

**ACTION PLAN FOR
RECOGNITION
LATVIA**

This action plan is drawn up to improve the quality of the process associated with the recognition of foreign qualifications. This plan will form part of Latvia's national report for the Ministerial Conference 2007.

Prepared by Latvian ENIC/NARIC centre upon request of and in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia

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ACTION PLAN FOR RECOGNITION

1. Legislation

1.1 Lisbon Recognition Convention

a. Plan and timetable for ratification if not yet accomplished

Latvia has ratified the Lisbon recognition convention already in 1999.

1.2 Review of national legislation relevant to recognition

Recognition of foreign qualifications or study periods is legislated for in Articles 84 and 85 of the Law on Higher education institutions. The law does not contradict with any of the principles of the Convention but doesn't specifically mention them either. The principles are directly addressed in the Recognition Manual produced by the Latvian Academic Information Centre - the ENIC centre. It seems to be a suitable solution as, according to law, any foreign qualification is evaluated by the ENIC centre and a statement on recognition is issued. According to law, the above statements have to be taken into account by the HEIs when making recognition decisions. Thus, in practice the principles of the legal framework of the Convention are applied in Latvia.

The draft Law on Higher Education will mention the Convention principles explicitly. In September 2006 the draft law has been submitted to Government for approval and further submission to Parliament for adoption. Adoption could be expected in the first half of 2007.

The results of the legislation review have been presented at a national seminar on the progress

1.3 Bilateral or regional recognition agreements

a. Conformity with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention

There are two international agreements in force that deal with recognition and two international agreements dealing with common Baltic education space:

- 1) “Agreement among the Governments of the Republic of Estonia, Republic of Latvia and Republic of Lithuania on the academic recognition of educational qualifications in the Baltic Educational Space “concluded in 2000,
- 2) The recognition agreement between Germany and Latvia concluded in 2002 (in force as of 2003).

Both agreements have been signed after adoption of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. The Baltic agreement is based upon the Lisbon Convention principles and is actually listing the qualifications of the Baltic States that are of a similar level and should therefore be recognised among the three countries unless substantial differences are observed. Thus, the Baltic agreement is actually a practical tool for credential evaluators aimed at easier indication of the prototype qualification to compare foreign one with. However, the Baltic agreement is already becoming outdated due to the changes in qualifications (e.g., workload, titles) and therefore needs to be amended.

The agreement with Germany also helps indicating the cross-recognition of particular qualifications between the two countries but is not referring to the Convention as Germany has not yet ratified it. This agreement is practically out of date as well; it should be renewed to follow the Bologna process developments.

Common Baltic education space:

Apart from the “Agreement among the Governments of the Republic of Estonia, Republic of Latvia and Republic of Lithuania on the creation of a common educational space in higher education within the Baltic States (2000)” an “Agreement on the creation of a common educational space in general upper secondary education and vocational education within the Baltic States” has been adopted in 2000.

Both agreements underline the necessity to overcome the obstacles for mobility and to have access to each others education institutions from the secondary to higher level.

Future actions:

- adoption of Law on Higher Education

- - renewing the agreements on mutual recognition in accordance with the new qualifications emerging through the Bologna process
- Latvian ENIC/NARIC should contribute to higher education policy development and legislation

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.

According to the Law on Education (1998) and Law on European region convention on recognition of qualifications related to higher education (1999) the competent recognition authority in Latvia is the Academic Information Centre. The procedure of recognition is stipulated in the Law on Education (1998) and Law on higher education establishments (1995).

The first step in the recognition procedure is an application by the holder of the foreign qualification, an education institution, a state institution, employer or a professional organisation.

The second step is examining of the foreign credential on the basis of the documents submitted, taking into account accreditation/quality assurance status, workload and content of the programme.

The third step is a statement by the Latvian ENIC/NATIC on the following:

- Which of the Latvian educational credentials the submitted foreign qualification is comparable to,
- The foreign credential is not comparable to the closest Latvian prototype; the observed substantial differences are stated.

The decision upon recognition is based on the Academic Information Centre (AIC) statement and is taken by:

- the higher education institution in question (if recognition has been requested for further studies),
- the particular employer (if recognition has been requested for the work in non-regulated profession)

- The competent authority for professional recognition (if recognition has been requested for the work in regulated profession).

The professions regulated in Latvia are listed in the Law on Regulated Professions and Recognition of Professional Qualifications (2001) and the Cabinet regulation No 337 of August 8, 2002 lists the (also indicating specialities and sub-specialities). In order to improve the recognition service of professional qualifications a “one-stop agency” is created - the Academic Information Centre is nominated as the information institution for all regulated professions (except transport professions).. Academic Information Centre is evaluates the documents submitted and sends them over to the appropriate competent authority for the recognition.

The situation that Latvian ENIC/NARIC and information centre for regulated professions is located in the same institution results good cooperation and synergy between academic and professional recognition.

b. Measures to improve implementation.

Base information provision, advice or formal decision upon recognition of qualifications on their assessment according to the criteria and procedures developed by the European Recognition Networks, and, where possible, apply the elements of qualifications frameworks - workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile as the new criteria for assessment of qualifications.

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

AIC follows the Lisbon Convention concept of an applicant's right to receive a reply within a reasonable time and not to exceed 4 months.

In reality in most cases the time for processing the applications is substantially shorter.

AIC is observing the Latvian legislation: the law on Law on proceeding of applications, complaints, and suggestions in state and municipal bodies (1994 with amendments in 2001) and the Law on administrative process (2001). According to these laws, applications of persons should be processed by the municipal bodies within 15 days.

In those cases when the request requests further investigation of the situation the Law would allow to extended the time for processing an application up to 6 months. In such

cases AIC would still observe the 4 month limit set by the Lisbon Recognition convention.

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2.2 Joint degrees

So far Latvian legislation doesn't mention joint degrees. There is no problem to recognise a foreign joint degree on condition that it is recognised in those countries whose HEIs have issued it.

The draft of the new Law on Higher Education introduces joint higher education programmes and joint degrees into Latvian legislation. Its adoption will make it possible to establish nationally recognized joint degrees.

Overview of institutional practice

Consider what measures have been or should be taken to allow national authorities to know

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

Academic Information Centre sent out questionnaire to higher education institutions asking about procedures in the recognition of foreign qualifications, problems and difficulties in diploma recognition and credit transfer processes. The answers show that in most cases there are no problems to recognise foreign diplomas and the recognition is based on the existing legislation. Only some universities have internal documents on recognition which follow the national legislation. Recognition in the biggest universities is carried out at faculty or study programme level, in smaller ones - at the level of institution. Most problematic area is transfer of credits. Higher education institutions stressed the problem of missing information and skills for credit transfer on equal level. In general, higher education institutions consider that their procedures are set in line with the Lisbon Recognition convention and national legislation.

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

Observing the legislation at higher education institutions is monitored by the state. State education inspectorate is the institution which controls and monitors how education institutions comply with national legislation (including the law on ratification of the Lisbon Recognition Convention). Inspectorate controls if education process complies with the Law on education and other national regulations in education field. One of the tasks of inspectorate is to analyse activities of education institutions and to propose changes needed to comply with the national legislation. State education inspectorate has right to inflict an administrative penalty to persons who do not comply with national legislation in education field. State inspectorate includes Higher education control department which provides control in higher education field.

Future actions:

- To prepare guidelines and recommendations for higher education institutions to improve credit transfer.
- to organise training and information seminars for higher education staff with regard to recognition issues.

2.4 Transparency tools for recognition

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

At present Latvia is using a national credit transfer and accumulation system. Latvian credit point is defined as a one-week full-time study workload. An average workload of a full-time study year in most HE programmes is 40 CP. Latvian credit system is compatible with ECTS. The number of ECTS credits is found by multiplying the number of Latvian credit points by a factor of 1.5.

Draft Law on Higher education introduces ECTS. The draft has been submitted for adoption and is likely to be adopted in the first half of 2007

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

Diploma Supplement template in Latvia is introduced as of 2004 and is obligatory for the all higher education institutions. It is issued in Latvian and English languages to all graduates free of charge. The institution responsible for Diploma Supplement is the Ministry of Education and Science. Diploma Supplements are issued according to the CoE/EU/UNESCO format which is introduced into Latvian legislation is through Cabinet Regulation of June 2005.

d. Plans and timetable for the implementation of possible other transparency tools.

The Europass is introduced as transparency tool as of May 2005. The National Europass centre is established and the common Europass package is being promoted. Exchange students of both – Leonardo and Erasmus programmes can obtain a Europass mobility document.

Future tasks:

- Renewing and maintaining the description of the national education system to be included in the Diploma Supplement Upon the request of national authority;

- Cooperation with the National Europass centre to encourage the transparency of qualifications.
- Cooperation within the ENIC and NARIC Networks on the implementation of the overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area and accordingly contribute at national level to the further development of the education system, and national qualifications framework.
- Maintaining and regular updating of information on the national education system

2.5 Borderless/transnational education

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

At assessment of borderless/transnational education Latvian ENIC/NARIC is following Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education (2001) and Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997). The national legislation tackling transnational education issue is the Law on Higher Education Establishments (1995). Law (article 86) stated that qualifications issued in Latvia by branches of foreign higher education institutions are recognised according to Law on Higher Education Establishments, regarding Lisbon Convention and European Council, European Union, and UNESCO documents concerning transnational education.

According to Article 86 of the Latvian Law on Higher Education Establishments a foreign HEI may open a branch or a representation in Latvia according to the following regulations: branch should be registered in the Register of educational institutions, it should obtain a licence for starting a study programme and their programmes should be accredited in Latvia. In practice it means that a branch of a foreign HEI should operate as any other HEI in Latvia.

There is no overall national data (official statistical data) on transnational education provision in Latvia.

Transnational education inflow to Latvia is coming mainly from Russia, Germany, UK, USA and Holy See. However, there is only one state recognised transnational education provider in the country at the moment – it is Holy See. The biggest transnational education flow comes from Russia. Yet, the branches of the Russian higher education institutions operate in Latvia without licenses or accreditation.

The current legislation does set rules for the transnational education provision. However the enforcement mechanism of these regulations is weak and it does not effectively prevent the flow of non-registered/ not quality assessed transnational education at the moment. As a result, the holders of qualifications earned through such transnational arrangements face recognition problems.

Successful implementation of European Higher Education Area and Bologna process depends also on capability to solve the issues of the imported transnational education. However, transnational education is also a challenge for national education system pushing it to become more diverse and to improve quality.

Future actions:

Ensure that branches of foreign higher education institutions comply with the Latvian legislation and Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education in territory of Latvia.

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;

Measures to provide the information on recognition is the following:

- website of Academic information centre (Latvian ENIC/NARIC). The website www.aic.lv provides information about both - academic and professional recognition, purposes of recognition, legislation, how to apply, how to appeal etc.
- preparation and dissemination of brochures about Academic Information Centre (Latvian ENIC/NARIC) and recognition to clients, universities, schools.
- Participation in the seminars organised by other institutions to inform about recognition criteria and procedures,
- Seminars organised by Latvian ENIC/NARIC to inform about recognition criteria and procedures

b. The timetable envisaged for such measures;

The work is done on annual basis.

In 2006 Latvian ENIC/NARIC organised a Baltic States seminar on using learning outcomes and qualifications frameworks for recognition. The seminar was held in Riga, University of Latvia, April 28, 2006. Seminar addressed usage of the new developments

of Bologna process - learning outcomes and qualification frameworks in recognition of qualifications, which also imply the link with quality assurance. The target group was the credential evaluators from the Baltic States: working at NARICs staff or HEIs, HE policy makers at State and institutional level, those involved in the development of national qualifications frameworks or development of Lifelong learning.

c. The bodies or institutions responsible for the measures;

Academic Information centre (Latvian ENIC NARIC)

d. The state of electronic provision of information on recognition;

All information on recognition is available on Academic Information Centre web page www.aic.lv

The web page www.aic.lv provides information about both - academic and professional recognition, purposes of recognition, legislation, how to apply, how to appeal etc.

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

Academic Information Centre has its own web page www.aic.lv , which is linked to ENIC/NARIC web page.

Future actions:

- Provide adequate, reliable and authenticated information, within reasonable time as prescribed by the Lisbon Recognition Convention, national and EU legislation, on qualifications, education systems, and recognition procedures to individual holders of qualifications, higher education institutions, employers, professional organisations, public authorities, ENIC/NARIC partners and other interested parties;
- Serve as the main information point on the recognition of higher education and higher education access qualifications at national level;
- Collect and regularly update information on education systems, qualifications awarded in different countries and their comparability to the qualifications in the Latvia, legislation on recognition, information on officially recognised and accredited institutions;
- Renew information about recognition issues in web page www.aic.lv

- disseminate information about recognition criteria's and procedures through dissemination of information during seminars, conferences, meetings;
- Prepare a renewed information brochure on recognition issues;
- Participation in the preparing publications, information and other materials on the Latvian education system and participate in publications, surveys, comparative studies and other research activities undertaken by the European Commission, Council of Europe, UNESCO and other international organizations;

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 and,

Academic information centre (Latvian ENIC/NARIC) provides all applicants with the relevant information on paper or electronic version about recognition procedure.

All higher education institutions are providing applicants with relevant information about admission requirements.

Future actions:

- To continue provide citizens with information on their rights regarding recognition;

4. Structures

4.1 National information centre

Outline the functioning of the national information centre (ENIC/NARIC), e.g. with regard to:

a. The formal status of the centre;

Academic Information Centre (AIC) is a foundation established in 1994 and governed jointly by the Ministry of Education and Science and University of Latvia, Institute of Mathematics and Computer Science.

Academic Information Centre has four activities - Latvian ENIC/NARIC (Latvian Centre for evaluation of foreign academic credentials), Information centre for professional qualifications and regulated professions, CEDEFOP Refernet national coordinating body,

and National Europass Centre. Latvian ENIC/NARIC serves as Latvian representative in the two European recognition/information networks: ENIC (Council of Europe/UNESCO European network of recognition and Information Centres and NARIC (EU Network of Academic Recognition Information Centres).

For regulated professions and professional qualifications AIC serves as an information institution and one stop agency in the field of regulated professions (except transport) in the Republic of Latvia

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

Regarding the Law on Education (1998) and Law on higher education institutions (1995) Academic Information centre has following competence:

Academic Information Centre is issuing statement to which Latvian degree is comparable evaluated foreign credential. The decision is based on Academic Information Centre statement and is taken by:

- higher education institutions - for further studies,
- employers - for work in non-regulated profession
- competent authorities - for work in regulated profession.

In such a way, Latvian ENIC/NARIC currently has an **advisory** competence.

The draft of the new law on Higher Education defines the ENIC/NARIC statement as decision making. The adoption of the law is expected in the second half of 2007.

c. Staff and budget;

The ENIC/NARIC staff involved in recognition meets the following basic requirements:

- Higher education qualification
- Familiarity with the international and national legal framework for recognition
- Skills in assessment of foreign qualifications
- Knowledge of foreign languages
- Computer literacy and skills in using ICT.

The ENIC/NARIC centre is not adequately staffed, however, from year 2007 the Ministry of Education and Science foreseen additional funding to hire more qualified employees.

2004 – 20 000 EUR per year. Two full time and 1 half time employee.

2005 – 25 000 EUR per year. Two full time and 1 half time employee.

2006 – 25 000 EUR per year. Two full time and 1 half time employee.

2007 – 50 000 EUR per year (From 2007 Ministry of Education and Science is giving considerably more financial support to Latvian ENIC/NARIC office)

From year 2007 is planned to hire one more evaluation expert and lawyer.

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

The ENIC/NARIC staff in Latvia should be versed in evaluation of foreign qualifications in line with international best practices in methodology and procedures of recognition, including:

- Conducting research into home and foreign education systems;
- Identifying the status of the institution awarding a qualification;
- Identifying the value of a given qualification by taking into account the academic and professional rights that qualification gives to the holder in the country in which it was conferred;
- Identifying the most appropriate comparison to the foreign qualification in the home education system;
- Providing a well-founded statement of existence/absence of substantial differences between the foreign qualification and the home one.

At the same time Latvian ENIC/NARIC centre has at its disposal:

- Reference works on foreign education systems
- Reference works on national education system of the country in which the centre is working: national education legislation (in national and foreign language), legislation in the field of recognition, lists of officially recognised and accredited institutions/programs, description of the national education system, description of the national criteria and procedures for recognition of foreign qualifications, etc.
- National/international institutional catalogues
- Recognition conventions, bilateral agreements, EU Directives, other relevant documents

Latvian ENIC/NARIC is giving to staff members the possibility to regularly upgrade their qualifications by participation in national and international training courses and seminars.

Latvian ENIC/NARIC organizes internal staff training in order to present and implement the last developments in the field of recognition.

To be in line with newest developments in recognition field Latvian ENIC/NARIC staff is participating in all ENIC/NARIC and NARIC meetings. Besides these events ENIC/NARIC staff are members of the EAIE (European Association for international education) and are regularly participating in EAIE annual conferences, are participating in EAIE ACE section (professional section of Admissions Officers and Credential Evaluators) events.

ENIC/NARIC staff has participated in study visits to NARIC's of other EU countries to improve knowledge about education systems and credentials in these countries (2003 – Sweden, 2004 – UK, 2006 – Hungary, 2007 – probably Malta and France).

ENIC/NARIC staff is participating in training courses for credential evaluators.

2005 – on-line training course for credential evaluators organised by NUFFIC,

2006 – training course on China credentials – organised by EAIE

e. Networking and cooperation at national level and internationally.

Internationally

Latvian ENIC/NARIC is participating in ENIC/NARIC network.

Regionally

Since 2004 the Baltic ENIC/NARIC regional cooperation is strengthened through annual regional meetings. The main aim of the regional meetings is to strengthen regional cooperation between three Baltic countries on recognition issue, to exchange experience and best practices in region, to discuss more problematic fields and cases, to apply for joint projects.

Nationally

Cooperation with other transparency and information centres – Europass, Euroguidance, Eurydice, and Eures. The cooperation includes information exchange on everyday basis, joint events, dissemination of information through events organised by other organisations.

Cooperation with higher education institutions.

Cooperation with institutions related to higher education development such as Latvian Rectors conference, Academic Programmes Agency (Socrates, Erasmus).

Cooperation and close collaboration with Ministry of Education and Science.

Future actions:

- 2007 staff training at EAIE training course for credential evaluators
- regular staff training to improve the expertise in recognition issue and newest developments on recognition field
- hiring more evaluation experts to avoid overload of staff.
- participation in ENIC/NARIC network meetings, seminars and conferences
 - Exchange information on the assessment of the qualifications and on the national qualifications system;
 - Develop cooperation with relevant organisations in countries in other regions of the world working in the field of recognition;
 - Promote the activities of the ENIC and NARIC Networks in countries in other regions of the world;
- participation in regional Baltic ENIC/NARIC network
- Cooperate on recognition issue with other information centres, higher education institutions, their networks and other relevant actors in the national context;
 - cooperate with the National Coordinator₁ and the competent authorities for the professional recognition of the regulated professions (EU Directives);
- National networking on recognition issue
- 2007 – organising of 4th regional Baltic ENIC/NARIC meeting.
- 2007 – joint conference on information and transparency issue together with Europass, Euroguidance, and Eures.

4.2 Cooperation of recognition/quality assurance bodies

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

Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre (HEQEC) is responsible for quality assurance in Latvia.

In order to organize the assessment a specific higher educational establishment and study programme a non-profit organization "Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre Ltd." (HEQEC) in accordance with recommendations of the Council of Rectors as well as in compliance with the requirements of the European Union and in accordance with the

recommendations of the respective institutions of the European Union is organizing an Evaluation Commission with involvement of Latvian and foreign experts.. HEQEC has a home page www.aiknc.lv where complete and reliable information about all accredited and licensed study programmes and institutions is included. AIC is using information on accreditation and licensing provided by Higher education quality evaluation centre everyday to inform other ENIC/NARIC offices about Latvian cases as well as informing other institutions raising question about study programs or institutions in Latvia.

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

Latvian ENIC/NARIC and Higher education quality evaluation centre have strictly divided competences; therefore the activities are not overlapping. There is no need to have specific agreement on working methods between these bodies.

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

Latvian ENIC/NARIC is using the information on accreditation and licensing provided by Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre daily to inform other ENIC/NARIC offices about Latvian cases as well as informing other institutions raising question about study programs or institutions in Latvia.

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.

Both n bodies inform each other about the developments in their respective international networks and the information is used to improve the daily work of each organisation.

Future actions:

- To continue exchange of information between Latvian ENIC/NARIC and Higher education quality evaluation centre