**Pathfinder Group on Automatic Recognition**

**Recognition and assessment of foreign qualifications**

*Report on the analysis of the survey of higher education institutions on applications from   
Bachelor graduates from another EHEA country to a Master’s degree programme*

(annexed to the Report by the EHEA Pathfinder Group on Automatic Recognition to the BFUG)

Prepared by the Pathfinder Group on Automatic Recognition

September 2014

**I. Introduction**

The Pathfinder Group on the Automatic Recognition of comparable higher education degrees (PfG) was established by the Ministers responsible for Higher Education at the meeting of the European Higher Education Area (Bologna Process) in Bucharest in April 2012. The objective of the work of the PfG is to explore ways to approach the long-term goal of automatic recognition of comparable HE degrees. The group agreed that it should work on automatic recognition of generic levels of qualifications by moving away from individual to system-level recognition, placing students on an equal footing irrespective of the country of origin of their HE degree. The group agreed to focus on the recognition of qualifications on the level of a Bachelor degree (first cycle of EHEA-QF[[1]](#footnote-1) or level 6 EQF for LLL) and a Master degree (second cycle of EHEA-QF or level 7 EQF for LLL). While not cutting across the autonomy of institutions to make decisions about admitting individual students, the shift to a system-based approach might nonetheless require a change in practices, policy attitudes, and culture in order to ensure that a graduate from an EHEA country has the automatic right to have access (though not necessarily be admitted) to a programme of further study at the higher level in any other EHEA country.

This survey chooses to use the definitions contained in the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC)[[2]](#footnote-2). Article 1 of the Convention provides that the terms have the following meaning:

* Access (to higher education): The right of qualified candidates to apply and to be considered for admission to higher education.
* Admission (to higher education institutions and programmes): The act of, or system for, allowing qualified applicants to pursue studies in higher education at a given institution and/or a given programme.
* Assessment (of individual qualifications): The written appraisal or evaluation of an individual's foreign qualification by a competent body.

The PfG's survey of higher education institutions (HEIs) on applications from Bachelor graduates from another EHEA country to a Master's programme was designed to foster a better understanding of the practices in the institutions regarding the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications which may give access to Master’s programmes. The analysis of the survey results aims to identify good practices which may enable HEIs to ensure that they are able to attract the best and most appropriate students from across Europe.

The survey was intended to gather information which would help HEIs in the implementation of their internationalisation strategies and in turn contribute to the Bologna Process goal that 20% of graduates should have had a mobility experience by 2020. Alongside credit mobility, the greatest area of growth in student mobility is in changing countries between Bachelor and Master levels. HEIs are fully autonomous in implementing their admission or selection procedures.

The Survey was carried out among HEIs in nine countries participating in the PFG, namely Belgium (French Community and Flemish Community), Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Croatia, the Netherlands, Sweden, Slovenia, and Luxembourg.

A total number of 87 HEIs initially responded to the survey and their responses were taken into account for the statistical analysis of the results (42 from Germany, 17 from Croatia, 5 from Denmark, 4 from Sweden, 4 from Belgium (Flemish Community), 4 from Estonia, 3 from the Netherlands and 8 from Slovenia). However, after the survey was closed and the analysis already undertaken, several further replies were received from Luxembourg and Slovenia, as well as a compilation of replies from Belgium (French Community)[[3]](#footnote-3). In order to make use of these replies as well, they were included in the analysis in qualitative terms.

This Report is structured in 3 parts:

* Part 1 provides an analysis on procedures and responsibilities in the institutions, more particularly on progress to a Master’s degree with a Bachelor from another EHEA country with a view on transparency, equality, management, efficiency and quality of the recognition procedure.
* Part 2 focuses on criteria and tools used in the recognition procedure.
* Part 3 is dedicated to appeals.

**Executive Summary**

69% of HEIs surveyed claim to accept all Bachelor's degrees from the EHEA awarded after successfully following an academic or professionally oriented programme; admission can be conditional in 83% of the cases.[[4]](#footnote-4)

It was shown that most of the more relevant criteria/tools to assess a foreign higher education qualification are used, but the usage varies. National QF for LLL/EHEA-QF/EQF are used (always or often) in only 55% of the cases, while the content and structure of the foreign programme (84% always or often), the length of studies (83% always or often), the number of credits (93% always or often), study results (72% always or often) as well as the recognition/accreditation of the institution and qualification by competent authorities (86% always or often) form the basis of assessing a foreign degree more frequently. LOs are consulted often or always in 68% of the cases and a grading/conversion table in 73% of them. Neither the quality/reputation/ranking of foreign HEIs nor the professional/personal/relevant experience or the recognition of prior learning plays a significant role in the recognition process. The result of the above is that there exists an overly strong fixation on formal and quantifiable criteria (length of studies/number of credits) in the recognition process, while more qualitative indicators such as QF, which certify in a more general way whether an applicant has the right knowledge, skills and competences to pursue further studies, play a less important role. While a previous survey[[5]](#footnote-5) showed that the relevant tools exist on system-level – QF and the Diploma Supplement (DS) are in place in all PfG countries –, these tools are not always (well) used in practice.

The DS is sufficient on its own to permit the assessment of foreign qualifications in only one quarter of cases (with the highest acceptance rate – over 50% – in Croatia), though considered useful in the large majority of cases. HEIs were mostly of the view that the DS would not provide sufficient 'evidence' for the actual completion of a degree, that it would not contain enough information and that the information it contained varied across institutions and countries.

The understanding and the use of the concept of 'substantial difference' in terms of the LRC varies somewhat between HEIs and countries and refers mostly to the length of studies, to the number of ECTS, to the content of studies, to the differences between a professionally oriented and an academically oriented degree as well as to different grading systems.

The timeframe needed in order to assess applications is of concern as it varies broadly, from only a few days up to 6 months.[[6]](#footnote-6)

In general, through the comparison of the numbers of domestic applications selected vs. those of EHEA applications selected, it is possible to see that domestic applications are at an advantage and are accepted more often: Around 52% of HEIs have a higher acceptance rate for domestic applications, while 19% of HEIs have a higher acceptance rate for EHEA applications[[7]](#footnote-7). In 29% of cases, the same acceptance rate applies.[[8]](#footnote-8)

While initial results pointed to the size of an institution (in this context determined by the numbers of applications they receive) playing a role as well, the final analysis rather points in the direction that size is less important than previously assumed. First results appeared to show that larger institutions tended to use more of the available criteria to assess applications (also using QFs, LOs, etc.), had QA in place more often, needed more time to assess an application (2-6 months), had an identified strategy publicly available, applied the same criteria throughout, and did not accept all applications by applicants with a Bachelor degree from another EHEA country, but the final results did not confirm these. It seems, therefore, that the size of institutions is generally not an important criterion for assessing applications. In addition, also other correlations tried (e.g. differences in recognition practices between EU-15/EU-13) did not prove to be significant.

In conclusion, the most significant results of the survey are:

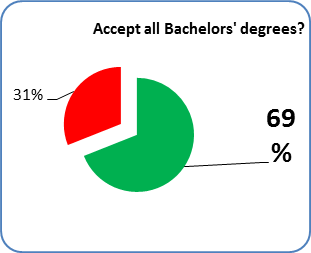
* HEIs in general try to be open towards applicants with EHEA degrees, but do not necessarily apply the right criteria in the recognition procedure: formal and quantifiable criteria (number of credits/length of studies) play the most important role, while more qualitative criteria – such as Qualification Frameworks or the achievement of Learning Outcomes – are used to a lesser extent when assessing degrees. As these criteria are, however, those which are most adapted to assessing if an applicant has the right knowledge, skills, and competences to pursue his/her studies in a given field, their use should be increased;
* Quality Assurance of recognition processes is already in place in nearly three quarters of HEIs and its importance is rising;
* Appeals against negative recognition decisions are generally possible;
* The acceptance rate of domestic applications is generally higher than the acceptance rate of EHEA applications. The long-term goal should be an equal acceptance rate for both domestic and EHEA applications.

**Part 1**

**Procedures and responsibilities in the institution**

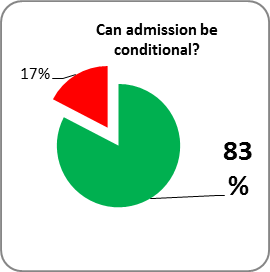
**1.1 Progress to a Master’s degree with a Bachelor from another EHEA country**

**Q1. Does your institution accept all Bachelors’ degrees from the EHEA, awarded after successfully following an academic or professionally oriented programme, as providing access to Master’s programmes in your institution?**

A total number of 60 institutions, (69%) accept all Bachelors’ degrees from the EHEA, awarded after successfully following an academic or professionally oriented programme, as providing access to Master’s programmes, while 27 institutions (31%) have additional requirements.

In some HEIs in some of the countries (e.g. Belgium (French Community), Denmark, Germany)[[9]](#footnote-9) an explicit distinction between academic Bachelors and professionally oriented Bachelors is made. While academic Bachelors are automatically accepted to be considered for admission, professional Bachelors may have to follow a bridging programme before being allowed access to Masters’ programmes.

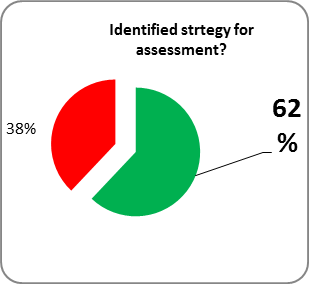
Even when all academic Bachelors from the EHEA are accepted as such, because of various reasons, direct admission to a certain master degree programme is not possible: a difference in the curricula in comparison to a respective national degree (Belgium (Flemish Community), Belgium (French Community), Denmark, Germany), the length of study, level or ECTS (Estonia, Germany, Sweden), relevance of the field of science (the Netherlands), or when a final grade is not good enough (Germany, the Netherlands) or because of inadequacy of learning outcomes in relation to entry requirements of the institution (Croatia), or when it does not give access to Master’s level in the country of origin (Sweden), where there is a substantial difference (the Netherlands), when the institution awarding foreign qualification is not recognised by the national authorities (Germany) or is generally not accredited (Netherlands).

**Q2. Can admission be conditional (part recognition of credits/supplementary courses required)?**

A total number of 71 institutions (83%) foresee conditional admission (part recognition of credits/supplementary courses required) whereas only 15 institutions (17%) do not. Among those 15 which do not offer the possibility for conditional admission, 5 are German *Fachhochschule* or *Hochschule* and 3 of them are technical universities from various countries.[[10]](#footnote-10)

**1.2 Transparency, equality, management, efficiency and quality of the recognition procedure**

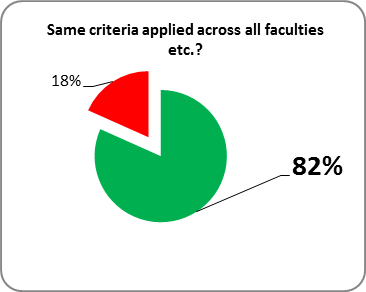
**Q3. Does your institution have an identified (and publicly available) strategy for the assessment of foreign degrees?**

A total number of 54 institutions (62%) have an identified and publicly available strategy for the assessment of foreign degrees while 33 HEIs (38%) do not have one.

Many of the HEIs have clear operational procedures in place which are made available by email, online or during the application process, covering internal admission and recognition procedures, adopted regulations, conditions and criteria for the assessment of foreign degrees. Some HEIs have fully automated (web services) procedures that lead the applicant through the different phases of the assessment.

One particularly interesting reason for not having a publicly available strategy for the assessment of foreign degrees is that some institutions apply automatic recognition when declaring that “foreign degrees and national degrees are assessed according to the same procedures. All applicants, regardless of their educational background, must fulfil the same entry requirements” or when saying that “foreign degrees aren`t treated in a different way compared with national degrees”.

Some institutions that do not have their own standards for recognition and assessment refer to existing national standards[[11]](#footnote-11) either being developed by ENIC-NARIC (Estonia, Sweden) or by National Rectors Conference or Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (Germany)[[12]](#footnote-12) or by simply referring to the (publicly available) LRC (the Netherlands).

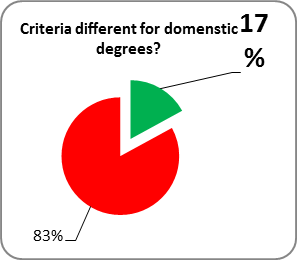
**Q4. Are the same criteria applied across all faculties/departments/units of your institution?**

A total number of 71 institutions (82%) apply the same criteria across all faculties/departments/units while 16 HEIs (18%) may have different criteria applied by their constituent parts.

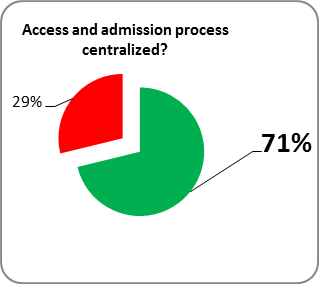
The same criteria are usually applied where there is a central administrative service (recognition office/admission office) at the institution. These centres run an administrative check (if documentation is complete, authentic) while the faculties/departments are consulted in terms of course-specific requirements and fulfilment of criteria. There are, however differences in decision making responsibility. In some institutions it is the faculties/departments which take decisions[[13]](#footnote-13) and in others, central offices are the ones that decide, although taking into account the opinion of the faculties/departments.

In conclusion, the majority of respondents which provided an additional explanation of their replies (no matter whether they replied positively or negatively[[14]](#footnote-14)) when answering the question on having the same criteria across all units, replied that it was up to the faculty to decide on specific entry requirements for each of the programmes. Some respondents referred to language requirements that may be different depending on the study programme.

**Q5. Are the criteria different for domestic degrees?**

A total number of 72 institutions (83%) apply the same criteria for domestic degrees, while 15 HEIs (17%) may have different criteria applied to domestic degrees.

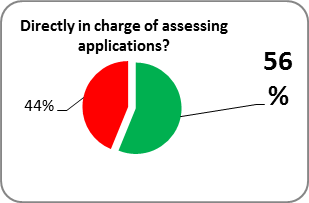
Those respondents who explained the difference in criteria applied to international qualifications in comparison to domestic degrees referred sometimes to procedural differences, not only to differences in criteria. For example, fraud check is not applied for domestic degrees at a university in Belgium (Flemish Community); an admission procedure is not necessary for domestic degrees since it is known in advance which degrees are acceptable for which Master course (Belgium (Flemish Community) and Belgium (French Community); a formal recognition procedure is not needed for domestic qualifications (Croatia, Estonia) nor is translation of documents in the national language (Croatia); national language requirements are not put before those with domestic qualifications (Germany), and an English proficiency test is not applicable to nationals (Denmark).

**Q6. Is the access and admission process centralised (to a single recognition officer or recognition office) or are individual academics/departments responsible for admission to their courses?**

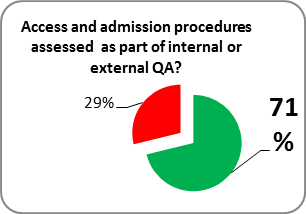
A total of 25 institutions (29%) have a decentralised process, while 62 HEIs (71%) have a centralised admission process.

In general, in those institutions where there is a separate recognition (access) and admission procedure[[15]](#footnote-15), central student administrative services are responsible for the administrative aspects of the recognition procedure, and faculties/departments are responsible for admittance/admission decision (Croatia, Estonia, the Netherlands, Sweden). In the institutions where there is no difference between a recognition (access) and an admission administrative procedure, the process is done centrally while the faculties need to give their consent (Belgium (Flemish Community), generally the case for Belgium (Frenhc Community) too) or opinion (Germany) to admission or examination boards, who are the ones who take a final decision on admission (Germany). In some institutions both access and admission are decentralised (Denmark), in others it depends on the programme (Germany).

**Q7. Are you (or your department/service/unit) directly in charge of assessing applications and deciding on admission to Masters programmes from graduates holding a higher education degree from another EHEA country?**

 49 respondents (56%) identified themselves as directly in charge of assessing applications. 38 respondents (44%) identified themselves as not being directly in charge.

**Q8. Are your access and admission procedures assessed as part of internal and/or external quality assurance?**

Among a total number of 62 (71%) respondents that replied positively to this question, some declared that the access and admission procedures are assessed as part of their internal quality assurance system (Belgium (Flemish Community), Croatia, Estonia, Germany), while others explained that there is no clear QA process, but that there is an external evaluation of the institutional admission procedure (Denmark, Germany). Some respondents answered that the assessment of admission procedures was done within the accreditation procedure (Germany). A total number of 25 (29%) replied negatively but some announced that it was in preparation (Germany).

**Q11. What is the average time for processing an access/admission decision?[[16]](#footnote-16)**

The time for processing an access/admission decision varies from the shortest procedure expressed in minutes, as declared by 10 institutions, to the longest procedure lasting up to 6 months. A total number of 35 institutions, however, express the duration of the procedures in weeks (1-4 weeks) and for 36 of them the procedure lasts for more than a month. Two German institutions state that the duration depends on the programme/faculty. As it appears from the analysis, it seems that overall institutions in Germany, Denmark and Sweden have the most efficient procedure.

**Q12. What is the average cost in euro of an access/admission decision to the applicant?**

50 institutions out of the total of 87 institutions do not charge any fees for the access/admission to the institution, while 37 institutions charge fees in the scale from 25 € to 300 €. The average cost of access/admission is 73 €.[[17]](#footnote-17)

**Part 2**

**Criteria and tools**

**Q13. Which of the criteria or tools below do you use to assess a foreign higher education qualification?**

The tool that is almost always used is the number of ECTS. The tools that are used very often are: accreditation of the institution by competent authorities, content and structure of the programme, length of study, study results. QFs are used often/always in a little over half of cases, while learning outcomes and grading tables are often used, though less frequently than formal criteria. The quality/reputation/ranking of the institution, as well as personal/professional experience and recognition of prior learning (RPL) are not often used.

1. **National qualifications frameworks, European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and the Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA**

National qualifications frameworks, EQF and QF-EHEA are often/always used in assessing foreign qualifications in a little over half of the cases. At 32 institutions (37%) they are always used, at 16 institutions (18%) they are often used, at 14 institutions (16%) they are seldom used, at 13 institutions (14%) they are never used and at 12 (13%) these tools are not applicable or known.

1. **Recognition/accreditation of the institution and qualification by competent authorities**

Accreditation of the institution and qualification by competent authorities is very much used in assessing foreign qualifications. At 60 institutions (68%) it is always used, at 16 institutions (18%) it is often used, at 5 institutions (6%) it is seldom used, at 4 institutions (4%, 3 professionally oriented institutions and 1 academy) it is never used and at 2 German *Fachhochschule* (2%) this tool is not applicable or known.

1. **Content and structure of foreign programme**

Content and structure of the foreign programme is very much used in assessing foreign qualifications. At 58 institutions (67%) they are always used, at 15 institutions (17%) they are often used, at 10 institutions (11%) they are seldom used, at 3 institutions (3%) they are never used and at 1 German *Fachhochschule* (1%) these tools are not applicable (or known).

1. **Length of foreign studies**

Length of foreign studies is very much used in assessing foreign qualifications. At 55 institutions (63%) it is always used, at 17 institutions (20%) it is often used, at 12 institutions (13%) it is seldom used, at 2 institutions (2%) it is never used and at 1 German *Fachhochschule* (1%) this tool is not applicable (or known).

1. **Learning outcomes achieved**

LO achieved is a tool often used in assessing foreign qualifications. At 30 institutions (35%) it is always used, at 29 institutions (33%) it is often used, at 19 institutions (22%) it is seldom used, at 4 institutions (4%) it is never used and at 5 institutions(6%) this tool is not applicable (or known).

1. **Number of credits (ECTS or other)**

Number of credits (ECTS or other) is a tool almost always used in assessing foreign qualifications. At 66 institutions (75%) it is always used, at 16 institutions (18%) it is often used, at 4 institutions (6%) it is seldom used and at 1 German *Fachhochschule* (1%) this tool is not applicable (or known).

1. **Study results obtained in a foreign programme**

Study results obtained in a foreign programme is a tool very often used in assessing foreign qualifications. At 40 institutions (46%) it is always used, at 23 institutions (26%) it is often used, at 15 institutions (18%) it is seldom used, at 7 institutions (8%) it is never used and at 2 institutions (2%) this tool is not applicable (or known).

1. **Grading/conversion table**

Study results obtained in a foreign programme is a tool often used in assessing foreign qualifications. At 47 institutions (54%) it is always used, at 17 institutions (19%) it is often used, at 16 institutions (18%) it is seldom used, at 4 institutions (6%) it is never used and at 3 institutions (3%) this tool is not applicable (or known).

1. **Quality/reputation/ranking of foreign higher education institution**

Quality/reputation/ranking of foreign higher education institution as a tool is not often used in assessing foreign qualifications. At 10 institutions (12%) it is always used, at 14 institutions (16%) it is often used, at 32 institutions (37%) it is seldom used, at 25 institutions (28%) it is never used and at 6 institutions (7%) this tool is not applicable (or known).

1. **Professional/personal relevant experience/recognition of prior learning (RPL)**

Professional/personal relevant experience/recognition of prior learning is not often used in assessing foreign qualifications. At 9 institutions (10%) it is always used, at 19 institutions (22%) it is often used, at 38 institutions (44%) it is seldom used, at 13 institutions (15%) it is never used and at 8 institutions (9%) this tool is not applicable (or known). A Flemish institution additionally explained that there is a separate procedure for recognition of prior learning.

Among **other tools** that are being used in recognition, respondents mentioned:

* relative marks like "Passed with distinction",
* letter of motivation and/or of recommendation,
* tests (acceptance tests/ linguistic),
* number of hours for each course,
* admission project presentation,
* criteria recommended by the QA Agency and ENIC-Naric Office,
* institutional research within certain relevant curricular areas,
* Diploma work.

**Substantial difference**

When asked about what makes a substantial difference, the respondents most often replied with the following (in brackets, the number of times the elements listed below were referred to):

- Duration of a study programme / Number of credits (23)

- Content and/or the structure of the study programme and/or LOs (21)

- Recognition/accreditation of the Institution/programme and qualification by competent authorities (6)

- Differences in level (6)

- Grading or study results (4)

- Faked degree (3)

- Entrance requirements (2)

- Different educational systems, looking at them as a whole (3)

- Difference between “Bachelor Academic” and “Bachelor Professional” (1)

- Relevance of the degree (1)

- Individual case decisions (1)

- The title of the degree certificate (1)

- Final thesis (1)

- RPL (1)

**Q14. Which documents does the student have to provide in order to enable a decision to be taken on his/her access and admission to the Master’s programme?**

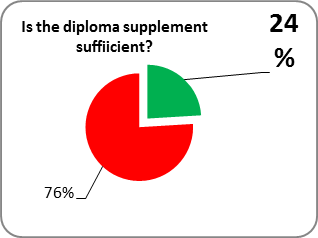
The list of documents needed to have access and to be admitted to the Master’s programme include the following (in brackets, the number of times the elements listed below were referred to):

* Original of the diploma providing access to Master’s studies (23)
* Certified copy of the diploma providing access to Master’s studies (74)
* Certified translation of the diploma (84)
* DS (60)
* An overview of the programme components followed by the applicant in case there is no DS (57)

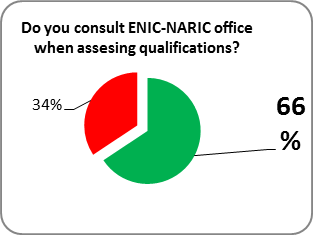
It is noticeable in the analysis that certain institutions ask for the programme components only, not as a substitute where there is no DS available. In addition to the above mentioned documents, the institutions may ask for the following:

* Language Competence certificates,
* CV,
* Letter of Motivation,
* Transcript of Records,
* Copy and translation of the school leaving certificate,
* detailed course descriptions,
* Reference letters,
* Certified copy, Apostille seal,
* Personal identification documents,
* List of subjects (programme components) that have been passed on Bachelor’s level,
* Certificate of citizenship,
* Birth certificate, marriage certificate or an official decision of the competent authority (for those applicants who changed their first and/or last name),
* Proof of payment of administrative fees,
* Official list of the admission requirements issued by the foreign higher education institution,
* Official curricula of the course of study, issued by the foreign higher education institution,
* A short chronological description of the entire educational history of the applicant,
* Study programme,
* Diploma work.

**Q15. Is the DS sufficient on its own to permit the assessment of the foreign qualification?**

The DS is sufficient on its own to permit the assessment of foreign qualifications for 24% of institutions. However, some respondents claim that not all information is always there (e.g. transcript of records, final grades, ECTS). Moreover, some institutions do not require the DS at all because it is not a relevant requirement for qualifications coming from outside the EHEA and “old” qualifications. This is the reason why they want to avoid having different requirements. Some respondents complained that the contents in the DS differ between countries and institutions. Finally, the DS cannot replace the official degree, which is needed as a concrete proof that the Bachelor’s degree has been obtained and is required for authenticity.[[18]](#footnote-18)

**Q16. Do you sometimes consult your ENIC-NARIC office when assessing applications?**

 57 institutions (66%) consult sometimes their ENIC-NARIC office when assessing applications (whether by just consulting its website or by a case by case approach, in formal correspondence or by phone or mail), whereas 30 institutions (34%) do not.

When they do so, it is mainly for the following reasons:

* in case of established equivalences in diplomas between countries,
* if they need information on the HEI or the degree (accreditation),
* in cases there is no clear indication of access to further studies on DS,
* if a HE system changed and information is needed about “old” qualifications,
* with professional higher education degrees (if looking for Master studies),
* in cases where the question of false documents arises,
* in case of uncertainty how to access a secondary school leaving certificate,
* in case of combination of qualifications from more than one country,
* in complex cases and cases of doubts or insecurities,
* in cases when applicants come from less known institutions/countries,
* in cases when the type of the program that person finished is not evident,
* for degrees from non-EU/EEA countries,
* to get a second opinion,
* to verify the structure and admission requirements,
* for information on certain courses, institutions, countries,
* in all cases.

**Q17. Which other sources of information do you consult?**

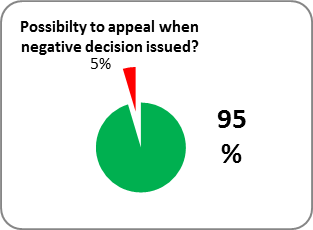
59 institutions (39%) consult higher education databases, 34 institutions (23%) consult other HEIs, 28 institutions (19%) consult ENIC-NARIC offices in other countries and 30 institutions (20%) stated they consulted some of the following sources:

* UNI-ASSIST e.V.
* Anabin
* Rankings, Gradings, Wikipedia, etc.
* <http://www.isep.org/students/placed/country_handbooks.asp>
* Collaboration in national groups
* Website of the educational institution issuing the degree
* websites of other relevant accreditation bodies
* ZAB - Zentralstelle Ausländisches Bildungswesen
* partner institution
* KMK
* ADD Trier
* DAAD

**Part 3**

**Appeals**

**Q9. In the case of a negative decision on access or admission, is there a possibility for an applicant to appeal?**

Only 4 institutions (5%) replied that there is no possibility for an applicant to appeal, while 83 institutions (95%) confirmed that such a possibility exists. However, those who replied negatively seem to understand that the question refers to appeals to possible negative admission decisions, not to recognition as such. This conclusion arises from an explanation provided by a Flemish University and in light of the fact that two out of four negative answers come from Croatian HEIs, whereas in Croatia the right to appeal is granted by the Law on Recognition. For the fourth institution, the explanation is not evident.

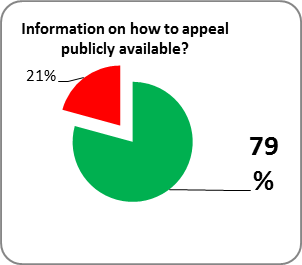
**Q9a. If yes, is the appeal handled internally within the institution or externally by an outside body?**

In 54 (72%) of the institutions appeals are handled internally, while in 21 (28%) institutions they are handled externally. Some institutions have a two-step procedure, both internally and then externally (in Belgium (Flemish Community), Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands). External appeals are handled by the competent ministries (Croatia, Denmark), the Court (Germany), the Board of Appeals (Sweden) or by an independent University Committee (the Netherlands) or a body at the University level (Slovenia).

**Q9b. If yes, is the appeal procedure free of charge?**

At 60 institutions (83%) the appeal is free of charge, while at 12 (17%) institutions it is not.

**Q10. Is information on how to appeal publicly available?** **If yes, is the information provided directly to the rejected applicant in the (annex of the) decision or published on a (public) website etc.**

In 69 (79%) institutions the information on how to appeal is publicly available, while in 18 (21%) institutions it is not. 46 institutions provide the information on appeal directly to the applicant, 10 institutions put the information on their website, whereas 10 respondents do both.

Conclusions & Policy issues

* In general, HEIs’ interpretation of possible ‘substantial differences’ in terms of the LRC can vary. Therefore, a way of ensuring a clearer and more unified application of the criteria of the Convention would be useful. Where they exist, national guidelines for admission decisions were considered helpful by HEIs. The development of national guidelines (e.g. helping HEIs to implement properly the legal framework in place) could therefore be discussed. One HEI considered it useful to use a restrictive and closed list of reasons for the rejection of applicants as a means to work with the rather vague concept of 'substantial difference' in terms of the LRC.
* The timeframe needed to process an application varies strongly from institution to institution and from country to country and can exceed the 4-months maximum time limit foreseen by the LRC framework[[19]](#footnote-19). Therefore, it could be useful – as a first step - to explore ways of moving towards guaranteeing a unified maximum timeframe for the processing of an application.
* The DS is, in most cases, not considered sufficient to permit the assessment of foreign qualifications. An updated DS containing more and/or more targeted information, reducing the variety of information it contains and reflecting the needs of HEIs, could be envisaged.
* Appeals are often, but not always, free of charge – and where they aren’t, costs vary strongly. To achieve a more unified framework concerning the legal remedies, a generalised approach of free internal appeals might strengthen the rights of applicants (as well as the correct application of the legal framework in place) throughout countries.
* National and European QFs are used during the recognition process in only around 55% of cases and are therefore not yet generally used as a tool to certify skills, knowledge and competences. Their use could therefore be better supported.

1. List of abbreviations:

   HEI = Higher education institution

   LO = Learning Outcomes;

   DS = Diploma Supplement;

   EQF for LLL = European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning;

   EHEA = European Higher Education Area;

   LRC = Lisbon Recognition Convention = Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region of the Council of Europe and UNESCO

   RPL = Recognition of prior learning [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/165.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Before the survey was developed by the PfG, Belgium (French Community) had surveyed its own HEIs on the academic recognition procedures and practices. To avoid carrying out two very similar surveys among HEIs of the French Community, Belgium (French Community) has prepared a compilation of responses for the PfG survey, based on those of their own survey. It is worth noting that 37 HEIs participated in this survey (out of a total of 42 HEIs). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Answers were not always clearcut. Some indicated yes, accepting all EHEA Bachelor degrees, but with exceptions when there was a specific reason not to accept a degree; others indicated no, but with the same meaning: they would exclude some degrees if there were specific reasons to do so. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Conducted for the PfG by the Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Not all responses by HEIs could be taken into account to answer this question as a total of 16 HEIs replied by indicating how many minutes/hours their staff would need to process one single application, but not referring to the whole recognition process. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. E.g. in Luxembourg, where a higher percentage rate of EHEA applications is accepted than domestic applications. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. These figures are based on responses from 42 of the respondents. These respondents indicated % domestic applications selected from all domestic applications received; and % of EHEA applications selected from all EHEA applications received. This was the only clear basis on which the rate of selection could be compared. . [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The reference to the countries is made when an institution from a country provided such an explanation. Although it does not necessarily mean that certain practice is nation-wide, it may provide interesting information about the difference between countries. These references are used only when there is a national pattern. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. That is what it is apparent from the name of the university. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. When referring to national standards and criteria, institutions sometimes considered that they have publicly available strategy for the assessment of foreign degrees, although it is not their own institutional strategy, and thus responded positively to the question No.3, while some other replied negatively, in the same situation. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Majority of German HEIs use ANABIN website. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. A central administration of a university, for example, does not know if the faculties apply the same criteria for assessment of foreign qualifications. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. A university replied negatively, but explained that "there are main criteria that are the same for all academic units” and that “in addition, every faculty can propose additional requirements that, however, need to be approved by the University Council”. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The majority of respondents made it clear that there is a difference between access and a formal recognition procedure that are done centrally, and admission procedures which are under the responsibility of academic units. However, some respondents may have interpreted the question differently, as implying that access and admission both equal a recognition process. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Not all responses by HEIs could be taken into account to answer this question as a total of 16 HEIs replied by indicating how many minutes/hours their staff would need to process one single application, but not referring to the whole recognition process. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. While in the other countries surveyed, access/admission-fees are either in place or not, in Belgium (French Community) registration and tuition fees are combined and these are only requested from an applicant once he/she is admitted. So, there is no fee requested for an admission application. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. In addition, in one case the respondent stated that the DS would not be sufficient due to legal reasons, as the applicable law required other supplements as well. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Paragraph 16 of the Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications, adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee on 23rd June 2010 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)