



Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education
(SKVC)

*Self-evaluation report
In the framework of SQUARE project*

4 January 2016

Vilnius

Introduction: the Self-evaluation process

The self-evaluation methodology, developed in terms of SQUARE project is intended to enable ENIC-NARICs centres to critically reflect to which extent they comply with the good practice agreed upon within the networks, and to improve where necessary and to enhance where possible. SKVC as Lithuanian ENIC/NARIC centre used the self-evaluation tool with the intention to help us analyse your current practice, identify some strengths and weaknesses. We are looking forward to other elements of SQUARE protocol being the peer review procedure to contribute towards drafting the action points needed to improve the quality of our centre.

The self-evaluation of SKVC consisted of an analysis of compliance with the standards and guidelines for good practice. The purpose was to gather data, reflect and establish the extent to which the existing practices and procedures of your centre comply with the standards and guidelines for good practice. These standards are based mainly on the *EAR Manual*, also *Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures* (adopted in Riga in 2001, revised in Sèvres in 2010), and combined with some elements of *the Joint ENIC-NARIC Charter of Activities and Services*.

As advised in the SQUARE protocol, various members of SKVC contributed to the self-evaluation, namely:

- One employee involved in recognition of qualifications and partially dealing with customer service (Ms Eglė Grigonienė);
- One experienced senior credential evaluator (Ms Kristina Sutkutė);
- Two middle-level managers with extensive experience in evaluation of credentials (Ms Rima Žilinskaitė and Ms Giedra Katilauskienė);
- One senior-level manager, head of the ENIC/NARIC (Ms Aurelija Valeikienė).

Before doing the self-evaluation, the Centre completed the typology form.

For a few standards, where it was explicitly requested to provide evidence for how the standard is met, we are referring to practice in the text and also attach physical examples. They all are kept on a hard copy file / in electronic form.

At the end of the entire process, the summary SWOT was made, areas for improvement identified.

Typology of SKVC as ENIC/NARIC Centre

1. ABOUT THE CENTRE

- Studijų kokybės vertinimo centras (SKVC), Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education
- When was your Information centre established?

On 24 January 1995.

- Are you an ENIC or ENIC-NARIC?

ENIC

ENIC-NARIC

2. LEGAL POWERS AND STATUS

Legal powers

- The activities of your centre are:

regulated by national law [*please explain how and to which extent*]

The activities of SKVC are regulated by the following national legislation:

- *Law on Higher Education and Research (adopted in 2009)* assigns SKVC to the tasks to create favourable conditions for the free movement of persons when organising and carrying out the assessment and/or recognition in Lithuania of higher education-related qualifications awarded in foreign institutions and fulfilling other functions set by the Government.
- *Description of the Procedure for Recognition of Education and Qualifications Concerning Higher Education and Acquired under Educational Programmes of Foreign States and International Organisations, adopted by Resolution No 212 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania of 29 February 2012*, assigns SKVC to the following tasks:
 - to perform the functions of a member of the European Network of National Information Centres on Academic Mobility and Recognition (ENIC) and the Network of National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC);
 - to collect and provide information about educational systems of foreign states and the Republic of Lithuania to ensure recognition of education and qualifications, academic mobility and international cooperation.
 - to provide academic recognition of foreign higher education qualifications concerning higher education;
 - to provide information to interested institutions and persons and to perform other functions defined in legal acts to enable the evaluation and recognition of higher education qualifications acquired in Lithuania.
 - to monitor decisions by higher education institutions concerning academic recognition of foreign qualifications and provide methodological assistance.
 - to publish general recommendations on assessment and/or academic recognition of foreign qualifications on its website and in other ways on the basis of the established practice.

- to provide information about assessment of particular foreign qualifications and recommendations on how to perform this assessment upon request of foreign qualification recognition authorities or other stakeholders.
- to provide information about assessment of particular foreign qualifications and recommendations on how to perform this assessment upon request of foreign qualification recognition authorities or other stakeholders.
- to collect information related to decisions taken by authorised higher education institutions on recognition of foreign qualifications.
- to deal with appeals concerning decisions on recognition made by authorized higher education institutions.
- Order of the Minister of Education and Science regarding allocation of state funded study places for holders of foreign and international qualifications provisions that SKVC is responsible for conversion of grades for holders of foreign or international qualifications who apply for state funded study places.
 - defined in a mandate given to your centre [*please provide a general and short description*]
- Are there any contractual requirements to be met for the services your centre offers?
No.
- How independent is your centre in setting its own recognition policies?

SKVC was founded in 1995 as an independent public body, funded from the State budget (a budgetary body). Its founder was the Ministry of Education and Science. SKVC has autonomous responsibility for its operations and its conclusions and recommendations made in its statements is not influenced by third parties such as organs of political influence and various stakeholders.

Independence of SKVC is guaranteed through the following measures:

- its operational independence from ministries and other stakeholders is guaranteed in official documentation (e.g. the aforementioned legal acts);
- the definition and operation of its procedures and methods, and the determination of the outcomes of academic recognition process and other processes are undertaken autonomously and independently from government, higher education institutions, and organs of political influence;
- while relevant stakeholders in higher education or particular experts are consulted in the process the final outcomes of an assessment and academic recognition remain the responsibility of the agency.

Legal status

- What is the legal status of your centre? Your centre is:
 - a public body
 - part of the ministry responsible for higher education:
 - a separate unit;
 - not a separate unit¹

¹ Functions assigned to staff alongside other functions.

- accountable / answerable to any other ministry or government department
- independent institution
- part of another larger public organization² [please describe]
- a private body
 - not for profit
 - independent institution
 - part of another larger private not-for-profit organization³ [please describe]
 - profit-oriented
 - independent institution
 - part of another larger private for-profit organization [please describe]

3. REMIT AND SCOPE OF SERVICES

- What services are offered by your centre?
 - Evaluation of international qualifications.
 - ✓ Are your statements/evaluations:
 - legally binding (for applications of individuals):
 - Recognition for further study
 - Recognition for access to regulated professions
 - Recognition for access to non-regulated professions
 - Recognition for employment⁴
 - a recommendation/ advice (for applications of institutions):
 - Recognition for further study
 - Recognition for access to regulated professions
 - Recognition for access to non-regulated professions
 - Recognition for employment⁵
 - Information on international qualifications⁶
 - Statements on international qualifications⁷
 - ✓ Which applicants are requesting your statements/evaluations?
 - Individuals
 - Education institutions:
 - tertiary
 - post-secondary non-tertiary
 - Upper secondary
 - Employers
 - Ministries

² E.g. national rectors' conference, university, etc.

³ E.g. educational exchanges support office, international education foundation, etc.

⁴ In case of formal requirements to the level of a qualification for access to non-regulated professions.

⁵ Idem.

⁶ E.g. information on generic level, including e.g. references to websites and databases.

⁷ Objective information without evaluation, e.g. accreditation status, level, workload, purpose and/or learning outcomes, without evaluating/comparing them.

Other:

state institutions (like Lithuanian Labor Exchange, National Health Insurance Fund, Tax Inspectorate Under the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Lithuania, etc.)

Online database for your applicants.

Provide training to third parties.

Training activities for higher education institutions.

Traditionally, SKVC has annual training seminars for higher education institutions. Such seminars are good tools to share practice of assessment of qualifications and information regarding educational systems around the world, tendencies in academy mobility and the newest instruments for recognition of qualifications and/or period of studies, etc.

Up to 2012 academic recognition system of foreign qualifications was centralized in Lithuania. SKVC provided assessment of qualifications concerning higher education and the Ministry of Education and Science academic performed academic recognition of such qualifications.

Since 2012, higher education institutions have possibility receive a right to provide an assessment and academic recognition of foreign qualifications by themselves for study purpose. Therefore, 9 training seminars, organized by SKVC in period 2012- 2015, were devoted to prepare higher education institutions to make an assessment and recognition of qualifications independently. Some seminars were aimed to provide general principals and provisions concerning an assessment and present more information about the models of recognition, main tools and instruments for an assessment, main steps of the procedure of assessment, etc. Other seminars had a purpose to introduce educational systems from regions like Asia and Africa or Post-soviet area for better understanding of qualifications from countries of such regions (Iraq, India, Nigeria, Cameroon, Russia, etc.). Trainings were provided by credential evaluators from SKVC and invited experts from other countries. Practical tasks were an important part of seminars, where participants learned a lot how to provide an assessment of qualifications in practice.

Trainings to employers

This year SKVC had training organised to employers regarding actual questions on recognition of foreign qualifications. According to the need, we intend to continue offerings such sessions in the future.

Consultations for high school students regarding studies abroad

Consultations (including presentations) regarding recognition of foreign qualifications are provided by SKVC in annual educational fairs and other similar events in Lithuania aiming to introduce studies in higher education institutions from Lithuania and foreign countries. In addition, SKVC had few visits to upper secondary schools where actual questions regarding foreign qualifications and educational systems were provided.

Research,

Projects

Conferences and seminars

Publications

Other: *[please specify]*

4. STATISTICS

Number of enquiries

- How many enquiries, statements and/or evaluations does your centre process annually?⁸

Total number of applications for academic recognition of foreign qualifications:

2012 – 1936 applications

2013 – 2428 applications

2014 – 3155 applications

2015 – 2544 (up to 23 October)

Total number of other inquiries regarding foreign qualifications, assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications, systems of education, grades conversion, etc.:

2012 – 4000 inquires

2013 – 5000 inquires

2014 – 4000 inquires

Total number of applications for conversion of grades (holders of foreign or international qualifications applying for state funded places):

2012 – 96 applications

2013 – 111 applications

2014 – 124 applications

2015 – 134 applications

Total number of applications from employers for recommendation regarding assessment of foreign qualifications (service provided since mid-2015):

2015 – 62

- Do you expect significant increases or decreases in the numbers, or changes in the type of enquiries/evaluations in the upcoming 3 years?⁹

We are expecting the continuation of the trend of the increasing number of applications for recognition and/or recommendations for assessment from institutions. This is related to general trends of internationalisation in higher education, mobility of workers and students, etc.

We are expecting an increase in applications from conflict countries (Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Ukraine, etc.), which often may require additional research and expertise.

Every year we are experiencing an increasing number of applicants from African and Asian regions as they are the regions targeted by Lithuanian higher education institutions. Nonetheless, the number of applications from neighbouring countries (Belarus, Russia, and Poland) is also not decreasing and the number of applications from other post-Soviet countries, especially the Caucasus region, continues to grow.

⁸ Provide an indication, e.g. based on the average of last 5 years.

⁹ E.g. level of education/qualification, country of origin of education/qualification, specific aspects of education/qualifications.

All of the aforementioned trends will result in increasing number of applications and the need for further systematization of practice and usage of IT tools, which are foreseen in our office plans.

The implementation of the decentralized academic recognition system also demands for additional consultancy and guidance for higher education institutions. The system has also created new tasks of monitoring and providing recommendations for the recognition activities of higher education institutions.

Human resources

- How many members of staff are employed by your centre?
 - ✓ Total numbers of persons and full time equivalent (FTE) of staff: *[please include a - numbers and b - fte]*
 - ✓ Total persons and fte working for your centre:
 - Leadership¹⁰: a) 4 , b) 4 fte (the number includes the Director and the Deputy Director of SKVC, Head and the Deputy Head of the Division for Qualification Assessment);
 - Policy advisor(s): a) - b) -
 - Credential evaluator(s): a) 8 and b) 8 fte
 - Administrative staff¹¹ a) 7 and b) 7 fte
 - Other¹²: maintenance a) 1 b) 1 fte

NB. Senior leadership of SKVC (Director and Deputy Director), the administrative staff and other staff members also lead and/or provide services for the tasks of SKVC as an external quality assurance agency.

- ✓ From the above categories, how many persons and fte are officially employed outside your centre¹³? *None, but IT support is subcontracted.*

Finances

- How are the services of your centre financed?
 - Public funds
 - Private funds¹⁴
 - Both. Please specify:
 - % of funds from public funding:
 - structural: *[please specify %]*
 - non - structural¹⁵: *[please specify %]*
 - % private funding: *[please specify %]*

¹⁰ Head of Organization, Deputy Head.

¹¹ E.g. Finance, law, Public Relations and Human Resources

¹² E.g. maintenance, IT support, etc

¹³ E.g. elsewhere in organization, or contracted outside centre

¹⁴ E.g. through fees to individuals and/or clients for services provided

¹⁵ E.g. tenders

Standards and Guidelines

Standard 1 – Procedures, Criteria and Quality Assurance

The ENIC/NARIC office aligns its recognition criteria and procedures with established good practice, reviews its procedures on a regular basis, and ensures that the criteria are consistently applied.

Guidelines

- *Recognition criteria and procedures are in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and subsidiary texts¹⁶ (especially the (revised) Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications), as well as with other good practice as collected in the European Area of Recognition manual¹⁷.*

The Lisbon Recognition Convention, its subsidiary texts, and other good practice tools are applied to all qualifications, including qualifications issued in countries, which are not Parties of the Convention. The provisions of the Convention have been fully incorporated into the national legislation, and this is reflected in the latest Bologna Process Implementation Report (2015)¹⁸. The national legislation has also been amended and/or so as not to be in conflict with the subsidiary texts.

Anybody can apply for recognition without any restrictions in terms of status and/or citizenship. Applications are currently processed free of charge. However, there are plans to introduce a small fee to prevent applications of candidates, which are not potential students and/or employees. Our office has noticed that many applicants outside Lithuania apply without having prior plans to study and/or work in Lithuania because the procedure does not cost anything and is open to anyone. This increases the processing times for applicants with more definite plans, i.e., prospective students, employees, and/or immigrants.

Our office accepts documents in English and Russian without a translation. Standardised documents (such as state standard diplomas and/or transcripts) are also accepted in Latvian, Estonian, Polish, French, and German.

However, credential evaluators read the titles of the qualifications and other crucial information, such as names of higher education institutions, study programmes in the original languages. Thus, for crucial information our office relies on documents in the original

¹⁶ See for full Convention and Subsidiary texts: enic-naric.net: <http://www.enic-naric.net/the-lisbon-recognition-convention-97.aspx>

¹⁷ <http://www.enic-naric.net/ear-manual-standards-and-guidelines-on-recognition.aspx>

¹⁸ http://bologna-yerevan2015.ehea.info/files/2015%20Implementation%20report_20.05.2015.pdf

language. Titles of foreign qualifications are indicated in the original language, titles in scripts other than Latin are transliterated.

The assessment is carried out in several steps, which are outlined in the Regulations approved by the Director of the Centre and are in line with the revised Recommendations:

- determining whether a qualification is a recognised award and belongs to the formal system of education of the country of origin;
- determining the level, i.e. the relative position and function compared to other qualifications in the country of origin;
- identifying a Lithuanian qualification, which is the most comparable to the foreign qualification;
- assessment of the qualification in terms of content, profile, workload, quality, and learning outcomes.

Qualification frameworks (overarching European and national ones) are considered in determining the level of the qualification in the country of origin, the most comparable qualification in Lithuania, and the learning outcomes.

The assessment focuses on the qualification for which recognition is sought and its learning outcomes. Our office uses learning outcomes approach; therefore, education previously acquired by the applicant generally does not have an effect on its assessment.

Past practice is always taken into account during an assessment. Substantial changes of practice are always discussed within all levels of management. Major shifts in practice are communicated to the stakeholders through various events and on our website.

For example, a major practice change for Nigerian Senior Secondary School qualifications was initiated after several years of extensive experience in dealing with these credentials, collection of information on the functioning of the system, and considering reviews by higher education institutions. The practice change was publicly communicated with substantiating explanations and clarifications.

Qualifications issued several years ago and/or under previous education structures are considered in the light of the status of the qualification in the issuing country by taking into account whether previous qualifications are included in the qualifications framework and/or whether comparability to the presently awarded qualifications has been determined in the country of origin. Our office does not consider to what extent the older qualification is outdated as it involves considering factors, which fall outside our sphere of competence, such as considering the profile of the activities undertaken by the applicant after the qualification has been issued. This is left to decide for institutions making the final decision, such as higher education institutions and/or employers.

- *Recognition criteria and procedures are reviewed on a regular basis in order to adapt to developments in the educational field and in the field of recognition (e.g. the introduction of new tools such as the national qualifications frameworks). Sources of input for reviewing recognition practice are applicants, clients and stakeholders;*

The review and the possibility to adapt our criteria and procedures are ensured through the following elements of our recognition system:

- Flexible legislative and working framework;
- The possibility to appeal our decisions;
- Informal discussions with higher education institutions and other ENIC/NARIC centres.

The system, which lays out the framework for criteria and procedures, is flexible enough to allow our office to adapt to the development in the field of recognition and education in general.

The main principles, such as the competences of institutions, processing time, the right to appeal, the types of decisions, are laid out in the Governmental Resolution. The rest of the provisions are left to regulate to our office and it is done through:

- legislation adapted by the order of the Centre, which, prior to approval and/or amendment, is distributed and discussed with the main stakeholders (the Ministry of Education and Science and higher education institutions)
- office practice consisting of various elements, such as office practice guides, country profiles etc.

The fact that most of the provisions regarding criteria and procedures are internally regulated allows for a quick review and adaptation. In order to make sure that the provisions are in line with the general education developments, the most important legal provisions are discussed with other stakeholders.

The framework is constantly being reviewed to adapt and reflect the main developments in the field of education, such as joint degrees, qualification frameworks, etc.

For example, after our office experience with joint programmes both as a quality assurance agency and a recognition office and following the findings and recommendation of the JOQAR project and subsequently the recommendation in the EAR Manual, we have adapted our office practice regarding joint degrees to make sure that accreditation of a programme as a whole by one reliable accreditation agency is considered to be a sufficient proof of the overall quality of the programme.

The framework can be reviewed when the need arises and it is flexible enough to make sure that the changes can be reflected instantly in our office practice.

In addition to the general framework of recognition, upon which our decisions are based, practice can also reviewed on the level of individual decisions based on the input of applicants and other stakeholders.

This is done through the applicant's right to appeal our decision to an external appeal body consisting of representatives of various stakeholders, such as higher education institutions, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, etc. If a decision of the Centre

is not supported by the applicant and the appeal body, the Centre has to review its decision. In certain cases, it results in the change of practice, but sometimes it also results in better substantiation of our decisions in terms of collected information and explanation to the applicant.

In addition to the aforementioned, we discuss and adapt our decisions based on informal information provided by higher education institutions and other ENIC/NARIC officer during various events. The Centre holds various seminars and training sessions on various systems of education where our decisions are discussed and higher education institutions share their experiences on how students with various backgrounds succeed in their study.

For example, the aforementioned change in our practice regarding Nigerian Senior School Certificate was partially based on the reviews of higher education institutions regarding students holding this credential.

- *The ENIC/NARIC office has tools (e.g. internal guidelines, written procedures and internal handbooks for its employees) to ensure the quality of its procedures. Mechanisms are in place to check whether the information and evaluations provided to applicants and clients is appropriate and to guarantee that recognition criteria are applied consistently from one case to the next and from one employee to the next.*

Our office has the following types of tools to ensure the quality of its procedures:

- Legislative framework, which is set up to make sure that the fundamental rights of applicants and consistency of decisions not only in our office, but also in other competent recognition bodies is observed;
- Our office internal quality management system (based on elements of ISO 9001, ESG¹⁹ and requirements in ENIC/NARIC Services Charter) in which our processes are described;
- Tools for credential evaluators:
 - methodological guidelines for specific issues;
 - country profiles;
 - general or country specific checklists.

The tools are in place to make sure that different evaluators go through the same steps every time and make the same decisions in similar situations.

- Mentoring and working in region groups, which allows for close cooperation and mentorship of evaluators working with the same region;
- Decision making process, which involves several levels:
 - in routine cases, the decision is reviewed by at least two people in addition to the evaluator: the head of the department and the director or the deputy director of the institution who signs the actual decisions;
 - in difficult cases, there is an institutionalised collegial committee, which consists of several credential evaluators, the head of the ENIC/NARIC office, and legal

¹⁹ European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, endorsed by Ministers of Education in 2005, revised in 2015.

advisors; the decisions of the committee are protooled and used for decision making and change and/or formulation of our office practice.

Our office has determined that, in terms of the quality and consistency of the decisions, the most important elements are various methodological and country specific tools, such as country specific checklists for credential evaluators. At the moment still too few of them have been developed to allow for the level of efficiency that we are aiming for. However, the further development of such tools is one of the primary goals of our office.

The most important element in the quality of the administrative procedure in terms of observing the deadlines, communicating with applicants, etc. is the internal quality management system. The administrative process is described. However, due to the lack of IT tools, the integrity and proper application of the administrative procedure can only be checked on ad hoc basis. Our office is planning to start working with a standard new document and workflow management software (DocLogix), which will allow for monitoring of the administrative procedure.

Compliance to the Revised Recommendations on Criteria and Procedure can be summarised as follows:

- Paragraphs on General considerations and Definitions are not applicable
- Full compliance with paragraphs: 4, 7, 8, 9, 26, 27, 28, 38, 41, 44
- Substantial compliance with paragraphs: 6, 12, 13, 32, 33, 34, 35
- Partial compliance with paragraph: 39
- Non applicable paragraphs: 5, 10, 11

Please provide your answer to standard 1 in this box, using the guideline followed by an indication of the overall compliance

COMPLIANCE STANDARD 1

1. No compliance
2. Partial compliance
3. Substantial compliance
4. Full compliance

Standard 2 - Applicant-centred Recognition

Foreign qualifications are evaluated based on the purpose for which recognition is sought and recognized unless there is a substantial difference. Learning outcomes take precedence in the evaluation. An alternative form of recognition is granted if possible where full recognition cannot be granted. There should be a process in place that enables the applicants to appeal against the recognition decision. All persons in a refugee (like) situation holding a qualification without documentation are able to have their qualifications assessed.

Guidelines

- *The purpose of recognition (academic, occupational/professional) is taken into account and the qualification is assessed in a flexible manner, focusing on the requirements that are relevant for this specific recognition purpose. Ideally the evaluation or statement issued includes the purpose of recognition.*

There are two types of assessment done by our office:

- Recognition statements for individuals seeking study and/or employment
- Recommendations to higher education institutions and employers.

Recognition decisions take into account only the general requirements relating to qualifications and indicate the comparable qualification in Lithuania. As such, they can be used for many purposes and it is up to employers and/or higher education institutions to decide whether the specific requirements are met for access to a particular profession and/or study programme.

When assessing qualifications for the purpose of such recognition statement, our office considers, on a general level, the purpose of the qualification (preparation for employment and/or further study) and any limitations that it might entail (such as access only to specific programmes). Our statement usually reflects the purpose of the qualification in the country of origin.

For example, some countries have access qualifications, which provide access only to non-university study programmes. Lithuanian *brandos atestatas* provides access to study programmes of all types of institutions. However, foreign qualifications with limited access can still be recognised for specific purposes of access to specific (e.g. non-university) study programmes.

In case of recommendations to institutions (which, contrary to the recognition statements, are not legally binding), focusing on the purpose allows our office even more flexibility. In some cases, our office can even recommend recognition of qualifications awarded by non-recognised, but legitimate providers for certain purposes. For example, this could apply to qualifications awarded by military institutions, which are outside the formal system of education, but are under control of the national Ministry of Defence.

The statements regarding recognition decisions and recommendations indicate the purpose of recognition.

- *Foreign qualifications are recognized unless there is a substantial difference, by:*
 - *focusing on the five key elements that together make up a qualification (level, workload, quality, profile and learning outcomes)*
 - *comparing the foreign qualification to the relevant national qualification required for the desired activity*
 - *determining whether the main requirements relevant for the desired activity are sufficiently covered by the outcomes of the foreign qualification.*

- *Qualifications are assessed against learning outcomes as much as possible. In the absence of clear statements of learning outcomes, the following may be consulted as an indicator of the output of a qualification: purpose, content, rights attached and orientation (e.g. research-based or professionally oriented).*
- *Where substantial differences are identified, provide a well-founded statement outlining the substantial differences between the foreign qualification and the home one and seek to offer alternative, partial or conditional recognition of the qualification.*
- *The applicant is informed about the possibility to appeal against the recognition decision. In the case of an appeal, the originally provided application together with new information - if provided by the applicant - is re-examined.*
- *With insufficient documentation, the assessment of a qualification of a person in a refugee (like) situation is based on a background paper. If deemed necessary, interviews are conducted with staff of higher education institutions and special examinations or sworn statements before a legally competent authority are arranged. Refugees are exempted from paying any assessment fees.*

In both cases (regarding decisions and recommendations issued) qualifications are assessed by focusing on the following key elements of a qualification: level, workload, quality, contents, profile, and learning outcomes.

The criteria are applied in the following way:

- Focus is placed on output rather than input. This allows us to place emphasis on the final result rather than various aspects of the delivery of the programme as well as allows recognition of qualifications obtained through flexible and/or non-traditional learning paths
- Quantitative criteria are considered only if they have substantial effect on the output (learning outcomes). This allows for recognition of qualifications, which may be different in some aspects, such as length, but are the same in learning outcomes.

Learning outcomes is the most important criterion and it is viewed not only in terms of formal statements of learning outcomes, but, in their absence, as an overall result (outcome) of the qualification encompassing all of its elements (such as profile, workload etc.). It is agreed that learning outcomes can be considered as valid only if the qualification is quality assured and the achievement of learning outcomes has been demonstrated by successful accumulation of the minimum required number of credits. Other elements of a qualification, such as workload, contents, are considered only if they have a substantial effect on learning outcomes.

A foreign qualification is compared to the most similar qualification in Lithuania based on their level. The focus is placed not on the particular qualification, which is required for the desired activity, but on the most similar qualification because our statement is general in nature and can be used by the applicant for many purposes. Our office determines whether the main requirements for the award of the national qualification are sufficiently covered by the foreign qualification in terms of two main aspects: employment and/or further study.

Qualifications are recognised unless there is substantial difference. When full recognition cannot be granted, the following alternative decisions are considered:

- partial recognition, which restricts recognition only to certain activity (for example, employment, but not further study);
- recognition with additional requirements (for example, one year of additional study).

All decisions, even the positive ones, provide information on the reasons for the decision and the appeal procedure as well as remedial measures that can be undertaken (if applicable).

Our decisions can be appealed to an external pre-court appeal body consisting of various stakeholders. After examining the appeal and additional information provided by the applicant (if any), the appeal committee may request for a review of our decision. In such cases, our office re-examines the file and, if necessary, collects additional information.

Our decisions can also be disputed in courts and this right is occasionally exercised by our applicants. So far, in all cases the court has supported the decisions taken by the Centre.

The administrative procedure as such can also be brought to scrutiny by unsatisfied applicants to the Commission of Administrative Disputes and there were several of such cases in our practice.

Our decisions can also be re-examined if the applicant provides additional information, which was unknown at the time the decision was taken.

Our office still has limited experience with refugees or persons in a refugee like situation without documentation. The few cases that our office did have were related to situations where partial documentation was missing, for example, a transcript was available, but not the diploma. Most of such situations were related to neighbouring countries at the time of conflict, such as Russia and Ukraine. Our office has extensive experience with these countries and was able to reconstruct the missing elements and/or pieces of information with additional information provided by the applicant and information available in our office internal resources.

However, we are currently preparing a framework for the assessment of a qualification of a person in a refugee (like) situation without documentation. It is provisioned that the assessment could be based on a background paper and interviews.

The example of how our office reports the existence of substantial differences to an applicant is attached as an annex to this self-evaluation document.

Please provide your answer to standard 2 in this box, using the guideline followed by an indication of the overall compliance

COMPLIANCE STANDARD 2

1. No compliance
2. Partial compliance
3. Substantial compliance
4. Full compliance

Standard 3 – Quality, Legitimacy and Authenticity

The quality and legitimacy of a qualification is assessed by verifying that it is quality assured and awarded in accordance with applicable provisions and requirements. Quality assurance and accreditation systems are considered as sufficient evidence of compliance with quality standards. The authenticity of submitted documents, in case of reasonable doubt, should be checked using internal and, if necessary, external verification methods.

Guidelines

- *The status of the awarding institution and programme is checked with the appropriate authorities to ensure that the programme is of sufficient quality and to link it to a national education system. The following information is taken into account:*
 - *which national authorities are responsible for accreditation/quality assurance;*
 - *whether the accreditation is at institutional or programme level;*
 - *what is the accreditation status of the institution and/or programme when the qualification was awarded.*

The information supplied by institutions and individuals is cross-checked with other official sources.

The quality of a qualification is one of our assessment criteria and is verified as one of the first steps in our assessment procedure. The outcome of the research into the quality of a qualification will determine whether our office will continue on to further steps of assessment. All of the aforementioned parameters are considered in establishing the quality of a qualification.

The research into the quality of a qualification itself involves several steps:

- our office determines what was the applicable system of quality assurance during the period of study and at the time of the award of the qualification:
 - whether it involves several stages, such as recognition and/or accreditation;
 - whether it is applicable to institutions and/or programs;
 - what were the competent quality assurance bodies;
- our office determines whether the qualification has been subjected to the applicable quality assurance mechanisms, such as recognition and/or accreditation:
 - if it has not been subject to the mandatory quality assurance mechanisms, our office considers the qualification as not recognised and goes on to consider the legitimacy of its provider;
 - if it has been validated and/or accredited by a body other than the competent national body, our office does research into the legitimacy of such body and the possible effects of such validation and/or accreditation (e.g. foreign providers validated by the UK institutions or providers accredited by the US accreditation bodies);
 - if the qualification has been subject to the quality assurance mechanisms and is properly recognised and/or accredited, our office considers the qualification to be recognised and goes on to other steps of assessment.

Lack of some elements or non-existence of certain quality assurance mechanism in the country of origin is not considered to be an obstacle for recognition.

The outcome of the research into the quality of the qualification is noted by each credential evaluator in the checklist.

Official sources (quality assurance agencies, ministries of education, ENIC/NARIC offices, etc.) are used as the primary sources of information to determine the quality of a qualification. Information provided by the education institution is considered as initial information, which requires double checking with official sources.

- *Qualifications based on non-traditional learning (such as flexible learning paths, recognition of prior learning (RPL), open/distance learning) are treated in the same way as traditional qualifications. If qualifications are based on transnational learning, additional provisions and/or requirements may be taken into account, such as whether transnational providers have permission to operate by both receiving (host) and sending (home) countries and adhere to other principles outlined in the legislation of both countries and the Code of Good Practice for the Provision of Transnational Education²⁰ and in the Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education²¹.*

Qualifications based on non-traditional learning are treated in the same way as traditional qualifications. The main criterion for assessment of all qualifications (non-traditional and traditional ones) is learning outcomes. If the non-traditional qualification has been properly quality assured, our office considers that the learning outcomes associated with that level and type of the qualification have been achieved, irrespective of the pathway taken. Our office accepts the fact that the competent awarding body established that the graduate has achieved the intended learning outcomes.

In case of transnational qualifications, our office considers whether the provider has been appropriately licensed (if applicable) by both the receiving country and the country of origin. Also, our office considers whether the rest of the provisions regarding quality assurance in the Code of Good Practice for the Provision of Transnational Education have been met. For example, our office considers whether the same and/or comparable quality standards have been applied to the provision of studies in the receiving country as in the country of origin. This is especially important if third party institutions and/or partners were involved in the provision of studies. For example, for a certain period of time some of the Russian higher education institutions had representatives and/or agents in Lithuania, which were providing studies in Lithuania without necessary permission for such activity from the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania. The Russian higher education institutions were recognised in Russia, but did not have the necessary permission to operate in Lithuania. In such cases, our office considered that the quality of studies, which were provided in Lithuania, was not assured.

²⁰ See for full Convention and Subsidiary texts: enic-naric.net: <http://www.enic-naric.net/the-lisbon-recognition-convention-97.aspx>

²¹ See for full Convention and Subsidiary texts: enic-naric.net: <http://www.enic-naric.net/the-lisbon-recognition-convention-97.aspx>

- *Since the procedures for quality assurance and accreditation of joint programmes are still being developed, a certain amount of flexibility is exercised in assessing the status of joint programmes. In the European context, a single accreditation of the entire joint programme is considered to be sufficient evidence for the quality [ref 6 = European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (October 2014)]. In other cases, it may be necessary to investigate the status of the institutions involved in the joint programme and status of the joint programme in all participating countries.*

If a joint programme has been accredited as a whole by a reliable accreditation agency, it is considered to be sufficient evidence of quality. Usually this would apply only in cases when programme accreditation is provisioned in the national systems of providers. Several months ago, our office assessed a joint qualification (European Master's degree in Human Rights and Democratisation) created and awarded by 8 universities from 6 European countries (Germany, Spain, Netherlands, Slovenia, Austria, Italy). The applicant studied in the Netherlands and Italy. Our office verified that the programme was accredited in the Netherlands and additionally Italy and it was treated as sufficient evidence of quality. Further checks were not considered to be necessary.

In cases when there is no evidence of such overall programme accreditation, our office verifies the recognition and/or accreditation status of the partners, which were actually involved in the provision of the completed programme. We may also verify whether the partners are authorised (if applicable) to offer this particular field and/or level of study in their country of origin.

We also take into consideration the fact some of the partners may be not higher education institutions. If other partners of the joint programme, which are recognised higher education institutions, take responsibility for the quality assurance of the programme, the existence of partners, which are not higher education institutions, is not considered to be an obstacle for recognition.

- *In case a qualification or the awarding institution is non-recognised, it may still be useful to investigate its legitimacy by taking into account any information of a third party's quality assessment. If relevant information is found, a statement or an advice may be issued explaining the status of the institution/qualification in cases where it is confirmed legitimate (but not officially recognised by the national educational authorities).*

In case a qualification or the awarding institution is non-recognised, our office cannot issue an official decision regarding recognition of the qualification. Nonetheless, our office investigates the legitimacy of the institution. Some of the cases when the provider can be considered as non-recognised, but legitimate are the following:

- the provider is operating within a framework set up by a competent national institution, such as the Ministry of Defence is quality assured under that framework;
- the qualification serves a particular function in the country of origin (for example, gives access to certain profession activity or can be transferred towards further study (for example, qualifications from non-accredited religious institutions)).

In such cases, our office can issue a letter, which provides information on the qualification, its status, profile, further opportunities in the country of origin, and recommendations to employers and/or higher education institutions.

- *The authenticity of submitted documents is checked using internal and, if necessary, external verification methods. The internal information management could include a database of samples of both genuine and fraudulent documents, a glossary of common terms, information on the formats and contents of educational documentation and internal records of country-specific verification procedures. External information management might consist of checking with relevant authorities/awarding bodies and requesting and examining original documents if not provided initially.*

Our office considers authenticity of documents to be an important factor in our daily operations. However, we do stress that establishing the authenticity of documents is not the aim of the assessment, but merely an indicator of the quality of our process. Therefore, we attempt to establish authenticity to the best of our knowledge, but try to ensure that authenticity matters would not hinder our process or make it overly lengthy, or even impossible. However, our office does put in a lot of effort and time in determining the authenticity of the submitted documents.

Our authenticity policy encompasses:

- documentation requirements;
- handling of documents during an assessment;
- imaging and storing the documents for future reference.

Our office has formulated general documentation requirements and country specific requirements. The requirements for documents are formulated with a view to make sure the integrity of our process and preventing fraud. Our office requires submission of certified true copies or the originals of credentials. For certain countries, which offer limited possibilities in terms of external verification, only originals are accepted. However, our office reserves the right to request for originals, if in doubt.

In cases, when electronic documents, which are considered to be official by the awarding institution, are issued, our office accepts such documents and considers them to be highly reliable if received directly from the awarding institution (e.g. through an official results database).

During an assessment procedure, the authenticity of the submitted documents is checked using both internal and external verification methods.

The internal verification is carried out through the following steps:

- the format, the signatures, etc. of the document are compared against the collected samples and official information sources (e.g. a list of Rectors to make sure that the document was signed by a person who was the Rector of the institution at the time of the issuance of documents);
- if originals are available, the security features and the genuineness of the signatures and seals are checked and, if available, are compared against the descriptors of security features, which are developed by our office for certain credentials;

- searches are done through various official information resources and on the website of the institution or other official bodies to check whether:
 - any official online databases to check the results are available;
 - to determine whether there is any indirect evidence of graduation, such as database of defended research papers, lists of students, etc.
- other factors may be considered as evidence supporting the authenticity of credentials , such as a license of a practitioner, which requires possession of certain credentials, etc.

If a credential successfully passes the internal verification, our office continues on to making an assessment decision. If, after the internal verification, there are some inconsistencies and/or deviations, our office turns to the external verification. The external verification is also applicable for some countries and/or credentials in cases when our office does not have sufficient practice to be able to carry out a proper internal verification (e.g. does not have sufficient number of sample credentials).

The external verification is carried out by directly contacting the issuing institution and/or another competent authority and indicating our institution's reference number to be quoted in reply. Usually, the applicant is informed about this and is requested to mediate in order to get an answer. The integrity of the answer (i.e. making sure that it comes from the issuing institution) is ensured by the reference number, which is never revealed to the applicant.

After an assessment, the credentials are scanned and its security features are described for the purposes of further reference. Once a sufficient number of the original credentials have been described, our office develops a document with information on the format and security features of a particular credential (e.g. from Nigeria or Russia).

Once our office has accumulated enough internal resources on a particular credential, the documentation requirements and the use of external verification is reviewed to remove the burden for the applicant and to make the procedure more efficient. For example, after several years of collecting information, our office has been able to move from relying solely on external verification to relying mostly on internal verification for credentials from India.

Authenticity is one of the issues that can make the assessment procedure too lengthy and sometimes impossible. While our office does consider external verification to be the most reliable form of verification, it can take a long time and the answer may never be received. This might put our institution and the applicant in limbo for months. For this reason, our office is improving our internal verification capacities by developing information tools and imaging and scanning all incoming credentials. However, reliable internal verification resources take some years to develop and experience with particular countries, which may not be numerous, is required. For this reason, in many cases, our office still relies on external verification, but the internal verification resources are constantly built and improved.

From our office experience, the internal verification and even external verification do not guarantee authenticity of the credential one hundred percent. For this reason, all of our statements include a disclaimer regarding confirming the authenticity of documents.

Compliance to the Revised Recommendations on Criteria and Procedure can be summarised as follows:

- Paragraphs on General considerations and Definitions are not applicable,
- Full compliance with paragraphs: 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31.

The example of how our office reports the existence of substantial differences to an applicant is attached as an annex to this self-evaluation document.

Please provide your answer to standard 3 in this box, using the guideline followed by an indication of the overall compliance

COMPLIANCE STANDARD 3

1. No compliance
2. Partial compliance
3. Substantial compliance
4. Full compliance

Standard 4 - Evaluation Tools and Resources

Relevant and up to date information on recognition and education systems is actively collected. National Qualification Frameworks where available are used as a transparency tool for understanding the level, learning outcomes and workload of foreign qualifications. Credits are accepted as an indication of the amount of study and the distribution of grades within a particular education system is taken into account when required or appropriate.

Guidelines

- *Up-to-date information is collected on relevant topics, such as education systems, qualifications awarded in different countries and their comparability to the qualifications in the home country, legislation on recognition, officially recognised and accredited institutions, admission requirements, recognition conventions, bilateral agreements, EU Directives, and other relevant bodies.*

All relevant information concerning credential evaluation is collected and stored on the server, there all the information can be reached by our office colleagues. We sort the information by county and by theme. Usually the information found in the county folder is: examples of credentials, information about education system, recognised and accredited institutions, accredited programs etc. We are in the process of developing country profiles and we have already finished profiles for the main countries that we get the most qualifications from (Russia, Belarus, UK, Ireland, Nigeria, India, USA). These country profiles will be available for use not only for our office but also for Lithuanian higher education institutions and other institutions interested in a qualification recognition procedure.

- *A database on previous evaluations is maintained, in order to ensure consistency in future evaluations.*

All the previous decisions are stored on the server, paper files are archived either in paper or, for the most recent years, in electronic searchable format. This allows access and review of our previous decisions.

Our office is planning to develop and introduce a user friendly searchable database with information on our decisions, which could also be available for external users. Also, all unseen/new original diplomas and supplements are scanned and added to the country folders, where other relevant information concerning credential evaluation is stored.

- *National qualifications frameworks are used as a key source of information to establish the level, generic learning outcomes and workload of foreign qualifications. Where a national qualification framework has been referenced to a meta framework (e.g. EQF), this is also taken into account.*

National qualification frameworks are used as a key source of information in establishing the level, generic learning outcomes and workload of foreign qualifications. Frameworks aid in determining the place of the qualification in the national system of education, its interrelation with other qualifications within that system.

The overarching frameworks are used as an additional tool, which is especially helpful when the national qualifications framework has many different levels.

However, the assessment is not carried out solely based on the qualification frameworks and their referencing. Several qualifications, which may differ in profile, can be placed on the same level. Therefore, an assessment decision requires additional research into the profile of the qualification, further academic and/or professional rights with a view of the purpose of the qualification holder.

It should be noted that absence of a qualification framework is not considered to be an obstacle in recognition.

- *Information is collected on the many different types of credit systems that are used by higher education institutions all over the world, which are sometimes limited to an individual institution or may be applied across different national education systems (e.g. ECTS). Credits are especially relevant in the recognition of periods of study.*
 - *Foreign credits are accepted for what they represent in their own system.*
 - *Credits obtained from various sources (and lacking the framework of a coherent programme) do not have to be added up and accepted as a “qualification”.*

One of the factors, which is considered during an investigation into a qualification or the country's system of education, is the credit system. The credit system is not only important for recognition, but also for transfer of credits, which is done by higher education institutions. However, higher education institutions often require consultations with regard to the credit system before making their final decision.

The following information is taken into account when considering credits:

- Is the credit system nationally defined or is it set up by an individual institution?
- What is measured with credit: contact hours, student independent work, and/or learning outcomes?
- What is the level of credits (for example, some second cycle programmes may include credits from the first cycle)?
- What is the typical number of credits required for completion of an academic year?
- What are the typical requirements in terms of number of credits for completion of the programme?

Our office considers that it is impossible to compare qualifications by reducing the credits to hours because the understanding of the hour may vary greatly in different contexts. Therefore, we compare the credits by applying the principle that a full time academic year at one institution equals a full time academic year at another institution. Thus, the number of credits required to accumulate during the year is considered to be equal.

For the credits to be considered at face value, they have to be quality assured. It means that the institution and/or programme should be appropriately recognised and/or accredited.

In our office, credits cannot be added up to form a qualification if the qualification has not been awarded in the foreign system. If a quality assured qualification has been awarded, even if it is based on credits from various sources, our office does not question the pathway, but considers that the learning outcomes have been achieved because the qualification has been quality assured. Lithuanian higher education institutions can also consider transfer of credits from various sources towards their programmes.

- *The grades obtained by a student may have an impact on the evaluation of a qualification, especially if the average grade of a qualification determines the right of access to further study in the education system where it was awarded. Since the distribution of grades may vary greatly between education systems, the statistical distribution of grades in both education systems should be taken into account when converting foreign grades.*

The grades are considered to be an indicator of the individual quality of a qualification and, as such, may have an impact on the final outcome of the assessment. The grades are most often taken into consideration when they determine the formal right of access.

For some qualifications (for example, the Irish Leaving Certificate or Nigerian Senior School Certificate), the award of the qualification does not automatically imply access to further study. Access is subject to a certain level of knowledge (grades) achieved. In such cases, in order for the

applicant to be considered for the right of access in Lithuania, the same level of knowledge (grades) should be achieved.

In some cases, when the right of access in term of grades is not so clearly defined, our office may take into consideration, the tradition or the most common requirement. For example, Indian Intermediate Certificate holders usually have access to Bachelor degree programmes only if they have achieved at least 50 percent of the required maximum.

Grade conversion and (or) interpretation is mainly based on the distribution of grades. However, in many cases, reliable information on the distribution of grades is not available or is insufficient. In such cases, a mathematical formula is used.

Examples of how your office uses national qualification frameworks, evaluates grades and acknowledges credit are included as an annex to our self-evaluation document.

Please provide your answer to standard 4 in this box, using the guideline followed by an indication of the overall compliance

COMPLIANCE STANDARD 4

1. No compliance
2. Partial compliance
3. Substantial compliance
4. Full compliance

Standard 5 - Transparency and Information Provision

Information on the recognition procedure and criteria is clear, accurate, up-to-date and readily accessible for applicants, stakeholders and the general public, and clear information on the status of their application is provided to applicants.

Guidelines

- *Information provided is accessible, user-friendly (relevant and designed for non-expert users), available in a variety of forms (website, by phone and e-mail, hardcopy brochures), available in at least one international widely spoken language, regularly updated and free of charge.*

All information about qualification recognition can be found at our website (www.skvc.lt), can be received by the phone or e-mail, or coming personally to our office. If a person is willing to come at our office personally, it can be done at any time during our office hours. Our office staff communicates in three languages: Lithuanian, English and Russian. Information provided on our website and brochures are in two languages: Lithuanian and English. The website was recently renewed taking into consideration that it has to be user friendly. All information within the website can be reached with up to three clicks. The phones and emails of credential evaluators

and the reception office can be found on the website. Emails are usually answered in a reasonable time, taking not more than three days. The information and news is updated when there is a need for this. All information provision is free of charge.

- *The information consists of:*
 - *a description of the national education system, recognition system, competent recognition authorities, assessment criteria, roles of the applicant, ENIC/NARIC and higher education institutions, and the rights and obligations of each of the parties;*
 - *a list of required documents and manner of their submission, time needed to process an application, conditions and procedures for appealing against a decision;*
 - *an inventory of typical recognition cases and/or a comparative overview of other education systems (or qualifications) in relation to the national ones.*

Description of the national education system, assessment criteria, roles of the applicant, and recognition system are provided on our website.

Requirements about the document submission, procedure and processing time are provided under general documentation requirements on our website. For some countries, there are specific requirements, where the documents needed for recognition are named in original language and other specific requirements provided. Time needed to process an application is communicated clearly and highlighted while communicating with applicants. Detailed information about appealing against a decision is provided on the website and on each recognition statement.

The Centre is preparing general recommendations and country profiles, where more detailed information regarding different countries education system and typical recognition cases will be provided. This information is used for qualification recognition purposes by Lithuanian higher education institutions.

- *During the application procedure the applicants are kept informed on the status of their application by providing them with:*
 - *an acknowledgement of receipt of the application, and an indication of the deadline;*
 - *information on any lacking documentation (and how to obtain it);*
 - *information on delays or issues encountered while dealing with the application;*
 - *information on any updates to the status of the application.*

There is no automatic acknowledgement regarding received applications. Information is provided upon request, information includes an application number and indication of the deadline.

In each case when documents are lacking, applicants are informed by official written notification (notification has to be sent within 20 office days). In certain cases when there might be questions (e.g. regarding obtaining Apostille, certification of copies etc.), information is provided

on how to obtain the document. If an applicant comes to our office in person and some general documents are missing, s/he is informed about that instantly.

In every case, if there are any issues that might prolong the qualification recognition time the applicant is informed by official written notification.

There is no automatic acknowledgement regarding updates. This information is provided upon request and some updates are communicated by formal letters while informing the applicant.

In relation to the Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedure according to the part on information to applicants provided, we assess our compliance being as follows:

- Full compliance with paragraphs: 15; 16; 17;
- Substantial compliance with paragraphs: -;
- Partial compliance with paragraphs: 14 (no automatic information); 18 (information only to HEIs).
- Non applicable paragraphs: -.

A print-out of the English description of the national recognition system on our website is included this information as an annex to our self-evaluation document.

Please provide your answer to standard 6 in this box, using the guideline followed by an indication of the overall compliance

COMPLIANCE STANDARD 5

1. No compliance
2. Partial compliance
3. Substantial compliance
4. Full compliance

Standard 6 - (Inter)national Cooperation and Presentation

The ENIC/NARIC office actively cooperates with national and international stakeholders on recognition issues and provides input in the development and dissemination of new recognition tools. It supports and promotes the activities of the ENIC and NARIC networks and mentions its membership of the networks in publications and branding activities.

Guidelines

- *ENIC/NARIC offices are the national centres where all expertise on recognition is available. They make use of this expertise by contributing to higher education policy developments and*

legislation in the field of recognition at regional, national and European level. They also cooperate with other information centres, higher education institutions and their networks and other relevant actors in the national context;

From the very moment of establishment of SKVC in January 1995, qualifications recognition was one of the two main functions of our Centre (the other being external quality assurance of higher education) and we were very active in the field throughout. This is a very particular feature of us as an organization, that under one roof we house understanding of both topics, which allows us to broadly contextualise activities, develop a wide range of services, and be at the centre of many events and processes both locally and internationally. SKVC is involved both formally (via membership in working groups) and informally (by the way of public consultations) in drafting national, regional, and international legislation, as well as various projects. International engagement is seen as prerequisite for success in our work and as a way of recognition of our expertise. As it will be demonstrated by concrete facts below, SKVC holds to the policy to provide opportunities to develop professional capacities of all staff members, so that they subsequently are able to contribute to a number of activities; the organisation and ENIC/NARIC in particular is represented by many capable employees – we are not one face, but one voice because of internal coordination and accountability.

Mrs Birutė Mockienė, the first Deputy Director of SKVC, contributed significantly towards development of the Lisbon Recognition Convention text and its adoption by national representatives meeting in Lisbon on 8-11 April 1997. She was promoting it locally, which resulted in ratification of LRC in Lithuanian Parliament on 17 December 1998, and which was instrumental in achieving LRC's entry into force – Lithuania was the fifth country member of the Council of Europe and the UNESCO Europe Region, which ratified the Convention; thus, it became the functioning international legal treaty as of 1 February 1999. Mrs Mockienė was elected Vice-president of ENIC Bureau (1994-1996), and served as the first President of LRC Committee (1999-2001). SKVC hosted an annual joint meeting of ENIC and NARIC networks in June 1999. On this occasion, one of LRC subsidiary texts – on International Access Qualifications – was adopted in Vilnius.

SKVC staff members also actively took part in the ELCORE Working Party on electronic communication in the field of recognition of qualifications, set up within the framework of the ENIC-NARIC networks. We participated in the group from its inception in September 2001 and to the meeting in December 2006, and worked on many action lines, most notably, on development and maintenance of the website www.enic-naric.net/ together with colleagues from Canada, Norway, UK, Poland, Belgium, Estonia, and in close cooperation with Secretariats, supporting LRC (the European Commission, Council of Europe, and UNSECO/CEPES).

In 1995-2004, before Lithuania's membership in NATO and the EU, the staff of the SKVC was engaged in the studies of the *aquis communautaire* contributing to Lithuania's adaptation to it for the purposes of the recognition of academic and professional qualifications; creating foundations for the common European Research Area (both activities involved comparative studies and development of standard guidelines). For a period of time between 2005-2009, SKVC also performed a function in promoting researchers' mobility, by acting as a local designated centre of EURAXESS Service Network, encompassing more than 250 centres in 40 countries and

supported by the European Commission. [After the higher education reform in Lithuania in 2009, this activity passed on to the Research Council of Lithuania.]

Over the years from establishment, SKVC partnered in projects with many ENICs and NARICs – in the Netherlands, France, Italy, the UK, Ireland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Belgium (Flanders), Spain, Croatia, and also involving other stakeholders, such as Tuning, EUA, HRK, ENIC Bureau etc. The total number of projects in which SKVC acted in the capacity as ENIC/NARIC centre and was partner is 18; the number of projects which we coordinated is eight. Further we provide an account on the most important and recent ones.

In 2008–2009, as partner SKVC joined in the project “*Survey on Substantial Differences*”. The outcomes of the project included a survey of various treatments and interpretations of the same real-life cases by different NARICs and the ratings of recognition decisions in terms of good or bad practice. The project provided the NARIC network with information on different readings and applications of essential differences to the evaluation of qualifications for recognition purposes. This created an opportunity to define areas for improvement and plan for further projects in this direction, namely the project “*European Area for Recognition*” (EAR) in which SKVC was a partner. The outcome of this project was an *EAR Manual* for the evaluators of qualifications earned at foreign institutions. The Manual deals with the most important aspects of evaluation and contributes to the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the development and dissemination of good practices in the evaluation of qualifications. Lithuanian team, which drafted parts of the Manual and commented other chapters, consisted of Ms Kristina Sutkutė, Ms Rima Žilinskaitė and Mrs Aurelija Valeikienė.

Notably, *EAR Manual* was endorsed by Ministers of Education of the European Higher Education Area at the meeting in Bucharest in 2012. SKVC further partnered in the related project – “*EAR-HEI Manual*”, aimed at embedding the best evaluation practice on the level of higher education institutions and development of individual professional capacities of credential evaluators.

In 2010, the Centre took a lead as coordinator of the project, the main outcome of which was the publication of the *Guidelines for Training Qualification Evaluators in Lithuania*, which is used as a methodological tool for training qualification evaluators and disseminating good practices in this area. The outcome of the project helps the Lithuanian ENIC/NARIC to deliver better services and contribute to the development of the general culture of qualifications evaluation in the European region.

The list of most recent projects, implemented from 2012 to date also include the following:

- “*EAR 2: European Area of Recognition 2*” (coordinated by Nuffic, Dutch ENIC/NARIC);
- “*EARN – Evaluation and Assessment of the Role of NARICs*” (coordinated by Nuffic);
- “*QFs-UHSE: The use or potential use of qualifications frameworks as a tool of mobility by HEIs and other stakeholders*” (coordinated by CIEP, French ENIC/NARIC);
- „*AURBELL: Automatic recognition between Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*“ (coordinated by Latvian ENIC/NARIC centre – AIC);

- “EU-MTR: Enhancing the use of mobility tools for recognition” (coordinated by French ENIC-NARIC centre – CIEP);
- “SCAN-D: Samples & Copies of Academic National Diplomas” (initiated and led by Italian ENIC/NARIC centre – CIMEA);
- “STREAM: Streamlining Institutional recognition: a Training platform for admissions officers” (coordinated by Nuffic);
- „SQUARE: System of Quality Assurance for the Recognition Networks“ (coordinated by Nuffic).

Aside projects, there is a tradition of study visits organized to various ENIC/NARIC centres. Several SKVC staff members visited France (2001), the Netherlands (Nuffic, 2002, 2014), Italy (CIMEA, 2003), Norway (NOKUT, 2004, 2012), Finland (Finnish National Board of Education, 2004), Sweden (2004), Denmark (2012), Germany (2012), Sweden (NARIC, 2014), UK (NARIC, 2014), Russia (Glavexpertcentr and National Information Center on Academic Recognition and Mobility, 2015). Study visits proved to be beneficial in establishing closer connections between offices, gathering information on foreign education systems, presenting Lithuanian education system abroad and helping to interpret our qualifications, exchange of good practice, building knowledge base to be subsequently used for optimisation of SKVC services, and training of HEIs.

SKVC staff contributed towards drafting the regional tripartite agreement among Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania on the academic recognition of access and higher education qualifications in the Baltic Educational Space (signed on 18 February 2000). Noteworthy, on a regional level, there is a tradition of annual meetings with the Estonian and Latvian ENIC/NARIC centres since 2004, each year in a different country. We hosted in Lithuania the events in 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014. The purpose of such meetings is to consolidate the cooperation of the three Baltic countries in the area of qualification evaluation, exchange information about changes in their education systems, develop a common position and contribute to the improvement of ENIC/NARIC activities at the international level. As a rule, the agenda of such meetings consists of discussions of relevant issues relating to the evaluation and recognition of qualifications, also planning common activities and discussing their outcomes.

SKVC staff members also participated in the inter-institutional working groups led by the Ministry of Education and Science towards bilateral agreements concluded on the level of Governments regarding recognition of qualifications and study periods with the following states:

- the Republic of Poland, drawn in 2005 (Dr Eugenijus Stumbrys, former Director of SKVC took part; now Mrs Giedra Katilauskienė, Head of Department of Qualification Assessment participates in the revision process),
- the Federal Republic of Germany, which entered into force in 2009 (Mr Eugenijus Stumbrys, Ms Rima Žilinskaitė),
- Ukraine, concluded in 2009, subject to legal procedures; (Ms Kristina Sutkutė participated),
- the Holy See (2012, Ms Rima Žilinskaitė),
- Moldova, signed in 2013 (Ms Rima Žilinskaitė and Mrs Raimonda Siaurusaitytė took part),
- the People’s Republic of China, signed in 2015, subject to ratification (input by Ms Kristina Sutkutė).

From 2009, Mrs Raimonda Siaurusaitytė and Ms Rima Žilinskaitė participate in drafting a bilateral recognition agreement with Belarus.

On the national level, SKVC was heavily involved in developing and agreeing among the main stakeholders of the principles, criteria, and procedures for assessment and academic recognition, which were imbedded in the regulations adopted by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania (several editions, of 1999, 2005, 2012). We also take part in drafting and discussing of relevant laws (on Education, on Higher Education and Research, etc).

Competence of our staff members is valued and utilised in various working groups at the Ministry of Education and Science, to name a few examples:

- Ms Kristina Sutkutė takes part in the Commission on Special Cases regarding admission of persons who gained their education abroad and compete for the state funding (from 2013);
- Regarding revision of ISCED classification (Ms Rūta Silevičiūtė and Mrs Raimonda Siaurusaitytė);
- Working group regarding admission of foreign citizens to Lithuanian higher education institutions (Mrs Giedra Katilauskienė and Ms Kristina Sutkutė); etc.

SKVC is closely engaged with the main stakeholder organizations in higher education in Lithuania – we are regular speakers at meetings of the Study Committee and the International Relations Committee of Lithuanian Rectors' Conference; also the Conference of Directors of Colleges of Higher Education. We also accept invitations to contribute to the events by other organisations (e.g., International Migration Organisation) on topics of relevance to us as ENIC/NARIC centre.

As to cooperation with other actors on the national level, SKVC cherishes both formal and informal linkages with a number of different institutions. We have signed memorandums of understanding and maintain regular active relations with the following organizations:

- Qualifications and Professional Education and Training Development Centre (KPMPC), which is the National Contact Point for the development of the Lithuanian Qualifications Framework;
- Educational Exchanges Support Foundation (SMPF), which among other is in charge of promoting Lithuanian higher education abroad, and also of such transparency instruments as Europass, ECTS, DS labels etc;
- Lithuanian Students' Union (LSS), which unites majority of student representatives from both types of higher education institutions (colleges of higher education and universities).

These framework agreements have symbolic value, as they formalise long-standing cooperation between organizations.

While serving our mission to contribute towards quality enhancement and promote internationalisation of higher education in Lithuania, we have a tradition of organizing yearly conferences (attended by 100-150 participants) choosing a different relevant topic. As a rule, they are targeted at our key audiences – representatives of higher education institutions, students, public bodies in charge of stirring and coordination in higher education, employers.

Invited speakers are not only from local stakeholders, but our partners and esteemed colleagues from abroad. Below are given several examples of such past events.

- At the conference “Evaluation and recognition of qualifications for mobility” (October 2007) presentations were made by local officials, university representatives, and SKVC staff. Among the speakers there were a number of experts from other countries: Dr Carita Blomqvist, first vice-president of the Intergovernmental Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee; Prof Andrejs Rauhvargers, Chair of the Bologna Stocktaking Working group; Mr Yves Beaudin, national coordinator of the Canadian ENIC and, until mid-2007, President of the ENIC Network Bureau; Mr Duncan Hamshere, expert, until late 2007, Head of the Qualifications and Skills Division of UK NARIC.
- The conference “Trends and practices in transnational education” (May 2014) covered both aspects of quality assurance and recognition of qualifications. The key-note speech was delivered by Dr Earl Stephen Hunt (USA), former President of ENIC Network Bureau and manager of U.S. Network for Education Information (USNEI). Other presenters were Mr Walter Balfe from Quality and Qualifications Ireland; Ms Carolyn Campbell (UK), Member of the Advisory Board of the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education; Professor Dr Simon Mercado (UK), Associate Dean, Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University, Professor in Global Management and Education; EAR-HEI Manual was featured by Ms Marlies Rexwinkel (Netherlands), Team coordinator, International Recognition Department, Netherlands Organisation for International Cooperation in Higher Education (NUFFIC). Local speakers included Dr Nijolė Saugėnienė, Head of Distance Learning Centre, College of Social Sciences; Ms Jolita Butkienė, Director of Quality, ISM University of Management and Economics; Ms Raimonda Markevičienė, Head of International Programmes and Relations Office, Vilnius University and national Bologna expert.
- At the conference “Achievements and Challenges in Implementation of the Bologna Process” (October 2014) the key-note speech was delivered by one of the main initiators of the Bologna Process, who was also drafting the Lisbon Recognition Convention – Mr. Sjur Bergan, Head of the Education Department at the Council of Europe. Other contributors were Dr Achim Hopbach, Managing Director of AQ Austria and former President of ENQA; Dr Neil Casey as expert on internal quality assurance within HEI from UK; Dr Jim Murray from Ireland as expert on implementation of national qualification frameworks, prof Linda B. Nilson from Clemson University (USA), the author of many articles and books in education science and practice. Local speakers included Dr Rimantas Vaitkus, Vice-Minister for Education and Research, Dr Vidmantas Tūtlys from Vytautas Magnus University, Mr. Paulius Baltokas, President of Lithuanian Students Union; Ms Nora Skaburskienė, Acting Director of SKVC; Ms. Aurelija Valeikienė, Deputy Director of SKVC.

Traditionally, our office offers annual training seminars for higher education institutions. Such seminars are good tools to share practice of assessment of qualifications and information regarding educational systems around the world, trends in academy mobility and the newest instruments for recognition of qualifications and/or period of studies, etc.

As mentioned before, up to 2012 academic recognition system of foreign qualifications was centralized in Lithuania. SKVC provided assessment of qualifications concerning higher education and, based upon it, the Ministry of Education and Science issued academic recognition decisions.

Since 2012, higher education institutions have possibility receive a right to provide an assessment and academic recognition of foreign qualifications by themselves for further study purpose. Therefore, nine training seminars, organized by SKVC in the period of 2012- 2015, were devoted to prepare higher education institutions to make an assessment and recognition of qualifications independently. Some seminars were aimed to cover general principles and provisions concerning an assessment and present more information about the models of recognition, main tools and instruments for an assessment, main steps of the procedure of assessment, etc. Other seminars had a purpose to introduce educational systems from regions, like Asia and Africa or post-Soviet area for better understanding qualifications from countries of such regions (Iraq, India, Nigeria, Cameroon, Russia, etc.). Training sessions were provided by credential evaluators from SKVC and invited experts from other countries. Practical assignments were an important part of seminars, where participants learned a lot how to provide an assessment of qualifications in practice.

- *In the EU-context, and as far as NARICs have competence in professional recognition matters, they cooperate with the National Coordinator and the competent authorities for the professional recognition of the regulated professions (EU Directives);*

SKVC as Lithuanian ENIC/NARIC does not have a specific mandate in professional recognition matters, as our competence is focused on academic recognition. Still, there is close cooperation with the National Coordinator for professional recognition within the Ministry of Economy (previously – within the Ministry of Social Security and Labour) in terms of exchanges of information, participation in events, public consultations regarding legal matters etc.

Notwithstanding, two SKVC staff members are included in the following external bodies:

- Ms Rima Žilinskaitė, Deputy Head of Department of Qualification Assessment, is part of the National Board for Regulated Professional Qualifications;
 - Mrs Diana Saruolienė, Credentials Evaluator, is part of the Committee on Evaluation and Recognition of Qualifications of Teachers and Learner Support Specialists.
- *ENIC/NARIC offices co-operate within the ENIC and NARIC Networks on the dissemination and use of the overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area and accordingly contribute at national level to the further development and dissemination of the national qualification frameworks;*

SKVC staff members were involved in the very beginning of preparatory work towards the National Qualifications Framework (LTQF) in 2004, then consulted in the process of development of it, subsequently – in referencing against European Qualifications Framework (concluded in 2012) with institutions primarily in charge of LTQF. Cooperation with KPMPC, responsible for development of LTQF, takes various forms, from projects to joint events, and daily consultations. Notably, after official launch of LTQF (after the referencing report was approved in 2012), the Statutes of SKVC were amended to record our responsibility for LTQF which manifests in terms of externally assuring quality of levels 6 and 7, and also performing our functions of the information centre.

From 2010, Mrs Aurelija Valeikienė, Head of Lithuanian ENIC/NARIC is a member of inter-institutional Central Professional Committee (CPK), composed by the Lithuanian Ministry of Education and Science. CPK is the coordinating body for the strategic issues in forming the National Qualifications' Framework in Lithuania.

- *ENIC/NARIC offices participate in publications, surveys, comparative studies and other research activities undertaken by the European Commission, Council of Europe, UNESCO and other international organizations;*

SKVC is consulted and provides input into various surveys, studies, and research activities by international organizations (the European Commission, Council of Europe, UNESCO, International Association of Universities, OECD, CHE etc), also thematic queries in the mailing list of ENIC/NARIC centres, this is part of our work routines. We also regularly contribute towards drafting national chapters of questionnaires for the Bologna Process Implementation Reports.

Professionalism of SKVC staff members is valued and recognized both in country and abroad. Current Acting Director of SKVC Mrs Nora Skaburskienė serves as National Bologna Expert. Mrs Aurelija Valeikienė, Deputy Director of SKVC and Head of Lithuanian ENIC/NARIC, as member from Lithuania in 2012-2015 actively participated in the Council of Europe working group (supported via Bologna Secretariat) devoted to European Higher Education Area Structural reforms (encompassing diploma recognition, quality assurance, qualification frameworks, and transparency). She was also member of a working group, drafting national level guidelines for HEIs on recognition of competences acquired in a way of non-formal, informal education and self-studies (later approved by Ministry of Education and Science). She was also invited speaker to a number international events by Council of Europe, the World Bank, ENQA etc.

In the anniversary publication by the Council of Europe "The Lisbon Recognition Convention at 15: making fair recognition a reality" (Higher Education Series No. 19; edited by Sjur Bergan and Carita Blomqvist), an article entitled "Implementing Lisbon Recognition Convention: a Perspective from an EU Member State" by Mrs Aurelija Valeikienė was included.

- *ENIC/NARIC offices develop cooperation with relevant organisations in countries in other regions of the world working in the field of recognition and promote the activities of the ENIC and NARIC Networks in countries in other regions of the world.*

In 2007-2008, in terms of Asia-Link programme, together with the Ministry of Education and Science, SKVC took part in education fairs in several Asian countries, namely Malaysia, China, India, Vietnam, Philippines with the aim to promote European higher education and to establish new and long-term relationships between institutions in both continents.

Recently, from 2011, two SKVC staff members were contributing towards deliberations of Working groups on recognition and credit transfer mechanisms in the framework of ASEM. To mention concrete results, Ms Rūta Silevičiūtė participated in discussions on ASEM bridging declaration and Ms Kristina Sutkutė provided input towards development of common tools, such

as the *Handbook of Guidelines, Principles and Good Practices on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications between Asian and European Regions*. We are also engaged in close consultations on interregional cooperation matters with the Lithuanian Ministry of Education and Science, while giving input with our knowledge and skills, and taking tasks of country representation as needed.

- *They refer to the membership of the ENIC and NARIC Networks in all publications and correspondence and on web sites and make appropriate use of its logo.*

Logos and active links to all networks, where SKVC is member, including ENIC and NARIC, are available from the front page of our website www.skvc.lt both in Lithuanian and English. There is a standard electronic signature created for all employees (in EN and LT), providing reference to SKVC as ENIC/NARIC centre and our membership in networks. References to memberships is also given in relevant publications, e.g. publications with translations of the main legislation (the LRC text and its explanatory memorandum) and subsidiary texts (recommendations by LRC Committee), also promotional leaflets, and most recently commissioned informative cartoons.

Please provide your answer to standard 5 in this box, using the guideline followed by an indication of the overall compliance

COMPLIANCE STANDARD 6

1. No compliance
2. Partial compliance
3. Substantial compliance
4. Full compliance

SWOT of SKVC as ENIC/NARIC Centre

The format for the SWOT analysis (please mind the footnotes):

Part 1: Compliance with the standards for good practice

Part 2: SWOT analysis

PART 1		PART 2						
S T A N D A R D	C O M P L I A N C E *	Priority ¹ (tick box)		Internal causes ²		External causes ³		Action points ³
		High	Low	beneficial (Strengths)	not beneficial (Weaknesses)	beneficial (Opportunities)	not beneficial (Threats)	
1	3	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Experienced and dedicated staff</p> <p>Internal culture conducive to self-reflection, improvement, and change</p> <p>Fully developed and flexible methodological framework</p> <p>Changing internal culture with respect to information analysis, compilation and sharing</p> <p>Growing experience with development and implementation of IT tools</p> <p>Vision for the future</p>	<p>Internal work culture which was not adapted to dealing with large number of applications from large variety of countries</p> <p>Lack of professional IT competency in house</p> <p>Development of IT tools requires time and investment</p> <p>Need to improve internal quality management system in order to simplify and clarify it</p>	<p>Matching funding from projects to purchase software and hardware</p> <p>Closer involvement with various stakeholders in higher education</p>	<p>Implementation of the plans with respect to optimisation of public administration on the state level</p> <p>Decreased state funding due to 2009 economic crisis</p>	<p>Internal staff events (seminars, training etc.) for sharing and developing of competences and common organisational culture</p> <p>Review of quality management system and update of quality manual</p> <p>Implementation of projects, which provide alternative sources of financing</p>

2	4	■		Clearly defined procedure, which is based on best practice Part of international recognition network(s)	Lack of experience with some countries, regions, and qualifications Lack of tools for faster procedure	Improvement of further development of the system for recognition of undocumented qualification holders	Pressure on the organisation in terms of resources and quality control with an expected large number of undocumented applicants	Further development of framework and methodology for recognition of undocumented qualification holders
3	4	■	■	Open approach to recognition of qualifications based on non-traditional learning Clearly defined policy regarding authenticity Started development of internal verification resources (scanned samples, descriptions of security features)	Lack of experience with qualifications based on non-traditional learning Overly reliant on external verification for credentials of some countries	Various international tools and resources, such as databases, country profiles, etc. Growing attention towards quality assurance, development of external quality assurance systems on state level Growing international cooperation on cross border quality assurance of higher education	Problems with quality assurance of the growing diversity of qualifications and modes of study Lack of publicly available information regarding status of institutions and programmes. Difficult, lengthy, or non-existent communication with some countries.	Further development of internal verification resources
4	3	■	■	Experience with IT development and implementation projects	Lack of professional IT competency in house, which is required to develop databases and data management tools Lack of resources to develop the tools Internal work culture which was geared towards data management Changes in staff	Funding opportunities through various EU projects	Decreased state funding due to 2009 economic crisis Low quality of services by the IT development service providers	Development of IT tools and resources Internal staff events (seminars, training etc.) for sharing and developing of competences and common organisational culture
5	3	■	■	Experience with IT development and implementation projects Clearly defined administrative procedure	Lack of IT tools to increase the effectiveness and communication during individual administrative process A comparatively large number of appeals Lack of consistent and clear	Funding opportunities through various EU projects	Increasing number of applicants	Development of IT tools and resources Development of clear and relevant communication strategy

					communication with stakeholders			
6	4		■	Active external participation and recognition for professional competency	Lack of human capacity to cover it all Difficulties in finding matching financing for international activities Lack of historic linkages with certain countries and regions	Calls to initiate international projects Support of the Ministry of Education and Research for international activities		Taking lead and initiating international projects Further development

* (1) no compliance, (2) partial compliance, (3) substantial compliance, (4) full compliance.

¹ For further analysis please take into consideration only the standards with high priority.

² Please base on your answers given in part 1: name the reasons for your compliance or noncompliance with the standards and decide which of them are beneficial, and which are not.

³ Please indicate how to convert your weaknesses into strengths, and threats into opportunities.