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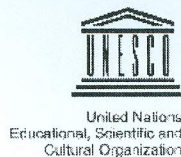
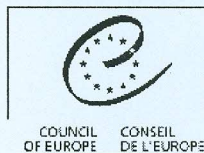
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Strasbourg/Paris, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2010

### Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications (adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee at its fifth meeting, Sèvres)

Directorate General IV: Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport  
(Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education/Higher Education and Research Division), UNESCO Division of Higher Education

### Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications (adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee at its fifth meeting, Sèvres, 23 June 2010)

#### Preamble

The Committee of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region,

Considering that the aim of the Council of Europe and UNESCO is to achieve greater unity between their members, and that this aim can be pursued notably by common action in cultural matters;

Having regard to the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region;

Having regard to the European Cultural Convention;

Having regard to European Conventions Nos. 15 on the Equivalence of Diplomas leading to Admission to Universities, 21 on the Equivalence of Periods of University Study, 32 on the Academic Recognition of University Qualifications, 49 Protocol to the European Convention on the Equivalence of Diplomas leading to Admission to Universities and 138 on the General Equivalence of Periods of University Study as well as European Agreement No. 69 on the portability of student grants;

Having regard to the UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the States belonging to the Europe Region and signatories to the Convention;

Having regard to the two declarations on the application of European Convention No. 15 and to the General Declaration on the European Equivalence Conventions;

Having regard to the Declaration of the European Ministers of Education in Bologna on 19 June 1999, and the subsequent communiqués of the Ministerial meetings;

Having regard to the Diploma Supplement elaborated jointly by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO, the UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education, the Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), and to the national and European higher education and lifelong learning qualifications frameworks;

Having regard to the practical action in favour of improving the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education carried out by the Council of Europe/UNESCO European Network of national information centres on academic recognition and mobility ("the ENIC Network");

Considering that the Council of Europe and UNESCO have always encouraged academic mobility as a means for better understanding of the various cultures and languages, and without any form of racial, religious, political or sexual discrimination;

Considering that studying or working in a foreign country is likely to contribute to an individual's cultural and academic enrichment, as well as to improve the individual's career prospects;

Considering that the recognition of qualifications is an essential precondition for both academic and professional mobility;

Recommends the governments of States party to the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region<sup>1</sup>:

- i. to take into account, in the establishment of their recognition policies, the principles set out in the appendix hereto;
- ii. to draw these principles to the attention of the competent bodies concerned, so that they can be considered and taken into account;
- iii. to promote implementation of these principles by government agencies and local and regional authorities and by higher education institutions within the limits imposed by the autonomy of higher education institutions;
- iv. to ensure that this Recommendation is distributed as widely as possible among all persons and bodies concerned with the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education;

Invites the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the Director-General of UNESCO, as appropriate, to transmit this Recommendation to the governments of those States which have been invited to the Diplomatic Conference entrusted with the adoption of the Lisbon Recognition Convention but which have not become parties to that Convention.

#### REVISED RECOMMENDATION ON PROCEDURES AND CRITERIA FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF FOREIGN QUALIFICATIONS AND PERIODS OF STUDY

##### I. General considerations



21. The competent recognition authorities should consider whether it is possible to provide for assessment of foreign qualifications as a public service free of charge. Where this is not feasible, fees should be kept as low as possible and should not be so high as to constitute a barrier to the assessment of foreign qualifications.

22. In deciding the size of any fees charged, due account should be taken of the cost of living and the level of salaries and student support in the country concerned. Special measures aimed at low income groups, refugees and displaced persons and other disadvantaged groups should be considered in order to ensure that no applicant is prevented from seeking recognition of his or her foreign qualifications because of the costs involved.

#### *Translation*

23. Requirements for the translation of documents should be carefully weighed and clearly specified, especially as concerns the need for authorised translations by sworn translators. It should be considered whether requirements for translation could be limited to key documents, and whether documents in certain foreign languages, to be specified by the competent recognition authorities, could be accepted without translation. The countries concerned are encouraged to revise any current laws preventing the acceptance of documents in non-national languages without translation. The use of the Diploma Supplement (where available) should reduce the need for translation of other key documents.

24. **As a rule, titles of foreign qualifications should be provided in the original language, without translation.**

#### *Verification of the authenticity of documents*

25. In view of the occurrence of falsified documents, verification of their authenticity is important. Such verification seeks to establish:

- (i) whether the documents in question are genuine, i.e. whether they have been issued by the institution indicated in the document and whether they have not subsequently been unlawfully altered by the applicant or others; and,
- (ii) whether the documents in question have in fact been rightfully issued to the applicant.

26. While the need to establish the authenticity of documents as a part of the assessment procedure is therefore very real, this need should nonetheless be balanced against the burdens placed upon applicants. The basic rules of procedure should assume that most applicants are honest, but they should give the competent recognition authorities the opportunity to require stronger evidence of authenticity whenever they suspect that documents may be forged. While certified photocopies of official documents will be sufficient in most cases, the competent recognition authorities should be in a position to require original documents where this is considered necessary for the purpose of detecting or preventing the use of forged documents.

27. States are encouraged to review any national laws requiring overly complicated and costly authentication procedures, such as full legalisation of all documents. Modern communications tools make it easier to verify the authenticity of documents in less cumbersome ways and competent recognition authorities and education institutions of home countries are encouraged to react swiftly and positively to requests for direct information on documents claimed to have been issued by them.

28. In the case of refugees, displaced persons and others who for good reasons, and in spite of their best persistent efforts, are unable to document their claimed qualifications, it should be considered whether alternative ways of recognising these qualifications may be found, for example, by measuring the learning outcomes which could reasonably be expected from the undocumented qualification. Such measures should be adapted to the circumstances of their recognition application and could include ordinary or specially arranged examinations, interviews with staff of higher education institutions and/or the competent recognition authorities and sworn statements before a legally competent authority.

### **V. Assessment criteria**

#### *Status of the institution*

29. In view of the wide diversity of higher education institutions and of the developments in transnational education, the status of a qualification cannot be established without taking into account the status of the institution and/or programme through which the qualification was awarded.

30. The competent recognition authorities should seek to establish whether the higher education institution belongs to the higher education system of a State party to the Lisbon Recognition Convention and/or belonging to the European Region. In the case of qualifications awarded by higher education institutions established through transnational arrangements, the competent recognition authorities should analyze these arrangements on the basis of the principles stipulated in the UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education and in the Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees.

31. Where countries have established a quality assurance system including a system of formal assessment of their higher education institutions and programmes, the competent recognition authorities should take due account of the results of the process when evaluating qualifications from such systems.

#### *Assessment of individual qualifications*

32. Recognition of foreign qualifications may be sought for a variety of purposes. The assessment should take due account of the purpose(s) for which recognition is sought, and the recognition statement should make clear the purpose(s) for which the statement is valid.

33. Before undertaking the assessment, the competent recognition authorities should establish which national and international legal texts are relevant to the case, and whether these require any specific decision to be reached or procedure to be followed.

34. The assessment should also take into account past practice in similar recognition cases, in order to ensure consistency in recognition practice. Past practice should be a guide, and any substantial change of practice should be justified.

35. The assessment of a foreign qualification should identify the qualification in the system of the country in which recognition is sought which is most comparable to the foreign qualification, taking into account the purpose for which recognition is sought. In the case of a qualification belonging to a foreign system of education, the assessment should take into account its relative position and function compared to other qualifications in the same system. Where available, the competent recognition authorities should also refer to the National Qualifications Framework, European Qualifications Frameworks and other similar Qualification Frameworks as part of the assessment process.

36. Qualifications of approximately equal level may show differences in terms of content, profile, workload, quality and learning outcomes. In the assessment of foreign qualifications, these differences should be considered in a flexible way, and only substantial differences in view of the purpose for which recognition is sought (e.g. academic or de facto professional recognition) should lead to partial recognition or non-recognition of the foreign qualifications.

37. Recognition of foreign qualifications should be granted unless a substantial difference can be demonstrated between the qualification for which recognition is requested and the relevant qualification of the State in which recognition is sought. In applying this principle, the assessment should seek to establish whether:

- (a) the differences in learning outcomes between the foreign qualification and the relevant qualification of the country in which recognition is sought are too substantial to allow the recognition of the foreign qualification as requested by the applicant. If so, the assessment should seek to establish whether alternative, partial and/or conditional recognition may be granted;



are linguistically close to the language(s) of the host country, languages widely understood in the host country, and/or languages in which staff members of the competent recognition authorities have sufficient competence.

#### Paragraph 24

The reason why titles of foreign qualifications should not be translated is that a translation in this case implies an assessment, and this assessment should only be undertaken by competent recognition authorities. The Diploma Supplement as well as credit accumulation and transfer systems have been devised to explain the content of qualifications without translating or evaluating them. Attention is drawn to the fact that transliteration is distinct from translation. Transliteration implies reproducing the sounds rendered by one alphabet or writing system in another alphabet or writing system, such as rendering a word written in the Cyrillic alphabet or in Japanese characters in the Latin alphabet. Transliteration enables readers unfamiliar with the alphabet or writing system of the original language to identify words or expressions from that language and should be undertaken using standard systems of transliteration where they exist.

#### Verification of the authenticity of documents

#### Paragraphs 25 - 28

The problem of falsified documents is becoming increasingly serious. It is therefore necessary to underline the need to verify the authenticity of documents submitted by applicants, as well as the identity of the applicants themselves. At the same time, however, it is necessary to maintain a balance between the need for verification and the need to avoid placing undue burdens on the majority of applicants, who submit authentic documents, and who should be treated according to the basic judicial rule of being "innocent until proven guilty". It is therefore necessary to give competent recognition authorities the possibility to require particularly severe proofs of authenticity, such as the submission of original documents, in cases where forgery is suspected. Another possibility in such cases is to require copies certified by an original signature and/or stamp of the institution having issued the qualifications. Higher education institutions should reply promptly to requests for such certification, which should be issued without fees, if possible, or at any rate at moderate fees.

At the same time, some laws on the verification of documents, such as those which require full legalisation of all documents, date from a time when international communication and verification was difficult. While they may have been justified at the time, today there are better and more efficient ways of verifying the authenticity of documents through direct contact with competent recognition authorities and education institutions from which the documents are claimed to originate. States are therefore encouraged to review their national laws and/or existing practice with a view to simplifying and modernising their rules on the verification of the authenticity of documents.

### V. Assessment criteria

#### Paragraphs 29 - 31

#### Status of the institution

Qualifications cannot be properly evaluated without taking into account the institution which has issued the qualifications. At the same time, national laws and practices for the assessment and quality assurance of higher education institutions vary. Consequently, the kind of information which may be obtained on higher education institutions also varies. Section VIII of the Lisbon Recognition Convention outlines the kind of information which should be provided by Parties which have established a system of formal assessment of higher education institutions and programmes, as well as the kind of information which should be provided by Parties which have not established such a system. Where countries have established national quality assurance agencies, or cross-national quality assurance bodies, these should be seen as a valuable information resource.

The UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education outlines the principles which should be respected by institutions and organizations involved in the provision of educational services through transnational arrangements and they should be applied in the assessment of qualifications. Similarly the principles described in the Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees should be applied in the assessment of joint degrees.

#### Assessment of individual qualifications

#### Paragraph 32

There is a direct connection between the assessment of foreign qualifications and the purpose(s) for which recognition is sought. For example, a given qualification may be adequate for the purpose of further study, but not for the purpose of employment at a given level. Conversely, a given qualification may be adequate for the purpose of employment, but not for further study, e.g. at doctoral level. This could, for example, be the case if a research component, the writing of an independent thesis or another form of substantial independent work were totally lacking in the foreign qualification and such a component were a requirement for access to doctoral studies in the home country. This implies that a recognition statement should make it clear for which purpose(s) it is valid, and a renewed assessment should be undertaken if recognition is sought for other purpose(s) than those (that) covered by a previous statement.

Qualifications may serve a wide range of purposes, some examples of which are:

- (a) general access to higher education;
- (b) restricted access to higher education (i.e. access restricted to certain parts of the higher education system);
- (c) general access to further studies at a given level (such as doctoral studies or second cycle studies);
- (d) restricted access to further studies;
- (e) access to professional training;
- (f) general access to the labour market (i.e. as a qualification for a wide range of positions at a given level);
- (g) access to a specialised area of the labour market;
- (h) access to a regulated profession.

#### Paragraph 33

Some examples of national or international legal texts which may apply to applications for the recognition of foreign qualifications are:

- (a) national laws and regulations on qualifications concerning higher education;
- (b) national laws and regulations concerning the exercise of gainful employment, including laws and regulations on regulated professions;
- (c) Council of Europe and UNESCO Convention;
- (d) Council of Europe and UNESCO Recommendations and Codes of Good Practice;
- (e) European Union Directives, including those on professional recognition;
- (f) other European Union rules and regulations, e.g. those governing the recognition of qualifications earned in the framework of EU education programmes such as the Lifelong Learning Programme and Erasmus Mundus;
- (g) international agreements established in the framework of other international organisations, such as the Nordic Council of Ministers;
- (h) bilateral or multilateral agreements between States;
- (i) bilateral or multilateral agreements between higher education institutions.

Not all such texts have the same legal value; their relative legal status must therefore also be taken into account.

#### Paragraph 36

Differences in the content, learning outcomes and profile of qualifications may concern e.g. the degree of specialisation or general education, requirements for independent written work (such as papers, dissertations, thesis), the inclusion of practice periods, laboratory