

## **QF from the perspective of international recognition**

During the last decade the scope and focus of international recognition has changed.

Still academic recognition for further studies or professional recognition for access to regulated professions is the main purpose of recognition. But new needs for recognition have developed.

First and foremost an increasingly demand for recognition of foreign qualifications has emerged for the non-regulated labour market in continuation of the liberalisation of the movement of workers. What is needed in these cases is an overall assessment of the level and profile of a foreign qualification rather than a detailed comparison of content.

This goes hand in hand with the shift in focus from input characteristics towards learning outcomes and competencies earned which formal academic and professional recognition has undergone as a consequence of increased international cooperation and of increased need to integrate and benefit from lifelong learning into regular higher education. What a student or a graduate knows, understands and is able to do is far more important than the exact way in which he/she has required this knowledge and ability.

It should be said that these new principles are reflected in the legal framework for recognition, that is the EU directives for professional recognition and for academic recognition the Lisbon Recognition Convention from 1997. In both cases the main principle is that foreign qualifications should be recognized unless there are substantial differences in the education and training.

However, national frameworks for qualifications which describe qualifications in terms of levels, workload, learning outcomes, competences and profile will surely improve transparency and ease the

work of the credential evaluators to place a foreign qualification properly in another country's system.

An overarching European meta-framework will provide reference points and hereby facilitate the comparison of foreign and national qualifications. Also, qualification frameworks described in terms of learning outcomes will greatly facilitate recognition of transnational education and prior learning.

The ENIC / NARIC networks - which are the main agents for improving recognition within Europe – are of the opinion that with the commitments to elaborate national and European frameworks for qualifications the main tools for establishing real transparency and improving recognition across the European Higher Education will be in place.

Latest, this was expressed in Andrejs Rauhvargers background report to the Bologna conference in Riga, December 2004 and in the conference conclusions as well.

Personally, I will go a step further being of the opinion that with the Bologna convergence of the HE degree structures and the establishing of national and European frameworks for qualifications we are in a situation where recognition in most cases could be granted automatically.

That applies certainly to those cases where only the recognition of a qualification's level is needed: recognition for the non-regulated labour market, admission to 2. cycle HE programmes where only a 1. cycle award – without specification – are required. But generally, I anticipate that the need for individual recognition will decrease concurrently with the fully implementation of the principle in the international legal framework on recognition at institutional level.

There might still in some cases exist the need for a more content based assessment of a foreign qualification. The question is, however, if it should be regarded as recognition or e.g. just a part of normal check of admission requirements which also applies to national qualification owners. In addition to facilitating the move towards automatic recognition the establishing of frameworks for qualifications could help defining European

standards for recognition of non-European qualifications. Some pilot projects on this matter would be greatly welcome.

A precondition for this ideal situation is, however, mutual confidence. Mutual recognition is to some extent based on mutual trust. But it is of vital importance to develop and integrate mechanisms which support confidence in the national frameworks and their alignment with the European framework. In the conference report a set of criteria is proposed for the verification that national frameworks are compatible with the European framework. The most important criteria state

- that the national frameworks and the body responsible for its development are designated by the relevant national ministry
- that the link between the qualifications in the national framework and the cycles described in the European framework is transparent
- that the competent national body shall self-certify the compatibility of the national framework with the European.

Our discussions later on this afternoon might add further to the list of criteria. The important thing to stress, however, is that we are talking about minimum criteria which are a absolute precondition for the use of qualification frameworks for recognition purposes.

Finally, it might be worthwhile to underline that paradise is not created out of conference reports and ministerial communiqué's. First and foremost proper implementation of both the national frameworks and the European framework is crucial. Secondly mechanism of monitoring should be addressed.

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