

RENSA Project: Explanatory Note

Background and Purpose

The Recognition of Non-Country Specific Awards (RENSA) project aimed to examine how ENIC-NARIC centres approach the issue of recognition of those awards which “do not form part of any one education system and are consequently outside of the remit of any national educational regulatory body”.

The project sought to build on prior work developing guidance for the networks, such as the development of the EAR Manual, which enables greater shared understanding of recognition issues and improved consistency among approaches within the networks. Non-country specific awards, in line with their growth and popularity, are increasingly becoming an issue for centres as applicants seek to obtain some form of recognition, which can prove difficult if the status of the awarding institution is difficult to ascertain. The overall objective of RENSAs has been to contribute to the fair and joint recognition of skills and qualifications, improving outcomes for applicants and contributing to greater consistency of evaluation within the networks.

The chief obstacle for recognition usually stems from the problem of determining the legitimacy of a qualification if the awarding institution / organisation is not recognised or accredited by any recognised national body. It can therefore be extremely difficult to agree on the legitimacy of the qualification. This is also reinforced by the legal framework some centres operate within; in cases where statements are legally binding there is often a strict requirement regarding recognition, linking it to national accreditation.

Scope and Context

This project sought to identify ways of assessing “non-country specific” awards.

In defining the scope, a number of types of qualification were excluded in order to focus on those which “do not form part of any one education system”. For example, on these grounds qualifications from regions not recognised by the UN were excluded as they form part of a single (very regionally specific) education system, despite their non-recognition more widely.

Additionally, while there are some overlapping considerations, those types of qualifications about which guidance has already been provided (including non-recognised but legitimate institutions *within a specific national system*, and Transnational Education provision) were not considered as part of the scope of this work.

For the purposes of the guidance, existing definitions were adhered to as much as possible, primarily from the EAR Manual glossary (<http://ear.enic-naric.net/emanual/glossary/glossary.aspx>) including definitions for “full” and “partial” recognition.



It was noted that the matter of substantial importance to most centres is the quality assurance aspect of the qualification. The discussion of legitimacy of the quality assurance provisions, while not being the main focus of this project, should take into account the already existing tools on cross-border higher education provision and best practices of recognition (such as the EAR Manual, TNE recommendations, etc.).

The project team has developed guidance which it hopes will be of value to the network, and a template for recording information on non-country specific awards which will enable greater sharing of a centre's findings amongst the whole network.

Limitations

Recognition of non-country specific awards may be of practical difficulty for a number of reasons, ranging from limitations of national regulations, to lack of information, to lack of established quality assurance. The guidance provided is to assist centres to make the best possible effort at an assessment, bearing in mind the aim of assisting applicants to further their education or employment goals through recognition of prior education and training; however, it is acknowledged that it is guidance only and that centres will need to take into consideration a range of factors in reaching a decision as to whether any form of recognition for individual non-country specific awards is possible.

Recommendations and Follow-Up

To make the best possible use of the extensive expertise of the ENIC-NARIC network, it is recommended that the centres continue to consult with each other regarding the recognition of new and "different" qualifications. It is for this reason that the proposed "evaluation form" includes a section for recording additional information received from other centres, including any assessments they have made of the awards in question in the past.

Within this context, however, it is important to consider the role of ENIC-NARIC centres to provide accurate and clear information, where possible, on qualifications.

Even if comparability to formal national qualifications might not be possible, we, as ENIC-NARICs, should recognize our role as providers of accurate and specific information on qualifications earned in an increasingly complex educational environment that takes place in an era of digital provision, international education, increased and diverse pathways. This would concern us providing information much in the same way we would expect to be provided for formal qualifications, including rights the person might be provided, potential articulation in the formal system of education (in case of non-formal qualifications), content, duration, quality assurance arrangements and other aspects that are important in recognition.

Furthermore, good and consistent use of the tools which the networks have for sharing information, including the "Listserv", ENIC-NARIC website (secure area), and network meetings, would be beneficial to ensuring the future development of recognition of qualifications in a diverse and changing educational landscape.