

Recognition of Foreign Qualifications at Higher Education Institutions

"All staff responsible for taking decisions on admission of students with foreign qualifications should be aware of the Lisbon Recognition Convention"

This quote is taken from the STREAM online training and good practice platform for European admissions officers. It emphasises the fact that recognition procedures within the European region have to be in line with the principles of the legally binding Lisbon Recognition Convention. Therefore, awareness of this convention and how to apply its principles is very relevant for quality assurance personnel, heads of admissions offices and programme directors at Higher Education Institutions.

What is recognition of foreign qualifications?

Recognition refers to the formal assessment of foreign qualifications or periods of study for the purpose of further studies, the right to carry an academic title or the right to enter the labour market. In the last decades, increased student mobility and the great diversity of education systems and higher education programmes between and even within countries, have increased the relevance of adequate recognition procedures.

A European endeavour

Since 1997 the Lisbon Recognition Convention forms the basis of and sets standards for recognition procedures in the European region. In 2015 the Ministerial Conference of European Higher Education Area (EHEA) countries, held in Yerevan, adopted the [revised Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA](#), which explicitly mention recognition and its bearing on the quality of higher education:

Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are essential components for ensuring the students' progress in their studies, while promoting mobility. Appropriate recognition procedures rely on:

- *institutional practice for recognition being in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention;*
- *cooperation with other institutions, quality assurance agencies and the national ENIC-NARIC centre with a view to ensuring coherent recognition across the country.*

Basic principles in a nutshell

The Lisbon Recognition Convention states that recognition decisions should at all times be fair, non-discriminatory and transparent.

Fair meaning that holders of qualifications issued in one country shall have adequate access to an assessment of these qualifications in another country; and each country shall recognise qualifications as similar to the corresponding qualifications in its own system unless it can show that there are substantial differences.

Non-discriminatory meaning that no discrimination shall be made on any ground such as the applicant's gender, race, colour, disability, language, religion, political opinion, national, ethnic or social origin.

Finally, the Lisbon Recognition Convention states that the responsibility to demonstrate that a foreign qualification does not fulfil the relevant requirements lies with the body undertaking the assessment, thus safeguarding a **transparent** process.

How can I ensure fair recognition in my institution?

- Ensure that clear **recognition procedures** for foreign qualifications and periods of study are available at your institution and are regularly updated. If your institution does not have a central recognition office, but recognition is devolved to faculty level, make sure the same procedures are followed and the same scrutiny is maintained at all levels.
- Make sure that **clear and reliable information** on recognition procedures and criteria is available for foreign students and their sponsors (employers, funding bodies, parents).
- Offer regular **training for admissions officers** working at your institution, to ensure adequate in-house knowledge on existing and evolving legislation and best practice in the European region. Most national ENIC-NARIC centres provide training and advice on diploma recognition. From 14 September until 31 December 2015 a European Commission-sponsored and free of charge [online training](#) is available.

Further advantages for your institution

Adequate recognition and admission procedures for foreign students allow you to attract international students and strengthen the international reputation of your institution. In addition, it enables you to effectively select students on the basis of their skills and capacities. A successful match between students' abilities on the one hand and the requirements of study programmes, on the other, will enhance the overall quality of the education offered by your institution.

Contact us

For further information on the STREAM online training and good practice platform for admissions officers, please contact EP-Nuffic's International Recognition Department:

Kortenaerkade 11
2518 AX, The Hague
The Netherlands

Tel: +31 (0)70 - 426 02 60

Project coordinators: Ms Katrien Bardoel (kbardoel@epnuffic.nl), Ms Jenneke Lokhoff (jlokhoff@epnuffic.nl) or Mr Bas Wegewijs (wegewijs@epnuffic.nl).