

REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR RECOGNITION

1. Legislation

1.1 Lisbon Recognition Convention

a. Plan and timetable for ratification if not yet accomplished

Republic of Lithuania has joined the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region (hereinafter, the Lisbon Convention). The Lisbon Convention was signed on 11 April 1997, was ratified on 15 October 1998, letters of ratification were deposited on 17 December 1998, it came into effect on 1 February 1999.

A free access to the text of the Lisbon Convention is available on the web-site of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania:

http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter2/dokpaieska.showdoc_1?p_id=69468

1.2 Review of national legislation relevant to recognition

a. The timetable and organization of the review of national legislation (including secondary legislation)

Regulations on the Assessment and Academic Recognition of Foreign Qualifications Giving Access to Higher Education and Higher Education Qualifications approved by Resolution No.60 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania of 21 January 2005 (hereinafter, Regulations on the Assessment and Recognition) identify institutions authorized to assess and recognize foreign qualifications, possible decisions concerning foreign qualifications, giving access to higher education, and concerning the assessment of higher education qualifications, provide for a possibility to seek recognition of a qualification through supplementary courses or qualifying examinations, determine the procedures of appeals.

The assessment of foreign qualifications concerning higher education is regulated by the *Rules for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications Giving Access to Higher Education* approved by the order No 1-24 of the director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereinafter, the Centre). These rules establish procedures and stages¹ for the assessment of qualifications, determine the substantial difference and specify concrete requirements for qualifications obtained in some foreign countries (i.e. the countries from which the majority of applicants arrive). These rules are intended to be regularly amended with respect to the practical aspects of the assessment of qualifications obtained in some concrete foreign countries, taking into account the problems emerging in the process of the assessment.

Those applicants, in whose qualifications concerning higher education a substantial difference in the duration of studies has been established during the assessment procedure, have a possibility to attend supplementary courses, after completion of which such qualifications are recognized. The procedure of the organization of supplementary courses is regulated by the *Description of the Procedure of the Organization of Supplementary Courses for Persons Seeking Recognition of Foreign Qualifications Giving Access to Higher Education in Lithuania* approved by the Order No ISAK-1046 of the Minister of Education and Science of 7 June 2005.

The Centre, observing Regulations on the Assessment and Recognition, organizes qualifying examinations for applicants whose foreign higher education qualifications have been assessed conditionally. A decision to assess a qualification conditionally is especially frequent when qualifications have been obtained combining consecutive studies and non-formal education. A qualifying examination taken by an applicant gives one a possibility to validate a part of non-formal education in the Republic of Lithuania. The procedure for taking a qualifying examination and

¹ In compliance with Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications, 2001

programmes have been approved by the order of the director of the Centre.

b. Steps envisaged as a result of the review, e.g. as regards amending national legislation where needed and an indicative timetable for such amendments

The main concepts of the Lisbon Convention and subsidiary documents are consistently transferred into the national legislation.

At the end of 2007, the Centre is going to prepare the rules for the assessment of foreign higher education qualifications. Those rules will give a detail procedure and stages of the assessment of foreign qualifications, the substantial difference will be identified and determined building on quantitative and (or) qualitative criteria, probable decisions concerning the assessment of a qualification, after some substantial difference or a group of them is identified, will be defined. This legal act is being prepared combining the main concepts of the Lisbon Convention and subsidiary documents with the existing practice of the assessment of qualifications.

c. When and how the outcomes of this review will be published

Majority of legal acts valid in the Republic of Lithuania, including amendments to them and new wordings, are given free access on the official web-site of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania: <http://www.lrs.lt/>. The information on recognition in Lithuania is periodically updated on the home-page of the Centre.

1.3 Bilateral or regional recognition agreements

a. Conformity with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention

The Republic of Lithuania has signed agreements on recognition with the following states:

1. Agreement of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, the Government of the Republic of Estonia and the Government of the Republic of Latvia „On the Recognition of Education in the Higher Education Area of the Baltic States”. This agreement was ratified on 12 December 2000, came into effect on 12 January 2001;
2. Agreement of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania and the Government of the Republic of Poland on Recognition of Documents Giving Access to Higher Education, Periods of Studies, Higher education Qualifications, Scientific Research and Art Degrees. This agreement was approved on 22 August 2005, came into effect on 1 December 2005.

Presently, a draft agreement with the Federal Republic of Germany is under preparation. The main concepts consolidated in the Lisbon Convention are taken into consideration in the preparation of the document.

2. Recognition practice

2.1. Criteria and procedures

a. Overview of the practice of competent recognition authorities in applying the Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and Periods of Study

Academic recognition and assessment of foreign qualifications in the Republic of Lithuania is carried out in accordance with the Regulations on the Assessment and Recognition. Equivalency of obtained foreign qualifications to qualifications acquired in the Republic of Lithuania after completion of study programmes of secondary or higher education is assessed by the Centre which also fulfils functions of the Lithuanian ENIC/NARIC. Academic recognition is carried out by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania (hereinafter, the Ministry), in the light of the assessment of a qualification given by the Centre.

The assessment is made basing on the general assessment principles, criteria and procedures

established in the Lisbon Convention and subsidiary documents (*Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications*).

Qualifications are assessed observing the following principles:

1. Any individual is eligible for applying to the Centre concerning the assessment of a qualification, when the assessment is necessary for study, work or other purposes;
2. The assessment is carried out basing on relevant assessment criteria and within the established for the assessment period;
3. The assessment is carried out basing on the available information concerning a qualification, recommendation and suggestions of other ENIC members, the existing practice concerning the assessment of other similar qualifications in the Centre;
4. In cases, when the conclusion is made that a qualification cannot be assessed as equivalent to the most similar qualification awarded in Lithuania, the Centre weights, whether an alternative assessment can be applied; if the decision is positive – such an assessment is applied;
5. In cases, when a decision is taken to assess a qualification as not equivalent to any qualification awarded in Lithuania or to assess it as equivalent to a respective higher education qualification conditionally, or as equivalent to another qualification than that sought by an applicant, the applicant is informed in writing concerning the steps of the assessment of the qualification, reasons of the decision taken (established substantial differences) and a possibility to make an appeal.

Qualifications are examined according to the following assessment criteria:

1. a status of the provider of a qualification;
2. a status of a completed study (learning) programme;
3. a place of implementation of a study (learning) programme in accordance with the principles laid down in the *Code of Good Practice in International Learning* created by UNESCO and European Council;
4. authenticity of the qualification;
5. requirements for admission to the study (learning) programme;
6. scope (duration) of studies (learning);
7. content of studies (learning);
8. assessment of study (learning) outcomes;
9. rights arising from the qualification in the country of origin;
10. study results.

While assessing qualifications, due attention is given to the practice of the assessment of similar qualifications and a purpose of the assessment of a qualification. Certificates issued by the Centre indicate the purpose (seeking to study, to start work activity, etc.) on which the assessment has been made.

Before starting the assessment procedure, the Centre determines which international legal acts and legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania have to be applied in the assessment of a qualification. The procedure of the assessment of qualifications is followed observing the Lisbon Convention and subsidiary documents (already mentioned above Recommendations) and legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania (Regulations on the Assessment and Recognition).

In accordance with the Regulations on the Assessment and Recognition, after the assessment of a qualification one of the following decisions is made:

1. to assess a qualification as equivalent to a respective qualification awarded in the Republic of Lithuania;
2. to assess a qualification as equivalent to a respective qualification awarded in the Republic of Lithuania on condition that a holder of that qualification fulfils concrete additional requirements (will take a qualifying examination and (or) will complete supplementary courses;

3. to assess a qualification as not equivalent to a respective qualification awarded in the Republic of Lithuania.

If a decision taken does not meet the expectations of an applicant, the applicant is informed orally or in writing what actions should be taken to have one's qualification assessed as equivalent to that recognition of which has been sought.

Recognition is carried out observing international agreements, international and national legal acts concerning higher education, and basing on conclusions of the assessment made. The decision concerning recognition of a foreign qualification is validated by an order of the minister of education and science of the Republic of Lithuania.

An applicant, who disagrees with the decision concerning recognition of a qualification, has the right to submit an appeal to the Appeal Commission on the Assessment and Academic Recognition of Foreign Qualifications Giving Access to Higher Education and Higher Education Qualifications formed by the minister of education and science and functioning in accordance with the regulations approved by the Ministry.

b. Measures to improve implementation

Only a part of measures proposed by the Recommendations, which could help to make the assessment of qualifications and academic recognition more transparent, coherent, fluent, consistent and quicker, has been transferred to legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania.

Paying respect to the practice of the assessment and diversity of qualifications being assessed, it is planned to expand the Regulations on the Assessment and Recognition and to improve the supporting legal acts (rules for the assessment of qualifications) that could give further details on the assessment procedures, could determine the assessment criteria and could even more explicitly and transparently define the cases in which a respective decision concerning the assessment of a qualification could be made.

Applicants are informed orally, in writing, by e-mail or on telephone, i.e. depending on the way in which an applicant applies on the issues of the assessment, on the assessment of a qualification: on the principles, criteria, results. Information on the assessment is available on the home-page of the Centre in the Lithuanian language, a part of it – in the English language. Handouts on the assessment of qualifications or higher education institutions of Lithuania, etc. available at the Centre have been also prepared.

Information on the procedures and criteria of the assessment is delivered in various forms, however, information services are planned to be further developed and improved. Currently, a specimen information package in the Lithuanian language has been prepared that will be handed to anyone submitting an application concerning the assessment and to all individuals interested in the assessment of foreign higher education qualifications. A more detail information on the procedures and criteria of the assessment in the English language should appear on the home-page of the Centre before the beginning of 2008.

c. Overview of the time required to process applications for recognition and measures to improve this time

In accordance with the Regulations on the Assessment and Recognition the assessment must be made not later than within 3 months from the day when all the documents necessary for the assessment have been submitted. In more complicated cases, the period may be extended, but not more that up to 3 months. It is worth mentioning that in simple cases of the assessment of a qualification the procedure lasts one months or even less. Academic recognition is made within a month.

2.2. Joint Degrees

a. Overview of the legal provisions concerning the recognition of joint degrees

The Law on Higher Education of the Republic of Lithuania (2000) and the *General Requirements on Joint Study Programmes* (2006) provide for a possibility of higher education institutions of the Republic of Lithuania to operate study programmes jointly with foreign higher education institutions and set general requirements for preparation and implementation of joint study programmes and award of joint qualification degrees and joint professional qualifications.

The same legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania (Regulations on the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications) are applied to the assessment and recognition of joint degrees as applied to all foreign higher education qualifications. Concepts of the *Recommendations on the Recognition of Joint Degrees* (2004) have not been transferred to the legal acts of Lithuania.

The Centre has not big experience on the assessment of joint degrees yet. During the last several years only a few such qualifications awarded in European higher education institutions have been assessed. Their assessment was made observing the main concepts of the Lisbon Convention and the legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania regulating the assessment and recognition mentioned above. Decisions concerning the assessment of those qualifications were as sought for by the applicants.

b. Amendments to remove legal obstacles or to establish legal provision favouring the recognition of joint degrees

The assessment and recognition of joint qualification degrees and joint professional qualifications is carried out observing the principles and recommendations laid down in the Lisbon Convention, including *Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees* (2004).

Until now, there were no cases when joint qualification degrees and joint professional qualifications were not recognized in the Republic of Lithuania.

c. Beyond legal provision, suggestion of policy measures to ensure the recognition of joint degrees

Information available at the authorities that carry out the assessment and recognition, on joint degrees awarded in foreign states, requirements set for preparation, implementation of joint study programmes and award of foreign joint degrees, is fragmentary and inconsistent, in most cases supplied by providers of joint degrees. Especially, lack of information on the requirements for preparation and implementation of joint study programmes leading to joint degrees is missing.

2.3. Overview of institutional practice

a. whether higher education institutions and other competent recognition authorities comply with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and with national laws

Institutions carrying out the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications

Types of procedures of the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications:

- assessment of a foreign qualification;
- academic recognition of a foreign qualification;
- professional recognition of a foreign qualification.

The assessment of foreign higher education qualifications giving access to higher education and higher education qualifications is centralised, it is carried out by the Centre.

Academic recognition of a foreign qualification is carried out by the Ministry. A decision concerning recognition is taken in the light of the conclusions of the assessment.

Academic recognition of a foreign qualification is indispensable for everybody wishing to study in higher education institutions of the Republic of Lithuania. National legal acts obligate an applicant to apply concerning the assessment and recognition of a qualification to the Centre that, implementing a “single window” principle, submits a certificate with the decision concerning the assessment of a qualification of an applicant and documents submitted by the applicant directly to the Ministry.

National legal acts also oblige higher education institutions of the country admitting to studies individuals who have acquired education abroad, to require them to produce a certificate of the assessment of his/her qualification issued by the Centre and an order of the minister of the Ministry concerning academic recognition of the qualification.

Procedures of the professional recognition of foreign qualifications may differ and depend on whether the professional activity is regulated or not.

Professional recognition in cases when engagement in a not regulated professional activity is sought, is carried out by employers themselves. When carrying out a professional recognition, employers are not obliged to require the applicants to have their qualifications assessed by the Centre. However, the employer has the right to treat the decision concerning the assessment of a qualification as a recommendation, if some doubts appear or there is lack of information on the equivalence of the acquired qualification to qualifications awarded in the Republic of Lithuania, their quality. Every year, a growing interest of employers to require the applicants to have their foreign qualifications assessed can be observed. Most often, the assessment and recognition of a foreign higher education qualification is required from individuals seeking access to the civil service. Seeking to protect themselves from unqualified manpower, more and more often employers include the requirement to hold a respective qualification into the inner legal acts, corporate rules, therefore, foreign qualifications have to be assessed and a comparison must be made whether a qualification assessed is equivalent to the qualification required.

Professional recognition in cases when engagement in a regulated profession is sought, is carried out by competent collegial institutions – commissions formed of specialists of a regulated profession. In most cases, competent institutions carrying out professional recognition have a requirement in their legal acts applied to individuals who have completed studies abroad, to submit a certificate issued by the Centre with a decision concerning the assessment of the acquired qualification.

The assessment of periods of studies completed abroad is carried out by higher education institutions in accordance with the procedure prescribed in their inner regulations and national legal acts.

Control of the compliance of the activity of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education with the Lisbon Convention

The Centre fulfils its functions observing the provisions of the Lisbon Convention. Every year, the Centre prepares activity reports and submits them to the Ministry and makes it public. The Centre, preparing and issuing legal acts regulating its activity, cares that they comply with the valid international and national legal acts (the Lisbon Convention, subsidiary legal acts, the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania, the Law on Higher Education of the Republic of Lithuania, etc.). The Ministry may also assess the compliance of the activity of the Centre with the said legal acts, when clients of the Centre apply to it: applicants not satisfied with the assessment and the decision taken have the right to appeal against it to the Appeal Commission of the Assessment and Academic Recognition of Foreign Qualifications Giving Access to Higher Education and Higher Education Qualifications which functions at the Ministry. If the Commission during consideration of the appeals establishes that actions of the Centre do not comply with the Lisbon Convention and supporting legal acts, returns the application to the Centre for a repeated assessment of a qualification.

Applicants have also the right to report to pre-trial dispute institutions and trials. Complaints of citizens are examined in the trials and in such cases trials judge about legitimacy of the decisions of the Centre and their compliance with the legal acts.

b. what measures could be taken if given institutions or authorities were shown consistently not to apply the Convention and/or relevant national laws

The main measure to ensure that the Centre keeps to the Lisbon Convention is regulation of its

activity (assessment of qualifications) by legal acts, prepared in the light of the Lisbon Convention and subsidiary legal acts (see 1.2.).

In 2007, the Centre intends to prepare for its applicants a detail information package with the view of further implementation of the provisions of the subsidiary act of the Lisbon Convention *Explanatory Memorandum to the Council of Europe and UNESCO Recommendations on Criteria and Procedures of the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications*, and to provide even more exhaustive information on the order, procedures, progress of the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications and their compliance with international and national legal acts. Thus, the process of the assessment will start from the fact that an applicant is already familiar with the information on the procedure of the assessment and recognition of a qualification. In this way, more favourable conditions for an applicant to protect one's rights and vested interest established in international and national legal acts will be created, what will enhance the quality of the functions of the Centre in assessment of qualifications.

2.4 Transparency tools for recognition

a. Plans and timetable for the implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)

In 2007, preparation of the amendments to the Law on Higher Education of the Republic of Lithuania allowing to change the national credit system to ECTS is planned.

b. Plans and timetable for the implementation of the Diploma Supplement

Diploma Supplement was legitimated in the Republic of Lithuania in 2004, students receive it since 2005, in 2006 it replaces a diploma annex. The following legal acts have been approved for the successful functioning of the Diploma Supplement:

1. a resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania has been passed regulating issuance of diploma supplements;
2. rules for filling higher education diploma supplements have been approved by the order of the minister of education and science of the Republic of Lithuania.

In consideration of the recently approved legal acts regulating award of joint degrees, plans to revise the resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania and other legal acts regulating issuance of a higher education diploma and its supplement have been formulated for 2007.

2.5 Borderless/transnational education

a. National and/or institutional policies concerning the assessment of borderless/transnational education

The national policy shows that attempts are made to create favourable conditions for the development of transnational education in the Republic of Lithuania.

National legal acts regulating international, transnational education

The Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania provides for the possibility for schools of foreign and international organizations to establish and organize studies in the Republic of Lithuania. The law determines that educational programmes of foreign states and international organizations may be operated in schools of the Republic of Lithuania and conducted in another than Lithuanian language, however, a written permission of the minister of education and science must be secured for such an activity. Certificates of respective foreign states or organizations are issued upon completion of the said studies.

The Law on Higher Education provides for that a branch of a foreign higher education institution may be established only by a legal entity that has material facilities indispensable to assure the activity of a higher education institution, and that has received a license of the Government in the established procedure to organize higher education studies. Any activity related to higher

education studies that is undertaken without a license of the Government is illegal.

Higher education studies under study programmes of foreign higher education institutions may be operated in Lithuania, if a national assessment (accreditation) system, in accordance to which those higher education institutions or their programmes have been assessed (accredited), is in place in those countries.

The Law on Higher Education establishes that higher education institutions of Lithuania and foreign countries intending to conduct studies in accordance with study programmes of foreign higher education institutions and pursue any other activity related to higher education studies, have to secure a license in the procedure established by the Government for this kind of service. Other legal entities that are authorized of a foreign higher education institution to operate higher education studies in Lithuania and have a mediation letter of the state institution regulating higher education in that foreign country, may also operate higher education studies in accordance with study programmes of foreign higher education institutions and pursue any other activity related to higher education studies, if they have secured a license in the procedure established by the Government to provide these services.

The Resolution of the Government *On the Approval of the Lithuanian Higher Education System Development Plan for 2006-2010* embeds a concept that the improvement of the procedures for preparation, assessment and registration of joint study programmes organized by Lithuanian higher education institutions together with foreign higher education institutions is a prerequisite for assurance of the quality of higher education conforming to the needs of the knowledge society and knowledge-based economy.

Experience of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education in the Field of the Assessment of Transnational education

Experience of the Centre in the assessment of qualifications earned in transnational education

The Division of the Assessment of Qualifications of the Centre assessing foreign qualifications earned in transnational education follows the *Code of Good Practice in the Assessment of Transnational Education*, the Lisbon Convention and subsidiary legal acts.

Endeavours to assure the quality of such transnational education are made. Candidates to operate higher education studies should apply the Study Programme Assessment Division of the Centre concerning the assessment, necessary for issuance of licenses to organize higher education studies and for procedures of accreditation of study programmes.

Experience of the Centre in the assessment the quality of institutions of transnational education and study programmes

In 2006, Bialystok University (Republic of Poland) has applied to establish its branch in Lithuania. A process of the assessment is still going on.

Taking into account a growing need to organize distance higher education, development of information technologies and emerging new markets of foreign providers of higher education, the Centre understands that distance studies will become an inseparable part of higher education studies.

Project on distance studies implemented by the Centre

The national policy clearly states that it is indispensable to create a state methodology for the assessment of learning programmes in extra-mural and distance formal education, to rally a group of competent independent assessors and approve the procedure of the assessment.

Therefore, the Centre is implementing a project "Creation of a Methodology for the Assessment of the Quality of Distance Studies and of a Procedure for its Application" financed from the European Social Fund under the 4th measure "Development of Conditions for Life-Long-Learning" of the 2nd priority "Development of Human Resources" of the Single Programming Document of Lithuania for 2004-2006. The project was launched in the beginning of 2005 and will be fully realised in the beginning of 2007. Results of the project on distance studies are directed to the assessment of the quality of distance studies conducted in Lithuania.

Plans for the improvement of the legal basis in transnational education in 2007

In 2007, the Ministry together with the Centre intends to prepare the following legal acts that will lay the foundations for the development of the system of higher education of Lithuania in 2006-2010, including the development of transnational education.

Among the measures of the first stage for implementation of *the Lithuanian Higher Education System Development Plan for 2006-2010* the following is provided for:

To improve the assessment of the results of the activity of higher education institutions:

- in 2007, the Ministry together with the Centre intend to prepare a draft order of the minister of education and science amending the order of the minister of 2001 approving the rules of the assessment of higher education and research institutions, and also a draft order of the minister of education and science amending the order of the minister of 2002 on registration of study and training programmes and the procedure of completing the register;
- in 2007, the Ministry plans to prepare and approve a programme for internalization of higher education;

Plans for the improvement of the assessment of higher education qualifications in transnational education for 2007

At the end of 2007, the Centre will finalize preparation of *the Rules of the Assessment of Foreign Higher Education Qualifications*. They are being prepared following the provisions of the Regulations on the Assessment and Recognition, the Lisbon Convention, Recommendations, the *Code of Good Practice on the provision of Transnational Education*, Dublin Descriptors.

While assessing foreign higher education qualifications earned in transnational education, as the first thing, specialists of the Centre check whether a qualification and a process of obtaining it have no general substantial differences in comparison with a respective qualification awarded in the Republic of Lithuania.

The rules will define general and concrete substantial differences in the qualifications being assessed applying certain criteria.

All these criteria are especially important in the assessment of a foreign qualification earned in transnational education. The content of these criteria in the assessment of qualifications earned in distance studies should be adjusted with regard to the *Methodology for the Assessment of the Quality of Distance Studies and the Procedures of its Applications* that is currently under preparation.

3. Information provision

3.1 Provision of information on recognition

a. Measures taken or envisaged to improve the provision of information on recognition criteria and procedures and on the national education system

Annually, in the beginning of the year, an international higher education, vocational training and qualification improvement exhibition “Higher Education Studies“ is organized in the Republic of Lithuania. Higher education institutions of Lithuania and foreign countries, in-service training institutions, expert and coordinating educational institutions take part in it. The exhibition is devoted to school-leavers, pupils of upper classes, their parents, and teachers, also to those who are interested in possibilities to study or improve their qualification in the Republic of Lithuania or abroad. The Centre takes an active part in this exhibition every year, produces detail information on issues of the assessment and academic recognitions of foreign higher education qualifications. Simultaneous conferences allow introducing the assessment of foreign qualifications, reports are made. Information on the assessment, assessment criteria and procedures of foreign qualifications concerning higher education and higher education

qualifications during this exhibition and also in the institution itself is delivered orally, handouts and flyers prepared for this purpose are disseminated. Such information is also advertised on the home-page of the Centre: <http://www.skvc.lt/old/wwwskvc/en/enic-naric.htm>

Seeking to improve access to the information concerning the criteria and procedures of the assessment of foreign qualifications, the Centre plans obligatory provision of such information to everybody seeking the assessment of a foreign qualification. For this purpose, every applicant receives an information package together with application forms concerning the assessment of a foreign qualification.

Information on the assessment and recognition on the purpose of studies is annually included into the rules for admission to higher education institutions that are approximated with the Ministry.

b. The timetable envisaged for such measures

It is planned to revise and update information provided by the Centre in the Lithuanian and the English language before the beginning 2008 and group it in accordance with the following selected criteria – the purpose on which the assessment of a foreign qualification is sought (for studies or work) and purposive groups (applicants, seeking the assessment of a foreign qualification, applicants who have obtained qualifications in the Republic of Lithuania and leave for higher education institutions abroad, institutions carrying out academic or professional recognition, etc.). Criteria are selected following the *Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Information on Recognition*².

In the beginning 2008, the Centre will finish implementation of the project lasting 34 months „Creation and Development of Database of the Assessment of the Activity of Higher Education Institutions and Foreign Qualifications“ (see 3.1). Creation of the database will enable to introduce such information medium that, inter alia, will accelerate development of services based on the latest information technologies, including a possibility to inform applicants electronically (by e-mails, on-line) concerning the process, status and the result of the assessment of their qualification.

The rules of the assessment of foreign higher education qualifications prepared by the Centre will hopefully become a methodical aid for higher education institutions of the Republic of Lithuania.

The Centre organizes and (or) takes part in organization of various events, seminars for higher education institutions on issues of the assessment and recognition of qualifications, such events will be further organized once or twice a year. Information on such events is advertised on the home-page of the Centre.

c. The bodies or institutions responsible for the measures

The following institutions are in charge of implementation of measures devoted to the improvement of services for provision of information on the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications:

- the Ministry;
- the Centre;
- higher education institutions;
- competent authorities carrying out professional recognition.

d. The state of electronic provision of information on recognition

In the beginning 2005, the Centre signed a contract for receiving EU Structural Funds for the

² Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Information on Recognition
(http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/HigherEducation/Recognition/ENIC%20NARIC%20Code%20information%20provision_EN.asp)

project “Creation and Development of the Database of the Assessment of the Activity of Higher Education Institutions and Foreign Qualifications“. This project is aimed at enhancing provision of information to the public and the latter’s involvement in information medium through the integral, uniform database of the assessment of the quality of higher education and research institutions, experts of the highest quality, academic and professional recognition of foreign qualifications. Creation of the database is aimed to introduce such information medium that, inter alia, would enable to develop services provided to the academic community and thus enhance attractiveness of the content of internet, would speed the development of the latest information technology-based services, up-date processes of routine activity. The created database of the assessment of the activity of higher education and research institutions and foreign qualifications would enable consumers to follow the process of the recognition of their foreign qualification. Information on the assessment of foreign qualifications concerning higher education and higher education qualifications, assessment criteria and procedures is advertised on the home-page of the Centre: <http://www.skvc.lt/old/wwwskvc/en/enic-naric.htm>.

e. Whether the national information centres establish and maintain their own web pages, linked to the ENIC-NARIC Web site

The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education has its home-page, the address is <http://www.skvc.lt/>. Links to the web-site of ENIC-NARIC are given there.

3.2 Information package for applicants

a. The extent to which information packages are provided for applicants by higher education institutions and other competent recognition authorities

Every applicant seeking the assessment of a foreign qualification and (or) recognition is consulted individually, by regular mail, by e-mail. Information on the assessment of foreign qualifications is available on the home-page of the Centre in the Lithuanian and the English languages, also on the home-page of the Ministry in the Lithuanian language.

Every applicant whose foreign qualification has not been assessed as being equivalent to a secondary or higher education qualification awarded in the Republic of Lithuania is given a letter with a detail description of the process of the assessment of a qualification and an exhaustive written explanation concerning the established substantial difference. An applicant, if one wishes so, is also consulted individually on the established substantial difference.

Information on the assessment of foreign qualifications concerning higher education and higher education qualifications is included into the annual report of the Centre. The annual performance report in the Lithuanian language is available on the home-page. Information concerning amendments in legal acts related to the assessment and recognition of such qualifications, generalized information on the countries of origin of qualifications, on the results of the assessment of qualifications, reasons and substantial differences basing on which decisions concerning the assessment are taken, information on the joint admission to undergraduate studies in higher education institutions of the Republic of Lithuania, appeals against the assessment of qualifications, related cases in trials is provided here, comparison with the results of previous years is given, the main tendencies are described.

b. If needed, how practice could be improved

In the beginning 2008, the Centre will implement a project “Creation and Development of the Database of the Assessment of the Activity of Higher Education Institutions and Foreign Qualifications“ (see 3.1). The database created during the implementation of this project will enable to receive more accurate topical statistical information in a shorter time, as well as to inventory the main (typical) results of the assessment of qualifications. The generalized information will not only be included into annual reports of the Centre, but will be also delivered

to individual applicants upon request. Summaries of such annual reports in the English language on the assessment of foreign qualification concerning higher education and higher education qualifications will be available on the home-page of the Centre from the IV quarter of 2008 onwards.

4. Structures

4.1 National information centre

a. The formal status of the centre

The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education is a state budgetary institution. The founder of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education is the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania.

The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education consists of 3 structural subdivisions:

- Maintenance Division;
- Study Programme Assessment Division;
- Qualification Assessment Division.

The functions of the national information centre are fulfilled by the Qualification Assessment Division.

b. Legal competence (e.g. advisory or decision making; academic, de jure professional, de facto professional recognition)

The Centre carries out academic assessment of foreign higher education qualifications. On the basis of the assessment made by the Centre, the Ministry carries out academic recognition. Professional recognition is carried out by the competent institutions and employers.

Chief officers of the Qualification Assessment Division of the Centre, who are civil servants, make the assessment. The final decision concerning the assessment is taken by the deputy director of the Centre.

While undertaking the assessment, complicated cases are analysed with help of experts involved, and in particular cases of the assessment of foreign qualifications a commission is formed.

An applicant, who disagrees with the decision concerning the assessment and (or) recognition of a qualification, is entitled to make an appeal to the Appeal Commission of the Assessment and Academic Recognition of Foreign Qualifications Giving Access to Higher Education and Higher Education Qualifications formed by the minister of education and science (hereinafter, the Appeal Commission) that functions in accordance with the regulations approved by the Ministry.

The Appeal Commission takes a decision to satisfy an appeal or not to satisfy an appeal of an applicant. When the Appeal Commission takes a decision to satisfy an appeal of an applicant, it obliges the Centre to undertake a repeated assessment and to take anew a decision concerning the academic assessment or obliges the Ministry to take another decision concerning the academic recognition.

c. Staff and budget

In accordance with the Resolution the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 18 incumbencies of the Centre were approved until 4 October 2006, since 4 October 2006 - 24 incumbencies. The Qualification Assessment Division had 5 incumbencies until 26 October 2006, since 26 October 2006 is has 7 incumbencies.

A head takes the lead of the Qualification Assessment Division, foreign qualifications are assessed by 4 chief officers who have distributed the assessment of qualifications by regions:

- qualifications obtained in the Russian Federation are assessed by 2 chief officers;
- qualifications obtained in the EU, the states of the European Economic Area and the Swiss Confederation are assessed by 1 chief officer;
- qualifications obtained in Asia, Africa, USA, Central, North and South America – by 1 chief officer.

One officer of the Qualification Assessment Division receives and registers application documents concerning the assessment of a foreign qualification and sends them to the Ministry for the academic recognition.

One officer of the Qualification Assessment Division coordinates preparation and organization of the qualifying examination. This supplementary examination is organized seeking to give a possibility to applicants, whose qualification has been assessed conditionally, to have their qualifications recognized after they pass a qualifying examination.

The finances of the Centre comprised 3191,6 thousand Lt in 2005. State budgetary means made 1498,3 thousand Lt. Extra 351,7 thousand Lt were allocated from the state budget to perform supplementary assignments delegated by the Ministry. 1341,6 thousand Lt were received from other resources as project funds.

| <i>Financial resources</i> | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006* | <i>Percentage of all funds</i> | <i>2005 compared with 2004, %</i> |
|-------------------------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| State budgetary means | 554,5 | 974,7 | 1171,3 | 1498,3 | 1822,1 | 47,0 | 127,9 |
| Supplementary budgetary means | 35,1 | 253,2 | 204,2 | 351,7 | 394,1 | 11,0 | 172,2 |
| Project funds | 44,8 | 56,1 | 88,8 | 1341,6 | 1657,9 | 42,0 | 1510,8 |
| Total: | 634,4 | 1284,0 | 1464,3 | 3191,6 | 3874,1 | 100,0 | 217,9 |

* preliminary numbers for 2006

d. Capacity building in terms of expertise and service to the public

Assessors of the Qualification Assessment Division of the Centre work in rooms isolated from those in which specialists receive documents and organize qualifying examinations. Applicants have a possibility to send their documents for the assessment of a qualification by regular mail or submit them in person arriving to the Centre. Applicants can deliver their documents concerning the assessment of foreign qualifications on Monday to Thursday from 8:00a.m. to 5:00p.m., on Fridays – from 8:00a.m. to 4:00p.m.

Since 2005, a “single window“ principle has been applied. Applicants can submit their applications concerning both the assessment and academic recognition of qualifications, to the Centre, employees of which send applications with the supporting documents to the Ministry. An applicant receives at the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education both - a decision concerning the assessment and a decision concerning the recognition made by the Ministry.

Information for applicants concerning the assessment and recognition procedures, documents to be submitted is available on the home-page of the Centre: <http://www.skvc.lt/>.

e. Networking and cooperation at national level and internationally

Employees of the Qualification Assessment Division of the Centre improve their qualification

visiting information centres in foreign countries, take part in the annual ENIC/NARIC meetings. Joint meetings of ENIC/NARIC centres of the Baltic states are organized every year. The Qualification Assessment Division cooperates with ENIC/NARIC centres of other countries and exchanges information with them.

At national level the Qualification Assessment Division of the Centre improves the assessment of foreign qualifications cooperating with the Ministry, higher education and research institutions and other competent institutions carrying out professional recognition.

4.2 Cooperation recognition/quality assurance bodies

a. Information exchange between the bodies responsible for recognition and quality assurance

Cooperation with Lithuanian institutions

Currently, employers or other competent authorities carrying out professional recognition in Lithuania very often rely on the academic recognition, as the academic recognition is the first stage of the professional recognition. As provided for in legal acts, academic recognition is obligatory in cases, when a person intends to pursue studies; however, quite frequently employers require academic recognition for the reason that they trust the institutions carrying out recognition and want to be sure of the quality of education. Later, an employee's salary or a position may depend on that. Every year we evidence the increased number of foreign qualifications, therefore, a reliable and efficient system to control and assess the quality of obtained qualifications is necessary.

Such institutions carrying out professional recognition as Chamber of Industry and Crafts, Dental Chamber, the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Lithuania, the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Lithuania and others closely cooperate with the institution carrying out the academic recognition – the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania and the institution organizing the assessment of qualifications and evaluation of study programmes – the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education. Contacts between employers and assessors of qualifications, providers of recognition should be mutual. Exchange of information is indispensable seeking to carry out efficiently both academic and professional recognition. Cooperation with social partners is enlisted in preparation of legal acts.

Permanent consultations on certain issues concerning the assessment and recognition of qualifications are going on with higher education institutions of Lithuania. An important aspect in the assessment and recognition of qualifications is a benevolent cooperation of applicants themselves and provision of various additional information.

International cooperation

Exchange of information among institutions of recognition and quality assurance is an inseparable part of recognition specialists' work. It is necessary to ascertain while assessing qualifications and later recognizing them whether a certain higher education institution is recognized by competent institutions and whether a study programme completed by an applicant has been accredited. This information is available both from the Lithuanian quality assurance institution and various foreign institutions assessing the quality of study programmes and carrying out institutional evaluation.

b. Discussion of and agreement on working methods between these bodies

In Lithuania, people organizing the assessment of qualifications and assessment of study programmes work in the same institution, therefore, problems in cooperation hardly arise.

All the information concerning the assessment of study programmes, the assessment of qualifications and the recognition of qualifications will be stored in the single on-line database, in which all data concerning the assessment and recognition could be found. As mentioned above, currently, a project "Creation and Development of the Database of the Assessment of the Activity

of Higher Education Institutions and Foreign Qualifications“ is being implemented in the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education. After this database is created, it will facilitate and simplify the search for and exchange of information among various institutions related to the assessment and recognition of qualifications.

c. Use of information on the outcomes of quality assessments in the recognition of qualifications

The primary and the main information resource in the assessment and recognition of qualifications is evaluation of an institution and study programmes. Before starting to assess any qualification, as the first step a status of a completed higher education institution is checked (if a higher education institution is recognized in the country of origin), it is also verified if a completed study programme has been accredited. A qualification cannot be further assessed without answering to these questions.

Information that is available on ENIC/NARIC network concerning recognized higher education institutions and accredited study programmes is important and indispensable. An important information resource when writing information letters concerning qualifications obtained in Lithuania to individuals leaving abroad or when consulting foreign colleagues concerning a status of Lithuanian higher education institutions or accreditation of study programmes is an Open Information and Counselling and Guidance System www.aikos.smm.lt, information databases: WHED and ANABIN.

Improvement and popularization of the home-page of the Centre is envisaged on which information concerning the evaluation of study programmes is provided. It should be made well-known by the general public, so that future students, teachers and other people concerned could benefit and efficiently use the information.

d. Use of membership of international networks and associations in recognition (e.g. ENIC and NARIC Networks) and quality assurance (e.g. ENQA) for the mutual benefits of both bodies

Participation in ENIC/NARIC networks is very significant in the sense of information exchange. If there was no possibility to exchange information with foreign colleagues, in some cases the assessment and recognition of a qualification would be impossible. Participating in these networks not only allows to exchange concrete information on a status of higher education institutions or accreditation of study programmes, but also share good practice, to ask for advise when preparing new legal acts concerning the assessment and recognition of qualifications or concluding international agreements.

The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education through its membership in the CEE network is an affiliated member of ENQA and seeks full membership in ENQA in 2007. The Centre is also a member of INQAAHE.