of VPL discourse is a promising field of investigation.

The relevance of this paper is partly national and partly international: on the one hand, it contributes to practice of art and professional teacher education in Finland by scrutinising the state of the art of validation in the intended curricula. On the other, it offers practitioners in vocational teacher education a framework to develop a more congruent integration of validation in the texts governing education. In order to further develop Nordic tools for validation, we propose for scholars a comparative analysis of curricular texts of vocational teacher education in the region, with an aim to improve comparability within the larger Nordic educational system.

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### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

### **About the Authors**

**Saari, Joona** (Corresponding Author) [joonasaari@outlook.com](mailto:joonasaari@outlook.com)

University of Turku, Brahea Centre & Turku University of Applied Sciences

ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2280-3683>

<https://fi.linkedin.com/in/joona-saari>

Mr. Joona Saari (MA) majored in the study of religion, and his academic interests include critical discourse analysis and rhetorical analysis. In his master's thesis Saari analysed transcripts of public speeches and discussed how ideology is expressed in political rhetoric. He has worked as a research assistant in the University of Turku focusing in areas of intercultural education and capacity building in higher education. Mr. Saari currently works as a project advisor at Turku University of Applied Sciences.

**Halttunen, Timo** [timo.halttunen@utu.fi](mailto:timo.halttunen@utu.fi)

University of Turku, Brahea Centre

ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3489-7958>

<https://fi.linkedin.com/in/timo-halttunen-53607982>

Mr. Timo Halttunen is working as head of unit at the Brahea Centre, Areal Research and Development (ARD) at the University of Turku. His areas of expertise are university lifelong learning, recognition of prior learning, and university-business collaboration. His current research is focused on the impact of personal and institutional characteristics to teacher and student exploration of working-life oriented pedagogies. He is chair of the Continuing Education Network in Finland (UCEF) and member of the steering committee of the European Continuing Education Network (eucen). He is also active in the Nordiskt Nätverk för Vuxnas Lärande.

**Brauer, Sanna** [sanna.brauer@oamk.fi](mailto:sanna.brauer@oamk.fi)

Oulu University of Applied Sciences, School of Professional Teacher Education

ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5303-6600>

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/sannabrauer/>

Dr. Sanna Brauer has been working as a senior lecturer at Oulu University of Applied Sciences, School of Professional Teacher Education since 2011. She is an expert in digital pedagogy and involved in various projects as well as national and international networks aiming to enhance professional development of teachers. Brauer's doctoral dissertation from 2019 was the first in the world to address digital open badges and badge-driven learning. She currently focuses on research related to motivation, competence-based professional development, and the digital transformation in the world of work. She's highly networked and open to making new connections.

**Mäkelä, Marjaana** [marjaana.makela@haaga-helia.fi](mailto:marjaana.makela@haaga-helia.fi)

ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8666-7863>

<https://fi.linkedin.com/in/dr-marjaana-makela-a062788b>

Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, School of Vocational Teacher Education

Dr. Marjaana Mäkelä is a Principal Lecturer at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences. As a researcher in the team of Engaging Vocational Pedagogy, she has responsibilities in vocational teacher education, curriculum development, quality management and export of education. In pedagogical development, her areas of expertise relate to continuous learning, validation processes and work-integrated learning. Her interdisciplinary research orientation includes moreover study of pedagogical discourse, consumer studies, French language and hospitality education. She is a member of the Finnish working group of validation in the framework of Nordiskt Nätverk för Vuxnas Lärande.

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## Appendix I: Data sources

All data below were retrieved on October 5th 2020.

### Centria UAS, ArTE

*Identification and recognition of prior learning.* Website.

<https://web.centria.fi/opiskelijalle/opiskeluohjeet/osaamisen-tunnistaminen/aikaisemmin-hankitun-osaamisen-tunnistaminen-ahot>

*Identification and recognition of prior learning – Student’s guide.* Website, PDF-document.

[https://web.centria.fi/Data/content/AHOT-ohje\\_opiskelijalle\\_Centria.pdf](https://web.centria.fi/Data/content/AHOT-ohje_opiskelijalle_Centria.pdf)

*Studying at work.* Website. <https://web.centria.fi/opiskelijalle/opiskeluohjeet/osaamisen-tunnistaminen/tyon-opinnollistaminen>

*Chapter in the degree charter: Student’s personal study plan.* Website.

<https://web.centria.fi/opiskelijalle/opiskeluohjeet/tutkintosaanto-ja-muut-ohjeistukset>

### Haaga-Helia UAS, ProTE

*Professional teacher development program – Guide.* Website, PDF-document.

[https://www.haaga-helia.fi/sites/default/files/file/2020-11/aokk\\_ops\\_ope\\_20-21.jpg\\_0\\_0.pdf](https://www.haaga-helia.fi/sites/default/files/file/2020-11/aokk_ops_ope_20-21.jpg_0_0.pdf)

*Professional teacher education.* Website. <http://www.haaga-helia.fi/fi/koulutus/ammattillinen-opettajakorkeakoulu/ammattillinen-opettajankoulutus>

*Guidelines for the recognition of competence acquired elsewhere.* Online study guide.

<http://www.haaga-helia.fi/fi/opinto-opas/yleista-hhsta/muualla-hankitun-osaamisen-tunnustamisen-ohjeet?userLang=fi>

*Open badge of skill.* Online study guide. <http://www.haaga-helia.fi/fi/opinto-opas/yleista-haaga-heliasta/open-badge-osaamismerkki?userLang=fi>

### Häme UAS, ProTE

*Professional teacher training – Study Guide.* Website, PDF-document.

[https://www.hamk.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Opettajankoulutuksen\\_opinto-opas\\_2020-2021.pdf](https://www.hamk.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Opettajankoulutuksen_opinto-opas_2020-2021.pdf)

*Professional teacher education – Description.* Online curriculum.

<https://huoasl.outsystemsenterprise.com/opetusuunnitelmat/OpetussuunnitelmanTiedot.aspx?CurriculumCodeInput=OPAP20A>

*Competence recognition practices.* Website. <https://www.hamk.fi/aokk-koulutus/ammattillinen-opettajankoulutus/#opiskelu>

*Guide for filling the form regarding identification and recognition of prior learning.* Website, PDF-document. [https://www.hamk.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/eAHOT\\_tayttoohje\\_Amot.pdf](https://www.hamk.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/eAHOT_tayttoohje_Amot.pdf)

*Guide for applying acceptance of prior learning.* Website, PDF-document.

[https://www.hamk.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Ohje\\_hyvaksiluvun\\_hakemisesta\\_2020.pdf](https://www.hamk.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Ohje_hyvaksiluvun_hakemisesta_2020.pdf)

*Guide for applying acceptance of competence.* Website, PDF-document.  
[https://www.hamk.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Ohje\\_osaamisen\\_nayton\\_hakemisesta\\_2020.pdf](https://www.hamk.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Ohje_osaamisen_nayton_hakemisesta_2020.pdf)

### **JAMK UAS, ArTE & ProTE**

*The basics of degree-leading education curricula in JAMK.* Curriculum, PDF-document.  
<https://opinto-opaat.jamk.fi/globalassets/opinto-opas-amk/opiskelu/suomenkielisten-koulutusohjelmien-opsit/2020-2021/ops-perusteteet-2020.pdf>

*Identification and recognition of competence.* Online study guide. <https://opinto-opaat.jamk.fi/fi/opinto-opas-yamk/opiskelu/osaamisen-tunnistaminen-ja-tunnustaminen/>

*Degree program in music education.* Online curriculum.  
<https://opetussuunnitelmat.peppi.jamk.fi/fi/48/fi/5195>

*Degree program in music education.* Online study guide. <https://opinto-opaat.jamk.fi/fi/opinto-opas-amk/opiskelu/opetussuunnitelmat/2019-2020/musiikkipedagogi/>

*Higher degree program in music education.* Online study guide. <https://opinto-opaat.jamk.fi/fi/opinto-opas-yamk/opiskelu/opetussuunnitelmat/2019-2020/musiikkipedagogi/>

*Professional teacher training studies.* Online curriculum.  
<https://opetussuunnitelmat.peppi.jamk.fi/fi/4952/fi/5073>

*Evaluation and acceptance.* Online study guide. <https://opinto-opaat.jamk.fi/fi/aokk/ope/opinnot-2020-2021/arviointi/>

*Principles and instructions for study approval.* Online study-guide. <https://opinto-opaat.jamk.fi/fi/aokk/ope/opinnot-2020-2021/opettajankoulutukseen-liittyvat-ohjeet-ja-lomakkeet/>

*Teacher's pedagogical studies in the field of music and dance.* Online study guide.  
<https://opinto-opaat.jamk.fi/fi/aokk/musiikki-ja-tanssiala/>

### **Metropolia UAS, ArTE**

*Identification and recognition of prior learning – Metropolia's guide.* Website.  
<https://www.metropolia.fi/fi/opiskelu-metropoliassa/yleista-tietoa-opiskelusta/opintojen-suunnittelu#c43877>

*Description of the music degree program.* Online curriculum and study guide. <https://opinto-opas.metropolia.fi/fi/88094/fi/70424/KXF20S1/year/2020>

*Curriculum for the music degree program.* Online curriculum and study guide.  
<https://opinto-opas.metropolia.fi/fi/88094/fi/70424>

*Description of the degree programme in music education.* Online curriculum and study guide.  
<https://opinto-opas.metropolia.fi/fi/16187/fi/70425/K0820S6/year/2020>



### **Novia UAS, ArTE**

*Degree charter, Section 21 Credit transfer of studies.* Website. <https://www.novia.fi/om-oss/styrande-dokument/examensstadga/&usg=ALkJrhicZaJGvWf3qz85lbmHH45qq-DWfA>

Music educator programme description. Website. <https://www.novia.fi/utbildning/utbildningsutbud/konst-och-kultur/musiker-yh-musikpedagog-yh/>

Music educator education content. Website. <https://www.novia.fi/utbildning/utbildningsutbud/konst-och-kultur/musiker-yh-musikpedagog-yh/musiker-yh/>

### **Oulu UAS, ArTE and ProTE**

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