

Improved recognition

The self-assessment tool companion

Developed in the “Automatic Recognition in the EEA 2030” project

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Introduction

This companion accompanies the “Improved recognition” self-assessment tool, which was originally developed in the context of the Erasmus+ co-funded “[Spotlight on recognition](#)” (SPOT) project and updated in the context of the Erasmus+ co-funded “[Automatic Recognition in the EEA 2030](#)” (AR2030) project.

The companion is a short, practical version of the self-assessment tool, including illustrations and further guidance on how to conduct a self-assessment, such as tips and tricks on the timing, steps and potential outcomes of the self-assessment exercise. The full self-assessment tool is thus meant to be used in parallel to this companion, especially by institutions who are self-assessing their recognition procedures for the first time.

In addition, the companion offers a shortened version of the self-assessment questionnaire for institutions that lack the time or resources to conduct the full assessment.

How to apply this tool

Target group and scope

The tool is for:

- all staff of higher education institutions whose work covers or is related to academic recognition procedures (e.g. those working in admissions or quality assurance offices).

It covers the recognition of:

- qualifications giving access to all three higher education cycles (bachelor's, master's, doctoral);
- higher education qualifications;
- periods of study;
- qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation.

Self-assessment process

The suggested timeline below outlines key steps and considerations, as well as tips and tricks from institutions who have already used the tool.



Our self-assessment team consisted of 6 people: 2 working directly with recognition and admissions, 1 from marketing, 1 from quality management, the head of the Admissions Office and the Vice-Rector for Studies.

Kristina Mataitienė, Klaipėda University, Lithuania assessment tool.



A 3-member-team being part of our central Directorate of Studies was the best framework to work efficiently with the tool.

*Maxime Donck, University of Reims
Champagne-Ardenne, France*



We used an online survey to gather input from staff working with recognition of foreign qualifications and study periods.

Monika Czerepak, Gdańsk University of Technology, Poland

Week 1-3: Set up self-assessment team

Typically 3-6 people, covering institutional expertise in:

- Development of policies and processes related to recognition
- Implementation of recognition policies and processes
- Internal quality assurance
- Applicant appeals

Week 4: Agree on approach and set timeline

- Develop common understanding of work ahead
- Agree on division of self-assessment questions and potential other tasks (e.g. establishment of joint space for data collection, report writing)
- Set milestones and deadlines

**Universities typically need 2-4 months for the self-assessment exercise.*

Week 5-11: Gather data

- Collect evidence (e.g. policy documents, forms, sample communications with applicants)
- Where needed, conduct interviews with relevant experts (e.g. IT, legal department)
- Draft answers to the self-assessment questions based on data

Week 12-13: Analyse data within team

- Is the presented evidence sufficient to support the answer?
- Does the practice match what is outlined in the EAR-HEI manual (see column for relevant sections)?
- Is there room for improvement?
- Which specific follow-up actions could lead to the identified improvement?

Week 14: Summarise findings in report

- Key findings
- Suggestions for follow-up actions
- Full answers to self-assessment questions in annex

Week 15-16: Present the report and decide on follow-up action

- Consult institutional leadership, community and relevant stakeholders (e.g. ENIC-NARIC, national rectors' conference) on findings
- Jointly develop action plan, covering for example
 - small-scale immediate improvements
 - institutional action plan for enhancing recognition policies and processes
 - revision of policies and processes
 - periodic reconvening of self-assessment team for decision on further improvement measures



The tool highlighted where our communication with applicants could be clearer and more predictable.

*Audronė Račkauskienė, Kaunas
University of Technology, Lithuania*



The tool supported quality management by enabling structured self-assessment and reflection on weaker elements of recognition processes.

Monika Czerepak, Gdańsk University of Technology, Poland



We received a lot of support and encouragement from staff at our national ENIC-NARIC office.

*Johanna Boynton,
Stockholm University, Sweden*

Self-assessment tool for improved recognition

The core of the tool is a table consisting of questions – divided into key questions and sub-questions – about institutional recognition practice. It is organised around a set of key questions (first column), which are supplemented by more detailed sub-questions (second column) that either break the key question into single elements to consider one by one or offer follow-up enquiries that invite reflection on further implications of the key question.

The third column, headed “Relevant sections in EAR-HEI manual”, refers to chapters and sections in the [European Recognition Manual for Higher Education Institutions](#) (EAR-HEI manual) that outline good practice in line with the LRC and provide valuable tips for institutional implementation. Finally, the fourth column, headed “Further reading”, provides links and references to selected additional sources summarising required and good practice regarding the addressed recognition practice, which might be useful in designing follow-up actions.

The following table is a shortened version. For the full version with further self-assessment questions, please consult the full tool.

Key question	Sub-questions	Relevant section in EAR-HEI manual	Further reading and useful tools
1: POLICIES AND GUIDELINES			
1.1 Which elements of a qualification do your staff consider during the recognition procedure in order to establish whether there is a substantial difference, and to what extent are these considered as a basis for a substantial difference?	Do your staff consider the following elements? • Level (e.g. master's, linked to a qualifications framework) • Workload (e.g. ECTS) • Quality (e.g. accreditation and external quality assurance of institution and/or programme, student grades) • Profile (content and purpose of the programme through which the qualification was obtained, e.g. focus on theoretical basis (or lack thereof), multi- or interdisciplinary aspects) • Learning outcomes (statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do after completion of the process of learning) • Other Which of these are considered most essential to the evaluation?	• Part I, Chapter 1: Introduction to recognition, Section "The Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC)" • Part I, Chapter 2: The five elements of a qualification • Part II, Chapter 6: Purpose of recognition • Part II, Chapter 7: Learning outcomes • Part II, Chapter 9: Substantial and non-substantial differences	The LRC (1997) governs recognition of qualifications and study periods abroad in the European region. The Global Recognition Convention (2019), Section I, Article I contains a definition of "substantial differences". The brochure Substantial Differences: A Glimpse of Theory, Practice and Guidelines (2021) provides input on how to categorise the different typologies with the aim of supporting higher education institutions in understanding whether a difference or a set of differences should be considered substantial.
2: IMPLEMENTATION OF PROCESSES – ORGANISATIONAL ASPECTS			
2.1 When processing recognition applications, how do your staff ensure that a consistent approach is being applied, both with regard to similar qualifications and each year?	N/A	• Part I, Chapter 1: Introduction to recognition, Section "Diversity of recognition procedures" • Part III, Chapter 12: Institutional recognition practices & procedures, especially Section "Recognition in the context of admission"	N/A

2: IMPLEMENTATION OF PROCESSES – INFORMATION PROVISION

2.2 As information is provided, either online or in person, how do you ensure that the applicant is always informed about the exact steps ahead and about what to expect, e.g. in terms of the time until a decision is taken?	N/A	Part III, Chapter 11: Transparency and information provision	The brochure Information Provision on Recognition of Qualifications: A Practical Guide for Higher Education Institutions (2021) aims to support international relations and admission officers, registrars and staff in charge of information management and provision at higher education institutions in improving the quality and relevance of information provision on recognition of qualifications. It also contains a set of pertinent questions for self-assessment.
2.3 Do your staff have guidelines on the maximum amount of time that should pass between the submission of an application and the communication of the recognition decision?	a) What is the maximum amount of time recommended or stipulated by these guidelines? b) In practice, how long does it typically take to communicate the recognition decision? c) What mechanisms are in place to ensure that the maximum amount of time is not exceeded and that recognition procedures are efficient and swift, without compromising the quality of the procedure?	Part III, Chapter 11: Transparency and information provision	The brochure Information Provision on Recognition of Qualifications: A Practical Guide for Higher Education Institutions (2021) aims to support international relations and admission officers, registrars and staff in charge of information management and provision at higher education institutions in improving the quality and relevance of information provision on recognition of qualifications. It also contains a set of pertinent questions for self-assessment.
2.4 In the case of a negative or only partially positive recognition decision, how exhaustive and transparent is the information provided about the reasons for the decision?	a) How detailed is the explanation? b) Is there a special procedure for appeals, and is this information provided to applicants in the case of a negative, partial or alternative recognition decision? c) To what extent does your institution's website provide information on or links to legal or regulatory texts that an appellant applicant might wish to consult? d) In what languages are these texts available?	- Part II, Chapter 6: Purpose of recognition - Part II, Chapter 9: Substantial and non-substantial differences - Part II, Chapter 10: Alternative recognition and the right to appeal	N/A

2: IMPLEMENTATION OF PROCESSES – SPECIAL PROCEDURES AND DECISIONS			
2.5 Which procedures are in place at your institution for applicants in a refugee-like situation with insufficient or missing documents?	N/A	Part V, Chapter 23: Qualification holders without documentation	Section VII, Article VII of the LRC and its subsidiary text Recommendation on the Recognition of Refugees' Qualifications under the Lisbon Recognition Convention and Explanatory Memorandum specifically address the recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation.
2.6 To what extent does your institution use the full range of recognition decisions, including partial, alternative and conditional recognition?	N/A	Part II, Chapter 10: Alternative recognition and the right to appeal	N/A
2.7 To what extent does your institution apply automatic recognition?	To what extent does your institution automatically recognise the level, quality and workload of qualifications from specific institutions or countries?	Part V, Chapter 16: Automatic recognition	The Council of the European Union issued a Recommendation on Promoting Automatic Mutual Recognition of Higher Education and Upper Secondary Education and Training Qualifications and the Outcomes of Learning Periods Abroad (2018). In addition, the project publication The Triangle of Automatic Recognition: Guidelines for the Application of De Facto Automatic Recognition (2020) offers practical advice and guidelines on how to implement automatic recognition.

2: IMPLEMENTATION OF PROCESSES – TOOLS AND RESOURCES

2.8 How do your staff verify the legitimacy, authenticity and quality of a qualification?	How well do the information sources you consult during the evaluation process fit your needs?	• Part II, Chapter 3: Accreditation and quality assurance (status of the institution) • Part II, Chapter 4: Diploma and accreditation mills • Part II, Chapter 5: Authenticity • Part V, Chapter 22: Qualifications awarded by institutions not recognised by national education authorities	N/A
2.9 Where do you seek information about the level, workload, profile, quality and learning outcomes of a qualification?	How well do the information sources you consult during the evaluation process fit your needs?	• Part II, Chapter 7: Learning outcomes • Part II, Chapter 8: Credits, grades, credit accumulation and credit transfer • Part IV, Chapter 13: How to find and use information • Part IV, Chapter 14: Diploma Supplement • Part IV, Chapter 15: Qualifications frameworks • Part V, Chapter 18: Qualifications gained after Flexible Learning paths	Nuffic's Micro-Evaluator is a user-friendly online tool for recognising micro-credentials. Additional information about the design and recognition of micro-credentials is provided in the TPG-LRC CoRE project report Micro-credentials for higher education institutions: Approaches developed in the EHEA using peer support. In addition, the EHEA Qualifications Table provides an easy overview of EHEA qualifications and their corresponding cycle or European Qualifications Framework (EQF) level. The qualifications are organized by Bologna Process cycle and corresponding EQF levels 5, 6, 7 and 8.

3: CAPACITY-BUILDING			
3.1 How does your institution ensure that its staff have the relevant knowledge and skills to perform recognition procedures?	a) How does your institution ensure that new staff members receive relevant training? b) How does your institution ensure that all staff members have opportunities to enhance their capacities or refresh their knowledge and skills? c) How does your institution ensure that its staff members regularly exchange information about cases and good practice, both within the institution and through interinstitutional exchange?	N/A	N/A
4: MONITORING AND IMPROVING			
4.1 How does your institution ensure that its recognition processes are up to date and fit for purpose?	a) How does your institution ensure that its recognition processes reflect developments in the field of recognition in a timely manner? b) How do you evaluate if the recognition processes are fit-for-purpose?	- Part III, Chapter 11: Transparency and information provision - Part III, Chapter 12: Institutional recognition practices & procedures	Standard 1.4 of the ESG expresses the expectation that institutions should consistently apply predefined and published regulations covering all phases of the student “life cycle”, including recognition. In addition, the LIREQA project report Integrating Academic Recognition and Quality Assurance: Practical Recommendations contains a set of recommendations that aim to help ensure fair recognition via quality assurance mechanisms.

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