EAR manual
2023
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note from the editors</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the EAR manual</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part 1. Introduction to recognition</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 The LRC and the role of the ENIC-NARIC Centre</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 The five elements of a qualification</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Schematic outline of the recommended procedure for the assessment of foreign qualifications</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part 2. The evaluation process</strong></td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 File requirements</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Accreditation and Quality Assurance</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(status of the institution)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Diploma and Accreditation Mills</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Authenticity</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Purpose of recognition</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Learning Outcomes</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Credits, grades, credit accumulation and credit transfer</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Substantial Differences</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Alternative recognition and the right to appeal</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part 3. Specific types of procedures and/or qualifications</strong></td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Refugees</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Automatic recognition</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Qualifications Awarded After Flexible Learning</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtopic – Micro-credentials</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Transnational education</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Qualifications awarded by joint programmes</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Non-country specific qualifications (international degrees)</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Non-Recognised but Legitimate Institutions</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part 4. Information instruments</strong></td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Diploma supplement (and other information tools)</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Qualifications Frameworks</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part 5. Recognition practices in the office</strong></td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 Transparency and Information Provision</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 Quality Assurance of Recognition in the ENIC Office and National Context</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Digital student data and digital processes</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part 6. Resources</strong></td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of publications and recommendations used in the manual</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Foreword

This is the second edition of the European Area of Recognition (EAR) manual, which was produced as part of the Erasmus+ project Implementation of Automatic Recognition in the Networks (I-AR).

The original EAR Manual, published in 2012, has proved to be a practical and comprehensive tool for recognition professionals and other stakeholders in the ENIC-NARIC Networks and across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). In 2012 the use of the EAR manual was already encouraged by the European Ministers for Education in the EHEA Communique.

Looking back, the publication of the EAR manual was not merely an end point bringing together all good practice, but also a start to focus on convergence and systematic practical implementation of LRC compliant recognition procedures. This resulted in many “spin off” initiatives over the last decade. It started with the follow up to develop a manual geared to higher education institutions, since the majority of recognition decisions in the EHEA are made by institutions. In 2020 the third edition of that EAR-HEI manual was published and a fourth edition is in the planning. Since their publication, the EAR manual and EAR-HEI manuals have been translated into various national languages of the ENIC-NARIC Networks, to aid credential evaluators.

The publication of the EAR-HEI manual, led to the development of an online training platform (STREAM), to support and train admission officers (and in many cases academics doing recognition) in the principles of the LRC. To this day the platform has been used by over twelve hundred of admissions officers within and outside the EHEA.

The EAR manual was also the basis for developing the ENIC-NARIC “Standards & Guidelines”, a self-evaluation and peer review instrument for the ENIC-NARIC Networks, adopted by the Networks in 2019. This instrument allows centres to evaluate their practical compliance with the LRC and improve identified areas with the help of peers. Hence, it is an important quality assurance instrument for the Networks. Recently, a similar tool has been developed for higher education institutions in the “SPOT” project, led by the European University Association.

As for the manual itself, much of its original content remains relevant until this day. After 11 years, ascertaining this much consistency in a common platform for recognition is encouraging. At the same time, this current revision (including the latest good practice) also testifies to the change of the education landscape, as well as shows how much progress has been made since its original publication. Perhaps above all, it also shows how well the principles of the LRC, adopted in 1997 just as international student mobility in the European region took off, still fit today’s reality and have proven a strong framework for recognition.
This second edition contains new chapters and segments to inform readers about noteworthy developments, as well as how to engage with them at the practical level of recognition. Furthermore, many of the existing chapters have been restructured, updated and refined to improve the accessibility and utility of the Manual. We are therefore assured that the EAR Manual will continue to support fair, transparent and efficient recognition practices in the EU and EHEA, and trust that these will add to the foundation for automatic recognition that has been laid over the past years.

Allan Bruun Pedersen  
Senior advisor, The Danish Agency for Higher Education and Science  
Vice-President Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee Bureau

Jenneke Lokhoff  
Senior policy officer, Nuffic  
President ENIC-NARIC Networks
Acknowledgements

The European Area of Recognition (EAR) manuals are based on previous projects, studies and publications on the international recognition of qualifications, and is the product of combined expertise that goes beyond the EAR project team. Therefore, I would like to start with a few words of appreciation for those who contributed.

First of all, I wish to thank the recognition centres involved in the ENIC-NARIC networks for their active contribution and valuable feedback to both the first and second edition of the EAR manual. Representatives of the ENIC-NARIC centres provided their ideas and opinions on the EAR manual at the annual network meetings, during various sessions and workshops devoted to specific EAR chapters, and contributed to the extensive survey of the recommendations in the first edition.

While developing the manuals, the ENIC Bureau and NARIC Advisory Board were consulted several times on key issues. I thank them for their comments, guidance and support, and for putting the EAR manual on the agenda (literally) of the ENIC-NARIC networks.

I would like to thank the European Commission, not only for funding the project through their programme, but also for the inspiring way in which the EAR manual was previously promoted at network meetings.

Additionally, I extend my gratitude to the recognition experts of the Council of Europe and UNESCO for their active support of the EAR manual.

I would also like to acknowledge the input of many experts from different fields that we met at various occasions, which resulted in very useful feedback from higher education institutions, students and their associations.

Additionally, I thank the numerous international recognition experts and policy makers that have supported the dissemination and acceptance of the EAR manual, its translation into local languages and all its spin off initiatives, and thus have contributed to the convergence of recognition practices.

The combination of describing best practice based on first-hand experience in a recognition centre, and providing flow-charts, real-life examples and links to useful information sources, has led to manuals that set the standard for fair, transparent and efficient recognition procedures.
And finally I would like to thank the members of the project teams and Steering Groups of the EAR and I-AR projects, which developed the manuals; all of whom worked together very enthusiastically and efficiently, covering all relevant aspects of recognition in a practical way.

I wish to dedicate this second EAR manual in honour of the late Dr. Earl Stephen Hunt, member of the first Steering Group, whose erudition and decades long experience was indispensable in creating the manuals.

Bas Wegewijs
Head of Centre Dutch ENIC-NARIC (Nuffic)
Nuffic
Note from the editors

The second edition of the EAR manual has been produced as part of the Erasmus+ Key Action 3 NARIC “Implementation of Automatic Recognition in the Networks” project (I-AR).

The updates in the second edition of the EAR manual include:

- A new organization of the structure of chapters, into six parts to better reflect the recognition procedure: 1) Introduction to recognition, 2) The evaluation process, 3) Specific types of procedures and/or qualifications, 4) Information instruments, and 5) Recognition practices in the office. Part 6 “Resources” provides an overview of publications and recommendations used in the manual.
- Updates of existing chapters, with the latest recommendations from reports and projects;
- Inclusion of new chapters, responding to either a more logical flow or new developments:
  - “Chapter 1. The LRC and the role of the ENIC-NARIC Centre”;
  - “Chapter 2. The five elements of a qualification”;
  - “Chapter 4. File requirements”. This topic was previously covered by the chapters dealing with “accreditation”, “authenticity” and “diploma mills”;
  - “Chapter 15. Qualifications awarded after flexible learning”, now also covers micro-credentials.
  - “Chapter 18. Non country specific qualifications (international degrees)”;

- “Chapter 23. Quality Assurance of Recognition in the ENIC Office and National Context”;
- “Chapter 24. Digital student data and digital processes”.
- Numbering of the recommendations into steps, and an illustration of each step with example(s);
- Update of all URL’s.

As part of the I-AR consortium, the following ENIC-NARICs produced this second edition: Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia Flanders (Belgium), Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland Norway, The Netherlands and Ukraine, as well as the European University Association, the European Consortium for Accreditation and the European Student Union.
About the EAR manual

This chapter gives an introduction to the European Area of Recognition (EAR) manual, including information about its contents and structure, target groups, objectives and methodology.

About the EAR manual

This manual is the second edition of the European Area of Recognition (EAR) manual. It contains standards and guidelines on all aspects of the recognition of foreign qualifications and aims to provide the credential evaluators from the European National Information Centres network and National Academic Recognition and Information Centres network (ENIC-NARIC Networks, see also below and Chapter I for more information) with a practical tool to assist them in their daily recognition work.

Although the manual is primarily intended to support credential evaluators of the ENIC-NARIC Networks, the manual makes the recognition procedures transparent to all stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in recognition: credential evaluators, higher education institutions' staff working with recognition matters such as admissions officers, students, and policy officers.

In general, the purpose of the EAR manual is to establish a common platform of fair recognition based on the principles and procedures in the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the supporting subsidiary texts adopted in the framework of the convention. In practical terms, the manual aims to create more clarity regarding recognition practices in all European countries and to contribute to a joint recognition area of higher education, in which all European countries practice a similar methodology in the recognition of qualifications, based on commonly agreed standards and guidelines. A more harmonised and transparent recognition practice is essential for student mobility in Europe and as such plays a key role in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). This is also true for the global dimension of the Bologna Process, for which the recognition of qualifications has been identified as a key area of co-operation.

Background

The first version was originally published in 2012. The rationale was to create a manual providing a single translation of the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC, see also below) followed upon developments in the previous decades.

At the time, there were three major developments that worked as a catalyst for developments in recognition, and with a few additions, this framework still stands. The first was the creation
of the National Academic Recognition and Information Centres (NARIC) network by the European Commission in 1984 and the European National Information Centres (ENIC) network by the Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES, in 1994. These networks have played a key role in keeping alive a continuous dialogue and to work together towards tackling recognition issues on the European level in numerous projects, working groups, conferences and annual meetings.

A second major milestone was the creation of an international ‘legal’ framework, the LRC or “Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region”, as it is called in full, established in 1997 by the Council of Europe and UNESCO, which became effective on 1 February 1999. Under this convention, an Intergovernmental Committee was established with a mandate to make decisions on behalf of the parties to the LRC. Since 1999, this Committee has adopted various recommendations. By now almost all countries of the Council of Europe have ratified the Convention and within the networks, the LRC is widely considered to form the basis for all recognition procedures.

Lastly, the Bologna Process which was initiated in 1999, has played a major role in placing the issue of recognition on the European agenda, with recognition being considered essential to creating the European Higher Education Area. Within the Bologna Process, the LRC is being regarded as the main international legal text that aims to further the fair recognition of qualifications concerning higher education in the European Region. The Bologna Process has led to many initiatives to improve transparency and recognition of qualifications, one of the most recent of which has been the establishment of the Bologna Working Group on Recognition.

Despite all the important work undertaken and the progress that had been made, one of the major obstacles that remained in 2009, was the divergence of recognition practices among the different countries. In other words, while there was a general consensus on what should be done, this good practice was either interpreted differently or not always implemented. A team of ENIC-NARIC centres aimed to fill this void by developing a recognition manual for all ENIC-NARICs translating the legal principles of the LRC into practice, using all good practice developed.

At time of the first publication of the EAR manual, it was a new and innovative tool: there had been various research projects, suggestions and agreements in the past on the different aspects and issues of recognition, but there had never been one general recognition manual, combining all the efforts of past results and setting clear and uniform standards for recognition practice.
To this day, the EAR manual serves various purposes: as a starting point for policy makers in order to review and improve national regulations, as a manual for credential evaluators and as an informative tool for foreign students, higher education institutions and other stakeholders. It serves to tackle this differences in recognition practices, by bringing together all the major recommendations of the last decades into one single manual, which focuses on the daily application of good practice.

In 2012 the use of the manual was adopted by the Ministers of Education from the European Higher Education Area, and included in the EHEA Bucharest Communiqué:

“We welcome the European Area of Recognition (EAR) Manual and recommend its use as a set of guidelines for recognition of foreign qualifications and a compendium of good practices”.

The first edition of the EAR manual proved to be a very useful tool for many ENIC-NARIC centres and a reference point for discussions on recognition in the ENIC-NARIC Networks. Since its publication, three editions of the manual have been published for higher education institutions. Now over 10 years after its publication, improved practices as well as many new developments in higher education in Europe, have created a need for a revised edition of the original EAR manual.

**Structure of the manual**

This second edition has been restructured and new information has been added to improve the manual’s practical use further. The manual is divided into different parts, including a set of chapters. Part 1 deals with an introduction to recognition, followed by part 2 which covers the essence of the evaluation process. Part 3 follows with qualifications obtained in specific situations and different education paths. Part 4 deals with information instruments and part 5 with recognition practices in the ENIC-NARIC office.

The first chapter is a schematic outline of the recognition procedure. All chapters in parts 2, 3 and 4, which deal with the recognition process, are structured similarly. Each of the chapters starts with a summary of the recommendations in a flow chart, followed by an introduction of the topic. The core
of each chapter is the recommendation on how to deal with the topic, with illustrations and examples for each step of the recommendation. At the end of each chapter the sources on which the recommendation is based are provided, including the relevant Articles of the Criteria and Procedures (RCP) of the LRC and for some topics a reference for further reading. The manual also includes a glossary of terms and a list of sources used in this manual.

**Methodology**

The content of the EAR manual is based on the LRC subsidiary texts, namely Criteria and Procedures in the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and its explanatory memorandum. Furthermore, each chapter draws on recommendations from selected sources, including international recommendations, results of projects, working groups and studies carried out within the ENIC-NARIC Networks and studies by recognition experts as well as other subsidiary texts to the LRC such as “Recommendation on the recognition of refugees’ qualifications” and “The recommendation on the use of qualifications frameworks in the recognition of foreign qualifications.”

The manual has gone through various rounds of testing. It has been tried out within the offices of the project team and within the ENIC-NARIC networks at board meetings, conferences and through an extensive questionnaire. Throughout the EAR project there has been close cooperation with the experts of the Bologna Follow Up Group on Recognition for advice and synergies. Unique about the EAR manual is that all recommendations have been consulted with the networks, and therefore the manual presents one agreed upon translation how to apply the principles of the LRC in practice.

**Rights**

No rights may be derived from the EAR Manual, since not all recommendations are followed by all competent recognition offices due to different mandates and remits.
Part 1. Introduction to recognition
This chapter provides an overview of the recognition structure established under the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

The Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC)

The Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) forms the basis of and sets standards for recognition procedures in the European region. The LRC is a treaty between states by which the parties and the competent authorities of each party undertake to fulfil the obligations (principles and procedures) specified in the treaty with respect to other parties to the treaty. The term competent authorities refers to ENIC-NARICs but also other entities responsible for recognition decisions, notably higher education institutions, which consequently are bound to follow the principles as formulated in the LRC.

The LRC lays down the fundamental principles of the fair recognition of qualifications and periods of study. The convention stresses that the burden of proof lies with the receiving institution and not with the applicant, meaning that the responsibility of demonstrating that a foreign qualification does not fulfil the relevant requirements for full recognition lies with the competent recognition authority responsible for the assessment. Furthermore, the LRC requires that each recognition authority shall recognise foreign qualifications unless it can show that there are substantial differences between the foreign qualification for which recognition is sought and the corresponding qualification of the host country. Another important principle established in the LRC is that the assessments of foreign qualifications by competent recognition authorities should be made “within reasonable time”.

The Convention was adopted and opened for signatures in Lisbon on April 11th 1997. Almost all member states of the Council of Europe as well as some countries in the UNESCO European Region have signed and/or ratified the Council of Europe/UNESCO ‘Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region’.

In the years following the adoption of the LRC subsidiary texts were added to give more detailed recommendations and to serve as guidance for institutions and credential evaluators.

The main subsidiary texts are:

- Recommendation on international access qualifications (1999);
- Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures on the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and Explanatory Memorandum (2001, revised 2010);
- Recommendation on the use of qualifications frameworks in the recognition of foreign qualifications (2013);
- Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees and Explanatory Memorandum (2004, revised 2016);
Two bodies are responsible for the governance of the Convention: the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee (LRCC) and the LRCC Bureau (LRCCB).

The LRCC
The LRCC (in full “Committee of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region”) is charged with overseeing, promoting and facilitating the implementation of the LRC.

The LRCC is an intergovernmental board, composed of delegates from each State Party to the LRC. Representatives of governmental and non-governmental organisations may also be invited to attend LRCC meetings as observers. The LRCC meets in ordinary session at least every three years. The LRCC reports to UNESCO and the Council of Europe, in their role as Co-Secretariat of the LRC. The LRCC may, with a majority of the Parties, adopt recommendations, declarations, protocols and models of good practice to guide the competent authorities of the Parties in their implementation of the LRC and in their consideration of applications for the recognition of higher education qualifications.

The LRCCB
The LRCC Bureau was established by the LRCC, in close collaboration with UNESCO and the Council of Europe, in their role as a Co-Secretariat of the LRC. The LRCCB provides advice to the LRCC on issues related to the implementation and monitoring of the LRC. To that end, the LRCCB:

- drafts recommendations, declarations, protocols and models of good practice that are submitted to the LRCC for adoption. These aim to support LRC implementation;
- conducts monitoring exercises on LRC implementation by Parties to formulate recommendations to the LRCC, based on the findings.

The LRCC Bureau is composed of elected representatives of a Ministry or another body from a Party to the LRC. It is composed of a President, a first and second Vice-President, and a Rapporteur. Each position can be held for two terms. Elected representatives serve on a voluntary basis. The Secretariats of the LRCCB are the Council of Europe and UNESCO.
The ENIC-NARIC centres

In the European region there are two networks of national recognition information centres that were established to facilitate recognition: the ENIC and NARIC networks. The ENIC-NARIC centres are the national contact points for anyone with questions regarding the recognition of qualifications.

The ENIC network
The European Network of Information Centres (ENIC) was established by the Council of Europe and UNESCO in 1994. Its purpose was to develop policy and practice for the recognition of qualifications. The ENIC Network fulfils this function by providing information on foreign qualifications, education systems, mobility schemes and recognition of foreign awards. The ENIC Network formed the basis for the development of the LRC. Under the LRC the ENIC Network and has a treaty task to support the implementation of the Convention. The Network consists of the national information centres of the LRC signatory countries. It cooperates closely with the NARIC Network.

The NARIC network
The Network of National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC) is an initiative established by the European Commission. The network was created in 1984 to improve the recognition of academic diplomas and periods of study in the Member States of the European Union (EU). It also includes the European Economic Area (EEA) countries and additionally Erasmus+ programme countries. All member countries have designated national centres. The purpose of these national centres is to assist in promoting the mobility of students, teachers and researchers by providing advice and information concerning academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study. The main users of this service include higher education institutions, competent recognition authorities, students and their advisers, parents, teachers and prospective employers.

The ENIC and NARIC networks - although formally separate networks - work closely together. In countries (or parts thereof) that belong to both networks, one single centre represents both networks. Both networks have joint List Serves. These are email lists for different topics via which information is shared and expertise exchanged. The Networks organise a joint annual meeting for representatives of all ENIC and NARIC offices.

Governance
The governance of the ENIC and NARIC Networks is supported by two consultative and coordinative bodies. The ENIC Bureau (EB) and the NARIC Advisory Board (NAB) and ELCORE each with separate functions.
The ENIC Bureau (EB) was established by the ENIC Network, in close collaboration with UNESCO and the Council of Europe, in their role as Co-Secretariat of the LRC. Meanwhile, the NARIC Advisory Board (NAB) was established by the NARIC Network, under the European Commission. The EB/NAB reports to the ENIC and NARIC Networks. The EB/NAB have a joint workplan which outlines the priorities, goals and activities for collaboration in the Networks.

The EB/NAB is elected bi-annually by the Networks and consist of experts from ENIC-NARIC centres who contribute on a voluntary basis. Each expert can serve for two terms for one position. The NAB has three times one position. The EB consists of two Vice-Presidents and one President. The ENIC President represents the cooperation mechanism that is the ENIC-NARIC Networks.

The ELCORE Working Group is the Working Party on Electronic Communication for Recognition. It is a structure supported by the Council of Europe, and reports to the EB/NAB. ELCORE provides advice on issues related to the electronic provision of information concerning the LRC. ELCORE is responsible for the ListServ. Its members contribute on voluntary basis.
Geographic overview ENIC-NARIC networks
Tasks
The ENIC-NARICs are designated by the Ministries of Education, or by other authorities performing similar functions, in their country. While they are all ENIC-NARIC centres, the status and scope of responsibilities of individual ENIC-NARIC centres may differ. As a result each ENIC-NARIC may vary in aspects such as remit and scope of services offered, staff size and legal status. The centres’ tasks, activities, resources and expertise are described in the “Joint ENIC-NARIC charter of activities and services”.

Contact details for all ENIC-NARIC centres are provided on: www.enic-naric.net. There you can also find additional information on recognition, including relevant documents such as the LRC.

Global Convention
In November 2019, the Global Convention on Higher Education was adopted by UNESCO’s General Conference. The Global Convention creates a framework for fair, transparent and non-discriminatory recognition of higher education qualifications. The novelty of the Convention is that it opens up opportunities for inter-regional academic mobility on a global scale, and puts into place universal principles for improving recognition practices between regions. The Convention entered into force on 5 March 2023 in line with its article XVIII after 20 countries joined the Convention.

With the Global Convention, there are now two legal frameworks for the ENIC-NARIC centres: the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the Global Convention. In principle, the Global Convention follows the same principles as the LRC and therefore both can easily co-exist. The LRC applies to the LRC region, and the Global Convention beyond. It is expected that good practice in recognition developed in the framework of the LRC can also be applied to interregional mobility and recognition.

UNESCO will be the secretariat of the Convention, ensuring and monitoring the implementation of the Convention’s text, in an “Intergovernmental Conference of Parties”. This body will meet every two years and will provide guidance (recommendations, guidelines and good practices) to the countries which have committed to the Convention (“State party”), and therefore have to follow the obligations established in its text.

The Global Convention will also provide platforms for national authorities to collaborate across borders and regions to develop better tools and practices for the recognition of higher education qualifications.
2 The five elements of a qualification

The core of the evaluation process is to consider the five elements of a qualification and determine whether the applicant will succeed in the purpose for which recognition is sought, or whether there is a substantial difference that may prevent the applicant from (fully) succeeding.

This chapter provides an overview of these five elements: quality, level, workload, profile and learning outcomes.

Introduction

Five parameters are required to define a qualification: quality, level, workload, profile, and learning outcomes. Although there is overlap between the concepts, all have relevance and need to be considered when assessing a qualification, especially in establishing whether there are substantial differences between the foreign qualification and the required one (see chapter 11 “Substantial Differences”).

Comprehension of the five elements also plays an important role in understanding the concept of automatic recognition (see chapter 14 “Automatic recognition”).

1 - Quality

A qualification is awarded upon successful completion of an education programme. Quality of the qualification therefore refers to the quality of the programme offered and the grades obtained, and in a broader sense the status of the institution in the national context (see chapter 5, “Accreditation and Quality Assurance (status of the institution)”).

The concept of quality is applied to academic programmes in three ways:

1. External quality assurance: the programme and the associated institutional support structures may have been subject to external quality assurance (QA) procedures. Quality assurance is seen as essential for building trust in higher education qualifications, institutions and systems.
2. Grades obtained by the student through the internal assessment of the quality of the learning outcomes achieved by the student;
3. A higher education institution, a constituent department or school may be ranked nationally or globally. The value of this indicator is discussed below.
Rankings
Using rankings to determine the quality of the institution and of the qualification is not recommended as good practice by recognition experts for at least the following reasons:
- Most rankings are strongly biased towards research performance, and do not necessarily reflect the quality of educational programmes;
- Rankings have no direct links to learning outcomes obtained by individual students;
- Ranking lists usually only contain a few hundred institutions, which means that at least 97% of the world’s higher education institutions are not covered by rankings. This severely limits the use of rankings in comparing qualifications. The indicators used are not always objective and may contain flaws.

“More information about quality can be found in chapter 5, “Accreditation and Quality Assurance”, chapter 10, “Credits, grades, credit accumulation and credit transfer”.

2 - Level of a Qualification
The level of a qualification refers to the level on which the qualification is placed in the national education system. In the European region, the majority of qualifications is referenced to a national qualification framework. In this context, the “level” of a qualification refers to where it is placed in the national qualifications framework (NQF).

Qualifications and NQF’s may also be referenced/linked to an overarching qualifications framework, such as the European Higher Education Area Qualifications Framework (EHEA-QF) or the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), which facilitate comparison between different national frameworks.

For higher education, three such levels (bachelor’s, master’s and doctorate) are now commonly used, which are referred to as cycle 1, cycle 2 and cycle 3 respectively in the EHEA-QF and levels 6, 7, and 8 in the EQF. In addition, the EHEA framework has the distinct short cycle, which is referenced to different levels (i.e. 5 and 6) in different countries. A general set of level descriptors is also defined for both qualifications frameworks.
Example 2.1: EQF Descriptors
The EQF consists of eight levels. Each of these levels is described in terms of knowledge, skills and competences.
For the bachelor level (6), the general descriptors are:

Knowledge: Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles;

Skills: Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialized field of work or study;

Competence: Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts. Take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups.

However, given the relatively recent adoption of the three-cycle model in Europe, not all qualifications are linked to these levels.

Although the overarching European qualifications frameworks have three main levels for higher education qualifications, and a level for short cycle qualifications, there may be extra levels or subdivisions in the national qualifications frameworks of individual countries. For instance, bachelor honours degrees and ordinary bachelor’s degrees may have separate levels in the NQF (with different level descriptors), but they map onto the same level in the EQF (level 6). Taught master’s programmes may differ from research oriented master’s programmes.

In general, the descriptors associated with (or implied by) the applicant’s qualification should correspond to the level descriptors in your system that would allow access to a given programme.

See for more information chapter 21, “Qualification Frameworks”.

3 - Workload
Student workload is a quantitative measure (in hours) of learning activities, calculated in different ways in different systems.

The workload of a qualification within one system may vary from subject to subject, especially when a subject requires practical experience. Workload may also vary depending on the level of a qualification.
In terms of the LRC, this variability means that it is not appropriate to insist on a fixed number of hours, years or credits for recognition of a qualification. Workload should be considered one of the elements of a qualification that play a role in achieving the learning outcomes (see element 5 below) of the qualification.

**Credits**
The time to acquire a given qualification is often measured in academic years and a certain number of credits is assigned to one academic year. Each credit is then associated with a student workload. Credits are usually awarded on satisfactory completion of a course module. Credits must also be accumulated, with a student gaining an appropriate number of credits at all levels within the programme for the qualification to be awarded.

**Example 2.2: Different types of workload - defined versus notional**
A taught master’s may have a defined workload whilst a PhD undertaken mainly by research may have a notional workload.

Credits represent the defined workload of a student in a study programme and comprise the required number of contact hours/lecture with or without self-study.

A research qualification like a PhD, which comprises research and a thesis, does not have a coursework component with defined credits. In this case, the workload can only be expressed in terms of a notional (i.e. expected) workload which will differ per student.

The variations in workload between education systems should be dealt with in a flexible way and accepted for achieving the learning outcomes.

**Example 2.3: ECTS and the ECTS Users Guide**
The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is a tool of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) for making studies and courses more transparent.

In Europe 60 ECTS = 1 full-time year’s study. The ECTS Users’ Guide of 2015 suggests a median figure of 1500-1800 hours per academic year, or about 25 hours per ECTS.

Workload should include the total student experience (in the classroom, fieldwork, workplace experience, time spent on reading or assignments or assessment etc.) and not just formal classroom or contact hours.
4 - Profile

The concept of a qualification profile has been used in various ways, either to describe the general purpose or content of the programme. Typical aspects of the qualification profile that are relevant for the recognition process are:

- The programme may be research oriented preparing the student for further academic study, or have a more applied, practical orientation to prepare the student for the labour market. In practice, virtually all higher education programmes are aimed at providing a combination of both types of skills. In higher education systems with a clear distinction between research universities and universities of applied sciences (binary systems), these two types of profiles may be distinguished more easily.

- Broad or specialized focus: the programme may cover a wide range of subjects (liberal arts education) or consist primarily of subjects that are all related to a particular field of study (e.g., biochemistry). In practice, there will be many variations of broad and single-focus programmes.

- The programme may be multi-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary, or mono-disciplinary. In the first two cases, the programme combines two or more subject areas and may have a specialisation which is in-between these areas, like a double major or major-minor combination.

Example 2.4: Using the profile of a qualification in recognition

The entry requirements for admission to a particular programme for applicants with a foreign qualification may be expressed in terms of a qualification profile (e.g., ‘a specialised bachelor’s programme in business studies with a professional orientation’). In that case, all qualifications that are in line with this profile (and that also fulfill the other criteria such as authenticity and accreditation status) can easily be recognised. Qualifications that do not fit this profile may be inspected more closely, to find out whether the learning outcomes sufficiently match the requirements. Depending on the requirements of the programme, a very specific profile or a whole range of profiles (e.g., ‘a bachelor in engineering, chemistry, physics or biology’) may be formulated. By using the qualification profile in this way, the evaluation process may be expedited up and unnecessary checks may be avoided.

The Diploma Supplement allows institutions to provide more information on the programme’s profile (see chapter 20, “Diploma Supplement (and other information tools)”.

5 - Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes are what a student is expected to know, understand and be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning.

The concept of learning outcomes can be understood in two ways. First, it can be an actual statement and may be written for a single module or programme component, a complete specific programme, a qualification level, or anything in between. There are various systems for writing learning outcomes and linking them to levels within national and overarching qualifications frameworks.

Secondly, learning outcomes can be understood in a broader sense and constructed on the basis of the other four elements (quality, level, workload and profile). This approach of learning outcomes is useful in the event that written statements are not available.

More information about learning outcomes can be found in chapter 9, “Learning Outcomes”.

Sources and references

- Bergan, S., Qualifications – Introduction to a concept, Council of Europe 2007.
- EHEA. Qualifications Frameworks.
- European Commission, Europass. Description of the eight EQF levels (website).

Relevant Articles RCP

36. Qualifications of approximately equal level may show considerable differences in terms of content, profile and learning outcomes. In the assessment of foreign qualifications, these differences should be considered in a flexible way, and only substantial differences in view of the purpose for which recognition is sought (e.g. academic or de facto professional recognition) should lead to partial recognition or non-recognition of the foreign qualifications.

37. Recognition of foreign qualifications should be granted unless a substantial difference can be demonstrated between the qualification for which recognition is requested and the
relevant qualification of the State in which recognition is sought. In applying this principle, the assessment should seek to establish whether:

a. the differences in learning outcomes between the foreign qualification and the relevant qualification of the country in which recognition is sought are too substantial to allow the recognition of the foreign qualification as requested by the applicant. If so, the assessment should seek to establish whether alternative, partial and/or conditional recognition may be granted;

b. the differences in access to further activities (such as further study, research activities, the exercise of gainful employment) between the foreign qualification and the relevant qualification of the country in which recognition is sought are too substantial to allow the recognition of the foreign qualification as requested by the applicant. If so, the assessment should seek to establish whether alternative, partial and/or conditional recognition may be granted;

c. the differences in key elements of the programme(s) leading to the qualification in comparison to the programme(s) leading to the relevant qualification of the country in which recognition is sought are too substantial to allow the recognition of the foreign qualification as requested by the applicant. If so, the assessment should seek to establish whether alternative, partial and/or conditional recognition may be granted. The comparability of programme elements should, however, be analysed only with a view to the comparability of outcomes and access to further activities, and not as a necessary condition for recognition in their own right;

d. competent recognition authorities can document that the differences in the quality of the programme and/or institution at which the qualification was awarded in relation to the quality of the programmes and/or institutions granting the similar qualification in terms of which recognition is sought are too substantial to allow the recognition of the foreign qualification as requested by the applicant. If so, the assessment should seek to establish whether alternative, partial and/or conditional recognition may be granted.
38. Where formal rights attach to a certain foreign qualification in the home country, the qualification should be evaluated with a view to giving the holder comparable formal rights in the host country, in so far as these exist and they arise from the learning outcomes certified by the qualification.

40. Competent recognition authorities should be encouraged to focus on the learning outcomes, as well as the quality of the delivery of an educational programme and to consider its duration as merely one indication of the level of achievement reached at the end of the programme. The assessment process should acknowledge that recognition of prior learning, credit transfer, different forms of access to higher education, joint degrees and life-long learning will all shorten the duration of some academic qualifications without diminishing the learning outcomes and a decision not to grant recognition should not be motivated by duration alone.

41. The assessment of a foreign qualification should focus on the qualification for which recognition is sought. Previous levels of education should be considered only where these levels have a serious bearing on the outcome of the assessment and should, as far as possible, be limited to qualifications of a level immediately preceding the qualification for which recognition is sought.

42. In undertaking the assessment, the competent recognition authority should apply their know-how and best professional skills and take note of all relevant published information. Where adequate information on the learning outcomes is available, this should take precedence in the assessment over consideration of the education programme which has led to the qualification.
3 Schematic outline of the recommended procedure for the assessment of foreign qualifications

In this chapter, a schematic outline is presented of the recommended procedure for the assessment of foreign qualifications or periods of study. The outline is intended as a summary checklist. In practice, the sequence of the steps outlined may vary, or several steps may be taken simultaneously.

**Step 1: Information & receipt**

1. Provide information on recognition and appeal procedure to applicant through website
2. Receive application or inquiry from applicant
3. Send acknowledgement of receipt to applicant

Proceed to step 2

**Step 2: Verification of completeness of file**

Ask applicant to complete file

File complete?

Refugees with undocumented qualifications?

Procedure chapter 13: Refugees

*Related Topic: Chapter 22: Transparency & information provision*
Step 3: Verification of institution and/or programme*

- Procedure chapter 5: Accreditation and Quality Assurance (status of the institution)

Is the institution/programme authorised to award qualifications for academic and professional purposes in the home country?

- Yes
- No

Consider the following:

- File requirements (Chapter 4)
- Diploma and Accreditation Mills (Chapter 6)
- Refugees (Chapter 13)
- Automatic recognition (Chapter 14)
- Qualifications Awarded After Flexible Learning (Chapter 15)
- Transnational education (Chapter 16)
- Qualifications awarded by joint programmes (Chapter 17)
- Non-country specific qualifications (international degrees) (Chapter 18)
- Non-recognised but legitimate institutions (Chapter 19)

Accreditation or diploma mills expected?

- No
- Yes

*Related Topic Chapter 5. Accreditation and Quality Assurance (status of the institution)

Step 4: Verification of documents

- Procedure chapter 4: File requirements, and chapter 7: Authenticity

Are applicant’s qualifications and documents authentic and rightfully issued?

- Yes
- No

*Proceed to step 5
*Go to step 7
**Step 5: Assessment of the qualifications**

- **Determine purpose for which recognition is sought**
  - procedure chapter 8
- **Determine if formal regulations exist**
- **Automatic Recognition**

**Examine the 5 aspects of the qualification***

1. **level**
   - procedure chapter 5
2. **workload**
3. **quality of the program or institution at which the qualification was obtained**
   - procedure chapter 5
4. **profile of the program or institution at which the qualification was obtained**
5. **Learning outcomes of the program that lead to applicant’s qualification**
   - procedure chapter 9

- **Determine if there are substantial differences**
  - procedure chapter 11
- **Procedure chapter 20: Diploma supplement (and other information tools)**
- **Information and advise for other ENICs, HEI’s or other sources**
- **Document of information**

**Proceed to step 6**

*Introduction chapter 2: The five elements of a qualification, and procedure chapter 21: qualification frameworks*
Step 6: Outcomes of assessment

- **Substantial differences**
  - **NO** → Full recognition
  - **YES** → Procedure chapter 12: alternative recognition and the right to appeal
    - **Alternative recognition**
      - **YES** → Partial recognition
      - **NO** → Conditional recognition
        - **YES** → Describe the substantial differences together with information on alternative, partial, or conditional recognition
        - **NO** → Proceed to Step 7

Step 7: Communication of the result of the procedure

- Inform applicant of decision
  - Does applicant appeal to the denial of recognition?
    - **NO** → Full recognition of qualification
    - **YES** → Partial recognition of qualification
  - Does applicant appeal to partial recognition?
    - **NO** → Qualification not recognised
    - **YES** → Procedure chapter 12: Alternative recognition and the right to appeal
      - Appeal successful?
        - **MAYBE** → Continue
        - **NO** → Continue
Part 2. The evaluation process

Part II discusses in chronological order the main aspects of the evaluation process.
This chapter focuses on file requirements for the application.

**Procedure file requirements**

1. **Determine which documents are required by applicant.**
   - See chapter 22: Transparency and information provision

2. **Ask applicant to complete the file.**

3. **Is the application complete?**
   - **NO**
     - **Refugees with undocumented qualifications?**
       - **YES**
         - **Use the procedure in chapter 13: Refugees**
       - **NO**
         - **Continue evaluation once file is complete**
   - **YES**
     - **Continue evaluation once file is complete**
Introduction

The evaluation of a foreign qualification is done on the basis of supporting documents from the applicant. Therefore, it is important for competent authorities in charge of recognition decisions to be transparent towards applicants and communicate document requirements (see also chapter 22: “Transparency and information provision”). In addition, to ensure fairness and efficiency, it is important to check if the file is complete when starting the evaluation process.

Two elements are important in regards to file requirements:
- the purpose for which recognition is sought;
- the documentation that provides the information to evaluate if the applicants is likely to succeed in the goal recognition is sought for.

Which documents are required depends on the country in question (e.g. academic transcripts for the US) and/or on the purpose of the evaluation (e.g. professional registration for professional recognition).

Note that student data is increasingly being provided in a digital format. It is necessary to be kept up to date of these developments and have a flexible approach regarding the student data you may receive (see chapter 24, “Digital student data and digital processes”).

Recommendations

1. Determine which documents are required from the applicant and make this information publicly available to prospective applicant(s), i.e. via the website (see also chapter 22, “Transparency and information provision”).

NB: Clearly specify any requirements regarding the documents:

a. Quality: if you only accept high-resolution digital copies in color, which helps to verify the necessary elements of the document;

b. Language requirements: ask for original language documents and where necessary for certified translations;

c. Identification: information on how applicants need to identify themselves.

Note: all documents should be handled securely to ensure the protection of personal data of the applicants. This could include, but should not be limited to, restricting internal access to the documents within your organisation, not releasing any personal data to third parties (including the
awarding institution for the purposes of verification) without written consent of the applicant, and redacting personal data from documents when storing them for future reference.

Example 4.1: List of required documents
Required documents may include:

- Application form including the purpose for which recognition is sought;
- All qualifications obtained after primary education;
- Original or certified copies of qualifications;
- Transcript, diploma supplement, marksheets;
- Certified translation;
- Identification;
- Any language tests;
- Consent of the applicant to release personal data for verification purposes.

This list should be detailed per country.

Example 4.2: Digital student data
An applicant submits their diploma in a digital format, free of charge. This format is not listed on your website, however the source and the data seem legitimate. The competent authority includes the data as part of the process and may examine authenticity later.

2. Check if the application file is complete. In case documents are missing, ask the applicant for a complete set.

NB: If the applicant is a displaced person or a person in a refugee-like situation with missing documentation, use the procedure detailed in chapter 13: “Refugees”.

3. Continue with the evaluation once the file is complete.

Relevant Articles RCP

15. The competent recognition authorities should publish standardised information on the procedures and criteria for the assessment of foreign qualifications concerning higher education. This information should automatically be given to all applicants as well as to persons making preliminary enquiries about the assessment of their foreign qualifications.

16. The time normally required should be specified to applicants to process recognition applications. This should be calculated from the time when all relevant information has been provided by applicants and/or higher education institutions. In the event that the recognition process is delayed, the applicant should be informed of the delay, the reason for it and notified of a
date when a decision can be expected. Applications should be processed as promptly as possible, and the time of processing should not exceed four months.

17. Competent recognition authorities should provide advice to individuals enquiring about the possibilities and procedures for submitting formal applications for the recognition or assessment of their foreign qualifications. As appropriate and if required in the best interests, advice should also be provided during as well as after the formal assessment of the applicants’ qualifications.

18. Competent recognition authorities should draw up an inventory of typical recognition cases and/or a comparative overview of other education systems or qualifications in relation to that of their own country as an aid in making recognition decisions consistent. They should consider whether this information could be made available to applicants with the provision that this information serves only as an indicative guide, and that each application will be assessed on an individual basis.

19. The responsibility for providing information on the qualification for which recognition is sought is shared by applicants, higher education institutions at which the qualifications in question were awarded and the competent recognition authority undertaking the assessment as specified in the Lisbon Recognition Convention, in particular in Articles III.3 and III.4.

Higher education institutions are strongly encouraged to issue a Diploma Supplement in order to facilitate the assessment of the qualifications concerned.
5 Accreditation and Quality Assurance (status of the institution)

This chapter uses the concepts of accreditation and quality assurance as an integral part of the recognition process and accepts the outcomes of such procedures as sufficient evidence for the quality of a higher education programme or institution.

Procedure accreditation and quality assurance (status of the institution)

1. Check accreditation status
2. Accept outcomes of foreign accreditation system
   - Accredited on awarding date qualification?
     - YES
     - Continue evaluation
     - NO
     - Partial recognition
       - Non-recognised but legitimate institutions.
       - See procedure chapter 19
       - Recognition of prior learning
       - Stop evaluation process, deny recognition, inform applicant

Authorities involved
Terminology used
Legislation
Accreditation process
Programme focus or institution
Levels and education covered by accreditation/recognition
Introduction

A foreign qualification can only be properly evaluated when taking into account the official status of the institution awarding the qualification and/or the programme studied. In other words, the credential evaluator should establish whether the institution is authorised to award qualifications which are accepted for academic and professional purposes in the home country, or, where applicable, if the programme is accredited. The fact that an institution and/or programme is recognised or accredited indicates that the qualification in question has undergone an appropriate minimum level of quality assurance in that particular country.

Depending on the country, different terms may be used in reference to the status of the institution or programme. The two most common are “recognition” and “accreditation”. They are often used interchangeably, but they are not synonyms.

Quality Assurance (QA) is a cornerstone of a country’s regulation of its education. QA in higher education includes the policies, procedures and practices that are designed to achieve, maintain, or enhance the quality of an institution and/or a programme. QA is carried out in different ways depending on the regulatory framework in the country. In the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) provide the framework for quality assurance and accreditation.

When evaluating a foreign qualification, the key element for a credential evaluator is to check the status of the institutions (i.e. recognition and licensing) and whether the programme and/or institution has undergone the appropriate form of QA for that country - that is that the programme and/or institution are officially recognised in the awarding country. Below the most common forms of status and quality assurance of a programme/institution are described, but one should always be aware that there might be other paths as well.

Information about the status
Information about the status of the institution provided on documentation should always be cross-referenced with other official sources outside the awarding institution.

Always make sure that the source of information is official and up to date, as educational systems often change and so does the status of an institution and/or programme. Additionally, check whether the author of the publication has adequate expertise in the field.
At the end of this chapter a list with examples of external sources is included. However, competent authorities are advised to keep their own updated lists of information resources at all times.

If the requested information cannot be found in the available resources, contact the competent authority in a given country, such as the ENIC-NARIC centre, the Ministry of Education, the accreditation agency, or the awarding institution.

**Recognition** refers to an official status granted by national legislation. Higher education is governed by national or regional legislation in most countries. Laws on higher education lay down the framework for the system as a whole, stipulate general criteria that have to be met, define policies and procedures that should be in place and bestow official, degree-granting authority on institutions, both public and private. Institutions that fulfil the requirements set in national legislation and have official degree-granting authority are considered to be recognised, though a different term may be used. Examples of terminology include “accredited”, “recognised”, “validated”, “registered”, “chartered”, and “approved”.

**Licensing.** In some countries institutions are initially granted a permit or license to operate as an educational entity (possibly for a limited amount of time while a decision is being reviewed). Licensing is not equivalent to accreditation and does not necessarily require demonstration of quality. To be granted accreditation, a licensed institution must go through the accreditation procedure. It is the accreditation that formally grants the institution the right to award officially recognised qualifications as well as access to public funding. Even so, qualifications awarded in periods where an institution and/or a programme operates under a temporary permit or license should be treated in the same way as fully accredited institutions and/or programmes, since they still belong to the higher education system of the country in question.

**Accreditation** is a formal decision by a recognised authority that an institution and/or programme has met a set of predefined minimum quality standards. It is important to note that in some countries there is only one competent authority that can award accreditation, whereas in other countries there may be several competent authorities that the institution can choose between, for example those which focus on different regions within a country, or have specific competences e.g. based on subject area. This might also include competent authorities that operate out of another country than where the institution is established. In the EHEA, cross-border quality assurance, including accreditation, is facilitated through the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). This is the EHEA's official register of quality assurance agencies that are approved to perform external quality assurance of an institution and/or programme in accordance with the ESG.
There are numerous ways in which accreditation is carried out depending on the legal framework in a country. Accreditation may be granted for an unlimited number of years, subject to systemic periodic reviews, or for a specific number of years after which an institution needs to apply for re-accreditation. Several other examples could have been included, reflecting the diversity of accreditation approaches. The differences in the ways accreditation is applied in different countries may include the level of government involvement.

Documentation provided by the awarding institution

- Qualification/Diploma/Degree. This can show the accreditation status of the institution and/or programme in certain countries;
- Statement/certificate issued as temporary proof of completion (in cases where a qualification is awarded long after the actual end of the study programme);
- Transcript: this may contain information regarding the accreditation status and the name of the accreditation agency;
- Diploma Supplement: Chapters 2.3., 2.4 and 8 of the Diploma Supplement usually contain information about the education system, accreditation and quality assurance system in a given country. For more information, please refer to chapter 20 on the Diploma Supplement.
- Website of the awarding institution.

Official sources outside of the institution

- website of the accreditation/quality assurance bodies;
- website of the ministry of education;
- official national publications regarding the education system.

Recommendations

1. Verify the status of the institution and/or programme through which the qualification was awarded and check whether the institution and/or programme belong to the education system of a given country.

When establishing the status of the awarding institution and/or the programme, consider the following:

a. which authority is involved in the recognition/accreditation process? This could be the Ministry of Education or an independent national or regional accreditation body. Check whether the authority is fully recognised in the system where it operates and the scope of its responsibilities.
Example 5.1: Be familiar with the responsible authority for accreditation
The applicant submits a degree that has been issued by a university you are not familiar with. The degree certificate has an American layout and your impression is that it is issued by an American university. The university website mentions an American address. You know that the authority responsible for the recognition of higher education institutions in the USA is CHEA, but the university is not mentioned in the CHEA database.

The website of the university does not mention CHEA but accreditation by an accreditation body for distance learning. You have your doubts about the accreditation status of this university in the USA. After further investigation you determine that the accreditation body mentioned on the website of the university is in fact an accreditation mill.

Example 5.2: Accreditation by an authority from another country
A credential evaluator is assessing a qualification from country Z. In country Z all higher education institutions must be accredited in order to award degrees. The credential evaluator cannot find the higher education institution on the national accreditation agency’s list of institutions that they have accredited, and contacts the agency to inquire about the status of the institution in question. The national accreditation agency responds that only institutions accredited by them are on their list, but that national legislation allows higher education institutions to choose other accreditation agencies in other countries, as long as they are listed on EQAR. Further investigation shows that the higher education institution has been accredited by an agency in country Y, and that this agency is on the EQAR-list. Thus, the institution is properly accredited, and the degree is valid.
Example 5.3: License to operate
In Singapore private institutions must be registered with the Committee for Private Education to obtain a license to operate and offer education. This registration is not equivalent to recognition or accreditation. These institutions are not recognised, as the CPE does not guarantee the academic quality of the institutions. Since Singapore does not have an accreditation body and only autonomous state higher education institutions are recognised, private institutions in Singapore offer programs in cooperation with recognised foreign institutions who issue the diploma or degree.

b. what terminology is used in a given higher education system with regard to recognition and accreditation, e.g.: “accredited”, “recognised”, “validated”, “registered”, “chartered”, “approved”?

Example 5.4: Differences in terminology
An applicant seeks recognition of his bachelor’s degree and master’s degree taken at different higher education institutions in country X. The credential evaluator checks the status of the programmes and finds out that the bachelor has been taken at a private institution and is listed as “validated”, whereas the master has been taken at a public institution and is listed as “accredited”. Further investigations show that in country X there are separate processes for awarding status to a programme, depending on whether the institution is public or private. Programmes at public institutions are “accredited” and programmes at private institutions are “validated”.
c. is education in the country where the qualification is issued governed by national/regional/local legislation and is its status granted by this legislation?

Example 5.5: National legislation versus accreditation
An applicant seeks recognition of his master’s degree. This qualification was awarded by a publicly recognised higher education institution listed on the website of the country’s Ministry of Education. Both the institution and the programme were established in line with the national legislation on higher education. In this case the competent recognition authority should trust that the awarded qualification represents an accepted level of education and recognise it accordingly.

Example 5.6 National legislation based on a Charter
In some systems, universities were in earlier times recognised and granted the eternal right to operate and confer academic degrees through a Charter, issued by the Pope, the King or Parliament. Examples of chartered universities can be found in the UK (University of London – Royal Charter; University of Glasgow – Papal Bull), but also in Italy (University of Bologna – Papal bull) or France (University of Montpellier – Papal bull).

d. is recognition and/or accreditation granted once or is it a cyclical process? If it is cyclical, which period is covered?

Example 5.7: Accreditation as a cyclical process
Accreditation is a cyclical quality assurance process which is usually repeated every 5 or 6 years. During every cycle, accreditation can be renewed but also be withdrawn. In education systems with a quality assurance system based on programme accreditation, it is therefore important to check whether the study programme was accredited at the time the diploma holder graduated. Examples of education systems with programme accreditation are Germany, Spain and Indonesia. Some education systems show a mixture of institutional recognition for the state sector and programme accreditation for the private sector (e.g. Ethiopia, Australia).
e. is the recognition and/or accreditation system geared towards the recognition/accreditation of institutions or programmes, or both?

Example 5.8: Institutional versus programme accreditation
A credential evaluator assessing a master’s degree has established that the awarding institution was a recognised higher education institution and that in the education system where the qualification was awarded it is not enough that the institution was recognised; the programme has to be accredited as well. The evaluator then checks with the relevant source to make sure the programme was accredited as well.

Example 5.9: Mixture of institutional recognition and programme accreditation
In Ethiopia we see a combination of institutional recognition for the public universities (if the name of the university is on the list, all its programs are recognised) and programme accreditation for the colleges in the private sector. Also in Australian higher education system we see a mixture of different types of institutions: non self-accrediting with programme accreditation and self-accrediting higher education institutions that are exempted from programme accreditation and mainly operate on the basis of internal quality assurance.

f. what levels and type of education does the accreditation/recognition cover, and which applies to the qualification?

2. a. Check whether the institution and/or programme through which the qualification was awarded, was recognised and/or accredited throughout the entire period of study.

The guiding principle is that credential evaluators should rely on the accreditation or quality assurance by competent bodies operating within the legal system, as evidence that an institution or programme complies with minimum quality standards.

Example 5.10: Non-accredited programme
An applicant seeks admission to a master’s programme in business studies and submits a first cycle degree awarded by an institution in country Z. This institution specialises in business studies, offering many short courses and one bachelor’s programme. Country Z has a system of programme accreditation, and the credential evaluator finds that this particular bachelor’s programme lost its accreditation a few years before the degree was awarded to the applicant. This means that the outcomes of the programme are uncertain, so recognition cannot be granted.
Example 5.11: Differences in regulation and legislation between countries

A competent recognition authority in country X receives an application for the assessment of a master's degree awarded by an accredited private institution in country Z. In country X only public higher education can be accredited. The competent authority should, however, trust the accreditation system of country Z and recognise the qualification accordingly.

Some situations will demand further investigation into the more specific nature of the institution and/or the programme. These situations may arise in particular with regard to transnational education, qualifications awarded by joint programmes, non-recognised but legitimate institutions, and with diploma and accreditation mills.

NB: In case of absence of an accreditation system in a country, check if the institution and programme operate within the national legislation.

Example 5.12: Accept a recognised qualification from countries with no accreditation system

An applicant seeks recognition of his master degree in law. This qualification was awarded by a recognised higher education institution listed on the website of the Ministry of Education. Since an accreditation system was not implemented in the country where the degree was obtained, neither the institution nor the programme was accredited. Both the institution and the programme were established in line with the national legislation on higher education. In this case the competent recognition authority should trust that the awarded qualification represents an accepted level of education and recognise it accordingly.

3. Assess if you are able to continue with the evaluation. In case the institution and/or the programme was properly recognised/accredited at the date the qualification was awarded, and/or did operate within the national legal system (step 2 a or 2 b), you can continue with your evaluation.
However, if there is no positive outcome in either 2a or 2b, you have no objective information on the quality of the qualification. This may be considered to be a substantial difference in terms of the LRC. In this case, the following options are available:

- Try to establish whether parts of the programme may be partially recognised (e.g. transfer credits that may have been quality-assured at another higher education institution);
- Try to establish whether the institution is a non-recognised but legitimate institution (see chapter 19, “Non-Recognised but Legitimate Institutions”);
- Refer the applicant to an assessment procedure which might lead to a recognition of prior learning (RPL) certificate that may be (partially) recognised;
- Stop the evaluation process, deny recognition and inform the applicant.

Note that some situations will demand further investigation into the more specific nature of the institution and/or the programme. These situations may arise in particular with regards to transnational education, qualifications awarded by joint programmes, micro-credentials, non-recognised but legitimate institutions and diploma and accreditation mills.

### Information tools

#### Websites of regional recognition networks
- The [ENIC and NARIC Networks](#).
- The [Asia Pacific Academic Recognition Network](#).

#### Databases, publications and websites containing information about national education systems (examples)
- [Anerkennung und Bewertung ausländischer Bildungsnachweise (ANABIN)](#). Assessments of higher educational qualifications, access qualifications and information about grading systems from many countries with the purpose of entering higher education in Germany. Information about recognised institutions. All information is in German.
- [Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR)](#).
- [Eurydice, National education systems (website)](#).
- [Kwalifikator, providing general information about foreign qualifications. Narodowa Agencja Wymiany Akademickiej (NAWA)](#).
- [IAU WHED](#). Unique database providing authoritative information on higher education systems, credentials and institutions worldwide.
- [ISOBAQ](#). Information system on pre-Bologna academic qualifications, National Center for Academic Recognition and Mobility (NACID). (log in required)
■ NOOSR Country Education Profiles. Provides thorough information about educational systems in more than 100 countries and assessment guidelines in comparison to Australian qualifications. Subscription is required. (fee based)
■ NUFFIC country modules. Information about educational systems in more than 90 countries. The country modules provide assessment guidelines in comparison to Dutch qualifications.
■ Organisation de Estados Iberoamericanos, listing education systems in the Latin American region.
■ Swedish Council for Higher Education, Qualifications Assessment Tool.
■ Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI): International Qualifications Database. Advice regarding the comparability of a number of foreign qualifications to qualifications in Ireland.
■ UK Ecctis, Online information database (fee based).
■ UNESCO, Country dossiers.

Websites containing information on national accreditation/quality assurance bodies and associations
■ Association of Specialised & Professional Accreditors (ASPA).
■ Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).
■ European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).
■ European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA).

■ European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).
■ Nationally Recognised Accreditors (U.S. department of education).

Other resources
■ Internet Archives/Wayback Machine: Enables you to access archived websites when you need information on older qualifications, programmes of study, etc. Accessibility depends on whether or not the website has been archived, but can be a very valuable tool.
Sources and references


Relevant Articles RCP

29. In view of the wide diversity of higher education institutions and of the developments in transnational education, the status of a qualification cannot be established without taking into account the status of the institution and/or programme through which the qualification was awarded.

30. The competent recognition authorities should seek to establish whether the higher education institution belongs to the higher education system of a State party to the Lisbon Recognition Convention and/or belonging to the European Region. In the case of qualifications awarded by higher education institutions established through transnational arrangements, the competent recognition authority should analyse these arrangements on the basis of the principles stipulated in the UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education and in the Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees.

31. Where countries have established a quality assurance system including a system of formal assessment of their higher education institutions and programmes, the competent recognition authority should take due account of the results of the process when evaluating qualifications from such systems.
6 Diploma and Accreditation Mills

This chapter introduces diploma and accreditation mills and provides definitions and tips for identifying diploma and accreditation mills and recommends how to deal with diplomas issued by such providers.

**Procedure diploma and accreditation mills**

1. **Examples of diplomas from mills for reference**
   - **Does the issuing institution actually exist?**
   - **YES**
   - **NO**
   - **Diploma Mill**
   - **Refuse recognition and keep example for future reference**

2. **Continue assessment**
   - **YES**
   - **NO**
   - **Is the institution accredited/recognised by appropriate authorities?**
   - **YES**
   - **See procedure chapter 5**
   - **NO**
   - **Is the institution a non-recognised but legitimate institution?**
   - **YES**
   - **See procedure chapter 19**
   - **NO**
   - **Diploma Mill**
   - **Refuse recognition and keep example for future reference**
Introduction

“Diploma Mill” refers to a business posing as an educational institution, which sells bogus qualifications without any requirements for (serious) study, research or examination. Diploma mills operate without any recognition by national competent authorities or lawful accreditation, even though they may possess a license to operate as a business. Usually, they operate online. They remain a serious concern to credential evaluators and recruiters.

“Accreditation mill” refers to a non-recognised, usually non-existent accreditation organisation that claims to provide accreditation without having any authorisation to do so. In many cases accreditation mills are closely associated with diploma mills.

On 3 June 2022 the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted the following definitions:

“A diploma mill” (also known as a “degree mill”) is an institution or organisation which is not recognised by national competent authorities or organisations as an institution accredited or authorised by the law of any member State to confer awards or qualifications, and which purports, by means of misrepresentation, to issue such awards or qualifications.”

“An accreditation mill” is an institution or organisation (in any legal form) which is neither recognised by national competent authorities nor authorised by the law of any member State to provide accreditation for education programmes or awards, and which intends to mislead employers, students or the public. “

Some of the most common characteristics of diploma mills are:

- credits and qualifications are offered based solely on life experience;
- there is a strong emphasis on fees and payment options. You may, for instance, find credit card logos on the website;
- courses may be very short in duration. In some cases, it may be possible to obtain a bachelor's degree in 5 days;
- a long list of “national”, “international” or “worldwide” accreditation agencies and affiliated bodies is mentioned on the website, most of which are not legitimate either;
- no visiting address is provided, only an office suite, or a P.O. box number. Contact details may differ from the claimed location of the institution;
- qualifications offered have unlikely titles;
- the name of the diploma mill is similar to well-known reputable universities;
- little or no interaction with academic staff is required.
Diploma mills often claim to be accredited by bogus accreditation agencies and in many cases the diploma and accreditation mills are owned by the same people. It is important to be aware of the accreditation procedures and quality assurance measurements.

It is imperative that competent authorities refuse to recognise qualifications or credits from diploma mills.

**Recommendations**

1. Check whether the issuing institution(s) actually exists and whether they are accredited and/or appropriately recognised by the competent authority in the country in question;

   **Example 6.1: Check whether the institution exists**
   The applicant submits a bachelor’s degree issued by Cambridge International University. At first glance, you immediately associate the name with the University of Cambridge, but the layout of the documents is different, and the university appears to be based in South Africa. Further research leads you to conclude that you are dealing with a diploma mill, which takes advantage of the name and reputation of a well-known British university.

2. If the programme is not accredited, determine the legitimacy of the provider, and if there is any merit for partial or full recognition;

   **Example 6.2: Accreditation mill**
   The application includes a bachelor’s degree from a university you are not familiar with. The website mentions that the university has offices in different countries and is accredited by an accreditation body you know is not the one responsible for accreditation in the education systems of the countries mentioned on the website. When you check the website of the accreditation body, it mentions a list of the institutions it has accredited, and you recognise some of these institutions as diploma mills. You conclude you are dealing with an accreditation mill.

   **Example 6.3: Provider is a diploma mill**
   You receive a question about the status of University of X, but you cannot find any information about the existence of this institution. There is no institutional website, you cannot find the name in your information resources and databases. On top of the degree certificate is mentioned “United States of America”, which is very unusual for an American qualification. As neither CHEA nor the US Department of Education mentions the institution in their databases, you conclude it is a diploma mill.
3. If you cannot confirm the existence and/or status of the awarding body, check the transcripts and website for some of the features mentioned above that are indicative of diploma mills;

Example 6.4: Check website of diploma mill
You are in doubt whether the bachelor's degree of the applicant originates from a diploma mill. You go to the website of the university and check the images of the faculty staff. You find that the image of faculty leader X is in fact that of professor Y from a renowned university. Further, you discover that some of the other images are stock photos that are also used in websites of diploma mills you are familiar with. When you check the physical address of the university with Google Maps, you find that it seems to be a parking lot located in a busy shopping street, which does not seem to be a realistic location for a university building. You conclude that you are dealing with a diploma mill.

4. Check one of several websites that provide the names of known diploma mills (see sources below). Keep in mind however that no such list is ever complete as new diploma mills appear and old ones change their names constantly;

5. Collect and save examples of qualifications from diploma mills for reference. This helps to become familiar with the common formats and contents of diploma mill qualifications.

Example 6.5: Features indicative of a diploma mill
An applicant has submitted several qualifications for assessment. Following the usual checks into the accreditation status of the awarding institutions, you have identified that the applicant's MBA (Master of Business Administration) has been issued by an institution which is not accredited by the appropriate authorities in the country of origin. A review of the institution's website reveals that no studies are required to obtain a qualification and there is no physical address given for the institution. A further check on the Oregon State list of unaccredited institutions confirms that this institution is a diploma mill. Consequently, the applicant is informed that recognition of the qualification is refused. Details of the institution are then added to an internal list of identified diploma mills to assist other staff.
Sources and references

Links to more information about diploma mills

- General information on diploma mills:
  - CIMEA, CIMEA against the mills. How to spot and counter diploma mills, 2010.
  - CIMEA, FraudS+ Knowledge and awareness of fraud in education: a student perspective, 2022.
- Council of Europe, Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)18 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on countering education fraud (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 13 July 2022 at the 1440th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies), 2022.

Relevant Articles RCP

No articles addressing diploma or accreditation mills directly. The topic is indirectly addressed in article 31 and additional recommendations can be found in article 29 and article 31, and in Bergan S. and E.S. Hunt (eds.), Developing attitudes to recognition: substantial differences in an age of globalisation, Council of Europe 2009, 155.
7 Authenticity

This chapter provides information on the internal and external procedures of verification of documentation submitted by an applicant. It also includes recommendations on how to verify a credential, practical examples, together with a list of country-specific information sources where you can verify documents, and other tools helpful in establishing whether the credential is authentic.
**Procedure authenticity**

1. Check if the qualification and other documents have been issued by the appropriate authority
2. Check whether all official names are correct at the time the qualification was issued:
   - on an institutional level: correct name of the president and the name of the institution
   - on a national level: e.g. correct name of the Ministry of Education or country
3. Check format of qualification (national and institutional)
4. Check appearance: Fonts, lack of stamps, signatures, misalignment, typing errors, etc
5. Check content: Logos, dates, duration, subjects, grading system, etc
6. Check if the institution, programme and/or qualification are accredited or recognised in the issuing country. See procedure chapter 5 and 6
7. Check chronology of submitted documents
8. Check if entry requirements have been met regarding level and grading
9. Check identity of applicant

**Irregularities and/or suspected forgery?**

- **NO**
  - Continue assessment

- **YES**
  - Contact issuing institution to verify credential
  - Contact relevant bodies in issuing country or other recognition centres for their opinion on documents
  - Ask for official transcripts to be sent directly to you through awarding institution or link to digital transcript
  - Submit the original documents for forensic examination
  - Legalisation/ apostille of The Hague
Introduction

Verification refers to a process through which credential evaluators establish the authenticity of documents presented to them and check these to make sure they are not fraudulent. Evaluating the authenticity of credentials is important, since the number of forged qualifications seems to be on the rise. This comes as no surprise considering the value of certain qualifications, the rights attached in terms of immigration, or the opportunities provided in terms of access to employment and further education. On the other hand, it is equally important to be careful not to place applicants under undue scrutiny. Evaluators and competent authorities should assume that documents are genuine unless there is evidence that suggests otherwise. It is advised that verification be carried out by the recognition centre itself whenever possible, as this is often more reliable and faster.

Generally, the most reliable form of verification is external verification at the source. The development of modern communication technologies has made this procedure faster and less costly. In several countries, it is possible to verify the authenticity of the document using a specified link. Several of these links are listed at the end of this chapter under Sources and References. However, expertise available in the evaluator’s office is often sufficient to detect altered and fabricated documents. Additional requirements for the applicant should be set only in exceptional cases.

There are different types of fraudulent documents including:
- fabricated/fake documents;
- altered documents;
- illegitimately issued documents (for instance to persons who have not undertaken the required study and/or examinations for the presented qualification but instead gained the document by means of bribery).

Please note that in addition to the types of fraudulent documents mentioned here, credential evaluators should be aware of diplomas issued by diploma mills, as well as other authenticity issues, such as misleading translations (for more information see chapter 6 “Diploma and Accreditation Mills”).
Recommendations

1. Perform the (online) external verification process:
   
   a. Use a national or institutional online verification database to verify the qualification. Alternatively, you could look for graduates lists published on the institutional website for different years or research repositories at institutional websites to find bachelor and master theses.

   b. Verify any language test result (such as IELTS or TOEFL) online. If these have been tampered with, you could also have doubts about the rest of the application. Doubts about authenticity are usually the result of a combination of factors.

Example 7.1: Use of online verification portals
You receive a qualification from Moldova, which you identify as a Diploma de Baccalaureat. You have never seen this type of qualification before, so you cannot compare it to a verified example and you are not confident that this is indeed an authentic document. Since your office lacks experience with qualifications from Moldova, you visit the web pages of various national bodies for information on the Moldavian system of education and possibilities for verification of credentials. While browsing through the webpage of the Ministry of Education of Moldova, you will come across a link to a website for verification of documents. Thus, you go to https://ctice.md/verif/, you select the option General Education and enter the registration number and series number to verify the name of the certificate holder. A decision can then be made accordingly.
You receive a qualification from Bangladesh, which you identify as a Higher Secondary Certificate. You have never seen this type of qualification before, so you cannot compare it to a verified example, and you are not confident that this is indeed an authentic document. Since your office lacks experience with qualifications from Bangladesh, you visit the web pages of various national bodies for information on the education system and possibilities for verification of credentials. While browsing through the webpage of the education authorities of Bangladesh, you come across a link to a website for online verification of examination results. You proceed to the website http://www.educationboardresults.gov.bd/, select the type of examination, the year, Board and fill in the roll and registration number to verify the name and examination results of the certificate holder. A decision can then be made accordingly.

Example 7.2: Digital transcripts
Digital transcripts will increasingly appear in applications. They are sent through secure links using e.g. blockchain technology and with permission of the student. As the link is valid for a limited period of time and the transcript cannot be printed as it concerns protected data, other ways of storing these student data should be considered. The discussion on secure transfer of digital student data has been initiated by the Groningen Declaration Network.

2. If external verification is not available or results in insufficient information, perform the internal verification process:

a. Check if the qualification (and any other required documents) has been issued by the appropriate authority;

Example 7.3: Check the appropriate authority
Using Nigeria as an example, for the Nigerian West African Senior School Certificate make sure the document has been issued by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) rather than a secondary school and make sure that all the official names on the documents are correct.

b. Check whether all official names are correct at the time the qualification was issued:
   i. On an institutional level: Check whether the name of the president and the name of the institution on the diploma are the correct ones for the year the diploma was issued.
   ii. On a national level: In some countries with many governmental changes, the name of the Ministry of Education might have changed several times or even the name of the country itself (e.g. Eritrea). In an education system where the degrees are formally issued by the king, like Spain, be aware that the name of the former king should no longer be on the degree certificate after his death;
Example 7.4: Check the name of the institution
After a merger or change of status from college to university, an educational institution might change its name. It is suspicious if a diploma appears to be issued under the new name before the name change took place.

c. Check if the format of the documentation is in line with what you can expect from documentation from that country and/or institution. Note that while some countries have a (national) standard format, in others the format of documents may differ depending on the level of the qualification, the institution, or even between different university faculties;

Example 7.5: Standardised registration numbers on diplomas
The long registration numbers on Chinese higher education diplomas (and degree certificates) follow a certain system and consist of different standardised elements. The registration number on the diploma in the application shows some irregularities and therefore you suspect fraud.

Example 7.6: Apostille or legalisation
In some countries, national legislation requires educational documents to be legalized or carry an apostille stamp. If this is the case in the country where a diploma has been issued, check whether the documents have gone through this procedure.

Example 7.7: Name of the degree
The applicant has obtained a Bachelor of Historical Art with Honours. You have never heard of this degree name and after some research you find that the degree name does not exist in the education system of the country where the applicant claims to have studied.

While the use of Apostille is common practice in some countries, note that the LRC Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures (article 25) states that States are encouraged to review any national laws requiring overly complicated and costly authentication procedures, such as full legalization of all documents. The change of such practices is even more important in the light of digitalisation. These practices can be prohibitively expensive to implement (especially when it comes to double legalization) or sometimes even impossible to fulfill (for example, diplomas issued by private providers cannot be Apostilled in certain countries).

d. Check the documents for irregularities. For example, are there varieties in fonts, lack of official stamps and/or signatures, misalignments, scanned signatures, informal language, spelling errors, inconsistent terminology, improbable qualification titles, inconsistent typeface elements? These can all be indications of fraud;
e. Check if the content of the qualification conforms with what you would expect from that country and/or institution. Are e.g. the logos, awarding bodies, dates and duration, the number of subjects studied, the grading system used, the compulsory subjects consistent with what you expect from the issuing country or institution?

f. Check if the institution, programme and/or qualification are accredited or recognised in the issuing country. Please see the previous chapters on Accreditation and Quality Assurance (chapter 5) and Diploma Mills and Accreditation Mills (chapter 6) for more details.

Example 7.8: Check the status of the institution
You receive a degree issued by the University of Newcastle. The name resembles that of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne in the UK which changed its trading name in 2006 into Newcastle University. You are familiar with the website and the layout of the documents issued by this British institution and its shield of arms showing a lion and a cross in the colours dark blue, white and red.
You notice that the University of Newcastle mentions a different website in its documents and uses a logo with red, dark blue and gold colours showing a lion and a cross. You suspect it to be a diploma mill, which (mis)uses the image and name of a well-known recognised British university.

Note that one of the outcomes when checking the accreditation status of the institution can be that the diploma is issued by a diploma mill. While at first names sounded familiar, after examination (steps d-f), it may show it is not the same institution, as the name, the logo, the use of colours and the layout of the documents are slightly different from what can be expected from this institution.

g. Check if the chronology of the documents submitted is in line with what can be expected. For example, check that the duration of secondary school corresponds with the expected number of years, or check that the age of the person who obtained the qualification is plausible.
Example 7.9: Chronology of educational background
The applicant submits a bachelor’s degree obtained in 2020. When you check his ID, you notice that he was born in 2005. In his home country, the entry requirement for bachelor’s programmes is 12 years of education, while the bachelor’s programmes have a nominal duration of 4 years. You notice some irregularities with overlapping dates in his CV and conclude that it is unlikely the student obtained the degree at such a young age.

The use of electronic credentials in verification
Student data are increasingly offered in a digital format and can potentially offer major benefits for verifying authenticity of data when they are directly delivered from a trusted source.

It is important to understand that digital student data can be offered in different formats, from low (pdf) to high data maturity (machine-readable data), each with different aspects to keep in mind when checking authenticity. As developments go fast it is recommended that competent authorities keep themselves informed about the latest developments.

In general, in the case of electronic credentials (or digital extracts from a digital student data depository):

- Determine that they were issued by an authorised source. The digital documents are not necessarily issued by a higher education institution awarding a degree. They are often issued and sent or published by a third party; all credentials should be subjected to internal verification.
- In the case of electronic documents issued and sent or published by a third party (e.g. through the website of the awarding higher education institution), verify whether the third party in question is authorised to issue credentials on behalf of the awarding higher education institution;
If the electronic document is signed (qualified) using a digital seal (see for example eIDAS-legislation), check the signature if it represents the higher education institution.

See also chapter 24 “Digital student data and digital processes”.

h. Check if the entry requirements have been met regarding level and grading;

Example 7.11: Meeting entry requirements
After completion of a Bachelor’s programme with very good results in country X, the student was admitted to a PhD programme which she completed in 5 years. You ask for her master’s degree, but the student claims she did not need a master’s degree for admission to the PhD programme. You check the entry requirements for the PhD programme on the institutional website, which states that either a master’s degree or a strong bachelor’s degree is needed for admission. The same is stated in the Higher Education Act of the country. You conclude that the entry requirements have been met.

i. Check whether the identity of the applicant can be verified.

Example 7.12: Authentication of applicant
Check the ID with the other documents in the application to see whether the photos, names, dates of birth and gender match. In cases of changes of name or legal gender, documentation should be provided by the applicant.

j. In case there are no irregularities, continue with the evaluation.

Information management system for authenticity checks
A good system for internal information management is needed for carrying out the internal verification processes described in this chapter. Effective internal information management includes the following:

- Keep a list of common and reliable verification tools for specific countries, especially online resources such as portals and databases that can be checked;
- Continuously collect examples of qualifications with their validity dates and security features where appropriate to use as reference material for future applications. This serves to familiarise credential evaluators with the format and content of educational documentation that can be expected from individual countries, as well as the educational terminology used;
- collect samples of fraudulent documents as a reference for common fraudulent practices (e.g. the use of scanned signatures);
- identify contexts where fraudulent practices may be encountered more frequently. This could also be limited to specific qualifications or institutions;
- enable certain staff members to specialise in evaluating documents from specific geographical regions;
  - this will allow a maximum exposure to similar documents and facilitate a greater familiarisation with the form and content of those documents;
- keep a glossary of common terms in foreign languages and do not rely solely on translations;
- regularly update your knowledge regarding the new technologies and digitalisation of credentials awarded by institutions and update your resources and procedure accordingly.

See also chapter 22, “Transparency and Information Provision” and chapter 23 “Quality Assurance of Recognition in the ENIC Office and National Context”.

3. In case the online external and internal verification turns up some irregularities and forgery may be suspected, external verification may be necessary:

i. Contact the issuing institution to verify the applicant’s qualifications;

**Example 7.13: Contact the issuing institution**
You have received a statement and transcript from an Australian university with a lot of spelling mistakes in it, which you find is quite uncommon. You decide to contact the registrar of the university and use the contact details on the website of the institution to send an email with the anonymized documents attached. Within a few days you receive confirmation that these documents have never been issued by the university.

ii. Request applicants to have their transcripts sent directly to you by the awarding institution and/or contact the relevant bodies/authorities in the country of origin or contact other recognition centres for their professional opinion on the documents presented in relation to authenticity. Alternatively, if available, you could receive - with permission of the applicant - a secure link to the digital transcript from the internal database of the institution or from a central depository.
Example 7.14: Contact another ENIC center
You have received a qualification from Greece in the field of music. You cannot find any information about the conservatory that has issued the diploma in the list of recognised state institutions on the website of the Greek authorities, and you decide to contact the Greek ENIC - NARIC centre for more information.

NB: for questions about countries that are not party to the Lisbon Recognition Convention, you should contact the ENIC-NARIC List Serv.

Example 7.15: Request verification by the institution due to inconsistencies in the credential
An applicant has submitted a certificate and transcripts for assessment. After comparing them with a verified certificate and transcripts issued by the same institution in the same year available in your internal electronic databank of verified genuine credentials, you identify considerable differences in appearance: the logo is incorrect and in the wrong position; the text is right-aligned rather than centre-aligned and a number of spelling errors and inconsistencies are detected within the text.

iii. Additional requirements may be set by the credential evaluator, such as:
■ Submitting the original documents for forensic examination;
■ legalisation/apostille of The Hague. Keep in mind that the legalisation seals and the apostille do not attest to the truthfulness of the contents of the document and that documents are not verified in all countries prior to legalisation. Furthermore, be aware that the absence of legalisation is no reason to suspect fraudulent practices, and it should only be asked for in exceptional circumstances when fraud is suspected so as to avoid overly complicated and costly recognition procedures.

NB: for privacy protection reasons it is important to get the applicant's permission before externally verifying their document. Please also bear in mind that some countries and some institutions may not respond to such enquiries and it is advised that this should not be interpreted to the applicant's disadvantage.

Note that for refugees/asylum seekers other procedures could be followed. For more information, please turn to chapter 13, “Refugees”.

EAR manual 2023
After determining these inconsistencies, you send out a request for verification to the issuing institution with the submitted copies of the documents attached. Assessment of the applicant’s documents is suspended until the answer from the issuing institution is received. Once the answer has been received, the decision is made accordingly.

Sources and references

General sources of information on authenticity
- CIMEA, SCAN-D.
- CIMEA, FRAUDOC - Guidelines on Diploma Mills and Document Fraud for Credential Evaluators.

Country specific sources for verifying certain documents (examples)
- Gambia (WAEC): [https://app.waecgambia.org/resultchecker/resultchecker.aspx](https://app.waecgambia.org/resultchecker/resultchecker.aspx);
- Kenya (KNEC): [https://www.knec.ac.ke/](https://www.knec.ac.ke/);
Nigeria:
- (WAEC): http://www.waecdirect.org/
- (NECO): https://www.neco.gov.ng/

Norway: Diploma Registry (Vitnemålsportalen): https://www.vitnemalsportalen.no/english/

Pakistan:
- secondary and Intermediate Examination results can often be verified at the issuing institution’s website, e.g. BISE Lahore results: http://www.biselahore.com/
- degree verification: https://www.hec.gov.pk/english/services/students/DAS/Pages/Degree-Attestation.aspx
- verification for the University of the Punjab: http://pu.edu.pk/home/results/

Romania: https://www.ebacalaureat.ro/

Sierra Leone (WAEC): http://www.waecsierraleone.org/

South Africa:
- Matric Results section of www.education.gov.za

Sweden: some universities issue transcripts with a code that can be checked on the universities’ website;

Tanzania: ACSEE results can be viewed on the Tanzania Examinations Council website: https://www.necta.go.tz/

Moldova: verification service for Moldova qualifications: https://ctice.md/verif/

Ukraine: verification service: https://info.edbo.gov.ua/edu-documents/

Country-specific sources for national format document samples
- France: http://www.education.gouv.fr/bo/2006/47/MENS0603037C.htm (university degrees only);
- Lithuania: www.aikos.smm.lt;
- Russia: http://www.russianenic.ru/rus/diplom.html;
- Ukraine: https://enic.in.ua/index.php/en/educational-documents-samples
- United Kingdom: https://www.rgu.ac.uk/file/hear-bringing-it-all-together

Checking older or non-working websites
Old and defunct websites can in certain cases be accessed using the Wayback Machine https://web.archive.org/ in order to check logo, institution name, programmes offered, etc.
Relevant Articles RCP

25. In view of the occurrence of falsified qualifications and diplomas as well as other documents, verification of the authenticity of documents is important. Such verification seeks to establish:
   i. whether the documents in question are genuine, i.e. whether they have been issued by the institution indicated in the document and whether they have not subsequently been unlawfully altered by the applicant or others; and,
   ii. whether the documents in question have in fact been rightfully issued to the applicant.

26. While the need to establish the authenticity of documents as a part of the assessment procedure is therefore very real, this need should nonetheless be balanced against the burdens placed upon applicants. The basic rules of procedure should assume that most applicants are honest, but they should give the competent recognition authorities the opportunity to require stronger evidence of authenticity whenever they suspect that documents may be forged. While certified photocopies of official documents will be sufficient in most cases, the competent recognition authorities should be in a position to require original documents where this is considered necessary for the purpose of detecting or preventing the use of forged documents.

27. States are encouraged to review any national laws requiring overly complicated and costly authentication procedures, such as full legalisation of all documents. Modern communications tools make it easier to verify the authenticity of documents in less cumbersome ways and competent recognition authorities and education institutions of home countries are encouraged to react swiftly and positively to requests for direct information on documents claimed to have been issued by them.
This chapter provides information on the main purposes for which recognition may be sought. Two most common purposes can be distinguished: professional recognition for access to the labour market, and academic recognition for access to further education and training. The chapter aims to give a better understanding of how the outcome of an assessment can vary depending on the purpose of recognition.

### Procedure purpose of recognition

**ACADEMIC**

1. Assess qualification in terms of academic recognition
2. Include purpose of recognition and the rights attached to qualification in recognition statement. If there are any rights attached to a statement, supporting legal texts should be clearly indicated and accessible
3. If recognition is sought for different purpose than covered by recognition statement, a renewed assessment is advised

**PROFESSIONAL**

1. Assess qualification in terms of professional recognition
Introduction

Recognition of foreign qualifications may be sought for different purposes, the most common being for access to further education and training (academic recognition) and/or the labour market (professional recognition):

- Academic recognition focuses on recognition of periods of study or qualifications issued by an accredited/registered educational institution with regard to a person wishing to continue or to begin studying or to use an academic title.
- Professional recognition is an official authorisation to practice a particular profession. It deals with the assessment of knowledge and skills of a specific person. Professional recognition concerns regulated and non-regulated professions. This manual only deals with the latter.

It is important to take the purpose of recognition into consideration when assessing a foreign qualification in order to ensure the assessment is both accurate and relevant. Depending on the purpose of recognition, the assessment of the relevant learning outcomes and competencies may vary.

The assessment and recognition of a qualification for entry into the labour market or a regulated profession may differ from the assessment and recognition of a qualification for admission to further studies. In other words, the assessment of the required learning outcomes and competences related to a completed qualification may vary depending on the purpose of recognition.

Recommendations

1. Identify the purpose for which recognition is sought. Is the purpose of recognition for further studies (academic) or access to the labour market (occupational/professional)?

Example 8.1: Determine the purpose of recognition

When an applicant applies for recognition of foreign qualifications, it is beneficial if they already indicate the purpose for recognition, such as academic or professional. For example, an applicant with a British BTEC National Diploma (a vocationally oriented QCF/EQF level 3 qualification) can either enter the labour market within the occupational field of their qualification or seek access to a university degree in a relevant subject area.
In another case, the level of research involved in an undergraduate programme may be a key consideration when evaluating the qualification for access to postgraduate study but less pertinent when the purpose of recognition is seeking employment. For instance, the lack of research training in a professionally oriented bachelor’s programme (e.g. in social work) would be less important when seeking employment than when seeking admission to postgraduate education.

a. If the applicant seeks professional recognition, it should be considered whether the knowledge and skills needed to practise the profession have been acquired. Since a positive assessment may give the applicant access to a particular regulated profession, it should be considered whether the diploma does indeed give access to that profession in the home country.

Example 8.2: Assess qualification in terms of professional recognition
A candidate applies for recognition to access second cycle (master) studies, where the entry requirement is a bachelor’s degree. This applicant completed 5-year long cycle master studies in pharmacy and defended the master thesis in the discipline (all academic components of their education were completed). To obtain the diploma, which also grants full professional rights, the applicant still has to complete an apprenticeship (required for professional purposes). In this situation, the applicant can be considered for access to a second cycle programme, since the whole academic part was completed and apprenticeship is required for professional purposes.

b. If the applicant seeks academic recognition, the admission conditions of the programme to which access is sought should be determined. In this way, it can be determined whether the foreign qualification meets these conditions. If the foreign qualification has restricted access to further studies in the home country, the same access conditions can be applied in the assessment process. The decision on academic recognition may also differ depending on the level and specialisation of the foreign qualification.
Example 8.3: Assess qualification in terms of academic recognition
An applicant with a Flemish short cycle qualification (EQF level 5) requests admission to the third year of an academically oriented bachelor’s programme. The qualification entitles the applicant in the home country to a maximum of 2 years of exemptions in a professionally oriented bachelor's programme. The admission officer decides that the programme is not sufficiently academically oriented and therefore grants zero or a limited number of credit exemptions.

2. After evaluating the qualifications against the purpose of which recognition is sought (see next chapters), the statement of recognition/qualification assessment should state clearly what the purpose of recognition is and what the rights attached to the statement are. If there are any rights attached to a statement, then the supporting legal texts should be clearly indicated and accessible.

Example 8.4: State the purpose of recognition in the recognition decision
An ENIC/NARIC office in country A provides the following information in the recognition statement for a qualification in country B:
- The purpose of the recognition (e.g. access to the labour market)
- A comparison of the qualification from country B with one or more qualifications from country A, resulting in full recognition, partial recognition or no recognition
- A clarification of the decision (explained in terms of substantial differences and linked to legislation in country A)
- Information on further options (e.g. applying for another training programme in a similar or different field)

3. If recognition is sought for a different purpose to one previously covered by a recognition statement, a renewed assessment is advised.

Example 8.5: Renew the assessment if the purpose of recognition changes
An applicant with a bachelor's degree in economics from country A applies for admission to the master's degree in psychology in country B. The admission officer decides that not all conditions are met. The applicant does not have sufficient knowledge in the field of study, which leads to a substantial difference. The admission officer issues a negative recognition statement. The applicant changes the admission application and requests admission to the master’s programme in business studies. The admission officer decides that all conditions are met and that the likelihood of successful completion of the programme is high. The applicant receives a new statement for partial or full recognition.
In another example, an applicant with a level 2 qualification in healthcare from country A seeks access to higher education in country B. The credential evaluator sees that the applicant does not have access to higher studies in country A and issues a negative decision on academic recognition. The applicant then asks for access to the labour market. Since the qualification in country A gives access to the profession and the evaluator sees that the necessary knowledge and skills have been acquired, a positive statement regarding professional recognition is issued.

**Relevant Articles RCP**

32. Recognition of foreign qualifications may be sought for a variety of purposes. The assessment should take due account of the purpose(s) for which recognition is sought, and the recognition statement should make clear the purpose(s) for which the statement is valid.

33. Before undertaking the assessment, the competent recognition authority should establish which national and international legal texts are relevant to the case, and whether these require any specific decision to be reached or procedure to be followed.

35. The assessment of a foreign qualification should identify the qualification in the system of the country in which recognition is sought which is most comparable to the foreign qualification, considering the purpose for which recognition is sought. In the case of a qualification belonging to a foreign system of education, the assessment should consider its relative place and function compared to other qualifications in the same system. Where available, the competent recognition authorities should also refer to the National Qualifications Framework, European Qualifications Frameworks and other similar Qualification Frameworks as part of the assessment process.

36. Qualifications of approximately equal level may show considerable differences in terms of content, profile and learning outcomes. In the assessment of foreign qualifications, these differences should be considered in a flexible way, and only substantial differences in view of the purpose for which recognition is sought (e.g. academic or de facto professional recognition) should lead to partial recognition or non-recognition of the foreign qualifications.

38. Where formal rights attach to a certain foreign qualification in the home country, the qualification should be evaluated with a view to giving the holder comparable formal rights in the host country, in so far as these exist and they arise from the learning outcomes certified by the qualification.
9 Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes facilitate the recognition of foreign qualifications, allowing a recognition process based on a detailed assessment of the formal criteria of the foreign qualification, but also taking into consideration what a person knows, understands, and is able to do. This chapter gives a brief introduction to the concept of learning outcomes and provides guidance on the use of learning outcomes in recognition.

---

**Procedure learning outcome**

- Diploma Supplement
- Description of study programme
- Degree profile

Infer learning outcomes of qualification from the other sources:
1. place in the national education system
2. purpose of the programme
3. contents of the programme
4. compulsory elements
5. rights attached to qualification
6. workload

Focus on learning outcomes of qualification

Sufficient information available?

- YES
- NO

Assess qualification based on overall outcomes

Assess qualification with emphasis on learning outcomes

Consider general information on learning outcomes:
1. NQF-descriptors
2. national level descriptors
3. national subject benchmark statements
Introduction

A learning outcome may be described as a statement of what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning. Learning outcomes may be written for a single module or programme component, for a complete programme of study, for a qualification level in general (descriptor), or anything in between.

In practice, the expression ‘learning outcome’ is also widely used in a more general sense to indicate the overall output of a programme, rather than in the narrow sense of a technical statement as described here. This is relevant to keep in mind, since descriptions of programme learning outcomes are not always provided, but can still be constructed from the overall input.

Various systems for writing learning outcomes are being used and developed. Learning outcomes play an important role in national and overarching qualifications frameworks (for more information, see chapter 21, “Qualifications Frameworks”). For instance, generic learning outcomes are linked to the cycles or levels of the overarching EHEA-QF and EQF. National qualifications frameworks make use of qualification descriptors (learning outcomes used as generic descriptions of the various types of qualifications), level descriptors (learning outcomes used as generic descriptions of the various levels) or national subject benchmark statements (learning outcomes describing the subject-specific characteristics and standards of programmes).

Learning outcomes may be divided into subject specific learning outcomes, which are related to the subject discipline, and generic learning outcomes, which are transferable from one academic discipline to another.

Learning outcomes at programme level have various uses:

- they are important for academic staff in designing study programmes, since they provide clear goals that the programme should aim for;
- they are useful for prospective students, as they provide transparent information on what students may expect to learn from a particular study programme;
- after obtaining a qualification, graduates will be able to provide relevant information to employers and competent recognition authorities on their abilities.

Information on learning outcomes at programme level might be found in the:

- Diploma Supplement;
- Description of the study programme (usually available on the websites or in the catalogues of higher education institutions);
- Degree Profile (if available).
General information on learning outcomes of specific types and levels of qualifications might be found in the following features of national qualifications frameworks:

- national qualification descriptors;
- national level descriptors;
- national subject benchmark statements.

Although the information sources listed above refer to learning outcomes at different levels of specificity, they are all important in the process of recognition of a foreign qualification.

In many cases, no direct information about learning outcomes is found in the accompanying documentation of the qualification, such as the list of subjects or transcript. Even section 4.2 (programme learning outcomes) of the new Diploma Supplement Template from 2018 (see chapter 20, “Diploma Supplement”), which is intended to provide “details of learning outcomes, knowledge, skills, competences”, does not always contain a clear list of learning outcomes.

When learning outcomes are taken into account in the evaluation of a foreign qualification, the recognition procedure is more directly focused on the outcomes reached and competences obtained, instead of only relying on the input criteria of the programme such as workload and contents.

The principal question asked of the graduate will no longer be “what did you do to obtain your qualification?” but rather “what can you do, now that you have obtained your qualification?”

**Recommendations**

1. Identify if there are learning outcome descriptions available for the programme leading to the qualification. This information can be found in:
   - the Diploma Supplement or comparable documents such as transcripts;
   - the description of the study programme (usually available on the websites or in the catalogues of higher education institutions);
   - Qualification registers, such as the Lithuanian aikos (www.aikos.smm.lt/en)
   - other sources such as the Degree Profile.

NB: Interpret the information contained in lists of learning outcomes with some care, as the writing and listing of learning outcomes is still a rather new development for higher education institutions in many countries. It might be, for instance, that an important learning outcome of the programme has been overlooked by the compilers of the list, whereas it might be obvious from the rest of the information on the programme that such a learning outcome is obtained...
in the programme. The learning outcomes assigned to a particular programme should always be examined within the context of the general learning outcomes assigned to the qualifications at that level (as expressed in national qualification descriptors and level descriptors).

Do not automatically conclude that non-matching lists of learning outcomes of two programmes are a sign of substantial differences between the programmes.

2. In the absence of information on learning outcomes, try to infer the output of a qualification from other pieces of more readily available information, such as:
   - the place of the qualification in the national education system or qualifications framework;
   - the purpose of the programme;
   - the contents of the programme;
   - compulsory elements (such as a thesis or dissertation);
   - the rights attached to the qualification and;
   - the workload of the programme.

Example 9.1: Use of learning outcomes to discover additional elements of the qualifications

An applicant has submitted a Degree Profile which gives a student-centred description of a specific physics bachelor's programme, focusing on the outcomes of the programme. Typically, Degree Profiles do not contain a list of subjects studied, which are usually found in the academic transcript or Diploma Supplement. Instead, the listed programme competences and learning outcomes provide detailed information on the abilities of the student. This information is especially useful for competent recognition authorities who are themselves knowledgeable in the field of physics, such as university staff responsible for master's programmes in physics.

Recognition offices which only provide general evaluations of qualifications can use this Degree Profile to conclude that this is a general and broad bachelor's programme in physics, with a strong emphasis on theory and research, suggesting the qualification is more academically than professionally oriented. Access to any type of physics master's programme, including heavily research-oriented master's programmes, should in principle be no problem.
Example 9.2: Use of generic learning outcomes to understand the qualification

The level descriptors of the Malta Qualifications Framework provide an overview of the outcomes of all eight Maltese levels in terms of knowledge, skills, competences and learning outcomes. As such, they are valuable for competent recognition authorities in obtaining a first impression of the generic outcomes of Maltese qualifications, and of the differences between the levels. Furthermore, the learning outcomes of a particular Maltese qualification can be checked against the generic learning outcomes of the corresponding MQF-level, to see whether they are consistent.

Example 9.3: Use of learning outcomes to understand how qualifications relate to each other

In some education systems (such as Ireland), there is a distinction between Honours Bachelor Degrees and Ordinary Bachelor Degrees. However, these distinctions vary from one country to another. By studying the national qualification descriptors of the Irish Ordinary Bachelor Degree and Irish Honours Bachelor Degree, the competent recognition authority can obtain an overview of the learning outcomes of both types of Irish bachelor’s degrees in order to understand how these qualifications differ from each other. For example, based on this information, the competent recognition authority can determine whether either of the awards may, in principle, provide access to master or PhD programmes in the host country.
Example 9.4: Use of learning outcomes to recognise qualifications for different purposes

A degree in medicine which is formally a first cycle degree in the issuing country (the title Bachelor is awarded on completion) gives access to the profession of physician in that country. The holder of the qualification moves to another country where programmes in medicine are split into two cycles and only the second cycle (Master) gives access to the profession of physician. However, the learning outcomes achieved by the holder of this bachelor’s degree are comparable to the learning outcomes achieved with the second cycle (Master) qualification in the receiving country. In this situation, where the national legislation of the receiving country permits it, the degree can be recognised for professional purposes.

Sources and references

- AIC et al., Comparative Report. Online course catalogues and databases for transparency and recognition.
- Bergan, S., Qualifications – Introduction to a concept, Council of Europe 2007.
Relevant Articles RCP

13. Where learning outcomes are clearly documented, for example in the European Commission/Council of Europe/UNESCO Diploma Supplement, or comparable documents, assessment should take these into consideration.

36. Qualifications of approximately equal level may show differences in terms of content, profile and learning outcomes. In the assessment of foreign qualifications, these differences should be considered in a flexible way, and only substantial differences in view of the purpose for which recognition is sought (e.g. academic or de facto professional recognition) should lead to partial recognition or non-recognition of the foreign qualifications.

37. Recognition of foreign qualifications should be granted unless a substantial difference can be demonstrated between the qualification for which recognition is requested and the relevant qualification of the State in which recognition is sought. In applying this principle, the assessment should seek to establish whether:

a. the differences in learning outcomes between the foreign qualification and the relevant qualification of the country in which recognition is sought are too substantial to allow the recognition of the foreign qualification as requested by the applicant. If so, the assessment should seek to establish whether alternative, partial and/or conditional recognition may be granted;

b. the differences in access to further activities (such as further study, research activities, the exercise of gainful employment) between the foreign qualification and the relevant qualification of the country in which recognition is sought are too substantial to allow the recognition of the foreign qualification as requested by the applicant. If so, the assessment should seek to establish whether alternative, partial and/or conditional recognition may be granted;
c. the differences in key elements of the programme(s) leading to the qualification in comparison to the programme(s) leading to the relevant qualification of the country in which recognition is sought are too substantial to allow the recognition of the foreign qualification as requested by the applicant. If so, the assessment should seek to establish whether alternative, partial and/or conditional recognition may be granted. The comparability of programme elements should, however, be analysed only with a view to the comparability of outcomes and access to further activities, and not as a necessary condition for recognition in their own right;

d. competent recognition authorities can document that the differences in the quality of the programme and/or institution at which the qualification was awarded in relation to the quality of the programmes and/or institutions granting the similar qualification in terms of which recognition is sought are too substantial to allow the recognition of the foreign qualification as requested by the applicant. If so, the assessment should seek to establish whether alternative, partial and/or conditional recognition may be granted.

38. Where formal rights attach to a certain foreign qualification in the home country, the qualification should be evaluated with a view to giving the holder comparable formal rights in the host country, in so far as these exist and they arise from the learning outcomes certified by the qualification.

40. Competent recognition authorities should be encouraged to focus on the learning outcomes, as well as the quality of the delivery of an educational programme and to consider its duration as merely one indication of the level of achievement reached at the end of the programme. The assessment process should acknowledge that recognition of prior learning, credit transfer, different forms of access to higher education, joint degrees and life-long learning will all shorten the duration of some academic qualifications without diminishing the learning outcomes and a decision not to grant recognition should not be motivated by duration alone.

42. In undertaking the assessment, the competent recognition authority should apply their know-how and best professional skills and take note of all relevant published information. Where adequate information on the learning outcomes is available, this should take precedence in the assessment over consideration of the education programme which has led to the qualification.
This chapter provides an overview of the concept of credits and how they relate to the workload and learning outcomes. It also outlines the main elements of the processes of credit accumulation and credit transfer. Recommendations provide a guide of how credits should be interpreted by a credential evaluator during an assessment. Grading and its impact on recognition are also discussed with recommendations on how to apply these concepts in practice.
Procedure credits, grades, credit accumulation and credit transfer

Consider the following:

1. accept quality assured credits as indication of a successfully completed amount of study and/or achieved learning outcomes
2. use the basic principles of the foreign credit system: minimum amount of credits for completion of programme and academic year
3. use of multiple credit systems: determine how to convert these systems
4. at what level have the credits been achieved?
5. does it represent a cohesive programme or part of a programme?
6. consider the following if there is no credit system available:
   - time required to complete the programme
   - number of units/subjects per semester
   - level of the programme

Interpret credits obtained

Determine the workload of the qualification or the separate teaming achievement

Consider the following:

1. interpret grades in the context of the education system in which a qualification or learning outcome was achieved
2. use grades merely as an indication of a student’s academic performance in general
3. compare foreign grades with own based on statistical distribution of grades

Interpret grades achieved

Determine the quality of learning achievements and rate the performance
Introduction

Credits
Credits are used to measure the volume of learning based on the achievement of learning outcomes and/or their associated workload measured in time. They are awarded to the learner upon successful completion of a given unit of a study programme and/or a complete programme.

In competence-based systems, credits do not necessarily have the quantitative aspect of workload, but rather attest to achievement of a set of learning outcomes, as credits can be acquired not only in the classroom, but also on the basis of assessment and validation of prior learning. Such credit systems allow recognition of flexible learning pathways and support lifelong learning.

Credits do not normally take the level of performance (grades) into consideration unless otherwise specified, but passing grades demonstrate that the learning outcomes leading to the award of credits have been assessed as achieved.

Different credit systems exist across various systems and levels of education worldwide. A credit system may be limited to a single institution, to a specific national context or may be applied across different national education systems, such as the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

It should be noted that not all systems and/or institutions have developed credit systems and might still measure student workload in hours or may not include any indication of workload for individual units. This should not be considered a substantial difference, and lead to refusal to consider recognition of a qualification and/or periods of study.

Credit Accumulation
Credit accumulation is the term used to describe the process of collecting credits allocated to the learning achievements of units within a programme. Upon the successful accumulation of a specified amount of credits in required subjects, a learner may successfully complete a semester, academic year, full study programme or short stand-alone course (such as e.g. a micro-credential or module) (see chapter 15 “Qualifications awarded after flexible learning”). The process of credit accumulation is determined by the credit system in which it operates and often allows for a flexible learning path. The process of credit accumulation may differ across different credit systems.

Credit Transfer
While credit accumulation refers to the collection of credits within one credit system, credit transfer refers to the process of transferring credits gained in one credit system or institution to another credit system or institution with the goal of receiving a specific qualification. Thus, credit transfer may facilitate the recognition of prior learning and can be a fundamental tool
when it comes to lifelong learning and mobility. Successful credit transfer across educational systems can be achieved through agreements between different awarding bodies and/or education providers. Credit frameworks can help facilitate mutual recognition of measurable learning. This can encourage further learning, allowing students to transfer between or within institutions without interruption of their studies and to maintain a clear record of achievements and credit transcripts.

A number of credit systems are designed to facilitate and incorporate credit transfer across different education systems, such as ECTS for higher education and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) for vocational education in Europe. One of the key benefits of using a common or similar credit framework is that it can ease a student’s entry into the international education arena and enhance mobility.

Progressive qualification frameworks focus on credits being assigned to a specific qualification level and allow for flexible learning paths by facilitating both credit accumulation and transfer at a national level. Such qualification frameworks may be mapped onto other national or international frameworks.

Grades
Grades describe the quality of learning achievements and rate the student’s performance at a particular level. A grading system usually includes a range of numbers, letters or descriptors indicating a level of achievement such as fail, pass or merit. Grading systems and marking criteria vary among different education systems and often between different levels of education. Grades can be awarded based on internal (institutional) assessment or external examination, or both. They are either criterion-referenced (where the grade reflects the score of the student in relation to an absolute scale), or norm-referenced (where the grade reflects the score of the student relative to the scores of previous cohorts of students). The very nature of grading systems and grading cultures makes it difficult, if not impossible, to accurately convert grades from one system to another.

Within the ECTS framework, the European Union has tried to relieve this issue by suggesting a grading table that provides information about the applicant’s performance regarding comparison to a reference group (cohort). A description of the procedure can be found in the 2015 ECTS Users’ Guide, pages 80-81.
Recommendations

Credits and credit transfer
Competent authorities should:

1. Accept quality assured credits as an indication of the successfully completed amount of study and/or achieved learning outcomes without detailed scrutiny.

Example 10.1.1: Credits as an indication of the completed studies’ workload
An evaluator in country A assesses a recognised bachelor qualification awarded in country B after completion of 180 ECTS. The transcript provides information that, in country B, 1 ECTS credit corresponds to 25 hours of student work, while, in the evaluator’s country A, 1 ECTS credit corresponds to 30 hours of student work. Even though there is clear information regarding the difference in the time allocated for one credit between the two credit systems, the credential evaluator takes into consideration the fact that both countries use the same ECTS credit system, that credits should be considered to be a sufficient indicator of workload, that the actual time to achieve learning outcomes may differ from student to student and considers the bachelor workload as comparable to 180 ECTS in country A.

Example 10.1.2: Credits as an indication of achieved learning outcomes
An evaluator in country A assesses a bachelor qualification awarded in country B after completion of 180 ECTS. The transcript provides information that 60 ECTS out of 180 ECTS were awarded after recognition of non-formal and informal learning, the evaluator checks that the awarding institution and the programme were quality assured and the awarded qualification is an official award in country B and considers the credits awarded after recognition of prior learning as sufficient proof of the achievement of learning outcomes for this specific part of the programme.

2. If a foreign programme uses a different credit system, use the basic principles of the foreign credit system, such as the minimum amount of credits required for completion of the programme and for completion of an academic year. With this information credential evaluators can determine how the foreign credits may be converted to or interpreted in their own credit system.
Example 10.3: Linking foreign credits to your own credit system
An applicant presents a bachelor’s degree from country X consisting of 120 Q-credits. It appears that 30 X-credits represent 1 year of academic study. With this information, a credential evaluator in country Y (which uses ECTS credits) examines the amount of X-credits earned for key subjects in the bachelor’s programme and roughly converts 1 X-credit to 2 ECTS. These estimations should be sufficient to provide an indication of the workload of the various parts of the programme, without breaking up the credits into smaller units such as study hours or contact hours.

3. Check if there are different credit systems in use in one country and if the credit system was changed at a particular point in time, and determine how these systems can be converted to each other.

Example 10.4: Conversion of older credit systems
An applicant submits an older qualification from country N, where the credit system changed from ‘study points’ (in which 1 study point represented 1 week of work, and the academic year consisted of 42 weeks) to ECTS. A credential evaluator finds out that the credits used in this qualification are the former study points and that in country N a conversion factor of 60/42 = 1.4 was used to convert study points to ECTS. The credential evaluator (who is working in the ECTS system) applies the same factor to the credits listed in the qualification of the applicant.

4. Consider at what level credits have been achieved. Note should be taken that credits reflect a progression towards a qualification and the level of credits within the same programme may differ depending on the year of study.
Example 10.5: Taking into consideration the level of credit
An applicant from country X applies for credit transfer in a master’s programme at an institution in country Y. Upon examination of the applicant’s transcript it becomes clear that the applicant seeks credit transfer for courses taken both at master’s and bachelor’s level. The bachelor’s level credits can be accepted if this is permitted by the regulations of the master’s programme offered by the institution in country Y. The opposite is also true: you can choose not to accept these credits if the institution doesn’t permit applying credits obtained at the bachelor’s level towards a master’s degree.

5. Take into consideration whether a collection of credits actually represent a cohesive programme (or part of a programme), comparable to credits that domestic students would be allowed to combine. Credential evaluators do not have to accept any collection of credits, especially if credits have been obtained from various higher education institutions without being part of one programme or representing a cohesive set of learning outcomes.

Example 10.6: Accumulation of credits
An applicant presents his degree course transcript indicating 180 ECTS achieved at undergraduate level, which is the equivalent of three years studying. However, there is no final certificate and it is thus not clear whether or not the student has actually passed the final examination. Possibly, the student may have acquired some additional credits for non-compulsory subjects, whereas some compulsory subjects are still missing. This might result in a transcript which shows that 180 ECTS have been accumulated, but which does not represent a fully completed programme. Accordingly, the recognition decision is suspended until the final degree certificate or other acceptable evidence of degree completion has been received.

6. Do not consider the absence of a credit system as an obstacle to recognition of qualifications and/or periods of study and take into consideration other factors, such as time required to complete the programme, number of units/subjects per semester, the level of the programme, etc.
Example 10.7: No credit system available
University of Oxford does not award credit weighing to its programmes and course units. However, it does consider that one year of their full-time undergraduate study is comparable to 120 UK credits or 60 ECTS. This information should be sufficient for recognition of qualifications and periods of study completed at the University, even without an indication of credits for individual programmes or course units.

Grades
Depending on the specific educational system in question, grades may or may not have a direct impact on the assessment of a given qualification. When considering grades obtained in a foreign system, competent authorities should:

1. Consider grades in the context of the education system in which a qualification or learning outcome has been achieved. Keep in mind that both grading criteria and distribution can vary to a great extent and that the comparison of grades from different grading systems can be problematic.

It may, therefore, be wise to use grades merely as an indicator of a student’s academic performance in general and not as a numerical tool that is easily translatable into one’s own grading system.

Example 10.8: Grades and recognition
An applicant presents a final certificate and a transcript. According to information on the grading system used in the applicant’s country, the student’s performance is quite poor. However, the student has passed the overall requirements of the programme and has been awarded the final qualification. Thus, a recognition decision can be made accordingly.

2. In cases where conversion of the grading system is necessary, you should base your comparison of the foreign grades with your own grades on the statistical distribution of grades, rather than on linear comparisons of grading scales.

In cases where the documentation form an applicant contains reliable information on the statistical distribution of grades of the programme completed (e.g. in the form of an ECTS grading table or a similar tool) you may use this information to obtain a more accurate assessment of the grades achieved by the applicant.
**Example 10.8: Statistical distribution of grades for comparison (taken from the ECTS users’ guide 2009)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade system A</th>
<th>Percentage*</th>
<th>Grade system B</th>
<th>Percentage*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30 lode</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Based on the total number of grades awarded in the degree programme concerned.

From this example, we see that a 30 awarded in the scale of A should be converted to a 1 in the scale of B. The grade 2 of B will translate into the grades 26-29 (average 27) of the country or system A.
Sources and references

- CEDEFOP, The European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET) (website).
- ECTS users’ guide 2015.
- EGRACONS, European Grade Conversion System (website).
- European Commission, European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) (website).
- European Commission, A European Approach to micro-credentials (website).

Relevant Articles RCP

5. The provisions referring to the assessment of foreign qualifications shall apply, mutatis mutandis, to the assessment of periods of study.

40. Competent recognition authorities should be encouraged to focus on the learning outcomes, as well as the quality of the delivery of an educational programme and to consider its duration as merely one indication of the level of achievement reached at the end of the programme. The assessment process should acknowledge that recognition of prior learning, credit transfer, different forms of access to higher education, joint degrees and life-long learning will all shorten the duration of some academic qualifications without diminishing the learning outcomes and a decision not to grant recognition should not be motivated by duration alone.
One of the cornerstones of the Lisbon Recognition Convention is that recognition should be granted, unless a substantial difference can be shown between the foreign qualification and the receiving country qualification to which the foreign one is compared.

In this chapter you will find guidelines to help you judge whether differences between qualifications are substantial or not, as well as recommendations on how to report substantial differences to the applicant.

### Procedure substantial differences

1. **Determine the main outcomes of foreign qualifications**
2. **Compare foreign qualification to the relevant national qualification (or set of qualifications) required for the desired activity**
3. **Main requirements for the desired activity are sufficiently covered by the learning outcomes of the foreign qualification?**
   - **YES**: Recognise qualification
   - **NO**: Consider alternative recognition of the qualification. See procedure chapter 12

Inform applicant of nature of substantial differences and of the reasons for alternative recognition, if applicable.
Introduction

The concept of substantial differences is one of the key features of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and is described as follows: “Foreign qualifications shall be recognised unless there is a substantial difference between the foreign qualification for which recognition is sought and the corresponding qualification of the host country”.

It is no easy task to precisely define the concept of substantial differences, as definitions vary from country to country, nor is there a guarantee that the concept can be applied in all evaluations of foreign qualifications. Indeed, the first legal definition of substantial differences in a recognition convention only appeared in 2019 in the text of the UNESCO Global Recognition Convention, and is the following:

**Substantial differences:** significant differences between the foreign qualification and the qualification of the State Party which would most likely prevent the applicant from succeeding in a desired activity, such as, but not limited to, further study, research activities, or employment opportunities.

Despite the absence of an explicit legal definition in the Lisbon Recognition Convention, a similar definition has been included in the EAR manual since the first edition in 2012. The principle that a qualification should be recognised unless a substantial difference can be demonstrated by the recognition authority, has led to an important move away from equivalence-based approaches that have previously provided an obstacle for academic mobility and in many cases made recognition unobtainable.

Substantial differences can be identified in three main areas:

1. Elements of the qualification (chapter 2). The five key elements are level, workload, quality, profile and learning outcomes. These are normally described in the official documentation provided by the holder of the qualification, or in official sources in the country from which the certificate was awarded.

2. Structure of the higher education national system. Some examples could be the following:
   - Existence of a mandatory national exam to proceed to higher education;
   - Binary or unitary system of higher education;
   - Existence of an academic or professional qualification awarded together with the programme title;
   - Qualifications which permit access to subsequent programmes;
   - Legislation and national rules of quality assurance systems;
3. **Modality** of achievement of the qualification.
   - Teaching institution that is different from the awarding institution;
   - Legal status, form of transnational education and its provider.

Although many differences can be found, the substantial differences are only those differences between the foreign qualification and the national qualification that are so significant that they would most likely prevent the applicant from succeeding in the desired activity such as further study, research activities or employment.

The burden of proof of a substantial difference lies with the competent recognition authority of the host country. For practical purposes, this means that:

- not every difference should be considered to be “substantial”;
- the existence of a substantial difference entails no obligation to deny recognition to the foreign qualification. Partial recognition should be considered in cases where full recognition cannot be given;

- the difference should be substantial in relation to the function of the qualification and the purpose for which recognition is sought, rather than in the formal characteristics of the qualification, such as nominal length of study or the structure of a study programme.

The experience in practice, developed along the years by ENIC-NARIC centres and competent authorities in matters of recognition suggest that a case-by-case approach is applied to determining whether substantial differences exist. The ENIC and NARIC networks promote flexible attitudes and a move away from rigid and legalistic interpretations in line with the LRC.

The interpretation of substantial differences is very much linked to the overall outcome of a qualification, programme and/or programme components, since this determines whether the applicant has been prepared sufficiently for the desired activity. A difference that is only related to input criteria (such as workload and structure of the programme) is not likely to directly impact the abilities of the applicant, and should therefore not automatically be considered a substantial difference.
Recommendations

1. Compare the foreign qualification to the relevant national qualification (or set of qualifications) that is required for the desired activity.

This national qualification spans a wide range of learning outcomes, from purely theoretical knowledge to practical skills. In many cases, the foreign qualification will lead to a different set of learning outcomes. The competent recognition authority should determine whether the main requirements for the desired activity are sufficiently covered by the learning outcomes of the foreign qualification. This means that not all the learning outcomes of the relevant national qualification need to be matched by those of the foreign qualification, but only those that are essential to successfully pursue the desired activity. That will to a large extent depend on the purpose(s) for which recognition is sought. In some contexts, a broadly based education may be desirable, whereas, in other contexts, a considerable degree of specialisation may be required.

Example 11.1: Focus on the purpose of recognition
An applicant has obtained a qualification in engineering, which prepares students for admission to PhD programmes in engineering and also gives professional rights in the field of engineering. If the purpose of recognition is admission to a PhD programme in engineering, the qualification should be evaluated only on the basis of the outcomes required for admission to the PhD programme, and not on the basis of the professional rights. On the other hand, if the applicant seeks recognition for professional purposes, the evaluation should be based on the outcomes required for entrance into the profession.

If the competent recognition authority has found that there are no substantial differences, full recognition should be granted. Both the competent recognition authority and the applicant can be confident that the applicant is well prepared for the task ahead and has a good chance of succeeding.
Example 11.2: Mode of delivery accepted
An applicant applies for admission to a master’s level programme in country x based on a bachelor’s degree offered by distance learning in country y. In country x legislation does not allow full degrees to be offered by distance learning. However, since country x in general recognises bachelor’s degrees from country y the mode of delivery should not be considered a substantial difference that prevents the applicant from being considered for admission.

2. A competent recognition authority should take into account the five key elements of a qualification: level, workload, quality, profile and learning outcomes.

Even if a substantial difference is found in one of the key elements, you should still determine whether this also leads to a substantial difference in the overall learning outcome of the qualification, or whether it is compensated by other elements of the qualification. You should focus on learning outcomes when evaluating the qualification and accept non-substantial differences in the learning outcomes of the programme.

Example 11.3: Accept (non-substantial) differences in the workloads
In many EHEA countries, the combined workload of consecutive bachelor’s and master’s programmes is 300 ECTS credits (usually 180 ECTS credits for the bachelor’s programme and 120 ECTS credits for the master’s programme). However, there are also countries where a bachelor’s programme of 180 ECTS credits may be followed by a master’s programme of 60 ECTS credits. These master’s programmes may have similar purposes and learning outcomes as the 120 ECTS credits master’s programmes, such as specialising in one of the main research areas of the chosen field of study, learning how to carry out original research, and preparing for admission to PhD programmes. Therefore, a difference of 60 ECTS credits between two master’s programmes should not be automatically considered as a substantial difference. All aspects of the master’s degree should be taken into account (level, workload, quality, profile and learning outcomes as well as academic rights to progress to the next level of study) and only substantial differences in the overall learning outcomes of the programme (which would prevent the applicant to succeed in the desired activity) should be considered as substantial.
Example 11.4: Accept (non-substantial) differences in profile
If an applicant wishes to change his field of study between the bachelor’s and master’s degrees, differences in profile do not automatically constitute a substantial difference, as long as the overall academic and/or professional goals of the two programmes are coherent. For instance, a bachelor’s degree in physics could be adequate preparation for admission to a master’s programme in the history of science or philosophy of science. If the applicant is seeking admission to a graduate programme in a more remote field, he could in all fairness be required to complete additional requirements such as certain prerequisite courses that are necessary to succeed in the master’s programme. This would also be required of national students who choose to continue in a more remote field at the graduate level.

Example 11.5: Accept (non-substantial) differences of the programmes
If an applicant is seeking recognition for a purpose which is in line with the outcomes of his qualification (such as admission to a master’s programme in history on the basis of a bachelor’s degree in history), the competent recognition authority will usually conclude that no substantial difference exists that would prevent access. Obviously, there are bound to be differences in the contents of history programmes offered in two different countries with respect to the time periods covered, elements of national history included in the different programmes, or the text books used. However, these differences should not be considered as substantial as long as the applicant has developed the competences to easily extend his knowledge of history to any particular period or country.
Example 11.6: Focus on learning outcomes and formal academic rights

An applicant with a master’s degree in applied computer science applies for admission to a PhD programme in informatics. The master’s programme in applied computer science prepares candidates to meet the needs of employers in the area of information technology, apply theory to the practical problems of developing information systems, and provide technological and managerial perspectives on information management. The requirement for admission to the PhD programme is a relevant master’s degree and research skills. The competent recognition authority reports to the applicant that the master’s degree in applied computer science fulfils the formal requirements, but that the lack of research in the master’s programme is a substantial difference that will make it very difficult for the applicant to succeed in the PhD programme. Based on this outcome of the evaluation, a higher education institution might consider whether conditional recognition could be granted, requiring the applicant to improve his research skills in the first stages of the PhD programme.

If the competent recognition authority has identified substantial differences that form a major obstacle for successfully pursuing the activity, full recognition should not be granted. This will presumably save the applicant from struggling through a study programme or employment without the required competences.

The competent recognition authority has an obligation to inform the applicant of the nature of these substantial differences. This provides the applicant with a chance to compensate for these differences, or to file an appeal against the evaluation of his qualification.

Based on the substantial differences identified and reported to the applicant, the competent recognition authority should try to offer alternative recognition of the qualification (see chapter 12: “Alternative recognition and the right to appeal”).

Example 11.7: Deny full recognition – substantial differences in level and learning outcome

An applicant with an ordinary bachelor’s degree in chemistry from country X is applying for a research master’s degree in biomedical sciences in country Y. In country X, an honours bachelor’s degree is required for admission to a similar master’s programme. In the applicant’s home country, the additional year of education for the honours degree provides the research training lacking in the ordinary degree.

3. If the competent recognition authority has identified substantial differences that form a major obstacle for successfully pursuing the activity, full recognition should
The admissions officer in country Y reports that there are substantial differences in level, purpose and learning outcomes of the foreign qualification, and decides that admission to the master’s programme is not possible.

Sources and references

**Relevant Articles RCP**

36. Qualifications of approximately equal level may show differences in terms of content, profile and learning outcomes. In the assessment of foreign qualifications, these differences should be considered in a flexible way, and only substantial differences in view of the purpose for which recognition is sought (e.g. academic or de facto professional recognition) should lead to partial recognition or non-recognition of the foreign qualifications.

37. Recognition of foreign qualifications should be granted unless a substantial difference can be demonstrated between the qualification for which recognition is requested and the relevant qualification of the State in which recognition is sought. In applying this principle, the assessment should seek to establish whether:

a. the differences in learning outcomes between the foreign qualification and the relevant qualification of the country in which recognition is sought are too substantial to allow the recognition of the foreign qualification as requested by the applicant. If so, the assessment should seek to establish whether alternative, partial and/or conditional recognition may be granted;

b. the differences in access to further activities (such as further study, research activities, and the exercise of gainful employment) between the foreign qualification and the relevant qualification of the country in which recognition is sought are too substantial to allow the recognition of the foreign qualification as requested by the applicant. If so, the assessment should seek to establish whether alternative, partial and/or conditional recognition may be granted;

c. the differences in key elements of the programme(s) leading to the qualification in comparison to the programme(s) leading to the relevant qualification of the country in which recognition is sought are too substantial to allow the recognition of the foreign qualification as requested by the applicant. If so, the assessment should seek to establish whether alternative, partial and/or conditional recognition may be granted. The comparability of programme elements should, however, be analysed only with a view to the comparability of outcomes and access to further activities, and not as a necessary condition for recognition in their own right;
d. competent recognition authorities can document that the differences in the quality of the programme and/or institution at which the qualification was awarded in relation to the quality of the programmes and/or institutions granting the similar qualification in terms of which recognition is sought are too substantial to allow the recognition of the foreign qualification as requested by the applicant. If so, the assessment should seek to establish whether alternative, partial and/or conditional recognition may be granted.
12 Alternative recognition and the right to appeal

This chapter deals with alternative types of recognition that can be given in cases where full recognition cannot be granted, as well as the applicant's right to appeal a recognition decision.

Procedure alternative recognition and the right to appeal

Assessment outcome in case of substantial differences:
1. conditional recognition
2. partial recognition
3. alternative recognition
   - recognition of qualification at different level than the level applied for
   - admission to programma with another profile
   - offering a bridge course to make up for substantial differences
4. refuse recognition (only when any alternative recognition cannot be found)

Inform the applicant about reason for decision and possibility to appeal

Assist applicant in identifying remedial measures that may be undertaken in order to obtain recognition at a later stage. This may cover:
1. information on higher education institutions offering similar study programmes
2. possible forms of study to complete education in the form of lifelong learning courses
   See procedure chapter 22

IN CASE OF APPEAL

Re-examine all the information provided. If needed, ask applicant for new evidence or conduct more in-depth research

IF RECOGNITION CANNOT BE GRANTED
**Introduction**

Depending on national law and practice, the outcome of the assessment of a foreign qualification can either be a legal decision or a non-binding advisory statement, which can take different forms. The recognition procedure may result in full recognition, alternative recognition (in cases where a substantial difference has been identified) and denial of recognition (in cases of diploma mills, fraudulent documents, unrecognised institutions, etc.). If the applicant agrees with the outcome, the procedure is complete. If the applicant disagrees with the outcome, he or she has the right to appeal the decision. The appeal procedure is usually set out in national legislation.

**Recommendations**

1. If, after thorough consideration of the case, the recognition authority concludes that recognition cannot be granted in accordance with the applicant’s request due to substantial differences, the recognition authority should investigate what options are available to the applicant. This may range from alternative recognition to full denial of recognition. Alternative types of recognition may include the following:

   - **Conditional** recognition: Recognise the qualification on condition that certain requirements are met by the applicant at a later stage, e.g. allow the applicant to enroll in a programme of study on the condition that they fulfil certain requirements first or during the first year of study, such as obtaining a number of credits in obligatory courses. These courses should be essential for admission to the programme and missing from the programme already completed by the applicant.

   **Example 12.1: Conditional recognition**
   A holder of a bachelor’s degree in physics applies for admission to a master’s programme in mathematics. The programme in physics lacks some of the learning outcomes obtained from a first cycle degree in mathematics. The core elements, however, matches those of a degree programme in math. The admission officer may consider admitting the person to the master’s programme on condition that he or she achieves the learning outcomes which were lacking to begin with, e.g. by completing additional courses during the first year of study.

   - **Partial** recognition: accept some of the credits earned as part of the foreign programme. The applicant would then have the opportunity to enrol in a national programme on the same level and receive exemptions for the credits accepted by the competent recognition authority.
**Example 12.2: Partial recognition**

A holder of a first cycle qualification in modern languages applies for admission to a master’s programme in philology. A general bachelor’s degree was obtained in the country of origin without obtaining a specialization in philology. The programme included only a few general courses in language and literature that do not cover the same learning outcomes as the bachelor’s degree in philology. The applicant therefore does not meet the admission criteria for the desired master’s programme. The recognition authority could offer the applicant admission to the first cycle philology programme with exemptions for the credits already obtained in the foreign programme, in order to qualify for admission to the desired master’s degree programme later.

C. **Alternative** recognition could result in the following forms of evaluating the applicant’s qualification:

   a. Recognition of a qualification at a different level than the level applied for.

**Example 12.3: Admission at a different level**

An applicant with a bachelor of arts degree applies for admission to a PhD programme. In the issuing country, the qualification gives access to some PhD programmes. But in your country the admission requirements for a PhD is a master’s degree. Instead of admission to the PhD programme, the applicant is offered admission to a master’s programme.

b. Admission to a programme with another profile.

**Example 12.4: Admission to another programme**

An applicant applies to a master’s programme for which a research-based bachelor’s degree in chemistry is required. The applicant has obtained a bachelor’s degree in the field of applied chemical technology that does not sufficiently prepare the student in research methodology, a key element of the research-based master’s programme. As a form of alternative recognition, the foreign qualification is evaluated by the competent recognition authority as comparable to a professional bachelor’s degree in chemical technology. This makes it clear for the applicant what foreign qualification is comparable to in the national education system of the host country. In this case, the university could offer admission into an alternative master’s programme.

c. Offering a bridging course to the applicant to make up for the substantial differences.
Example 12.5: Preparatory course to bridge access
A technical university provides a preparatory course for national students who wish to improve their knowledge of mathematics, physics and chemistry before entering a bachelor's programme in engineering. If a credential evaluator finds substantial differences in these subject areas in a foreign qualification, the applicant may be referred to a preparatory course, in order to qualify for admission to the bachelor's programme.

2. Only when the competent recognition authority cannot find any alternative form of recognition should recognition be denied. In such cases the applicant should be provided with the explanation as to why the recognition cannot be granted and how the applicant may proceed to obtain a qualification that would fulfil the admissions requirements. It should be kept in mind that in some cases, the absence of recognition may be “fair recognition” (e.g. diploma mills, fraudulent documents, unrecognised institutions, etc.).

Example 11.4: Explanation of denial to applicant
An applicant submits a bachelor's degree in an application for admission to a master's programme. It is concluded that no studies were required to obtain the qualification and that the awarding ‘institution’ is a diploma mill. In this case the competent recognition authority should not consider any alternative form of recognition, and should refuse recognition and provide the reason for such decision to the applicant.

3. In all cases where applicants disagree with the decision taken by the competent recognition authority, they should have a possibility to appeal against it. The competent recognition authority should inform the applicant about the reason for the decision and the possibility to appeal against it. In the case of appeal, the competent recognition authority should again examine all the information provided. When necessary the authority may ask the applicant for additional evidence that has not yet been provided (or insufficiently provided) or conduct more in-depth research.

- Where recognition cannot be granted according to an applicant’s request, the competent recognition authority should assist the applicant in identifying remedial measures that may be undertaken in order to obtain recognition at a later stage. These remedial measures may cover:
  - information on higher education institutions offering similar study programmes;
• possible forms of study (eventual possibility to complete his/her education in the form of lifelong learning courses), etc.

The recommendations described above do not apply to cases where recognition has been denied due to diploma mills or fraudulent documents.

The recommendations above only describe the first instance of appeal (which is usually an internal procedure of the recognition authority). The second instance is usually regulated in a separate law (e.g. in an administrative code).

Some countries have an external appeal body for disputes on recognition decisions, which may consist of representatives of different stakeholders such as the ministry of education, higher education institutions, the national ENIC-NARIC, student unions, employers, etc. In practice, the presence of such an external body, which can subject recognition decisions to scrutiny, puts pressure on the recognition authority to make sure that the recognition decisions are fair, well grounded, and transparent.

For details regarding the information that should be provided to the applicant before and during the recognition procedure as well as information on the recognition decision and appeal, please go to chapter 22: “Transparency and Information Provision”.

Sources and references

Relevant Articles RCP

8. Where, after thorough consideration of the case, the competent recognition authority reaches the conclusion that recognition cannot be granted in accordance with the applicant’s request, alternative or partial recognition should be considered, where possible.

9. In all cases where the decision is different from the recognition requested by the applicant, including in cases where no form of recognition is possible, the competent recognition authority should inform the applicant of the reasons for the decision reached and his or her possibilities for appealing against it.

44. Where recognition cannot be granted according to an applicant’s request, the competent recognition authority should assist the applicant in identifying remedial measures the applicants may undertake in order to obtain recognition at a later stage.
Part 3. Specific types of procedures and/or qualifications
13 Refugees

Refugees or persons in a refugee-like situation may not have the appropriate education documentation for an evaluation. The chapter presents methods in which such qualifications can be evaluated, in accordance with Article VII of the LRC.

* The interview is an optional addition to the background paper, and its use depends on the model used.

---

Procedure refugees

I. Background paper
   - Mapping and reconstruction of the educational background
   - Documents and supporting evidence provided by applicant
   - General knowledge on education system in the given country
   - Analysis of the available documentation

II. Interview based assessment
   - Consider partial recognition/ recognition of specific learning outcomes in case the alternative assessment lacks enough evidence for full recognition

Determine purpose of recognition:
1. academic
2. professional

Create background document

Issue background paper/ final assessment report in both the national language(s) and a widely spoken language to ensure portability

Use the outcomes of the alternative assessment to support recognition process
Introduction

Under the LRC, refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation who cannot adequately document the qualifications or periods of study they claim, are entitled to the assessment of their qualifications or periods of study when applying for admission to a study programme or for the purpose of seeking employment.

The LRC encourages parties to establish alternative procedures to ensure the assessment of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation in cases of partial or missing educational documentation.

Article VII.

Section VII, Article VII of the LRC, regarding the recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation, states:

“Each Party shall take all feasible and reasonable steps within the framework of its education system and in conformity with its constitutional, legal, and regulatory provisions to develop procedures designed to assess fairly and expeditiously whether refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education, to further higher education programmes or to employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications obtained in one of the Parties cannot be proven through documentary evidence.”

Furthermore, in 2017, the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee adopted the “Recommendation on the recognition of refugees’ qualifications under the Lisbon Recognition Convention and Explanatory Memorandum”, which states:

“The assessment of inadequately documented qualifications should be based on information collected from reliable public sources as well as the person applying for recognition of their qualifications and should, as appropriate, be supplemented by interviews with the applicant, examinations and any other appropriate assessment methods.”
### Procedures

For the implementation of art. VII of the LRC, alternative procedures have been developed at national and international level. In fact, while the regular assessment is based on the educational credentials submitted by the applicant, in cases of partial or missing educational documentation, the assessment of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation can be based on information gathered either:

- by the receiving institution on the specific case with desk research only: a methodology commonly known as “background document” (see below);
- with both research and interviews to the holder of the qualification: a methodology known as “interview-based assessment”. Its realisation is the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR) (see below).

In the case of the background document, all the information is looked for and verified with the use of desk research while in the case of the interview-based assessment, the interview of the holder and the verification of his/her statements are part of the research carried out by credential evaluators to substantiate the achievement of the qualification.

Both methodologies were developed to compensate for the lack of educational documents and following the same principles applied in regular assessment procedures and proved reliable. Their outcomes provide a basis for a recognition decision by the competent authority.

These two methods are explained in the “Explanatory Memorandum to the recommendation on recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation”.

### The background paper

The background paper is an authoritative description of the qualifications that the competent recognition authorities consider the applicant is likely to hold and/or the periods of study considered they are likely to have undertaken.

The background paper is a file that may include:

- Detailed information on the content, level and extent of education, provided by the applicant, such as:
  - personal data of the applicant;
  - name (in the original language) of the qualification obtained;
  - name (in the original language) of the institution where the qualification was obtained;
  - status of the institution and of the programme in the education system where the qualification was obtained;
level of the qualification obtained;
name, in the original language, of the programme in which the qualification was obtained;
nominal duration or workload of the programme;
description of the programme;
formal rights given by the qualification obtained;
the year(s) in which the qualification was earned or the period of study undertaken.

b. relevant supporting documentation presented:
- student identification number(s) or code (if available);
- educational documents (transcripts, school certificate(s), etc.);
- declaration(s) of institution(s) that the qualification was awarded;
- testimonials of work experience (if applicable);
- any other evidence, such as instructors names, description of courses, etc.

For the file, the competent authority should make use of any available and reliable information about the institutions and programmes in which the qualification has been earned as well as information obtained through previous assessments of similar qualifications and as far as possible refer to the level, quality, learning outcomes, profile and workload of the qualification. The difference lies in the steps of the methods.

The European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR) and UNESCO Qualifications Passport (UQP)
The Council of Europe and UNESCO both developed interview-based instruments for the assessment of qualification holders in a refugee-like situation, with missing documentation:

EQPR is a document providing an assessment of the higher education qualifications based on available documentation and a structured interview. It presents information on the applicant’s work experience and language proficiency. The document provides reliable information for integration and progression towards employment and admission to further studies.

The UQP is based on EQPR and promoted as an instrument under the Global Convention. It serves as a modern universal tool to facilitate mobility for refugees and vulnerable migrants with qualifications.

Portability
Portability is an underpinning concept of the Recommendation, which emphasizes that parties should accept information on, and where relevant assessment of, such qualifications established by competent recognition authorities in other parties so that refugees do not need to repeat the process of compiling information and that public authorities do not dedicate resources to repeating the work already undertaken by
other parties. While national legislation does not always allow to formally recognise the assessment made in another country, countries should make it possible to take it into account.

**Recommendations**

1. In cases of partial or missing educational documentation from refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation, ensure a fair assessment by using an alternative procedure. The background document and the interview-based assessment are two methods that are most widely used and recommended to receiving institutions:
   i. Background paper:
      a. You accept that the information provided by the applicant is not complete and try to reconstruct the academic achievements based on alternative information provided by the applicant in a ‘background paper’.
      b. You try to assess the qualification(s) on the basis of the information provided in the ‘background paper’. Adopt a flexible approach, accepting that not all required documentation and information is included in the application file.

   **Example 13.1: Using the background paper for recognition of refugees’ qualifications**

   An applicant who is a refugee seeks recognition of his/her bachelor qualification in computer science but he/she does not have a diploma or certificate confirming the completion of the programme. The credential evaluator prepares a “background paper” describing the educational background of the applicant based on information on the qualification, course descriptions, work experience and documentation provided by the applicant. Having evaluated the educational portfolio, the competent recognition authority may decide to recognise the bachelor’s degree.

   **Example 13.2: Flexible approach towards an incomplete file**

   An applicant who is a refugee seeks recognition of his/her bachelor qualification but he/she does not have a diploma or certificate confirming the completion of the programme but has final transcript of records. On the basis of the transcripts, the credential evaluator concludes that the applicant has a qualification at bachelor level from an accredited institution, giving access to a master’s study at the institution. Furthermore, the transcript of records provides a good overview of the workload and profile. The credential evaluator may advise to consider him/her for admission to a master’s programme.
ii. **Interview based assessment:**

An interview with a credential evaluator who is expert on the education system(s) in which the qualification(s) were issued, may help check coherence in the applicant’s education route and provide insight into details that could not be determined on the basis of documents and public sources of information.

The information collected through desk research may be used as a preparatory step in interview-based assessment procedure.

The applicant may be asked about the contents and learning outcomes of the study programmes, information about the textbooks used and examinations. The applicant also provides information about the study method of the educational institution and the projects completed during the education programme. They may also be asked about the practical details of school or university life.

The information gathered in the interview in combination with the results of desk research contribute to the final assessment of probability that the applicant actually acquired the declared, but insufficiently documented qualification. This is expressed in the final document.

Take into account the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees or other international tools when assessing qualifications of refugees with missing educational documentation.

NB: Ensure that the procedure is published on your website, in line with chapter 22 “Transparency and Information Provision”.

---

**Example 13.3: Academic recognition based on European Qualifications Passport for Refugees**

An applicant who is a refugee claims to have completed her master qualification and plans to seek admission to a PhD programme. Her master qualification is substantiated through the analyses of the available information and the interview, and that she is a holder of the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees. The decision on admission to a PhD programme will be made afterwards by the institution of higher education she applies to.

1. Issue the background paper/final assessment report in both the national language(s) and a widely spoken language in order to ensure the portability of the final document.

2. Use the outcomes of the alternative assessment (a background document or interview-based assessment report) to support the actual recognition process. For instance, it
may be used as a basis for an admission decision taken by an institution of higher education or decision on employment taken by the employer.

4. Consider partial recognition/recognition of specific learning outcomes in case the alternative assessment does not contain enough evidence to recognise the qualification declared by the applicant.

Example 13.4: Recognition of prior learning
An applicant who is a refugee seeking employment applies for recognition of his bachelor qualification in accounting. Most of his educational documentation is missing. Based on the information and documentation provided by the applicant, the credential evaluator compiles the educational portfolio. The portfolio does not contain enough evidence, however, to support recognition of his qualifications according to applicant’s request. In addition to formal education, the applicant has had some professional experience in accounting, also certified by the documents issued by his former employers. In this case, the credential evaluator advises him to contact an educational institution/authority competent in RPL (recognition of prior learning).

Sources and references
- Council of Europe, European Qualifications Passport for Refugees.
- HK-Dir, Refugees and Recognition – REACT project.
- HK-Dir, Refugees and Recognition – ARENA project.
- UNESCO, UNESCO qualifications passport for refugees and vulnerable migrants.
- WES, WES Gateway Program.

Several ENIC-NARIC offices have developed a procedure for the assessment of refugee qualifications. You can find more information on the services provided by a few ENIC-NARIC centres through the following links:
- Ministry of Higher Education and Science Denmark, Background report on foreign educational qualifications.
- HARNO, Recognition of refugees’ qualifications in Estonia.
- HK-Dir, Recognition of foreign higher education.
- CIMEA, Recognition of qualifications held by refugees (Italy).
- Nuffic, Netherlands Information for refugees about diplomas.
- Swedish Council for Higher Education, No documents from your foreign education?

**Relevant Articles RCP**

20. In cases where refugees, persons in a refugee-like situation or others who for valid reason cannot document the qualifications they claim, the competent recognition authority is encouraged to create and use a “background paper”, giving an overview of the qualifications or periods of study claimed with all available documents and supporting evidence.

22. In deciding the size of any fees charged, (...) special measures aimed at low income groups, refugees and displaced persons and other disadvantaged groups should be considered in order to ensure that no applicant is prevented from seeking recognition of his or her foreign qualifications because of the costs involved.

28. In the case of refugees, displaced persons and others who for valid reasons, and despite their best persistent efforts, are unable to document their claimed qualifications, it should be considered whether alternative ways of recognising these qualifications may be found, for example by measuring the learning outcomes which could reasonably be expected from the undocumented qualification. Such measures should be adapted to the circumstances of their recognition application and could include ordinary or specially arranged examinations, interviews with staff of higher education institutions and/or the competent recognition authority and sworn statements before a legally competent authority.
14 Automatic recognition

This chapter discusses the concept of automatic recognition and how to apply this in practice.

Introduction

Automatic recognition is a concept that is currently not covered by the LRC and its subsidiary texts. However, it is included in this manual because many ENIC-NARICs deal with this concept. Automatic recognition is introduced to ensure fast, fair and consistent recognition procedures.

The idea behind the concept dates back to the foundations of the Bologna Process and the creation of the three cycle structure in the EHEA. More recently, the 2020 Rome Communiqué commits to implementing AR by 2030, and the European Commission has embraced “automatic recognition” as an objective to be implemented by 2025 in all European Union Member states.

Procedure automatic recognition

1. Determine if qualification qualifies for Automatic Recognition
   - YES
     - Accept quality, level, and workload of the qualification and treat qualification as a domestic qualification
   - NO
     - Treat as foreign qualification

2. Evaluation on system level or access to programmes?
   - ACCESS TO PROGRAMMES
     - Continue evaluation of profile and learning outcomes
   - SYSTEM LEVEL
     - Communicate recognition decision to applicant or institution. Consider developing digital tools to replace such individual decisions
The definition used for automatic recognition in the EHEA and the EU originates from the EHEA Pathfinder group on Automatic Recognition:

“Automatic recognition of a degree leads to the automatic right of an applicant holding a qualification of a certain level to be considered for entry to the labour market or a programme of further study in the next level in any other EHEA-country (access).”

System versus programme level
An easy way to understand automatic recognition is to make the distinction between system and programme level recognition, using the 5 elements of a qualification (see figure 1):

- System level: the level, quality and workload are elements that can be considered regardless of the content of the programme. These three elements are the same across bachelor’s degrees, independent of the major subject of the degree.
- Programme level: profile and learning outcomes, on the other hand, are programme-specific and cannot be generalised. The contents of bachelor’s degrees in physics and in history are very different.

Automatic recognition is always recognition on system level. It gives the applicant the automatic right to be considered for access to the next academic level. The actual recognition decision would still take into account the profile of the qualification with a view of the purpose of recognition.

Conditions and models
Automatic recognition can obviously only be applied if certain conditions are met. In general the qualification should come from a country that:
- signed the LRC,
- implemented the three-cycle system and has an education system referenced to the Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area or European Qualifications Framework, and
- has a quality assurance system based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

NB: in case of regional accreditation this concerns the region.
Figure 1

**Evaluation recognition**
Evaluate (5 elements)
qualification based on LRC
Substantial difference principle

**System level**
1. level
2. quality
3. workload

**Programme level**
4. profile
5. learning outcomes

Any additional selection criteria that may apply

**Admissions decision**

**Automatic recognition**
No separate procedure to evaluate the three elements on system level for qualifications from countries that:
- Signed LRC
- Have a three cycle structure and referenced to EQF/QF-EHEA
- Have a QA-system based on the ESG

---

**Figure 1**
There are different models to implement automatic recognition. In the EHEA the following four models are used:

1. Automatic recognition arranged in bilateral and multilateral agreements;
2. Automatic recognition based on a list of countries to be decided by a competent recognition authority (unilateral);
3. Non-legal recommendations (Baltic-Nordic manual);
4. De facto application of automatic recognition, accepting for many countries that in practice MA=MA, BA=BA, and quickly evaluating qualifications in an automated process.

These models can be applied at the same time.

**Access versus admissions**
Access is of a more general nature than admissions. A qualification may give formal/general access to all programmes at the next level of study if it meets the general level requirement for access. It may also just give partial access if the home country formally stipulates that it only gives access to a certain type of programme at the next level or only to programmes at a certain type of institutions (e.g. universities of applied sciences).
In the context of automatic recognition, access refers to general access to the next level (i.e. from bachelor to master). This is different from access to a specific programme, which is based on evaluation of profile and learning outcomes (scope of LRC). In addition, as part of the admissions procedure, additional selection requirements may apply for access to a programme, such as minimal grades, motivation, etc (outside scope of LRC and part of institutional admission process).

Note in your dialogue with higher education institutions, that in institutional admissions procedures the admissions and recognition process are usually one and the same.

Further note, the automatic access that may be granted in the receiving country should be comparable to the access to the next level of study that the qualification gives in the home country. For example, a level 6 qualification only giving partial access to the next level in the home country should give the same access in the receiving country. This may require some adjustment or interpretation into the education system of the receiving country as every system has its own differences.

### Recommendations

1. Determine if the qualification qualifies for automatic recognition;

   **Example 14.1: Qualification covered by a multilateral agreement**
   An applicant with a Lithuanian Bakalauras applies for a master’s programme in the Flemish Community of Belgium. Both countries are party to the Benelux Baltic Treaty on automatic recognition, which stipulates automatic recognition of qualifications between the countries, including the bachelor and master level. The credential evaluator knows automatic recognition applies in this case.

2. If the qualification qualifies; accept the quality, level and workload of the qualification and continue the evaluation as if this was a domestic qualification (i.e. check its authenticity and whether the qualification was accredited at time of issuing);
Example 14.2: The Nordic Baltic admissions officers manual
A student with a bachelor from Denmark applies for a master’s programme in Estonia. Both Denmark and Estonia are members of the Nordic Council of Ministers that published a manual indicating how each other’s qualifications should be recognised. On basis of the agreement on mutual automatic recognition as laid down in the manual, the student has general access to studies on master level in Estonia. The admissions officer in Estonia accepts the quality level and workload, and continues with the evaluation on programme level, which is focused on access to the specific programme.

Example 14.3: Automatic recognition on basis of a bilateral agreement
According to a bilateral agreement between two countries, a qualification qualifies for automatic recognition. However, when continuing with the standard verification check, it appears that the qualification was issued by a non-recognised operator. In this case, recognition is denied (unless the institution qualifies as a non-recognised but legitimate institution).

Example 14.4: Accreditation expired
A qualification qualifies for automatic recognition. However, when checking its accreditation status, it appears that the qualification was not accredited at the time it was issued. The absence of accreditation leads to denial of recognition.

3. a. If you provide an evaluation on system level, communicate the recognition decision to the applicant or institution. Consider developing digital tools to replace such individual decisions on system level;
b. If you provide evaluations for access to programmes, continue the evaluation of the profile and learning outcomes.

Example 14.5: Automatic recognition in a database
Country X has a centralized system for foreign students applying for studies. Higher education institutions receive the files via the centralized system. The ENIC-NARIC centre has coordinated with the relevant stakeholders, to provide a level to the qualification before the package is distributed to the different institutions. In this way, the level is automatically accepted and the institution only has to continue with checking accreditation and verification of the document.
Example 14.6: Communicate automatic recognition decisions to the wider public
The Irish ENIC-NARIC (QQI) and the Polish ENIC-NARIC (NAWA) both have databases in automatic recognition decisions of specific qualifications which are publicly available. The admissions officer looks up the qualification, accepts the quality and level and continues with the evaluation after a simplified authenticity check.

Sources and references


Relevant Articles RCP

6. Procedures and criteria for the assessment of foreign qualifications should be transparent, coherent and reliable, and they should periodically be reviewed with a view to increase transparency, taking account of developments in the education field and eliminating requirements leading to undue complications in the procedure.

31. Where countries have established a quality assurance system including a system of formal assessment of their higher education institutions and programmes, the competent recognition authority should take due account of the results of the process when evaluating qualifications from such systems.

33. Before undertaking the assessment, the competent recognition authority should establish which national and international legal texts are relevant to the case, and whether these require any specific decision to be reached or procedure to be followed.

35. The assessment of a foreign qualification should identify the qualification in the system of the country in which recognition is sought which is most comparable to the foreign qualification, considering the purpose for which recognition is sought. In the case of a qualification belonging to a foreign education system, the assessment should consider its relative place and function compared to other qualifications in the same system. Where
available, the competent recognition authorities should also refer to the National Qualifications Framework, European Qualifications Frameworks and other similar Qualification Frameworks as part of the assessment process.
This chapter discusses assessment of qualifications acquired in flexible ways. It starts by introducing the main concepts relating to non-traditional learning, such as non-formal, informal, and distance learning as well as recognition of prior learning. It then outlines the recommended approach for credential evaluators in assessing qualifications awarded after flexible learning. A separate subtopic is devoted to micro-credentials. It provides a definition and description of the concept and lays out a recommended framework for assessing such credentials.

### Procedure Qualifications Awarded After Flexible Learning

- **Accept that the awarding institution has determined that the learning outcomes of the qualification have been achieved by the graduate.**
- **Accept that relevant quality assurance system guarantees the quality of the programme and/or institutions meets the standards.**
- **Accept that qualifications obtained may appear different from qualifications acquired in a traditional way (such as workload, credits, content).**
- **Assess qualifications awarded after flexible learning.**
- **Assess qualifications partially or fully obtained through flexible learning paths as their counterparts obtained in the traditional way.**
Introduction

As flexibility in learning is becoming more mainstream, it places increased importance on recognition of such qualifications. In the spirit of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, holders of qualifications awarded after flexible learning should benefit from the same principles of transparency, mobility and fair recognition as those with qualifications earned the traditional way.

A flexible learning path refers to any situation in which the graduate has obtained a qualification in a way that is not the conventional learning path. The flexibility of the learning path may be:

- open and distance learning;
- access and admission to the programme, exemptions of part of the programme or the whole programme, based on recognition of prior learning;
- access and admission to the programme, exemptions of part of the programme or the whole programme, based on modular learning, such as micro-credentials.

Traditionally, education was seen as an input-based process expressed in workload and length of studies (hours, semesters and years). In a competence-based system, education is seen as an output-based process expressed in the competences achieved by the learner. As a result, the qualifications awarded in higher education are no longer seen as proof of participation and successful completion of a programme but as the certification of having achieved certain predefined learning outcomes. Thus, credential evaluators are advised to take into consideration what the learner knows and can do irrespective of their chosen learning path.

In the ECTS users guide the following concepts are defined:

**Formal learning**
Learning typically provided by an education or training institution, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and leading to certification. Formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective.

**Informal learning**
Learning resulting from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and typically does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional but in most cases it is non-intentional (or “incidental”/random).
Non-formal learning
Learning that is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. It is, however, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner’s perspective.

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning
The process through which an institution certifies that the learning outcomes achieved and assessed in another context (non-formal or informal learning) satisfy (some or all) requirements of a particular programme, its component or qualification.

The Global Recognition Convention included the following definitions, that are not included in the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its subsidiary texts:

Formal learning: learning derived from activities within a structured learning setting, leading to a formal qualification, and provided by an education institution recognised by a State Party’s competent authorities and authorised thereby to deliver such learning activities.

Informal learning: learning which occurs outside the formal education system and which results from daily life activities related to work, family, local community, or leisure.

Lifelong learning: a process which refers to all learning activities, whether formal, non-formal, or informal, covers the entire lifespan and has the aim of improving and developing human capacities, knowledge, skills, attitudes and competencies.

Non-formal learning: learning achieved within an education or training framework which emphasises working life and which does not belong to the formal education system.

Non-traditional learning modes: formal, non-formal and informal mechanisms for the delivery of educational programmes and learning activities not primarily relying on face-to-face interaction between the educator and the learner.

Prior learning: the experience, knowledge, skills, attitudes and competencies which an individual has acquired as a result of formal, non-formal, or informal learning, assessed against a given set of learning outcomes, objectives, or standards.
Distance learning
Distance learning refers to any educational activity in which students are separated from the faculty and other students. The development of both distance and open learning was enabled by the development of information and communication technologies. Students and the faculty may be based in one country or in different countries. In the latter case, distance learning can become an electronic form of transnational education (see chapter 16: “Transnational education”). Distance learning courses may or may not require a physical on-site presence for reasons such as consultations with teachers, taking examinations or defending a thesis, etc.

Distance learning may be provided both by institutions dedicated solely to distance learning (such as the Open University in the UK or the Fernuniversität Hagen in Germany) and by “traditional” institutions that – apart from “traditional” programmes - also provide distance learning programmes.

Distance learning as a form of provision is recognised as legitimate in most countries, and it may be provided by public or private higher education institutions or take the form of transnational education due to enrolments from anywhere.

Recognition of Prior Learning
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) refers to the process by which a competent authority or education institution assesses the knowledge, skills and competence which an individual possesses as a result of, for example:
- Learning acquired in a non-formal or informal setting;
- Learning that did not lead to a qualification;
- Learning acquired through professional experience;
- Learning acquired through unfinished studies at a recognised institution.

There is a wide range of terminology which refers to the process of identification, assessment and formal acknowledgement of prior learning and achievements (examples are Accreditation of prior learning (APL), validation des acquis de l’expérience (VAE) and Accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL)). In this manual we use the term RPL to cover all these different terminologies.

Prior learning may have resulted in learning outcomes that are comparable to those acquired through traditional learning. Recognition of such learning is important in order to facilitate admission to further studies or credit transfer.
Recommendations

1. Assess qualifications partially or fully obtained through flexible learning paths in the same way as a comparable qualification which was obtained in the traditional way with focus on learning outcomes.

2. Accept that the institution awarding a qualification which is based on a flexible learning pathway has determined that the learning outcomes of the qualification have been achieved by the graduate.

Example 15.1: Assessing a qualification awarded on the basis of RPL
An applicant applies in country X for recognition of a French qualification: Brevet de Technicien Supérieur (BTS). The qualification has been awarded primarily on the basis of RPL by the competent French authorities. The qualification should be recognised by the competent authority in country X according to exactly the same standards as if the qualification was obtained strictly through the French formal education system.

3. Accept that the relevant quality assurance system guarantees that the predefined (minimum) quality of the programme and/or institution meets the standards, regardless of the flexible learning path completed by the student.

Example 15.2: Assessing a qualification awarded after distance learning
The holder of a professionally oriented bachelor’s degree in international trade management asks for a recognition statement for his prospective employer. The qualification was obtained through an online programme. The institution only provides distance learning programmes. It was accredited by a recognised accreditation agency and is authorised to provide undergraduate and graduate studies. As such this bachelor’s degree may be considered in the same way, and of the same level, as any other bachelor’s degree from that country.

Usually regular institutional and/or programme accreditation procedures cover flexible forms of provision and recognition of prior learning. In some cases, there may be specific procedures targeted at certain types of provision, such as distance learning or micro-credentials. If in doubt, please contact the ENIC-NARIC or national recognition information centre in the institution’s country.

Be aware that competent RPL authorities might not appear on the usual lists of recognised higher education institutions. If you cannot find this information, please contact the ENIC-NARIC or national recognition information centre in the institution’s country.
Example 15.3: Trusting quality assurance mechanisms
You are assessing a bachelor’s degree in business administration awarded by an open distance education provider. The applicant was admitted to the programme without the traditional access qualification and obtained the degree through an online programme. You verify that the institution is accredited and is authorised to provide online undergraduate and graduate studies. Thus, you can consider that the learning outcomes associated with this award have been achieved and the bachelor’s degree can be considered in the same way, and of the same level, as any other bachelor’s degree from that country.

4. Accept that qualifications obtained through flexible learning pathways may appear different from qualifications acquired in a traditional way, especially in the type of information provided with the qualification (such as workload, credits, contents of the programme).

Example 15.4: Recognising an RPL qualification with a different appearance
An applicant has submitted a recognised qualification which was awarded solely on the basis of RPL. The qualification is not accompanied by a transcript and is not described in traditional terms of workload and contents of the programme, which you take into consideration in your decisions. Nonetheless, you should trust that the qualification has been awarded after its holder has attained the competences required for this qualification provided that the validation process has been carried out in accordance with the legislation on RPL in the country of origin. You should base your assessment on the available information about the generic and specific learning outcomes for this level and/or type of qualification.
Example 15.5: Recognising a qualification with some information missing
An applicant has submitted a recognised bachelor’s degree for recognition. The Diploma Supplement indicates that the workload of the programme is 240 ECTS, but the courses listed in the supplement amount to 120 ECTS. The rest of the credits were marked as recognition of prior learning. The Diploma Supplement also provides information on the level and the learning outcomes associated with this award. You verify the quality assurance status of the institution and the programme, consider the level and the learning outcomes of the programme and assess the qualification in the same way as you would assess a similar qualification obtained in a conventional way.
Subtopic – Micro-credentials

Introduction

Modular education refers to small units of learning aimed at acquiring specific skills, upskilling, or reskilling offered by various types of providers (employers, higher education institutions). It is most often offered as e-learning (also in the form of MOOCs), but can also be blended or face to face.

The most widely known type of modular education is a micro-credential. Within the December 2020 document “A European Approach to Micro-credentials”, the European Commission gives the following definition:

A micro-credential is a proof of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a short learning experience. These learning outcomes have been assessed against transparent standards.

The increasing prominence of modular learning and, particularly micro-credentials, is evidenced by the fact that for some time they were offered solely based on the standards developed by the providers, but now there are efforts by policy makers to increase standardisation to ensure wider use and transferability. Those efforts include looking for ways to integrate micro-credentials into regular education structures, such as quality assurance, credit and qualification frameworks. In June 2022 the Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability was adopted.

Thus, while most units of modular learning may not constitute a conventional qualification, they are more standardised than non-formal education and, in many cases, can be subject to a more simplified recognition process than the traditional RPL procedures.

An evaluation methodology was developed for this type of learning in the framework of the e-VALUATE project, co-funded by the Erasmus+ Program of the European Union. It involves scoring the ‘level of robustness’ from 0 to 3 of seven criteria when evaluating the credential to determine if there are sufficient grounds for a simplified recognition procedure.

The seven criteria are
1. Quality of the study programme;
2. Verification of the certificate;
3. Level of the study programme;
4. Learning outcomes;
5. Workload;
6. The way study results are tested;
7. Identification of the participant.

**Recommendations**

1. Consider integrating micro-credentials into your recognition services. How this can be done will largely depend upon your office’s remit and profile, but some of the possible options are:
   - assessing micro-credentials as periods of study;
   - assessing micro-credentials with qualifications in a holistic way with micro-credentials adding on and/or compensating for some missing elements of a qualification;
   - advising or providing recommendations to higher education institutions involved in assessing micro-credentials.

2. Assess micro-credentials by identifying the level of the robustness according to the seven criteria and consider recognising or advising to recognise those with high level of robustness without additional RPL procedures. This would in particular encompass quality assured micro-credentials with clear level and workload as well as assessed learning outcomes. Be flexible by keeping in mind that, while most micro-credentials may not be part of formal education, they can attest the achievement of a set of learning outcomes.

---

**Example 15.6: Advising higher education institutions regarding micro-credentials**

An ENIC-NARIC office receives a request from a higher education institution for an assessment of a degree awarded by a university in the USA. The file also includes a micro-credential obtained through online learning. Depending on the college/university, the student may be awarded exemption or credit transfer in the USA based on the micro-credential in question. The credential evaluator provides this information as an addition to the assessment of the degree.
Example 15.7: Using the levels of robustness in assessment
You have been asked to provide some advice regarding recognition of a Micro-Master's Certificate in Supply Chain Management awarded by the University X that is quality assured. You look at the level of the robustness of the award according the seven criteria and determine that for all of the criteria the level of the robustness is between 2 and 3. You take into consideration that:

- the credential was awarded by a quality assured and accredited higher education provider that regularly undergoes institutional accreditation procedures;
- the University X describes the award as equivalent to one of its semesters of graduate study;
- the award was subject to continuous and final assessments with verified identity of the student.

You conclude that the award is substantial and can be considered for recognition as one semester of Master level study without additional RPL procedures.

Example 15.8: Consider the added value of assessment
You have received an application for recognition with the purpose of access to a bachelor's programme in IT. In the application file the applicant has included a senior secondary qualification and a MOOC Lynda Certificate of Completion in an IT related course. The information on the Lynda Certificate states that course duration was several hours and it only attests to the viewing of the course. You determine that the secondary qualification already gives general access to all types of bachelor's degree programmes. Thus, you assess the senior secondary qualification, but decide that, for this purpose, the assessment of Lynda Certificate would be unnecessary and would not create any additional value for the applicant.

3. Consider the balance of the added value of an assessment against the resources needed for it with a specific purpose in mind. Some modular learning can be very small, representing just a few hours of learning and/or attesting only to participation or viewing. In this case, the learning can be included as part of RPL portfolio, but might not be substantial for other types of recognition.

In order to save time and resources, keep record of your previous decisions for reference.
Sources and references

- European Commission, *Europass. Description of the eight EQF levels* (website).


Relevant Articles RCP

40. Competent recognition authorities should be encouraged to focus on the learning outcomes, as well as the quality of the delivery of an educational programme and to consider its duration as merely one indication of the level of achievement reached at the end of the programme. The assessment process should acknowledge that recognition of prior learning, credit transfer, different forms of access to higher education, joint degrees and life-long learning will all shorten the duration of some academic qualifications without diminishing the learning outcomes and a decision not to grant recognition should not be motivated by duration alone.
16 Transnational education

Recognition of qualifications awarded in transnational education may require closer examination of the programme and status of the institutions involved as well as regulations regarding recognition/accreditation of education providers in home and host countries. When countries developed legislation regarding provision of transnational education this also has to be taken into account. The chapter provides a simplified overview of the subject and gives guidelines on how to assess qualifications awarded.

**Procedure transnational education**

1. **Verify the recognition/accreditation of the awarding institution and programme in home country**
2. **Verify the institution’s legal permission to operate in receiving country**
3. **Analyse transnational arrangement through which the qualification was awarded**
4. **Qualification/credits properly accredited in home system and permitted to operate in host country?**
   - **YES**
     - Assess qualification
   - **NO**
     - Do not recognise qualification
Introduction

Transnational education (also known as “cross-border education”) refers to all types and modes of delivery of higher education study programmes, or sets of courses of study, or educational services (including those of distance education) in which the learners are located in a country other than the one where the awarding institution is based.

An issue that might arise is to determine the “home country” of the awarding institution, and the authority that is responsible for recognising and/or accrediting it and/or its programmes.

Transnational education programmes are established through transnational arrangements. There are two types of such arrangements:

1. **Collaborative arrangements**, where study programmes of the awarding institution are delivered or provided by a partner (e.g. an institution from country X allows an institution from country Y to deliver its programme, and the qualification is awarded by the institution from country X), or;

2. **Non-collaborative arrangements**, where study programmes are delivered directly by an awarding institution on a cross-border basis (e.g. a university from country X has a branch in country Y, where it provides the programme while awarding the qualification from country X).

Within collaborative provision, different types of partnerships are possible. Examples are:

**Franchise**

The partner institution abroad delivers a whole (degree) programme that has been developed and is delivered by the awarding institution. The awarding institution guarantees the quality of the study programme, is responsible for the teaching and assessment policy and confers the degree. The transcript can be issued by either institution.

General information about the partnership is mentioned on the website of the awarding institution, while the programme details with the curriculum can be found on the website of the partner institution.

There might be some minor differences in the programme offered abroad due to local circumstances (e.g. a foundation year due to differences in entry requirements or the language of instruction).
The teaching staff will mainly be from the partner institution, though the awarding institution can send their own staff to deliver parts of the study programme.

Validation
In this collaboration, the partner institution develops and delivers a programme that is not offered by the awarding institution. The awarding institution judges that the quality of this programme is comparable to that of its own programmes. It guarantees the quality of the programme and issues the diploma/confers the degree. It has not developed and does not offer the programme itself, but offers similar programmes in this field.

Legislation
Differences in legislation can influence the evaluation of TNE qualifications. For example, in some countries legislation requires that the partner institution should be recognized in the country where it is located, whereas in other countries this is not a requirement.

Recommendations
1. Verify the status of the awarding institution responsible for developing the transnational education programme and awarding the qualification:
   a. Verify that the awarding institution and (where applicable) the programme is/are recognised/accredited in the home country;
   b. Verify that the awarding institution (which in the case of non-collaborative agreements is also the providing institution) has legal permission (by home and receiving authorities) to operate in the receiving country.

Example 16.1: Franchise
The Faculty of Religion of University X offers the Bachelor of Theology and other bachelor and master’s programmes in the field of theology and religion. Its partner institution Y abroad has entered into an agreement with University X and is allowed to use the curriculum of the Bachelor of Theology and deliver this programme, while University X will confer the bachelor’s degree.
Example 16.2 Validation
You are evaluating a Bachelor of Theology. The degree has been conferred by a recognised private university that has validated the study programme which was designed and delivered by its partner institution in another country. The partner institution is not allowed in its home country to confer academic degrees and has sought collaboration with a recognised foreign university. You check the programmes of the awarding institution and find out that this university does not offer any programmes in the field of theology. You therefore have doubts about the quality assurance of this programme.

Example 16.3: Checking of transnational education qualification - authorisation in the country of provision is required
An applicant is seeking access to a PhD programme in psychology where a research-based master is required. He/she holds a master’s degree in social sciences. The qualification was awarded in country X by an awarding institution established and operating in the education system of country Y. The awarding institution was accredited by one of the recognised accreditation organisations of country Y and is authorised to provide bachelor’s and master’s programmes in the off-shore campus in country X. It is recognised in country X as a foreign provider awarding foreign qualifications. The credential evaluator should therefore assess the master's degree in question as any master’s degree coming from country Y and, if no substantial difference exists, the qualification should be recognised and the applicant should be considered for admission to the PhD programme.
Example 16.4: Checking of transnational education qualification - authorisation in the country of provision is not required

An applicant seeks recognition for his/her master’s degree awarded by a private higher education institution based in country X after completion of a transnational programme taken in country Y. The awarding institution is recognised both in the home country (country X) and by the authorities of the receiving country Y. In this case the credential evaluator should assess the qualification obtained at the campus in country Y in the same way as if the qualification were obtained in country X.

2. Check whether the quality of the programme is ensured by the transnational arrangement of the institutions involved. Recognition authorities should verify whether the transnational education programme is accredited in the home country of the awarding institution or recognised/accredited in the receiving country, “whether as legitimate foreign education or part of the host education system”. One of these options should usually be sufficient, provided a competent recognition authority in at least one of the participating countries has evaluated the quality of the educational programme. Check whether the transnational arrangements - through which the transnational education programme was established - comply with the legislation in both receiving and home countries:

- is the providing institution offering a transnational programme (e.g. through a branch campus abroad, distance education or any other form) allowed to do so according to its national legislation;
- in the case of non-collaborative arrangements - is the transnational provider permitted to operate in the receiving country? This could include various types of permission including operation as a foreign provider, operation as a private provider, or even (in some cases) a form of recognition or accreditation;
- in the case of collaborative arrangements is the providing institution in the receiving country authorised to offer programmes at a given level of education and is it authorised to enter into transnational arrangements;
- has the quality of the transnational education programme been monitored? If yes, by whom? Is the quality of the programme (academic quality and standards, teaching staff, teaching, awards, academic workload) offered through transnational arrangements comparable to the quality of traditional programmes offered by the institution awarding the degree?
Example 16.5: Education provider not recognised
The competent recognition authority has received a master’s degree for recognition. The qualification was awarded by a recognised institution established and operating in the education system of country X after completion of a programme offered in country Y. The qualification was not recognised in country Y because neither the programme nor the institution was legally established in country Y. The competent recognition authority is recommended to respect the national legislation of country Y in these matters and take it into account when making the recognition decision.

Sources and references

- Council of Europe and UNESCO, Revised code of good practice in the provision of transnational education, 2007.

Relevant Articles RCP

1. The present Recommendation is adopted within the framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and applies to the Parties of this Convention. The principles and practices described in this Recommendation can, however, also equally be applied to the recognition of qualifications issued in other countries or under transnational education arrangements, to the recognition of joint degrees and to the recognition of qualifications in countries other than those party to the Lisbon Recognition Convention.
29. In view of the wide diversity of higher education institutions and of the developments in transnational education, the status of a qualification cannot be established without taking into account the status of the institution and/or programme through which the qualification was awarded.

30. The competent recognition authorities should seek to establish whether the higher education institution belongs to the higher education system of a given country. In the case of qualifications awarded by higher education institutions established through transnational arrangements, the competent recognition authorities should analyse these arrangements on the basis of the principles stipulated in the UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education and in the Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees.

40. Competent recognition authorities should be encouraged to focus on the learning outcomes, as well as the quality of the programme and to consider its duration as merely one indication of the level of achievement reached at the end of the programme. The assessment process should acknowledge that recognition of prior learning, credit transfer, different forms of access to higher education, joint degrees and life-long learning will all shorten the duration of some academic qualifications without diminishing the learning outcomes and a decision not to grant recognition should not be motivated by duration alone.
Recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes may require closer examination of the programme and status of the institutions involved. In such cases, some flexibility in the assessment is recommended, as national legislation for properly awarding joint qualifications may be lagging behind in many countries. In this chapter information is provided on how to proceed with the assessment of such qualifications.

**Procedure qualifications awarded by joint programmes**

- Check if the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes has been applied to the programme's accreditation
  - YES
  - NO

- Check whether the joint programme as a whole has been accredited by a reliable (national) accreditation organisation
  - YES
  - NO

- Check the accreditation/recognition status of the consortium partners in their home system or partial accreditation of the programme
  - NO
  - ACCREDITED / RECOGNISED

- Recognise qualification unless there is a substantial difference

- Accept that consortia providing joint programmes may include institutions that are not recognised higher education institutions, as long as the recognised institutions take responsibility for the quality of the joint programme
Introduction

A joint degree is a qualification awarded by higher education institutions who are involved in the joint programme, attesting the successful completion of the joint programme. It is a single document signed by the competent authorities (rectors, vice-chancellors) of the institutions involved in the joint programme and it replaces the separate (institutional/national) qualifications.

A joint programme is a programme offered jointly by several higher education institutions. A joint programme does not necessarily lead to a joint degree. That is only one of the possible awards. After the completion of a joint programme the graduate may be awarded: a single national qualification, a double/multiple qualification and/or a joint qualification.

Recognition of a foreign qualification usually means recognition of a foreign national qualification. Qualifications awarded by a joint programme on the other hand are considered as either belonging to more than one national system or not fully belonging to any single national system. Hence some additional evaluation elements have to be taken into account in the assessment of the quality assurance of a joint programme.

In May 2015 European ministers responsible for higher education adopted the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in order to ease the external quality assurance of these programmes. The European Approach sets a framework for joint quality assurance of joint programmes by providing an application mechanism and standards that are based on the agreed tools of the EHEA without applying additional national criteria. It determines that cooperating higher education institutions should jointly select a suitable quality assurance agency from the list of EQAR-registered agencies. The agency should use the standards and procedures mentioned within the European Approach to carry out a single evaluation or accreditation of the entire joint programme - the result of which is expected to be accepted in all EHEA countries.

In the absence of a clear accreditation status under the European Approach, evidence of the quality of the joint programme should be sought in the status of the consortium partners and their programmes.
Recommendations

1. Check if the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes has been applied to the accreditation of the programme. It means that an integrated quality assurance of the programme has been applied, the programme is accredited in each of the relevant consortium partners, and no further checks are necessary;

2. In the absence of such accreditation, check whether the joint programme as a whole has been accredited by a reliable (national) accreditation organization, usually in a country where one of the consortium partners is located. In that case, you have sufficient evidence for the overall quality of the programme, and further checks into the status of the consortium partners should not be necessary;

Example 17.1: Checking of a qualification awarded by a joint programme accredited in the single accreditation procedure

A joint programme offered by 4 different higher education institutions have been accredited in one single accreditation process by an EQAR registered quality assurance agency. This accreditation has been carried out according to principles set out in “The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes” adopted in the Bologna ministerial conference in 2015. The competent recognition authority does thus not need to investigate, if the programme is recognised in the 4 participating countries.

In the absence of a single accreditation process as mentioned under 1 and 2, check the accreditation/recognition status of the consortium partners in their home system or (in countries with an accreditation system at programme level) the accreditation status of parts of the programme, in order to obtain sufficient evidence for its quality.

The accreditation status of part of a programme offered by one institution of a consortium can be particularly difficult to verify in most education systems. Therefore a flexible approach is advised in this aspect of investigating the joint qualification. Not every detail about the accreditation of the programme needs to be checked, as long as there is sufficient evidence for the overall quality.
Example 17.2: Checking of a qualification awarded by a joint programme where one of the awarding institutions was not recognised/accredited

An applicant submits a master’s degree for recognition. According to the information in the Diploma Supplement, the programme was offered jointly by three institutions. Two of them are officially recognised/accredited institutions authorised to provide master’s programmes. The third one is a post-secondary institution not authorised to offer higher education programmes. The holder of the degree studied at two institutions, of which only one was recognised. In this case the competent recognition authority may decide not to recognise the degree or to recognise only the credits earned at the recognised/accredited institution.

Example 17.3: Checking a qualification awarded by a joint programme where one of the participating institutions was not recognised/accredited

A competent recognition authority receives for assessment a joint master’s degree issued by five institutions. Four of them are officially recognised/accredited higher education institutions and the fifth institution is a private consulting company. The transcript shows that the holder of the qualification has studied at two recognised/accredited institutions. In this case the credential evaluator should take into account the status of the higher education institutions and assess the joint master’s degree as any foreign qualification.

3. Accept that consortia providing joint programmes may include institutions that are not recognised higher education institutions, as long as the recognised institutions of the consortium take responsibility for the quality of the joint programme. The provision of joint programmes is in some respects experimental (especially within the European Higher Education Area) to create new forms of higher education programmes. Therefore, consortia may include partners outside of the formally recognised higher education institutions, such as research institutions or commercial organisations with specific knowledge or skills that are relevant to the joint programme.
Information tools

More information regarding the joint programme and the awarded qualification (joint degree) should be available in the Diploma Supplement of the joint degree.

Information specific to the joint programme can also be found in the following sources:
- official website of the higher education institution offering the joint programme;
- agreement establishing a joint programme.

Example 17.4: Checking of academic rights conferred after completion of joint master’s programme provided by HEIs offering academic and professionally oriented programmes

An applicant is seeking access to PhD studies for which a research-based master degree is required.

The applicant holds a joint master qualification (joint degree) awarded after the completion of a joint programme provided by two institutions from two countries. The joint degree is signed by the competent authorities from both countries. Both institutions are recognised in their home countries. One of the institutions providing the joint programme is authorised to provide research-based master’s programmes giving access to PhD studies and the other one only professionally-oriented master’s programmes not giving direct access to PhD studies.

In this case the competent recognition authority should base the assessment on the learning outcomes of the joint qualification and whether the methodology of scientific research was included in the learning outcomes of the joint programme. If this is the case, full recognition should be granted notwithstanding that one of the HEIs only offers professionally-oriented master’s programmes, which do not give direct access to PhD programmes.

If, however, the methodology of scientific research is lacking in the joint programme, this can be considered as a substantial difference and may lead to an alternative form of recognition, such as the offer of a bridging programme.
Sources and references


Relevant Articles RCP

Joint degrees are mentioned in articles 1, 3, 29, 30 and 40. No articles deal solely with joint degrees within the Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications. The Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees deals exclusively with recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes.

1. The present Recommendation is adopted within the framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and applies to the Parties of this Convention. The principles and practices described in this Recommendation can, however, also equally be applied to the recognition of qualifications issued in other countries or under transnational education arrangements, to the recognition of joint degrees and to the recognition of qualifications in countries other than those party to the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

3. Terms defined in the Lisbon Recognition Convention are used in the same sense in the present Recommendation, and reference is made to the definition of these terms in Section I of the Convention. The provisions pertaining to the competent recognition authorities shall also be applied, mutatis mutandis, to authorities and individuals responsible for the assessment of foreign qualifications and for the provision of information on qualifications and their recognition. Terms that specifically refer to the provision of transnational education are defined in the UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in the provision of Transnational Education. Terms that specifically refer to joint degrees are defined in the Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees.
29. In view of the wide diversity of higher education institutions and of the developments in transnational education, the status of a qualification cannot be established without taking into account the status of the institution and/or programme through which the qualification was awarded.

30. The competent recognition authorities should seek to establish whether the higher education institution belongs to the higher education system of a State party to the Lisbon Recognition Convention and/or belonging to the European Region. In the case of qualifications awarded by higher education institutions established through transnational arrangements, the competent recognition authorities should analyse these arrangements on the basis of the principles stipulated in the UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education and in the Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees.

40. Competent recognition authorities should be encouraged to focus on the learning outcomes, as well as the quality of the programme and to consider its duration as merely one indication of the level of achievement reached at the end of the programme. The assessment process should acknowledge that recognition of prior learning, credit transfer, different forms of access to higher education, joint degrees and life-long learning will all shorten the duration of some academic qualifications without diminishing the learning outcomes and a decision not to grant recognition should not be motivated by duration alone.
Unlike TNE or joint degree programmes, non-country specific qualifications are a form of international qualifications that do not belong to any national or subnational education system. The legitimacy of these qualifications can be difficult to determine. Even though this type of award is not mentioned in the LRC, good practice has been developed as a subsidiary text within the framework of the Convention.
Procedure non-country specific qualifications (international degrees)

Check whether national recognition and/or accreditation were possible
Legal and/or administrative barriers were present to gaining recognition or accreditation

Check the status of the institution and qualification

ACCREDITATION / RECOGNITION
Consider full recognition

NO ACCREDITATION / RECOGNITION
Check the quality assurance arrangements of the awarding institution:
- evidence of only internal quality assurance measures
- evidence of internal and external quality assurance provided by a recognised quality assurance body
- evidence of internal and external quality assurance by specialised quality assurance bodies
INSUFFICIENT EVIDENCE

Is there general recognition of the award by providers of education, employers, or government bodies in the country of recognition authority?

NO
Check whether qualification is linked to qualifications framework or quality standard. Not applicable if the body has self-referenced

YES
Consider partial or local recognition

NO LINKS TO FRAMEWORKS OR QUALITY STANDARDS

Is there a description of the learning outcomes for the qualification?

NO
Clear and comparable learning outlines outlined

YES
Consider:
- partial or conditional recognition
- advisory statement
- non-recognition

No learning outcomes identified
Introduction

A non-country specific qualification is a qualification that is not part of the education system of a country and is consequently outside the scope of any national educational regulatory body. The main difference with other types of qualifications is that non-country specific qualifications are not part of that country’s educational framework.

Types of non-country specific awards

A non-country specific qualifications may fall within one (or more) of several categories.

- Regional: these qualifications are issued by a non-country specific body which operates across a specific regional area. An example would be the West African Senior School Certificate issued by the West African Examinations Council;

- International access qualifications: these qualifications are issued in multiple countries across the globe and are not specific to a single country e.g. Diplomas of the International Baccalaureate awarded in Belgium. Some qualifications within this category may also be referred to as “international access qualifications” since they may give access to higher education studies;

- Professional/Sectoral: these qualifications in professional or sectoral/technical fields are not specific to a single national education system and are issued by a non-country specific body e.g. European Engineers by FEANI.

- Religious: whilst certain religious qualifications are formally part of a national qualifications framework, such as the Holy See qualifications offered abroad e.g. Holy See qualifications offered in Ireland, other qualifications may be non-country specific and are not officially part of national education systems;

- International organisations: these are qualifications issued by supra-national or international bodies e.g. the United Nations University, UNRWA, World Maritime University, UNESCO qualifications offered in Japan.

Another example of a non-country specific qualification that falls under the category academic qualification is the future European Degree which is currently being explored by the European Commission through the European Universities Initiative. Since the legal status and other matters regarding the European Degree are yet to be decided, it is not clear which other categories as mentioned above will apply.

Non-country specific qualifications are not to be confused with qualifications awarded by institutions that are not formally recognised in their national system of higher education but may still be legitimately offering study programmes. For information about the latter type of qualifications, see also chapter 19, Non-Recognised but Legitimate Institutions.
In cases where institutions operate independently of any national education system and offer higher education study programmes across country borders, there may be an intersection between non-country specific and transnational education qualifications. However, these terms should not be used interchangeably. For information about the latter type of qualifications, see also chapter 16, “Transnational Education”.

Possible assessment outcomes
Due to the differences in processes and systems, competent recognition authorities may arrive at different outcomes upon assessing non-country specific qualifications. However, some possible outcomes to the evaluation may include:

- **Full recognition:** the award is deemed to meet the necessary requirements of the recognition authority’s processes, e.g.:
  - International access qualifications (European Baccalaureate, International Baccalaureate), based on the LRC recommendations on international access qualifications.
  - According to national regulations the recognition authority can also consider full recognition for:
    - Qualifications offered by international inter-governmental institutions (e.g. the UN Awards);
    - Qualifications offered by sectoral (specialised) institutions outside the formal system of education.

- **Partial or conditional recognition:** in cases where a qualification does not meet the full criteria, but where the recognition authority can offer partial, alternative or conditional recognition. The recognition authority could:
  - Provide recommendations and contextual information after going through the “Criteria for Recognition” as listed above;
  - Provide recommendations on how to articulate the gained skills and knowledge or competence assessment or similar pathways into the national system of education.

- **Advisory Statement:** instead of formal recognition, the recognition authority offers contextual information on the nature of the qualification in question.

- **Non-recognition:** in some cases, (full/partial) recognition or an advisory statement is not possible if the qualification is deemed not to meet the necessary requirements of the competent recognition authority’s processes.
Recommendations

1. Check the status of the institution and the qualification:
   
   a. Check the background of the body responsible for the non-country specific qualifications:
      ■ check whether national recognition and/or accreditation were possible for the qualification (and were not sought despite availability) or;
      ■ whether, conversely, legal and/or administrative barriers were present to gaining recognition or accreditation.

      In case of doubt, it may also be helpful to ask within the ENIC-NARIC Networks for information and experience regarding the institution or qualification in question.

      If the body issuing the non-country specific qualification is based in an LRC member country, the credential evaluator can contact the ENIC-NARIC centre in that country for further information on the nature of the qualification. Their information may assist in determining whether the issuing body has the opportunity to become accredited within a national system, or whether it is deemed to sit outside that system.

   b. In the event that no formal accreditation or other type of quality assurance has been obtained, check the quality assurance arrangements of the awarding institution. The recognition authority can investigate whether there is:
      ■ evidence of only internal quality assurance measures;
      ■ evidence of internal and external quality assurance provided by a recognised quality assurance body;
      ■ evidence of internal and external quality assurance by specialized quality assurance bodies.

      If sufficient evidence of formal accreditation and quality assurance is present, the credential evaluator can determine if full recognition can be considered.

If the qualification in question was delivered by an issuing body which is recognised for the purpose of providing country-specific awards, but which also issues non-country specific awards that are not accorded national recognition due to administrative obstacles, the credential evaluator should take the national operations of the issuing body into consideration when assessing the non-country specific qualification e.g. *titulo propio* in Spain.
Example 18.1: Qualification awarded by an international organisation
An applicant holds a Master degree from an university in country X.

The credential evaluator reviews the accreditation status, national considerations, qualifications framework, and learning outcomes. The university is founded by an agency of an international body. The degree was first accredited in 2015 by an EQAR registered accreditation agency in country Y.

The recognition authority is recommended to consider full/partial recognition if the Master degree was awarded from 2015 onwards.

The recognition authority is recommended to issue an advisory statement if the Master degree was awarded prior to 2015.

2. In case you find that the institution and/or the programme resulting in the non-country specific award was not properly accredited, you have no objective information on the quality of the qualification. This may be considered to be a substantial difference in terms of the LRC. The following options are available:

a. Try to establish whether there is general recognition of the award by providers of education, employers, or government bodies in the country of the recognition authority. This information may indicate to the recognition authority whether partial or local recognition might be considered. National considerations may include:
   - Do most or all national educational institutions accept the award?
   - Do any government bodies, particularly sectoral bodies, give formal acceptance to the award for progressing to (for example) licensed status in a profession?
   - Does it have status through national legislation (e.g. European Baccalaureate)?
   - Is it widely accepted by educators (e.g. credit transfer)?
   - Or is it widely accepted by employers?
   - Or, is there no evidence of being accepted?

b. Check whether the qualification is linked to a qualifications framework or quality standard. In particular, how these links have been determined is of key importance.

If the body has self-referenced, this may not be of relevance to the recognition decision.
If the body followed a robust referencing process (with external input), the recognition authority may wish to consider:
- Links to both qualification frameworks and quality standards;
- Links to a qualification framework;
- Links to quality standards;
- No links to frameworks or quality standards.

c. Try to find out if there is a description of the learning outcomes for the qualification in question. The possible results are that there are:
  - Clear and comparable learning outcomes outlined;
  - No learning outcomes identified.

If recognition can be offered, the credential evaluator should also consider the general characteristics necessary for an evaluation; such as the content, duration, link to specific occupational roles and other aspects related to the comparison of the award.

Example 18.2: Secondary education qualification awarded by an international organisation
An applicant holds a Diploma of the International Baccalaureate (IB Diploma) and is seeking access to a first-cycle university degree.

The IB Diploma is issued by the International Baccalaureate (IB), a non-profit institution based in Switzerland. It is widely accepted for admission to higher education institutions. The credential evaluator is recommended to assess the award in line with the recognition authority’s approach to international higher education access awards, taking into account the LRC recommendations. Therefore, full recognition is recommended.

Example 18.3: Qualification awarded by an international organisation
An applicant holds a Master degree from an educational institution based in country X.

The credential evaluator finds that the educational institution is founded by an international organisation. While investigating the accreditation status, the credential evaluator finds that this particular programme is not accredited by the accreditation agency A in country X even though a few other master’s programmes of the this institution are accredited. Recognised universities in country X are not obliged to obtain accreditation from this agency. However, the credential evaluator is not able to identify the level of learning outcomes or possible links to qualification frameworks based on the information available.
The recognition authority is recommended to investigate the possibility for partial recognition. However, there is a lack of knowledge of the standard of education offered to be confident of providing assessment.

Sources and references


Relevant Articles RCP

2. The present Recommendation is adopted within the framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and applies to the Parties of this Convention. The principles and practices described in this Recommendation can, however, also equally be applied to the recognition of qualifications issued in other countries or under transnational education arrangements, to the recognition of joint degrees and to the recognition of qualifications in countries other than those party to the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

29. In view of the wide diversity of higher education institutions and of the developments in transnational education, the status of a qualification cannot be established without taking into account the status of the institution and/or programme through which the qualification was awarded.

30. The competent recognition authorities should seek to establish whether the higher education institution belongs to the higher education system of a given country. In the case of qualifications awarded by higher education institutions established through transnational arrangements, the competent recognition authorities should analyse these arrangements on the basis of the principles stipulated in the UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education and in the Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees.
40. Competent recognition authorities should be encouraged to focus on the learning outcomes, as well as the quality of the programme and to consider its duration as merely one indication of the level of achievement reached at the end of the programme. The assessment process should acknowledge that recognition of prior learning, credit transfer, different forms of access to higher education, joint degrees and life-long learning will all shorten the duration of some academic qualifications without diminishing the learning outcomes and a decision not to grant recognition should not be motivated by duration alone.
This chapter describes how to deal with qualifications awarded by institutions that are not formally recognised by official education authorities, and which may still be legitimate in offering study programmes. It describes the different types of concerned institutions and provides recommendations on how to take into account these qualifications worth to be delivered partial recognition or advice.

**Procedure non-Recognised but Legitimate Institutions**

- Conduct research into the legitimacy of the institution and the qualification
- Where possible, request further information about the institution through the applicant
- Conduct research into the legitimacy of the institution and the qualification
- Information that may be held by national accreditation authority
- Develop knowledge base of recognition processes/quality assurance measures across education system worldwide
- Conduct research into the legitimacy of the institution and the qualification
- Include explanation of status of institution/qualification in assessment statement
Introduction

The status of the awarding body is important to the evaluation of qualifications. For more information on this, please turn to chapter 5: “Accreditation and Quality Assurance (status of the institution)”.

Where an institution is recognised in the country of origin, the qualification can be assessed and recognised according to the Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications (adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee in 2010). When an institution is not recognised in a national system, it is important to not simply dismiss it. An effort should be made to ascertain whether the institution can be considered to be a legitimate provider even though it is not officially recognised, in which case a fair and transparent assessment is still possible.

A Non-recognised but legitimate institution refers to institutions which are not formally recognised by the authorities officially responsible for the accreditation and recognition of institutions in a given system, but which may offer study programmes of comparable level to other formally recognised programmes. Such institutions may include government or military institutions, adult education centres or religious seminaries. Generally, non-recognised but legitimate institutions may be categorised into two groups.

1. Institutions barred from recognition or choosing not to be recognised

This category includes legitimate institutions whose programmes may be comparable in content and level to those from recognised higher education institutions and which may be treated as such by public authorities, employers and higher education institutions, but which for various reasons may fall outside of the formal education system. Such institutions typically include government or military education institutions, religious institutions and seminaries. Some may also be transnational education providers (see also chapter 16: “Transnational education”).

2. Substandard tertiary education providers

This category includes legitimate institutions which provide genuine higher education programmes but which are unlikely to meet the standards for accreditation or recognition in their country, many of them having tried and failed to attain

---

1 Qualifications from non-recognised institution: an overview of the issue, Hunt, E.S., in “Developing attitudes to recognition: substantial differences in an age of globalisation”, CoE, 2009
recognition/accreditation. Often these institutions may appear on the lists of ‘unaccredited institutions’ published by competent authorities for recognition.

It is worth noting that national procedures for quality assurance and recognition may vary from country to country. Not all education systems include a fully established system of accreditation or recognition, and in some cases the established accrediting agencies may have a narrow scope or jurisdiction that precludes assessment of particular types of institutions or programmes. However, the affected institutions in that country may well be legitimately offering qualifications that give access to professions and may be accepted by recognised institutions. Qualifications from such institutions may be, upon further investigation, of a comparable standard. Even if this is not the case, or if there are legitimate differences making full recognition impossible, it may still be possible to provide some form of recognition or useful comments and advice to applicants holding such qualifications and to interested parties.

**Recommendations**

1. Where possible, request that the applicant provide further information about the institution. Where possible, conduct research into the legitimacy of the institution and the qualification. Take particular note of any third party quality assurance measurements as well as any information which may be available at the national accreditation authority. As detailed in Section VIII of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the information which should be provided by the competent authorities in each country will vary depending on whether or not they have an established system of recognition/accreditation.
Example 19.1: Qualifications from countries with established quality assurance and recognition procedures covering a range of institution types
An applicant has submitted a qualification from a religious institution which is not accredited by the relevant quality assurance authority in the home country. Further investigation reveals that the awarding institution is offering genuine study programmes and as such may be considered a legitimate, though non-recognised, institution, and may even hold accreditation in another system. An analysis of the qualification may lead to some form of recognition, on the basis of the course entry requirements, duration, structure, learning outcomes and any external quality assurance mechanisms which may apply.

2. Develop a knowledge base of the recognition processes and quality assurance measures across different education systems worldwide as well as in one’s own country, and the variety of institutional types and potential recognition and accreditation issues. This will facilitate the research necessary into the legitimacy of institutions and qualifications and how best to deal with non-standard situations.

Example 19.2: Qualifications from countries without fully established recognition authorities
An applicant has submitted qualifications from a country where, as yet, there are no formal recognition procedures in place, or where the procedures do not cover continuing education. Further investigation reveals that the awarding provider’s programmes are validated by the country’s engineering council and as such subject to a degree of external quality assurance. Careful consideration of qualifications from this institution, including looking at the transcripts and programme learning outcomes in depth, may lead to partial recognition on a case-by-case basis or to a statement useful for employment purposes. Details of research conducted and the decision made should be saved centrally to ensure consistency in future assessments.

3. Consider issuing a statement explaining the status of the institution/qualification in cases where the institution and the course programme are confirmed legitimate, but are not officially recognised by national authorities.

You may wish to keep a record of institutions and qualifications that you have researched for future reference.
Example 19.3: Qualifications from countries with regulated recognition procedures for national education providers only

An applicant with a police qualification applies for recognition. A formal recognition statement is not possible since the institution and its programme fall outside of the national education system in the country of origin. The recognition authority issues a statement explaining the status of the programme, the purpose, duration and admission requirements that the applicant can use for academic and professional recognition purposes.

Sources and references

**Relevant Articles RCP**

29. In view of the wide diversity of higher education institutions and the developments in transnational education, the status of a qualification cannot be established without taking into account the status of the institution and/or programme through which the qualification was awarded.

30. The competent recognition authorities should seek to establish whether the higher education institution belongs to the higher education system of a State party to the Lisbon Recognition Convention and/or belonging to the European Region. In the case of qualifications awarded by higher education institutions established through transnational arrangements, the competent recognition authorities should analyse these arrangements on the basis of the principles stipulated in the UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education and in the Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees.

31. Where countries have established a quality assurance system including a system of formal assessment of their higher education institutions and programmes, the competent recognition authorities should take due account of the results of the process when evaluating qualifications from such systems.
Part 4. Information instruments
This chapter introduces the Diploma Supplement (DS) and other information tools as instruments to facilitate recognition of foreign qualifications. It provides an overview of the tools, guidelines on how to use them and concrete examples to support the credential evaluator.

Procedure diploma supplement (and other information tools)

DS available?

YES

Check key information of DS

Use DS for various aspects of recognition

Continue evaluation

NO

use other information (such as transcript)

Absence of DS is no reason for negative decision
Introduction

The Diploma Supplement (DS)\(^1\) is a document describing the qualification it is issued with and the education system to which the qualification belongs. It is a transparency tool meant to facilitate the understanding and recognition of qualifications. It is issued, automatically or upon request, in the countries involved in the Bologna process, but it has not been completely implemented in all the signatory countries.

The DS enables the credential evaluator to place the foreign qualification in its national educational context and then compare it to a qualification in the host country. It is a first essential step in the understanding of the qualification in its own educational system, with an overview of the system itself.

The DS is usually issued in the language of the awarding country, and another widely spoken language (usually English). Therefore, the use of the Diploma Supplement (where available) should reduce the need for translation of other key documents required for recognition. This saves the applicant having to pay for a translation and would speed up the recognition process.

Another information tool worth mentioning is the Certificate Supplement (CS). It is similar to the DS but concerns information on Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualifications. The CS is used in EHEA countries, however, in other countries, other type of documents containing extra information on the qualification can be provided and used in the assessment of a qualification.

In 2020, the European Commission launched the Europass digitally-signed credentials infrastructure (EDCI). It is a way for HEI to issue digital qualifications. Hence DS and CS can be stored on Europass or the device of the qualification holder. It can be directly shared with admission officers, employers or credential evaluators. Europass verifies both the institution that issued the degree and the qualification. It is available in different formats and student data can be imported in a database.

\(^1\) The outline structure for the DS was developed by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO-CEPES (adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee in June 2007 at Bucharest). This chapter refers to the revised model for the DS adopted at the EHEA Ministerial Conference in May 2018 and subsequently adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention in June 2019. The DS template, the explanatory notes, the outline structure, examples of DS and a glossary can be consulted at the ENIC-NARIC website listed in the references below. All the 8 sections contain relevant information for the recognition of qualifications (information on the holder of the qualification, information on the qualification and the system of education, etc.).
Recommendations

1. Request the DS from applicants whose qualifications were awarded by higher education institutions in the EHEA. It should not be requested from applicants whose qualification was awarded outside the EHEA or before the implementation of the DS in their country, as they will not have it. Note that the absence of a DS should not be considered as a reason to reject the application.

Example 20.1: Requesting a Diploma Supplement (DS) from an applicant

A credential evaluator receives an application containing a qualification from a higher education institution that delivers DS. The credential evaluator asks the applicant for the DS. The latter explains he has lost it and the higher education institution does not replace it. The credential evaluator gets in touch with the higher education institution and asks for verification and a duplicate of the DS. The HEI answers that the candidate did graduate but they cannot issue another DS. Hence, the credential evaluator continues to evaluate the qualification.

In the case of a digital DS, the credential evaluator can check on the EDCI and download student data.

2. If no DS is available, use all the other supporting documents provided with the qualification. Many higher education institutions issue supplementary documentation containing information similar to DS, such as degree profiles, transcripts of records or records of examinations for each subject studied at a university (e.g. credit book, index of exams, etc.). Information contained in these documents should be treated in the same way as the information of the same kind included in the DS.

Example 20.2: Other information tools

An applicant submits a qualification delivered from a country outside the EHEA.

The file contains a document issued by the higher education institution in addition to the required documents. The document contains information regarding the mission of the HEI, the goals of the programme, further studies’ possibilities, and employability of graduates.

Once the authenticity of the document and the status of the institution and programme have been checked, the credential evaluator can use the information provided by the additional document to better understand the qualification and receive more information regarding the learning outcomes.
3. Use the DS as a secondary source and check key information. The credential evaluator should be aware that the existence of a DS does not guarantee the status of an institution, its awards, or whether it is recognised as part of a national higher education system. Even if the DS includes this kind of information, credential evaluators should:

   a. Always carefully check, via other sources, the status of the institution, whether the qualification is recognised in the awarding country or not.

   b. Check whether the name of the person who obtained the qualification is the same as on the DS. In some educational systems, qualifications carry a number which is also mentioned in the DS; it might be worth verifying this number correspondence.

Example 20.3: Checking a Diploma Supplement (DS)

A credential evaluator receives an application including a well-structured and detailed DS containing clear information on the status of the institution and programme. The information shows that the institution is recognised by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in the home country and that the programme has recently received an accreditation by the National Accreditation Organisation (NAO) of that country for a period of 5 years.

The credential evaluator verifies this information on the website of MoE and NAO but cannot find the institution and programme on the lists and subsequently decides to contact the national recognition information centre of the country that delivered the documents. These sources inform the credential evaluator that the qualification was issued by a degree mill specialising in selling bogus qualifications accompanied by authentic-looking bogus DS's. Consequently, the application is rejected.

4. Use the information provided of the DS, if available, when evaluating an application. The DS provides a structured overview of information relevant to the evaluation and recognition process in one document.

Credential evaluators should specifically consider the following sections and sub-sections of the DS:

   a. Section 2: Information identifying the qualification, and in particular the paragraphs:
      a.1 Name of qualification and (if applicable) title conferred (in original language);
      a.2 Name and status of the awarding institution. For more information on this, see chapter 5: “Accreditation and Quality Assurance (status of the institution)”;
a.3 Name and status of institution (if different from 2.3) administering studies;
This is particularly important when the institution awarding the qualification is not the same as the institution(s) administering the studies: for instance, in the case of a joint programme or cross-border or transnational education. For more information on this, please turn to chapter 17 “Qualifications awarded by joint programmes”.

b. Section 3: Information on the level of qualification and reference to national and international qualification frameworks, on the duration and the access requirements. This can help in placing the foreign qualification in its national educational context and more easily compare it to the qualification of the host country.

c. Section 4 (especially section 4.2). Information on the contents and results gained, with a focus on learning outcomes. When learning outcomes are clearly documented, assessments should take these into consideration and recognition should be based on a comparison of learning outcomes and competences. For more information, see chapter 9, “Learning Outcomes”.

d. Section 6. Additional information. This section should be consulted on a case-by-case basis.

e. Section 8. Information on the national higher education system. This section gives information on the higher educational system: its general access requirements; the national qualifications framework (where applicable), types of institution and the quality assurance or accreditation system. For countries which are members of the European Union, the national framework should also be compatible with the European Qualifications Framework. For more information on this, please turn to chapter 21: “Qualifications Frameworks”.
Example 20.4: Using the Diploma Supplement (DS)

An applicant submits an application file including a DS, from a country the national recognition information centre has little experience with. It involves a joint programme provided by two different types of institutions in the same country and accredited by a small private agency. The degree awarded does not have an easily understandable degree’s name (such as “bachelor” or “master”). The credential evaluator has trouble in understanding the credit system and the grading scale used. Instead of getting in touch with the counterparts of that country with a long and complicated email, the credential evaluator is going through the DS seeking for information. The DS provides clear information on the accreditation system, on the joint programme and the agencies involved, but also on the NQF and EQF level, as well as on the learning outcomes of the qualification and the higher education system. It gives sources where information can be checked. The credential evaluator can hence pursue the evaluation of the application.

Example 20.5: Examples of Diploma Supplement

- Examples of the Diploma Supplement can be found at: https://europa.eu/europass/fr/diploma-supplement-examples
- Examples of the Certificate Supplement can be found at: https://europa.eu/europass/en/europass-certificate-supplement-examples

Sources and references

- Europass Website: the Certificate Supplement.
- Europass, National Europass Centres Website.
- Europass, Diploma Supplement – Templates and Instructions.
Relevant Articles RCP

13. Where learning outcomes are clearly documented, for example in the European Commission/Council of Europe/UNESCO Diploma Supplement, assessments should take these into consideration.

19. The responsibility for providing information on the qualification for which recognition is sought is shared by applicants, higher education institutions at which the qualifications in question were awarded and the competent recognition authority undertaking the assessment as specified in the Lisbon Recognition Convention, in particular in its Articles III.3 and III.4. Higher education institutions are strongly encouraged to issue a Diploma Supplement in order to facilitate the assessment of the qualifications concerned.

20. In cases where refugees, persons in a refugee-like situation or others for good reason cannot document the qualifications they claim, competent recognition authority is encouraged to create and use a “background paper” giving an overview of the qualifications or periods of study claimed with all available documents and supporting evidence.

23. Requirements for the translation of documents should be carefully weighed and clearly specified, especially as concerns the need for authorised translations by sworn translators. It should be considered whether requirements for translation could be limited to key documents, and whether documents in certain foreign languages, to be specified by the competent recognition authority, could be accepted without translation. The countries concerned are encouraged to revise any current laws preventing the acceptance of documents in non-national languages without translation. The use of the Diploma Supplement (where available) should reduce the need for translation of other key documents.
Qualification Frameworks can serve as a useful tool enabling credential evaluators to consider qualifications in relation to the different levels of a national system and should be used while considering the five key elements in recognition: level, learning outcomes, quality, workload and profile. This chapter contains guidelines on application of Qualification Frameworks in recognition practice.
Introduction

National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) are having an increasing influence on national reforms of education, training and qualifications systems, in particular in terms of addressing the challenges of lifelong learning. A qualifications framework is an instrument for the development and classification of qualifications. In their most basic sense NQFs can be understood as classifiers specifying the relationship - horizontally and vertically - between different qualifications within a national system. A comprehensive qualifications framework is one that covers all levels and types of education, both academic and vocational. The NQF provides a way to compare qualifications and to describe the relation between the different levels of a national educational system, and the level, workload and learning outcomes of specific qualifications. This should also help recognition abroad. It is a useful tool for employers and educational/training institutions to better understand the level of a national and foreign qualification, in particular with regard to further study opportunities and occupational/professional outcomes.

There are several types of qualification frameworks: national qualification frameworks referring to one country’s educational system and international overarching frameworks such as the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF-LLL), which provides a common European reference framework, and the framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area also known as the Bologna framework or the EHEA-QF. The EQF-LLL and the EHEA-QF are overarching frameworks whose goal is to facilitate the mutual understanding of qualifications within the European Economic Area and the EHEA countries respectively, enabling an easier comparison of systems and levels of education.

NQFs may be referenced against the international frameworks, thus describing which levels in the national and international frameworks correspond to each other.

Recommendations

1. Competent authorities should always view the foreign qualification within its national system. If an NQF exists, they should take its position within this framework into consideration. If a country does not have an NQF, this fact should not prejudice the evaluation of a qualification from such a country.
Example 21.1: When an NFQ does not exist
If qualifications are not included or a country does not have an NQF, it should be established if other official documentation of the level of these qualifications exists, and the assessment should be based on this documentation. Also, the learning outcomes of National Qualifications Frameworks and overarching qualifications frameworks are generic and provide a reference point for recognition. In cases where the learning outcomes provided by the qualifications frameworks are insufficient or there is no qualifications framework for recognition purposes, the more detailed descriptions of learning outcomes provided by institutions should be used. The description of learning outcomes in the Diploma Supplement or other documents is also useful for recognition purposes.

2. For European countries, credential evaluators should check to see if the NQF of the country where the qualification was obtained has been referenced to the EQF-LLL or to the EHEA-QF. The European Commission has launched an EQF-portal (Compare Qualifications), where National Qualifications Frameworks can be compared by using the EQF as a translation. If a National Qualifications Framework has been self-certified or referenced, there is, as a general rule, no need for the competent recognition authority to investigate the level of qualifications further. In the case that qualifications have been referenced/self-certified towards the same level in overarching frameworks, they should be seen as broadly compatible. See example 21.5 below.

3. Where qualifications were issued under previous structures, the credential evaluator should refer to the status of the qualification in the issuing country. If an NQF exists in the country where the qualification was awarded, it should be established whether previous qualifications are included in it.

Example 21.2: Legacy Awards or Previous Qualification Structures
How to place old qualifications (legacy awards) within a Qualification Framework? Ireland has referenced qualifications to the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) that were awarded prior to the introduction of the NFQ in 2003. These national awards were placed at various levels on the NFQ and are known as ‘legacy awards’. They still hold the same rights and privileges to current qualifications offered at similar levels on the NFQ. See: NFQ_Fan_With_Legacy_Awards.jpg (1871×1323) (qqi.ie). If the qualifications are not included, it should be established if other official documentation of the level of these qualifications exists and the assessment should be based on this documentation.
4. Where adequate information on the learning outcomes of a specific qualification is available, this should help understand the place of a qualification within a framework and compare qualifications on the basis of learning outcomes. For information about learning outcomes, see also chapter 9, “Learning Outcomes”.

Example 21.3: Learning Outcomes
The admissions officer in country B receives an application for admission to the third year of a professionally oriented bachelor’s programme in business studies on the basis of a post-secondary qualification from country C. Country B has an NQF in which the required qualification is at level 5 (associate degree). Country C does not have an NQF, so the admissions officer examines the information on the national education system provided by the recognition information centre of country C (including a diagram of the educational system). It appears that the post-secondary qualification from country C has comparable purposes and learning outcomes (it is a short-cycle programme qualifying for the labour market and progression to year 3 of a bachelor’s programme) as the level 5 associate degree. Therefore, the admissions officer decides that the level of the foreign qualification fulfils the requirements, even though an official level on the NQF hasn’t been assigned.

5. Credential evaluators should use NQFs as transparency tools for understanding the level, learning outcomes, and workload of foreign qualifications.

Example 21.4: Workloads and Substantial Differences
In many EHEA countries, the combined workload of consecutive bachelor’s and master’s programmes is 300 ECTS (usually 180 ECTS for the bachelor’s programme and 120 ECTS for the master’s programme). However, there are also countries where a bachelor’s programme of 180 ECTS may be followed by a master’s programme of 60 ECTS. These master’s programmes may have similar purposes and learning outcomes as the 120 ECTS master’s programmes, such as specialising in one of the main research areas of the chosen field of study, learning how to carry out original research, and preparing for admission to PhD programmes. Therefore, a difference of 60 ECTS between two master’s programmes should not be automatically considered as a substantial difference. All aspects of the master degree should be taken into account (level, workload, quality, profile and learning outcomes as well as academic rights to progress to the next level of study) and only substantial differences in the overall outcome of the programme (which would prevent the applicant to succeed in the desired activity) should be reported.
While recognising that qualifications should be assessed on the basis of learning outcomes as far as possible, competent recognition authorities may also be guided in their assessment by the workload learners are assumed to require in order to obtain the given qualification. This is normally expressed as credits and indicates the typical workload expected to achieve the learning outcomes associated with a qualification. For information about credits, see also chapter 10, “Credits, grades, credit accumulation and credit transfer”.

Qualification frameworks are not an instrument leading to automatic recognition of foreign qualifications, but they should be regarded as an important transparency tool and a foundation to compare qualifications on the basis of learning outcomes.

Example 21.5: Comparing levels of different national qualification frameworks
Countries have developed national qualifications frameworks with different structures and a different number of levels suited to their national educational systems. For example, a qualification in social work can be placed at level 5 in country X’s national qualifications framework and level 3 in country Y’s framework. The EQF-LLL can be used to compare the levels of the two different frameworks, provided the NQFs of both countries have been referenced to the EQF-LLL:

A British Bachelor Honours degree is placed at level 6 of the British national qualification framework, which has been referenced to level 6 of the EQF-LLL. An Irish Bachelor Honours degree is at level 8 of the Irish NQF, which has also been referenced to level 6 of the EQF-LLL. Therefore, if credential evaluators have to assess and compare these two qualifications, the use of the EQF-LLL can be useful in understanding their respective levels.
Sources and references

- Europass, *Compare Qualifications* (website).
- European Commission, Europass. *Description of the eight EQF levels* (website).
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), *The National Framework of Qualifications*.

Relevant Articles RCP

35. The assessment of a foreign qualification should identify the qualification in the system of the country in which recognition is sought which is most comparable to the foreign qualification, considering the purpose for which recognition is sought. In the case of a qualification belonging to a foreign education system, the assessment should consider its relative place and function compared to other qualifications in the same system. Where available, the competent recognition authority should also refer to the National Qualifications Framework and European Qualifications Frameworks as part of the assessment process.
Part 5. Recognition practices in the office
This chapter describes good practices on provision of information on recognition process, national education system relevant for applicants, competent recognition authorities in other countries and for other stakeholders.
Procedure transparency and information provision

Ensure that information is clear and
1. Easily accessible
2. Targeted at different interest groups
3. User-friendly
4. Interactive
5. Supplemented with links to other useful information sources
6. Provided in many forms
7. Not only in national language
8. Regularly updated
9. Free of charge

Provide information regarding procedures and criteria for the assessment of foreign qualifications
1. Description of the recognition system and competent authorities
2. Description of assessment criteria. The role of the applicant, competent recognition authorities and the decisionmaking body in the recognition process
3. The rights and obligations of the each of the parties
4. The schematic outline of the recognition process
5. The list of required documents and manner of their of submission
6. status: recommendation or a legally binding decision, and types of recognition statements
7. Description of the host country’s education system and qualifications to which the foreign qualifications are compared
8. The approximate time needed to process an application
9. Any fees charged

Provide information during application procedure
1. Acknowledgement of receipt
2. Clear list of required additional documents
3. Informal advice on how to obtain required documents and/or information
4. Automatic updates on status of application
5. Deadlines available
6. Information on delays in application
7. Description of the host country’s education system and qualifications to which the foreign qualifications are compared
8. Cooperate with applicant
9. Respect confidentiality of applications

Provide information on recognition decision
1. Reason(s) for decision
2. Rights granted by recognition decision in host country
3. Information on appeal procedure (if outcome is negative)
4. Advice further study/work possibilities, if requested
5. Measures the applicant may undertake to obtain recognition later See procedure chapter 12
Introduction

Transparency is one of the main principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. It ensures applicants to get the most accurate, clear and reliable information on recognition procedures and criteria followed in the host country. This implies a fair consideration for all applicants. It is aimed at facilitating academic and professional mobility.

The provision of clear and accessible information on recognition procedures and criteria plays a key role in making the recognition process more understandable, transparent, clear, and successful. Also, comparison tables of qualifications may facilitate and support successful implementation of automatic recognition.

Recommendations for Transparency

Competent recognition authorities should:

- seek to establish the best ways to raise awareness about recognition;
- seek to align their recognition criteria and procedures with established good practices;
- make clearly available their procedures and criteria for the assessment of foreign qualifications and periods of studies to the applicants;
- review on a regular basis their criteria and procedures in order to adapt to developments in the educational field and in the field of recognition;
- make sure that this information is clear enough so that applicants will have a realistic idea of the decision;
- provide a description of the assessment procedures and criteria in their national language and in English and/or another widely spoken language;
- draw up an inventory of typical recognition cases and/or a comparative overview of other education systems or qualifications in relation to their own. If possible create an online database of earlier assessment outcomes (“precedents”) and make this available online for applicants and other external stakeholders;
- make the recognition statements available through databases and registries that enable digital transfer of student data;
- establish anti-discriminatory mechanisms (no discrimination shall be made on any grounds, each application is dealt with in the same way and a fair evaluation is granted to all applicants).
Credential evaluators should:

- always follow the procedures and criteria adopted by their relevant authorities, keeping in mind that all cases are assessed individually;
- be able to refer to specific cases/the standard assessment of a particular qualification, underlining individual assessment;
- take the input of other parties into consideration.

**Example 22.1: An overview of assessment outcomes and comparisons**

On its website, a competent recognition body publishes generic comparison tables (for example list of foreign access qualifications) according to their previous cases and assessment experience. This overview may serve as guidance for applicants to get an idea of the result that can be expected if they submit an application for admission to this recognition body. The overview is regularly updated, and only outcomes that are in line with current assessment standards are included. It is clearly stated on the website that the information provided is for general guidance only.

**Example 22.2: Consistency of recognition decisions**

The recognition body maintains an overview of guidelines and explanations for various standard reasons for not granting full recognition, to be used when substantial differences in the qualification of the applicant have been found. These reasons relate to the assessment criteria of the recognition body, based on the LRC. The credential evaluators may pick the appropriate phrases as a point of departure when sending a negative recognition decision to an applicant. The overview document serves to ensure the consistency and efficiency of case processing.

**Example 22.3: Solutions for digital transfer of student data**

Students, universities, employers, national recognition authorities, professional organisations and other stakeholders need trustworthy information to assess the value of a foreign qualification. The development of databases and registries that enable digital transfer of student data provides easy access to trustworthy information. The competent recognition body actively uses available databases and registries to gather information in its case handling, and also makes its decisions available through similar channels.
Transparency should guide the work of credential evaluators from the moment they receive the application, during the assessment process and up to the point the final decision is made. On the other hand, personal data of applicants should be protected at all times.

The competent authority should be clearly defined and accessible. Criteria and procedures used to assess foreign qualifications should be the same whatever the country of origin of the applicants.

Although assessing qualifications implies an individual evaluation, identical procedures should be followed and the final decision should always be rational and clearly explainable to the applicants.

**Recommendations for Information Provision**

Information provided by competent recognition authorities should be:

- easily accessible;
- targeted at different interest groups such as: qualification holders, undocumented refugees, other ENIC-NARIC centres, employers, public authorities, professional organisations, higher education institutions, mobility and exchange agencies, quality assurance agencies, etc.;
- user-friendly: relevant and designed for non-expert users in terms of content and language;
- interactive, e.g. a questions and answers forum, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses provided for further queries. All information requests should be answered in a reasonable time;
- supplemented with links to other useful local, national or international information sources;
- provided in a variety of forms: electronically, by telephone, by post, face-to-face, and hard copy (brochures, fact sheets), etc.;
- provided not only in the national language but also a second widely spoken language(s), preferably including English;
- regularly updated;
- free of charge.
Information Provision on Criteria and Procedures

Competent recognition authorities should make available in a clear and transparent way their procedures and criteria for the assessment of foreign qualifications and periods of studies. The information should consist of the following elements:

- description of the recognition system and competent authorities;
- description of the assessment criteria;
- the role of the applicant, competent recognition authorities and the decision-making body in the recognition process;
- the rights and obligations of each of the parties;
- the schematic outline of the recognition process;
- the list of required documents (if possible adapted to the specifics of each country) and manner of their submission;
- types of decisions: full recognition, partial recognition, no recognition, etc.;
- status: recommendation or a legally binding decision, and types of recognition statements;
- description of the host country’s education system and qualifications to which the foreign qualifications are compared;
- the approximate time needed to process an application;
- any fees charged;
- references to the legislation (national and international, etc.);
- conditions and procedures for appealing against a recognition decision.

Example 21.4: Required documents for assessment

The list of required documents to be submitted by the applicant may depend on the purpose of recognition and on the country where the qualification was obtained. Required documents (recommendation as for minimum):

- application form;
- qualification certificate (diploma) in original language;
- Diploma Supplement, academic transcript and/or any other document annexed to the qualification certificate;
- translations of educational documents (in case these are not in a widely spoken language, or not in the language accepted by the individual recognition authority);
- ID card, passport or other similar document.

Information Provision during the Application Procedure

During the Application Procedure, the competent recognition authorities should:

- provide all applicants with an acknowledgment of the receipt of their applications;
- if applicable, indicate documentation and/or information that are lacking, using the terminology of the applicant’s country of origin;
- provide informal advice to the applicant on how to obtain the required documents and/or information;
- inform the applicant about any updates to the status of the application;
- indicate a deadline to the applicants;
■ inform applicants on delays or issues encountered while dealing with their application;
■ ensure that information is always accessible to the applicants by any means (in printed or electronic form or by telephone);
■ cooperate with the applicant and provide all the required information within the competent authority’s sphere of competence;
■ respect the confidentiality of applications and do not disclose any personal data without the applicant’s consent.

Example 21.5: Informing and cooperating with the applicant
Your organisation strives to complete all applications within 25 working days. You are working on an application from country Z; in order to complete the assessment you require a confirmation on the status of the institution that awarded the qualification. You contact the relevant authorities in country Z to investigate the status of the institution, but it takes longer than you expected to receive a reply. You contact the applicant and explain that the status of the institution needs to be confirmed. Explain what type of confirmation you require (e.g. a statement from the competent authority) – the applicant might be able to cooperate with you and facilitate the provision of the required information by the competent authorities.

Information Provision on the Recognition Decision
All the recognition decisions taken by the competent recognition authorities should be supplemented with the following information:
■ reason(s) for the decision;
■ rights granted by the recognition decision in the host country;
■ information on the appeal procedure including the path to follow and deadline (see chapter 12: “Alternative recognition and the right to appeal”);
■ measures the applicant may undertake in order to obtain recognition at a later stage.

In addition, if requested by the applicant advice should be provided regarding information or contacts at higher education institutions or other relevant bodies about further study and/or work.

In general, the emphasis should be placed not on the amount of information, but more on its relevancy, clarity, and availability.

Information on how to get a foreign qualification assessed should be published and disseminated among all stakeholders. A schematic procedure should be put in place by each competent authority.
Sources and references


Relevant Articles RCP

6. Procedures and criteria for the assessment of foreign qualifications should be transparent, coherent and reliable, and they should periodically be reviewed with a view to increasing transparency, taking account of developments in the education field and eliminating requirements leading to undue complications in the procedure.

11. The procedural recommendations contained in the present document aim at making assessment procedures more consistent and transparent and at assuring all applicants a fair consideration of their application. The recommendations on procedures and criteria to be followed are equally valid regardless of whether the outcome of the assessment procedure is:
   i. a recognition decision;
   ii. advice to the competent recognition authority making the decision;
   iii. a statement addressed to individual(s), institution(s), potential employer(s) or others.

   It is recommended that applicants have access to an assessment relevant to the case.
15. The competent recognition authorities should publish standardised information on the procedures and criteria for the assessment of foreign qualifications concerning higher education. This information should automatically be given to all applicants as well as to persons making preliminary enquiries about the assessment of their foreign qualifications.

16. The time normally required to process recognition applications, counted from such time as all relevant information has been provided by applicants and/or higher education institutions, should be specified to applicants. In the event that the recognition process is delayed, the applicant should be informed of the delay, the reason for it and notified of a date when a decision can be expected. Applications should be processed as promptly as possible, and the time of processing should not exceed four months.

17. Competent recognition authorities should provide advice to individuals enquiring about the possibilities and procedures for submitting formal applications for the recognition or assessment of their foreign qualifications. As appropriate, in the best interests of the individual, advice should also be provided during as well as after the formal assessment of the applicants’ qualifications, if required.

18. Competent recognition authorities should draw up an inventory of typical recognition cases and/or a comparative overview of other education systems or qualifications in relation to that of their own country as an aid in making recognition decisions consistent. They should consider whether this information could be made available to applicants with the proviso that this information serve only as an indicative guide, and that each application will be assessed on an individual basis.

19. The responsibility for providing information on the qualification for which recognition is sought is shared by applicants, higher education institutions at which the qualifications in question were awarded and the competent recognition authority undertaking the assessment as specified in the Lisbon Recognition Convention, in particular in its Articles III.3 and III.4. Higher education institutions are strongly encouraged to issue a Diploma Supplement in order to facilitate the assessment of the qualifications concerned.
23 Quality Assurance of Recognition in the ENIC Office and National Context

This chapter describes practices to improve the quality assurance in ENIC Offices to ensure fair services and decision-making. The chapter also provides recommendations on advancing recognition in the national context by focusing on the recognition infrastructure and directly promoting quality assurance of recognition in HEIs.

Introduction

As mobility and flexibility in learning is increasing, so are the standards and expectations for efficient and fair recognition and information provision services. Mutual recognition is instrumental in achieving learning goals on regional, national, institutional, and personal levels. In light of this, the aspect of quality assurance in recognition is important as it is essential to ensure timely and fair services as well as transparent and consistent decision making. This chapter discusses what quality measures can be taken by the ENIC offices to assure the quality and continuous improvement of their processes, but also what measures could be advanced on a national level.

Strengthening the national recognition infrastructure

The ENIC centre is mandated under the LRC to support the implementation of the LRC in the national context.

Legal and practical implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention are both important to achieve fair and smooth recognition practices.

One exercise to support practical implementation is to create a chart that visualizes how national academic recognition is organized in your country and whom are the main actors involved in recognition.

The chart allows for reflection, evaluation and improvement of the national recognition “infrastructure”.

Next you can publish the chart on your website so the process is transparent to all stakeholders (and as such supports information provision as discussed in the previous chapter).

Creating and reviewing the chart provides a basis for quality assurance mechanisms discussed below.
### Steps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Responsible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Make an inventory of competent authorities and other stakeholders involved in recognition</td>
<td>Ministry or ENIC-NARIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invite a representative of each stakeholder to participate in the drafting process</td>
<td>Ministry or ENIC-NARIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop the draft chart and send it to the stakeholders. The draft chart includes: a flowchart, a brief description of each stakeholder and its role in the recognition process (see the examples below)</td>
<td>Ministry or ENIC-NARIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review the draft chart and provide written input</td>
<td>All stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revise the draft chart on the basis of input from the stakeholders</td>
<td>Ministry or ENIC-NARIC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Quality Assurance in the ENIC Office

In order to ensure the quality of its recognition and other services, the ENIC office could develop and/or embed recognition and related services into their internal quality assurance and engage in external quality assurance exercises. Internal quality assurance implies that processes and services are described and standardised, there are indicators to monitor that these processes are going the way they are supposed to, and there are regular reviews with the purpose of continuous improvement.

External quality assurance usually involves an external peer review, which helps an office determine to what extent their practices and processes meet the internationally agreed good practice. It is an opportunity to have a fresh perspective on the office’s work and processes as well as a tool in identifying areas for improvement.
Recommendations

1. Make sure that your services are standardised and transparent. This usually means that your processes have clearly defined steps with timeframes and clearly outlined decision making processes. In practice this would encompass internal guidelines, manuals, and tools to ensure that your processes are consistent and carried out within a certain established framework. The information about the main points of the process should be made available to all the stakeholders involved (see also chapter 22, “Transparency and Information provision”).

Example 23.1: Internal guidelines published on the intranet
The Danish ENIC-NARIC office has a range of internal guidelines concerning principles and procedures of recognition published on the intranet for credential evaluators and administrative staff. These internal guidelines include:
- Principles and procedures for recognition, procedures for the secretariat, which receives and creates files for recognition;
- Internal procedures for principles and procedures of recognition of access qualifications and tasks related to assisting admission officers from HEIs;
- An extensive internal document with standard descriptions for filling in the recognition decisions. The document aims at securing the standard format and formulations of the centre’s decisions as well as for giving guidance on the use of the recognition decision and for the consistency of recognition decisions.
- An internal document related to the explanation of substantial differences in case of non-recognition or partial recognition.
- Guidelines of issuing background documents to refugees with undocumented qualifications or insufficient documentation.
- An internal document on the verification process and how to detect fraudulent documents, including examples.

2. Set measures with clear indicators to ensure that individual processes are going in accordance with the established procedure. Often these can now be automated and embedded into your IT systems.
Example 23.2: IT system supporting consistent procedures
The Lithuanian ENIC-NARIC office has an internal system, which takes credential evaluators through all of the steps of the procedure, automatically generates most of the communication with the applicant, allows the credential evaluator to review previous practice for the same or similar qualifications, flags all processes with approaching deadlines, flags any pending decisions that fall outside of previous practice, and requires at least one colleague to review the decision prior to signing.

3. Collect feedback from your stakeholders in a structured way and on a regular basis. Depending on your mandate, these could include the following:

a. Develop and integrate regular customer satisfaction surveys into your services to ensure that your services are fit for purpose.

Example 23.3: Ways of integrating customer satisfaction surveys into the service
- The Swedish ENIC-NARIC uses a pop up survey on their website to identify who uses their services and for what purpose.

- The Danish ENIC-NARIC sends a link to a customer satisfaction survey to all applicants who receive a recognition statement. The survey encompasses questions related to the assessment, application process, and the information and services provided during the application.

b. Collect feedback via structural meetings with your national stakeholders, i.e. through meetings with ministry and / or accreditation agencies, admissions officers networks, via videoconferences, in-person meetings, or whichever channel of communication seems most suitable (see below, under national infrastructure).

Example 23.4: Feedback collection
During a regular meeting with admissions officers, it appears that HEIs in some cases only need part of the information provided on the recognition statement provided by the ENIC-NARIC. In addition, they wish to have the information faster than currently provided. The ENIC-NARIC centre decides to experiment with giving HEIs the option to choose between a shorter and a full recognition statement. This turns out to be successful: the information can be provided faster to the HEI, because less time is spent on providing unnecessary information.
4. Actively review your processes and services and adjust them to ensure that they are in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its subsidiary texts; reflect the most recent developments in education; and meet your customer expectations.

The reviews could be done on regular basis, for instance every few years, and/or on ad hoc basis.

The following sources can be instrumental for regular and ad hoc reviews:

a. feedback from your customers (customer satisfaction surveys, complaints, appeals against your decisions, etc.);

b. analytics from indicators allowing to track the progress of the procedure;

c. new developments in education and/or updates to documents that you base your work on.

Example 23.5: Regular review / Internal audit

The Dutch ENIC-NARIC office uses a digital system to process applications and issue the evaluations to the applicants. The system requires an update every few years. Before each update, the office conducts an internal review to identify points of improvement in the procedure and to investigate how the digital system could accommodate these changes.

Example 23.6: Ad hoc review

An ENIC office is tracking the average processing for specific qualifications. It has noticed that joint degrees take longer than usual to assess and decided to review its handling of such degrees. After looking through the recommendations provided for recognition of joint programmes in the EAR manual, it has determined that its office has implemented most of the EAR manual’s recommendations, but it does not always apply the European Approach to quality assurance an for joint programmes. Even when this approach is applied to a joint programme, their credential evaluators still tend to check the accreditation status of the programmes in all the institutions involved, even though, in such cases, accreditation of the programme as a whole by one partner is sufficient. In light of this, the ENIC office has decided to review this practice in accordance with the recommendations: it updated its manuals and re-trained all credential evaluators on this topic.
Example 23.7: Customer journey
An ENIC-NARIC conducts a “customer journey”. The journey maps the total experience of the different stakeholders (“customers”) for each of the services provided by the ENIC-NARIC centre. On the basis of the mapping of each stage and who is (and should be) involved, the centre reviews the process including the viewpoint of all actors involved, and make adjustments where necessary to ensure (new) services are offered in an “applicant centred” way.

Example 23.8: After the peer review
An ENIC/NARIC office has undergone a peer review as part of the ENIC-NARIC quality assurance system. The peer review report contains a recommendation to improve the application process for assessments. After receiving the report, the ENIC/NARIC office formulates concrete follow-up actions in an internal implementation plan and monitors the implementation of the action points over time.

5. Undergo external peer-review at least every 5 years and/or after implementation of major changes. It is recommended that the external peer-reviews of the ENIC centres be carried out in accordance with the Standards & Guidelines for the ENIC-NARIC networks’ (SQUARE), which is a quality assurance tool developed specifically for these networks and adopted by themselves as a voluntary exercise during the ENIC-NARIC Annual Meeting 2019 in Cologne, Germany. It involves two steps: a self-assessment and a peer review by an international panel, involving a reviewer from the reviewed office’s country. The self-assessment tool can also be used for regular reviews as a part of internal quality assurance. The outcomes of the peer review are a set of recommendations from the peers and action points developed by you with the aim of improving your practices.

Quality Assurance in the National Context
While the quality of the activities of the ENIC-NARIC office is important, in most countries, the main decision makers in recognition are higher education institutions. Thus, without higher education institutions fair, efficient, and transparent recognition cannot be achieved. The ENIC office can play a role in advancing recognition in the national context by directly participating and/or promoting the elements of quality assurance of recognition of qualifications in HEIs. The quality assurance at this level would be aimed at ensuring the application of the LRC principles by all parties involved.
Some of the ways to achieve consistency and quality within the system is:

- Developing overarching national legislation, which transfers the main principles of the LRC and its subsidiary documents, and is also applicable to higher education institutions;
- Introducing a common quality code, which includes provisions regarding recognition. This can encompass:
  - A national quality framework aimed at recognition, which can be described as a guiding-principle document developed in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders to ensure the quality and consistency of academic credential assessment services; a code for internationalisation developed and/or updated with provisions on recognition.
- Make recognition a part of the external quality assurance procedures.

The quality assurance arrangements should not in any way undermine the autonomy of higher education institutions.

Recommendations

1. Engage with stakeholders to achieve a quality assured recognition framework on the national level. It is recommended to have at least one or several tools, such as listed above, implemented for a coherent and well-functioning recognition system. While this cannot be done by an ENIC office alone, you should engage in an active dialogue with policy makers and higher education institutions in developing and implementing such tools.

Example 23.9: Ways of implementing Quality Assurance aimed at recognition

Canada has developed a Pan-Canadian Quality Assurance Framework for the Assessment of International Academic Credentials (QAF). It is a voluntary and non-prescriptive document, which provides guiding principles to ensure the quality and consistency of academic credential assessment in institutions and academic credential assessment services. The adoption of QAF by an institution involves a self-assessment; application to the QAF, which requires demonstrating adherence to the tool; formal adoption; and regular self-assessments.
Australia’s National Information Centre for qualifications recognition in the Australian Government Department of Education engages domestically and globally on qualifications recognition policy to encourage improved recognition practices. It also delivers a suite of qualifications recognition information products and services to support stakeholders.

**Example 23.10: Sharing good practice in recognition with HEIs**

The “Spotlight on recognition” project consortium headed by the European University Association developed a self-assessment tool for higher education institutions to measure whether their recognition practices are LRC compliant. This tool supports the implementation of ESG 1.4 (see below). The ENIC-NARIC, in its role to support the implementation of the LRC, can share this type of good practice with its higher education institutions. The tool is available in English, French, German and Spanish.


---

2. Collaborate with QA agencies for meaningful inclusion of recognition into external quality assurance.

---

**Example 23.11: Elaboration of a relevant article in the ESG**

Recognition has been included into the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* under ESG 1.4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification.

The experience of the cooperation of the ENIC offices and quality assurance agencies in implementing this article include:

- Training of the QA staff and/or experts on recognition issues;
- Identifying indicators, which might be important for HEIs to demonstrate that fair recognition practices are applied;
- Providing information for external reviews;
- Discussing the tools for thematic reviews focused on recognition and encouraging the role of the ENIC offices and the network in those.

3. Encourage and contribute to networking of HEIs within the field of recognition by providing specific services and giving a platform for the exchange of good practice.
Example 23.12: Collaboration with HEIs through online platforms and events
The Ukrainian ENIC-NARIC office provides online an platform for discussions and Q&As and hold annual events where admission officers from various higher education institutions meet to exchange good practice and discuss any issues relating to recognition of foreign credentials.

Sources and references
- CICIC, Pan-Canadian Quality Assurance Framework for the Assessment of International Academic Credentials (QAF).
- ENIC-NARIC Networks, Standards & Guidelines for the ENIC-NARIC Networks.
- SKVC et al, Linking Academic Recognition and Quality Assurance. The LIREQA project (website).
- SKVC et al, Integrating academic recognition and quality assurance: practical recommendations.

Relevant Articles RCP
6. Procedures and criteria for the assessment of foreign qualifications should be transparent, coherent and reliable, and they should periodically be reviewed with a view to increasing transparency, taking account of developments in the education field and eliminating requirements leading to undue complications in the procedure.

11. The procedural recommendations contained in the present document aim at making assessment procedures more consistent and transparent and at assuring all applicants a fair consideration of their application. The recommendations on procedures and criteria to be followed are equally valid regardless of whether the outcome of the assessment procedure is:
   i. a recognition decision;
ii. advice to the competent recognition authority making the decision;
iii. a statement addressed to individual(s), institution(s), potential employer(s) or others.

15. It is recommended that applicants have access to an assessment relevant to the case.

The competent recognition authorities should publish standardised information on the procedures and criteria for the assessment of foreign qualifications concerning higher education. This information should automatically be given to all applicants as well as to persons making preliminary inquiries about the assessment of their foreign qualifications.
24 Digital student data and digital processes

Student data are increasingly offered in a digital format, impacting every stage of the recognition process. This chapter provides information and recommendations on processing digital student data and developing digital credential evaluation workflows that are in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

Procedure digital student data and digital processes

1. Accept digital student data in various formats
2. Use trusted sources and online verification portals to:
   - Verify the authenticity of the qualification submitted
   - Verify the issuer
   - Assess other elements of the qualification
3. Implement a case handling system that is interoperable and LRC compliant
4. Issue digital evaluation statements that are:
   - Secure and privacy-compliant
   - Easily verifiable
   - Accepted by relevant stakeholders
Introduction

In recent years, the accelerated shift towards digital transformation has furthered the discussion on the potentialities related to the digitisation of student data and recognition processes. The question as to how these developments can support fair and smooth recognition in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention was addressed in the DigiRec project. Its White Paper “Digital student data & recognition” shows that taking steps towards a digital process for the recognition of qualifications can ensure a faster, more consistent, secure and convenient process, tailored around the applicant’s interests and needs.

Digital student data and digital solutions play a role in all three stages of the credential evaluation process:

1. Input phase – the student data received
2. Throughput phase – the processing of the student data, including evaluation
3. Output phase – the result of the evaluation (recognition/comparability statement)

Both the “input” and the “output” of the evaluation workflows are linked to a broader worldwide ecosystem of digital student data. A lot of initiatives have been developed at a European level, such as Europass2, offering a range of online “e-Portfolio” tools, and European Digital Credentials for Learning3 launching an EU standard for digitally signed educational credentials, allowing for easier recognition and understanding of qualifications across the EU. Another example is the development of the European Blockchain Services Infrastructure (EBSI4), which features a use case dedicated to digitally-issued education diplomas.

---

3 European Digital Credentials for Learning | Europass
4 https://ec.europa.eu/cefdigital/wiki/display/CEFDIGITAL/EBSI
**Input: digital student data**
Digital student data comprehend all student information presented in a digital form, such as qualifications and transcripts, including grades and learning outcomes. They encompass a variety of formats and data maturity levels (e.g. PDFs or structured data), with new technologies emerging regularly. Higher education institutions can either issue digital credentials with a link to their own database or verification portal or use intermediaries to provide this service. The consent of the applicant may be needed before data are released in a secure way to third parties, for example in the case of cryptographically secured verifiable credentials. Badges, or clickable graphics containing an online record of learning achievements, are another way to provide digital student data. Badges are currently mostly used in relation to MOOCs and other micro-credentials (see also chapter 15, Qualifications Awarded After Flexible Learning), to show completion of smaller learning units or other forms of learning within and outside the education system.

**Throughput: digital evaluation workflows**
Different digital databases or applications can be used to process student data and their evaluation lifecycle, depending on the use and purpose within the institution. The student data are either imported manually or submitted directly by the applicant in a secure and privacy-compliant way. Data relevant to the evaluation process can also be delivered or imported from other trusted, authoritative sources (e.g. an accreditation agency, a national diploma register or a trusted third party). Some of these sources offer the opportunity to directly integrate their data into the recognition workflow, for example through a secure API connection.

**Output: digital recognition statements**
Digital evaluation statements can be issued in a variety of ways, for example through a portal accessible by the applicant or a secure digital mailbox. The statements may present different security features and options for verification, depending on the data maturity level and the mode of delivery. The outcomes of the evaluation process can be stored in a digital database for consistency purposes, to support consistency in future recognition decisions made by your institution.
Recommendations

1. Accept digital student data, also in cases where procedures or qualifications are still (partially) paper-based (e.g. due to national legal frameworks). One of the basic principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention is that all applicants have the right to a fair assessment of their qualifications. It is therefore advisable for your digital applications portal or system to be inclusive and accessible in terms of design, information content and delivery, allowing for the submission of both scanned as well as electronically issued documents. Make sure that the digital student data can be imported or submitted for evaluation in a secure, tamper-proof and privacy-compliant way.

Example 24.1: Accepting digital student data

An applicant in country A seeks a comparability statement of a first-cycle degree in political science obtained from a higher education institution in country B. This particular institution in country B does not award digital documents yet. The competent authority in country A provides an online platform for applications for a statement of comparability. It accepts various data formats and offers the applicant the option of uploading a high-resolution scan of the paper-based qualification, through a secure and encrypted connection.

2. Where relevant, use trusted sources and online verification portals to:
   a. verify the authenticity of digital student data,
   b. determine if digital credentials submitted for evaluation were issued by an authorised source (e.g. a third party authorised to issue credentials on behalf of an institution), and/or
   c. assess other elements of the qualification (e.g. accreditation status).
Example 24.2: Verifying the authenticity of digital credentials

An applicant applies for recognition of a Canadian qualification submitted as a digital verifiable credential through the MyCreds™ | MesCertif™ platform. This is a national credential wallet for post-secondary learners that has been created by Canadian higher education leadership and is managed by the Association of Registrars of the Universities and Colleges of Canada (ARUCC). This authorised and trusted source allows higher education institutions to issue digital records online, so that individuals can access and share their transcripts, academic documents, badges, credentials and micro-credentials from their post-secondary studies in Canada. When shared through the MyCreds platform, credentials come with digital signatures that meet the legal standards set by the Canadian postsecondary institutions and the European Union for authentic electronic documents. The real time verification system certifies that the credentials are authentic, tamper-evident, legally valid and issued by a vetted organization. For this reason, it is not necessary to contact the college or university for further verification.

3. When designing or further developing a digital system for the recognition process:
   a. Take interoperability with different data sources and formats into account, as also pointed out in the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027⁵ and the European Data Strategy 2019-2024⁶. This can improve both the inclusivity of the system (enabling applicants to submit different data formats) as well as its ability to connect to trusted sources to exchange relevant data at every stage of the credential evaluation process.
   b. Ensure that your credential evaluation databases and systems operate in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the good practices laid out in this manual. It should for example account for the applicant’s right to appeal and ensure that assessments are amendable in case of a positive answer to an appeal procedure.

---

Example 24.3: Connecting to trusted sources
The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) developed a database called “DEQAR” that includes all external quality assurance results by EQAR-registered agencies, based on the agreed EHEA quality assurance standards. DEQAR provides an Application Programming Interface (API) that allows you to feed these data directly into your local credential evaluation system or application. As a recognition office or information centre (ENIC-NARIC) you may use the API to embed a live search into your workflow to automatically verify the accreditation or evaluation status of a higher education institution or study programme. This had been piloted by several ENIC-NARIC centres as part of the DEQAR CONNECT project.

Example 24.4: Creating a paper look to facilitate acceptance
One way to facilitate the transition to and the acceptance of digital evaluations by stakeholders is to create digital documents that have the look of the paper evaluations complete with colors, images, stamps or backgrounds and watermarks that mirror the paper document.

Information tools
- DigiRec White Paper, Digital Student Data & Recognition, 2020.

4. When issuing digital evaluation or recognition statements, ensure that the statement:
   a. contains minimum security features to avoid falsification;
   b. is easily verifiable, for example through a portal or a platform;
   c. complies with legislation in force (particularly regarding personal data), and
   d. is accepted by relevant stakeholders (e.g. HEI, employers, etc.).

---

7 https://www.eqar.eu/about/projects/deqar-connect/
Relevant Articles RCP

There are no specific RCP's dealing with digitisation. At time of publishing, the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee Bureau identified digitisation as an area to further explore. The recommendations in this chapter are based on general principles of the LRC and good practice developed.
Part 6. Resources
Overview of publications and recommendations used in the manual


- Bergan, S., Qualifications – Introduction to a concept, Council of Europe 2007.


- CEDEFOP, The European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET) (website).


- CICIC, Pan-Canadian Quality Assurance Framework for the Assessment of International Academic Credentials (QAF).
- CIMEA, Cimea against the mills. How to spot and counter diploma mills, 2010.
- CIMEA, SCAN-D.
- CIMEA, FRAUDOC - Guidelines on Diploma Mills and Document Fraud for Credential Evaluators.
- CIMEA, Recognition of qualifications held by refugees (Italy).
- CIMEA et al, Automatic recognition in practice – examples and tools from the project partner countries.
- Council of Europe, European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR).
Council of Europe, Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)18 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on countering education fraud (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 13 July 2022 at the 1440th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies), 2022.

DigiRec White Paper, Digital Student Data & Recognition, 2020.


EGRACONS, European Grade Conversion System (website).

EHEA Ministerial Conference, Yerevan Communique, 2015.

EHEA Qualifications Frameworks.


ENIC-NARIC Networks, Standards & Guidelines for the ENIC-NARIC Networks.


European Commission, European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) (website).

European Commission, Microcredentials (website).


European Commission, Europass. Description of the eight EQF levels (website).


- HARNO, Recognition of refugees’ qualifications in Estonia.


- HR-Dir, Refugees and Recognition - Toolkit 2 (REACT) project.

- HK-Dir, Refugees and Recognition - Toolkit 3 (ARENA) project.

- HK-Dir, Recognition of foreign higher education.


- Ministry of Higher Education and Science Denmark, Background report on foreign educational qualifications.


- Microbol project group, Micro-credentials linked to the Bologna Key Commitments, 2021.

- MicroHE project group, Challenges and Opportunities of Micro-Credentials In Europe. Briefing on the award, recognition, portability and accreditation of microcredentials: an investigation through interviews with key stakeholders & decision makers, 2019.


Nuffic, Netherlands Information for refugees about diplomas.

SKVC et al, Linking Academic Recognition and Quality Assurance. The LIREQA project (website).

SKVC et al, Integrating academic recognition and quality assurance: practical recommendations.


Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), The National Framework of Qualifications.

- Swedish Council for Higher Education, No documents from your foreign education?


- UNESCO, Qualifications passport for refugees and vulnerable migrants.


- U.S. Department of Education, Diploma Mills and Accreditation - Resources and Publications.

- WES, WES Gateway Program.