

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR RECOGNITION – Czech Republic

1. Legislation

1.1 Lisbon Recognition Convention

The Czech Republic signed the Lisbon Convention on 11.4.1997. The Convention was ratified on 15.12.1999 and entered into force on 1.2.2000.

Provision of information about the Lisbon Convention and its implementation is one of the regular tasks of the Ministry and the ENIC/NARIC. This information will continue to be provided, via the Ministry of Education's and ENIC/NARIC' websites and thematic seminars, to the public, applicants for recognition and newly established higher education institutions.

Objectives: To continue implementation of the Lisbon Convention and its accompanying texts by means of holding seminars for recognition bodies

1.2 Review of national legislation

Higher education is fostered by the Higher Education Act (Act no. 111/1998 on higher education institutions as amended). Access to higher education is addressed in the Schools Act (Act no. 561/2004 on pre-school, basic, secondary, tertiary professional and other education) and Decree no. 12/2005 on conditions for recognition and nostrification of certificates issued by foreign institutions.

The provisions of the Higher Education Act make it possible for competent recognition bodies to observe the principles of the Lisbon Convention. (In the Czech Republic these bodies are: public higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the Interior Ministry - police, and the Ministry of Defence - military). For recognition of periods of study and individual examinations other higher education institutions (i.e. state and private) serve as recognition bodies. As regards recognition of certificates of completion of secondary education, provisions of the Schools Act and the Decree on recognition and nostrification apply. These documents also respect the principles of the Lisbon Convention and make it possible for the recognition bodies (regional authorities and Ministry of Education) to implement them.

Legal regulations concerned with secondary and higher education were developed while the Lisbon Convention was already in place and its principles were therefore incorporated into them. Amendments to the Schools Act and the Higher Education Act are currently being debated. They concern legalisation of documents put forward by the applicant for recognition. There are a number of bilateral agreements on legal assistance in this area, which abolish the requirement of legalisation. There is consensus in the area of higher education that legalisation should only be required in cases where there is justified doubt on the part of the recognition body concerning authenticity of the documents.

Objectives: To prepare and enforce an amendment to the Higher Education Act by the end of 2007. To inform partners in the Higher Education Area about it through mutual contacts among the relevant ministries and ENIC/NARICs, and to publish up-to-date amendments to legal documents at the MoEYS's (www.msmt.cz) and ENIC/NARIC's websites (www.naric.cz).

1.3 Bilateral or regional recognition agreements

As regards academic recognition of qualifications, the Czech Republic is bound by several bilateral agreements. There are agreements on mutual recognition of documents on education with Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. The most recent agreement on recognition of periods of study, documents of education and documents on scientific degrees and titles was concluded with Poland. This agreement, which entered into force on 1 October 2006, replaced the 1991 agreement.

As concerns agreements on recognition of documents on education with the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan and Bulgaria, the Czech Republic is seeking their repudiation. All the agreements, including those being repudiated, fully respect the principles of the Lisbon Convention. The agreement with Afghanistan is repudiated due to lack of information about changes in the country's higher education system and impossibility to obtain it. The agreement with Bulgaria is repudiated as it also covers, to a degree, professional recognition.

More recent agreements concluded between the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Hungary and Poland, and the agreement with Germany, which is in the making, not only respect fully the principles of the Lisbon Convention, but they go beyond them and stipulate mutual equivalence of higher education qualifications and qualifications facilitating access to HE institutions.

Objectives: To start the work on a Czech-Austrian agreement or joint memorandum on recognition and to enter negotiations on a new agreement with Bulgaria in 2007.

2. Recognition practice

2.1 Criteria and procedures

All public HE institutions confirmed, in a poll focused on this topic, that they use the Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and Periods of Study in their recognition practice. Its use is also promoted by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the ENIC/NARIC at specialist seminars organised for personnel responsible for recognition.

HE institutions apply the procedure recommended in Annex 3 to the Recommendation, i.e.:

1. Receipt of the application and information to the applicant about procedures.
2. Verification of whether all documents required are attached to the application (the diploma, diploma supplement or transcript). If yes, the application will be looked through. If no, the applicant is asked to provide the missing information.
3. Verification of authenticity of the documents (legalisation or Apostille) is required for academic recognition by the Higher Education Act, unless an international agreement states otherwise (agreements on legal assistance).
4. Verification of whether the HE institution which issued the diploma is recognised as belonging to the relevant country's national higher education system. In the case of transnational institutions, verification of whether the institution is a branch of a recognised foreign HE institution, and whether this institution acknowledges that this is the case. In other cases information is sought whether the institution complies with the Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education. At this stage HE institutions often turn to the ENIC/NARIC for assistance.
5. Assessment of qualifications is carried out taking account of its purpose, the Higher Education Act and both multilateral and bilateral international agreements. Account is also taken of similar cases the recognition body dealt with in the past, and the experience of the ENIC/NARIC and other recognition bodies.

The content and scope of the qualification are considered to identify the corresponding accredited study programme at the institution to which the application for recognition is addressed. If no such programme is available, the application is forwarded to an institution that provides a similar study programme or, if there is not such a programme whatsoever, recognition is refused and the applicant is asked to appeal the decision. Then the case is decided by the Ministry of Education. If the applicant's qualification cannot be recognised the same level, he/she is offered recognition at a lower level of higher education, or, possibly, the applicant is informed on what is missing in the qualification and it is up to him/her to acquire the necessary knowledge. If the recognition body asks ENIC/NARIC for assistance, ENIC/NARIC prepares an expert statement on the level of higher education achieved based on a comparison of the national education system in the country where the qualification was acquired and that of the CR.

6. A decision on recognition and a certificate are issued. If the decision is negative, it is justified and the applicant is informed about appeal procedures.

According to the law the application must be dealt with and a decision made within 30 days, and 60 days in more complex cases. If the applicant fails to provide all the documents required, the proceedings can be suspended until the application is complete.

Objectives: Although public HE institutions' and the Ministry of Education's recognition procedures are, according to their statements, in line with the basic steps proposed in the Recommendation, the recognition process is one of regular topics discussed at various seminars. This is necessary in view of changes in the posts of responsible academics and staff at autonomous HE institutions. The ENIC/NARIC, in co-operation with the Ministry of Education will continue in organisation of annual seminars that promote this procedure, and will provide consultation to recognition bodies on a continuous basis.

2.2 *Joint degrees*

Legislation on higher education enables recognition of joint degrees. Higher education institutions are called upon, on various occasions such as seminars, consultations and others, to seek partners for joint degrees among HE institutions recognised in the respective countries, or institutions, which prove to observe the Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education.

In connection with the launch of the Erasmus Mundus programme recommendations have been made for HE institutions concerning accreditation and joint degree recognition.

The Ministry of Education provides via its development schemes financial support for integrated projects of HE institutions leading to joint degree. Implementation of Joint degree programmes is one of MoYES priorities in the area of internationalisation of higher education. HE institutions are repeatedly encouraged to apply the Recommendations on the Recognition of Joint Degree.

Objectives: To continue providing financial support for joint degree projects; to promote the use of the Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint degree in the national recognition practice via seminars and consultations.

2.3 *Overview of institutional practice*

The recognition practice of HE institutions and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports is in line with the Lisbon Convention, the Higher Education Act and other documents including: Recommendation on International Access Qualifications, Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and Periods of Study, Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education and Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees.

Recognition bodies are called upon to focus, when assessing qualifications, on learning outcomes and competencies rather than on the length of studies and equality of content. However, these data are rarely available. In the event that the content and scope of studies do not meet the requirements for a similar qualification in the CR, recognition bodies are called upon to consider the relevant work experience of the applicant in order to ensure fair recognition. The purpose for which recognition is required is always important (academic recognition, *de jure* or *de facto* recognition). It appears to be

necessary to develop a methodology for recognition of non-formal and informal learning in higher education. Foreign experience should be made use of in this area. The first steps was already made by the Act on the recognition of outcomes of further education.

The Ministry of Education and the ENIC/NARIC follow the situation as regards recognition at private HE institutions by means of annual NARIC seminars where HE institutions inform about their recognition practice and, in particular, about negative decisions on recognition. The Ministry of Education is the appeal body in the event that an HE institution turns down the applicant's appeal against a negative decision.

The Ministry of Education and the ENIC/NARIC assist recognition bodies in terms of methodology by means of seminars and consultations, and promote the use of instruments facilitating recognition. Both institutions have frequent contacts also with applicants for recognition who ask them for advice and assistance related to recognition. In the case of problematic tasks, the Ministry or ENIC/NARIC discuss the issue with the HE institution and seek remedy.

Objectives: To foster the development of NQF till 2010. The end of year 2008 can be deemed as a realistic deadline for the development, testing and implementation of the methodology of the recognition of prior learning including non-formal and informal learning.

2.4 *Transparency tools for recognition*

Better implementation of the ECTS and its introduction where it is not yet used are necessary steps, among those promoting internationalisation of higher education, that are set out in policy documents and long-term plan of the Ministry of Education and long-term plans of HE institutions.

Although ECTS implementation is not prescribed in the Higher Education Act, HE institutions understand the importance and benefits of this system. Most of them implement the ECTS or a comparable system, although in sporadic cases all faculties do not use it.

The objective is that a half of public HE institutions and those private ones, which have the "Erasmus Charter" obtain the European Commission's "ECTS Label". All students who show interest and aptitudes should get an opportunity to study at least one semester abroad. The proportion of foreign students in Czech HE institutions will be increased, including those within the ERASMUS scheme, and should amount to 10% of the total number of students. It is assumed that this objective should be reached by 2010.

The Diploma Supplement is mentioned as one of the study documents in the 1998 Higher Education Act, and, until 2005, it could be issued at the graduate's request. From 2005 it was to be issued automatically to new graduates. Since the beginning of 2006 the importance of the Diploma Supplement has been even higher due to an amendment to the

Higher Education Act, which stipulates that the Diploma Supplement replaced the existing certificate of state final examination. According to Article 55, paragraph 2 of Law no. 111/1998 on higher education institutions, as amended, the Diploma Supplement together with the relevant diploma are documents testifying to completion of studies and acquisition of an academic title.

The Diploma Supplement is issued in a bilingual, Czech-English version according to the template proposed and adopted by UNESCO, Council of Europe and the European Commission. It is issued for free.

The Ministry of Education and NARIC monitor the situation as regards the issuing of the Diploma Supplement and call upon HE institutions to eliminate possible shortcomings. So far, 4 HE institutions received the DS label and many others are striving to get this award.

Objectives: Consistent implementation of ECTS including all its functions and HE institutions' preparation for obtaining the EC certificates the "ECTS Label" and the "Diploma Supplement Label" are priorities set out by the Ministry of Education for 2007. The Ministry of Education and ENIC/NARIC will continue the methodological and advisory activities in these areas.

2.5 *Borderless/transnational education*

National and institutional policies concerned with assessment of borderless/transnational education aim to avoid discrimination of high-quality institutions of this kind and their programmes. However, fair assessment of qualifications acquired at these institutions is conditional upon sufficient information about their quality and compliance with the Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education.

Recognition of qualifications acquired from borderless/transnational institutions is not rejected due to formal reasons. When dealing with each such application, creditability of the institution is considered and as well as possible experience of partners within the ENIC/NARIC network.

Of course, these institutions are subject to the same rules as those applied to national institutions, provided they decide to become HE institutions within the national higher education system – in this case they can become private HE institutions. This requires that, upon compliance with legal requirements, they get accreditation for their programmes and state approval to operate as a private HE institution entitled to issue diplomas and award academic titles in line with the Higher Education Act.

Objectives: To collect information about borderless/transnational institutions operating in the Czech Republic, and to obtain information, via the ENIC/NARIC Network, about such institutions abroad for the purpose of recognising their diplomas.

3. Information provision

3.1 *Provision of information on recognition*

Information about the national education system is provided via on-line databases, electronic and printed publications and presentations delivered at international conferences, seminars and meetings. Moreover, provision of information is facilitated by participation of representatives of the Ministry, HE institutions, the Rectors' Conference, the HE Council, the Accreditation Commission, the Centre for Higher Education Studies, the National Institute for Technical and Vocational Education (NITVE), the Institute for Information on Education and the ENIC/NARIC in the work of international organisations and networks. These institutions are responsible for the provision of information.

Information about studies at secondary and tertiary professional schools is provided by NITVE. Information about higher education studies and the system is provided by ENIC/NARIC by means of the database "Vysoké školy" in Czech, and "Higher Education Institutions" in English. The database is available on-line at www.csvs.cz (in Czech) and at www.naric.cz (in English). Besides this, lists of HE institutions, their faculties, study programmes and branches are published annually, including admission requirements, in the Czech language. The Guide for International students is printed every two years; the last edition was released in spring 2005.

Information on recognition is provided by the recognition bodies – i.e. HE institutions, the Ministry and the advisory body (ENIC/NARIC). Information in the Czech language is placed on the public administration portal and on the web pages of individual public HE Institutions, information in Czech and English is available on the ENIC (www.csvs.cz) and NARIC websites (www.naric.cz). Both these websites provide a link to the ENIC-NARIC website.

Objectives: To continue maintenance of databases, data collection and publishing activities; to ensure a regular update of websites; to unify information about the recognition process that is provided by competent recognition bodies.

3.2 *Information package for applicants*

Information about the process of recognition of higher education qualifications, including the application form, is placed on the websites of recognition bodies (i.e. HE institutions and Ministry of Education) and on the ENIC/NARIC websites. Both the Ministry and ENIC/NARIC provide this information in an electronic form.

Information about HE institutions and their accredited study programmes and fields of study is available on the websites of the Ministry of Education and ENIC/NARIC. The website of the Ministry also contains information of the Accreditation Commission on the standards and evaluation of HE institution and faculties. The Ministry of Education places information about recognition of qualifications providing access to higher education as well as higher education qualifications at the public administration portal.

Regional authorities publish information about recognition of qualifications facilitating access to HE institutions at their websites.

The ENIC/NARIC provides information at their websites in Czech and English. Higher education institutions provide information at their websites in Czech some of them also in English.

The objective is that all public higher education institutions involved also have information for applicants in the English language. The term is 2007.

4. Structures

4.1 *National information centre*

The Centre for Equivalence of Documents about Education, which is one of the sections of the Centre for Higher Education Studies, was set up in 1991. Since then it has performed the function of ENIC, and since 1997 the function of NARIC, Czech Republic.

The Centre is a methodological, consulting and advisory body for recognition bodies and for applicants for recognition. It is not entitled to decide on recognition matters. At request it issues statements on the position of HE institutions and qualifications for recognition bodies (in cases of both academic and professional recognition) and/or for applicants (mainly in cases of *de facto* professional recognition).

The Centre maintains two databases on higher education institutions, their accredited study programmes and fields of study - in Czech and English. It prepares an annual publication for Czech applicants for higher education studies, a guide for international students and information for newspapers.

The Centre participates in the preparation of bilateral agreements on recognition and sees to their implementation. It is an advisory body on the issue of Diploma Supplement and, for this purpose, prepares a description of the Czech higher education system.

The Centre (ENIC/NARIC) has 3 full-time employees including a secretary. At national level it co-operates with the Ministry of Education and other ministries (defence and the interior), higher education institutions, the Accreditation Commission, the Rectors' Conference and the Council of HE Institutions, student chamber of the Council of Higher Education, the National Institute for Technical and Vocational Education (primarily as regards Europass), the Institute for Information on Education, and with competent recognition bodies for professional recognition. At international level it co-operates with partners within the ENIC-NARIC network.

The ENIC/NARIC deal with over 300 written inquiries per year and at least twice as many inquiries over the telephone. The number of requests for information concerning recognition of foreign qualifications in the CR and Czech qualifications abroad is constantly rising.

Objectives: To continue and develop activities related to the Joint ENIC/NARIC Charter of Activities and Services.

4.2 *Cooperation recognition/quality assurance bodies*

There is a very close co-operation between the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the Accreditation Commission and the ENIC/NARIC. Representatives of the aforementioned institutions participate, on a regular basis, in seminars on quality evaluation and recognition both within the scheme of the Bologna Promoters Team, and as part of projects of the Centre for Higher Education Studies and NARIC. There is mutual exchange of information on the approaches and procedures employed by these institutions concerning quality evaluation and assurance, as well as recognition. The co-operation is informal.

The results of accreditation and evaluation of the quality of HE institutions and study programmes in the CR are used by NARIC primarily when pursuing recognition of Czech higher education qualifications abroad.

The ENIC/NARIC and ENQA share information on the workings of the ENIC-NARIC Networks and ENQA, and on problems related to recognition and quality assurance. Examples of fruitful co-operation include cases of recognition of qualifications acquired from borderless/transnational institutions, or applications of these institutions for accreditation or state approval in the CR. In these cases exchange of information and experience between the Accreditation Commission and ENIC is very important.

Objectives: Mutual co-operation will be further developed and expanded – for example in the form of participation of ENIC/NARIC CR in a pilot project as part of which Accreditation Commissions of the Czech R and the SR prepare evaluation of their activities.