

BOLOGNA PROCESS
TEMPLATE FOR NATIONAL REPORTS: 2005-2007

A. Background information on your Higher Education system

Details

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Main achievements since Bergen 19-20.5.2005

1. Describe the important developments relating to the Bologna Process, including legislative reforms, since Bergen.

Universities

The Universities Act (645/1997) was amended on July 30th 2004. The amendment (715/2004) enacted a Bologna-compatible two-tier degree structure, with an obligatory Bachelors level (1st cycle) degree before Masters level (2nd cycle) degree in all fields except medicine and dentistry. The new Act makes it possible for universities to award official English degrees and degree titles. The Government Decree on University Degrees (794/2004), which specifies the Universities Act, was issued on August 19th. Repealing 20 previous field-specific decrees, it detailed the two-tier degree structure and aims and structures for Bachelors, Masters and Doctoral degrees. ECTS-equivalent credit system was also enacted by the law. Official degree titles in Finnish, Swedish and English were determined.

Polytechnics

The Polytechnics Act (351/2003) was amended on June 10th 2005. In amendment (411/2005) the polytechnics second-cycle degrees were put into permanent legislation. The amendment (413/2005) states that all the polytechnics have a student organisation who represent the student body of that institution. The student organisation appoints the student representatives to polytechnic board and other governing bodies in the institution. The polytechnics introduced ECTS August 1st 2005.

Amendment reflecting degree form on The Decree on the Higher education Degree System (423/2005) came to place in August 1st 2005. The polytechnic master's degrees were added to the decree.

The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) has developed the audit procedure focusing on the quality assurance systems of Finnish HEIs in order to show the international community that Finland has a valid and competent quality assurance practice. This procedure is a response to the development principles prevailing in the European Higher Education Area. FINHEEC started quality audits in 2005. The aim is to audit all higher education institutions by the year 2011.

National organisation

2. Describe any changes since Bergen in the structure of public authorities responsible for higher education, the main agencies/bodies in higher education and their roles.

3. Describe any changes since Bergen to the institutional structure.

Partnership

4. Describe the structure which oversees the implementation of the Bologna Process in your country.

The Government EU sub-committee for Education monitors the Bologna process in general. The sub-committee consists of representatives from higher education institutions, students and social partners, other relevant ministries and the Ministry of Education.

The Ministry of Education also appoints the members of Bologna Promoters groups. The Bologna promoters have been organising seminars on the current Bologna issues, such as recognition of Foreign Qualifications, third cycle degrees and employability. The Bologna promoters group consists of students (representatives from the two national HE student organisations SYL and SAMOK), university and polytechnic staff, Finnish ENIC/NARIC, ECTS coucellors, FINHEEC, CIMO, Ministry of Education and Finnish National Board of Education. All the appointed members have the same rights to participate in the group.

The Ministry of Education regularly arranges national thematic seminars for all interested parties. Furthermore, the Ministry maintains close contact with institutions, students, and other relevant reference groups.

5. Describe the arrangements for involving students and staff trade union/representative bodies in the governance of HEIs.

Universities:

University Act states that the university senate is constituted of professors, other staff and students and representatives of external stakeholders. The amount of members in the whole senate and in each group is decided by each university in its standing orders. All the senate members have the same rights to act in the senate. The university senate is presided over by the rector.

(<http://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1997/en19970645.pdf>)

Lower governing bodies in university (such as faculty boards) are constructed also of professors, other staff and students.

Polytechnics

Polytechnics Act states that the polytechnic board is constituted of polytechnics governance, teachers, other staff members and students and from the working life. The number of representatives in the whole board and in each group is decided by maintaining organisation. All the board members have the same rights to act in the board. The polytechnic board is presided over by the rector.

<http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2003/20030351?search%5Btype%5D=pika&search%5Bpika%5D=ammattikorkeakoululaki>

The teachers, other staff and students are also represented in the lower levels of governance.

6. Describe the measures in place to ensure the co-operation of business and social partners within the Bologna Process.

The Government EU sub-committee for Education monitors the Bologna process in general. The sub-committee consists of representatives from higher education institutions, students and social partners, other relevant ministries and the Ministry of Education.

B. Main stocktaking questions, including scorecard elements

Degree system

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

Stage of implementation of the first and second cycle

7. Describe the progress made towards introducing the first and second cycle.

Universities

New degree system was build up in close cooperation between ministry and universities. In every academic field there was steering group which coordinated the curriculum development. The ministry of education gave funding to these teams and organised joint meetings.

The Ministry of Education also funded the special support project for implementing new degree system ("Five years, two degrees") which has provided models for curriculum development process and training for the key personnel in universities and polytechnics

The training has been extensive and has concentrated especially on curriculum's core content analysis, the student's workload evaluation and on the use of personal study plans. These methods enable the planning of coherent and meaningful degree programmes which support the students' learning process.

According to the new legislation, the students that state their studies before the new degree structure have the right to either transfer their studies to the new structure or continue their studies in the old until the transition period, which is until august 2008 and for engineering 2010.

Polytechnics

First- and second-cycle degrees have been enhanced by several national network projects funded by the Ministry of Education. All polytechnics have and will engage in these projects. The first phase of the first-cycle ECTS project dealt with the ECTS credit system, Diploma Supplement and the preparation of the description of the Finnish higher education qualifications framework. The focus of the second phase was on the enhancement of the curriculum and the description of learning outcomes in different fields of study. (<http://www.ncp.fi/ects>). Study guidance, training and theses have also been targets of the development projects.

Second-cycle degrees were developed and established in 2003-2005. There was an international evaluation of the second cycle polytechnic degrees carried out by FINHEEC (www.kka.fi/pdf/julkaisut/KKA_1104.pdf). The results of the evaluation were acknowledged before the degrees were put into permanent legislation. The ongoing second project will make the Bologna process and the degrees known; ECTS credits, competences, learning outcomes, eLearning, blended learning, joint and double degrees and quality assurance. (www.ylempiampk.fi)

Stage of implementation of the third cycle

8. Describe the progress made towards implementing doctoral studies as the third Bologna cycle.

In Finland, all universities have traditionally engaged in both education and research, and they all have the right to award doctorates. The postgraduate student body is relatively heterogeneous. Doctoral studies typically take at least four years of full-time studies including a publicly defended doctoral dissertation. Traditionally most doctoral studies have been undertaken as independent study, but the proportion of organized courses has been increased steadily. A graduate school system was created in 1995. It has been expanded rapidly, and currently ca. 4.500 doctoral students study in graduate schools. This number constitutes a majority of those doctoral students who are pursuing their degree actively. Every year a total of 1 400 doctoral degrees are awarded by Finnish universities.

All structured doctoral programmes include taught courses, and the proportion of independent work on doctoral thesis is approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of doctoral studies. Credit points are in use in taught courses, not in independent research work. The aims of an ongoing curricula development is to integrate interdisciplinary training and transferable skills in doctoral education.

In 2006 the Ministry released a working group memorandum on the development of doctoral education

(http://www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/OPM/Julkaisut/2006/liitteet/opm_13_tr03.pdf). It includes proposals which are in line with the suggestions of the Berlin and Bergen Communiqué on the third cycle. It is proposed that the traditional route to the doctorate will be retained along the graduate school but that the structures and good practises of the graduated schools will be extended to other doctoral training as well. In addition measures to improve the efficiency of doctoral education will be carried on with a view to ensuring employability, and that the PhD programmes are primarily completed in four years.

The ministry of education has started the development of a qualifications framework in lines with the EQF including the third cycle. The first version of the framework was published in 2005 in

Ministry's memorandum "Qualifications Framework. Description of Finnish higher education qualifications"

(http://www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/OPM/Julkaisut/2005/liitteet/opm_265_tr04.pdf). The framework includes all higher education degrees and describes them in terms of the work load, the level, learning outcomes, eligibility for further study and professional qualifications.

Finnish doctoral education was recently evaluated by an international expert group

Dill, D. et al. (2006) *PhD Training and the Knowledge-Based Society. An Evaluation of Doctoral Education in Finland*. Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council. Tampere: Tammer-Paino Oy. http://www.kka.fi/pdf/julkaisut/KKA_106.pdf

Access to the next cycle

9. Describe the arrangements for access between the first and second cycles and second and third cycles.

All first cycle qualifications give access to second cycle and second cycle qualifications give access to third cycle. HEIs may require bridging courses to transfer between cycles in some subject areas.

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

Implementation of national qualifications framework

10. Describe the stage of implementation of the national qualifications framework to align with the overarching Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA.

There was a working group in 2004-2005 appointed by the Ministry of Education to prepare the proposal for the national higher education qualifications framework. The main elements and descriptors of the proposal are in line with the Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA. The working group consisted of representatives from polytechnics and universities, the student organisations, the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council, the National Board of Education (ENIC/NARIC) and from the Ministry of Education. The social partners were consulted before the proposal was finalised. In the proposal, the main types of qualifications are described in terms of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are divided into knowledge (breadth and depth), skills (language and communication) and competences (cognitive, professional and ethical). There has been a wide round of written consultation (60 statements were received and main comments were collected in one document) and some seminars have been organised on relevant aspects of the proposal, e.g. on doctoral degrees and labor-market relevance of qualifications. No decision has not yet been made concerning the form of approval and implementation of the proposal.

11. What measures are being taken to increase the employability of graduates with bachelor qualifications?

According to the mission of Polytechnics the Polytechnic institutions train professionals in response to labour market needs. Nearly 83% of Bachelors graduated from Polytechnics during 2000-2004 were employed in the end of 2004. Slightly under 5% of the graduated continued their studies. University students are given right to take a degree at master level bachelor degree being an intermediate phase towards the master degree and offering a possibility to enter working life.

Quality assurance

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

National implementation of the Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA

12. To what extent is your national system of QA already in line with the Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA?

The FINHEEC audit model has been designed with the quality assurance standards and guidelines issued by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in mind.

In spring 2004, FINHEEC set up a taskforce to plan auditing and write an audit manual setting out the aims and objects of audits, as well as the methods, evaluation criteria, principles of signing up for audits, and follow-up procedures. The members of the taskforce were representatives of HEIs, students, employers, and the FINHEEC Secretariat. FINHEEC arranged several seminars to introduce the audit model to higher education institutions and other interested parties and to collect their feedback on it. In spring 2005, FINHEEC piloted the audit methods and criteria. The audit model is presented in a manual, which will be effective until the end of 2007 (*Audits of Quality Assurance Systems of Finnish Higher Education Institutions. Audit Manual for 2005-2007*, http://www.kka.fi/pdf/julkaisut/KKA_406.pdf). The planning of the model was informed by the ENQA *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA*.

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

Stage of development of external quality assurance system

13. Describe the quality assurance system operating in your country.

Finnish national quality assurance in higher education has three components: national policy steering (MoE), the institutions' own quality assurance (HEIs), and national auditing (FINHEEC). Additionally, national quality assurance is increasingly influenced by a growing need to substantiate quality in the international market and by international policy lines. About one half of all evaluations are made by international evaluation groups.

In Finland, universities and polytechnics have traditionally been responsible for the quality of their work. By law, the institutions must evaluate their education, research and other activities and their effectiveness. They shall also take part in external evaluation of their activities. According to law, they must also publish the findings of the evaluations they undertake.

The steering system highlights the role of evaluation in higher education development. The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council is an independent expert body, which assists universities, polytechnics, and the Ministry of Education in matters relating to evaluation. Its duties and policies are governed by the Decree on the Higher Education Evaluation Council from 1995, and it consists of 12 members, appointed by the Ministry of education for a four-year period. Members represent universities, polytechnics, students and employers. The FINHEEC organizes audits of quality assurance systems of HEIs, program, and thematic evaluations, and it is responsible for evaluating the quality of education and other activities of HEIs (research is evaluated in Finland by the Academy of Finland). FINHEEC is a member of ENQA.

The Finnish response to the aims and objectives set in the Berlin communiqué was deliberated by a committee on quality assurance representing HEIs, their students, the Ministry of Education and the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC). The committee discovered that, as regards different components of quality assurance set out in the communiqué, the Finnish system includes: a division of responsibilities between various bodies and institutions; the evaluation of

HEIs and degree programmes; student participation; and participation in international co-operation. About the FINHEEC audit model, see above, answer 12.

FINHEEC adheres to the operating principles of enhancement-led evaluation. This means that the purpose of all evaluation is to support the HEIs in their endeavour to improve the education they offer. The information FINHEEC generates is of the type which the HEIs can utilise in the further development of their own operations. Public evaluation reports also provide the Ministry of Education and other interest groups with information on the quality of education and quality assurance of the HEIs. One important aim is to disseminate the good practices. Without exception the evaluation reports include proposals for further development. The responsibility for the utilisation and application of evaluation information rests ultimately with the institutions themselves. FINHEEC monitors the implementation of the development proposals in follow-up evaluations and the Ministry of Education refers to the FINHEEC evaluations in its annual performance negotiations with the HEIs.

FINHEEC is preparing for a peer review of the agency according to the Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA in 2008.

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

Level of student participation

14. Describe the level of student participation in your national quality assurance system.

Both national higher education student organisations (SYL and SAMOK) represented in the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC). The two student representatives in the council are full members and participate on the all council decision making, including decisions on the audit out-comes.

Students are also full members in the audit panels and in other evaluation boards and groups appointed by FINHEEC.

In the audit process the audit panel interviews also student representatives of the institution. Also target number 4 in the audit manual is "Participation of staff, students and external stakeholders in quality assurance". This also ensures that students are involved also in the internal evaluations.

The students role in the quality assurance system is strong, starting from the department level in internal evaluations all the way to the external evaluations on national level.

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

Level of international participation

15. Describe the level of international participation in your national quality assurance system.

The FINHEEC is a member of the ENQA, the INQAAHE and the Nordic evaluation network NOQA. The NOQA carries out Nordic evaluation projects, publishing the reports at its web site (<http://www.noqa.net>), and arranges joint seminars and meetings. Within the NOQA the Nordic countries cooperate in the recruitment of foreign evaluation experts. The FINHEEC also participates in the meetings, seminars and workshops of the ENQA and the INQAA. FINHEEC members and secretariat have been invited as experts to take part in international evaluations (e.g.

OECD, most European countries, South Africa, Japan, South Korea, Brasilia). The FINHEEC receives visits by a number of experts from foreign higher education institutions and evaluation organisations each year. The FINHEEC also uses international external experts in its evaluation projects.

Recognition of degrees and study periods

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

Stage of implementation of Diploma Supplement

16. Describe the stage of implementation of the Diploma Supplement in your country.

In the Finnish higher education legislation, in the University and Polytechnic Decrees, higher education institutions are required to provide their students a Diploma Supplement. All graduates (100%) receive the Diploma Supplement automatically, free of charge, and in a widely spoken European language (English). The Diploma Supplement corresponds to the EU/CoE/UNESCO format.

The National Board of Education (NBE) offers support and training to the higher education institutions in their quality and development work with the Diploma Supplement. NBE is also responsible for the content and updates of the point 8 of DS: "Information on National Higher Education System". The description is approved by the Ministry of Education. 17 higher education institutions in Finland have received the DS Label from the European Commission.

(Scorecard)

National implementation of the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention

17. Describe the stage of implementation of the main principles and later supplementary documents of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

Finland has ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention and it has come into force on March 1, 2004.

The compliance between the Lisbon Recognition Convention and national legislation received thorough review before the Lisbon Recognition Convention entered into force. The Government proposal (HE 155/2002) includes a detailed explanation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. This document covers all the Articles of the Lisbon Convention, explaining how and in which parts of the national legislation the Articles have been implemented. All principles of the Convention are applied in practice.

Finnish legislation or other steering instruments e.g. recommendations by the Ministry of Education also comply with the main principles of the subsidiary texts. E.g. international access qualifications give access to higher education in Finland, criteria and procedures for the assessment of foreign qualifications are reflected in the legislation or other documents. They have also been discussed in several seminars. Recommendation on the recognition of joint degrees is important in Finland, since Finnish higher education institutions participate widely in the joint programs. Ministry of Education has also given its own recommendation on joint degrees, which complies with the subsidiary text. Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education is not very relevant in Finnish context and it is not known as well as other subsidiary texts.

Finland has a fully operational ENIC. For more information, please see the National Action Plan for Recognition.

Implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its enforcement is stated in the Law 877/2002. The Articles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention have been implemented in the relevant parts of the higher education legislation, e.g. in the Universities' Act, Government Decree on University Degrees, and the Polytechnics' Act and Polytechnic Decree. The higher education legislation covers e.g. the competence of authorities, access and admission issues and the applicant's right to appeal. It also determines that access to higher education in the country of origin gives access also in Finland. Some Articles of the Lisbon Convention concerning e.g. the administration and information given to applicants have been implemented in the Administrative Procedure Act (434/2003) covering the administrative practice and procedures in Finland. The basic principles of equality are covered by the Constitution of Finland and it has been further specified in the higher education legislation.

The documents are available on the internet at www.finlex.fi in Finnish and Swedish. The Finnish Constitution, part of the higher education legislation (e.g. Universities Act <http://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1997/en19970645.pdf> and Government Decree on University Degrees <http://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2004/en20040794.pdf>) as well as the Administrative Procedure Act are also available in English. Information in English concerning legislation is also available from the Ministry of Education and the National Board of Education/ENIC/NARIC.

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

Stage of implementation of ECTS

18. Describe the credit and accumulation system operating in your country.

The ECTS-equivalent credit system was established in the university and polytechnic act amendments in 2005. All the cycles use this credit system. The implementation of ECTS is 100% in academic 2006/2007.

19. Has your country produced a national plan to improve the quality of the process associated with the recognition of foreign qualifications? If so, give a brief description of the plan and attach a copy.

Please find attached the Finnish action plan (see annex 1).

Lifelong Learning

(Scorecard)

Recognition of prior learning

20. Describe the measures in place to recognise prior learning, including non-formal and informal learning.

The higher education legislation encourages the recognition of prior learning at higher education institutions. According to the Government Decree on University Degrees "the student may count studies towards the degree and replace studies included in the degree with other studies of corresponding level, as specified by the university. At the discretion of the university, the student

may also count towards the degree and replace studies included in the degree with knowledge demonstrated in some other manner". According to the Government Decree on Polytechnic Studies "students are allowed credits for corresponding studies completed in other Finnish or foreign higher education or other educational institutions on grounds laid down in the degree regulations and to substitute other studies of the same standard or corresponding practical training or work experience for studies or practical training required for the degree".

A national working group on the recognition of prior learning in higher education institutions was set in March 2006 to help higher education institutions to implement those provisions. The group is chaired by the Ministry of Education. The tasks of the working group are the following: to chart the practices that higher education institutions apply in the recognition of prior studies and prior learning; evaluate the functionality of the current procedures and processes and their alignment with European policy and best practice; identify and promote national and international best practices in the recognition of prior learning and present recommendations for common principles and processes of recognition in the recognition of prior studies and prior learning at higher education institutions.

The national working group has given preliminary recommendations for the recognition of prior learning in higher education institutions. These include recommendations for a recognition system, for the common principles of the recognition system, for the good practices of higher education institutions, and recommendations to the Ministry of Education on promoting the recognition of prior learning at higher education institutions. Special emphasis will be on recognition and validation of prior informal and non-formal learning. The most relevant recommendations for recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning are listed below.

Recommendations for a recognition system:

Each higher education institution devises a consistent, reliable and transparent system for the identification and recognition of prior learning. The system should also cover identification and recognition of informal and non-formal learning. The recognition system is applied to education leading to a higher education degree.

The recognition system and methods of assessing competence will be developed in co-operation with key stakeholders, taking into account the skills needs of working life and adequate quality assurance.

Recommendations for the common principles of the recognition system:

The system is based on the students' right to apply for the recognition of their prior learning. Applying for recognition is voluntary for students and the process is initiated by an individual student. Students bear the burden of proving their competence and are primarily responsible for submitting sufficient information. Students are entitled to appeal against decisions issued to them. Higher education institutions must justify their decisions.

The recognition system and the assessment criteria determined by a higher education institution are based on a competence-based approach. Special emphasis is being paid to the learning outcomes. As part of their curricula, higher education institutions define the learning outcomes of degrees and parts thereof against which the competence attested by a student will be measured. Assessment is based on competence, not on where or how it was acquired. In their assessment, higher education institutions take into account the European qualifications frameworks that are currently being prepared.

Decisions made within the framework of the recognition system are based on expertise and reliable documentation. Higher education institutions are responsible for the quality assurance of the recognition of prior learning.

Recognised studies are equal to studies taken at the student's own institution.

Assessment relating to the recognition of studies and competence, and determining any possible supplementary studies is consistent and based on policies determined by the higher education institution. Students are treated in a consistent, equal and predictable manner.

The higher education institution should determine the proportion of degree studies that must be completed at the degree-awarding institution. Degrees may not be completed in full through informal and non-formal learning.

Studies awarded for prior learning may be graded.

Recommendations for higher education institutions:

Higher education institutions draw up clear descriptions of the system for the recognition of prior learning and the responsibilities at the different stages of the recognition process. The descriptions are incorporated into the institutional quality assurance system.

The descriptions should include at least the following details:

- documents relevant to credit transfer
- where to apply for the transfer of credits or for a decision on supplementary studies
- the decision-maker(s)
- field-specific criteria for assessment
- the time required for processing an application
- the appeal procedure and relevant documents
- documentation of decisions
- how to enter transferred credits into the higher education institution's electronic database
- how to indicate transferred credits on the degree certificate.

The description of the system is easily accessible to students, academic staff and stakeholders. The recognition system and its principles are presented at least on the institution's web pages and study guide.

Higher education institutions draw up plans for providing student counseling and guidance. Such a plan describes the counselling and guidance available to students, those responsible for its provision and the stages at which it is available. Higher education institutions pay special attention to the use of individual study plans in planning credit transfers and supplementary studies. The aim is to chart each student's learning and the achievement of the learning outcomes set for the higher education degree.

Higher education institutions introduce and develop methods (such as portfolios and skills demonstrations) for students to prove their competence in order to receive credit and/or for their prior learning to be considered in terms of the manner of completing studies or their scope. Higher education institutions may also recognise qualifications or studies based on evidence other than formal documents.

Higher education institutions evaluate the effectiveness of the recognition of prior learning, i.e. the effects of transferred credits and supplementary studies on the curriculum and its development, on the development of students' competence and their individual study plans, as well as on graduation times and transition to working life.

Recommendations to the Ministry of Education:

The Ministry of Education supports activities aiming to develop methods to identify and recognise prior learning and informal and non-formal learning. The outcomes should be applicable at national level and/or in specific fields of education.

The Ministry of Education appoints joint working groups of universities and polytechnics in order to prepare and implement field-specific policies.

Recognition of prior learning at higher education institutions is included as part of their steering by targets and results.

21. Describe legislative and other measures taken by your country to create opportunities for flexible learning paths in higher education.

A regionally covering network on higher education institutions has been created in order to ensure access from all geographical areas in the country. A public student finance scheme has been developed in order to ensure equal possibilities to enter higher education regardless of the student's social or financial background. Affordable student housing is arranged by independent foundations. All higher education leading to a degree is free of charge for students. Special needs of the national linguistic minorities are taken into consideration in student selection and educational provision.

Access into higher education is wide, also from non-traditional paths: vocational secondary education provides eligibility for higher education. The university and polytechnic legislation makes it possible for higher education institutions to admit students without formal qualifications, in case the institution otherwise verifies the student's abilities.

Through a national agreement (JOO-agreement) students can also attend to courses and modules in other universities in Finland. There is also virtual university and virtual polytechnic to give students wider selection of studies than they home institution can offer.

There is open university and open polytechnic that are accessible to all despite their educational background. It is possible to enter to a degree program through the open university.

All the degree programs are based on modular structure.

Joint degrees

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

Establishment and recognition of joint degrees

22. Describe the legislative position on joint degrees in your country.

The higher education legislation concerning university and polytechnic degrees gives a possibility to the Finnish HEIs to establish joint programmes. According to the Government Decree on university degrees, education leading to a higher education degree may also be arranged in international co-operation. Joint programmes are possible and encouraged in all three cycles. It is possible for the Finnish higher education institutions to award joint degree if the program fulfils the criteria set for the Finnish higher education degrees and the quality of the program has been assured.

The percentage of HEIs that have established joint programmes is not available but based on the enquiries received e.g. at the Finnish ENIC/NARIC and the Centre for International Mobility (CIMO), most of the higher education institutions seem to have them. Most of them are second cycle programs, but there are also first cycle programs, especially at polytechnics. There is a growing interest towards creating joint programmes in the 3rd cycle. Finnish universities have also been successful in both participating in and coordinating ERASMUS MUNDUS Master's degrees.

To encourage and contribute to the development of joint programs as well as to assure the quality of joint programmes two documents have been prepared on national level. In 2004 "Development of international joint degrees and double degrees: Recommendation of the Ministry of Education" and in 2005 "Planning and development of joint degrees" prepared jointly by higher education institutions, CIMO, Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council and the National Board of Education/Finnish ENIC/NARIC. The documents have been published on the websites of the Ministry of Education, CIMO and Finnish ENIC/NARIC. Several seminars and workshops on good practice have been arranged and individual advice to higher education institutions is given by both CIMO and the National Board of Education.

HARKITTAVAKSI: OTETAANKO ESIMERKKINÄ MUKAAN The Finnish-Russian Cross-Border University (CBU) is an example of a joint programme which has been planned and is being implemented on a wide basis. The CBU aims to increase and to deepen the educational co-operation between Finnish and Russian universities as well as establish joint Master's degree programmes. CBU is funded by the Finnish government's action programme "Finland, Russia and International Co-operation 2003-2007".

C. Current issues in Higher Education

Higher education and research

23. Describe the relationship between higher education and research in your country - what percentage of research is carried out in HEIs; are any steps being taken to improve the synergy between HE and other research sectors.

Approximately 59,0% of publicly-funded research is being conducted at HEIs (2004).

Approximately 19% of the total funding for research is being conducted at HEIs (2005).

The GDP share of public funding for research in was 1,03% (2004).

The GDP share of the total funding for research was 3,5% (2005).

24. What percentage of doctoral candidates take up research careers; are any measures being taken to increase the number of doctoral candidates taking up research careers?

From all the doctorates 66 % held a research career in 2002. There are plans to increase graduate school activities and to increase international cooperation.

The social dimension

25. Describe any measures being taken in your country to widen access to quality higher education.

A regionally covering network on higher education institutions has been created in order to ensure access from all geographical areas in the country. A public student finance scheme has been developed in order to ensure equal possibilities to enter higher education regardless of the student's social or financial background. Affordable student housing is arranged by independent foundations. All higher education leading to a degree is free of charge for students. Special needs of the national linguistic minorities are taken into consideration in student selection and educational provision.

Access into higher education is wide, also from non-traditional paths: vocational secondary education provides eligibility for higher education. The university and polytechnic legislation makes it possible for higher education institutions to admit students without formal qualifications, in case the institution otherwise verifies the student's abilities.

All full-time students enrolled in degree programs in polytechnics and universities are entitled to the student grant. The student grant is based on three elements: student grant, student loan and housing supplement. The basic student grant is 259 euros monthly. In 2005 the maximum sum of state-guaranteed loan for higher education raised from 200 euros to 300 euros a month and the maximum loan for students studying abroad from 360 to 440 euros per month. A tax relief can be granted for those who graduate in the normative time specified in legislation. The deduction would be 30% of the part of the loan exceeding 2500 euros. Housing supplement covers 80 percent of the housing expenses. The limit of housing expenses was raised 1.11.2005 to 252 euros.

26. Describe any measures to help students complete their studies without obstacles related to their social or economic background.

The Finnish universities and polytechnics have started using personal study plans (PSPs) for study counselling in all fields of education by 2006. PSP means personal study planning as an ongoing process during the studies. In PSP the student can accumulate various study planning documents for him/herself or for study counselling. The PSP is therefore closely connected to the curricula and the degree structures.

Evaluation of new degree structures and curricula has started 2006 in the university sector and continues stable. The special focus will be in learning outcomes and accumulation of students knowledge. Study paths, credit accumulation, graduation time and students study processes are also being monitored. The ministry of education supports these activities by funding 2007-2009 national project W5W.2, which gives tools and guidance for development oriented evaluation procedures.

In the national project concerning polytechnic sector good steering models, supporting practices, research information production and its applications are developed. Special attention is been paid to correspondence between education and working life, developing steering systems of good quality and improving tutorial activities in polytechnics.

Mobility

27. Describe any measures being taken to remove obstacles to student mobility and promote the full use of mobility programmes.

The national Development Plan for education and research includes targets for international student mobility. National statistics on student mobility are collected regularly and the trends analyzed each year. Mobility issues are a part of the annual result-oriented negotiations between the Ministry and the leadership of the HEIs.

Inward student mobility:

- The number of incoming exchange students is growing rapidly. E.g. in the Erasmus programme almost 6000 students came to Finland in 2005/06, whereas the number of Finnish Erasmus students was below 4000. Besides EU programmes, there are a number of Nordic and national student mobility programmes available, the number of which is growing.
- a large number of study programmes is available in English
- the number of foreign degree students is still rather modest. Bologna compatible Master courses taught in English are introduced by several universities to remedy the situation.
- entrance examinations are being organised abroad, e.g. in some Asian countries
- there are joint efforts to market Finnish higher education abroad

The quality of the higher education available is the corner stone when increasing student numbers.

Outward student mobility

- emphasis is put on guidance and counselling of HE students and pupils interested in HE studies
- all HEIs offer a wide range of exchange possibilities
- for degree students, there are information sources (e.g. CIMO and the regional labour administration centres) as well as funding available (national study aid system)
- more attention and funding has been put on recognised work placements abroad
- several studies dealing with mobility have been published in recent years

28. Are portable loans and grants available in your country? If not, describe any measures being taken to increase the portability of grants and loans.

The Finnish student grant and student loan are both fully portable. (further information on the national study aid system is available through www.kela.fi)

29. Describe any measures being taken to remove obstacles to staff mobility and promote the full use of mobility programmes.

A study on staff mobility is being carried out by CIMO (Centre for International Mobility). CIMO makes a number of monitoring visits to HEIs annually. Staff mobility is one of the topics for the visits. Best practices are identified & disseminated, problems identified and discussed.

The share of outgoing Finnish exchange teachers is 5,5% of the total number of teachers whereas the European average is only 1,5%. The number of exchange teachers is 1 014 in 2005/2006.

A follow-up evaluation concerning teaching in foreign languages was made and published by FINHEEC in 2005.

A new funding scheme has been developed to attract foreign top researchers and scholars to Finnish HEIs.

The attractiveness of the EHEA and cooperation with other parts of the world

30. Describe any measures being taken in your country to promote the attractiveness of the EHEA.

Several mobility programmes have been started in recent years. They include FIRST (Finnish-Russian Student Exchange Programme); North-South-South (a network programme for mobility between Finland and certain developing countries); Asia programmes through the HEI Asia networks (and a CIMO pilot programme for China, India and Korea as of 2007), a new fellowship programme for Indian post-graduates as of 2007; n2n (north-to-north) mobility programme between HEIs in the Arctic area.

Finnish HEIs have been particularly active in Erasmus Mundus Action 4 projects, the aim of which is to promote European HE in the world.

Future challenges

31. Give an indication of the main challenges ahead for your country.

Further internationalisation of Finnish higher education continues to be one of the main challenges in the future. Special attention has to be paid to the competitiveness of the Finnish HEIs. Financing and owner-policy issues as well as intensifying cooperation between HEIs are central national development targets. Above-mentioned subjects are linked to the overall development requirements of modernisation and structural development of Finnish HEIs.

Completed National Reports should be sent to the Bologna Secretariat by email no later than Friday 15 December 2006.

Please remember to attach a copy of your national action plan to improve the quality of the process associated with the recognition of foreign qualifications.

Bologna Secretariat
May 2006

Annex 1

The main body of the Finnish action plan is based on the recommendations of the working group on the recognition of prior learning chaired by the Ministry of Education. Finland's approach has been to improve the process concerning the recognition of all prior learning, not only that of foreign qualifications. Part of the recommendations of the working group may already have been implemented at higher education institutions, especially when discussing the recognition of foreign qualifications. Nevertheless, the recommendation for higher education institutions is to streamline the possible different procedures and include all recognition activities in one procedure. The presentation of the recommendations is followed by answers to specific questions of the Bologna Follow-up Group are given.

This action plan was prepared by the national Bologna promotion group. The group consists of representatives of the Ministry of Education, higher education institutions, the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council, the National Board of Education/Finnish ENIC/NARIC, the Centre for International Mobility (CIMO) and the national student organizations. The group is chaired by the Ministry of Education. This plan was also approved by a specific working group set for the recognition of prior learning.

The description of the current situation as well as plans for improving the recognition system are based on national legislation, experience gathered in the above mentioned organizations, feedback from seminars organized on the topic, a special questionnaire sent to higher education institutions and the work of the national working group on the recognition of prior learning in higher education institutions.

National working group on the recognition of prior learning in higher education institutions

The work of the national working group on the recognition of prior learning in higher education institutions has been helpful in preparing this action plan. The members of the working group represent higher education institutions, the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council, the ENIC/NARIC and the national student organizations. The group is chaired by the Ministry of Education. The working group was set in March 2006 and it will finalize its work in December 2006. The tasks of the working group are the following: to chart the practices that higher education institutions apply in the recognition of prior studies and prior learning; evaluate the functionality of the current procedures and processes and their alignment with European policy and best practice; identify and promote national and international best practices in the recognition of prior learning and present recommendations for common principles and processes of recognition in the recognition of prior studies and prior learning at higher education institutions.

Improving the recognition system in Finland will include the implementation of the recommendations of the national working group presented below:

Recommendations of the national working group on the recognition of prior learning in higher education institutions

The national working group has given preliminary recommendations for the recognition of prior learning in higher education institutions. These include recommendations for a recognition system, for the common principles of the recognition system, for the good practices of higher education institutions, and recommendations to the Ministry of Education on promoting the recognition of prior learning at higher education institutions. Special emphasis will be on recognition and validation of prior informal and non-formal learning.

Recommendations for a recognition system:

Each higher education institution devises a consistent, reliable and transparent system for the identification and recognition of prior learning. The system should also cover identification and recognition of informal and non-formal learning.

The recognition system is applied to education leading to a higher education degree. The system is applied to the recognition of competence acquired abroad and it may be applied to other types of education provided by higher education institutions.

Higher education institutions are only obliged to assess and recognise the competence of their own students and applicants.

Prior learning is assessed at two stages: when assessing an applicant's eligibility for higher education and when assessing the prior learning of a student admitted to the institution.

The recognition system and methods of assessing competence will be developed in co-operation with key stakeholders, taking into account the skills needs of working life and adequate quality assurance.

Recommendations for the common principles of the recognition system:

The system is based on the students' right to apply for the recognition of their prior learning. Applying for recognition is voluntary for students and the process is initiated by an individual student. Students bear the burden of proving their competence and are primarily responsible for submitting sufficient information. Students are entitled to appeal against decisions issued to them. Higher education institutions must justify their decisions.

The recognition system and the assessment criteria determined by a higher education institution are based on a competence-based approach. Special emphasis is being paid to the learning outcomes. As part of their curricula, higher education institutions define the learning outcomes of degrees and parts thereof against which the competence attested by a student will be measured. Assessment is based on competence, not on where or how it was acquired. In their assessment, higher education institutions take into account the European qualifications frameworks that are currently being prepared.

Higher education institutions facilitate student mobility within and between institutions, in particular when moving from one cycle to the next. An applicable first-cycle degree provides eligibility to apply for a second-cycle degree programme. Higher education institutions determine in advance the education that provides the competence required to complete a second-cycle degree. Supplementary studies may only be required where a student lacks the competence relevant to the progress of second-cycle studies and to the achievement of the learning outcomes.

Decisions made within the framework of the recognition system are based on expertise and reliable documentation. Higher education institutions are responsible for the quality assurance of the recognition of prior learning.

Recognised studies are equal to studies taken at the student's own institution.

Assessment relating to the recognition of studies and competence, and determining any possible supplementary studies is consistent and based on policies determined by the higher education institution. Students are treated in a consistent, equal and predictable manner.

Recognition of complete qualifications is based on qualification certificates awarded by officially recognised education institutions.

Higher education institutions decide on the expiration of completed credits. A fully completed qualification does not expire.

The higher education institution should determine the proportion of degree studies that must be completed at the degree-awarding institution. Degrees may not be completed in full through informal and non-formal learning.

Studies awarded for prior learning may be graded.

Recommendations for higher education institutions:

Higher education institutions draw up clear descriptions of the system for the recognition of prior learning and the responsibilities at the different stages of the recognition process. The descriptions are incorporated into the institutional quality assurance system.

The descriptions should include at least the following details:

- documents relevant to credit transfer
- where to apply for the transfer of credits or for a decision on supplementary studies
- the decision-maker(s)
- field-specific criteria for assessment
- the time required for processing an application
- the appeal procedure and relevant documents
- documentation of decisions
- how to enter transferred credits into the higher education institution's electronic database
- how to indicate transferred credits on the degree certificate.

The description of the system is easily accessible to students, academic staff and stakeholders. The recognition system and its principles are presented at least on the institution's web pages and study guide.

Higher education institutions draw up plans for providing student counseling and guidance. Such a plan describes the counselling and guidance available to students, those responsible for its provision and the stages at which it is available. Higher education institutions pay special attention to the use of individual study plans in planning credit transfers and supplementary studies. The aim is to chart each student's learning and the achievement of the learning outcomes set for the higher education degree.

Higher education institutions introduce and develop methods (such as portfolios and skills demonstrations) for students to prove their competence in order to receive credit and/or for their prior learning to be considered in terms of the manner of completing studies or their scope. Higher education institutions may also recognise qualifications or studies based on evidence other than formal documents. Special attention must be paid to the treatment of refugees in situations where documents have been lost or destroyed.

Higher education institutions develop their knowledge base in terms of credit transfers and the recognition of prior learning.

Higher education institutions evaluate the effectiveness of the recognition of prior learning, i.e. the effects of transferred credits and supplementary studies on the curriculum and its development, on the development of students' competence and their individual study plans, as well as on graduation times and transition to working life.

Recommendations to the Ministry of Education:

The Ministry of Education supports activities aiming to develop methods to identify and recognise prior learning and informal and non-formal learning. The outcomes should be applicable at national level and/or in specific fields of education.

The Ministry of Education appoints joint working groups of universities and polytechnics in order to prepare and implement field-specific policies.

Recognition of prior learning at higher education institutions is included as part of their steering by targets and results.

Below is described the recognition system in Finland and further actions not included in the recommendation of the working group as requested by the Bologna follow-up group.

1. Legislation

1.1 Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention

Finland has ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention and it has come into force on March 1, 2004.

1.2 Review of national legislation relevant to recognition

The compliance between the Lisbon Recognition Convention and national legislation received thorough review before the Lisbon Recognition Convention entered into force. The Government proposal (HE 155/2002) includes a detailed explanation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. This document covers all the Articles of the Lisbon Convention, explaining how and in which parts of the national legislation the Articles have been implemented.

Implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its enforcement is stated in the Law 877/2002. The Articles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention have been implemented in the relevant parts of the higher education legislation, e.g. in the Universities' Act, Government Decree on University Degrees, and the Polytechnics' Act and Polytechnic Decree. The higher education legislation covers e.g. the competence of authorities, access and admission issues and the applicant's right to appeal. It also determines that access to higher education in the country of origin gives access also in Finland. Some Articles of the Lisbon Convention concerning e.g. the administration and information given to applicants have been implemented in the Administrative Procedure Act (434/2003) covering the administrative practice and procedures in Finland. The basic principles of equality are covered by the Constitution of Finland and it has been further specified in the higher education legislation.

The documents are available on the internet at www.finlex.fi in Finnish and Swedish. The Finnish Constitution, part of the higher education legislation (e.g. Universities Act <http://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1997/en19970645.pdf> and Government Decree on University Degrees <http://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2004/en20040794.pdf>) as well as the Administrative Procedure Act are also available in English. Information in English concerning legislation is also available from the Ministry of Education and the National Board of Education/ENIC/NARIC.

1.3 Bilateral or regional recognition agreements

There are no bilateral or regional agreements on the recognition of qualifications.

2. Recognition practice

2.1 Criteria and procedures and (2.3.) overview of institutional practice

In Finland, higher education institutions are the competent decision-making bodies in student admissions. The ENIC/NARIC organizes training for the higher education institutions e.g. in matters related to foreign education systems, gives advice and provides an expert opinion as well as spreads information on good practice. The Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment for Foreign Qualifications and Periods of Study has been discussed in several seminars.

In charting the recognition practices in higher education institutions, the work of the national working group (mentioned in the introduction) on the recognition of prior learning in higher education institutions has been very important. The working group has organized seminars and sent out questionnaires to higher education institutions concerning their criteria and practice. The national student unions have made their own enquiries.

Based on the information received from the different sources as well as the experience of the stakeholders in the working group, the measures to improve the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention will be planned on the basis of the recommendations of the working group. Generally, the situation seems to be rather good. Students and higher education institutions have e.g. expressed that personal study plans have improved the situation when it comes to the recognition of previous studies.

The national working group has made recommendations for common national principles for the recognition of prior learning to be applied in all higher education institutions. These guidelines will be applicable for the most part also in recognizing foreign education or learning.

All Finnish polytechnics will participate in the new joint application system for Bachelor degree programs conducted in English. The system will be launched in January 2007, and it will streamline and improve the process. The system is based on an online application that can be accessed at www.admissions.fi. By using one application form, an applicant can apply for up to four different degree programs conducted in English at 25 polytechnics all over Finland. The application date to all the polytechnics' Bachelor degree programs conducted in English is now the same. Moreover, all the polytechnics will apply the same admission criteria. The website contains all the necessary information about the application procedure and gives useful information about studying and living in Finland. In addition, centralizing services at the polytechnics' admissions offices provides the applicant with a better guidance service. The new system will be monitored and after the first round improvements, if necessary, will be made.

The time required to process recognition applications has not emerged as a problem in Finland. Student admissions take place in a certain schedule and this means that questions concerning recognition are solved in due course. With the joint application system, the time for processing applications at Finnish polytechnics will be streamlined.

2.2 Joint Degrees

The higher education legislation in Finland (University and Polytechnic Decrees) that came into force in 2005 gives the Finnish higher education institutions the possibility to establish joint programs. Joint programs are possible and encouraged in all three cycles. There is a growing interest towards creating joint programs at the third cycle level.

The percentage of higher education institutions that have established joint programs has not been calculated, but all the joint programs have been planned using the documents "Recommendation on Joint Degrees" (Ministry of Education) and "Planning and development of joint degrees". These documents, prepared in 2004 and 2005 respectively, aim to encourage and contribute to the development of joint programs.

Finnish higher education institutions participate actively in the Erasmus Mundus programme. The Centre for International Mobility (CIMO) is the national Erasmus Mundus information point and supports the higher education institutions by providing information and training. In spring 2007, the ENIC/NARIC will be organizing a seminar on the higher education systems of China and India, two important countries from where Finnish higher education institutions recruit students into their joint degree and other international programs.

The ENIC/NARIC will develop instructions on how to award Diploma Supplements for joint programs and it will publish them on its website. Furthermore, the ENIC/NARIC aims to support higher education institutions in their work with developing joint degree programs by e.g. organizing training and national and international seminars. For 2007, a Nordic seminar on joint degrees has been planned in co-operation with the Ministry of Education, ENIC/NARIC and CIMO.

Recognition of Joint Degrees

The National Board of Education (ENIC/NARIC), which is the competent authority in Finland in recognizing the eligibility that foreign qualifications give for civil service posts and positions and some regulated professions in Finland, can issue a decision on the recognition of a qualification if the qualification in question is an official qualification of higher education in the country it was completed in, and the higher education institution is legally recognised by the authorities of the country. If the joint degree is an official higher education degree in any of the countries participating in the joint degree program, the joint degree can be recognised by the National Board of Education.

The non-regulated labor market employers decide independently whether the qualifications of applicants meet the requirements of the employer. Thus, there is no obstacle to recognizing joint degrees, including joint degrees that are not a part of the official higher education system in any country.

Also higher education institutions make their recognition decisions independently. Higher education institutions have the right, as stipulated in higher education legislation, to grant persons access to studies if the higher education institution finds them to have the necessary background education, the skills and knowledge to pursue the higher education studies. Higher education institutions also have the right to recognize studies completed elsewhere, as decided by the higher education

institution. Thus for academic recognition, there are no obstacles for the recognition of joint degrees. The ENIC/NARIC has recommended the use of the principles of the Recommendation on the recognition of joint degrees.

2.4 Transparency tools for recognition

ECTS

Finnish higher education studies have been measured in credits since the 1970s. Therefore, the adoption of the ECTS system as a tool in student exchange and international co-operation was quite easy. The Finnish higher education institutions have been using the ECTS system since it was first introduced in the EU mobility programmes. With the new higher education legislation that came into force in 2005, a new credit system which is fully compatible with the ECTS system was adopted. The workload for one study year is 60 credits which equals to approximately 1600 hours of student work.

Diploma Supplement

Finnish higher education institutions adopted the Diploma Supplement early. Already in 1995 the Finnish higher education legislation required that higher education institutions issue the Diploma Supplement on request to their graduates. With the new higher education legislation that came into force in 2005, the higher education institutions are required to issue their students a Diploma Supplement automatically. All graduates in Finland receive the Diploma Supplement automatically, free of charge, and in a widely spoke European language (English). The Diploma Supplements correspond to the EU/Council of Europe/UNESCO format.

The ENIC/NARIC provides the higher education institutions support and training in their quality and development work with the Diploma Supplement. The ENIC/NARIC provides instructions in Finnish and Swedish, and recommendations and examples of how to express certain key elements in English. The ENIC/NARIC co-ordinates updating the Diploma Supplement's point 8 "Information on the National Higher Education System", which is then approved by the Ministry of Education.

The challenge for the year 2007 is to develop support material and instructions to cover joint degrees. The higher education qualifications framework will also be taken into account.

Other transparency tools

The Finnish EUROPASS Centre, which is located in the same unit as the ENIC/NARIC and the National Reference Point for vocational education (NRP), has made all EUROPASS documents available to the public. The EUROPASS CV and the Europass Language Passport can be downloaded from EUROPASS Centre's website. Vocational education institutions and higher education institutions are encouraged to adopt the EUROPASS Mobility document.

There has been extensive information and promotion campaigning to make EUROPASS and its transparency documents better known to the education institutions, guidance and counselling services, the labour market and the public at large. More promotion and information campaigns, projects and materials are planned for the coming years.

2.5 The assessment of borderless/transnational education

The non-regulated labor market employers decide independently whether the qualifications meet the requirements of the employer. Thus, there is no obstacle to recognizing such degrees.

Also higher education institutions make their recognition decisions independently. Higher education institutions have the right, as stipulated in higher education legislation, to grant persons access to studies if the higher education institution finds them to have the necessary background education and the skills and knowledge to pursue the higher education studies. Higher education institutions also have the right to recognize studies completed elsewhere, as decided by the higher education institution. Thus for academic recognition, there is no obstacle as such. In practice most higher education institutions seem to require qualifications which can be identified as qualifications in a certain national system.

The Ministry of Education has made the UNESCO/OECD guidelines for quality provision of cross border higher education available to the higher education institutions and recommends that higher education institutions implement the principles of these guidelines.

However, the situation is different for the regulated labor market and professional recognition, *de jure recognition*. The National Board of Education, which is the competent authority in Finland in recognizing the eligibility that foreign qualifications give for civil service posts and positions and some regulated professions in Finland, can issue a decision of recognition only on qualifications, and if the qualification in question is an official qualification of higher education in the country it was completed in, and the higher education institution is legally recognized by the authorities of the country.

3. Information provision

3.1 Provision of information on recognition

Recognition of qualifications

The web pages of the ENIC/NARIC office (www.oph.fi/info/recognition) contain a section on the recognition and international comparability of qualifications in three languages, viz. Finnish, Swedish and English. The web pages also provide links to relevant sources of further information made available and updated by the Ministry of Education, Eurydice, other sections of the National Board of Education and the ENIC/NARIC network.

The section includes information on the various purposes of recognizing foreign qualifications in Finland and the appropriate steps to take in each case. Information is given on the *de jure* professional recognition of qualifications, the *de facto* recognition of qualifications in the private sector and the academic recognition of qualifications.

Regarding academic recognition, the web pages describe academic recognition of qualifications, give information on good practices and provide further links to the related international agreements, for example. The pages contain a list of Finnish higher education institutions with links to their own web pages. On their own web pages the higher education institutions provide further information on their admission processes and procedures for applying to study and access to further study.

The ENIC/NARIC has a centralized e-mail service recognition@oph.fi which is monitored during office hours by two employees. Telephone queries are taken during all office hours and individual consultation is arranged at request.

Education systems and qualifications

The national ENIC/NARIC website contains an independent section on the Finnish education system and qualifications. The section on Finnish higher education has information on the Finnish qualifications that give eligibility to higher education in Finland, on the higher education system and qualifications as well as on the structure of the different kinds of degrees. This section also includes a list of recognized Finnish higher education institutions and has links to their own websites.

The ENIC/NARIC website provides information on foreign education systems and qualifications. In line with the subsidiarity principle of information provision, policy has been to employ the information sources that are provided and updated by the national authorities of the respective countries.

The office has produced publications on foreign education systems. These include the Higher education in the People's Republic of China; Education systems in Iran, Iraq, the former Yugoslavia and Somalia; Teacher education in Russia; Education system of the United States; Education system of the Soviet Union and Education system of Russia.

The ENIC/NARIC office provides training to its stakeholder groups, e.g. the higher education institutions and employment authorities. Training is provided in the form of training sessions and lectures in conjunction with national seminars and as independent seminars. Training events for officials dealing with immigrants have been arranged in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour. Training for the needs of admissions personnel at higher education institutions has included the general principles of academic recognition, issues related to the Lisbon Recognition Convention, good practices, accreditation and recognition of prior learning, joint degrees as well as other topical issues related to the recognition of qualifications and international developments. Seminars have also been given on topics such as the recognition of higher education degrees from the Baltic countries, Russia, Soviet Union, Ukraine, Belorussia and Moldova, and their education systems and the recognition of teacher's qualifications completed abroad. The ENIC/NARIC office will continue organizing training in the future. In spring 2007, training will be provided on the education systems and qualifications of China and India, for example.

The ENIC/NARIC is also active in reaching to the general public. Members of staff have participated with the media by giving interviews and writing articles in papers on issues concerning the recognition of qualifications and mobility, for example. Members of staff are also active in discourse with the professional audience and have submitted papers to professional journals on topics involving the recognition of qualifications.

The ENIC/NARIC office will continue work on developing information provision on its web pages on the basis of the results given by the customer survey that the office conducted during 2005 - 2006. The survey's target group was selected by random sample from persons who had applied for a recognition decision from the National Board of Education between 1998 and 2004. The aim of the survey was to measure how satisfied the applicants were with the application service process and to what extent the decision was perceived to influence their situation. The survey was carried out by the National Board of Education Evaluation unit and the results were published in fall 2006. The survey will be repeated regularly.

On the basis of the survey, the ENIC/NARIC office will pay special attention in developing its web pages to better accommodating the pages' terminology and style to the needs of its various target groups. It will also be taken into consideration whether to include more information on the most common types of recognition decisions issued by the National Board of Education. The

ENIC/NARIC will continue to provide up-to-date information on its web pages in Finnish, Swedish and English.

The ENIC/NARIC office will continue cooperation and network building with stakeholders and cooperation partners for regular exchange of information. The office has commenced small-scale, regular meetings with representatives of higher education institutions, and seeks to strengthen and pursue this role further. The joint online application system of Finnish polytechnics to their English language Bachelor programs will be further supported and developed in cooperation with the system administrator.

3.2 Information package for applicants

Information package for applicants provided by higher education institutions

The web pages of the Ministry of Education, the ENIC/NARIC, and the Centre for International Mobility (CIMO) contain a list of Finnish higher education institutions with links to their own web pages.

The web pages of the higher education institutions provide information on the admission process and procedure for applying to study and access to further study in the higher education institutions. The website of the joint online application system of Finnish polytechnics to their English-language Bachelor programs (www.admissions.fi) also provides information to applicants in a concerted manner.

Information package for applicants provided by the ENIC/NARIC office

Applicants wishing to apply for a decision of recognition for *de jure* purposes of professional recognition from the National Board of Education are provided complete instructions for applying before submitting an application. Information is available on the web as well as in guide booklets and brochures provided by the ENIC-NARIC office and includes, e.g. the required documentation, requirements concerning the authentication and translations of documents, the average handling times of applications and fees.

The information includes descriptions of the different types of professional recognition decisions available and information on the criteria that is applied, as well as the application procedure that is followed in each type of case. For example, teachers, social workers and persons practicing law will all require certain types of decisions of recognition and are provided information that is targeted towards their needs. Information is also provided on the option to the recognition decision, the advisory statement. The information that is provided to applicants before they apply also includes information on the legal status of the recognition decision and advisory statement.

Once the application has been received by the National Board of Education, the applicant is contacted if the application is not complete. Furthermore, the applicant is always contacted if the applicant may not be granted recognition according with the applicant's request.

Information on past practice in the recognition of similar cases is given and explained to applicants at their request; it is always noted that each application is assessed on an individual basis. The office has an inventory of all applications and their outcomes in a database for processing applications.

4. Structures

4.1 National information centre ENIC/NARIC

The formal status and legal competence of the centre

The National Board of Education (NBE) is a central government agency and its status and duties are defined in the National Board of Education Act (182/1991) and Decree (183/1991). The responsibilities of the national ENIC/NARIC, the national contact point for the European Union general system for professional recognition, and the national contact point for EUROPASS and the National Reference Point (NRP) networks have been assigned to the NBE through the Ministry of Education's decisions. According to the Finnish legislation, the NBE acts as the national information center (ENIC/NARIC) for the recognition of qualifications referred to in the Lisbon Recognition Convention (article IX.2).

The National Board of Education is the competent authority in professional recognition of higher education qualifications completed abroad (*de jure* professional recognition). The NBE issues legally binding decisions on the eligibility that foreign qualifications confer to regulated professions in Finland. The decision making is based on two different acts: the Act (531/1986) and Decree (519/1997) on the Competence for Civil Service Posts Conferred by Higher Education Studies Taken Abroad; and the Act (1597/1992) and Decree (520/1997) on the Implementation of the General System of Recognition of Professional Qualifications of EC Citizens. The largest group of applicants are teachers, the next largest are lawyers and social workers.

In academic recognition, the ENIC/NARIC has an advisory role. Decisions on academic recognition are made by the higher education institutions. The ENIC/NARIC provides information, advice, expert statements, and organizes training to higher education institutions as described above. The training is based on input and feed-back from the higher education institutions. To improve its services and in order to ease question-making and answering, there are plans to develop a more structured form for the information given to the higher education institutions.

A user survey is being planned in order to gain feed-back from the higher education institutions on their satisfaction with the office's services.

Staff, budget and capacity building in the terms of expertise and service to the public

The activities of the National Board of Education are mainly funded from the national government budget. The NBE may organize training and consultation on a fee-paying basis.

The ENIC/NARIC has nine full-time staff members. The office staff is highly qualified. Two experts have doctoral degrees; one expert will gain a doctoral degree in the near future. The other experts have second cycle university degrees. All the experts have international experience in studying and/or working abroad.

Each member of staff draws up a yearly personal development plan. The employer encourages taking part in in-service training and assumes the expenses up to certain amount. There are many different alternatives for capacity building. The staff has taken part in courses (by e.g. EAIE, NAFSA), international conferences and exchange periods in other ENIC/NARIC offices. Courses in foreign languages, information technology and law have also helped to build the office's expertise.

In fall 2005, the ENIC/NARIC office conducted a customer survey to learn about the areas of the recognition process that needed improvement. The results of the survey will be viewed from the point of planning capacity building.

Networking and cooperation at national level and internationally

At the national level, the ENIC/NARIC office seeks to establish networks of stakeholders and cooperation partners for the regular exchange of information. The stakeholders and cooperation partners include the Ministry of Education and other ministries such as the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Labour; the higher education institutions (universities and polytechnics); the Centre for International Mobility (CIMO); other competent authorities for recognition of foreign degrees; the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC); student organizations (SYL, the National Union of Students in Finland and SAMOK, the National Union of Finnish Polytechnic Students); the Trade Union of Education in Finland (representing teachers); SOSNET, the Finnish National University Network for Social Work (representing social sector professionals); immigration authorities and organizations; the employment services; Statistics Finland, for example.

At the international level, the National Board of Education represents Finland in the ENIC and NARIC networks. The members of the office participate actively in ENIC/NARIC activities. Experts from Finnish ENIC/NARIC have participated in short and long-term projects as trainers for the ENIC/NARIC officials in other countries, for example. The Finnish EUROPASS Centre is located in the same unit as the Finnish ENIC/NARIC and National Reference Point (NRP) for vocational education. The Finnish EUROPASS Centre actively participates in the networking activities of EUROPASS Centres and, for example, takes part into the technical working group, chaired by the European Commission, for the development of the EUROPASS Mobility.

There has been strengthened cooperation between the Nordic ENIC/NARIC offices since 2002. A Nordic project funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers has been on-going since 2003. Under the project, there have been several subprojects, e.g. "Higher education structures and recognition problems", "Teacher recognition", "Deviations from the 3+2 degree structure and recognition issues", and "Recognition standards". As part of the project, all the Nordic ENIC/NARIC offices have been evaluated. In the evaluation, each office first prepared a self-study protocol and was then visited by an external evaluation team. The Finnish office was evaluated in 2004. The project will come to an end in 2007, but continuation has been applied for from the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Networking and cooperation within academic recognition at both the national and international level will be continued.

4.2 Cooperation recognition/quality assurance bodies

There are many existing forms of co-operation between FINHEEC (Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council) and the ENIC/NARIC. The organisations meet at least biannually to discuss common topics (e.g. the Diploma Supplement, qualification frameworks, learning outcomes, joint degrees and national audits) and the exchange of information is active. Both organisations follow each others' activities and participate in each others' seminars. In addition to this, representatives of both bodies participate in the same national committees and processes (e.g. *ad hoc* committees of the Ministry of Education, the group of the national Bologna promoters, the working group on the recognition of prior learning).

In Finland, the external quality assurance of higher education is organised in the form of institutional audits of the quality assurance systems. Audits have been performed by FINHEEC since late 2005. There is no direct link in Finland between the tasks of FINHEEC and the recognition of national qualifications. The ENIC/NARIC and FINHEEC discuss the effects of qualification frameworks and the identification of learning outcomes on the recognition of foreign qualifications.

