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# **European Area of Recognition Manual**

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**Practical guidelines for fair recognition of qualifications**



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

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Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

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## The EAR consortium

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This publication is a result of the European Area of Recognition (EAR) project. The members of the consortium are listed below.

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The project team consisted of recognition experts from the following 8 [National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union](#) (NARICs) and [European Network of Information Centres in the European Region](#) (ENICs), listed in alphabetical order:

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## Acknowledgements

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The European Area of Recognition (EAR) manual is 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 write a few words of appreciation for those who contributed to the manual.

First of all, I would like to thank the recognition centres involved in the ENIC/NARIC networks for their active contribution and valuable feedback to the project. The response to our extensive survey on all recommendations of the EAR manual exceeded all of our expectations, particularly since it took many hours for most centres to answer the questions. The representatives of the ENIC/NARIC centres also provided their ideas and opinions on the EAR manual at the annual network meetings, during various sessions and workshops devoted to specific EAR chapters.

During the EAR project, 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 EAR project through the Lifelong Learning Programme, but also for the inspiring way in which the EAR manual was promoted at network meetings.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the recognition experts of the Council of Europe and UNESCO for their active support of the EAR manual, which even included dissemination of some of the preliminary project results beyond the European Region.

The project team had strong ties to the Bologna Follow Up Working Group on Recognition, which gave a clear focus to the function of the EAR manual and how it could be disseminated and used. I would like to thank the Working Group on Recognition for sharing their expertise and for providing us with a platform from which to launch the EAR manual.

I would also like to acknowledge the input of many experts from different fields that we met at various occasions such as the Stakeholders' Conference on Recognition (in Riga, April 2011) and the EAIE meeting (in Copenhagen, September 2011), where we presented our project results and obtained very useful feedback from higher education institutions, students and their associations.

And finally I would like to thank the members of the EAR project team and steering group, all of whom worked together very enthusiastically and efficiently, covering all relevant aspects of recognition in a practical way. 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 a manual that sets the standard for fair, transparent and efficient recognition procedures.

Lucie de Bruin  
Coordinator EAR project  
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Dutch ENIC/NARIC  
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## Foreword

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The European Area of Recognition (EAR) Project is part of the ongoing series of activities funded by the Life-Long Learning Programme of the Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission, administered under the auspices of the Education, Audio-Visual and Culture Executive Agency. It represents a comprehensive effort to summarise the work of national and international work in furtherance of access to educational and work opportunities and international mobility since the signing in April, 1996 of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC<sup>1</sup>).

The LRC established the ENIC Network (European Network of National Information Centres on academic recognition and mobility) with the Council of Europe and UNESCO jointly providing the Secretariat for the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the ENIC Network. The Network is made up of the national information centres of the States party to the European Cultural Convention or the UNESCO European Region. An ENIC is a body set up by the national authorities to provide information on national recognition policies and practices pertaining to foreign qualifications, the national education system, and information on studying abroad and mobility. The NARIC network is an initiative of the European Commission. The network aims at improving academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study in the Member States of the European Union (EU) countries, the European Economic Area (EEA) countries and Turkey.

Publication of the EAR Manual represents a tremendous step forward in the context of pan-European and even global work to make information and decisions about the recognition of foreign qualifications better understood, more transparent, and fairer than before. It supports the policy aims of Life-Long Learning by providing a model for national recognition authorities, credential evaluators, and admissions and human resources staffs that flows across successive levels and types of education, training, and professional advancement. It is critical to have in place tools for ensuring that mobile students and workers can take their skills from country to country and move up the educational and professional ladders, and the EAR Manual does this. The Manual also supports the European policy goals related to cross-national mobility. Additionally, it supports the policy goals of ensuring quality at all levels of education by providing tested and proven guidance and references for evaluating providers and qualifications to ensure that they are legitimate.

The contents of the EAR Manual comprise a thorough review of the issues pertaining to international recognition, the processes used, best practice examples, and comprehensive references to additional sources of information and policy. This content reflects over 15 years of experience, policy development, and cooperation by the ENIC Network, the NARIC Network, and the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee. In addition, the Manual benefits from working closely with the Bologna Follow-Up Group and various organisations across Europe and throughout the world, including the Recognition Convention Committees of the other five global regions within the UNESCO Regional Network. The EAR Manual is thus not only an important tool for implementing European policies pertaining to recognition; it is also conscious of, and contributes to, the global dimension of recognition and mobility.

Today, the work of the ENIC and NARIC Networks is extensive and growing. What has been needed for some time is a comprehensive reference tool for recognition policies and practices that can serve to inform the public and stakeholders, to train new credential evaluation staff, to help Member States and policy leaders to understand the recognition process and to align national laws and procedures with European best practices, and to provide an iterative resource that can be revised as new issues and new solutions arise. The EAR Manual is this tool, and we feel it will be a resource that will stand the test of time. It is the product of input from recognition experts across the ENIC and NARIC Networks, and our colleagues at NUFFIC, the Dutch NARIC, are to be congratulated for coordinating the development of the Manual as well as - we hope - related resources and programmes for its dissemination and refinement. As representatives of the ENIC and NARIC networks and the LRC Committee, we are proud to endorse this publication and to urge its wide adoption and use.

Dr. Carita Blomqvist  
President  
Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee  
Finland

Dr. E. Stephen Hunt  
President  
ENIC Network  
United States

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<sup>1</sup> The full name of the LRC is the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region, signed at Lisbon, Portugal on April 11, 1997 and entering into force on February 1, 1999.

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## Introduction

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This manual has been developed as part of the European Area of Recognition Project (EAR). 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) with a practical tool to assist them in their daily recognition work.

Although the manual is in the first place meant for the 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, students and policy officers.

In general the EAR 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 the quality of student mobility in Europe and plays as such a key role in the European Higher Education Area. 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 EAR manual builds further on initiatives resulting from major developments over the last decades which have worked as a catalyst for developments in recognition. One major development has been 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.

Another major milestone has been the creation of an international 'legal' framework, the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, also referred to as the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), established in 1997 by the Council of Europe and UNESCO, which entered into force 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 started in 1999 has played a major role in placing the issue of recognition on the European agenda, 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 of the important work that has been done and the progress that has been made, one of the major obstacles for recognition currently to be tackled is the divergence of recognition practices among the different countries. In other words, while there is a general consensus on what should be done, this good practice is not always implemented, or interpreted differently.

The present recognition manual is a new and innovative tool: there have been various research projects, suggestions and agreements in the past on the different aspects and issues of recognition, but there has never been one general recognition manual, combining all the efforts of past results and setting clear and uniform standards for recognition practice. Such a tool will have multiple uses - serving 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.



The EAR manual aims to tackle this difference in recognition practice, by bringing together all the major recommendations of the last decades into one single manual, which focuses on the daily application of good practice. Obviously, no rights may be derived from the EAR Manual, since not all recommendations are followed by all competent recognition offices.

#### **STRUCTURE OF THE MANUAL**

The first chapter is a schematic outline of the recognition procedure. The following 16 chapters cover a particular recognition topic and follow the order of the recognition procedure outlined in the first chapter.

These 16 chapters are all 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 where applicable. At the end of each chapter the sources of the recommendation are provided, including the relevant Articles of the Criteria and Procedures of the LRC and for some topics a reference for further reading.

The manual also includes a glossary of terms and a list of the sources used in this manual.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

The content of the EAR manual is based on the Criteria and Procedures in the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and its explanatory memorandum. These are subsidiary texts to the LRC. From these texts the topics for the chapters of the manual have been identified and they are the foundation for the content of each chapter. The content of each chapter is also based on the 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.

The manual has had 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, to which 63% of the ENIC/NARIC offices responded (for more information on the outcomes of this questionnaire, see the project website: [www.eurorecognition.eu](http://www.eurorecognition.eu)). The manual was reviewed by external stakeholders at the Stakeholders' Conference on Recognition organised by the Bologna Working Group on Recognition in Riga in April 2011. Throughout the EAR project there has been close cooperation with the experts of the Bologna Follow Up Group on Recognition for advice and synergies.

#### **PROJECT TEAM**

Given the ambition of the project, the project team consisted of 8 ENICs/NARICs from different regions of the European Union. These were: The Netherlands, UK, France, Poland, Denmark, Lithuania, Belgium (Flemish Community) and the Czech Republic. The project team was assisted by a steering group consisting of the President of the ENIC Bureau and the President of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee.

#### **WEBSITE**

The manual is accessible online at [www.eurorecognition.eu](http://www.eurorecognition.eu). The outcomes of the questionnaire are also available on this website.

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# 1. Schematic outline of the recommended procedure for the assessment of foreign qualifications

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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.


## Legend

Each step is preceded by a box like the one below. It contains the number and a short description of the step.




Step 1 – short description

If applicable, reference is made to the related topic in this manual through the shape below.



Related Topic:  
(Chapter #:) name of chapter

A process is represented by a rectangle like the one below. It contains a short description of the process.



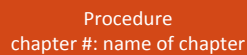
Do this and that

A decision is represented by a diamond like the one below. It contains the question that is to be decided upon.




Yes or no?

A sub-process or procedure is described by the shape below. It contains the chapter of this manual the procedure is described in, as well as a short description.



Procedure  
chapter #: name of chapter

The end of a process is represented by the shape below. It contains a short description of the outcome of the process.



Negative decision  
on assessment

Documents or information are represented by the shape below. It contains a short description of which kind of document or information is concerned.

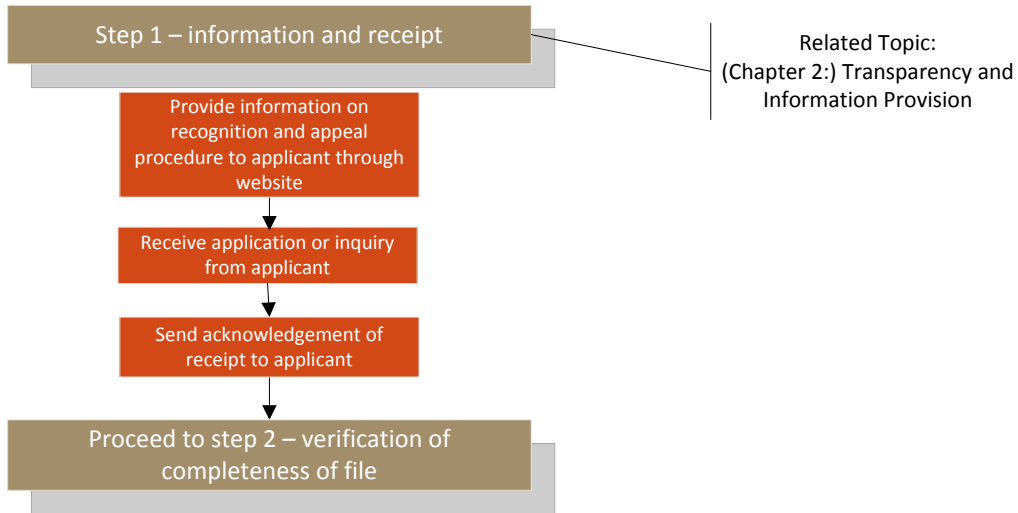


Document or  
information

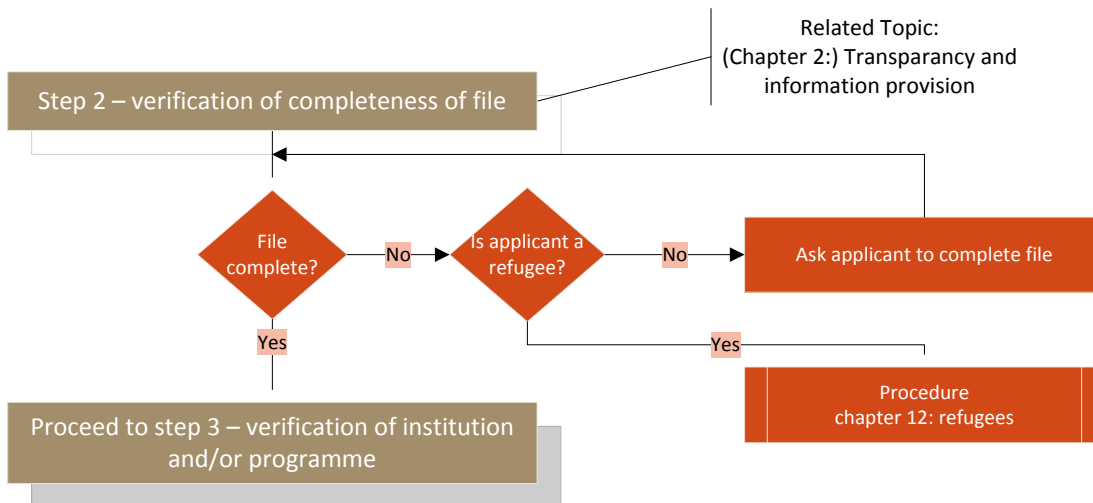
The process the documents are used for is pointed at with a bended arrow:



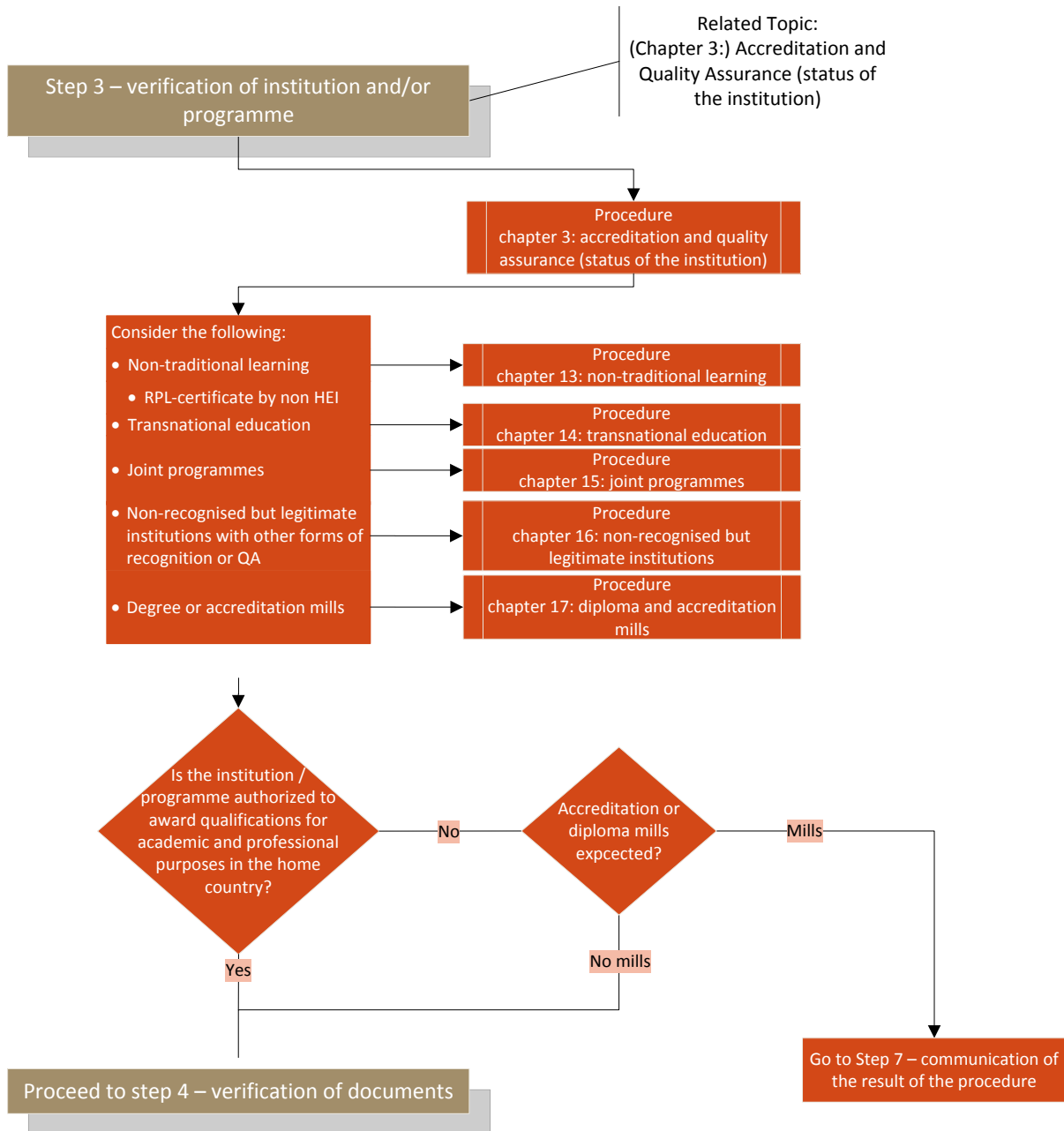
### STEP 1 – INFORMATION AND RECEIPT



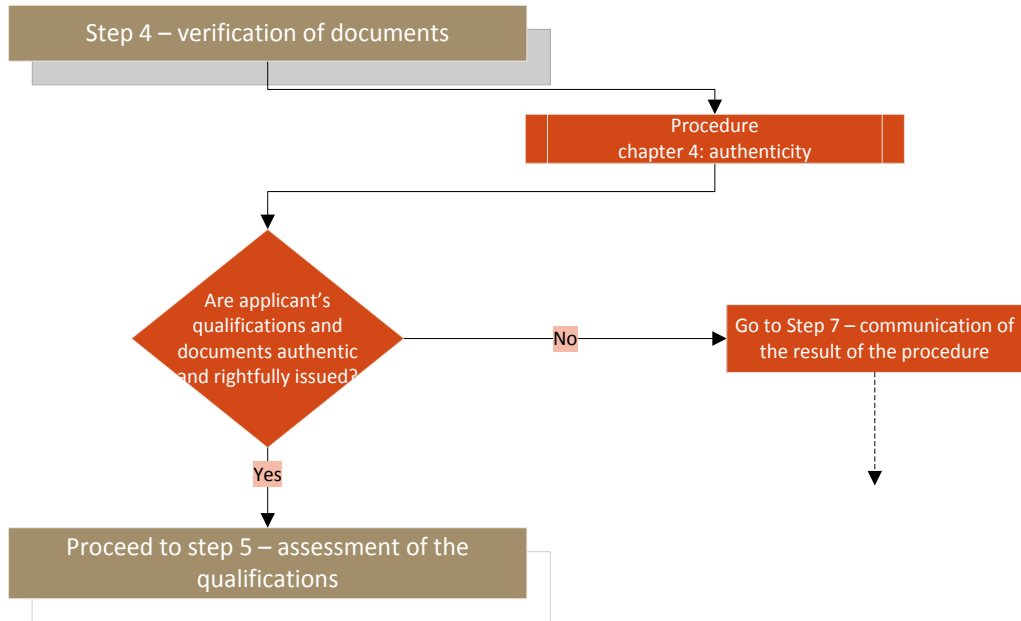
### STEP 2 – VERIFICATION OF COMPLETENESS OF FILE



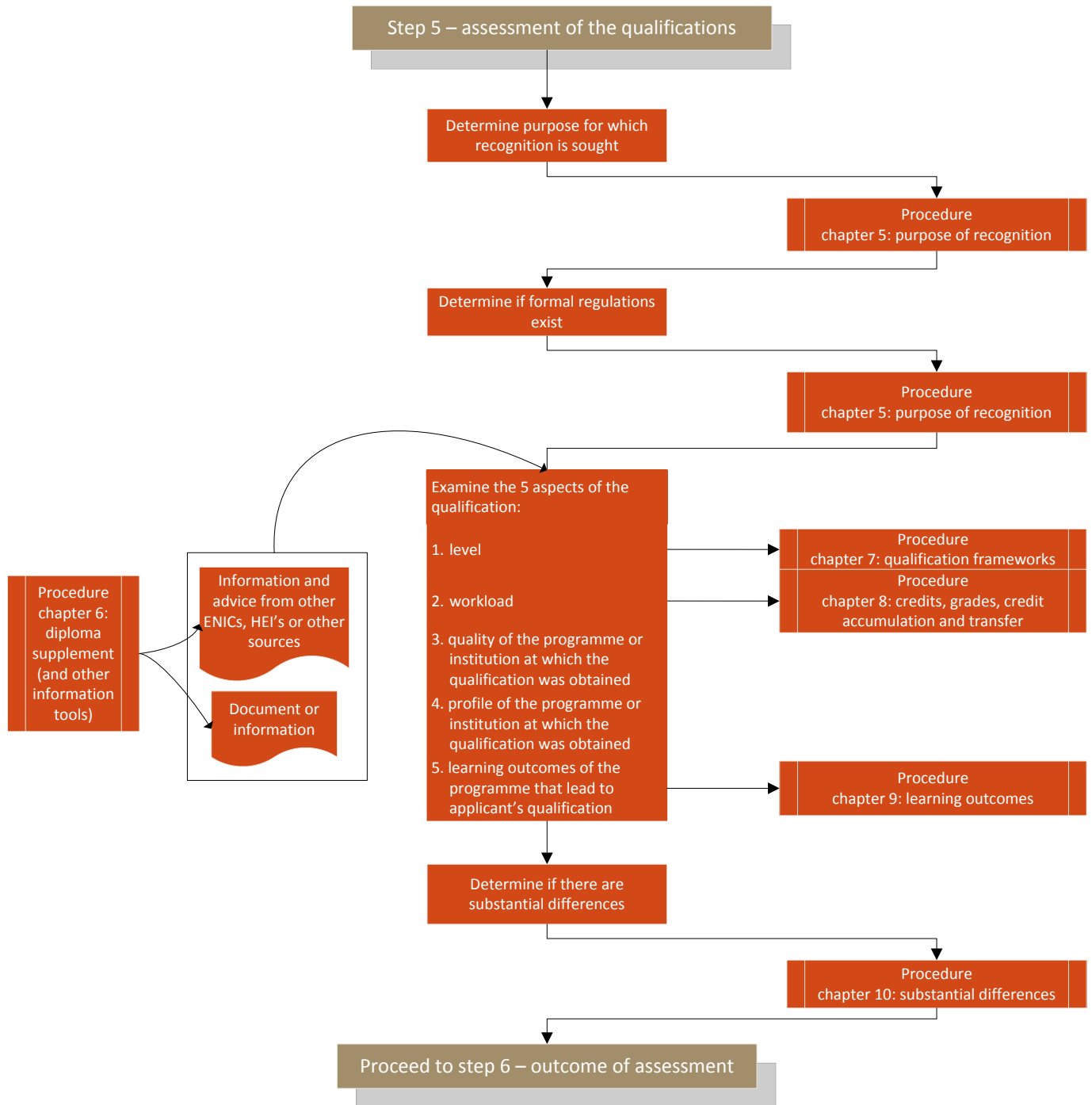
**STEP 3 – VERIFICATION OF INSTITUTION AND/OR PROGRAMME**



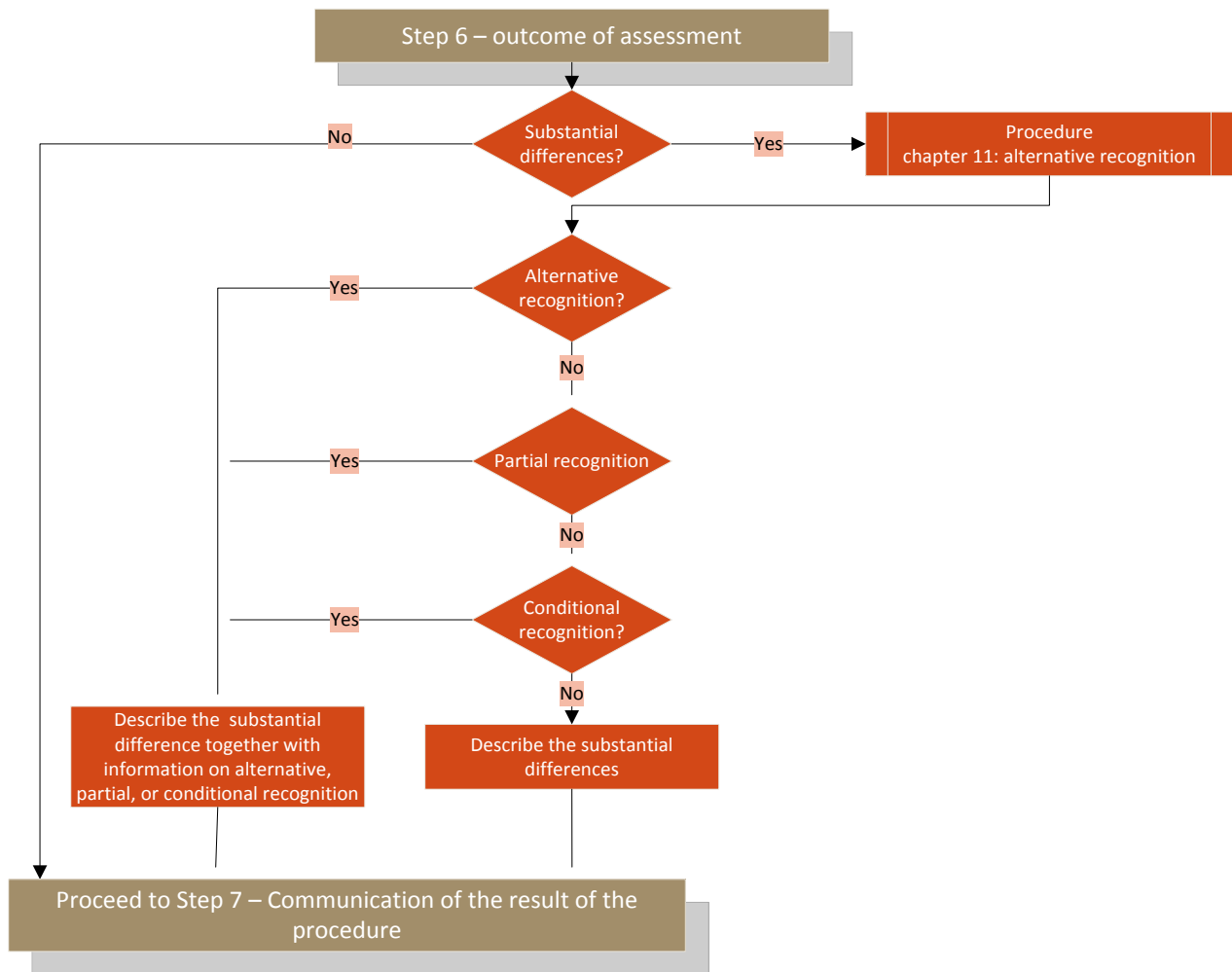
#### STEP 4 – VERIFICATION OF DOCUMENTS



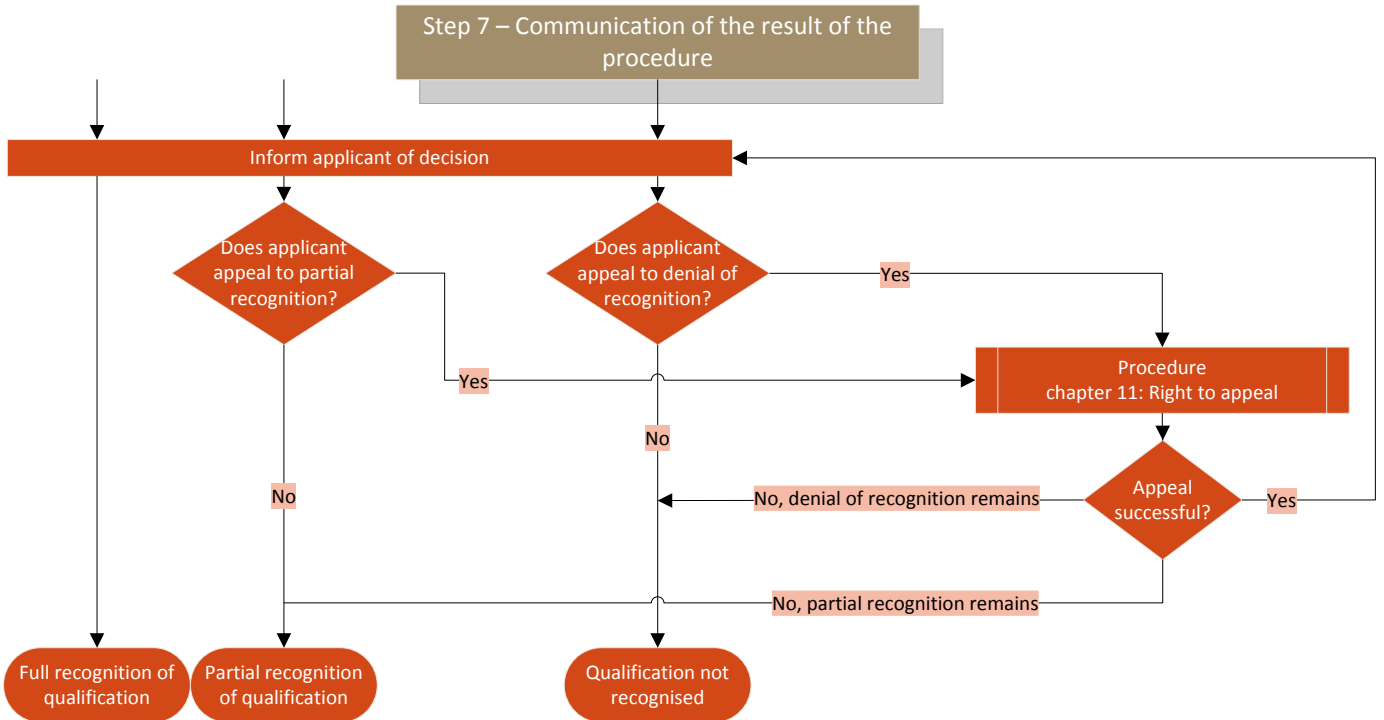
**STEP 5 – ASSESSMENT OF THE QUALIFICATIONS**



## STEP 6 – OUTCOMES OF ASSESSMENT



**STEP 7 – COMMUNICATION OF THE RESULT OF THE PROCEDURE**



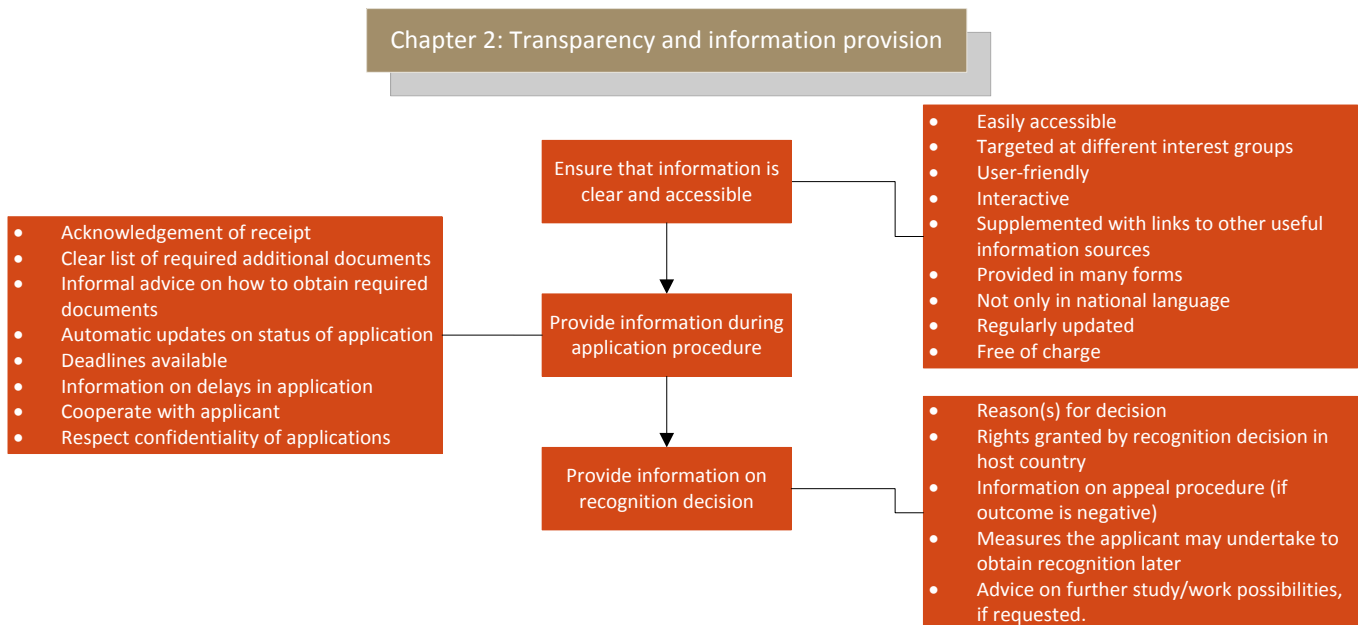


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## 2. Transparency and Information Provision

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### FLOWCHART



### 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 the 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.

### 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”);
- 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.

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, refugees, other ENICs/NARICs, 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 the 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**

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 may include:

- copy of the qualification in the original language;
- sworn translation of the qualification (in case it is not in a widely spoken language);
- copy of the Diploma Supplement or similar information source;
- curriculum vitae;

- copy of ID card.

### 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.

### 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;
- in case of a negative decision, information on the appeal procedure including the path to follow and deadline (see topic 11: "Alternative recognition and the right to appeal" on page 49);
- 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 only 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

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Link: [http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit\\_aliasid=2478](http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit_aliasid=2478)
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Link: [http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit\\_aliasid=1618](http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit_aliasid=1618)
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### 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.

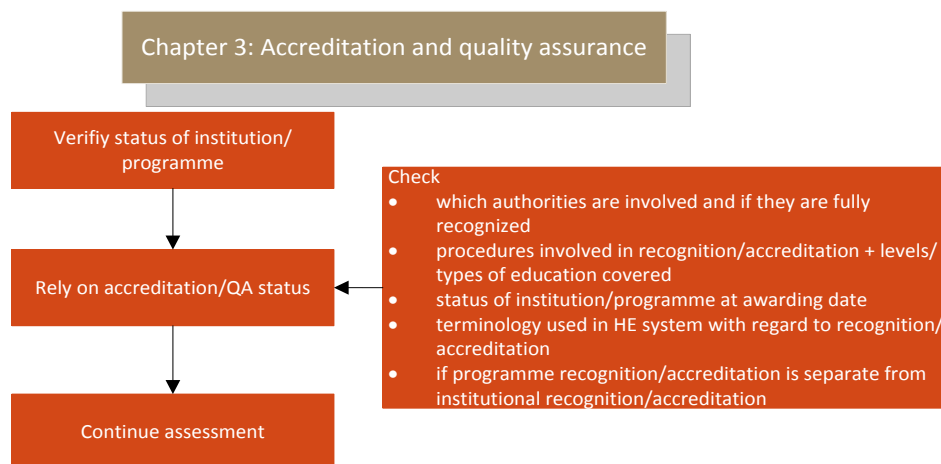
15. The competent recognition authorities should publish standardised information on the procedures and criteria for the assessment of foreign qualifications concerning higher education. This information should automatically be given to all applicants as well as to persons making preliminary enquiries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

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### 3. Accreditation and Quality Assurance (status of the institution)

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#### FLOWCHART



#### INTRODUCTION

A foreign qualification cannot be properly evaluated without taking into account the official status of the institution awarding the qualification and/or the programme taken. In other words, it should be established 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 the programme is recognised or accredited indicates that the qualification in question represents an appropriate minimum level of education 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.

**Recognition** refers to the official status granted by national legislation. Higher education is governed by national 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.

**Accreditation** is a formal decision by a recognised authority which has verified whether the institution and/or the programme meet the predefined minimum quality standards. Accreditation is usually a voluntary process and is granted for a specified number of years, after which the institution or programme has to request re-accreditation. The differences in the way accreditation is applied in different countries may include the government involvement and the extent to which the procedure is really voluntary. In most countries acceptance of the qualifications depends on whether the institution or/and the programme is accredited, so though it may be a voluntary process, there is in fact little choice.

**Licensing and accreditation.** In some countries institutions are first granted a permit or license to operate as an educational entity (possibly for a limited amount of time while the 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 has to go through the accreditation procedure. It is the accreditation that grants the institution the right to award officially recognised qualifications as well as access to public funding.

**Quality assurance** is another term used in the discussions of the recognition and accreditation of institutions and programmes. Quality Assurance in higher education includes the policies, procedures and practices that are designed to achieve, maintain or enhance the quality of the institution and/or the programme.

**Recognition/accreditation of an institution and recognition/accreditation of a programme.** Generally qualifications awarded by recognised institutions are considered to be recognised. However, in some countries recognition/accreditation of a programme is separate from the recognition/accreditation of an institution. In other words, it is possible for recognised institutions to offer programmes that are not officially recognised and for non-recognised institutions to offer recognised programmes.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Credential evaluators should 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.

Credential evaluators should rely on accreditation or quality assurance by competent bodies as evidence that an institution or programme complies with minimum quality standards.

No distinction should be made between qualifications or periods of study earned at private versus public institutions, as long as the private institution is recognised and/or accredited by competent authorities.

When establishing the status of the awarding institution and/or the programme it is recommended to check:

- which authorities are involved in the recognition/accreditation process and whether the authorities involved in accreditation/recognition are themselves fully recognised in the system where they operate;
- whether the focus of the recognition and/or accreditation system is on the recognition/accreditation of institutions or programmes, or both;
- what procedures are involved in recognition/ accreditation and what levels and types of education do they cover:
  - is the education governed by national/regional/local legislation and is the status granted by this legislation;
  - does the procedure include quality assurance;
- whether the institution and/or programme through which the qualification was awarded, was recognised and/or accredited at the awarding date;
- what terminology is used in a given higher education system with regard to recognition and accreditation, e.g.: “accredited”, “recognised”, “validated”, “registered”, “chartered”, “approved”.

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 finally there is the case of Diploma and Accreditation Mills. These four specific topics are described in detail on pages 63, 66, 69 and 72 respectively.

## INFORMATION TOOLS

The information helpful to establish the status of an institution and/or programme can be found in the following sources:

- documentation provided by the awarding institution:
  - *qualification*: in countries with an official format for qualifications, only fully recognised institutions (public and private) are allowed to issue an official (state) qualification (e.g. Ukraine, Russian Federation);
  - statement/certificate issued as temporary proof of completion (when the qualification is awarded 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*: this usually contains information about the status, accreditation and quality assurance system in a given country in chapter 2.3., 2.4 and 8 of the Diploma Supplement model. For more information, please turn to topic 6: “Diploma Supplement (and other information tools) on page 32;
  - *website of the awarding institution*.

It is recommended to double-check the information provided by the awarding institution with other official sources.

- national official sources:
  - website of the accreditation /quality assurance bodies;
  - website of the ministry of education;

- websites of the associations of accreditation/quality assurance agencies, e.g. the website of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation of United States of America ([www.chea.org](http://www.chea.org));
- official national publications regarding the education system.
- international official sources:
  - websites of international organisations, like UNESCO (<http://www.unesco.org/en/education>);
  - websites of credential evaluator networks, like the ENIC and NARIC Networks ([www.enic-naric.net](http://www.enic-naric.net));
- publications containing information about the national education systems/accreditation and recognition, such as:
  - the International Association of Universities (<http://www.iau-aiu.net/>);
  - EURYDYCE ([http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index\\_en.php](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php));
- websites of international organisations and information tools regarding quality assurance and accreditation, such as:
  - the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) (<http://www.engq.eu/>);
  - the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) (<http://www.eqar.eu/register.html>).

Always make sure that the **source of information** is official and up-to date because educational systems often change and so does the status of an institution and /or programme. Also check whether the author of the publication has adequate expertise in the field.

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 and the awarding institution.

#### **Example 1**

A competent recognition authority in country X received for assessment a master 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.

#### **Example 2**

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.

#### **Example 3**

A credential evaluator assessing a master 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 the data base of accredited programmes to make sure the programme was accredited as well.

#### **SOURCES AND REFERENCES**

- Bergan S. And E.S. Hunt (eds.), *Developing attitudes to recognition: substantial differences in an age of globalisation*, Council of Europe 2009.  
Link: [http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit\\_aliasid=2478](http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit_aliasid=2478)
- Council of Europe and UNESCO, *Revised code of good practice in the provision of transnational education*, 2007.  
Link: [http://www.enic-naric.net/documents/REVISED\\_CODE\\_OF\\_GOOD\\_PRACTICE\\_TNE.pdf](http://www.enic-naric.net/documents/REVISED_CODE_OF_GOOD_PRACTICE_TNE.pdf)
- Council of Europe/UNESCO-CEPES, *Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees*, 2004.

Link:

<https://wcd.coe.int/wcd/com.instranet.InstraServlet?command=com.instranet.CmdBlobGet&Instrane tImage=320284&SecMode=1&DocId=822138&Usage=2>

- Council of Europe/UNESCO-CEPES and European Commission, *Diploma Supplement*, 1997.  
Link: [http://www.enic-naric.net/documents/THE\\_DIPLOMA\\_SUPPLEMENT.pdf](http://www.enic-naric.net/documents/THE_DIPLOMA_SUPPLEMENT.pdf)
- ENQA, *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, 2009.  
Link: [http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG\\_3edition%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG_3edition%20(2).pdf)
- Rauhvargers, A. and A. Rusakova, *Improving recognition in the European Higher Education Area: an analysis of national action plans*, Council of Europe 2010.  
Link: [http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit\\_aliasid=2469](http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit_aliasid=2469)

#### ORGANISATIONS AND NETWORKS

- Association of Specialised & Professional Accreditors (ASPA).  
Link: <http://www.aspa-usa.org>
- Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).  
Link: <http://www.chea.org>
- European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).  
Link: <http://www.enqa.eu>
- European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA).  
Link: <http://www.eaconsortium.net>
- European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).  
Link: <http://www.eqar.eu/register.html>
- International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).  
Link: <http://www.inqaahe.org>
- Nationally Recognised Accrediting Agencies (U.S. department of education).  
Link: [http://www.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/accreditation\\_pg6.html#NationallyRecognised](http://www.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/accreditation_pg6.html#NationallyRecognised).

#### 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.

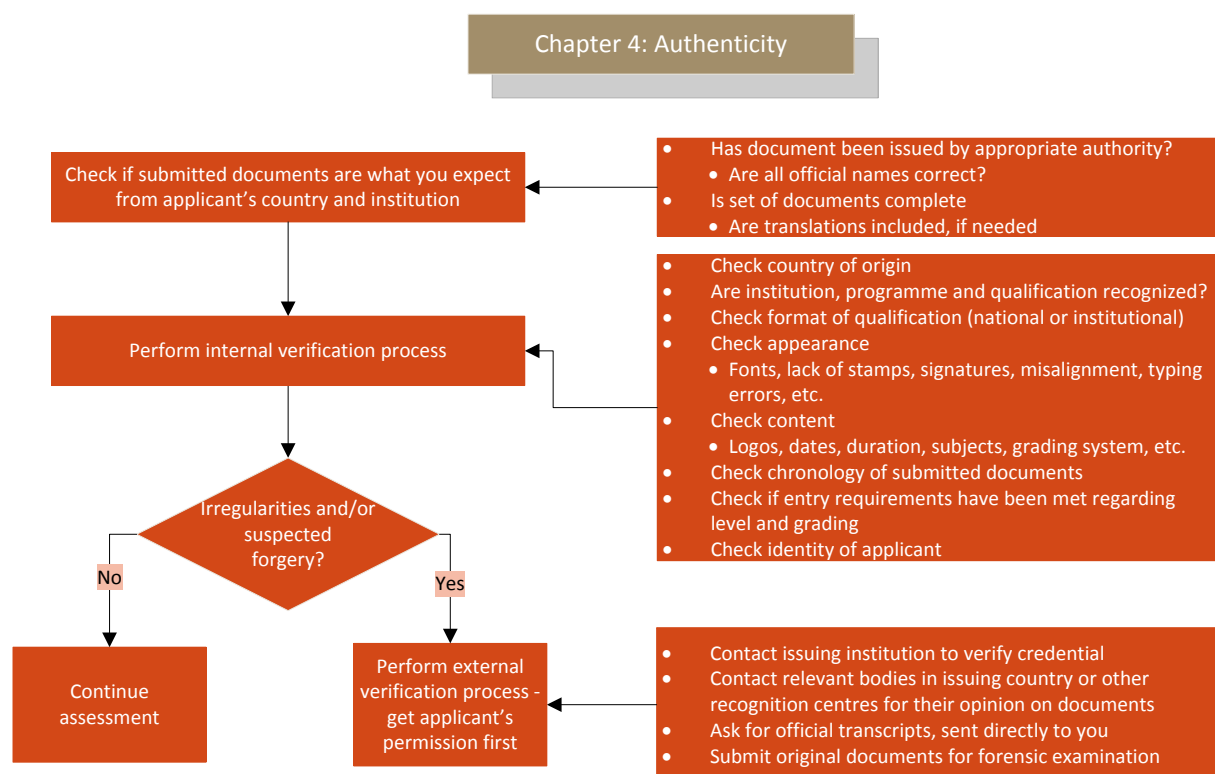


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## 4. Authenticity

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### FLOWCHART



### INTRODUCTION

Verification refers to a process through which credential evaluators establish the authenticity of documents presented to them, and check the documents in the file to make sure they are not fraudulent. Evaluating the authenticity of credentials is important, since the amount 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.

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 and other authenticity issues, such as misleading translations (for more information on diploma mills, please see topic 17: "Diploma and Accreditation Mills" on page 72).

### RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that credential evaluators check the authenticity of documents, using the procedure described below.

1. Internal information management:

- 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;
- keep a list of common and reliable verification procedures for specific countries;
- 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. Do not rely solely on translations.

For refugees/asylum seekers other procedures could be followed. For more information, please turn to topic 12: “Refugees” on page 52.

## 2. Assessment Procedure:

- submission of documents:
  - check that each document has been issued by the appropriate authority. Using Nigeria as an example, make sure the document has been issued by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) rather than a secondary school for the Nigerian West African Senior School Certificate and ensure that all the official names on the documents are correct;
  - determine which documents are required for specific countries and ask for a complete set of documents. 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);
  - ask for original language documents and where necessary for certified translations;
- all credentials should be subjected to internal verification. Therefore, check:
  - the country of origin;
  - whether the institution, the completed study programme, and the qualification are recognised and/or accredited;
  - the format of the documentation. Please 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 the faculty;
  - the appearance (e.g. variety of fonts, lack of official stamps and/or signatures, misalignment, scanned signatures, informal language, spelling errors, inconsistent terminology, improbable qualification titles, inconsistent typeface elements. These can all be indications of fraud);
  - if the content of the qualification conforms to what you would expect from that country (e.g. logos, awarding bodies, dates and duration, the number of subjects studied, the grading system used, the compulsory subjects);
  - the chronology on the documentation (e.g. 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);
  - the entry requirements have been met, in terms of level and grading;
  - the identity of the applicant.

In cases, when the internal verification turns up some irregularities and forgery may be suspected, the following steps may be necessary:

- External verification:
  - contact the issuing institution to verify the applicant’s qualifications;
  - request applicants to have their transcripts sent directly to you by the awarding institution in a sealed envelope;
  - 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;
  - submit original documents for forensic examination.

NB: Please note that it is important to get the applicant’s permission before externally verifying their document for privacy protection reasons. 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.

Additional requirements may be posed on the applicant by the credential evaluator, such as:

- ask to see original documents;
- ask for 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. Further 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.

Generally, the most reliable form of verification is external verification at the source. The development of modern communication technologies has made this step faster and less costly. 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.

#### **Example 1**

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 rather than centre-aligned and a number of spelling errors and inconsistencies are detected within the text.

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.

#### **Example 2**

An applicant from Pakistan has submitted his degree certificate awarded in 2009 from the University of Punjab. Comparing the certificate with verified examples in the internal electronic databank of genuine credentials, it seems authentic, despite the fact that there seem to be some misalignments and inconsistencies. Due to those inconsistencies, you look for alternative ways to verify the credential. According to your list of information resources on Pakistan, you are aware that it is quite common to find examination results for recent graduates on the websites of higher education institutions. You then visit the webpage of the University of Punjab and find the option for verifying results at <http://pu.edu.pk/home/results/>. After selecting the type of qualification, the year of examination and the Roll Number (found on the certificate) the name of the person who obtained the qualification can be verified and a decision can then be made accordingly.

#### **Example 3**

You receive a qualification from Moldova, which you identify as a Diploma de Bacalaureat. 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 log on to <http://www.acte.edu.md/>, select the Diploma de Bacalaureat and then enter the graduation year, personalised number and the diploma number to verify the name of the certificate holder. A decision can then be made accordingly.

## SOURCES AND REFERENCES

### General sources of information on authenticity

- Brown, G. M., Fighting Credential Fraud. In: World Education News & Reviews, 2005. <http://www.wes.org/eWENR/05oct/feature.htm>
- Kearny, R., *Detecting Forged Credentials in a High Tech World*. In: World Education News & Reviews, 1994. Link: [http://www.wes.org/ewenr/wenrarchive/FBC\\_DetectForgedCredsFall94.pdf](http://www.wes.org/ewenr/wenrarchive/FBC_DetectForgedCredsFall94.pdf)

### Country specific sources for verifying certain documents

- Bangladesh: secondary school and higher secondary examination results: <http://www.educationboardresults.gov.bd/>;
- China: verification service for Chinese qualifications: [http://www.vetassess.com.au/migrate\\_to\\_australia/verify\\_chinese\\_documents.cfm](http://www.vetassess.com.au/migrate_to_australia/verify_chinese_documents.cfm);
- Gambia (WAEC): <http://www.waecgambia.org/resultchecker/>;
- Ghana (WAEC): <http://ghana.waecdirect.org/>;
- India: <http://www.cbse.nic.in/> and <http://www.indiaresults.com/>;
- Kenya (KNEC): <http://www.knec.ac.ke/main/index.php>;
- Nigeria:  
(WAEC): <http://www.waecdirect.org/>;  
(NECO): <http://www.neconigeria.org/>;
- Pakistan (HEC):
  - secondary and Intermediate Examination results can often be verified at the issuing institution's website, e.g. BISE Lahore results: <http://www.biselahore.com/>;
  - for degree verification: <http://www.hec.gov.pk/insidehec/divisions/QALI/DegreeAttestationEquivalence/DegreeAttestationServices/Pages/Default.aspx>;
  - verification for the University of the Punjab: <http://pu.edu.pk/home/results/>;
- Romania: <http://www.ebacalaureat.ro/rezultate/>;
- Sierra Leone (WAEC): <http://www.waecsierra-leone.org/>;
- South Africa:
  - [http://www.nqf.org.za/pls/cms/page?s=3263,8281,0,0,177,348127,How\\_do\\_I\\_verify\\_learner\\_achievements\\_of\\_qualifications](http://www.nqf.org.za/pls/cms/page?s=3263,8281,0,0,177,348127,How_do_I_verify_learner_achievements_of_qualifications);
  - Matric Results section of [www.education.gov.za](http://www.education.gov.za);
- Sweden: some universities issue transcripts with a code that can be checked on the universities' website;
- Tanzania: 2009 ACSE results can be viewed on the Tanzania Examinations Council website: [www.necta.go.tz](http://www.necta.go.tz);
- Moldova: verification service for Moldova qualifications: <http://www.acte.edu.md/>;
- Ukraine: verification service: [www.osvita.net](http://www.osvita.net);

### 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](http://www.aikos.smm.lt);
- Russia: <http://www.russianenic.ru/rus/diplom.html>;
- Ukraine: <http://www.osvita.net/html.php?link=3>.

## 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.

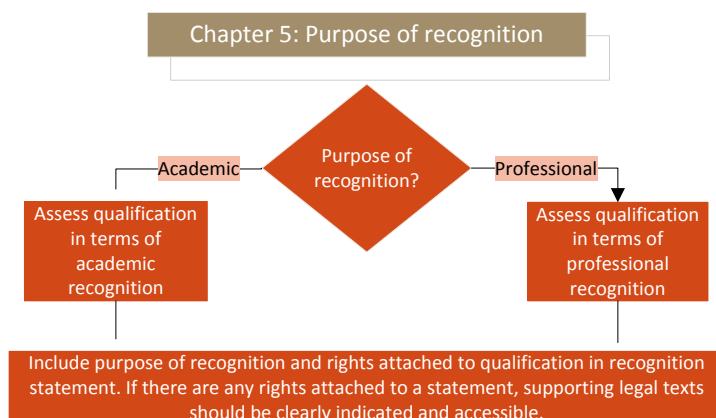
27. States are encouraged to review any national laws requiring overly complicated and costly authentication procedures, such as full legalisation of all documents. Modern communications tools make it easier to verify the authenticity of documents in less cumbersome ways and competent recognition authorities 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.

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## 5. Purpose of Recognition

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### FLOWCHART



### 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 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.

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. 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.

### RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that credential evaluators consider the purpose for which recognition is sought when assessing qualifications. More specifically, credential evaluators should consider the following points:

- 1) Is the purpose of recognition for further studies (academic) or access to the labour market (occupational/professional)?
- 2) Depending on the purpose of recognition, the assessment of the relevant learning outcomes and competencies may vary.
  - a. It is recommended that foreign credentials should be assessed in a flexible manner, identifying only those substantial differences which are relevant to the purpose for which recognition is sought.
- 3) It is advised that the statement of recognition/qualification assessment should state clearly what the purpose of recognition is and what the rights attached to the statement are.
  - a. If there are any rights attached to a statement, then the supporting legal texts should be clearly indicated and accessible.
- 4) If recognition is sought for a different purpose to one previously covered by a recognition statement, a renewed assessment is advised.

### EXAMPLE

When an applicant applies for recognition of foreign qualifications, it is beneficial to 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 programme (e.g. in social work) would be less important when seeking employment than when seeking admission to postgraduate education.

#### **RELEVANT ARTICLES RCP**

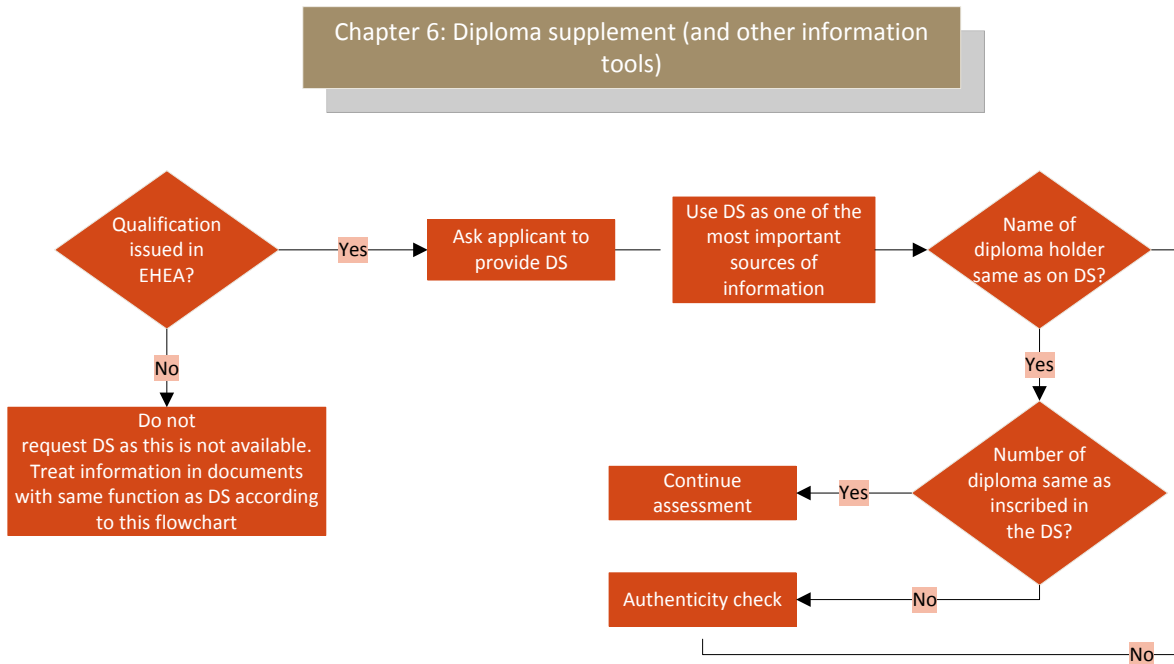
- 32.** Recognition of foreign qualifications may be sought for a variety of purposes. The assessment should take due account of the purpose(s) for which recognition is sought, and the recognition statement should make clear the purpose(s) for which the statement is valid.
- 33.** Before undertaking 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, taking into account the purpose for which recognition is sought. In the case of a qualification belonging to a foreign system of education, the assessment should take into account 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.

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## 6. Diploma Supplement (and other information tools)

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### FLOWCHART



### INTRODUCTION

The Diploma Supplement (DS)<sup>2</sup> 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.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Credential evaluators should make use of the DS, if available, when evaluating an application. The DS should always accompany the qualification and should include the transcript of records listing the courses and other elements of the programme completed.

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

- 2 Information identifying the qualification, and in particular the paragraphs:
  - 2.1 Name of qualification and (if applicable) title conferred (in original language);
  - 2.3 Name and status of the awarding institution. For more information on this, please turn to topic 3: “Accreditation and Quality Assurance (status of the institution)” on page 21;
  - 2.4. Name and status of institution (if different from 2.3) administering studies;  
This is 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 topic 15: “Qualifications awarded by joint programmes” on page 66.
- 3 Information on the level of qualification, and reference to national and international qualification frameworks.

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<sup>2</sup> The outline structure for the DS as developed by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES is made up of 8 sections. This chapter refers to the model of the DS developed by the 3 international organizations and the updated version of the DS explanatory notes (*adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee, June 2007, Bucharest*). The DS model, the explanatory notes, samples of DS, founding principles, general guidelines and a glossary can be consulted at the EC website listed in the references below. All the 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.).



4 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 on this, please turn to topic 9: “Learning Outcomes” on page 41.

5 Information on the function of the qualification.

6 Additional information.

*This section should be consulted on a case by case basis.*

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 topic 7: “Qualifications Frameworks” on page 35 and topic 3: “Accreditation and Quality Assurance (status of the institution)” on page 21.

The DS should be considered as one of the most important sources of information on the qualification and its system in which it was awarded, but it should not be used as the only source of information. The existence of a Diploma Supplement 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 always carefully check, via other sources, the status of the institution, whether the qualification is recognised in the awarding country or not. It is also a good habit to check whether the name of the person who obtained the qualification is the same 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.

DS are 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.

The DS should be used as a tool to enable 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 issued in countries involved in the Bologna process. Therefore, it should not be requested of applicants whose qualification was awarded outside the EHEA or before the Bologna process was implemented.

In these countries, documents similar to the DS, such as transcripts of records or records of passed examinations for each subject studied at university (e.g. credit book, index of exams, etc.) are issued to students. During the assessment of the foreign qualification, the information contained in these documents will be treated in the same way as the information of the same kind included in the DS.

**EXAMPLE**

An example of the Diploma Supplement can be found at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ds/ds\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ds/ds_en.pdf) and

<http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/en/documents/diploma-supplement/examples>

**SOURCES AND REFERENCES**

- Aelterman G. et al., *Study on the Diploma Supplement as seen by its users*, 2008.  
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- Council of Europe/UNESCO-CEPES, *Explanatory Notes to the Joint European Diploma Supplement*, 2007.  
Link: [http://www.aic.lv/ace/ace\\_disk/Dipl\\_Sup/DS\\_expl\\_nt\\_rev2007.pdf](http://www.aic.lv/ace/ace_disk/Dipl_Sup/DS_expl_nt_rev2007.pdf)
- Rauhvargers, A., *The renewed approach to the Diploma Supplement in the context of the developments of recent years*, Rauhvargers, A. In: “New challenges in recognition”, Council of Europe 2008.  
Link: [http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit\\_aliasid=2285](http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit_aliasid=2285)
- Template Diploma Supplement on website European Commission.  
Link: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ds/ds\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ds/ds_en.pdf)
- Website National Europass centres.

Link:<http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/europass/home/vernav/Information+and++Support/National+Europass+Centres.csp>

#### **RELEVANT ARTICLES RCP**

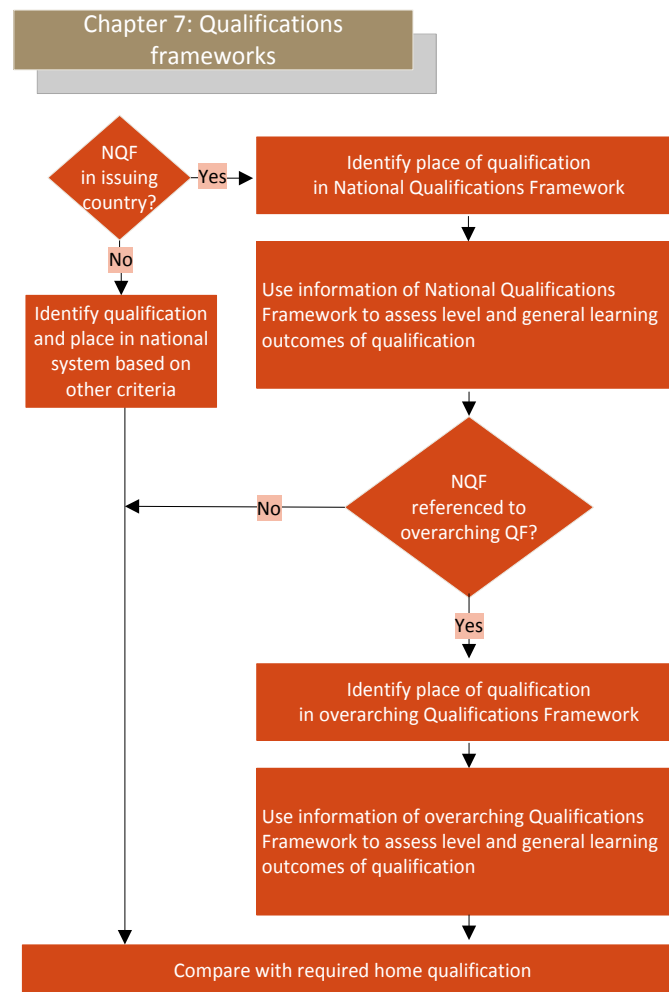
- 13.** Where learning outcomes are clearly documented, for example in the European Commission/Council of Europe/UNESCO Diploma Supplement, assessments should take these into consideration.
- 19.** The responsibility for providing information on the qualification for which recognition is sought is shared 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.

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## 7. Qualifications Frameworks

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### FLOWCHART



### 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

- Credential evaluators 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.
- 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 Commission has launched an EQF-portal, where National Qualifications Frameworks can be compared by using the EQF as a translation device (see example below). It is expected that the majority of EU countries have referenced their qualifications frameworks to the EQF by 2012 and specific comparisons of NQF's will thus be available on the portal.
- 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.
- 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.
- Credential evaluators should use NQFs as transparency tools for understanding the level, learning outcomes, and workload of foreign qualifications.

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: 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:



- How to place old qualifications (legacy awards) within a Qualification Framework? Credential evaluators should examine whether these qualifications are included in the national qualifications frameworks of the respective countries. If this is the case credential evaluators should take the level of the qualification as one of the important parameters in the final assessment. 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.
- 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

- Bjornavold, J. and M. Coles, *Added value of National Qualifications Frameworks in implementing the EQF*, European Union 2010.  
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- Hong Kong Education Bureau, *Qualifications Framework*, 2008.  
Link: <http://www.hkqf.gov.hk/guie/home.asp>
- European Commission, *The European Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning*.  
Link: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc44\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc44_en.htm)
- National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, *The National Framework of Qualifications*.  
Link: <http://www.nfq.ie/nfq/en/>
- UK-NARIC et al., *Implementing and Improving National Action Plans (IINAP)*, Cheltenham 2009.  
Link: <http://www.iinap.naric.org.uk/outcomes.aspx>
- Website EQF-Portal (Compare qualifications frameworks), European Commission.  
Link: [http://ec.europa.eu/eqf/compare/select\\_en.htm#comparison](http://ec.europa.eu/eqf/compare/select_en.htm#comparison)

#### RELEVANT ARTICLE

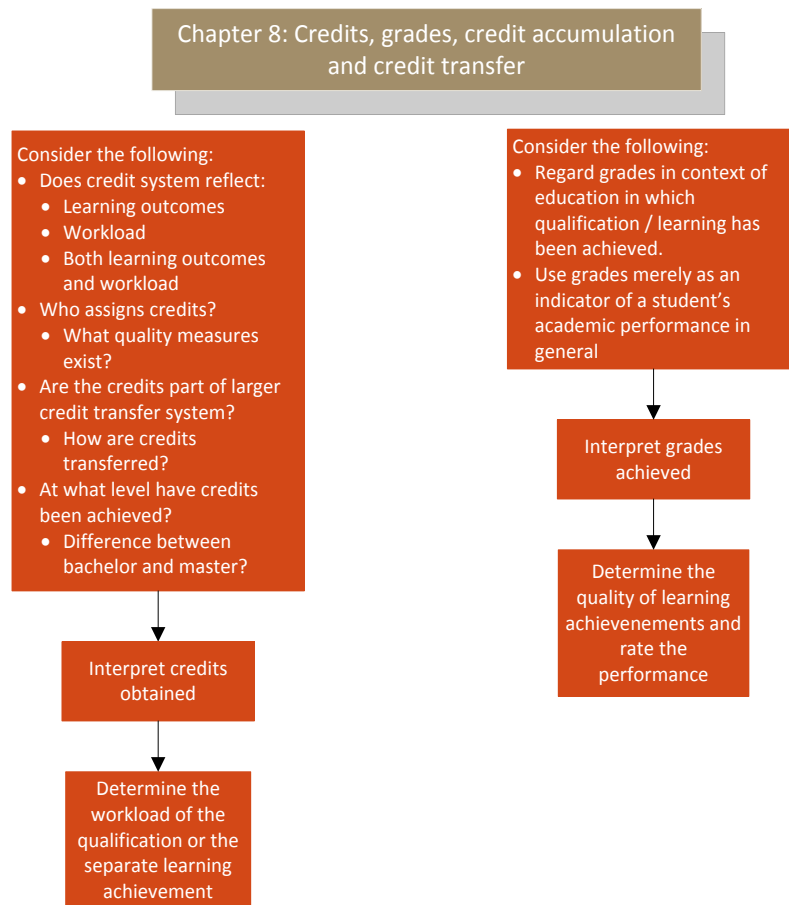
35. The assessment of a foreign qualification should identify the qualification in the system of the country in which recognition is sought which is most comparable to the foreign qualification, taking into account the purpose for which recognition is sought. In the case of a qualification belonging to a foreign system of education, the assessment should take into account 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.

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## 8. Credits, grades, credit accumulation and credit transfer

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### FLOWCHART



### INTRODUCTION

#### Credits

Credits measure workload. They quantitatively describe learning achievements and are awarded to the learner upon successful completion of a given unit of a study programme and/or a complete programme. Credits do not normally take the level of performance into consideration unless otherwise specified. Credits are used to quantify learning in terms of learning outcomes, relating to the workload of learning involved to reach a particular learning outcome.

Different credit systems exist across various sectors 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).

#### 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 be entitled to be awarded the final qualification or to gain access to the final examinations leading to a qualification. 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 same goal of achieving a given amount of credits in order to receive 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 available 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 they 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.

### **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. The very nature of grading systems and grading cultures makes it difficult if not impossible to accurately convert grades from one system to another.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

### **Credits**

It is recommended that credits be taken into consideration in the process of credential evaluation. Credits provide an indication of the amount of study already completed, often reflect a learning path and are thus a useful tool to provide recognition of prior learning. They are also fundamental to the recognition of periods of study which, like completed qualifications, should be given fair consideration. It is important to assess the same qualification at the same level each time notwithstanding a difference in grades or a difference (lower number) in credits which could be due to recognition of Prior Learning by the awarding institution.

Credential evaluators should take into account:

- The credit system presented; what does it reflect?
  - learning outcomes,
  - workload or
  - both learning outcomes and workload?
- Who is responsible for the assigning of credits and what quality control measures are in place to ensure consistency? For instance, are the credit-allocation procedures validated and reviewed by an external body?
- Do the credits form part of a larger credit transfer system? If so, what are the processes of credit transfer within that system?
- At what level have the credits been achieved?
  - Is there a difference between credits at one level (Bachelor's) and another level (Master's)?
  - What influence should this have on assessing the final level of learning outcome?

Based on the information gained from the considerations above, it should be possible to form a decision on the recognition of prior learning depending on how the credits link into the system to which access is being sought.

### **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, it is recommended to:

- consider grades in the context of the education system in which a qualification or learning 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 1**

An applicant presents a transcript from a recognised university, detailing the credits completed towards a Bachelor degree. This transcript therefore confirms the level at which the credits have been awarded and thus, although the qualification is incomplete, credit transfer may be utilised for the credits successfully obtained to allow the individual to continue their studies in another institution accordingly. Details of the recognition decision are then kept on file to ensure consistency in future assessments and to assist new staff.

**Example 2**

In a second instance, 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 certificate. Thus a recognition decision can be made accordingly.

**Example 3**

A third 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.

**SOURCES AND REFERENCES**

- Website European Commission on European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET).  
Link: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc50\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc50_en.htm)
- Website European Commission on European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).  
Link: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc48\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc48_en.htm)

**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.

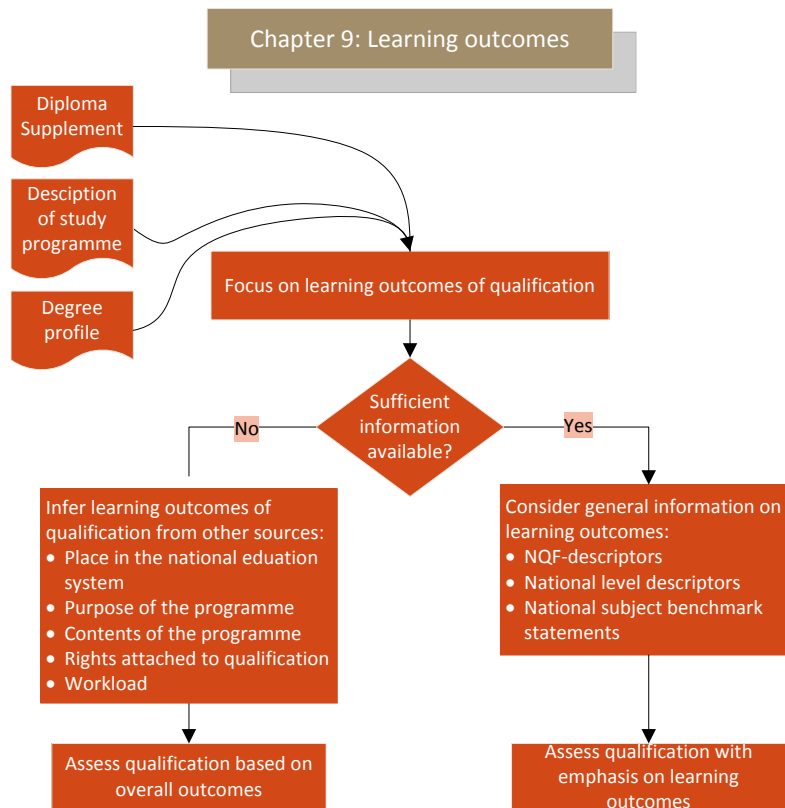


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## 9. Learning Outcomes

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### FLOWCHART



### 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 specific programme, for a qualification level, or anything in between. Learning outcomes are often 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.

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.

Various systems for writing learning outcomes are being used or are being developed. Learning outcomes are playing an increasingly important role in the development of national and overarching qualifications frameworks (for more information, see topic 7: "Qualifications Frameworks" on page 35). 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).

For the purpose of writing learning outcomes for a particular programme, an important development is the methodology adopted by the higher education institutions that are involved in the Tuning Process. Within the Tuning Process, a template for a Degree Profile has been designed, which contains a number of sections in which the programme is described in terms of outcomes. One of these sections is a list of learning outcomes at programme level.

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.

If learning outcomes are taken into account in the evaluation of a foreign qualification, the recognition procedure may be 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?”

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that competent recognition authorities base their evaluation of a foreign qualification on establishing what the applicant knows, understands and is able to demonstrate. For this purpose, competent recognition authorities should focus on the learning outcomes of the qualification. This approach should be used to check whether substantial differences exist between the foreign qualification and the required one. For more information, see topic 10: “Substantial Differences” on page 45.

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 at national level 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 practice, usually no direct information on learning outcomes is found in the accompanying documentation of the qualification, such as the list of subjects or transcript. Even section 4.2 (programme requirements) of the Diploma Supplement, which is intended to provide “details of learning outcomes, knowledge, skills, competences”, does not always contain a clear list of learning outcomes.

In the absence of information on learning outcomes, the competent recognition authority should 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 workload of the programme.

As the writing and listing of learning outcomes is still a rather new development for most higher education institutions in many countries, the information contained in lists of learning outcomes should be interpreted with some care. 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 being developed within the programme. The learning outcomes assigned to a particular programme should always be looked at within the context of the general learning outcomes assigned to the qualifications at that level (as expressed in national qualification descriptors and level descriptors).

Also, the competent recognition authority should be reluctant to conclude too easily that non-matching lists of learning outcomes of two programmes are a sign of substantial differences between the programmes.

### Example 1

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 2

In some education systems (including 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 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 3

An applicant has submitted a Degree Profile<sup>3</sup> which gives a student-centred description of a specific physics bachelor 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 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 programme in physics, with a strong theoretical emphasis and an element of research suggesting the qualification is more academically than professionally oriented. Access to any type of physics master programme, including heavily research-oriented master programmes, should in principle be no problem.

### SOURCES AND REFERENCES

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- Bergan S. And E.S. Hunt (eds.), *Developing attitudes to recognition: substantial differences in an age of globalisation*, Council of Europe 2009.  
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Link: [http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit\\_aliasid=2469](http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit_aliasid=2469)

### RELEVANT ARTICLES RCP

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<sup>3</sup> The Degree Profile described in this example can be found on page 86-88 of the following publication: Lokhoff, J. et al., [A Guide to Formulating Degree Programme Profiles](#), Bilbao, Groningen, The Hague 2010.

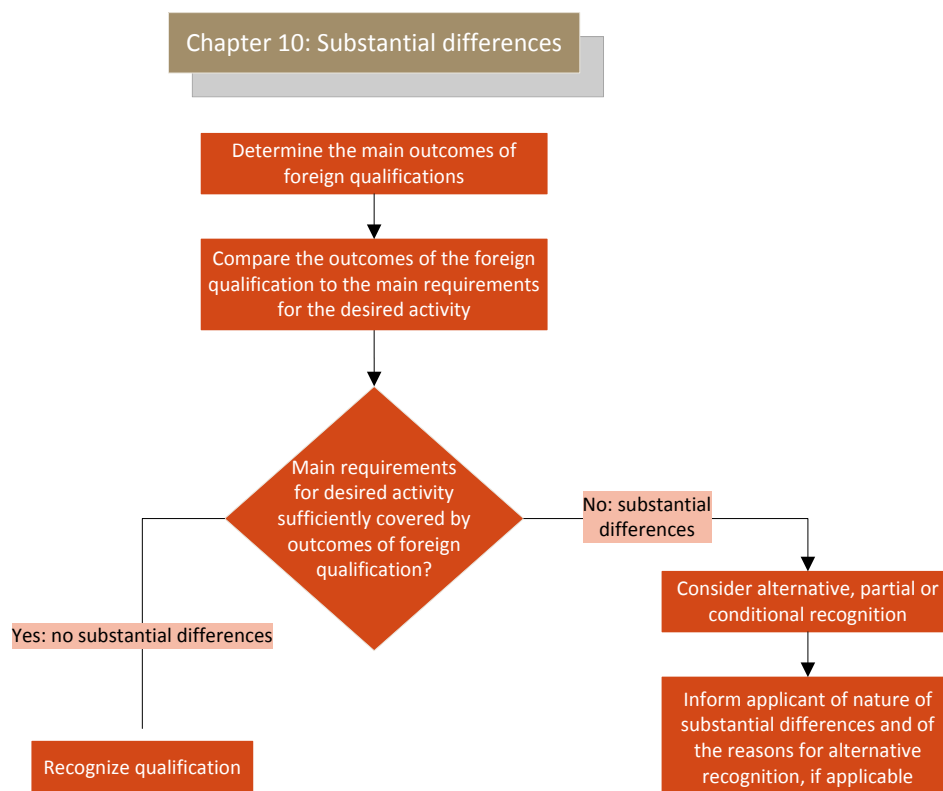
13. Where learning outcomes are clearly documented, for example in the European Commission/Council of Europe/UNESCO Diploma Supplement, or comparable documents, assessment should take these into consideration.
36. Qualifications of approximately equal level may show differences in terms of content, profile 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.

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## 10. Substantial Differences

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### FLOWCHART



### 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”. By focusing on the five key elements that together make up a qualification (level, workload, quality, profile and learning outcomes) and by taking substantial differences into account, competent recognition authorities have transformed their approach from expecting foreign qualifications to be almost exactly the same as those offered in their own countries, to focusing on “Recognition” by accepting non-substantial differences.

Substantial differences are 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 and the accompanying guidelines are as follows:

- 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;
- the difference should be substantial in relation to the function of the qualification and the purpose for which recognition is sought.

Differences in attitudes to recognition and to the interpretation of substantial differences persist. The ENIC and NARIC Networks promote flexible attitudes and to move away from rigid and legalistic interpretations.

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 have a direct effect on the abilities of the applicant, and should therefore not be considered automatically as a substantial difference.

The recommendations given in this chapter, combined with the necessary flexibility and willingness on the part of competent recognition authorities to provide fair recognition, should lead to more convergence in this very important aspect of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

The competent recognition authority should recognise a qualification, unless it can prove that there is a substantial difference that could be a major obstacle for successfully pursuing the desired activity. The essential question to answer is: does the qualification that the applicant has obtained enable him to follow a given study programme or take up a given employment?

The competent authority should 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 outcomes, from purely theoretical knowledge to practical skills. In virtually all cases, the foreign qualification covers a different range of outcomes. The competent recognition authority should determine whether the main requirements for the desired activity are sufficiently covered by the outcomes of the foreign qualification. This implies that not all of the 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.

#### **Example 1**

An applicant has obtained a qualification in engineering, which prepares for admission to PhD programmes in engineering and also provides 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 2**

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 be glad to report that no substantial differences exist between the qualification of the applicant and the required one.

Obviously, there are bound to be differences in the contents of history programmes offered in two different countries with respect to the subjects covering the national history. However, these differences should not be considered as substantial, since the applicant has developed the competences to easily extend his knowledge of history to any particular period or country.

#### **Example 3**

If an applicant wishes to change his field of study between the bachelor's and master's degrees, this does not automatically constitute a substantial difference by itself, 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 constitute 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 can in all fairness be required to complete additional requirements such as certain prerequisite courses. This would also be required of national students who choose to continue in a more remote field at the graduate level.

#### **Example 4**

In many EHEA countries, the combined workload of consecutive bachelor and master programmes is 300 ECTS (usually 180 ECTS for the bachelor programme and 120 ECTS for the master programme). However, there are also countries where a bachelor programme of 180 ECTS may be followed by a master programme of 60 ECTS. These master programmes may have similar purposes and learning outcomes as the 120 ECTS master 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 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) 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.

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, partial or conditional recognition of the qualification (see topic 11: "Alternative recognition and the right to appeal" on page 49).

#### **Example 5**

An applicant with a master's degree in Applied Computer Science applies for admission to a PhD programme in Informatics. The main learning outcomes of the Master programme in Applied Computer Science are being able 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 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 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.

What may be defined as "substantial differences" (which may lead to alternative, partial, conditional recognition or to non-recognition), 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.

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Link: [http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit\\_aliasid=2478](http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit_aliasid=2478)
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#### **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.

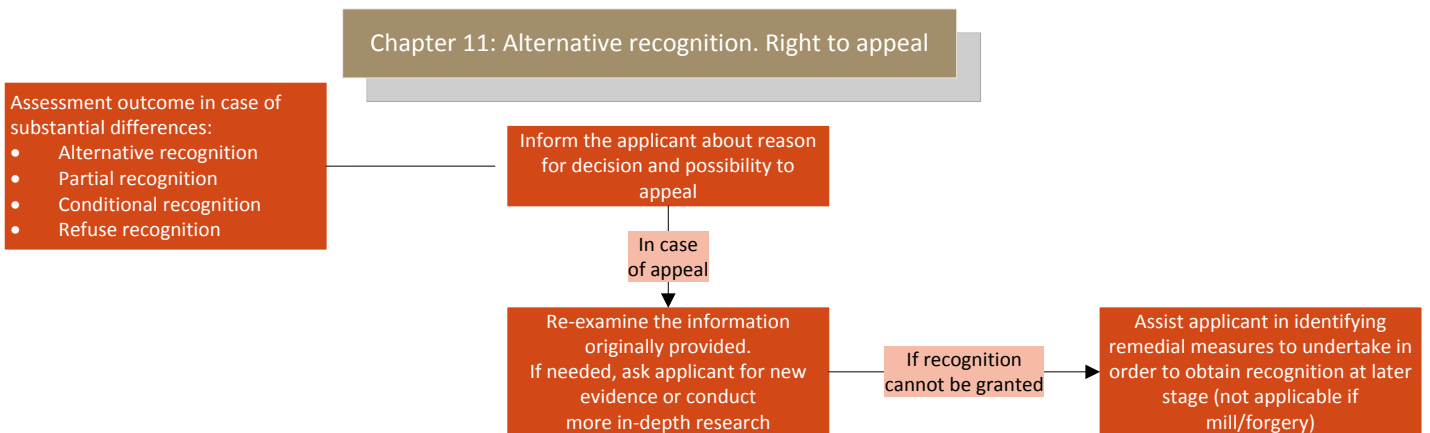


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## 11. Alternative recognition and the right to appeal

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### FLOWCHART



### INTRODUCTION

Depending on national law and practice, the outcome of the assessment of a foreign qualification may take the form of a decision, a comparability statement or advice to the applicant or an institution. If the applicant agrees with the outcome, the procedure is of course complete. If however the applicant disagrees with the outcome, he or she has the right to appeal the decision. The appeal procedure is usually given by the national legislation.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Where, after thorough consideration of the case, the competent recognition authority reaches the conclusion that, due to substantial differences, recognition cannot be granted in accordance with the applicant's request, the competent recognition authority should consider an alternative form of recognition. Such alternative types of recognition may include:
  - **alternative** recognition could take the form of evaluating the applicant's qualification in terms of another relevant qualification which is not the one required for the desired activity. This would suggest an alternative way into the education system or job market for the applicant. In addition, the applicant may be offered a bridging course by the competent authority to make up for the substantial differences;
  - **partial** recognition could take the form of accepting some of the credits earned as part of the foreign programme. The applicant would then have the opportunity to enrol in the programme that is required by the competent recognition authority for access to the desired activity and receive exemptions for the credits accepted by the competent recognition authority;
  - **conditional** recognition could take the form of allowing the participant to start with the desired activity on the condition that certain goals (for instance obtaining a number of credits in obligatory courses) are successfully met by the applicant during the activity.
- Only when the competent recognition authority cannot find any alternative form of recognition (alternative, partial, and conditional) should recognition be denied. It should be kept in mind that in some cases, the absence of recognition may be "fair recognition" (e.g. diploma mills, fraudulent documents).
- 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 an appeal, the competent recognition authority should again examine the information originally provided. When necessary the authority may ask the applicant for 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);
  - requested tuition fees, 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 Topic 2: "Transparency and Information Provision" on page 17.

#### **Example 1**

An applicant is seeking admission to a research-based master's programme in chemistry, for which a research-based bachelor's degree in chemistry is required. The applicant has obtained a bachelor's degree in the applied field of chemical technology which does not prepare the student in scientific 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 bachelor's degree in applied chemical technology. This makes it clear to the applicant where he stands in the national education system of the host country. The admitting institution can then use this information to determine whether the applicant qualifies for admission to the desired master's programme, or to suggest a master's programme which may be more suitable.

#### **Example 2**

An applicant seeking recognition of his master's degree disagrees with the decision issued by the competent recognition authority. He submits an appeal in which he gives arguments supporting his case and encloses new documents (detailed description of the study programme, issued by the institution awarding the degree, a letter from the ministry of education giving information on this type of qualification).

The competent recognition authority deals with the appeal according to the existing regulations. It considers the arguments raised by the applicant, examines the new documentation and again evaluates the qualification. If the original decision is upheld the competent recognition authority answers the applicant's arguments in its explanation and upholds the original decision.

#### **Example 3**

An applicant submits a master's degree for recognition. It is established 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 is not obliged to consider any alternative form of recognition, should refuse recognition and should give the applicant reasons for the decision.

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#### **RELEVANT ARTICLES RCP**

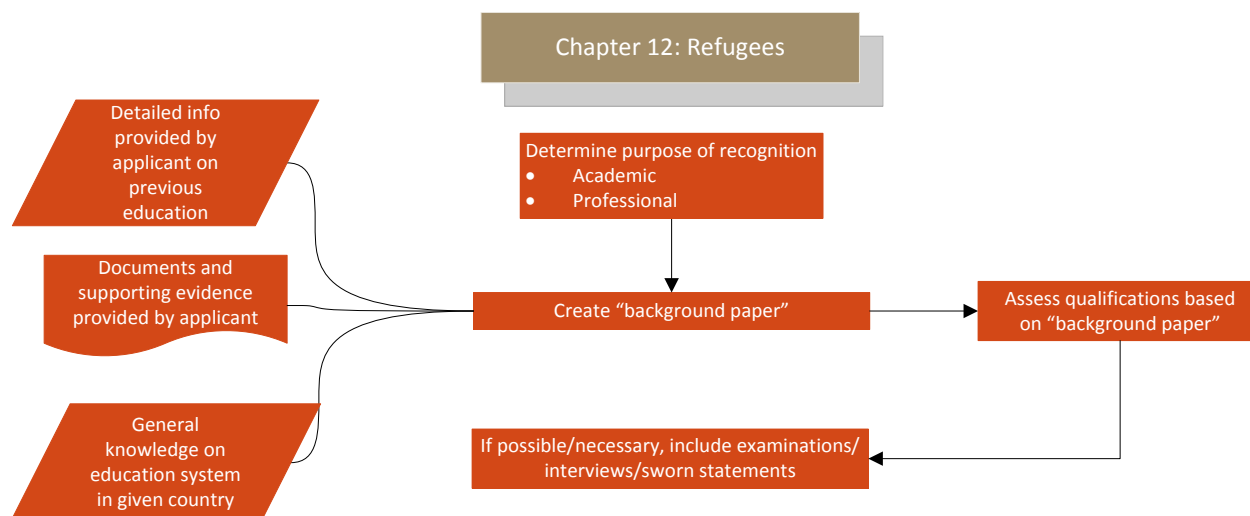
8. Where, after thorough consideration of the case, the competent recognition authority reaches the conclusion that recognition cannot be granted in accordance with the applicant's request, alternative or partial recognition should be considered, where possible.
9. In all cases where the decision is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

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## 12. Refugees

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### FLOWCHART



### INTRODUCTION

Recognition of the formal qualifications of people with insufficient documentation or without documentation for a valid reason, is different from the traditional recognition of foreign qualifications. The traditional assessment is based on the educational credentials submitted by the applicant whereas the assessment of a refugee's qualification is based on incomplete – or completely absent – information about the individual qualification and/or the educational system in which it was obtained.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The refugees, displaced persons or persons in a refugee-like situation who have formal education from a recognised and/or accredited educational institution and others who for valid reason and in spite of their best persistent efforts cannot document the qualifications they claim, should have a right to have their qualifications assessed by a competent recognition authority.

- When reconstructing the educational background credential evaluators should take into account the purpose of recognition. Different procedures could be followed depending on if the applicant wishes to work or to pursue further studies.
- To facilitate the assessment of the qualifications of refugees, displaced persons or persons in a refugee-like situation with insufficient documentation, credential evaluators should create a "background paper".

The "background paper" is an authoritative description or reconstruction of the academic achievements based on:

- detailed information provided by an applicant, regarding the contents, extent and level of education; information regarding professional experience should also be included, especially when related to the applicant's education;
- documents and supporting evidence provided by the applicant; (educational documents, testimonials of work experience or any other evidence which may help to confirm the information given in the application;
- general knowledge of the educational system in the country in question.

The "background paper" may be based on the model of the Diploma Supplement. See topic 6: "Diploma Supplement (and other information tools)" on page 32 for more information.

*Example of the overview of an educational background*

Educational Background	
Qualification	Evidence
Secondary education	Diploma
Higher education-first degree	Student ID
	+ transcript of 1st year
Higher education-second degree	No educational documents, but instructor's statement
	+ employment contract
	+ proof of informal and non-formal learning

- Credential evaluators should assess the qualifications on the basis of the “background paper”.
- Whenever possible and/or necessary the assessment procedure could also include specially arranged examinations, interviews with staff of higher education institutions and/or the competent recognition authority and sworn statements before a legally competent authority.

**Example 1**

An applicant who is a refugee seeks recognition of his bachelor qualification in computer science. Unfortunately he 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 degree.

**Example 2**

An applicant who is a refugee seeking admission to a PhD programme applies for recognition of his master qualification. Most of his educational documentation is missing. The educational portfolio compiled by the credential evaluator does not include enough evidence to allow the evaluator to make a recommendation. In this case the applicant's qualifications have to be additionally assessed by the academic staff of the university. Since the applicant wishes to be admitted to a PhD programme, he has to submit a small research project and discuss it with the academic experts in the field.

**Example 3**

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 doesn't 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).

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#### **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, 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 in spite of 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.

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## 13. Non-Traditional Learning

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### INTRODUCTION

The recognition of non-traditional learning is important in order to facilitate access for learners to future learning paths. In the spirit of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, non-traditional learners should benefit from the same principles of transparency, mobility and fair recognition as those with formal qualifications, ensuring also that academic progression on the basis of non-traditional qualifications is as close as possible to progression on the basis of those earned the traditional way. As such credential evaluators are advised to take into consideration what the learner knows and can do irrespective of their chosen learning path.

Non-traditional learning encompasses all skills, knowledge and competences acquired outside the traditional classroom setting, through other types of learning activities in a non-formal context and may lead to a set of relevant learning outcomes comparable to learning outcomes achieved the traditional way. It may be considered the overarching term for various forms of learning including informal and non-formal learning.

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.

Informal and non-formal learning would not ordinarily lead to a certified award; however, learners may apply for recognition of prior learning (RPL) from an institution for credit towards a qualification based on the learning outcomes achieved through the non-traditional way. For more information on this, please turn to the information in the "Subtopic – Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)" on page 59.

### RECOMMENDATION

It is important to establish a clear and transparent set of criteria specifically for recognising non-traditional learning with learning outcomes as the key consideration. Qualifications obtained through non-traditional learning may appear substantially different to those acquired through formal learning, with the former perhaps identified in terms of hours, weeks, theory and practice time (if indeed definable), and the latter often expressed in terms of credits. Such learning can thus prove difficult to evaluate since criteria used for evaluating formal qualifications can not necessarily be applied in the same way and it is important to focus on the achieved learning outcomes evident from the differing learning paths. Having a searchable record of previous credit/recognition outcomes for non-traditional learning will ensure transparency and consistency in the application of evaluation criteria and assist new staff.

Useful tools for the evaluation of non-traditional learning may include letters of recommendation/references and mobility documents such as the Europass Mobility Supplement, for instance, which details learning outcomes acquired through a period of training abroad.

The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning may also be considered as a tool to evaluate non-traditional learning. The EQF-LLL applies to all types of education, and promotes the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The outcomes of non-traditional learning may be compared to the learning outcomes of the eight reference levels of the EQF-LLL.

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Link: [http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit\\_aliasid=2478](http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit_aliasid=2478)
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#### RELEVANT ARTICLES RCP

40. Competent recognition authorities and other assessment agencies should be encouraged to focus on the learning outcomes and competencies, 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, double 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.

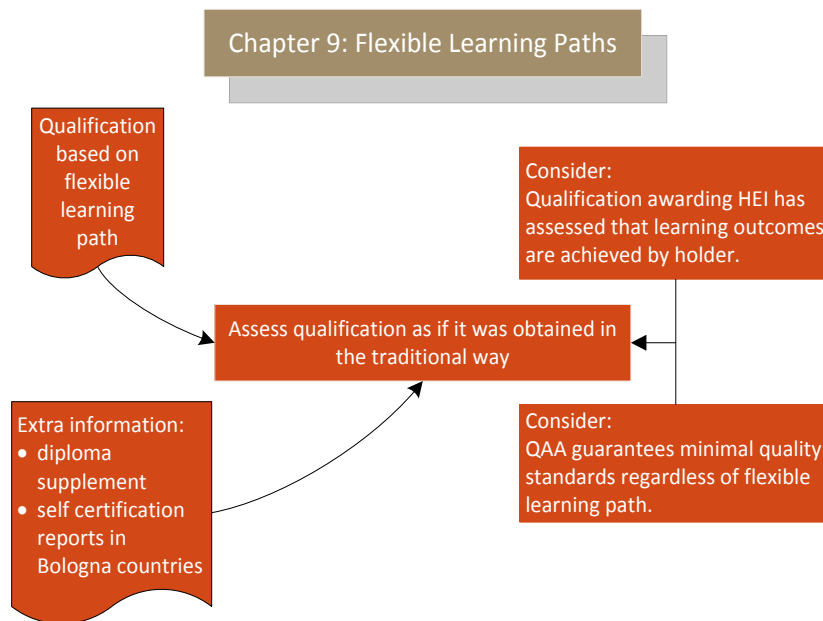


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## Sub Topic – Flexible Learning Paths

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### FLOWCHART



### INTRODUCTION

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

- access and admission to the programme not based on the standard requirements in terms of entrance qualifications (e.g. a secondary school leaving certificate);
- exemptions of part of the programme based on a previous obtained qualification or period of study;
- exemptions of part of the programme, or the whole programme, based on non-formal or informal learning;
- credit transfer during the programme (e.g. via exchange programmes);
- distance learning and e-learning.

Flexible learning paths are mostly based on the methodology of recognition of prior learning (see “Subtopic – RPL” on page 59).

In the case of flexible access and admission, the more traditional instrument of (individual) entrance examinations may also be used.

As the concept of lifelong learning is becoming more important (e.g. in the EQF-LLL), it will become more common that qualifications are obtained in a flexible way. Before this development, education used to be 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 recognition of having achieved certain predefined learning outcomes.

### RECOMMENDATION

Qualifications based on a flexible learning pathway should be evaluated in the same way as a similar qualification awarded by that institution which was obtained in the non-flexible traditional way.

The competent recognition authority should accept that the higher education institution awarding a qualification which is based on a flexible learning pathway has assessed that the learning outcomes of the qualification have been achieved by the graduate.

The relevant Quality Assurance Agency, if there is one, guarantees that the predefined (minimum) quality of the programme and/or institution meets these quality standards, whatever flexible learning path the student

took. For more information about this, please turn to topic 3: “Accreditation and Quality Assurance (status of the institution)” on page 21.

Useful information tools include the Diploma Supplement (see topic 6: “Diploma Supplement (and other information tools) on page 32 for more information) which may provide information regarding the flexible learning paths in the relevant higher education, and the Self-Certification reports of the countries participating in the Bologna Process which detail information regarding the flexible learning paths and learning outcomes in the higher education systems. The self-certification reports are published on this website: <http://www.enic-naric.net/index.aspx?s=n&r=ena&d=qf>

#### SOURCES AND REFERENCES

- Bergan S. And E.S. Hunt (eds.), *Developing attitudes to recognition: substantial differences in an age of globalisation*, Council of Europe 2009.  
Link: [http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit\\_aliasid=2478](http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit_aliasid=2478)
- Bergan, S. and A. Rauhvargers, *Recognition issues in the Bologna Process: policy development and the road to good practice*, Council of Europe 2006.  
Link: [http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit\\_aliasid=1618](http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit_aliasid=1618)
- Rauhvargers, A. and A. Rusakova, *Improving recognition in the European Higher Education Area: an analysis of national action plans*, Council of Europe 2010.  
Link: [http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit\\_aliasid=2469](http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit_aliasid=2469)

#### RELEVANT ARTICLES RCP

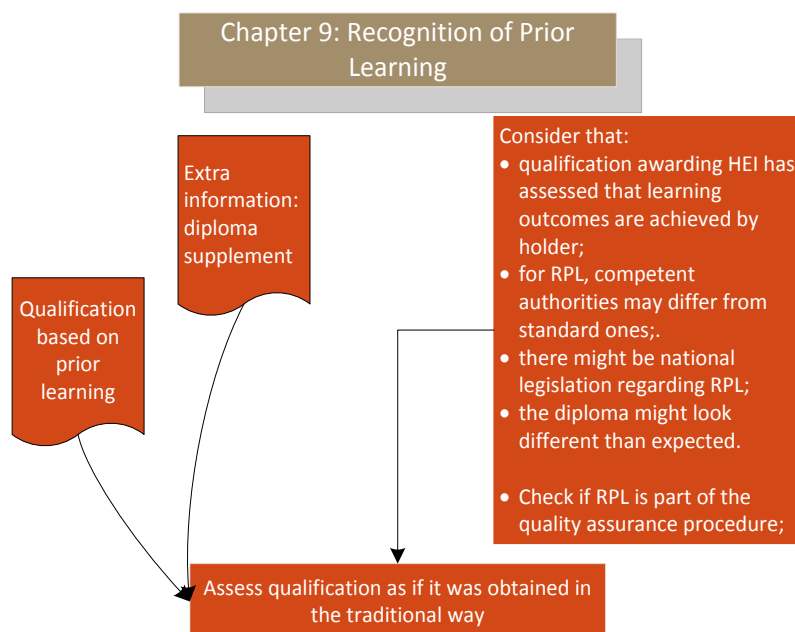
40. Competent recognition authorities should be encouraged to focus on the learning outcomes, as well as the quality of the delivery of an educational programme and to consider its duration as merely one indication of the level of achievement reached at the end of the programme. The assessment process 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.

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## Subtopic – Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

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### FLOWCHART



### INTRODUCTION

While ‘recognition’ in this manual is used to refer to the process of evaluating a foreign qualification, the recognition in Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) refers to the process by which a competent authority or education institution in one particular country assesses the knowledge, skills and competence that an individual possesses as a result of a period 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 different 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* and Accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL). In this manual we use the term RPL to cover all these different terminologies.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Foreign qualifications which have partly or fully been awarded by an institution through recognition of prior learning should be evaluated in the same way as similar qualifications awarded by that institution obtained in the traditional way.

The following should be taken into consideration:

- the competent recognition authority should accept that the higher education institution awarding a qualification which is based on a flexible learning pathway has assessed that the learning outcomes of the qualification have been achieved by the graduate;
- there are many cases in which RPL is not part of the quality assurance procedure;
- competent RPL authorities might not appear on the usual lists of recognised higher education institutions. If this is the case you are recommended to find out whether the institution is authorised according to national legislation to issue a RPL qualification. If you cannot find this information, please contact the ENIC/NARIC or national recognition information centre in the country where the institution is established;

- the qualification and transcript – even when in compliance with the institutional norms - might look different, for example workload and number of credits (if the RPL is given value in credits) or the list of subjects.

**Example**

An applicant applies 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 according to exactly the same standards as if the was obtained strictly through the formal education system.

**SOURCES AND REFERENCES**

- Nuffic et al., *Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning: Learning Outcomes. Final report*, The Hague 2009.  
Link: <http://www.rpl.naric.org.uk/documents/final%20report.pdf>
- Nuffic et al., *Formal recognition of non formal and informal learning. A study exploring the possibilities of formal recognition of non-formal and informal learning*, The Hague 2008.  
Link: [http://www.rpl.naric.org.uk/StudyonFormalRecognitionof\\_nov2008\\_def.pdf](http://www.rpl.naric.org.uk/StudyonFormalRecognitionof_nov2008_def.pdf)

**RELEVANT ARTICLES RCP**

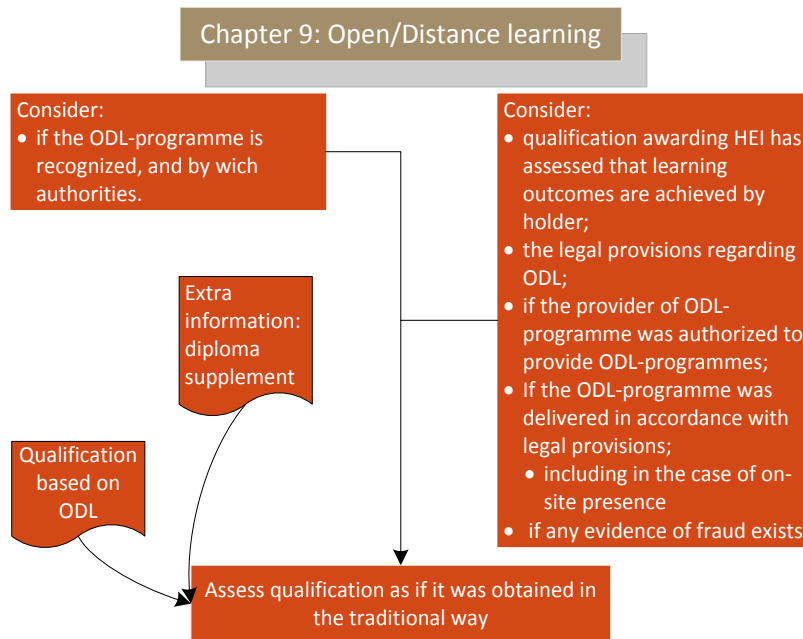
There are no articles dealing solely with RPL within the RCP.

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## Sub topic - Open/Distance learning

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### FLOWCHART



### INTRODUCTION

The term distance learning (distance education, open education) refers to any educational activity in which students are separated from the faculty and other students. The development of distance/open learning was enabled by the development of information and communication technologies. This may include, in addition to correspondence instruction, synchronous or asynchronous learning environments with a variety of instructional modes, e.g., audio or computer conferencing, computer-mediated instruction, Internet-based instruction, videocassettes or disks, or television. 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 topic 14: “Transnational education” on page 63).

Distance learning courses may or may not require a physical on-site presence for such reasons as taking examinations or defending a thesis etc. The distance study texts are different from that for regular courses of higher education study. The aim of them is to make a full-value guided independent study possible.

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 - provide also 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.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Credential evaluators should verify the status of the institution providing distance learning and/or distance learning programme through which the qualification was awarded.

Where the distance learning providers and/or a distance learning programme are recognised and/or accredited, credential evaluators should assess qualifications awarded by distance learning programmes in accordance with the provisions of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and Recommendation on Criteria and procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications.

Qualifications based on an open/distance learning pathway should be evaluated in the same way as similar qualifications obtained in the traditional way.

When assessing qualifications obtained through open/distance learning (ODL), it is recommended to check:

- which authorities are responsible for recognition and/or accreditation of distance learning programmes in the home country of the provider of the distance learning programme; Recognition/accreditation of distance learning may be done by specialised distance learning accreditors, or by general institution or programmatic accreditors, or both. The important thing is that they must be properly recognised accrediting agencies;
- if the distance education programme was properly recognised and/or accredited in the home country of the provider;
- what the legal provisions are regarding distance learning in the home country of the provider of the distance learning programme;
- whether the provider of the ODL-programme was authorised to provide ODL-programmes (taking into account that even a legitimate higher education institutions may have to fulfil additional requirements and/or be granted a special permit to provide distance learning programmes);
- whether the distance learning programme was delivered in accordance with the relevant legal provisions of the home country of the provider;
- in case the programme requires physical on-site presence of the students for such reasons as taking examinations or defending a thesis and these were organised in a country different from the home country of the programme provider (e.g. in the home country of a student), make sure it was done in accordance with the legal regulations of this country;
- if any evidence of fraud exists.

In the case of a positive outcome of the verification, credential evaluators should assess the qualification using the same criteria and procedures as in case of any other foreign national qualification.

#### **Example 1**

The holder of a professionally-oriented bachelor 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 responsible for distance learning programmes and is authorised to provide undergraduate and graduate studies. As such this bachelor degree may be considered in the same way, and of the same level, as any other bachelor degree from that country.

#### **Example 2**

An applicant submits for recognition of a bachelor degree obtained through distance learning in country Y. The qualification was obtained in an institution providing accredited study programmes and also distance learning programmes in country X. The distance learning programme is not accredited by any specialised distance learning accreditors or by programmatic accreditors. In this case the competent recognition authority in country Y is not obliged to grant a positive decision on recognition.

#### **SOURCES AND REFERENCES**

- Bergan S. And E.S. Hunt (eds.), *Developing attitudes to recognition: substantial differences in an age of globalisation*, Council of Europe 2009.  
Link: [http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit\\_aliasid=2478](http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit_aliasid=2478)
- Council of Europe and UNESCO, *Revised code of good practice in the provision of transnational education*, 2007.  
Link: [http://www.enic-naric.net/documents/REVISED\\_CODE\\_OF\\_GOOD\\_PRACTICE\\_TNE.pdf](http://www.enic-naric.net/documents/REVISED_CODE_OF_GOOD_PRACTICE_TNE.pdf)
- Rauhvargers, A. and A. Rusakova, *Improving recognition in the European Higher Education Area: an analysis of national action plans*, Council of Europe 2010.  
Link: [http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit\\_aliasid=2469](http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit_aliasid=2469)

#### **RELEVANT ARTICLES RCP**

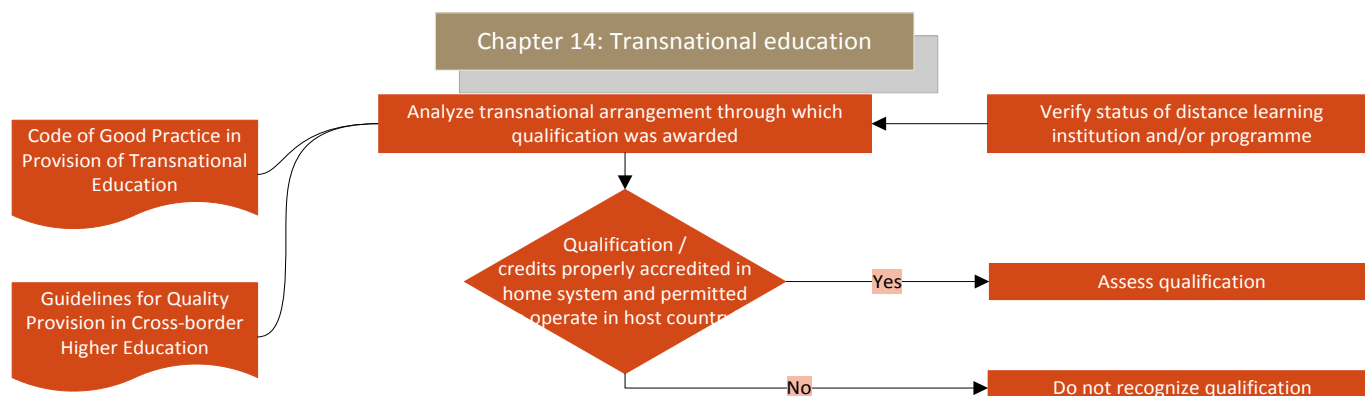
There are no corresponding articles in the RCP for the assessment of foreign qualifications based on ODL.

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## 14. Transnational education

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### FLOWCHART



### INTRODUCTION

Transnational education (also known as “cross-border education”) is a relatively new development in higher education. Transnational 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 different from the one where the awarding institution is based.

In many cases it's difficult to determine what the "home country" of the awarding institution is, and which authority is responsible for recognition and/or accreditation of an institution and/or the programme.

Transnational education programmes should be 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 another partner institution (e.g. an institution from country x allows an institution from country y to deliver its programme and the qualification is awarded by an institution from country x); or
2. **non-collaborative arrangements**, where study programmes are delivered or provided directly by an awarding institution (e.g. a university from country x has a branch in country y; it provides the programme and awards the qualification).

### RECOMMENDATIONS

If transnational education is provided through distance learning, credential evaluators should verify the status of the institution providing the distance learning and/or distance learning programme through which the qualification was awarded.

In the case of qualifications awarded by higher education institutions established through transnational arrangements, credential evaluators should analyse these arrangements on the basis of the principles stipulated in the Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education and in the Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education.

Competent recognition authorities should recognise qualifications and credits from transnational providers as long as the following conditions are met:

- these are accredited in the country where the institution offering the programme and awarding the qualification is located,
- the provider is permitted (by home and host authorities) to operate in the host country
- the provider adheres to the principles outlined in the Code of Good Practice for the Provision of Transnational Education and in the Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education.

Recognition may of course be denied if there are legitimate grounds based on other factors.

Credential evaluators should assess qualifications issued through transnational educational programmes, complying with the provisions of the Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education and of the Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education, in accordance with the stipulations of

the Lisbon Recognition Convention and Recommendation on procedures and criteria for the assessment of foreign qualifications.

Competent recognition authorities should refuse to recognise qualifications or credits from diploma mill providers and institutions accredited by bogus accrediting agencies, known as “Accreditation Mills”.

When assessing qualifications obtained through transnational education it is recommended to check:

- the status (i.e. recognised or accredited) of the institutions involved in the transnational education programme and/or the status of the programme leading to the qualification.
- whether the transnational arrangements - through which the transnational education programme was established - comply with the legislation in both receiving (host) and sending (home) countries:
  - is an institution providing 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 (host) 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 partner institution in the host country authorised to provide 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 1**

An applicant is seeking access to a PhD programme in psychology where a research-based master is required. He holds a master’s degree in social sciences. The qualification was awarded in country X by an institution established and operating in the education system of country Y. The institution was accredited by one of the recognised accreditation organisations of country Y and is authorised to provide bachelor and master 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 2**

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 programme was not recognised in country Y because neither it 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 in this case and take it into account when making the recognition decision.

#### **Example 3**

An applicant submits for recognition his 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 institution is recognised both in the home country (country X) and by the authorities of 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.

#### **SOURCES AND REFERENCES**

- Bergan S. And E.S. Hunt (eds.), *Developing attitudes to recognition: substantial differences in an age of globalisation*, Council of Europe 2009.  
Link: [http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit\\_aliasid=2478](http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit_aliasid=2478)



- Council of Europe and UNESCO, *Revised code of good practice in the provision of transnational education*, 2007.  
Link: [http://www.enic-naric.net/documents/REVISED\\_CODE\\_OF\\_GOOD\\_PRACTICE\\_TNE.pdf](http://www.enic-naric.net/documents/REVISED_CODE_OF_GOOD_PRACTICE_TNE.pdf)
- OECD and UNESCO, *Guidelines for quality provision in cross-border higher education*, 2005.  
Link: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/27/51/35779480.pdf>
- Rauhvargers, A. and A. Rusakova, *Improving recognition in the European Higher Education Area: an analysis of national action plans*, Council of Europe 2010.  
Link: [http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit\\_aliasid=2469](http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit_aliasid=2469)

#### RELEVANT ARTICLES RCP

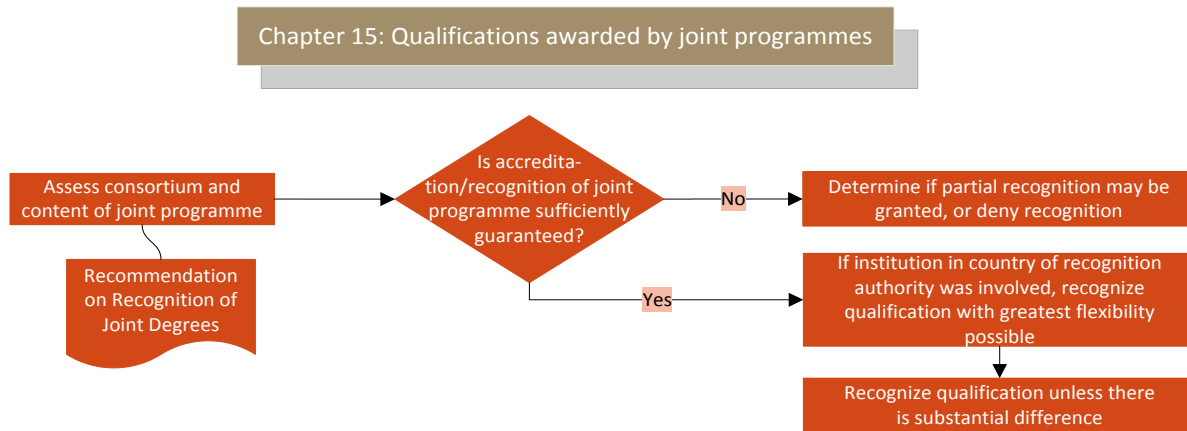
1. The present Recommendation is adopted within the framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and applies to the Parties of this Convention. The principles and practices described in this Recommendation can, however, also equally well be applied to the recognition of qualifications issued in other 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.

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## 15. Qualifications awarded by joint programmes

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### FLOWCHART



### 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. It 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 such qualifications.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

In the case of qualifications awarded by joint programmes, credential evaluators should assess them taking into account the principles stipulated in the Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees.

Competent recognition authorities should recognise foreign qualifications awarded by joint programmes unless they can demonstrate that there is a substantial difference between the qualification for which recognition is sought and the comparable qualification within their own higher education system.

Competent recognition authorities of countries whose higher education institutions are involved in the joint programme and/or award a joint degree should recognise these qualifications with the greatest flexibility possible.

When assessing qualifications awarded by joint programmes, credential evaluators are recommended to check:

- if all institutions involved in the joint programme were recognised and/or accredited in their home systems;
- if the joint programme was recognised by *all* participating higher education institutions, namely the ones where the student actually studied;
- if the joint programme was offered in a limited number of institutions and if the joint degree was awarded in the name of a larger “consortium”, credential evaluators are recommended to check whether:
  - all members of the “consortium” were appropriately recognised/accredited higher education institutions;
  - at least (programmes of) the institutions in which the student effectively has studied have been quality assessed;

- what are the legal regulations regarding joint programmes and joint degrees in the countries involved in the joint programme /awarding the joint degree;
- if the joint degree was awarded in accordance with all the legal frameworks of the awarding institutions;
- whether the joint degree was signed by the competent authorities of the awarding institution/institutions.

In case the joint degree was awarded in addition to a national qualification or several national qualifications were awarded, all these qualifications should be evaluated as one attestation of a joint qualification.

#### 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 1

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.

#### Example 2

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 3

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 programmes giving access to PhD studies and the other one only professionally-oriented master 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 in spite of the fact that one of the HEIs only offers professionally-oriented master 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

- Aerden, A. and H. Reczulska, *The recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes*, ECA 2010.

Link:

[http://www.ecaconsortium.net/admin/files/assets/subsites/1/events/event\\_8/1270212437\\_eca---the-recognition-of-qualifications-awarded-by-joint-programmes---2010.pdf](http://www.ecaconsortium.net/admin/files/assets/subsites/1/events/event_8/1270212437_eca---the-recognition-of-qualifications-awarded-by-joint-programmes---2010.pdf)

- Council of Europe/UNESCO-CEPES, *Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees*, 2004.

Link:

<https://wcd.coe.int/wcd/com.instranet.InstraServlet?command=com.instranet.CmdBlobGet&InstraneImage=320284&SecMode=1&DocId=822138&Usage=2>

- Rauhvargers, A. and A. Rusakova, *Improving recognition in the European Higher Education Area: an analysis of national action plans*, Council of Europe 2010.

Link: [http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit\\_aliasid=2469](http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit_aliasid=2469)

#### RELEVANT ARTICLES RCP

Joint degrees are mentioned in articles 1, 3, 29, 30 and 40. No articles are dealing 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 solely with recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes.

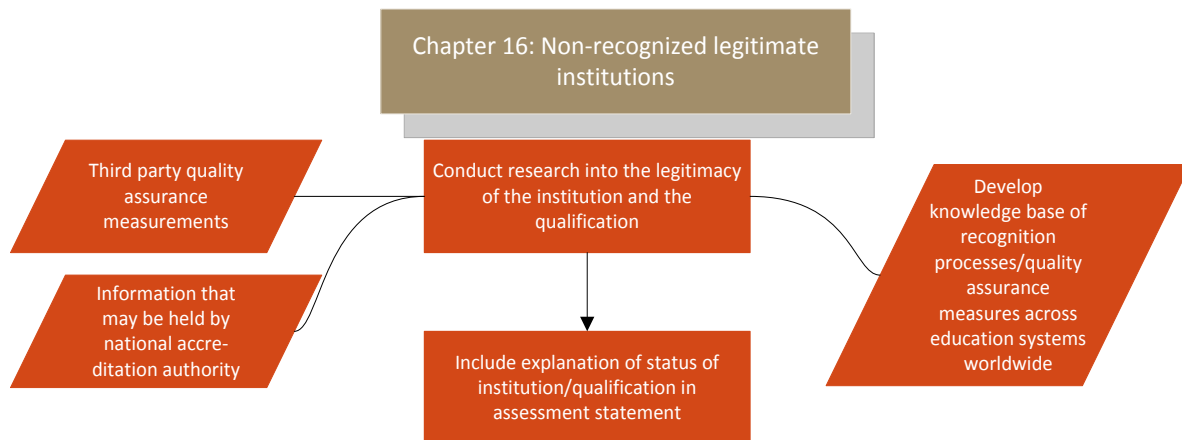
- 1** The present Recommendation is adopted within the framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and applies to the Parties of this Convention. The principles and practices described in this Recommendation can, however, also equally well be applied to the recognition of qualifications issued in 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.

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## 16. Non-Recognised but Legitimate Institutions

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### FLOWCHART



### INTRODUCTION

The status of the awarding body is important to the evaluation of qualifications. For more information on this, please turn to topic 3: “Accreditation and Quality Assurance (status of the institution)” on page 21.

Where an institution is recognised in the country of origin, the qualification can be assessed and recognised according to the evaluation criteria of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. 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<sup>4</sup>.

#### 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 national accreditation system. Such institutions typically include government or military education institutions, religious institutions and seminaries and providers of adult continuing education. Some may also be transnational education providers (see topic 14: “Transnational education” on page 63).

#### 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 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

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<sup>4</sup> *Qualifications from non-recognised institution: an overview of the issue*, Hunt, S., in “Developing attitudes to recognition: substantial differences in an age of globalisation”, CoE, 2009

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**

Where possible, request that the individual 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.

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.

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 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. Details of research conducted and the decision made are then saved centrally to ensure consistency in future assessments.

#### **Example 2**

*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.

#### **Example 3**

*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.

#### SOURCES AND REFERENCES

- Bergan S, and E.S. Hunt, *Qualifications from Non-Recognised Institutions: An Overview of the Issue*, Council of Europe 2009.  
[http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit\\_aliasid=2478](http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit_aliasid=2478)
- Rauhvargers, A. and A. Rusakova, *Improving recognition in the European Higher Education Area: an analysis of national action plans*, Council of Europe 2010.  
Link: [http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit\\_aliasid=2469](http://book.coe.int/EN/ficheouvrage.php?PAGEID=36&lang=EN&produit_aliasid=2469)

#### RELEVANT ARTICLES RCP

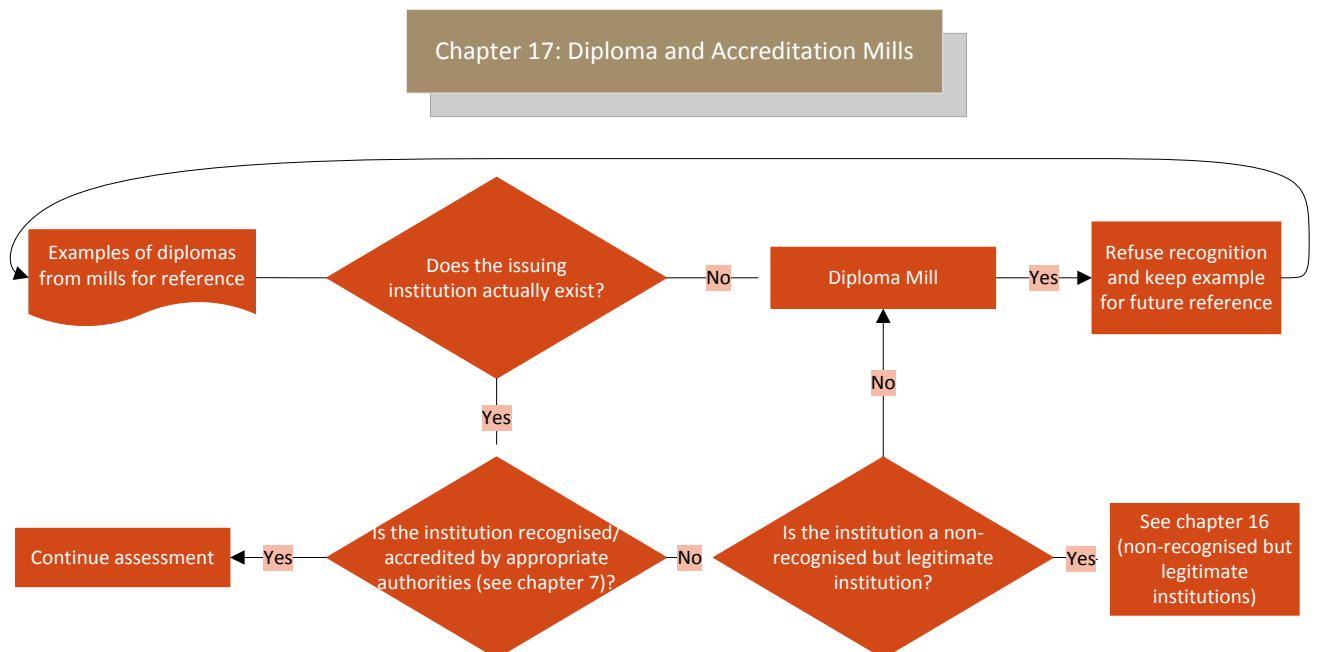
29. In view of the wide diversity of higher education institutions and of the developments in transnational education, the status of a qualification cannot be established without taking into account the status of the institution and/or programme through which the qualification was awarded.
30. The competent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

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## 17. Diploma and Accreditation Mills

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### FLOWCHART



### 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 online without any recognition by national competent authorities or lawful accreditation, even though they may possess a license to operate as a business. 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.

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 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 professors 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. For more information on accreditation and accreditation mills, please refer to “Accreditation and Quality Assurance (status of the institution)” on page 21.



## RECOMMENDATION

It is imperative that credential evaluators refuse to recognise qualifications or credits from diploma mills. More specifically, it is recommended that credential evaluators follow the following steps to prevent recognition of documents issued by diploma mills when assessing foreign credentials:

- check whether the issuing institution or institutions actually exist and whether they are accredited and/or appropriately recognised by the competent authority in the country in question;
- if the awarding body is not accredited and/or appropriately recognised by the competent authority, determine the legitimacy of the provider, and if there is any merit for partial or full recognition;
- 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;
- 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;
- 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

An applicant has submitted a number of qualifications for assessment. Following the usual checks into the accreditation status of the awarding institutions, it has been 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 considered to be 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.

## INFORMATION TOOLS

### Links to more information about diploma mills

- Article in Pacific Business News May 2000:  
<http://www.bizjournals.com/pacific/stories/2000/05/29/focus1.html#top>
- General information on diploma mills:
  - Centre for information on Diploma Mills.  
Link: <http://www.diplomamills.nl>
  - Government of Maine, Higher Education Department, on Degree and Accreditation Mills.  
Link: <http://www.maine.gov/education/highered/Mills/Mills.htm>
  - World Education Services.  
Link: <http://www.wes.org/ewenr/DiplomaMills.htm>

### Links to relevant websites with list of diploma mills/unaccredited institutions

- List of bogus accrediting agencies, see:  
[http://www.degree.net/resources/accreditation/fake-accrediting-agencies\\_200911122319.html](http://www.degree.net/resources/accreditation/fake-accrediting-agencies_200911122319.html)
- Government of Maine, Higher Education Department, list of unaccredited institutions.  
Link: <http://www.maine.gov/education/highered/Non-Accredited/a-am.htm>
- Michigan List of unaccredited institutions.  
Link: [http://www.michigan.gov/documents/Non-accreditedSchools\\_78090\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/Non-accreditedSchools_78090_7.pdf)
- Oregon List of Diploma Mills.  
Link: [http://www.osac.state.or.us/oda/diploma\\_mill.html](http://www.osac.state.or.us/oda/diploma_mill.html)
- Useful questions about diploma mills and accreditation mills.  
Link: [http://www.chea.org/pdf/fact\\_sheet\\_6\\_diploma\\_mills.pdf](http://www.chea.org/pdf/fact_sheet_6_diploma_mills.pdf)

## 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.

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## 18. Overview of publications and recommendations used in the manual

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Listed below in alphabetical order are the identified sources and recommendations mentioned or used in the EAR manual or its preparing desktop research.

Aelterman G. et al., *Study on the Diploma Supplement as seen by its users*, 2008.

Andrea Lundgren, *Godkjenning av utenlandsk høyere utdanning for flyktninger med mangelfull dokumentasjon*. Rapport fra pilotsprosjektet varen, NOKUT 2004.

Adam S., *An introduction to learning outcomes: A consideration of the nature, function and position of learning outcomes in the creation of the European Higher Education Area*. In: EUA Bologna Handbook, 2006.

Aerden, A. and H. Reczulska, *The recognition of qualifications awarded by joint programmes*, ECA 2010.

Bergan S., *Recognition issues in the Bologna process*, Council of Europe 2003.

Bergan S, and E.S. Hunt, *Qualifications from Non-Recognised Institutions: An Overview of the Issue*, Council of Europe 2009.

Bergan S. And E.S. Hunt (eds.), *Developing attitudes to recognition: substantial differences in an age of globalisation*, Council of Europe 2009.

Bergan S., *Qualifications — Introduction to a concept*, Council of Europe 2007.

Bergan, S. and A. Rauhvargers, *Recognition in the Bologna Process: policy development and the road to good practice*, Council of Europe 2006.

Bjornavold, J. and M. Coles, *Added value of National Qualifications Frameworks in implementing the EQF*, European Union 2010.

Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks, *A Framework for Qualifications of The European Higher Education Area*, Copenhagen 2005.

Brown, G. M., *Fighting Credential Fraud*. In: World Education News & Reviews, 2005.

CEDEFOP, *Glossary. Quality in education and training*, 2011.

CEDEFOP, *Terminology of European education and training policy. A selection of 100 key terms*, 2008.

Centre international d'études pédagogiques (CIEP) et al., *An exploration of the use of the European Qualifications Framework in qualifications recognition procedures of four ENIC-NARIC centres*, Paris 2011.

Council of Europe/ UNESCO, *Revised recommendation on criteria and procedures for the assessment of foreign qualifications*, 2010.

Council of Europe/UNESCO-CEPES, *Explanatory Notes to the Joint European Diploma Supplement*, 2007.

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

Council of Europe/UNESCO-CEPES and European Commission, *Code of good practice in the provision of information on recognition*, 2004.

Council of Europe/UNESCO-CEPES, *Joint ENIC/NARIC charter of activities and services*, 2004.

Council of Europe/UNESCO-CEPES, *Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees*, 2004.

Council of Europe/UNESCO-CEPES, *Recommendation on International Access Qualifications*, 1999.

Council of Europe/UNESCO-CEPES, *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning higher education in the European Region*, 1997.

Damme, Van, D., *The need for a new regulatory framework for recognition, quality assurance and accreditation*, UNESCO 2001.

ECA, *Principles for accreditation procedures regarding joint programmes*, 2007.

ECA and ENIC-NARIC networks, *Joint declaration concerning the automatic recognition of qualifications*, 2005.

European Commission, *ECTS Users' Guide*, 2009.

European Commission, *European Credit System for Vet - Technical Specifications. Report of the Credit Transfer Technical Working Group*, 2005.

ENQA, *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, 2009.

Kearny, R., *Detecting Forged Credentials in a High Tech World*. In: *World Education News & Reviews*, 1994.

Lokhoff, J. et al., *A guide to formulating degree programme profiles. Including programme competences and programme learning outcomes*, Bilbao, Groningen, The Hague 2010.

Nuffic et al., *Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning: Learning Outcomes. Final report*, The Hague 2009.

Nuffic et al., *Formal recognition of non-formal and informal learning. A study exploring the possibilities of formal recognition of non-formal and informal learning*, The Hague 2008.

Nuffic et al., *Competences in Education and Cross-Border Recognition. Evaluation of the usefulness of learning outcomes and competences for international recognition*, The Hague 2007.

Nuffic et al., *Survey on Substantial Differences. Final report*, The Hague 2007.

OECD and UNESCO, *Guidelines for quality provision in cross-border higher education*, 2005.

UK-NARIC et al., *Implementing and Improving National Action Plans (IINAP)*, Cheltenham 2009.

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, *Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning*, 2004.

Rauhvargers, A. and A. Rusakova, *Improving recognition in the European Higher Education Area: an analysis of national action plans*, Council of Europe 2010.

Rauhvargers, A., *The renewed approach to the Diploma Supplement in the context of the developments of recent years*, Council of Europe 2008.

The Hague Conference on Private International Law, *The ABCs of Apostilles. How to ensure that your public documents will be recognised abroad*, 2010.

Vlăsceanu L., et al., *Quality Assurance and Accreditation: A Glossary of Basic Terms and Definitions*, Papers on Higher Education, UNESCO-CEPES 2004.

## 19. Glossary

Term	Definitions
<b>Academic recognition</b>	<p>Approval of courses, qualifications, or diplomas from one (domestic or foreign) higher education institution by another for the purpose of student admission to further studies. Academic recognition can also be sought for an academic career at a second institution and in some cases for access to other employment activities on the labour market (academic recognition for professional purposes). As regards the European Higher Education Area, three main levels of recognition can be considered, as well as the instruments attached to them (as suggested by the Lisbon Convention and the Bologna Declaration): (i) recognition of qualifications, including prior learning and professional experience, allowing entry or re-entry into higher education; (ii) recognition of short study periods in relation to student mobility, having as the main instrument the ECTS (European Credit Transfer System); (iii) recognition of full degrees, having as the main instrument the Diploma Supplement.</p> <p>Source: Vlăsceanu L., et al., <a href="#">Quality Assurance and Accreditation: A Glossary of Basic Terms and Definitions, Papers on Higher Education</a>, UNESCO-CEPES 2004.</p>
<b>Access</b>	<p>Certain qualifications convey the holder with the right to access specific qualifications/courses/programmes at a particular education level within the education system in which the qualification was taken. For instance a first cycle degree usually provides access to second cycle studies.</p> <p>Source: Lokhoff, J. et al., <a href="#">A guide to formulating degree programme profiles. Including programme competences and programme learning outcomes</a>. Bilbao, Groningen, The Hague 2010.</p>
<b>Accreditation</b>	<p>The process by which a (non-)governmental or private body evaluates the quality of a higher education institution as a whole or of a specific educational programme in order to formally recognise it as having met certain pre-determined minimal criteria or standards. The result of this process is usually the awarding of a status (a yes/no decision), of recognition, and sometimes of a license to operate within a time-limited validity. The process can imply initial and periodic self-study and evaluation by external peers.</p> <p>Source: Vlăsceanu L., et al., <a href="#">Quality Assurance and Accreditation: A Glossary of Basic Terms and Definitions, Papers on Higher Education</a>, UNESCO-CEPES 2004.</p>
<b>Accreditation Mills</b>	<p>“Accreditation mill” refers to a non-recognised educational accreditation organisation providing accreditation and quality assurance without having an authorisation to do so. In many cases accreditation mills are closely associated with diploma mills.</p> <p>Source: <a href="#">Council for Higher Education Accreditation – Section on Degree Mills</a> (website).</p>
<b>Accreditation of prior certificated learning (APCL)</b>	<p>A process, through which previously assessed and certificated learning is considered and, as appropriate, recognised for academic purposes.</p> <p>Source: Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, <a href="#">Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning</a>, 2004.</p>
<b>Accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL)</b>	<p>A process through which learning achieved outside education or training systems is assessed and, as appropriate, recognised for academic purposes.</p> <p>Source: Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, <a href="#">Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning</a>, 2004.</p>
<b>Accreditation of prior learning (APL)</b>	<p>A process for accessing and, as appropriate, recognising prior experiential learning or prior certificated learning for academic purposes. This recognition may give the learning a credit-value in a credit-based structure and allow it to be counted towards the completion of a programme of study and the award(s) or qualifications associated with it. The term 'accreditation of prior learning' is used in these <i>Guidelines</i> to encapsulate the range of activity and approaches used formally to acknowledge and establish publicly that some reasonably substantial and significant element of learning has taken place. Such learning may have been recognised previously by an education provider; described as 'prior certificated learning' or it</p>

	<p>may have been achieved by reflecting upon experiences outside the formal education and training systems; described as 'prior experiential learning'.</p> <p>Source: Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, <a href="#">Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning</a>, 2004.</p>
<b>Accreditation organisation</b>	<p>A designated competent authority which is legally entitled to accredit an institution, programme or module of study within the context of a national education system.</p> <p>Source: Lokhoff, J. et al., <a href="#">A guide to formulating degree programme profiles. Including programme competences and programme learning outcomes</a>. Bilbao, Groningen, The Hague 2010.</p>
<b>Alternative Recognition</b>	<p>Alternative recognition may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) recognition of the foreign qualification as comparable to a qualification of the host country, but not to that indicated by the applicant;</li> <li>(ii) partial recognition of the foreign qualification;</li> <li>(iii) full or partial recognition of the foreign qualification subject to the applicant successfully taking additional examinations or aptitude tests;</li> <li>(iv) full or partial recognition of the foreign qualification at the end of a probationary period, possibly subject to specified conditions.</li> </ul> <p>Source: Council of Europe/ UNESCO, <a href="#">Revised recommendation on criteria and procedures for the assessment of foreign qualifications</a>, 2010.</p>
<b>Apostille of the Hague</b>	<p>An Apostille is a certificate that authenticates the origin of a public documents. Apostilles can only be issued for documents issues in one country party to the Apostille Convention (signed in 1961 in The Hague, hence the name) and that are to be used in another country which is also a party to the Convention.</p> <p>N.B.: The Apostille only confirms the authenticity of the signature. It does not confirm anything of the educational contents of the document.</p> <p>Source: The Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH), <a href="#">The ABCs of Apostilles. How to ensure that your public documents will be recognised abroad</a>, 2010.</p>
<b>Assessment methods</b>	<p>The total range of methods used to evaluate the learner's achievement in a course unit or module. Typically, these methods include written, oral, laboratory, practical tests/examinations, projects, performances and portfolios. The evaluations may be used to enable the learners to evaluate their own progress and improve on previous performance (formative assessment) or by the institution to judge whether the learner has achieved the learning outcomes of the course unit or module (summative assessment).</p> <p>Source: Lokhoff, J. et al., <a href="#">A guide to formulating degree programme profiles. Including programme competences and programme learning outcomes</a>. Bilbao, Groningen, The Hague 2010.</p>
<b>Awarding body</b>	<p>Body issuing qualifications (certificates, diplomas or titles) that formally recognises the learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) of an individual, following an assessment and validation procedure.</p> <p>Source: CEDEFOP, <a href="#">Glossary. Quality in education and training</a>, 2011.</p>
<b>Awarding institution</b>	<p>A university or other higher education institution which awards degrees, diplomas, certificates or credits at tertiary level.</p> <p>Source: Lokhoff, J. et al., <a href="#">A guide to formulating degree programme profiles. Including programme competences and programme learning outcomes</a>. Bilbao, Groningen, The Hague 2010.</p>
<b>Background Paper (refugees)</b>	<p>In cases where refugees, persons in a refugee-like situation or others for good reason cannot document the qualifications they claim, competent recognition authorities are 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.</p> <p>The "background paper" is intended to be a tool</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- for the competent recognition authorities to reconstruct the educational background of the refugee in order to facilitate the assessment;</li> <li>- for the refugee to affirm his or her academic achievements towards other evaluating bodies, like higher education institutions and employers, in order to gain access to further studies or appropriate employment.</li> </ul>

	Source: Council of Europe/UNESCO, <a href="#">Recommendation on Criteria And Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications</a> , 2010.
<b>Collaborative Arrangements</b>	Collaborative arrangements, such as: franchising, twinning, joint degrees, whereby study programmes, or parts of a course of study, or other educational services of the awarding institution are provided by another partner institution;  Source: Council of Europe/UNESCO, <a href="#">Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education</a> , 2007.
<b>Competence</b>	A dynamic combination of cognitive and metacognitive skills, knowledge and understanding, interpersonal, intellectual and practical skills, ethical values and attitudes. Fostering competences is the object of all educational programmes. Competences are developed in all course units and assessed at different stages of a programme. Some competences are subject-area related (specific to a field of study), others are generic (common to any degree course). It is normally the case that competence development proceeds in an integrated and cyclical manner throughout a programme.  Source: European Commission, <a href="#">ECTS Users' Guide</a> , 2009.
<b>Competent authority</b>	Person or organisation that has the legally delegated or invested authority, capacity, or power to perform a designated function.  Source: Lokhoff, J. et al., <a href="#">A guide to formulating degree programme profiles. Including programme competences and programme learning outcomes</a> . Bilbao, Groningen, The Hague 2010.
<b>Course unit</b>	A self-contained, formally structured learning experience. It should have a coherent and explicit set of learning outcomes, expressed in terms of competences to be obtained, and appropriate assessment criteria. Course units can have different numbers of credits.  Source: Lokhoff, J. et al., <a href="#">A guide to formulating degree programme profiles. Including programme competences and programme learning outcomes</a> . Bilbao, Groningen, The Hague 2010.
<b>Credential evaluation</b>	Comparing and assessing foreign qualifications.  Source: Lokhoff, J. et al., <a href="#">A guide to formulating degree programme profiles. Including programme competences and programme learning outcomes</a> . Bilbao, Groningen, The Hague 2010.
<b>Credit</b>	Quantified means of expressing the volume of learning based on the workload students need in order to achieve the expected outcomes of a learning process at a specified level.  Source: European Commission, <a href="#">ECTS Users' Guide</a> , 2009.
<b>Credit system</b>	A credit system makes it possible to divide a qualification into units or into partial objectives the objectives of a programme of vocational and educational training. Each unit is defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competences (KSC) and can be characterised by the relative level of the learning outcomes involved, which may be defined by a reference level and by its volume which may be expressed in points or other factors. Each unit may or may not be awarded separately.  Source: European Commission, <a href="#">European Credit System for Vet – Technical Specifications. Report of the Credit Transfer Technical Working Group</a> , 2005.
<b>Degree Profile</b>	A Degree Profile describes the specific characteristics of an educational programme or qualification in terms of learning outcomes and competences, following an agreed format.  Source: Lokhoff, J. et al., <a href="#">A guide to formulating degree programme profiles. Including programme competences and programme learning outcomes</a> . Bilbao, Groningen, The Hague 2010.
<b>Degree programme</b>	A prescribed study programme leading to a formal qualification awarded by a higher education institution.  Source: Lokhoff, J. et al., <a href="#">A guide to formulating degree programme profiles. Including programme competences and programme learning outcomes</a> . Bilbao, Groningen, The Hague 2010.
<b>Diploma Mill</b>	A diploma or degree mill is an entity that sells postsecondary credentials without requiring appropriate academic achievement.  Source: <a href="#">World Education Services</a> (website).
<b>Diploma Supplement</b>	The Diploma Supplement is an annex to the official degree/qualification designed to provide a description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies

	<p>that were pursued and successfully completed by the holder of the degree/qualification. It is based on the model developed by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES. The purpose of the supplement is to provide sufficient independent data to improve the international 'transparency' and fair academic and professional recognition of qualifications (diplomas, degrees, certificates etc).</p> <p>Source: European Commission, <a href="#">ECTS Users' Guide</a>, 2009.</p>
<b>Directive 2005/36/EC</b>	<p>European Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications aids mobility by obliging Member States to consider the qualifications acquired elsewhere in the Community to allow access to a regulated profession in their territory.</p> <p>Source: <a href="http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/qualifications/policy_developments/legislation_en.htm">http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/qualifications/policy_developments/legislation_en.htm</a></p>
<b>Distance learning</b>	<p>Education and training imparted at a distance through communication media: books, radio, TV, telephone, correspondence, computer or video.</p> <p>Source: CEDEFOP, <a href="#">Terminology of European education and training policy. A selection of 100 key terms</a>, 2008.</p>
<b>Dublin descriptors</b>	<p>The Dublin Descriptors provide very general statements of typical expectations of achievements and abilities associated with awards that represent the end of a Bologna cycle. General level descriptors have been developed for the 'short cycle within the first cycle' and the first, second and third cycle. The descriptors consist of a set of criteria, phrased in terms of competence levels, which enables to distinguish in a broad and general manner between the different cycles. The following five sets of criteria are distinguished:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Acquiring knowledge and understanding.</li> <li>2. Applying knowledge and understanding.</li> <li>3. Making informed judgements and choices.</li> <li>4. Communicating knowledge and understanding.</li> <li>5. Capacities to continue learning.</li> </ol> <p>The Dublin descriptors have been developed by an international group of experts, which has named itself the Joint Quality Initiative (JQI). The work of the JQI and Tuning is considered complementary by both parties.</p> <p>Source: European Commission, <a href="#">ECTS Users' Guide</a>, 2009.</p>
<b>European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)</b>	<p>ECTS is a learner-centred system for credit accumulation and transfer based on the transparency of learning outcomes and learning processes. It aims to facilitate planning, delivery, evaluation, recognition and validation of qualifications and units of learning as well as student mobility. ECTS is widely used in formal higher education and can be applied to other lifelong learning activities.</p> <p>Source: European Commission, <a href="#">ECTS Users' Guide</a>, 2009.</p>
<b>European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)</b>	<p>Technical framework for transfer, recognition and, where appropriate, accumulation of individual learning outcomes to achieve a qualification. ECVET tools and methodology comprise the description of qualifications in units of learning outcomes with associated points, a transfer and accumulation process and complementary documents such as learning agreements, transcripts of records and ECVET Users guides.</p> <p>Source: CEDEFOP, <a href="#">Glossary. Quality in education and training</a>, 2011.</p>
<b>European Qualification Framework (EQF)</b>	<p>The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) acts as a translation device to make national qualifications more readable across Europe, promoting workers' and learners' mobility between countries and facilitating their lifelong learning. The EQF aims to relate different countries' national qualifications systems to a common European reference framework. Individuals and employers will be able to use the EQF to better understand and compare the qualifications levels of different countries and different education and training systems.</p> <p>Source: EU-EQF website: <a href="http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc44_en.htm">http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc44_en.htm</a> See also topic "Qualifications Frameworks" on page 35.</p>

<b>Flexible learning paths</b>	<p>A flexible learning path refers to any situation in which the graduate has obtained a qualification in a way that is not the standard learning path followed by the mainstream student. The flexibility of the learning path may be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- access and admission to the programme not based on the standard requirements in terms of entrance qualifications (e.g. a secondary school leaving certificate);</li> <li>- exemptions of part of the programme based on a previous obtained qualification or period of study;</li> <li>- exemptions of part of the programme, or the whole programme, based on non-formal or informal learning;</li> <li>- credit transfer during the programme (e.g. via exchange programmes).</li> <li>- distance learning.</li> </ul> <p>Source: Rauhvargers, A. and A. Rusakova, <a href="#">Improving recognition in the European Higher Education Area: an analysis of national action plans</a>. Council of Europe 2010.</p>
<b>Formal Learning</b>	<p>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.</p> <p>Source: European Commission, <a href="#">ECTS Users' Guide</a>, 2009.</p>
<b>Formal rights (attached to a foreign qualification in home country)</b>	<p>Formal rights obtained through a qualification may, for example, be the right to access to higher education (i.e. the right to be considered for participation in higher education), the right to access to doctoral studies, the right to use a given title or the right to apply for professional recognition.</p> <p>Source: Council of Europe/UNESCO, <a href="#">Revised recommendation on Criteria And Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications</a>, 2010.</p>
<b>Generic competences</b>	<p>Generic Competences are also called transferable skills or general academic skills. They are general to any degree programme and can be transferred from one context to another.</p> <p>Source: Lohhoff, J. et al., <a href="#">A guide to formulating degree programme profiles. Including programme competences and programme learning outcomes</a>. Bilbao, Groningen, The Hague 2010.</p>
<b>Grades</b>	<p>Grades describe the quality of learning achievements and rate the performance of a student at a particular level.</p> <p>Source: European Commission, <a href="#">ECTS Users' Guide</a>, 2009.</p>
<b>Informal learning</b>	<p>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).</p> <p>Source: European Commission, <a href="#">ECTS Users' Guide</a>, 2009.</p>
<b>Joint degrees</b>	<p>A joint degree should be understood as referring to a higher education qualification issued jointly by at least two or more higher education institutions or jointly by one or more higher education institutions and other awarding bodies, on the basis of a study programme developed and/or provided jointly by the higher education institutions, possibly also in cooperation with other institutions. A joint degree may be issued as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. a joint diploma in addition to one or more national diplomas,</li> <li>b. a joint diploma issued by the institutions offering the study programme in question without being accompanied by any national diploma</li> <li>c. one or more national diplomas issued officially as the only attestation of the joint qualification in question.</li> </ol> <p>Source: Council of Europe/UNESCO-CEPES, <a href="#">Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees</a>, 2004.</p>
<b>Joint programme</b>	<p>A joint programme is a programme offered jointly by different higher education institutions irrespective of the degree (joint, multiple and double) awarded.</p> <p>Source: ECA, <a href="#">Principles for accreditation procedures regarding joint programmes</a>, 2007.</p>
<b>Learner</b>	<p>An individual engaged in a learning process (formal, non-formal or informal learning).</p>



	Source: European Commission, <a href="#">ECTS Users' Guide</a> , 2009.
<b>Learning outcome</b>	Statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do after successful completion of a process of learning. Source: European Commission, <a href="#">ECTS Users' Guide</a> , 2009.
<b>Licencing / licensure of an institution</b>	The term "licensing" may be slightly differently defined in different countries. In general, however, licensing is considered to be the approval to conduct business as an educational institution. Licensing is not equated to accreditation and does not necessarily require demonstration of quality or ability to meet performance standards. Source: Vlăsceanu L., et al., <a href="#">Quality Assurance and Accreditation: A Glossary of Basic Terms and Definitions, Papers on Higher Education</a> , UNESCO-CEPES 2004.
<b>Level (cycle) descriptors</b>	Generic statements of the broad expected outcomes of each of the three cycles. A good example of general cycle (level) descriptors are the so-called Dublin Descriptors, which have served as one of the foundations for the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. Source: European Commission, <a href="#">ECTS Users' Guide</a> , 2009.
<b>Life-long learning</b>	All learning activity undertaken throughout life, which results in improving knowledge, knowhow, skills, competences and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons. Source: CEDEFOP, <a href="#">Glossary. Quality in education and training</a> , 2011.
<b>Module</b>	The term module has different meanings in different countries. In some it means a course unit; in others a module is a group of course units. In ECTS Users Guide module is defined as a course unit in a system in which each course unit carries the same number of credits or a multiple thereof. Source: European Commission, <a href="#">ECTS Users' Guide</a> , 2009.
<b>National Qualifications Framework</b>	An instrument for the development and classification of qualifications (e.g. at national or sectoral level) according to a set of criteria (e.g. using descriptors) applicable to specified levels of learning outcomes. Source: Added value of National Qualifications Frameworks in implementing the EQF <a href="http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/eqf/note2_en.pdf">http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/eqf/note2_en.pdf</a>
<b>National register</b>	Official national listing of state recognised programmes/ institutions/ qualifications/ professions. Source: Lokhoff, J. et al., <a href="#">A guide to formulating degree programme profiles. Including programme competences and programme learning outcomes</a> . Bilbao, Groningen, The Hague 2010.
<b>Non formal learning</b>	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. Source: European Commission, <a href="#">ECTS Users' Guide</a> , 2009.
<b>Non recognised but legitimate institutions</b>	A Non-recognised but legitimate institution refers to those which are not formally recognised by the national authorities officially responsible for the accreditation and the educational provision in a given system, but may offer genuine study programmes which may be of comparable level to other formally recognised programmes. Source: Bergan S. And E.S. Hunt (eds.), <a href="#">Developing attitudes to recognition: substantial differences in an age of globalisation</a> . Council of Europe 2009.
<b>Non-collaborative arrangements</b>	Non-collaborative arrangements, such as branch campuses, off-shore institutions, corporate or international institutions, whereby study programmes, or parts of a course of study, or other educational services are provided directly by an awarding institution. Council of Europe/UNESCO- CEPES, <a href="#">Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education</a> , 2007.
<b>Non-traditional</b>	Non-traditional learning encompasses all skills, knowledge and competences acquired outside the traditional classroom setting, through other types of learning

<b>learning</b>	<p>activities in a non-formal context and may lead to a set of relevant learning outcomes comparable to learning outcomes achieved the traditional way. It may be considered the overarching term for various forms of learning including informal and non-formal learning.</p> <p>Source: European Commission, <a href="#">ECTS Users' Guide</a>, 2009.</p>
<b>Partial Recognition</b>	<p>Partial recognition could take the form of accepting part of the credits of the foreign qualification. The applicant would then have the opportunity to enrol into the programme that is required by the competent recognition authority for access to the desired activity and receive exemptions for the amount of credits accepted by the competent recognition authority.</p> <p>Source: Rauhvargers, A. and A. Rusakova, <a href="#">Improving recognition in the European Higher Education Area: an analysis of national action plans</a>. Council of Europe 2010.</p>
<b>Professional recognition - de facto</b>	<p>Refers to situations of unregulated recognition for professional purposes, such as where no national legal authorisation to practice a particular profession exists or is required. This is the most problematic area of professional recognition .</p> <p>Source: Council of Europe/UNESCO-CEPES, <a href="#">Outline Structure for the Diploma Supplement</a> (glossary), 2007.</p>
<b>Professional recognition - de jure</b>	<p>Refers to the recognition of the right to work in a specific country in a regulated profession (e.g. medical doctor) in the European Union or European Economic Area. These situations are subject to the European Union Directive 2005/36/EC whereby if a citizen is a fully qualified professional in one Member State, he or she has a right to exercise that profession and be recognised as a professional in another Member State.</p> <p>Source: <a href="http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/qualifications/policy_developments/legislation_en.htm">http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/qualifications/policy_developments/legislation_en.htm</a></p>
<b>Qualification</b>	<p>Any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting the successful completion of a recognised programme of study.</p> <p>Source: European Commission, <a href="#">ECTS Users' Guide</a>, 2009.</p>
<b>Qualification descriptors</b>	<p>Generic statements of the outcomes of study. They provide clear points of reference that describe the main outcomes of a qualification often with reference to national levels.</p> <p>Source: Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks, <a href="#">A Framework for Qualifications of The European Higher Education Area</a>, 2005.</p>
<b>Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA)</b>	<p>The QF – EHEA is an overarching framework for qualifications in the European higher education area, comprising three cycles (including, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications), generic descriptors for each cycle (Dublin Descriptors) based on learning outcomes and competences, and credit ranges in the first and second cycles. The overarching framework sets the parameters for each Bologna country to develop its own national framework.</p> <p>QF EHEA is also known as the Bologna Qualifications Framework.</p> <p>See also: Dublin Descriptors and Qualification Frameworks</p> <p>Source: <a href="http://www.ehea.info">www.ehea.info</a></p>
<b>Quality assurance</b>	<p>The process or set of processes adopted nationally and institutionally to ensure the quality of educational programmes and qualifications awarded.</p> <p>Source: European Commission, <a href="#">ECTS Users' Guide</a>, 2009.</p>
<b>Recognition centres</b>	<p>NARIC ENIC: European Network of Information Centres in the European Region. A network under the European Council and UNESCO.</p> <p>NARIC: National Recognition Information Centres in the European Union. A network under the European Commission.</p> <p>Network of national centres providing information, advice and assessment of foreign qualifications. Created to help improve the academic recognition of international awards and facilitating the integration of national education systems.</p> <p>Source: Lokhoff, J. et al., <a href="#">A guide to formulating degree programme profiles. Including programme competences and programme learning outcomes</a>. Bilbao, Groningen, The Hague 2010.</p>
<b>Recognition of</b>	<p>The process through which an institution certifies that the learning outcomes</p>

<b>non-formal and informal learning</b>	<p>achieved and assessed in another context (non-formal or informal learning) satisfy (some or all) requirements of a particular programme, its component or qualification.</p> <p>Source: European Commission, <a href="#">ECTS Users' Guide</a>, 2009.</p>
<b>Recognition of Prior Learning</b>	<p>A method of assessment that considers whether a learner can demonstrate that they can meet the assessment requirements for a unit through knowledge, understanding or skills they already possess and do not need to develop through a course of learning.</p> <p>Source: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority: <a href="#">Qualifications and Credit Framework Glossary</a> (website).</p>
<b>Regulated professions</b>	<p>A profession is said to be regulated when access and exercise is subject to the possession of a specific professional qualification.</p> <p>Source: European Website on regulated professions: <a href="http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/qualifications/regprof/index.cfm?fuseaction=regProf.home">http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/qualifications/regprof/index.cfm?fuseaction=regProf.home</a></p>
<b>Self-Certification Report</b>	<p>Reports of the countries participating in the Bologna Process that carried out self-certification exercises to verify the compatibility with the overarching framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. It details information regarding the flexible learning paths and learning outcomes in the higher education systems.</p> <p>The self-certification reports are published on this website: <a href="http://www.enic-naric.net/index.aspx?s=n&amp;r=ena&amp;d=qf">http://www.enic-naric.net/index.aspx?s=n&amp;r=ena&amp;d=qf</a></p>
<b>Skills</b>	<p>A skill is the learned capacity to carry out pre-determined results often with the minimum outlay of time, energy, or both. Skills can often be divided into general/generic and subject specific skills.</p> <p>Source: Lokhoff, J. et al., <a href="#">A guide to formulating degree programme profiles. Including programme competences and programme learning outcomes</a>. Bilbao, Groningen, The Hague 2010.</p>
<b>Subject benchmark statement</b>	<p>Subject benchmark statements set out expectations about standards of degrees in a range of subject areas. They describe what gives a discipline its coherence and identity, and define what can be expected of a graduate in terms of the abilities and skills needed to develop understanding or competence in the subject.</p> <p>Source: The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, <a href="#">Subject benchmark statements</a> (website).</p>
<b>Subject specific competences</b>	<p>Competences related to a specific subject area.</p> <p>Source: Lokhoff, J. et al., <a href="#">A guide to formulating degree programme profiles. Including programme competences and programme learning outcomes</a>. Bilbao, Groningen, The Hague 2010.</p>
<b>Substantial Differences</b>	<p>The term “substantial difference” clearly indicates that minor differences between qualifications do not provide sufficient reason for non-recognition. It takes into account the diversity of higher education systems and traditions and recognises that there are usually differences between corresponding qualifications in different education systems. Thus the existence of differences between qualifications alone does not provide sufficient reason for non-recognition.</p> <p>Source: Bergan S. And E.S. Hunt (eds.), <a href="#">Developing attitudes to recognition: substantial differences in an age of globalisation</a>. Council of Europe 2009.</p>
<b>Transcript</b>	<p>An official (e.g. certified) document which provides a complete summary of the student’s academic record at that institution(s)/leading to a qualification.</p> <p>Source: European Commission, <a href="#">ECTS Users' Guide</a>, 2009.</p>
<b>Transnational Education</b>	<p>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 different from the one where the awarding institution is based. Such programmes may belong to the education system of a State different from the State in which it operates, or may operate independently of any national education system.</p> <p>Source: Council of Europe/UNESCO, <a href="#">Revised Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education</a>, 2007.</p>
<b>Transparency of</b>	<p>Degree of visibility and legibility of qualifications, their content and value on the (sectoral, regional, national or international) labour market and in education and</p>

<b>qualifications</b>	training systems. CEDEFOP, <a href="#">Glossary. Quality in education and training</a> , 2011.
<b>Tuning</b>	<p>Tuning Educational Structures in Europe is a university driven project which aims to offer a universal approach to implement the Bologna Process at higher education institutional and subject area level. The Tuning approach contains a methodology to (re-)design, develop, implement and evaluate study programmes for each of the Bologna cycles.</p> <p>The term “Tuning” emphasises the notion that universities are not looking to unify or harmonise their degree programs into a prescribed set of European curricula, but rather are looking for points of convergence and common understanding based on diversity and autonomy.</p> <p>Source: Lokhoff, J. et al., <a href="#">A guide to formulating degree programme profiles. Including programme competences and programme learning outcomes</a>. Bilbao, Groningen, The Hague 2010.</p>
<b>Workload</b>	<p>Indication of the time students typically need to complete all learning activities (such as lectures, seminars, projects, practical work, self-study and examinations) required to achieve the expected learning outcomes.</p> <p>Source: European Commission, <a href="#">ECTS Users’ Guide</a>, 2009.</p>

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