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**Abstract**

While European and national policies aim at opening higher education for a growing share of the population, institutions are confronted with the challenge to redefine access and progression rules and to establish suitable procedures. Many non-traditional students already have a long record of formal, non-formal and informal learning and can demonstrate a range of relevant knowledge, skills and competences when starting a study programme. The article examines how the demand for widened access and the recognition of prior learning are rooted in societal developments and political strategies. It also describes methods and tools that help institutions to validate learning outcomes achieved outside higher education. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)