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**THE COMMITTEE OF THE CONVENTION ON THE RECOGNITION OF  
QUALIFICATIONS CONCERNING HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE  
EUROPEAN REGION**

**SUBSIDIARY TEXT TO THE CONVENTION:  
“RECOMMENDATION ON THE USE OF  
QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS IN THE  
RECOGNITION OF FOREIGN  
QUALIFICATIONS”**

Directorate General II, (Directorate of Democratic Citizenship and Participation – Education Policy and Rights Division) of the Council of Europe and the UNESCO Division for Teacher Development and Higher Education

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# **RECOMMENDATION ON THE USE OF QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS IN THE RECOGNITION OF FOREIGN QUALIFICATIONS**

## **Preamble**

The Committee of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region<sup>1</sup>,

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 and by supporting the reforms of higher education;

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 the Declaration of the European Ministers of Education in Bologna on 19 June 1999, and the subsequent communiqués of the Ministerial meetings within the Bologna Process, especially their reference to qualifications frameworks and the role that they (sub-national, national and overarching) could play in the reforms of higher education in Europe as well as in countries which belong to the UNESCO European Region and which although not involved in the process, have or intend to develop a National Qualifications Framework;

Having regard to the subsidiary texts adopted under the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region: the UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education, the Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications, and the Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees;

Having regard to the Diploma Supplement which facilitates the recognition of qualifications by indicating the NQF, EQF and EHEA QF level, developed jointly by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO;

Having regard to the European Union's Europass<sup>2</sup> as well as to developments with the use of credit systems, in particular the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS);

Having regard to other similar transparency tools existing in countries party to the Convention;

Having regard to the work undertaken towards improving the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education by the Council of Europe/UNESCO European Network of National Information Centres (ENIC<sup>3</sup>) on academic recognition and mobility and the national information centres;

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<sup>1</sup> In this Recommendation, the Convention will be referred to as "the Lisbon Recognition Convention".

<sup>2</sup> Decision 2241/2004/EC (15 December 2004) of the European Parliament and of the Council - on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass).

<sup>3</sup> Some ENIC centres are also NARIC centres and all cooperate through the ENIC/NARIC Networks

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 the developments of qualifications frameworks at subnational, national and regional levels (including for example the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF-LLL));

Considering that National Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area are often self-certified and referenced against the QF-EHEA and EQF-LLL;

Considering that there are parties to the Lisbon Recognition Convention that are not committed to the QF-EHEA and/or the EQF-LLL, but where qualifications frameworks also exist or may be developed;

Considering that learning outcomes provide the basis on which qualifications frameworks and recognition practices are built;

Considering that qualifications frameworks include and/or refer to arrangements for ensuring the quality of programmes and of the institutions issuing the qualifications included in the frameworks;

Considering that the recognition of qualifications is an essential precondition for both academic and professional mobility, as well as for building knowledge based societies;

Recommends the governments of States party to the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region:

- i. to take into account, in the establishment of their recognition policies, the principles outlined in the appendix hereto which forms part of this Recommendation;
- ii. to draw these principles to the attention of the competent bodies concerned;
- iii. to promote the implementation of these principles by government agencies, local and regional authorities within their country, and by higher education institutions;
- iv. to ensure that this Recommendation is distributed as widely as possible among all stakeholders 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.

**APPENDIX TO THE RECOMMENDATION ON THE USE OF QUALIFICATIONS  
FRAMEWORKS IN THE RECOGNITION OF FOREIGN QUALIFICATIONS**

**I. Definitions**

1. General Terms:

- a. The general terms used throughout the present Recommendation are the same as those understood in the Lisbon Recognition Convention and referenced in the definition of terms (Section I) of the Convention.

2. Terminology specific to the present Recommendation:

- a. “National Qualifications Framework(s) (NQFs)” refers to qualifications frameworks developed at the national or sub-national level and specific to a country’s structure of education and training;
- b. “Overarching frameworks” refers to regional frameworks to which NQFs are related (for example the QF-EHEA and EQF-LLL);
- c. “Qualifications frameworks” refers in general terms to both NQFs and overarching frameworks.

**II. Scope and General Considerations**

1. The Recommendation focuses on the use of qualifications frameworks as important information and transparency tools in the recognition of higher education qualifications and qualifications giving access to higher education.

2. The Recommendation takes account of the fact that, from a lifelong learning perspective, qualifications frameworks can also facilitate the recognition of prior learning, since qualifications frameworks describe qualifications in terms of learning outcomes independently from learning paths. It also takes account of the fact that qualifications frameworks can be used to facilitate access to the labour market.

3. The Recommendation demonstrates ways in which qualifications frameworks may be helpful in establishing similarities between foreign qualifications and relevant qualifications within the education system in which recognition is sought, and whether or not there are substantial differences between qualifications.

4. The fact that not all countries, or indeed all signatories to the Lisbon Recognition Convention, have national qualifications frameworks should not be an impediment to recognizing qualifications from such countries. Likewise many older qualifications may not be placed in a qualifications framework even if the country in question has now developed one.

5. National Qualifications Frameworks facilitate recognition especially when they have been linked in a transparent and comparative way – through self-certification and referencing – to the overarching frameworks, such as QF-EHEA and EQF-LLL.

6. While the existence of a NQF alone does not lead to “automatic recognition”, the positioning of qualifications within the NQF of the awarding country and their relation to one or more overarching frameworks gives important information to facilitate the recognition processes.

### **III. Recommendations**

1. The competent recognition authorities, and the ENIC Network should develop a common understanding on how to use national, European or other overarching qualifications frameworks for the purpose of facilitating the fair recognition of qualifications and should identify the opportunities and challenges they present.

2. Qualifications frameworks should be used to make it easier for competent recognition authorities to assess foreign qualifications.

3. Qualifications frameworks should be used while considering the five key elements in recognition: level, learning outcomes, quality, workload and profile. However, qualifications frameworks provide limited information to support the recognition process when it comes to the profile of a qualification.

4. The following principles should apply to assure the effective use of qualifications frameworks in recognition practice:

*a. Level*

- i. If a National Qualifications Framework has been self-certified or referenced, there is, as a general rule, no need for the competent recognition authority to investigate the level of qualifications further;
- ii. In the case that qualifications have been referenced/self-certified towards the same level in overarching frameworks, they should be seen as broadly compatible;
- iii. When level discrepancies occur, qualification specific information including the Diploma Supplement or other documents should be used. In these cases, the formal rights the qualification in the awarding country should be taken into account.

*b. Learning outcomes*

- i. The learning outcomes of National Qualifications Frameworks and of overarching qualifications frameworks are generic and provide a reference point for recognition;
- ii. In cases where the learning outcomes provided by the qualifications frameworks are insufficient for recognition purposes, the more detailed descriptions of learning outcomes provided by institutions should be used. The description of learning outcomes in the Diploma Supplement or other documents is useful for recognition purposes.

c. *Quality*

- i. A transparent link between recognition, qualifications frameworks and quality assurance should be established;
- ii. If a National Qualifications Framework has been self-certified or referenced, there is an assumption that the individual qualifications included in the framework by the competent authority are quality assured. Therefore as a general rule there is no need for the recognition authority to investigate the quality of the qualification.

d. *Workload*

While recognising that qualifications should as far as possible be assessed on the basis of learning outcomes, competent recognition authorities may also be guided in their assessment by the workload learners are assumed to require in order to obtain the given qualification. This is normally expressed as credits and indicates the typical workload expected to achieve the learning outcomes associated with a qualification.