

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR RECOGNITION

In Hungary the Hungarian ENIC was designated the task of drafting the National Action Plan for Recognition, which had been drawn up by the ENIC Bureau, the NARIC Advisory Board and the Bureau of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee and approved by the Bologna Follow Up Group on 7 April, 2006.

Since in Hungary academic recognition belongs to the sphere of competence of the higher education institutions, the Hungarian ENIC conducted a survey on the institutional practice through a questionnaire on the academic recognition practice of the higher education institutions which was sent to the heads of all the faculties of the higher education institutions concerned. In order to facilitate responses an on-line version of the questionnaire was also made available on the web site of the Ministry of Education and Culture¹³.

Altogether 124 completed questionnaires were processed by the Hungarian ENIC. A summary of the results of the Survey on the Practice of the Higher Education Institutions in the Field of Academic Recognition (as later referred to in the text) is published on the same web site.

1. Legislation

1.1 Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention

Hungary signed the Lisbon Recognition Convention on 11 April 1997, and ratified it on 4 February 2000.

In order for the Lisbon Recognition Convention to become part of the Hungarian legislative system, the Convention was promulgated by an Act¹⁴.

1.2 Review of national legislation relevant to recognition

In Hungary it is the Act on Recognition THAT regulates the recognition of foreign certificates and degrees¹⁵.

Sections of the Act on Recognition that concern academic recognition were drawn up in accordance with ALL the principles, regulations and the subsidiary texts of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

¹³ Text available at: www.okm.gov.hu/akcioterv

¹⁴ Act XCIX of 2001. Text available at: <http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/getdoc.cgi?docid=a0100099.tv>

¹⁵ Act C of 2001 on the recognition of foreign certificates and degrees
Text available at: http://www.okm.gov.hu/letolt/nemzet/naric/et_angol.pdf

The national legislation concerning recognition is being reviewed regularly, in compliance with the obligations of legal harmonization both on national and international levels. As an example, in November 2005 a new act on public administration procedure took effect in Hungary which made the amendment of the Act on Recognition necessary. Similarly, Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications, which will enter into force on 20 October 2007, necessitates the amendment of some regulations of the Act on Recognition.

The regular reviews have provided opportunities to incorporate new developments concerning academic recognition arising from the Bologna process into Hungarian legislation.

Other than the above-mentioned reviews no further re-evaluation of the national legislation is foreseen.

1.3 Bilateral or regional recognition agreements

Hungary is a signatory party to several bilateral agreements concerning the recognition of qualifications¹⁶ some of which agreements cover recognition matters solely.

The principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention had already been considered in the bilateral agreements drafted after the approval of the Convention, thus recognition of foreign qualifications under the ruling of these agreements is granted unless there is a substantial difference.

Hungary is also a signatory party to further agreements¹⁷ which only touch upon the issue of qualification recognition.

Having revised the agreements the conclusion is that they contain no regulations contradicting the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

2. Recognition practice

2.1 Criteria and procedures

As it was pointed out in 1.2, regulations concerning academic recognition were drawn up in view of principles laid down by the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications.

¹⁶ Texts of these agreements available at: <http://www.okm.gov.hu/main.php?folderID=912&articleID=4653&ctag=articlelist&iid=1>

¹⁷ Like the regional CEEPUS Agreement, which stipulates the automatic recognition of periods of studies.

Since in Hungary academic recognition is done by higher education institutions, the Hungarian ENIC has recently conducted a survey entitled “Survey on the Practice of the Higher Education Institutions in the Field of Academic Recognition” to collect information on the recognition practices of the institutions, in order to see whether the rules applied by them for academic recognition are consistent with the stipulations of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, its subsidiary texts and the relevant national law.

Information to applicants

The Survey on the Practice of the Higher Education Institutions in the Field of Academic Recognition has showed that the number of applications for academic recognition diverges drastically among higher education institutions, they vary from 1-2 to 600 per year.

Responses to the Survey established that the majority of the higher education institutions offer information in printed format to assist applicants and they also give information on the phone if necessary. It is concluded that only a few institutions make information on their recognition procedure available on their web sites.

Recommendation: Higher education institutions with a significant number of applications should provide essential information on their academic recognition procedure on their web sites as well.

Information on the qualification for which recognition is sought

According to Hungarian legislation, primarily it is the applicant’s responsibility to provide the necessary documents for the recognition procedure. Nevertheless, where necessary, higher education institutions also have the right to contact the issuing foreign institution or the relevant authority to seek further information on the given qualification.

Nonetheless, if the applicant is a refugee, Hungarian law makes it possible for the higher education institutions to exempt them from providing the required documents.

Results from the Survey on the Practice of the Higher Education Institutions in the Field of Academic Recognition suggest that in respect of information on the qualification Hungarian higher education institutions do not seem to encounter difficulties. In most cases, if further information is required, institutions contact the Hungarian ENIC and some institutions look for information on the Internet.

The Survey has also revealed that only in a few cases would higher education institutions contact the Hungarian ENIC concerning each and every recognition case, while 3 of the institutions contact the issuing foreign higher education institutions in every case.

Recommendation: Although Hungarian ENIC is more than ready to answer all enquiries received from higher education institutions, it is recommended that in order to shorten the length of the procedure they should only contact the Hungarian ENIC in case of doubt,

while in case of similar qualifications they can refer to their previous decisions. Furthermore, the foreign higher education institutions should only be contacted in case of justified doubt about the authenticity.

Fees

Under present regulations higher education institutions are enabled to charge fees for the assessment of foreign qualifications, in compliance with the law that determines the maximum amount in one-fourth of the minimum wage.

At the same time, higher education institutions may request the assistance of the Hungarian ENIC to give expert opinion on a certain qualification, in which case the Hungarian ENIC does not charge the institution.

The Survey on the Practice of the Higher Education Institutions in the Field of Academic Recognition has pointed out that only a minority of the institutions charge for the academic recognition of the qualifications and even fewer number of institutions charge the applicants for the recognition of periods of studies.

Recommendation: There are no specific recommendations since Hungarian higher education institutions do not charge for academic recognition when appropriate.

Time frame

According to Hungarian legislation, the decision on academic recognition should be made in 60 days of the receipt from the application, which deadline may be extended once by 30 days.

The Survey on the Practice of the Higher Education Institutions in the Field of Academic Recognition has proved that in case of the recognition of periods of studies the great majority of higher education institutions reached their decisions within 1-2 months and a smaller percentage within 3 months. No cases were reported when it took longer than this.

In case of the recognition of qualifications, responses showed the same; however, 3 institutions indicated that their recognition procedure takes 4 months or longer. The reasons for longer procedures were, for example, “it is time consuming to request further information on the qualification from the issuing institution” or “the committee making the recognition decision does not meet regularly”.

Recommendation: Higher education institutions should reconsider their internal regulations and the frequency of meetings in order to shorten the time frame of the recognition procedure.

Translation

The general rule according to Hungarian law is that the essential documents necessary for the recognition procedure must be submitted together with their authorized Hungarian translation. Nevertheless, the higher education institutions are empowered by this law to accept non-authorized translations in the case of certain languages specified by themselves.

The Survey on the Practice of the Higher Education Institutions in the Field of Academic Recognition has revealed that almost half of the institutions do not require authorized Hungarian translation if the original documents are in English or German, and a number of institutions have reported that they do not require authorized translation from some other languages either, such as Dutch, Ivrit, Latin, Italian, Spanish and Serbo-Croatian.

Recommendation: Higher education institutions should examine the possibility of limiting the circle of languages from which they request authorized Hungarian translations.

Verification of the authenticity of documents

In Hungary the verification of the authenticity of documents is not prescribed by law. However, if it seems necessary, the higher education institution has the right to request the verification of authenticity by the relevant foreign authority.

Nevertheless, Hungarian legislation requires that the certified copy of the essential documents are to be handed in, in which cases copies made by the issuing higher education institutions are deemed to be certified ones.

It is concluded from the Survey on the Practice of the Higher Education Institutions in the Field of Academic Recognition that most higher education institutions do not automatically require the verification of the authenticity of the relevant documents. However, in three cases it has been reported that the given institution contacts the issuing foreign institution for verification in every cases.

As far as copies are concerned, institutions require the applicant to hand in originals or certified copies of the essential documents.

Recommendation: It is advised that only when doubt concerning the authenticity of the original documents arises should institutions require verification. Furthermore, institutions should accept copies made by the institution as certified copies since they may be accepted as such under the law.

Status of the institution

In Hungary the Act on Recognition stipulates that in the process of assessing the foreign higher education qualification – among other aspects – the legal status of the foreign higher education institution that issued the qualification should also be examined.

Based on the Survey on the Practice of the Higher Education Institutions in the Field of Academic Recognition it is concluded that the institutions follow this regulation.

Assessment of individual qualifications

The Survey on the Practice of the Higher Education Institutions in the Field of Academic Recognition has revealed that no specific difficulties were encountered by Hungarian higher education institutions concerning the procedure of assessing the qualifications in this respect.

However, responses to the survey have pointed out that 40% of the higher education institutions do not keep specific record of their academic recognition decisions.

Recommendation: Where the number of applications makes it practical, higher education institutions should keep either electronic or paper format database on their previous decisions.

2.2 Joint Degrees

In 2006 the Hungarian Parliament adopted an amendment to the Act on Recognition in order to establish specific legal provisions for the recognition of joint degrees.

Accordingly, foreign joint degrees may be recognised in Hungary if the following two conditions are fulfilled:

- all member institutions belong to the higher education system of their home country,
- the foreign joint degree belongs to the higher education system of at least one Parties to the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

2.3 Overview of institutional practice

When the regulations of the Act on Recognition were drawn up, they transferred academic recognition into the sphere of competence of the higher education institutions.

In 2002 it was a new task for the institutions and they were requested by law to file a report to the Hungarian Ministry of Education on all of their decisions made concerning the recognition of foreign periods of study or qualifications for academic purposes.

This practice has eventually been stopped and higher education institutions are no longer required to inform the Hungarian Ministry of Education of their academic recognition decisions. The reason for this is twofold. First, such practise appears to be contrary to the principle of institutional autonomy. Second, it placed excessive workload on the institutions.

In summary, no plan has been made to introduce such a supervisory scheme in the future. In the present procedure the applicant has the right for appeal if the given institution or authority does not consistently apply the Convention and/or relevant national law.

The Hungarian ENIC has gained positive experience from the Survey on the Practice of the Higher Education Institutions in the Field of Academic Recognition. The collected information on the academic recognition practices of the individual institutions may be distributed among the others and it may also help define issues in which further assistance is needed. Similar exercise may be a valuable tool in the future as it does not place excessive burden on the higher education institutions.

2.4 Transparency tools for recognition

European Credit Transfer System

Several higher education institutions started applying the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) in the middle of the last decade and by September 2003 all universities and colleges were using it. In the case of postgraduate, correspondence and evening courses, as well as PhD programmes the credit system has been in use since September 2004.

Diploma Supplement

The Diploma Supplement has been gradually introduced to Hungarian higher education. Following the amendment to the 1993 Higher Education Act¹⁸ in 2003, higher education institutions were obliged to issue the Diploma Supplement at the request of the student, free of charge in Hungarian and at the student's expense in English. At present, according to the 2005 Higher Education Act¹⁹ from 1 March 2006 "the Diploma Supplement shall be issued together with the Bachelor and the Master degree, in Hungarian and English, or in the case of national or ethnic minority courses, on the request of the student, in the language of the minority concerned".

Europass

Beside ECTS and Diploma Supplement a further transparency tool for recognition is Europass. In Hungary the National Europass Centre was established in 2004. The web site of this Centre²⁰ provides detailed information about the five Europass documents out of which the Europass-Curriculum Vitae and the Europass-Language Portfolio can be completed on-line. Authorities that are responsible for issuing the other three Europass

¹⁸ Act LXXX of 1993 on Higher Education.

Text available at: http://www.okm.gov.hu/letolt/felsoo/2003_ftv_egyesített_030625.pdf

¹⁹ Act CXXXIX of 2005 on Higher Education

Text available at: http://www.okm.gov.hu/letolt/nemzet/naric/act_cxxxix_2005.pdf

²⁰ Available at: www.europass.hu

documents have also been designated. The Europass-Diploma Supplement is issued by the higher education institutions concerned.

European Qualifications Framework

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is also a possible future transparency tool for recognition. In view of this, Hungary launched national consultation on the working document ‘Towards a European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for Lifelong Learning’ in autumn 2005 within which the Ministry of Education invited a large circle of Hungarian stakeholders to express their views on the issue and to foresee challenges which may arise in relation to the development and implementation of EQF²¹.

2.5 *Borderless/transnational education*

In Hungary legal regulations related to the borderless/transnational education have been drawn up with special regard to the quality assurance of education in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision of Cross-border Higher Education.

Hungarian higher education institutions are allowed to operate outside the territory of Hungary only with the official permit of the Hungarian Minister of Education and Culture, and the Hungarian Accreditation Committee is also involved as an expert body in the licensing procedure.

The operation of a foreign higher education institution in Hungary is also subject to authorisation. Foreign higher education institutions that have received the official permit to operate in Hungary are registered by the Registration Centre. The list of the registered institutions is published on the web site of the Ministry of Education and Culture²².

According to the Act on Recognition degrees issued by foreign higher education institutions operating in Hungary without a permit may not be recognised.

3. Information provision

3.1 *Provision of information on recognition*

The Hungarian ENIC is the main body to provide information on recognition criteria and procedures and on the national education system; nevertheless, higher education institutions are also ready to give information to students and lecturers on recognition matters.

²¹ Information available at: <http://www.okm.gov.hu/main.php?folderID=1139>.

²² <http://www.okm.gov.hu/main.php?folderID=912&articleID=4652&ctag=articlelist&iid=1>

In order to provide information that is accurate, adequate and relevant the Hungarian ENIC maintains a regularly updated web site²³ disclosing detailed information concerning recognition; for instance, information bulletins for persons wishing to have their foreign qualifications recognised in Hungary, information on national and international legislation regulating recognition or information on the national higher education system and qualifications.

Data on the Hungarian ENIC's web site is organised in a way that makes it accessible for users in terms of content, language and style. Information on the web site is available in Hungarian as well as in English. Moreover, the web site provides direct link to the ENIC-NARIC web site and other relevant national and international web sites.

Besides maintaining a web site the Hungarian ENIC has published and continuously issues printed information sheets, leaflets and booklets as well.

The staff of the Hungarian ENIC regularly organise and actively take part in national seminars and conferences, giving presentations primarily on the national system as well as on the international system of recognition, criteria and procedures.

Hungarian ENIC is considering to launch an electronic newsletter on national and international recognition matters.

3.2 Information package for applicants

Information package model

Information for applicants wishing to have their qualifications recognised is available on the Hungarian ENIC's web site and it is also available in printed format which is sent by mail to the applicant upon request.

Institutional practice

Please consult 2.1 *Criteria and procedures, Information to Applicant*.

4. Structures

4.1 National information centre

At the time of writing the Hungarian ENIC is one of the departments of the Ministry of Education and Culture. It is foreseen that from 1 January 2007 it will become part of the newly established Educational Authority.

The legal basis for the Hungarian ENIC's activity is the Act on Recognition.

²³ Available at: www.ekvivalencia.hu (in Hungarian) or www.naric.hu (in English).

The Hungarian ENIC operates as an advisory body in issues of academic recognition since this kind of recognition belongs to the sphere of competence of the higher education institutions.

In cases concerning the recognition of foreign qualifications for employment purpose the Hungarian ENIC acts as a decision making body and makes legally binding decisions.

The Hungarian ENIC makes *de jure* professional recognitions of teacher qualifications obtained in an EU Member State, in which cases the Hungarian ENIC acts as the competent authority to recognize the qualification for the purpose of practice of the profession.

In other cases, upon request by the applicant, the Hungarian ENIC assesses the foreign qualification and makes *de facto* recognition.

At the time of writing the Hungarian ENIC's staff consists of thirteen employees, two of which are administrators.

The Hungarian ENIC has no independent budget.

The Hungarian ENIC keeps regular, both formal and informal contact with other professional bodies and authorities, and also with higher education institutions and students' unions.

4.2 Cooperation recognition/quality assurance bodies

The Hungarian ENIC is member of the ENIC and NARIC Networks and regularly attends their joint annual meetings as well as the meetings of the NARIC Network.

In Hungary the Hungarian Accreditation Committee established by the 1993 Higher Education Act is the body responsible for quality assurance in higher education. The Hungarian Accreditation Committee is a member of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

The Hungarian ENIC works in close cooperation with the Hungarian Accreditation Committee consulting with them regularly. This active working relationship is of high importance, since the two organizations are appointed by law as expert bodies to make recommendations in such an essential issue as the operation of foreign higher education institutions in Hungary.