

EUA response to EU consultation on mutual recognition of qualifications and study periods abroad

Recognition is a crucial building block of European higher education, both in the context of the Bologna Process and in European Union policies. The recognition of qualifications allows people to access study programmes and further their education in other countries, as well as use professional qualifications acquired in different locations. The recognition of study periods abroad allows students to be mobile during their studies. Well-functioning systems of recognition are crucial for the European knowledge society and its unique features involving the free movement of students, graduates and citizens at large. It also positions Europe as a strong competitor in the global education arena and more generally in a rapidly-evolving world marked by a mobile and changing labour market.

With the present paper, the European University Association (EUA) responds to the EU's [public consultation](#) on promoting the mutual recognition of qualifications and study periods abroad. Launched in January 2018, the European Commission will use the consultation to prepare a proposal for a Council Recommendation as part of the initiatives to establish a [European Education Area](#) by 2025.

EUA has a long track record in working with its members and the ENIC/NARIC networks to promote good practices in recognition that are in line with the [Lisbon Recognition Convention](#) (LRC). Notable outcomes of these activities, many of which were co-funded by the European Commission, are the "[European Area of Recognition Manual](#)" and the "[European Recognition Manual for Higher Education Institutions](#)".

Most recently, EUA took part in the [FAIR project](#), which included six national systems, their ministries, ENIC/NARIC centres, and 22 higher education institutions. The project resulted in [recommendations on how to promote automatic recognition of qualifications](#). The evidence gathered during the FAIR project identified large differences in the recognition procedures between the different countries and institutions. This is partly due to incorrect or incomplete implementation of the common framework in the LRC, which leads to divergence in recognition practices and long processes. These findings are in line with those of other studies, such as the Bologna Implementation Reports and the [EUA Trends series](#), which have shown that while progress has been made, some challenges remain.

To correct this, the FAIR project points to the need for national ministries to increase transparency and provide a clear chart of procedures, roles and responsibilities. The national system should be evaluated in terms of transparency, efficiency, consistency and the ability to apply the LRC to the recognition of foreign qualifications. Ministries and the ENIC/NARIC centres should provide clear information and incentives for training staff in higher education institutions. Likewise, higher education institutions should establish transparent procedures and responsibilities for recognition.

EUA concludes that the challenge for recognition in Europe is not the legal framework as set out in the LRC, but a lack of clarity and consistency in national and institutional implementation. EUA, therefore, encourages the European Commission to further support and promote dissemination, awareness-raising and capacity-building on carrying out recognition in line with the LRC and automatic recognition as promoted by the [EHEA Pathfinder Group on Automatic Recognition](#) in the most efficient manner. Moreover, member states should use these good practices to set up education systems with strong, autonomous institutions capable of implementing recognition in a transparent and consistent manner.

EUA calls on the EU to take up these issues and make good use of existing structures, such as the Education and Training 2020 Strategic Framework, to increase visibility of the issue and point to solutions and good practices. The Association does not find that a new governance model or “process” will give additional value to the existing EU and Bologna Process frameworks. Similarly, while there are some cases in Europe where mutual recognition agreements between two or more countries have proven to work well, the impact of these agreements is limited to the countries involved and can be counterproductive in terms of the mobility of students and citizens from other countries. In a field where challenges arise due to a lack of transparency and clear responsibilities, creating parallel structures and agreements is not a long-term solution. The EU and EHEA should instead focus on efforts to ensure that the current commitments by the member states discussed above are fully implemented.

info@eua.eu

· www.eua.eu

