Survey on external quality assurance of recognition (September 2016)

Addressed to: ENQA members and affiliates that are QA agencies operating within the EHEA.

1. Background

Fair recognition of qualifications, periods of study and prior learning (to which we will refer to in this study as “recognition for academic purposes” or “academic recognition”) is one of the main objectives of the Bologna Process since its creation. The Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) sets ups some agreed common operating principles that are legally binding for the concerned countries. However, after almost 20 years of existence, implementation of the LRC is still a challenge. Particularly, students are still facing major barriers to mobility because of imperfect academic recognition of periods of study, certificates, diplomas and degrees obtained in another national system or institution. Even though the situation is different depending on the country (with different legal frameworks and bodies involved), several reports make it evident that academic recognition in European higher education is largely within the hands of higher education institutions. The fact that higher education institutions are autonomous, and the member states have limited capacity to bind them to the principles of the LRC, is identified as a major challenge.

The ESG 2015 (standard 1.4) considers this issue as an essential component of the internal quality assurance (IQA) system of a higher education institution:

Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are essential components for ensuring the students’ progress in their studies, while promoting mobility. Appropriate recognition procedures rely on:

- institutional practice for recognition being in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention;
- cooperation with other institutions, quality assurance agencies and the national ENIC/NARIC centre with a view to ensuring coherent recognition across the country.

According to the 2012 Bologna Process Implementation Report, in the majority of countries recognition policies and practices conducted at higher education institutions are not evaluated by QA agencies. As part of their adaptation to the ESG 2015, it is clear that QA agencies have now the responsibility of addressing academic recognition issues in their external quality assurance (EQA) systems.
2. Objectives of the survey

This survey has the following objectives:

- To determine the role, interest and mandate of ENQA agencies regarding academic recognition matters;
- To explore the links between ENQA agencies and other recognition bodies or authorities, particularly ENIC-NARICs;
- To map current practices on EQA of academic recognition policies and practices.

The survey is addressed to all ENQA members and affiliates which are QA agencies in the EHEA.

This survey is the first study launched by the newly created ENQA working group on recognition. It will hopefully contribute to clarifying the links between QA and recognition; ie, to what extent can the work conducted by the QA sector be translated into specific benefits for the higher education community in terms of recognition? The following ENQA member agencies have contributed to the preparation of this questionnaire: ANECA, AQU-Catalunya, CTI, NOKUT, SKVC, and QQI.
3. Explanatory note on terminology and the scope of the study

The scope of this study is “recognition for academic purposes” or “academic recognition”. It covers the range of recognition policies and practices (most frequently put in place by higher education institutions) in the following contexts:

- Recognition of academic qualifications (qualifications providing access to higher education and higher education qualifications). It covers recognition (normally, in a context of admission for further studies) of formal academic qualifications; these qualifications can be of a different nature and delivered in a wide range of situations:
  - Domestic or foreign qualifications;
  - Qualifications delivered at home or in the context of cross-border higher education (CBHE);
  - Academically-oriented or professionally-oriented qualifications (Vocational Education and Training -VET);
  - Qualifications obtained through different modes of delivery (including e-learning or blended learning formal qualifications).

- Recognition of periods of study (credits) gained in other institutions (domestic or abroad); i.e. credits achieved as part of an Erasmus exchange.

- Recognition (normally, in a context of admission) of prior learning, also known as recognition of informal and non-formal learning. Informal learning is learning that results from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. Non-formal learning is learning which results from planned activities, but which do not constitute formal learning (community or non-credit adult courses, professional development courses, continuing education, MOOCs not awarding ECTS credits, etc.).
4. How to complete the survey

Please, kindly read the explanatory note above before completing this survey.

The survey contains 21 questions and should not take you longer than 30 minutes to complete. Please attempt to answer all questions. Where needed, please feel free to consult your colleagues in order to achieve as comprehensive and accurate responses as possible.

You do not have to complete the survey in one sitting. You may save the form and you or any other person with access to the same computer (and the same IP address) and the survey link may go back to previous pages in the survey and update existing responses until the survey is completed.

The closing date for the survey is 30 September 2016.

If you have any questions about the survey, please contact Lindsey Kerber at the ENQA Secretariat at secretariat@enqa.eu.

Please note that your responses will not be used to evaluate or review your agency or for any purpose other than stated above.

Your participation in this survey is highly appreciated – we thank you for your time and contribution.
Identification and profile of the agency

1. Name of your agency

2. Country of operation

3. Agency’s relation to ENQA
   - Member
   - Affiliate

4. Focus of external quality assurance carried out by the agency
   - Institutional level
   - Programme level
   - Both
   - Other, please specify

5. Scope of the agency in terms of subject
   - Generalist agency with no specific approach per discipline
   - Subject-specific agency
   - Other, please specify

6. Please specify whether the agency is following any other European or international standards (apart from the ESG) (e.g. EUR-ACE, EURO-INF, ISO, EFQM, Engineering Alliance, etc.)

7. Person completing the questionnaire
   - Name and surname
   - Function
   - Email

8. Grant/refusal of permission to ENQA to publish your responses
   - I give permission for my Agency to be identified with the responses I give in the final report.
   - I do not give permission for my Agency to be identified with the responses I give in the final report (your responses will be reported anonymously).
**First part: The role, interest and mandate of the agency regarding academic recognition matters and the links with national recognition bodies**

9. How is academic recognition (recognition for academic purposes) conducted in your country? Please briefly describe the legal background as well as the different bodies/institutions involved and how they inter-relate.

10. Is your agency involved in some way in academic recognition?

If yes, please specify whether your agency has an official mandate regarding this involvement.

Please elaborate.

11. Please describe the relationship between your organisation and the ENIC-NARIC centre in your country.
   - The QA agency and the ENIC-NARIC service are part of the same organization
   - ENIC-NARIC is involved in some of the processes of the agency
   - The QA agency and the ENIC-NARIC centre periodically exchange information
   - The QA agency and the ENIC-NARIC have occasional contacts
   - The QA agency and the ENIC-NARIC centre do not have any contact at all
   - Other, please specify

Comments

12. Please specify the main common areas of interest (if any) between the QA agency and the ENIC-NARIC centre?

13. In the near future, in what direction do you see the contact between the QA agency and the ENIC-NARIC centre evolving?
   - The relationship is not likely to evolve
   - The relationship is likely to evolve. In this case, please specify (more cooperation, less cooperation, formalisation of contacts, establishing of regular meetings, etc.).

14. Are there any specific actions currently being developed (working groups, policies, dissemination activities, other) in your agency regarding academic recognition issues?
   - Recognition of academic qualifications
   - Recognition of study periods (credits) conducted in other institutions (domestic or abroad)
   - Recognition of prior learning (including informal and non-formal learning)
   - Other
If you answered yes to any of the options in the above question, please describe the activities conducted briefly and please specify any particular topics related to academic recognition in which your agency has a special interest.

- Fraudulent providers (diploma mills, accreditation mills),
- Recognition of cross-border HE,
- Recognition of professionally-oriented qualifications or VET,
- Recognition of joint programmes,
- Recognition of e-learning qualifications,
- Recognition of MOOCs and other open learning sources, etc.
- Other

Are you planning or do you think it would be interesting to develop other activities related to academic recognition in the future? If yes, please elaborate.

If you answered no for all items to the above question, are you planning or do you think it would be interesting to develop some kind of activities related to academic recognition in the future? If yes, please elaborate.
Second part: To what extent and how are recognition practices conducted by higher education institutions addressed in the EQA processes of the agency? (ESG 1.4)

15. Do HEIs in your country currently address academic recognition in their IQA systems and procedures? (Always/Frequently/Occasionally/Never)
   - Recognition of qualifications
   - Recognition of study periods (credits) conducted in other institutions (domestic or abroad)
   - Recognition of prior learning (including informal and non-formal learning)
   - Other, please

Comments

16. Are academic recognition topics covered by the EQA processes of your agency? (Fully covered (systematically in all processes)/Partially covered (only in some processes and/or not systematically, etc.)/No)
   - Recognition of qualifications
   - Recognition of study periods (credits) conducted in other institutions (domestic or abroad)
   - Recognition of prior learning (including informal and non-formal learning)
   - Other, please specify

If you answered fully or partially to any of the items above:

- For the topics fully or partially covered, does your agency provide any written rules or guidelines? If yes, please briefly explain the content of these rules or guidelines and to whom are they addressed?
- For the topics fully or partially covered, could you please specify the kind of evidence that is requested/taken into account when assessing the quality of recognition processes conducted by the HEIs?
- Please provide the link to some evaluation/accreditation reports produced by your agency that address academic recognition practices. It is also possible to send examples of reports to the following e-mail address: secretariat@enqa.eu.
- Are you planning or do you think it would be interesting to change the way your EQA processes address academic recognition issues? If yes, in which way and are these possible changes to some extent related to the adoption of ESG 2015?

If you answered no for all the above items:

- Are you planning or do you think it would be interesting to address academic recognition in your EQA processes? If yes, in which way and are these possible changes to some extent related to the adoption of ESG 2015?

Comments
17. Are the following topics addressed in the expert and/or staff training events organized by your agency? (Always/Frequently/Occasionally/Never)
   - Recognition of qualifications
   - Recognition of study periods (credits) conducted in other institutions (domestic or abroad)
   - Recognition of prior learning (including informal and non-formal learning)
   - Other (please specify)

   If you answered “never” for at least one of the above items:
   - For the topics in which you answered “never”, are you planning or do you think it would be interesting to address academic recognition in your expert and/or staff training the future? If yes, please elaborate.

Comments
18. In your opinion, is there a need for quality assurance agencies to improve the way they address academic recognition issues in the EQA systems? (Absolutely/ To a certain extent/ Not really) Please elaborate.

19. What do you think the contribution of QA agencies should be regarding fair academic recognition of degrees, credits and prior learning?

20. What do you think the role of ENQA should be in supporting better academic recognition?

21. Final comments