

The state of play of Quality Assurance coverage on (Automatic) Recognition: findings from the DIGI-REQA project

Authors: Agnes Witzani (AQ Austria) and Aleksandra Zhivkovikj (EQAR)

Contributing project partners: AQ Austria, AQU, AIC, CIMEA, SKVC, NAWA, Nuffic, NVAO, EUA, ENQA, EQAR.

Version for publication: October 2026



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

Content

List of Abbreviations.....	3
List of Figures.....	5
List of Tables	6
1 Introduction	7
1.1 Project Information	7
1.2 Empower Automatic Recognition through quality assurance procedures	8
1.3 Terminology and methodology	8
2 Findings from Desk Research	11
3 External QA perspective on recognition: Analysis of ENQA Reports	12
3.1 Introduction	12
3.2 Analysis.....	13
3.2.1 Automatic recognition.....	13
3.2.2 Collaboration with ENIC-NARIC Centres	13
3.2.3 Evaluation of the inclusion of recognition in IQA and compliance with the LRC	14
3.2.4 Capacity building of peer-review experts.....	14
3.2.5 QA agencies analysing treatment of recognition within the HE Sector .	14
3.2.6 Promotion of dialogue and dissemination of good practice regarding “recognition”	14
4 External QA perspective on recognition: Analysis of the project partner survey on recognition and QA.....	16
4.1 Introduction	16
4.2 Analysis.....	16
4.2.1 Quality Assurance Agencies	16
4.2.2 ENIC-NARIC centres.....	17
4.3 Practical examples	18
4.3.1 NVAO „the appreciative approach“	18
4.3.2 SKVC Lithuania.....	19
4.3.3 AQ Austria	19
4.3.4 AQU Catalunya	20
5 External QA perspective on recognition: Analysis of review reports in DEQAR	23
5.1 Aim, scope and methodology	23
5.1.1 Aim of the research.....	23
5.1.2 Previous findings of analysis of DEQAR reports	24

5.1.3	Selection Criteria	25
5.1.4	Content analysis	26
5.1.5	Limitations	27
5.2	Analysis.....	27
5.2.1	Frequency	27
5.2.2	Weight.....	28
5.2.3	Frequency and weight compounded.....	31
5.2.4	Tone.....	32
5.2.5	Topics.....	34
5.3	Conclusion	37
6	Internal QA perspective on recognition: Analysis of Interviews with HEIs..	38
6.1	Aim, scope and methodology of the research	38
6.2	Interview outcomes: key findings	38
6.2.1	Understanding of & approaches to Automatic Recognition (AR)	39
6.2.2	Practice of AR & implementation Challenges	42
6.2.3	Integration of Recognition into IQA & Monitoring and Evaluation of Recognition	44
6.2.4	Capacity Building & Stakeholder Cooperation.....	46
6.2.5	Special topics: Micro-credentials, Joint degrees and TNE	47
6.3	Conclusion	48
7	Conclusion	49
	Annex 1: Prompt history for ENQA reports analysis.....	51
	Annex 2: Survey - Information Collection Template	52
	Annex 3: Interview Guidelines	56
	Annex 4: Interview Outcome Template	60
	Annex 5: Results of analysis of DEQAR reports per QA agency and procedure..	62
	Annex 6: Good practices outlined in the DEQAR reports	73
	Annex 7: Mapping of digital tools used by interview partners	81
	Annex 8: AR Implementation Challenges & Good Practice from HEI interviews	85

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation Full name

AAQ	Agency for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (Switzerland)
ACQUIN	Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute
AHPGS	Accreditation Agency in Health and Social Sciences
AQAS	Agency for Quality Assurance through Accreditation of Study Programmes
AQ Austria	Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria
ANQA	National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation
ASHE	Agency for Science and Higher Education
BAC	British Accreditation Council
CYQAA	Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education
ECAQA	Eurasian Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Health Care
ECTE	European Council for Theological Education
evalag	Evaluation Agency Baden-Württemberg
FIBAA	Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation
FINEEC	Finnish Education Evaluation Centre
HAKA	Estonian Quality Agency for Education
HCERES	High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education
IEP	Institutional Evaluation Programme
KAA	Kazakhstan Association for Modern (Contemporary) Education
MusiQuE	Music Quality Enhancement
NVAO	Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Project: 101228790 — DIGI-REQA — ERASMUS-EDU-2024-EHEA-NARIC

SKVC	Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education
Unibasq	Agency for the Quality of the Basque University System
ZEVA	Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (Zentrale Evaluations- und Akkreditierungsagentur)
CBQA	Cross-Border Quality Assurance
DEQAR	Database of External Quality Assurance Results
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
QA	Quality Assurance
AR	Automatic Recognition
TNE	Transnational Education
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning

List of Figures

¹ Figure: Average depth of analysis per ESG-aligned procedure by EQAR-registered agencies	30
--	----

List of Tables

¹ Table 1: Overview of QA agencies included in the analysis of DEQAR reports.....	26
² Table 2: Scale for assessing depth of analysis of reports by EQAR-registered agencies .	29
³ Table 3 – Level of substantial coverage of the recognition-related topics in the reports by EQAR-registered agencies.....	31
⁴ Table 4 – Definitions of tone of analysis in the reports by EQAR-registered agencies	33

1 Introduction

This report on the “State of play of Quality Assurance coverage on (Automatic) Recognition – findings from the DIGI-REQA project” compiles results of four research activities with the aim to explore practices of incorporating recognition into QA procedures. As part of the Erasmus+ co-funded DIGI-REQA project (*see chapter 1.1 for more information*) the analyses of this report explore automatic recognition (AR) hand in hand with other types of recognition to get a broader picture of approaches linking QA with recognition. The assumption is that well-functioning QA is a central precondition for both AR and recognition in a broader sense.

As part of the DIGI-REQA project this report bridges the gap between two EHEA key commitments, quality assurance and recognition, by strengthening the link between the two areas. It explores how recognition practices can be more systematically embedded within institutional quality assurance processes, in line with the [European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(ESG\)](#), in particular Standard 1.4 on student admission, progression, recognition and certification, and the principles of the [Lisbon Recognition Convention \(LRC\)](#).

In order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the quality assurance of recognition, the report combines several analytical perspectives addressing both external and internal quality assurance policies and practices. Evidence is drawn from 62 external review reports of QA agencies, the methodologies of five agencies, 446 institutional review reports produced by 24 QA agencies operating within and beyond the EHEA, and the recognition-related policies and practices of 21 higher education institutions.

1.1 Project Information

The Erasmus+ co-funded [Digital Tools and Quality Assurance for Automatic Recognition \(DIGI-REQA\)](#) project is a transformative initiative aimed at enhancing automatic recognition practices across Europe. This effort addresses key gaps identified in the implementation of automatic recognition, emphasising practical digital tools and links with QA. This project is also designed to support the practical implementation of the [agreement on automatic recognition of higher education qualifications between the Baltic and Benelux countries](#).

By leveraging innovative digital solutions and fostering transnational collaboration, **DIGI-REQA seeks to:**

- Expand and operationalise the Multilateral Treaty on Automatic Recognition of Qualifications and the [AR-go tool](#) aimed to support its implementation;
- Explore and align digital tools instrumental for achieving automatic recognition;
- Strengthen the role of quality assurance in enabling automatic recognition.

The project also examines the integration of emerging trends like micro-credentials and joint degrees into recognition frameworks. Ultimately, DIGI-REQA envisions a more transparent, efficient, and user-friendly recognition system that aligns with the goals of the EHEA and promotes greater mobility, equality, and trust across borders.

To achieve its goals the project brings together and engages various stakeholders: National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARICs), QA agencies, and three European

stakeholder organisations (ENQA, EQAR, and EUA) as partners, and through them also extends its reach directly to students, higher education institutions, and employers.

Participants:

- Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) (coordinator), Lithuania
- Akademiskās Informācijas Centrs (AIC), Latvia
- European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), Belgium
- European University Association (EUA), Belgium
- The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), Belgium
- Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria), Austria
- Agència Per A La Qualitat Del Sistema Universitari De Catalunya (AQU Catalunya), Catalonia
- Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatie Organisatie (NVAO), Netherlands, Flanders and Luxembourg
- Associazione CIMEA (CIMEA), Italy
- Narodowa Agencja Wymiany Akademickiej (NAWA), Poland
- Stichting NUFFIC (Nuffic), Netherlands

This project is funded by the Erasmus+ Programme KA3 "Support for Policy Reform." With a duration from 1 August 2025 – 31 July 2027. This is a continuation of the [DIGI-AR](#) (2022-2024) project.

1.2 Empower Automatic Recognition through quality assurance procedures

One of the key objectives of the DIGI-REQA project is to explore approaches to operationalizing the link of recognition with QA to advance automatic recognition. It seeks to support enhanced recognition of micro-credentials, joint degrees, and transnational education provision within higher education institutions (HEIs). Additionally, it aims to contribute to fostering uptake of recognition by internal and external QA systems.

Following this report, recommendations and good practice examples identified for linking (automatic) recognition with QA will be further explored and result into guidance on how to incorporate recognition into quality assurance (following January 2027).

1.3 Terminology and methodology

The understanding of automatic recognition adopted in the DIGI-REQA project is based on the concept's definition by the **Council of the European Union**¹:

"Automatic mutual recognition of a qualification: the right for holders of a qualification of a certain level that has been issued by one Member State to be considered for entry to a higher education programme in the next level in any other Member State, without having to go through any separate recognition procedure. This shall not prejudice the right of a higher education institution or the competent authorities to set specific evaluation and admission criteria for a specific programme. It does not prejudice the right to check, if the qualification is authentic

¹ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210(01))

and, in case of an upper secondary education and training qualification, if it really gives access to higher education in the Member State of issuance or, in duly justified cases, if the granted qualification meets the requirements for accessing a specific higher education programme in the receiving Member State."

Building on this definition as a starting basis, four principal practical approaches to automatic recognition have been identified in the report *The Triangle of Automatic Recognition: Guidelines for the application of de facto automatic recognition*²:

1. Automatic recognition arranged in bilateral and multilateral agreements;
2. Automatic recognition based on a list of countries to be decided by a competent recognition authority (unilateral);
3. Non-legal recommendations (Baltic-Nordic admissions manual);
4. De facto application of automatic recognition, accepting for many countries that in practice MA=MA, BA=BA, and quickly evaluating qualifications in an automated process

Considering that AR is not mentioned in the ESG (2015), the analyses in this report address *recognition* in a broader sense to explore how recognition is systematically embedded within external and internal QA. In line with the Guidelines of *ESG 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification*, the use of the term "recognition" includes recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

The findings presented in this report build on existing research and data generated through previous European projects, in particular **Q-Entry**³ and **LIREQA**⁴. To examine how recognition is currently addressed within QA systems, this report combines the analyses of existing evidence with the collection of new data. The methodology consists of four complementary components:

- **Desk research** (Chapter 2)
- **Analysis of ENQA reports**: 62 external review reports of QA agencies against Parts 2 and 3 of the ESG (Chapter 3)
- Analysis of a **survey among project partners** on recognition and QA including the methodologies of five agencies (Chapter 4)
- Analysis of **review reports in DEQAR**: 446 institutional review reports produced by 24 QA agencies operating within and beyond the EHEA (Chapter 5)
- Analysis of **22 interviews** with one ENIC-NARIC and 21 HEIs on the internal QA perspective on recognition (Chapter 6)

The structure of the report and its presented findings follows the spirit of the ESG and its approach to the levels of quality assurance: from external QA of agencies (*see chapter 3*), to external QA of HEI (*see chapters 4 and 5*) to the internal QA perspective (*see chapter 6*).

² <https://www.nuffic.nl/sites/default/files/2020-08/the-triangle-of-automatic-recognition%20%281%29.pdf>

³ <https://www.q-entry.eu/>

⁴ <https://www.enqa.eu/projects/linking-academic-recognition-and-quality-assurance-lireqa/>

Project: 101228790 — DIGI-REQA — ERASMUS-EDU-2024-EHEA-NARIC

Each of the chapters elaborates further on the specific methodology used for the analysis of the particular materials.

This report is complemented by a forthcoming *position paper* that provides guidance and practical examples of good practice on how automatic recognition can be effectively linked to quality assurance processes.

2 Findings from Desk Research

This chapter shortly summarises advancements and developments on integrating recognition in QA procedures. It builds upon the results of previous projects in the same field, mainly [LIREQA](#) (2019) and [TPG-LRC CoRE](#) (2024).

The 2019 LIREQA project concluded with a report titled "[Integrating Academic Recognition and Quality Assurance: Practical Recommendations](#)", aimed at three target groups: HEIs, QA Agencies and ENIC-NARIC Centres. The key takeaways concern integration, cooperation, transparency and trust, meaning that recognition should be more closely integrated into the QA process, and that all partners in the recognition process should work closer together and, with that, build mutual understanding so as to ensure fair and transparent recognition processes. There are three main recommendations:

1. **For Higher Education Institutions:** Suggestions on how to embed recognition within internal QA processes, align with the [Lisbon Recognition Convention](#), and foster trust.
2. **For Quality Assurance Agencies:** Guidance on how to systematically include recognition aspects (like study periods, RPL) in their external reviews, moving beyond basic checks.
3. **For ENIC/NARIC Centres:** Recommendations to improve information sharing, build capacity, and collaborate more closely with HEIs and QAAs.

The 2024 TPG LRC CoRE report "[Ensuring and Enhancing the Quality of Recognition processes: Key considerations and Recommendations](#)" discusses the quality of European academic recognition procedures. It takes into account the LRC and the ESG. The main findings of this report include the need to put more effort in implementing the LRC fully, enhance the connection between recognition and QA and improve cooperation and communication between all partners.

The following research builds on those previous projects and directly relates to formulated recommendations. Both, the analysis of ENQA reports (external reviews of QA agencies, see chapter 3) and the survey questions for QA agencies and ENIC-NARIC for example built directly on LIREQA recommendations for quality assurance agencies (see chapter 4).

3 External QA perspective on recognition: Analysis of ENQA Reports⁵

3.1 Introduction

The first level of analysis examined the work of quality assurance agencies registered in EQAR from an external, peer-review perspective. Drawing on 62 external review reports conducted against the ESG framework, the analysis explored how international review panels assessed agencies' approaches to recognition and the extent to which recognition-related requirements were reflected in agencies' policies, procedures, and practices. The main source in this part consists of external review reports prepared by ENQA.

The reports, which include full reviews as well as partial/targeted reviews⁶, were downloaded on 15 December 2025 from the ENQA review database (<https://www.enqa.eu/review-database/>), and cover the period from 2021-25.⁷ The reports were examined with a view to what extent the assessed QA agencies implement the recommendations specified by the LIREQA project team in 2019. Therefore, it is explored to what extent the agencies assessed in the reports

- cover “recognition” in their external QA procedures (recommendation 1)
- evaluate if recognition is included in IQA and if recognition is in compliance with the LRC (recommendation 2)
- build capacity of peer-review experts in recognition and/or consult recognition specialists to identify key issues related to recognition and produce relevant recommendations for improvement (recommendation 3)
- engage in thematic analysis across the HE sector, and promote good practices and address areas of persistent difficulty (recommendation 4)
- promote dialogue and contribute to the dissemination of good practices in recognition (recommendation 5)

In addition to the LIREQA recommendations, a question is to what extent the agencies, according to the review reports, cooperate with ENIC-NARIC centres and whether “automatic” or “automated recognition” plays a role in these reports.

Limitations:

First, the ENQA reviews assess the extent to which the QA agencies comply with the ESG and do not specifically focus on recognition, nor on aspects that go beyond the specific requirements of the ESG (2015). Requirements of the ESG encompass Standard 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification⁸:

⁵ This analysis was conducted by and the chapter was written by Antonia Hofstätter (AQ Austria).

⁶ See <https://www.enqa.eu/targeted-reviews/> for more information on types of reviews.

⁷ Because the batch includes both full and partial reviews, some agencies appear twice in our sample.

⁸ https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf

"Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student "life cycle", e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification."

Therefore, the results in this report reflect the overall extent to which the agencies' treatment of recognition and practices surrounding recognition have been assessed in the ENQA reports in relation to the ESG requirements; they do not provide definite and exhaustive data on how exactly the agencies treat recognition and recognition-related topics. This is further done in the subsequent analysis of their methodologies and practices in the next chapters.

Thus, the results in this chapter reflect the prominence or marginality of "recognition" within the framework of ENQA reports and the perspectives of peer-review teams.

Second, a note on the methodology of the conducted research: The analysis has been assisted by the AI software Perplexity. The following process was applied: The reports were uploaded to Perplexity in batches and the prompts entered for each batch. The prompt history is available in *Annex 1*. Once Perplexity offered results to the inquiries, the data provided was verified with the original documents. In order to verify the overarching results, AI-generated answers were cross-checked against samples of the reports. This showed that the data provided by Perplexity was often inaccurate. Detected inaccuracies in the results were corrected accordingly. Yet, this could only be done for a sample of reports and not for all reports. Although mentioned references were checked thoroughly, there remains a margin of error in the following analysis. Based on the verification of results, the authors are confident that the overall trends and tendencies detected by Perplexity are valid. All references included in the analysis below have been verified.

3.2 Analysis

3.2.1 Automatic recognition

First, a keyword search⁹ of "automatic recognition" was conducted to check whether any of the reports mentioned the topic. In case a review team misspelled the term, also "automated recognition" was searched in order to avoid eliminating possible findings. However, both terms brought up no mentions across all reports. Similar findings are discussed in chapter 5.2.1, analysing institutional review reports by QA agencies. Since AR is not explicitly mentioned in the ESG (2015), a plausible explanation is that review teams focus on forms of recognition covered by the standard.

3.2.2 Collaboration with ENIC-NARIC Centres

The majority of reports do not mention any collaborations between QA Agencies and ENIC-NARIC centres. Where this topic is mentioned, it is often treated as a recommendation to be implemented rather than an existing practice. The results have shown that at least five agencies were actively encouraged by the authors of the reports to explore how they can contribute better to the establishment of a 'triangle' of cooperation between HEIs, QA Agencies and ENIC-NARIC Centres.

⁹ For this keyword search, which involved all 62 reports, the PDF-search function was used instead of AI Perplexity.

A few agencies function also as ENIC-NARIC centres or operate within larger institutional structures in which ENIC-NARIC centres are also embedded. This applies, for instance, to NOKUT (Norway), SKVC (Lithuania) ASHE (Croatia), and QQI (Ireland). While this indicates formal or institutional proximity, it remains unclear how and to what extent collaborations exist in practice.

3.2.3 Evaluation of the inclusion of recognition in IQA and compliance with the LRC

All reviewed QA Agencies embed recognition (ESG 1.4) in their criteria and thereby check – at least indirectly – whether this topic is part of internal QA. However, only very few agencies explicitly include LRC compliance in their methodologies according to the reports analysed: one example is CYQAA (Cyprus) - which *“has incorporated [...] institutional recognition practices to be based on the Lisbon Recognition Convention into its criteria for all processes, and the certification phase of the student lifecycle into its institutional and departmental evaluation criteria”* (ENQA external review report of CYQAA, 2024, p. 30) – and, albeit indirectly, German agencies, which apply national criteria (Specimen Degree) that encompass recognition in line with the LRC (see, e.g., ENQA external review report of GAC, 2022, p. 34).

3.2.4 Capacity building of peer-review experts

The analysis found that none of the ENQA reports describe any specific expert training on recognition, while more generic forms of training are mentioned across the reviews (on procedures, ESG standards, roles, national systems, ethics, etc.). According to these findings, recognition is thus not treated as a distinct area of competence. However, in general review teams did not address in detail the specific areas of expert training in the reports.

3.2.5 QA agencies analysing treatment of recognition within the HE Sector

The findings show that the review reports confirm that HE-sector wide thematic analyses are an established practice among QA agencies, but none of the reports explicitly identifies “recognition” as a topic of thematic analyses.

It must be mentioned, however, that the review reports only cite some examples of thematic analyses – or, indeed, often include none of the topics of thematic analyses conducted by the agencies – but do not list all analyses by QA agencies of the HE sectors. These might well include analyses of recognition-related practices across national HE sectors. Therefore, these results are regarded to be inconclusive. Further research is required to provide a substantive answer to this inquiry.

3.2.6 Promotion of dialogue and dissemination of good practice regarding “recognition”

The findings show that while not many agencies have created initiatives that exclusively focus on promoting dialogue and good practice in recognition, many do include the promotion of good practice in recognition into their wider national and international outreach and networking work. Dialogue on and good practice in recognition is also indirectly ensured through the inclusion of this topic in evaluation criteria (thus making it a topic of discussion for review panels, agencies and HEIs), cooperations with ENIC-NARIC

Project: 101228790 — DIGI-REQA — ERASMUS-EDU-2024-EHEA-NARIC

centres and other national and international networks. Worth highlighting as examples of agencies that promote good practice in and dialogue on recognition are agencies that also function as ENIC-NARIC centres and thereby, by definition, provide advice on recognition, such as QQI (Ireland) or ASHE (Croatia).

4 External QA perspective on recognition: Analysis of the project partner survey on recognition and QA

4.1 Introduction

Following the first analysis on the external QA perspective on recognition through the lens of agency-level review reports (chapter 3), a survey amongst project partners was conducted to get more detailed information on how recognition is addressed in QA agencies' review methodologies and practices, as well as how ENIC-NARIC centres cooperate with QA agencies. The information was collected with a structured data template and survey amongst DIGI-REQA project partners. The subsequent analysis summarizes the results of this survey. Of the **eight survey participants**, three were QA agencies, three ENIC-NARIC centres and two agencies combine both. The survey respondents are from Lithuania, Spain, Austria, Latvia, Italy, the Netherlands and Poland.

The survey (see *Annex 2* for details) was split into two parts: the first one was only answered by QA agencies and the second one only by ENIC-NARIC centres. The main topics this survey targets are the following:

- Recognition standards
- Evaluation of recognition
- Communication between QA agencies and ENIC-NARIC centres
- Challenges and opportunities in collaboration

4.2 Analysis

4.2.1 Quality Assurance Agencies

The first topic of discussion is recognition in QA standards. Recognition is referenced in the QA standards of all five QA agencies. Four out of the five QA agencies include standards/criteria on recognition on a programme or study field level, three on the level of institutional external QA procedures. In this survey "recognition" was used in a broader sense considering various types of recognition (recognition of qualifications, formal, non-formal and informal education as well as credit recognition for mobility) in order to find out where QA agencies focus in their methodology. Automatic recognition is not addressed in QA agency methodologies.

The methodology of one agency mentions: "*Consistent recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies and prior non-formal and informal learning is performed.*" Another one describes: "*Students' previous work and professional experience is recognised in accordance with legal regulations and the learning outcomes achieved. This recognition in the subjects or courses of the curriculum is relevant and appropriate.*" and specifies in its standards that: "*Procedures for recognising students' prior learning are in place, relevant, and applied appropriately.*" One agency emphasises that these procedures should be "(...) *clearly defined and transparent for all parties involved*".

The most frequently mentioned aspects in the respective standards are **binding and transparent procedures**, a **student-centred approach**, safeguarding qualification levels, the avoidance of negative effects such as inadequate or missing recognition, **compliance with international standards**, and (international and institutional) cooperation.

To gain further insights, agencies were asked which **methods are applied to evaluate recognition**. All of them use self-assessments as a form of evaluation. One agency specifies that higher education institutions are asked to provide the following information in their self-assessment reports: *"information on how the recognition of foreign qualifications is carried out", "information on how recognition of study periods is carried out", "indication of the criteria used for partial crediting" and "information on how the recognition of competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning is carried out and how uniform standards and guidelines are ensured in this process"*. Furthermore, documentation, reviews and site visits are used by 80% of the survey-participants to evaluate recognition. However, all institutions answered that their review panels do not include specific expertise in recognition.

In addition to this, participants were asked **how frequently recognition is identified as an area of concern** in reviews. One agency stated "occasional" concerns, four answered "rarely". Typical issues identified include a low number of prior learning recognitions and questions regarding EU regulations. In one case the higher education institutions do not recognise foreign qualifications, therefore it is not a topic of the review.

Beyond their own standards and processes concerning recognition, the agencies were asked if and how frequently they **collaborate with ENIC-NARIC** centres. While 80% of them responded "yes", the communication mostly takes place when a problem/question arises or concerning the evaluation of joint programs. Building on these answers, the next question focused on types of communication. The responses indicate that communication mostly takes place to share expertise, for example within joint projects or events and in developing QA methodologies.

4.2.2 ENIC-NARIC centres

To further the understanding of collaborations between quality assurance agencies and ENIC-NARIC centres, the centres were also asked if and on what matters they collaborate with QA agencies. The majority of the participants responded "yes", either they have a fixed partner agency or if information is needed, the respective organization or relevant body is contacted. Similarly to the QA agencies collaboration and communication exists here mainly to obtain and share information as well as for discussing new policies. One centre further elaborates and explains that they are consulted *"when there is a revision or update of the accreditation guidelines at national level"*. The other centres do not participate in QA reviews.

The following part of the survey focused on challenges and opportunities ENIC-NARIC centres experience when working with QA agencies. Only one centre mentioned a lack of time and resources as a challenge, the rest did not report any challenges. As opportunities or enabling factors the centres describe a close location, specific contact persons and resources (time and personnel). One survey-participant describes: *"The main opportunity is to contribute to improve the quality, the transparency and information provision on the higher education system at national level and (...) international levels at large. Information*

sharing and objectives alignment at national and international level positively impact also at the institutional level.”

Closely related to this question the next part of the survey focused on how cooperation could be improved. Some ENIC-NARIC centres suggested joint training and projects, as well as the inclusion of recognition in national QA standards. One centre also suggested a stronger European dialogue would be helpful: *“However, the national dialogue could benefit from a stronger European dialogue. An example is the inclusion of recognition in national QA standards. Standard ESG 1.4 is not always included or sufficiently addressed in self – evaluations due to the fact that they are not addressed in the external review. This leads to a situation where recognition can become a tick box item, instead of its procedures (and their compliance) being part of consideration. In our view this should be better addressed on European level, so it can be supported at national level.”* This aspect, the inclusion of recognition in external reviews, is analysed and discussed in Chapter 5 in detail.

4.3 Practical examples

In the following section four QA agencies provide a more detailed insight into their QA methodologies in order to better understand the context of how recognition is/is not addressed in external QA procedures.

4.3.1 NVAO „the appreciative approach“

NVAO's jurisdictions are the Netherlands, Flanders and Luxembourg. These 3 jurisdictions have different QA systems and legislation, and the way recognition is addressed in external QA procedures is also different.

In Flanders, the three most important external QA procedures are initial accreditation (for new programmes), accreditation (for existing programmes) and institutional review. Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences are subject to institutional review, the other HEIs are not. The latter undergo continuous NVAO accreditation for each programme every 6 years. After the initial accreditation and the accreditation the programmes fall under the “*own conduct*” of the HEI, meaning that the HEI can organise the programme assessments themselves, on the condition that these programme assessments are ESG-compliant, involve internal and external stakeholders, independent and external experts, the HEI has set up a QA system to guarantee the quality of the programmes, resulting in a formal confirmation decision by the board of the HEI regarding the quality of the programme, and there is on the HEI website public information on the programme quality including the results of the programme assessments.¹⁰

NVAO **assessment frameworks in Flanders** have no standards and criteria but contain 3 or 4 coherent evaluation questions and refer to the 8 quality features for programmes which are included in the Flemish legislation and tie in with the ESG. NVAO panels have a large autonomy in determining the themes for enquiry within the remit of the evaluation questions but are not allowed to use the evaluation questions or the quality features as criteria that have to be checked and separately assessed. NVAO's methodology in Flanders

¹⁰ NVAO assesses this “own conduct” and the fulfillment of the conditions every 6 years as part of the institutional review. As long as this institutional review is positive the accreditation of the programmes (after the initial accreditation and accreditation) is automatically renewed by NVAO for 6 years. If the institutional review is negative then all programmes of the HEI have to undergo NVAO programme accreditation until there is again a positive institutional review, with a waiting period of 6 years before applying for a new institutional review.

is characterised by using an **appreciative approach** which is enhancement-led and based on trust in HEIs, resulting in a holistic judgement regarding the quality. To protect its methodology NVAO emphasises the training of panel members and gives the NVAO process coordinator the explicit task of safeguarding the methodology and appreciative approach during the procedure.

Recognition is specifically addressed in the assessment frameworks when it comes to regulated professions; this has to be addressed explicitly by the panel in the assessment report ("the panel verifies whether the programme meets the regulations with respect to the admission of graduates to corresponding posts or professions"). Academic recognition is regulated in the Flemish legislation but for the purpose of admission this belongs to the autonomy of the HEIs. In NVAO assessments the institutional recognition practices could be addressed as part of the quality features or as part of the educational policy in the institutional review. But this will only happen if the panel sees a reason to address it, e.g. because students raise concerns or attention is raised as a result of the self-evaluation report or the educational policy. In practice when institutional recognition practices of foreign qualifications come to the fore it is likely to be connected to panels' broader questions regarding admission of students and admission policies.

4.3.2 SKVC Lithuania

SKVC is the quality assurance agency of Lithuania. It is responsible for institutional accreditation, study field accreditation (covering clusters of study programmes), and the evaluation of study programmes, including evaluations conducted in accordance with the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

Recognition, as required under ESG 1.4, is incorporated into both institutional accreditation and study field accreditation procedures.

Within institutional accreditation, recognition is assessed under the evaluation area *Studies and Research (Art)* and forms part of the criterion *The level of integration between studies and research (art) and its compliance with the institution's strategic objectives*. The relevant indicator states: *Consistent recognition of foreign qualifications, periods of study completed abroad, and prior non-formal and informal learning is ensured*. The full text of methodology is available at:

https://skvc.lrv.lt/public/canonical/1769152988/2009/Institutional_Review_Methodology_2025.pdf

Within study field accreditation, recognition is assessed under the evaluation area *Student Admission and Support* and forms part of the criterion *The process of student selection and admission is consistent with the learning outcomes of the study field*. The relevant indicator examines the procedure for the recognition of foreign qualifications, periods of study, and prior non-formal and informal learning, as well as its implementation in practice. The full text of the methodology is available at:

<https://skvc.lrv.lt/media/viesa/saugykla/2024/3/l2il1i8sUII.pdf>

4.3.3 AQ Austria

AQ Austria is the national quality assurance agency for Austrian universities of applied sciences and private university colleges. It carries out both *institutional accreditations* and *accreditations of study programs*. These procedures form the basis for state recognition of universities and their course offerings. Further external quality assurance procedures for

Austrian public universities, universities of applied sciences and university colleges of teacher education include *Audits*. An audit is carried out as a peer review procedure at the end of which the internal quality management system of a university or other higher education institution is certified.

Recognition as a criterion in accordance with ESG 1.4 is explicitly included in accreditation procedures, both institutional and programme accreditation as well as joint programmes.

Criteria in institutional accreditation procedures according to FH-AkkVO 2024 § 15, Abs. 4 (5) Z 6 and criteria for accreditation of study programmes according to § 17 (2) Z 5 (own translation from German): *"Procedures for recognizing exams, other academic achievements, and formally, non-formally, and informally acquired competences, which were also acquired in the context of the professional oriented education of the university of applied sciences degree program and are recognized, thereby enabling a reduction in the duration of study, are clearly defined and transparent for all parties involved."*

Criteria in accreditation of study programmes for private HEI according to PrivH-AkkVO 2024 § 18. (doctoral degree programmes) and § 19. Programme accreditation according to § 24 Abs. 4a HS-QSG Abs. 1, Z 3: *"Procedures for the recognition of formally, non-formally, and informally acquired competencies, in the sense of crediting them toward examinations or parts of the program, are clearly defined and transparent for all parties involved."*

Criteria for joint programmes according to PrivH-AkkVO § 20 Abs. 2, Z. 4: *"The participating institutions have concluded a cooperation agreement, which is attached to the application for program accreditation and regulates the following points in any case: [...] 4. Automatic and complete recognition of examinations and academic work completed at the participating institutions."*

Guidelines for **international Accreditation of HEIs and Degree Programmes** 2019, Criteria for Accreditation of Bachelor- and Masterprogrammes: Criterion 2.10: *"The procedures for recognition of academic competences and, if applicable, non-academic competences in terms of crediting towards examinations or parts of a degree programme have been clearly and transparently defined. When recognising or crediting academic competences, the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention) shall be considered."* (see also Doctoral programme and doctoral programme management Criterion 4.8)

4.3.4 AQU Catalunya

The Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU Catalunya) is a public law entity whose objective is the assessment, accreditation and certification of quality in all things concerning universities and higher education centres in Catalonia. AQU Catalunya carries out programme-level evaluations, institutional evaluations, and audits of the internal quality assurance systems of Catalan universities.

The consideration of recognition within ESG 1.4 is embedded in AQU Catalunya's external quality assurance framework and is addressed through its main review processes, including programme accreditation and institutional accreditation.

Criteria in accreditation of study programmes

According to the document *Standards and criteria for the quality assessment of university Bachelor's and Master's degrees* (AQU, 2022 - <https://www.aqu.cat/en/doc/Universitats/Metodologia/Standards-and-Criteria-for-the-Quality-Assessment-of-University-Bachelor-s-and-Master-s-Degrees>), recognition of prior learning is specifically addressed under Standard 3e, which states the following:

Standard 3e: The degree programme has relevant regulations for the recognition of students' prior learning, and these are properly applied (page 20)

AQU Catalunya's programme-level criteria require universities to have clear, regulatory-compliant and consistently applied procedures for recognising prior learning, credit transfer and previous studies. These procedures should support students' progression through different educational levels, facilitate mobility and ensure that recognition decisions are aligned with the intended learning outcomes of the degree programme.

The criteria also cover the recognition of foreign qualifications, previous work and professional experience, provided that such recognition is relevant, legally grounded and academically appropriate. Overall, prior learning recognition is presented as a key mechanism to avoid unnecessary barriers, promote fair access and ensure that students are neither disadvantaged nor granted recognition that is inconsistent with the level and objectives of the programme.

These standards and evaluation criteria are specifically applied to the following assessment methodologies:

- Guide to the Design, Validation and Modification of Degree Programmes (AQU, 2023 - <https://www.aqu.cat/en/doc/Universitats/Metodologia/Guide-to-the-design-validation-and-modification-of-recognised-bachelor-s-and-master-s-degree-programmes-2023>)
- Guide to the Accreditation of Bachelor's and Master's Degree Programmes (AQU, 2023 - <https://www.aqu.cat/en/doc/Universitats/Metodologia/Guide-to-the-design-validation-and-modification-of-recognised-PhD-programmes-2024>)

Criteria in institutional accreditation

According to the document cited above, *Standards and criteria for the institutional accreditation of university centres* (AQU, 2021 - <https://www.aqu.cat/en/doc/Universitats/Institucions-i-centres/Standards-and-criteria-for-the-institutional-accreditation-of-university-centres>), recognition of prior learning is specifically addressed under the following Standard:

Procedures for recognising students' prior learning are in place, relevant, and applied appropriately.

In institutional accreditation, AQU Catalunya places particular emphasis on whether centres have appropriate, transparent and consistently applied procedures for recognising prior learning, previous studies and credit transfer across different levels of

higher education. These mechanisms are considered essential to support student progression, facilitate mobility and ensure that recognition decisions are academically sound and aligned with the relevant qualification level.

The criteria also address the recognition of foreign qualifications, previous work and professional experience, provided that recognition is legally grounded, publicly available and applied coherently. In this context, prior learning recognition is presented as a way to avoid unnecessary barriers and discrimination, while inappropriate or inconsistent recognition may disadvantage students and affect the academic standards and reputation of the centre.

These standards and evaluation criteria are specifically applied to the following assessment methodologies:

- Guide to the Institutional Accreditation of University Centres (AQU, 2021 - <https://www.aqu.cat/en/doc/Universitats/Institucions-i-centres/Guide-to-the-institutional-accreditation>)
- Guide to the Certification of IQAS in Higher Education Institutions (AQU, 2023 - <https://www.aqu.cat/en/Studies/Dissemination/Publications/Publications-finder/Guide-to-IQAS-certification-in-higher-education-institutions-2023>)

5 External QA perspective on recognition: Analysis of review reports in DEQAR¹¹

5.1 Aim, scope and methodology

5.1.1 Aim of the research

Earlier findings in this report suggested that QA agencies include the topic of recognition in their own ESG-aligned methodologies (and standards). Aiming to develop an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of how this is implemented in practice beyond agencies' own perceptions, this chapter explores the review reports of QA agencies of higher education providers¹². The main data source in this part of the study is the information stored on the Database for External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR), notably institutional review reports uploaded by EQAR-registered agencies¹³.

The research also takes a step further, and looks into how both the standard and the more detailed guidelines of ESG 1.4 regarding recognition are evaluated by EQAR-registered agencies. The following part of the ESG 1.4. was taken into consideration:

"Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are essential components for ensuring the students' progress in their studies, while promoting mobility. Appropriate recognition procedures rely on (a) institutional practice for recognition being in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention; (b) cooperation with other institutions, quality assurance agencies and the national ENIC/NARIC centre with a view to ensuring coherent recognition across the country"

Three main research questions guided the process:

1. How is (automatic) recognition addressed by EQAR-registered agencies in their review reports?
2. What are the observations of EQAR-registered agencies regarding the quality of (automatic) recognition procedures of HE providers?
3. Are the elements of ESG 1.4 on recognition explicitly covered in review reports of EQAR -registered agencies? How frequently and what is the depth of analysis of the topic of recognition in the external evaluation of the HE providers?

¹¹ This analysis was conducted by EQAR.

¹² Unlike the rest of the study, this part also involves providers that do not have degree awarding powers but provide programmes at higher education level. See further definitions in DEQAR Glossary: <https://www.eqar.eu/qa-results/glossary/>

¹³ See further: <https://www.eqar.eu/qa-results/>

5.1.2 Previous findings of analysis of DEQAR reports

The analysis presented in this chapter builds on the findings from the TPG LRC CoRE project¹⁴. That study examined external quality assurance expert reports by 11 quality assurance agencies, seven of which are also included in the present analysis¹⁵.

The earlier study focused primarily on the frequency with which the four phases of the student lifecycle addressed under ESG 1.4, namely admission, recognition, progression, and certification, were mentioned in the reports. The findings showed that quality assurance agencies most frequently addressed admission and recognition, followed by certification. Progression was the least frequently mentioned phase across the analysed reports.

With regard to recognition specifically, important differences between agencies were identified. Recognition was discussed considerably more frequently in reports from HAKA (Estonia), SKVC (Lithuania) and ASHE (Croatia).

The findings also highlighted several positive practices, showing that some quality assurance reports addressed not only the recognition of formally acquired qualifications, but also the recognition of skills, competences, and learning outcomes obtained through prior learning, professional experience, and other non-traditional learning pathways.

Where recommendations were made, they commonly focused on strengthening institutional policies and procedures for recognising prior learning, particularly learning acquired through academic mobility and through non-formal and informal pathways. The analysis further found that the aspect of recognition most frequently examined by review panels was the consistency and transparency of recognition procedures. Reports assessed whether recognition processes were clearly defined, publicly available, and applied consistently across the institution.

The findings presented in the following sections adopt a more granular analytical approach and focus exclusively on recognition as a topic under ESG 1.4, as well as automatic recognition as a fast-track procedure. While the previous study primarily explored the frequency with which recognition was mentioned and the topics associated with it, the present analysis extends the investigation to examine the topic of automatic recognition, the depth of analysis devoted to recognition-related issues and the tone adopted by review panels when addressing them. This makes it possible not only to identify whether recognition is considered in external quality assurance processes, but also to understand the extent to which it is critically examined, evaluated, and used as a basis for recommendations and enhancement-oriented reflections. The current research process also took into consideration multiple procedures per agency (whenever possible) enabling not only a comparison between the QA agencies but also within the agencies themselves.

¹⁴ See "TPG-LRC CoRE Working Group (2024) Ensuring and enhancing the quality of recognition processes: Key considerations and recommendations". Rome: CIMEA. Available at: https://www.eqar.eu/assets/uploads/2024/07/TPG-LRC-CoRE_QA-of-recognition-report.pdf

¹⁵ Similar report selection criteria were applied as in this study: Reports written in English, based on the 2015 version of the ESG, and focused exclusively on institutional-level reviews. The dataset comprised reports published on DEQAR

5.1.3 Selection Criteria

The review covers the period of February 2024 to May 2026, beginning from the date of the previous analysis of DEQAR reports conducted under the TPG LRC – CoRE project. This timeframe ensures continuity with earlier findings while capturing the most recent developments in institutional level external quality assurance by QA agencies based in the EHEA.

Only expert reports written in English were included, ensuring consistency of interpretation and comparability across agencies.

The analysis focuses exclusively on institutional level evaluation and accreditation procedures, including voluntary (i.e. enhancement oriented) and mandatory (i.e. licencing-related) procedures. Programme level reviews and other non-institutional QA activities were excluded to maintain a coherent analytical scope.

The final dataset consisted of **446 reports¹⁶ by 24 agencies¹⁷**. This represents 90% of all reports in the English language uploaded in DEQAR in this period, issued by 40% of all agencies registered on EQAR in the period under analysis.

The table below presents the agencies, their country of origin, number of reports included in the analysis, the percentage of reports included in the analysis out of all the reports by the agency written in English language since February 2024, the number of procedures included and the focus countries of evaluations (i.e. domestic and/or cross-border institutions).

Agency	Country	No. of Reports	% of All Reports in English	No. of Procedures Covered	CBQA included
AAQ	Switzerland	3	30%	1	No
ACQUIN	Germany	9	47%	1	Yes (only)
AHPGS	Germany	1	100%	1	Yes (only)
ANQA	Armenia	9	100%	1	No
AQAS	Germany	1	25%	1	Yes (only)
ASHE	Croatia	18	83%	1	No
BAC	UK	69	100%	2	Yes
CYQAA	Cyprus	89	100%	3	Yes
ECAQA	Kazakhstan	11	100%	3	Yes
ECTE	Germany/CB focus	25	100%	2	Yes (only)
evalag	Germany	2	5.3%	1	Yes (only)

¹⁶ Applying the first criteria, the initial dataset comprised 559 reports by 33 agencies. Subsequent filtering excluded cases where (a) the only document in English was the decision, not the full expert report, (b) reports resulting from procedures that did not represent significant percentage of all the reports resulting from the procedures, written in English (i.e. below 10% of all reports in the period of analysis) and (c) cases where only individual expert reports were available in English, but not the full review panel report

¹⁷ In total, this is 90% of all reports in English uploaded in DEQAR in the period of analysis, by 40% of all agencies registered on EQAR at the selected time period.

Agency	Country	No. of Reports	% of All Reports in English	No. of Procedures Covered	CBQA included
FIBAA	Germany	8	57%	2	Yes (only)
FINEEC	Finland	4	36%	2	Yes
HAKA	Estonia	10	100%	2	Yes
HCERES	France	8	4.3%	1	Yes (only)
IEP	Switzerland / CB focus	5	100%	1	Yes (only)
KAA	Kosovo	7	100%	1	No
MusiQuE	Belgium / CB focus	8	100%	3	Yes (only)
NVAO	Netherlands	6	30%	1	Yes (only)
QAA	UK	105	100%	14	Yes
QQI	Ireland	40	100%	2	Yes`
SKVC	Lithuania	6	80%	1	No
Unibasq	Spain	2	25%	1	No
ZEVA	Germany	2	20%	1	No

¹Table 1: Overview of QA agencies included in the analysis of DEQAR reports

The selection of agencies reflects a deliberate effort to ensure analytical breadth and representativeness:

- Geographical distribution of QA agencies across 14 EHEA countries, ensuring diversity of QA approaches and traditions
- Agencies with national mandates and agencies with European or international scopes, as well as QA agencies with broader mandates and domain-specific bodies¹⁸
- 37 ESG-aligned QA methodologies¹⁹²⁰
- 225 reports concerning domestic institutions, 221 reports concerning cross-border (CB) higher education providers

5.1.4 Content analysis

Review reports within the scope outlined above have been subjected to content analysis, through the application of predefined coding categories. Two complementary levels of analysis were applied in the research phase. First, a segment level analysis was performed using MAXQDA text analysis software, examining coded paragraphs²¹, their weights, tone

¹⁸ E.g. ECTE and MusiQuE

¹⁹ See full list in Annex X

²⁰ Out of which 7 are applied to both with home and CB providers. The analysis further makes a differentiation whenever possible.

²¹ First step included simple search for selected list of keywords including "automatic recognition", "recognition", "prior learning", "non-formal and informal learning", "Lisbon Recognition Convention", "ENIC NARIC" etc. The search also included alterations such as LRC for Lisbon Recognition Convention, or ENIC and NARIC separately for ENIC-NARICS. The second stage included manual clearing up of the data from false positives (e.g. "the institution recognises the efforts of its employees", "the

and thematic attributes²². Second, a report level analysis examining cumulative frequencies, weights, evaluative tone and thematic coverage across entire reports was performed. This dual approach enabled both granular insights in the reports, as well as methodology-level patterns.

The analysis in this publication outlines findings per agency and procedure(s) and, whenever possible, distinguishes between domestic and cross-border reviews.

The analysis includes quantitative²³ as well as qualitative findings, including excerpts from the analysed reports and good practices. On the latter, Annex X summarises the documents and policies highlighted as good practices in the coded segments.

5.1.5 Limitations

The following limitations should be considered when consulting this document:

- a) The analysis focuses on what is documented in the reports, not on background discussions, expert deliberations and research. Whenever not present, the analysis does not claim that recognition was absent from the review process—only that it was not explicitly reported. Nevertheless, report content is indicative of relative prioritisation.
- b) Agencies differ in evaluation cultures and reporting styles. Some include comment on every standard; others comment only when issues arise. One agency, for example, uses a grading scale and comments only when grades fall below a threshold.
- c) Related to (b): agencies using fitness for purpose approaches may vary in coverage depending on the HEI's priorities (e.g., internationalisation, mobility, non-traditional learners). Thus, richness of analysis may reflect the institutional context and strategy, not only agency practice.
- d) The use of language can differ among agencies, hence panels could use synonyms and context-specific language when talking about some of the topics related to recognition. For example, one agency uses the terminology "accreditation/validation of knowledge" to describe providers' recognition procedures. Whenever detected, the analysis included these segments in the research.

5.2 Analysis

5.2.1 Frequency

This aspect explored how often (automatic) recognition is addressed across reports, expressed as percentage of reports in which recognition appears as a coded area at least once relative to all reports by the agency included in the analysis.

The findings demonstrated that **automatic recognition in particular is not a topic that is addressed in the reports**; only 1 out of 446 reports included the topic explicitly. In

institution recognises the importance of internationalisation"). The third stage included paring of coded segments which appeared in different parts of the reports sections or pages.

²² The weighting, detecting the tone and thematic attributes were assigned manually. A second layer of confirmation was implemented using MicrosoftCoPilot

²³ Annex X includes all the statistics per agency and procedure

the report, the topic was discussed as part of the recognition procedure of the institutions. In both cases, the panels explained the particularities when automatic recognition is implemented.

The lack of coverage of the topic as such could be because of different reasons. On the one hand, review teams may perceive recognition of other forms of learning as a more challenging area for providers than recognition of formal qualifications. Consequently, reports may discuss these topics in greater detail. On the other hand, since automatic recognition is not explicitly mentioned in the ESG (2015), QA agencies may concentrate on the regular recognition procedures covered by the standard. Lastly, automatic recognition procedures could be evaluated implicitly when examining recognition policies overall, without using the term "automatic recognition" itself.

Consistent with this reasoning, the findings demonstrate that **recognition in a broad sense constitutes an element of external quality assurance across a large proportion of the reviewed procedures. Recognition-related content was identified in almost 70% of all reports, 75% of all ESG-aligned analysed procedures and 23 agencies** (out of 24 fulfilling the methodological criteria), incorporating evaluation of recognition policies and practices in their procedures. This suggests that recognition is an established component of the evaluation of higher education providers within many external quality assurance frameworks in the EHEA.

It is encouraging that **recognition was included in almost all procedures that are mandatory for higher education providers to obtain or maintain formal permission to operate**. On the other hand, one concerning finding is that two agencies conducting reviews directly linked to formal accreditation or licensing decisions under national regulatory frameworks addressed recognition in fewer than half of their reports. Given the importance for learner mobility, fair access and internationalisation, the relatively limited attention devoted to recognition in these mandatory review processes raises questions about the degree to which recognition is systematically examined by external quality assurance in the particular HE systems.

At the same time, **many of the procedures in which recognition was addressed in few reports or not at all, were voluntary procedures**. This may indicate a degree of methodological flexibility and a fitness-for-purpose approach, whereby the scope of the review is adapted to the objectives of the procedure and, in some cases, agreed between the provider and the agency.

It is also important to highlight the **procedural diversity with agencies that have multiple procedures**. Within several agencies, **recognition was addressed more prominently in some procedures related to the educational level or study field under review** (e.g. ECAQA, QAA). These patterns suggest that, in addition to agency policy, other factors can influence the focus of recognition within review procedures.

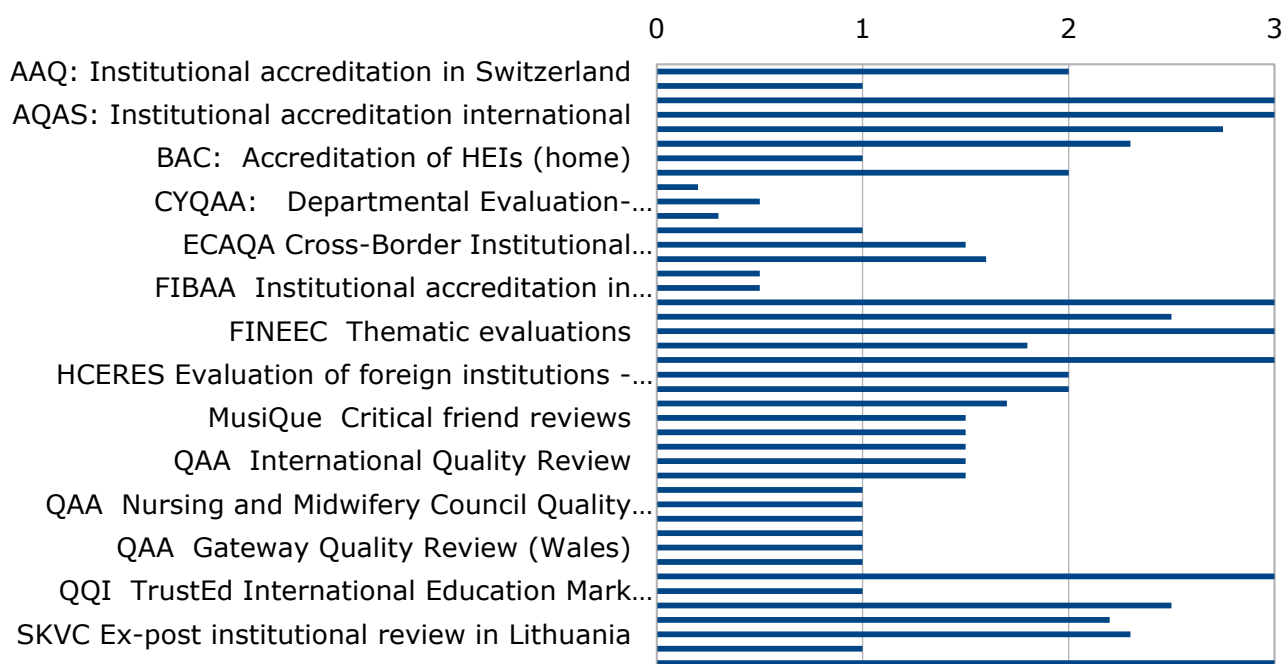
5.2.2 Weight

The analysis further looked into the depth of analysis of the coded segments, assessed using a four level weight scale, distinguishing references and citations of standards and legislation from substantive analytical engagement. The table below explains the 4-level scale applied.

Level	Explanation	Example
0	Citations of standards, chapter titles, definitions, ESG references, or national legislation.	Standard 4.2.2: Recognition of prior studies and credit transfer is regulated by procedures and regulations that are in line with European standards and/or international practices
1	Recognition is mentioned but not explored in depth. Mere descriptions of procedures are also included	The institution has established a procedure for recognising prior learning
2	General discussion of recognition through simple judgements.	The institution has established a transparent and clear procedure for recognising prior learning
3	Recognition is analysed in relation to institutional procedures and practices. The report evaluates implementation, identifies strengths or weaknesses, and include recommendations for improvement.	The institution has established a transparent and clear procedure for recognising periods of study. The panel, however noted that the institution only applies this procedure on periods of previous studies rather than other experiences beyond academia.

²Table 2: Scale for assessing depth of analysis of reports by EQAR-registered agencies

Results demonstrated that while recognition may be included as a topic of evaluation, the depth of discussion varies considerably across agencies and procedures. The results show a broad spectrum ranging from procedures where recognition is mentioned as a standard but there is no further analysis presented, to descriptive observations to procedures where recognition is examined in detail, linked to institutional practices, and accompanied by recommendations for improvement. Figure 1 presents the distribution per agency and procedure.



¹Figure 1: Average depth of analysis per ESG-aligned procedure by EQAR-registered agencies

At the **upper end of the scale**, several procedures achieve average scores between 2 and 3, indicating that recognition is analysed, evaluated, and frequently connected to quality improvement in depth. This group **includes less than half of the total number of reports** that included the topic of recognition in some way (i.e. 40%). The **reports are produced by 13 agencies**, with some agencies demonstrating consistently high analytical engagement across multiple procedures, most notably FINEEC.

A larger group of procedures occupies the **middle range of the scale**, with average scores between 1 and 2. That is approximately **45% of all analysed reports** and produced by **13 agencies**. The reports generally vary from descriptions of the recognition procedures to simple judgements of the quality of the procedures.

At the **lower end of the scale**, **approximately 15%** procedures demonstrate only limited analytical engagement with recognition, with one national agency demonstrating this depth across all of its procedures²⁴.

Looking at the particularities, whenever possible to **compare between evaluations made by the same QA agency of domestic vs cross-border higher education providers**, the findings show that the latter applied procedures overall **demonstrate deeper engagement with recognition than comparable domestic procedures**. One possible explanation is that agencies may operate with a higher degree of familiarity and trust towards institutions within their own national systems, particularly in mature quality assurance environments where institutions have already undergone several review cycles and recognition-related issues may have been examined previously.

²⁴ The particularities of CYQAA's approach are important to keep in mind here. The agency uses 5 point compliance scale, and the report includes comments and recommendations per standard only when the higher education institutions scores below certain threshold.

Looking at particular examples, HAKA ranges from 1.8 in its domestic evaluations to 3 in the cross-border ones. BAC shows a similar pattern, with recognition receiving considerably deeper treatment in cross-border accreditation (2) than in domestic accreditation (1). These variations suggest that **analytical depth, just like frequency, can be shaped not only by agency-wide approaches but also by the specific design and objectives of individual procedures**. Even within the same agency, recognition may be addressed at markedly different levels of depth.

Another important finding concerns **variation within agencies**. Some agencies **demonstrate relatively consistent levels of analytical engagement across their procedures**. FINEEC provides a good example, with similar scores for its domestic and cross-border accreditation procedures respectively.

5.2.3 Frequency and weight compounded

The combined analysis of frequency and weighting reveals important differences regarding the substantial coverage of recognition across external quality assurance ESG-aligned procedures. How often recognition is addressed meaningfully was operationalised as both frequency of recognition appearing as a topic and being addressed at depth levels 0, 1, 2 or 3. Findings were classified into 4 main categories (see table 3).

	High Depth	Low Depth
High frequency	Embedded analytical engagement: Recognition is frequently addressed and analysed as a quality assurance issue (> 75% frequency, >2 weight) (29% of reports) Examples: AHPGS, AQAS, ASHE, all FINEEC procedures, HAKA (CB), QQI (domestic procedures), SKVC, ZeVA	Compliance-oriented attention Recognition is frequently mentioned but the report analysis does not often go in depth (>75% frequency, <2 weight) (38% of reports) Examples: ACQUIN, all CYQAA procedures, 2 ECTE procedures, HAKA (domestic procedure) KAA, 1 MusiQue procedure, several QAA procedures, QQI (CB)
Low frequency	Selective analytical engagement: Recognition is discussed less often but receives substantial analysis when it appears (<75% frequency, >2 weight) (5% of reports) Examples: ANQA, 1 QAA procedure	Peripheral engagement: Recognition receives limited attention and is discussed rarely (<75% frequency, <2 weight) (29% of reports) Examples: BAC, ECAQA, HCERES, FIBAA, IEP, 1 MusiQue procedure, NVAO, 2 QAA procedures, Unibasq

³Table 3 – Level of substantial coverage of the recognition-related topics in the reports by EQAR-registered agencies

The findings demonstrate that visibility and analytical engagement do not necessarily coincide. Some procedures address recognition in almost every report, yet discuss it only

briefly, whereas others refer to recognition less frequently but engage with it in considerable depth when it is considered relevant.

Further, results show that while **recognition is a frequently addressed topic of external quality assurance it has been less successful in becoming an object of systematic written analysis in the reports**. This implies that many procedures have successfully institutionalised recognition as a topic of evaluation but have not yet developed equally strong practices for analysing it in depth. This being said, **it is easier to find the topic or keyword “recognition” in reports than to find extensive analysis of recognition practices**.

On general level, while **nearly 70% of reports address recognition, only one third (i.e. 34%) combine this visibility with substantial analytical depth**. The analysis shows that frequency and depth are not correlated.

Looking into the particularities, some agencies such as FINEEC demonstrate consistency in both coverage and depth of analysis. Consequently, all of the procedures can be found in the same quadrant. This can signal a consistent approach to writing the evaluative parts of the reports, or national/system level prioritisation of the topic of recognition. Agencies with high diversity, on the other hand, are usually the ones doing voluntary types of reviews which are not necessarily tied to formal national accreditation procedures (e.g. MusiQue and some of the QAA procedures). Only 2 agencies rarely include recognition in their written analysis, but when they do, it is done in substantial manner.

5.2.4 Tone

Examining the tone of recognition-related findings complements the analysis of frequency and depth by revealing how review panels position the issue within their evaluations. Distinguishing between declarative, positive, and recommendation-oriented statements made it possible to assess whether recognition is treated primarily as a matter of compliance, as an area of good practice, or as a subject requiring further improvement.

Tone was analysed using three evaluative codes²⁵.

Code	Explanation	Examples
Positive	Recognition procedures are judged as good or commendable	The institution consistently applies predefined and published regulations covering all phases of the student life cycle. It has introduced Regulations for the Recognition of Prior Learning and Assessment Regulations that are fit-for-purpose.

²⁵ Since some of the reports had multiple tones depending on different areas addressed, the analysis further distinguishes 4 more categories, which are essentially all possible combinations of the basic three tone codes above: (1) Positive and declarative, (2) Positive and recommendation, (3) Declarative and recommendation, (d)Positive, declarative and recommendation

Code	Explanation	Examples
Declarative	Status quo is described without evaluative judgement	The institution applies regulations covering all phases of the student life cycle. It has introduced Regulations for the Recognition of Prior Learning and Assessment Regulations.
Negative / Recommendation²⁶	Issues are identified; improvements recommended	The institution does not consistently applies predefined and published regulations covering all phases of the student life cycle. The panel recommends that the institution introduces Regulations for the Recognition of Prior Learning and Assessment Regulations.

⁴Table 4 – Definitions of tone of analysis in the reports by EQAR-registered agencies

The most common tone, accounting for more than one-third of all reports (36%) is positive only.²⁷ This suggests that **some reports present recognition as an area of good practice**, with findings highlighting strengths, achievements, and effective implementation without necessarily providing recommendations for improvement.

Some of the good practices include:

- having a full credit recognition policy
- mechanisms that are effective and clear
- policy on prior learning and recognition of external qualifications that is fair, transparent, and consistently applied
- Regular reviews and updating policies and procedures to ensure they remain current and effective
- use of ENIC and NARIC databases to compare international qualifications against published criteria, including those of relevant professional bodies, as well as a range of other [international] resources²⁸ by the admissions staff

On the other hand, together with the mixed categories containing recommendations, **approximately one third of all reports (i.e. 34%) contain recommendations**

²⁶ As the areas for improvement were often entangled with recommendations by the expert panel, the analysis considers them in package

²⁷ Followed by 18% of the reports classified as descriptive only and further 13.5% of reports as recommendation only

²⁸ Some particular examples were named in the reports: Bangladesh BSc & BEng Database, QQI QSearch, Ecctis, World Education Services, the University Grants Commission of India, Nuffic, DEQAR, Kwalifikator, CHEA

regarding recognition, demonstrating that recognition is an area subject to ongoing quality enhancement for some higher education providers²⁹.

Looking at the content of the recommendations, comments range from general notes on the need for the provider to establish procedures for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, to disclosing particular details of the recognition procedure *such as specifying the number of credits that can be transferred or provide students information on how the (recognition) process is organized. (QA19_P01_cb_1)*³⁰

On the more detailed end, some of the recommendations included:

- Information should be written in plain English, be easy to access, and clearly detail the process, possible options, and avenues for advice and support
- Discontinuing the decision making on case-by-case basis as it may enable a misuse of said approval by the institutions' leadership
- The institution should define maximum response time frame for the requests for recognition of qualifications, as well as the complaints in case of rejection, in its official documentation
- Use structured tools such as EAR-HEI to provide even further transparency in the assessment of qualifications presented by international learners
- Consider seeking advice from recognised credential evaluators such as ENIC-NARICs on a regular basis as part of their qualification recognition.

One particular recommendation regarding the fitness for purpose of the recognition procedure was highlighted by QQI, suggesting *a targeted study of the international labour market (countries from which the university receives applicants) and measures aimed at recruitment of applicants, cooperation with employers or recognition of APs based on them (QA02_P01_dom_3).*

5.2.5 Topics

Analysing the topics associated with (automatic) recognition makes it possible to examine what aspects are actually evaluated. This helps identify thematic priorities within external quality assurance reports as well as for higher education providers.

The identification of thematic patterns and recognition related areas (derived from 1.4), including the themes (a) prior learning, (b) non formal and informal learning, (c) alignment with the Lisbon Recognition Convention, (d) cooperation with other HEIs, QA agencies, and ENIC NARICs and values/judgements (e) fair recognition and (f) transparency.³¹ The inclusion of ESG 1.4 areas that fall outside the scope of automatic recognition, namely

²⁹ The absence of recommendations in the other reports could be absence of issues, but also to several other reasons/factors such as tackling recognition via other areas for improvement (e.g. mobility or admission procedures, internationalisation policies etc.), overall writing style of reports and QA cultures, as well as, lack of prioritisation of recognition related topics in the written analysis overall.

³⁰ The coding of the reports follows the format: QAx = QA agency and randomly assigned code for anonymization; PXX=Procedure and reference number; dm=Domestic review OR cb=Cross-border review; number at the end = number of report on the list for each QA agency

³¹ As explained earlier, since none but two of the reports included in the analysis tackled automatic recognition, the research focused on regular recognition procedures as pre-condition for automatic recognition, as well as the intertwines of the procedures which as results demonstrated occurs in practice

prior learning and non-formal and informal learning, was intended to facilitate a comparison of how quality assurance reports prioritise these objects of recognition vis-à-vis the recognition of formal academic qualifications.

The topic analysis demonstrates that **quality assurance agencies do not approach recognition as a single area**. This reflects the spirit of ESG 1.4 which names different objects of recognition (i.e. prior learning, periods of studies, informal and non-formal learning), quality/features of the processes (i.e. pre-defined and published regulations, fair processes) and system level structures (i.e. cooperation with other institutions, quality assurance agencies and the national ENIC/NARIC centre).

In the analysed reports, **recognition is addressed through a diverse set of interconnected themes, most notably prior learning, general recognition procedures, transparency, and credit recognition. Recognition of full degrees was rarely explicitly analysed in the reports**. This could be due to the coverage of the topic under the evaluation of the general recognition procedures, the more pressing challenges related to validating the knowledge acquired through other means than formal education as well as the current priorities of HE providers (such as attracting non-traditional learners or recognition of learning via mobility periods).

Going further, while some procedures focus on a single dimension of recognition, **roughly three quarters of the analysed procedures address multiple recognition dimensions**, suggesting a broader understanding of recognition as an institutional process.

Looking into the particularities, **recognition of prior learning appeared as the most frequent area, with 17 procedures tackling this matter**. It is important to note that agencies define "prior learning" in different way – sometimes strictly focusing on recognition of previous academic studies, while other do so more broadly – including knowledge and skills acquired through other experiences, most prominently through the world of work. The qualitative findings also show different practices among higher education providers.

An example is presented below:

"For recognition of prior learning, each professor needs to review prior learning, which needs to match by at least 70% when comparing previous and current studies which leads to believe that only previous studies count as previous learning" (QA12_P01_dom_15)

Non formal and informal learning are areas addressed in 12 procedures, with predominantly positive or declarative tone. One provider was given the following recommendation:

"Institution X has processes for the recognition of prior certificated learning, which is typically managed at the School level, but does not at this stage extend to non-formal/informal learning. In order to apply for accreditation of prior learning, students must submit an External Transfer of Credits form at undergraduate level or Transfer Credit Evaluation Form at graduate level, as well as transcripts for the previous credit. A maximum of 25% of total approved programme course credit requirements may count towards a graduate degree as transfer credit. Transfer credit must be approved by the Vice Dean of the School. The team heard from staff that discussion has taken place about

introducing accreditation of prior experiential learning and the review team recommends that institution X develops a policy for the recognition of informal learning” (QA21_P01_cb_17)

Compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention was addressed in 9 procedures, with QQI's TrustEd International Education Mark demonstrating an especially strong focus on the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Review panels examined not only the reference to the LRC in the providers' documents, but also their practical implementation, including institutions' approaches to assessing substantial differences and the operation of appeals procedures. The overall tone of the sections tackling LRC in the reports is mainly positive or declarative tone. A few recommendations were also detected, for example

“It is recommended that the institution reviews policy and procedures and any other relevant policies and processes against the principles and guidance in the LRC and subsidiary texts, and against criteria 5.2 (c)-(f), to establish clearly where gaps exist in institutional policy and practice, to ensure adherence to LRC for the purposes of assessing the qualifications presented by international learners as part of their admission to institution's programmes, and to make references to the LRC explicit in resulting documentation.” (QA01_P01_dom_17)

Collaboration with stakeholders and ENIC-NARICs was an area addressed in 8 and 7 procedures, respectively. The overall tone of most of the reports was positive or declarative. An example of a recommendation in this area proposes the following:

“A transparent student selection process and standardised recognition of credits and micro-credentials should be introduced. Such an approach will ensure consistency, fairness, and strategic alignment in collaborative educational initiatives and should be rolled out and followed across the institution. Based on the audit visit, it was found that students sometimes have problems getting their studies at foreign universities accredited in their faculty. Developing joint approaches for validating and recognising prior learning in joint programmes, in collaboration with partner universities, would facilitate smoother student transitions and progression within such offerings.” (QA06_P01_cb_01)

Beyond the dominant themes the analysis also reveals a few, less frequently addressed but nevertheless noteworthy topics. These were not systematically explored but were product of the exploratory analysis. Although appearing in only a very limited number of procedures, these themes illustrate the diversity of ways in which recognition has been approached within external quality assurance. For example, **training appeared only sporadically** (7 reports), yet addressing important aspects for enabling capacity-building and institutional practice. Others included more qualitative aspects of the procedures such as fairness (7 reports) and fitness for purpose (2 reports). On the latter, QA rarely explored the fitness for purpose of the recognition procedures vis-a-vis the strategic priorities of the HE providers (e.g. internationalisation strategy, attracting certain groups of learners) and HE provider characteristics (e.g. number of international students, exchange flows, participation in exchange programmes etc.)

5.3 Conclusion

Overall, the findings confirm earlier findings of the analysis of DEQAR reports (2024), demonstrating that recognition is a recurring topic in the external review reports produced by quality assurance agencies of higher education providers.

At the same time, the present analysis provides a more nuanced picture of how recognition is addressed. While recognition is frequently included in reports, the depth of engagement varies considerably across agencies and procedures, ranging from brief references to standards and institutional policies to detailed evaluations of implementation that identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. Notably, less than half of the analysed reports contain substantive analytical discussion of recognition-related issues, suggesting that recognition continues to be addressed unevenly across external quality assurance procedures. This may reflect limited attention to the topic by review panels, a lower degree of prioritisation by HE providers themselves, or simply the absence of significant recognition-related challenges warranting further discussion.

The thematic analysis further shows that recognition of prior learning and the recognition of non-formal and informal learning receive considerably more attention than topics such as cooperation with ENIC-NARIC centres, staff training, or explicit compliance with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. This distribution suggests that reports by QA agencies tend to reflect institutional priorities, existing challenges, and emerging developments in recognition practice. By contrast, automatic recognition appears only rarely as an explicit topic of evaluation. One possible explanation is that institutions and review panels perceive other aspects of recognition, particularly prior learning and non-formal and informal learning, as more complex, challenging, or strategically important areas for development.

6 Internal QA perspective on recognition: Analysis of Interviews with HEIs

6.1 Aim, scope and methodology of the research

Building on the research of external quality assurance perspectives on recognition, this part of the study explores the internal QA perspective through interviews conducted with 21 HEI and one ENIC-NARIC³². The aim of analysing the interview outcomes is to identify challenges and good practices in the implementation of AR and its integration into internal quality assurance (IQA) systems. While the interviews focused on implementation of AR, many findings are relevant for recognition in a broader sense. From an HEI perspective, AR is part of the admission process of a prospective student and thus not a separate procedure to analyse.

For this analysis, all project partners were involved and conducted in total **22 interviews** (21 HEI and 1 ENIC-NARIC) based on guiding questions. To ensure consistency over eight different interviewers, an **interview guideline** was provided and interviewers summarized their interview results into **outcome templates** which, in turn, facilitate better comparability. The interview guideline (Annex 3) and the outcome template (Annex 4) are available in the Annex.

To analyse the interviews, following a cleaning process³³, an AI tool³⁴ was used to generate comparative tables based on the outcome templates. The comparative tables served as basis for comparing results and identifying good practice examples from the interview outcomes. The analysis follows **five thematic categories** which will be described in Chapter 6.2. Wherever references to specific interviews are made or interview partners are quoted, quotes and interview partners are anonymized. During the analysis, interviews were coded with the name of the interviewing institution and a continuous number.

The following Chapter 6.2 contains **key findings and identified good practice examples** as well as possible recommendations on linking (automatic) recognition with internal QA. These findings will be further explored and discussed in the course of the ongoing DIGI-REQA project and developed into guidance on how to incorporate recognition into quality assurance (following January 2027).

6.2 Interview outcomes: key findings

The following **five thematic categories** are set as the core framework for analysing the 22 interviews conducted by eight project partners:

1. **Understanding of and approaches to automatic recognition (AR):** How HEIs understand AR, approaches used to implement AR, legal foundation as well as institutional policies. For this thematic category answers from interview questions 1, 2a and 2b were analysed.

³² One interview was conducted with ENIC-NARIC for background information. The ENIC-NARIC of this respective country is not a partner in the DIGI-REQA project and was thus included in interview sample.

³³ Before using AI to analyse the interview outcomes, all Interview outcome templates were cleaned of personal references, the first page containing interview context data was deleted and file names were coded.

³⁴ Gemini Notebook was used to analyse 22 outcome templates.

2. **Practice of AR and implementation challenges:** Operational workflows and challenges, digital tools used, technical and legal barriers, and identified good practices. Interview questions 3a, 3b, 5 and 10 were analysed for thematic category 2.
3. **Integration into internal QA & monitoring and evaluation of recognition:** How recognition processes are embedded into institutional quality assurance frameworks, governance, quality indicators, and continuous evaluation loops. Interview questions 4a, 4b and 8 are relevant.
4. **Capacity Building & Stakeholder Cooperation:** Training and support for academic and administrative staff, intra-institutional cooperation, and external or inter-institutional networks/cooperation. Interview questions 9 and 11 were analysed to answer this category.
5. **Special topics (Microcredentials, Joint Degrees and Transnational education, TNE):** Challenges regarding the recognition of microcredentials, joint degrees and TNE are summarized in this category relating to interview questions 6 and 7.

6.2.1 Understanding of & approaches to Automatic Recognition (AR)

The fundamental premise of AR, as articulated in the **Council of the European Union** (see *Chapter 1.3*), is to accord holders of a qualification issued by an EHEA member state the direct legal right to be considered for entry into a higher education programme at the next academic level without undergoing an additional, redundant recognition procedure. However, operationalizing this principle across HEIs exposes conceptual and procedural divergences.

In institutional practice, a fundamental distinction exists between **system-level qualification recognition** and **programme-level admission**. As clarified by national ENIC-NARIC (*AQ Interview 1*), system-level recognition regards only assessing the overarching level / cycle—establishing that an accredited Bachelor's degree equals a Bachelor's level, or a Master's degree equals a Master's level across EHEA borders. In contrast, programme-level admission remains the sovereign prerogative of the receiving HEI, encompassing subject-specific prerequisites, grade distribution benchmarks, language proficiency standards, and profile-matching assessments.

The following approaches to AR were presented to interview partners along with the definition of AR:

1. Automatic recognition arranged in bilateral and multilateral agreements;
2. Automatic recognition based on a list of countries to be decided by a competent recognition authority (unilateral);
3. Non-legal recommendations (Baltic-Nordic admissions manual);
4. De facto application of automatic recognition, accepting for many countries that in practice MA=MA, BA=BA, and quickly evaluating qualifications in an automated process.

Key Findings:

A recurring distinction across all interviewed Austrian, Flemish, Dutch, Catalan, Lithuanian, Latvian, Italian and Polish HEIs is that **automatic recognition applies to the system/degree level** (e.g., BA = BA, see above: system-level qualification recognition), but does **not guarantee automatic admission**, as HEIs retain autonomy over programme-specific prerequisites. This is made clear, for example in *SKVC Interview 2*: While qualifications covered by AR agreements benefit from a simplified and faster qualification review, *"automatic recognition is not applied without review, as the university still verifies the awarding institution and carries out an initial assessment of the qualification before proceeding to programme-specific admission requirements"*

When discussing AR, this basic distinction, separating admissions from recognition and, with it, system-level (recognition) from programme-level (admission), has to be noticed as well as different legal frameworks across the EHEA countries embedding recognition and recognizing the LRC in different ways. While this report does not provide the space to analyse legal frameworks in-depth, a basic understanding is important to understand challenges of implementation and the need for further multilateral agreements in some countries.

Analysing approaches to AR across all conducted interviews:

One Polish HEI and the Flemish HEIs explicitly report applying **all four approaches** of AR in practice depending on the applicant's origin and cycle. All other interview partners state a combination of more than one approach. Institutions routinely pair formal legal treaties (Approach 1) with pragmatic *de facto* level recognition (Approach 4) for straightforward EHEA degrees, while resorting to individual evaluations or national agency referrals for non-AR countries.

Approach 1: Bilateral and Multilateral Agreements are mentioned in 19 Interviews from 7 partner countries (excluding only HEI from Catalunya). The agreements named are: Baltic Recognition Agreement, Baltic-Benelux Treaty, Italy-Austria bilateral agreement (the so-called "Exchange of Notes", in Italian: Scambio di Note), Polish legal framework for automatic recognition.

Bilateral and/or multilateral agreements, such as the Baltic-Benelux Agreement, serve as the main multilateral framework supporting automatic recognition for HEI in countries part of the Baltic-Benelux Agreement. Still, as stated with regards to the distinction between system-level AR and program-level admission, similar restrictions with regards to the implementation of AR were mentioned from several interview partners operating with AR approach 1: One interview partner stated, despite the application of the Benelux-Baltics agreement, *"there is no real difference in treatment of applications between EU member states and qualifications from Benelux-Baltics, since the substantial difference may still exist according to programmes (NVAO Interview 3)"*.

Approach 2: 11 out of 22 interviewed HEI report applying AR based on a list of countries to be decided by a competent recognition authority (unilateral). However, in the practice it becomes obvious, that most HEI rely on official national information from ENIC-NARIC centres for recognition.

Eight interviewed HEI stated to apply **Approach 3**, using non-binding admissions manuals and regional guidance tools. For an analysis of specific tools mentioned see 6.2.2.

Approach 4 contains the application of *de facto* application of AR: In 13 out of 21 interviewed HEI the *de facto* approach is applied. This includes HEI from all interviewed regions, except for HEI from Lithuania who refrain from this approach since they rely strictly on formal legal frameworks, international treaties and national list-based approach.

Interviewees from Austria and Catalunya (Spain) described a similar *de facto* approach to AR in terms of recognition of qualifications: Both countries apply a *de facto* recognition of official qualifications from the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). This recognition allows graduates to be considered for access to the next level of studies without requiring a separate procedure for approval or declaration of equivalence, without prejudice to the verification of the authenticity of the qualification, the academic effects it has in the country of origin and the specific admission requirements of the programme (*AQU Interview 1*). Similarly, all interview partners from Austria made clear: *"We are bound to the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the Austrian Universities Act³⁵. This constitutes our legal basis and we operate in accordance with it. For us, a bachelor's programme is a bachelor's programme and a master's programme is equivalent to a master's programme. The level is obvious from the certificate (AQ Interview 2)"*.

This understanding of AR made visible in the interviews of Austrian and Catalan HEI shows the **importance of the legal context**: Where automatic recognition is integrated in legal provision, further agreements are not necessary from the point of view of HEI.

In contrast to this, for example in **Latvia**, recognition of foreign credentials is strictly regulated. Unless a national treaty is signed, HEI have limited³⁶ jurisdiction in making recognition decisions for full formal qualifications³⁷ without competent recognition body (*AIC Interview 1*).

Overall take away thematic category 1:

AR grants the holder of a qualification the right to be considered for access at a given degree level (BA or MA) without a separate formal approval process but does not grant automatic or guaranteed entry into a specific degree programme. All interviewed HEI apply at least one of the mentioned approaches to AR. While the legal context plays an important role regarding the implemented approaches, a persistent gap remains between national legal mandates and daily HEI operational realities.

³⁵ The Austrian University Decree (Universitätsgesetz 2002; see: <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20002128> regulates automatic recognition in Section 64, paragraph 3 and 4. Beyond the legal bases for automatic recognition, Austria also has in place regional agreements with other states concerning forms of recognition that go beyond the recognition of the level of qualifications. The most comprehensive one is the *Exchange of Notes between Austria and Italy*, which includes also the recognition of academic titles

(<https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=10009235>).

³⁶ According to the Education Law Paragraph 11.1 "The expert-examination of education documents issued from 1 January 2016 in a country of the European Union, a country of the European Economic Area, the Swiss Confederation, or a foreign country determined by the Cabinet in accordance with the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region (...the Lisbon Convention) shall be carried out by a higher education institution if it has acquired the right to carry out the expert-examination of the abovementioned documents., provided that the holder of the education document has submitted the application for commencing or continuing studies at the relevant higher education institution in compliance with that laid down in Paragraph four of this Section."

³⁷ Recognition of partial qualifications is in the competency of HEI. However, partial qualifications cannot be used as basis for admission.

6.2.2 Practice of AR & implementation Challenges

Key Findings:

In practice, HEIs make no clear distinction between the approaches to AR with regards to implementation. The recognition of qualifications is in many countries part of the admission process (see *thematic category 1*). Admission often consists of several steps where the recognition of prior qualification is only part of the process, as for example stated in *NVAO Interview 2*: “For the arts programmes, the admission office is only part of the process, there is also an artistic assessment by the programme”. And it is important to notice that AR does not guarantee a positive decision on admission.

Despite the selected approach to AR, interviewees named similar cross-cutting implementation **challenges** which apply for recognition of qualifications:

- **Verification and authenticity of qualifications:** includes verifying the status of institutional accreditation of the institution.
- **Staff capacity:** High application volumes, staff turnover, and a lack of regular, structured training create operational bottlenecks and lengthen decision timelines.

The importance of knowledge management within institutions, for example, highlighted in *Nuffic Interview 2*, *NVAO Interview 1*: “Institutional knowledge is uncodified and resides “in the heads of individual people”, leaving the institution vulnerable to staff turnover and requiring administrative staff to rely on informal advice from former officers.” The **expertise of individual employees** is essential for reliable and consistent recognition decisions (*NVAO Interview 1-3*).

- **Procedural challenges and institutional fragmentation:** Split responsibilities between central admissions and autonomous faculty may lead to inconsistencies regarding e.g. application of criteria.

Findings from the CIMEA interviews indicate a significant degree of fragmentation within institutions (*CIMEA Interviews 1-4*): Recognition procedures may vary considerably between faculties within the same institution, with each faculty applying its own approach. While interviewees generally demonstrated an understanding of automatic recognition, this internal fragmentation can have a substantial impact on how procedures are implemented in practice, particularly where no written procedure exists at institutional or faculty level.

Inconsistent recognition decisions may be a result of these procedural challenges: “Admission decision is often outcome of dialogue between central admissions and programme. It is not always clear who decides if there is disagreement.” (*NVAO Interview 2*)

- Assessing qualifications from **TNE** (where teaching and awarding bodies differ), and **secondary school leaving certificates**³⁸ presents far greater difficulty than standard EHEA university degrees (see *thematic category 5*).

³⁸ Secondary school leaving credentials present distinct evaluation barriers compared to standardized higher education degrees. Automatic recognition frameworks rarely cover upper secondary certificates (e.g., ENIC-NARIC Austria explicitly notes that Austrian UG 2002 Section 64 applies strictly to BA and MA levels, leaving secondary credentials to manual evaluation).

Digital Tools for the implementation of AR:

Digital tools, internal and external databases, portals, manuals and IT systems are an important and reliable source of information and are used by staff to evaluate foreign credentials and implement AR. In summary, HEIs rely on a combination of internal knowledge stored in databases and external tools and databases. The following points highlight the tools mentioned in most interviews while *Annex 7* provides a full list of external tools and databases mentioned in the interviews.

- Several HEIs created specialized in-house tools, internal repositories and knowledge bases which need constant updating (e.g. *AQ Interview 2*, *NAWA Interview 3*, *NAWA Interview 1*, *CIMEA Interview 4*, *NVAO Interview 3*)
- Heavy reliance on external reference databases / external credential databases and country profiles: most notably Anabin (Austria, Italy, Netherlands), Nuffic country modules (Netherlands, Poland), the Polish Kwalifikator (Poland, Italy), ARDI (Italy), Q-Entry (Italy, Poland), UK ENIC / Ecctis (Netherlands, Poland), and DEQAR (Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Netherlands).
- Dedicated digital recognition tools like **AR-go**, **EMREX**, or **Eduwallet** are rarely used, inaccessible, or unknown in daily admissions operations across the surveyed HEIs.

However, for many tools **limitation** apply: While HEI admissions software in some cases lacks automated filtering logic, while external reference databases can be incomplete, out-of-date, or unable to process advanced digital credential formats. The following **challenges** were highlighted in interviews: While these tools are helpful in many cases, they do not always provide sufficient information for more complex recognition cases or the - quality of the information provided it is not always clear (Nuffic Interview 1). Other sources, like e.g. the country modules from Nuffic, which are mentioned as a useful resource in several interviews, are not fully accessible to all interviewed HEI (e.g. *NVAO Interview 1*).

Good practice examples:

To mitigate these challenges, several institutions have introduced effective operational practices, such as **in-house repositories** (databases of past evaluation decisions), integrated admission **software** (e.g. example of recruitment system *NAWA Interview 3*) that automatically flag whether a diploma qualifies for AR or requires external referral, peer networks and capacity building (see *thematic category 4*). A full table of identified good practices from the interviews is available in *Annex 8*. The two mentioned examples are:

- Internal database example *NAWA Interview 1*: The university maintains an internal repository of anonymised qualification documents and reference materials developed from previous recognition cases. This repository serves as a practical

Admissions officers frequently encounter country-specific course exclusions, partial passes (such as foreign A-level certificates awarded despite failed subject components), and varying secondary-level quality assurance standards, making Bachelor admission evaluations highly labour-intensive.

reference tool for future assessments of uncommon qualifications and helps ensure consistency in recognition decisions while reducing the need to repeat the same verification process.

- One HEI recruitment platform automatically flags whether AR applies or an individual decision is required (*NAWA Interview 3*), an idea that was also suggested by *NVAO Interview 1*, to first triage on AR through an automatism in IT system.

Overall take away thematic category 2:

The interviews identified several challenges to the implementation of automatic recognition, including limited resources, insufficient dialogue and coordination between departments and responsible units, and unclear or fragmented distribution of responsibilities within institutions. This can make it difficult to ensure that automatic recognition principles and good recognition practices are consistently applied, particularly where decisions or recommendations from recognition officers may be overruled at faculty level. The findings therefore point to the importance of clear responsibilities, effective institutional dialogue, and sufficient support for recognition staff to ensure consistent implementation.

6.2.3 Integration of Recognition into IQA & Monitoring and Evaluation of Recognition

Key Findings:

Interview partners were asked regarding their institutional policies and/or regulations for recognition and the types of recognition addressed. However, concerning integration of recognition in IQA the type of automatic recognition was not addressed separately by the interviewed HEI. Answers thus refer to recognition procedures in general. The findings suggest that it is relevant to consider not only AR itself but also the broader institutional context and the extent to which recognition principles are formally documented and consistently applied.

The implementation of core recognition principles, including the assessment of substantial differences, is generally observed in practice but is not always explicitly reflected in institutional procedures. The interviews indicate that recognition is rarely governed by a standalone policy; instead, recognition workflows and admissions procedures are generally embedded in institutional regulations, bylaws, study regulations, or statutes, with some institutions also referring to specific recognition guidelines.

Several **internal quality assurance instruments** were identified as supporting decision consistency and transparency, including databases and workflow systems, multi-level administrative verification processes, appeals monitoring, and student feedback mechanisms following admission.

The interview outcomes show a divergent picture of embedding recognition into formal IQA systems and those operating through informal or decentralized operational procedures.

• Formal IQA integration:

- Many HEIs state formal institutional regulations covering qualification recognition, credit transfers, RPL, and mobility periods. These procedures are directly embedded into their IQA frameworks, aligned with ESG standards and with standards of their relevant QA agency, and linked to strategic internationalisation goals (*SKVC Interviews 1+2, NAWA Interviews 2, 3+4, AQU Interview 1, AIC Interview 3 and AQ Interview 2+3*).
 - *NAWA Interview 4* assigns Vice-Rector oversight to conduct annual quality reviews of admission files.
 - *NVAO Interview 3* integrated admissions into its Education Service to align workflows closer with educational and QA policy.
- **Informal or non-integrated operational practice:**
 - *CIMEA Interview 1, 2+4, Nuffic Interview 1+2, AIC Interview 2, NAWA Interview 1 and NVAO Interview 1* have no formal institutional recognition policies integrated into an overarching IQA cycle. Decisions rely on faculty autonomy, operational guidelines or decentralized departmental criteria without central QA monitoring.
 - *CIMEA Interview 3* maintains internal regulations for full academic recognition and RPL but explicitly exempts treaty-based recognition (*Exchange of Notes*) from IQA monitoring because it refers directly to national legal provisions.

However, answers to the question of **monitoring and evaluation of recognition** give evidence that most HEI provide instruments and mechanisms to assure the quality of recognition procedures. HEIs employ varying mechanisms to track, evaluate, and refine recognition processes: **Student and mobility surveys** (*AIC Interview 1, AQ Interviews 2 + 3, AQU Interview 1, NAWA Interviews 1 + 3 and SKVC Interviews 1 + 2* conduct regular surveys targeting student satisfaction, RPL process clarity, or mobility recognition experiences); **appeals tracking and file audits** (*NAWA Interview 2, NAWA Interview 4, CIMEA Interview 4, AIC Interview 3 and AQU Interview 1* systematically monitor appeal cases or perform annual random samplings of international student files to audit legal compliance and decision consistency); and **student progression and success analysis** (*AIC Interview 3, Nuffic Interview 2 and NVAO Interview 2* track student grades, dropout rates or academic progression in programme committees following admission). One interviewed HEI stated, for example, that a reflection on the admission within the programme committee takes place with regards to the correlation of admission and student progression, however this is not yet structurally embedded (*NVAO Interview 2*).

Further mentioned mechanisms concern **self-assessment** (*Nuffic Interview 2* utilizes the EUA Spotlight self-assessment tool), annual monitoring reports (*SKVC Interview 2*) or benchmarking workflows with partner universities and within alliances (*NVAO Interview 3*).

Only four interviewed HEIs (*CIMEA Interview 1+2, AIC Interview 2 and NVAO Interview 1*) reported having no formal mechanisms or procedures in place to evaluate recognition decisions.

Overall take away thematic category 3:

Recognition and admission are often processes with **shared responsibilities** between administrative and programme departments. Clear and transparent processes are

therefore essential. Without integration of recognition procedures into IQA, HEIs report a **lack of shared methodology** resulting in inconsistent criteria applied to applicants depending on which faculty reviews the file (*Nuffic Interview 2, CIMEA Interview 1*).

With IQA integration, recognition procedures are governed by institutional regulations with established procedural steps (e.g. *NAWA Interview 3, AIC Interview 1*). IQA integration ensures a consistent and transparent process compliant with national and EHEA regulations.

6.2.4 Capacity Building & Stakeholder Cooperation

Key Findings:

Building on the findings of 6.2.2 AR practice and implementation challenges, it is obvious that **capacity building for HEI staff** is of utmost importance for reliable and consistent recognition decisions. Operationalizing AR consistently across the EHEA depends on professionalized institutional staff and strong multi-level stakeholder cooperation networks. Where HEI rely on bottom-up knowledge transfer, this informal approach (*NAWA Interview 4, CIMEA Interview 1*) leaves institutions vulnerable to administrative staff turnover, possibly resulting in inconsistent evaluations and loss of institutional memory.

Capacity building and stakeholder cooperation rely on a combination of **national ENIC-NARIC training, peer practitioner networks, European University Alliances**, and **informal internal knowledge transfer**. While dedicated, standalone internal training departments are rare, institutions compensate through structured onboarding, legal briefings, alliance initiatives and active participation in professional credential evaluation associations (*SKVC Interview 2, AQ Interview 2, CIMEA Interview 4, NAWA Interview 3, NVAO Interview 3*). European University Alliances are used for joint training opportunities within staff mobility, e.g. seminar on the joint admission office (*NVAO Interview 2*).

HEIs rely heavily on national ENIC-NARIC centres (such as AIC, NAWA, CIMEA, Nuffic and SKVC) for core staff training, updates on regulatory changes, and webinars. Several universities mandate structured onboarding programs for all new admissions personnel (*SKVC Interview 2, AQ Interview 2, Nuffic Interview 1+2*).

Specific good practice examples identified include:

- **Structured mentorship and onboarding** (*SKVC Interview 2*): Assigning an experienced supervisor to new credential evaluators during their first year, backed by monthly supervision meetings to review complex cases.
- **In-House repositories** (*NAWA Interview 1+4, NVAO Interview 3*): Maintaining searchable internal archives of past evaluation decisions and historical qualification records to prevent duplicate work and ensure decision consistency across staff transitions.
- **Internal workshops** (*NAWA Interview 3*): Delivering 1- to 2-day internal workshops for faculty coordinators immediately before recruitment cycles, tailored directly to the 20 most frequently encountered foreign education systems.

- **Cross-institutional tool sharing** (*NVAO Interview 1*): Sharing and adapting admissions matrices across alliance partner universities to filter AR cases consistently.
- **Active Membership in networks** (*CIMEA Interviews, SKVC Interview 2, Nuffic Interviews*): Institutional membership in professional associations (APICE, TAICEP) to access specialized webinars, global credential databases, and peer-review networks. A good source of information, mutual learning and cooperation are specialized professional networks and peer-learning communities, such as APICE (Italian Professional Association of Credential Evaluators), TAICEP (Association of International Credential Evaluation Professionals), DHENIM (Dutch Higher Education Network for International Marketing & Admissions), Forum Administracji Akademickiej (FAA - Poland), the Austrian RPL Network.
- **Stakeholder cooperation:** SKVC is viewed as an important adviser and reference point for recognition practices and was mentioned as an especially good practice example for stakeholder cooperation with active cooperation, regular events and opportunities of direct consultations on recognition-related matters. (*SKVC Interview 1*)

Overall take away thematic category 4:

While general recognition training remains valuable, interviewees suggested complementing it with more advanced, case-based discussions for experienced recognition practitioners. Key areas of interest include document fraud, the use of artificial intelligence in falsified credentials, and country-specific recognition challenges. HEIs also noted the growing need for more specialised cooperation and knowledge exchange as the number of international students continues to increase.

6.2.5 Special topics: Micro-credentials, Joint degrees and TNE

The interviews addressed also special topics of recognition with the aim to identify further links between QA and recognition and explore good practice examples.

Many interviewed HEIs noted that **recognition of microcredentials** is still an emerging area with low application volumes. Furthermore, microcredentials are not relevant for AR since they are usually only eligible for credit recognition through validation (recognition of non-formal and informal learning procedures) (*NVAO Interview 1*). In terms of recognition procedures, *AQ Interview 3 as well as NVAO interview 2* mentioned the integration of microcredentials into established RPL procedures (validation of prior learning). Interviewees also formulated doubts about the quality of micro-credentials awarded by companies (non-traditional providers). Thus, quality assured registries, such as the planned EQAR database for quality-assured microcredential providers to verify non-HEI providers (*AQ Interview 2*) are of high relevance for HEI.

The interview outcomes analysis showed that AR does not apply for microcredentials in any of the interviewed HEIs.

Recognition is an important topic for **joint degrees** and especially relevant in joint admission processes. When the consortium follows a joint admission process, it is

important that the **cooperation agreement** includes the admission rules that apply (*NVAO Interview 3*). Established **joint admission committees** and pre-approved credit transfer matrices upfront in consortium agreements for joint degrees support consistent recognition decisions across the consortium and a clear distribution of responsibilities (*AQU Interview 1*). Another example for a quality assured mechanism in recognition for joint degrees was a **centralized joint coordination body**: a dedicated joint admissions and recognition committee representing all partner institutions to oversee applicant evaluation, harmonize criteria and ensure compliance with the IQA and legal requirements of each participating country (*NAWA Interview 2*).

Transnational Education (TNE) and Franchise Provision: were named as a challenge in the recognition of qualifications (*see thematic category 2*). Evaluators must carefully differentiate between accredited degree-awarding institutions and unaccredited local delivery centres.

6.3 Conclusion

The interview analysis along five thematic categories highlights the range of approaches to AR across HEIs in the countries of eight interviewing project partners. While legal context for applying AR varies, the findings on **challenges of implementation** are broadly applicable. The findings highlight persistent operational hurdles, including verification difficulties, staff turnover, and internal procedural fragmentation between central administrations and autonomous faculties. To address these challenges, institutions utilize a combination of external databases, internal knowledge repositories, and collaborative peer networks.

Furthermore, the interview outcomes show the varying degrees to which recognition processes are **integrated into internal quality assurance frameworks**. The interviews raised the question of whether a separate policy is necessary to make the link between quality assurance and recognition explicit and visible. While a standalone policy may not always be required, quality assurance instruments can provide mechanisms for ensuring the quality, consistency, and transparency of recognition processes. Recommendations to eliminate inconsistent criteria across faculties include standardized recognition workflows governed by formal institutional regulations and systematically monitored through regular student feedback, appeal file audits, and academic progression tracking.

A central outcome across all interviews is the **key role of capacity building** within recognition staff. Rather than relying on informal knowledge transfer, interview outcomes suggest to establish formal e.g. mentorship programs and internal workshops, complemented by active engagement with national ENIC-NARIC centres, partners and credential evaluation networks to preserve institutional memory.

Finally, to ensure quality-assured recognition of qualifications including AR, the findings from the analysis of interviews suggest HEI to formally integrate recognition workflows into their IQA frameworks, enhance the use of reliable digital tools, invest in structured staff training and systematically monitor recognition procedures and decisions.

7 Conclusion

One of the main objectives of the DIGI-REQA project (2025-2027) is to explore and support the operationalisation of the link between automatic recognition and QA. This report gathers and analyses evidence on *how recognition is addressed by quality assurance* from different perspectives:

- The **perspective of external quality assurance** through agency-level report analysis and survey outcomes (see chapters 3 and 4) and HEI-level reports (see chapter 5): An analysis was conducted of 62 ENQA reports, the external peer review of quality assurance agencies against Parts 2 and 3 of the ESG. In addition, a survey on how recognition is addressed by agencies in their methodologies for external QA reviews of HEIs or programmes and how ENIC-NARIC centres cooperate with QA agencies was carried out among the project partners. An analysis of 446 **external review reports** on higher education providers issued by QA agencies was conducted, providing insights into both how QA agency review panels address (automatic) recognition and how higher education institutions organise recognition procedures, including identified good practices and recommendations for improvement.
- The **perspective of internal quality assurance** and the practical implementation of automatic recognition (see chapter 6): 22 interviews with HEIs (including one ENIC-NARIC) were conducted. The interviews aim to identify good practices and challenges in the implementation of AR and its integration into IQA systems.

All four parts of the research that were conducted primarily addressed AR but also recognition in a broader sense considering various types of recognition (recognition of qualifications, formal, non-formal and informal education as well as credit recognition for mobility). The findings show that AR is seen as part of recognition and (in case of IQA) admission procedures. The concepts are interrelated and thus cannot be analysed separately. The following conclusions try to summarize overarching key points connecting the four conducted studies.

Concluding key points & Recommendations

- Based on the analysed data, **AR does not feature in external quality assurance reports** – neither on the level of QA agencies (ENQA reports, see chapter 3) nor on HEI-level (reports from QA agencies, “review reports in DEQAR”, see chapter 5). This is not surprising, though, since neither the ESG nor the Lisbon Recognition Convention cover this much more recent concept. While recognition is frequently included in external QA procedures on both levels, the depth of discussion of the topic varies considerably across agencies and procedures, as was shown in both analyses.
- The assumed absence of AR in QA could be argued to be reflected from the **point of view of HEI** in the interview outcomes: None of the interviewed HEI has a definition for AR. While a definition is also not necessary and all institutions apply AR in one of the mentioned approaches, it showed that HEIs are not familiar discussing the concept of AR.

- **IQA integration:** To ensure that recognition of qualifications is fair, transparent, consistent, and systematically applied, HEI are advised to embed their recognition practices directly into their broader IQA frameworks. This integration is explicitly supported by the ESG 1.4 (Student Admission, Progression, Recognition, and Certification), which requires that institutions must consistently apply published, pre-defined regulations covering all phases of the student lifecycle, including recognition. Interview outcomes showed that integration in IQA systems is lacking consistency. However, there are many good examples of monitoring and evaluation of recognition procedures – which could be better integrated into IQA mechanisms (see chapter 6).
- The findings from the HEI interviews made clear that the **use of digital tools** for AR should be better promoted and made visible. Results show a lack of knowledge about advanced EHEA digital tools, like the AR-go tool. Many institutions rely on internal databases or national resources and established databases as tools for AR.
- Examples of good practice regarding a quality assured approach to AR and recognition in the broader sense were identified on external and internal QA perspectives and in both analyses, the analysis of review reports in DEQAR as well as the analysis of interviews with HEI. A full list of good practice examples identified can be found in *Annexes 6 and 8* and encompass good practices on several topics amongst:
 - Transparency and (decision) consistency in AR implementation and recognition procedures
 - Staff capacity building
 - Monitoring & Evaluation
- A notable area for improvement is **closer collaboration between QA agencies, ENIC-NARIC offices and HEI**. Existing collaboration of this kind is hardly mentioned in QA agency review reports, and where it is mentioned, it typically takes on the form of a recommendation to establish or strengthen such cooperation.

Looking ahead, the recommendations and good practice examples identified will be further explored and developed following this report into a *position paper* with **guidance for internal and external quality assurance** on how to incorporate recognition into quality assurance.

Annex 1: Prompt history for ENQA reports analysis

Prompt 1: How is recognition considered in the methodological frameworks of this QA agency? Refer to the page where you found your information (if there is any consideration of recognition) + Report PDF

Prompt 2: How is recognition considered in the methodological frameworks of QA agencies? Please, if possible, give overall answers/trends and then underline them with examples. Only consider the uploaded reports as your sources + 10 reports attached

Differentiate between types of recognition: qualification, periods of study, recognition of prior learning

Prompt 3 *with the goal to address whether LIREQA Recommendations (2019) being implemented by QA agencies in their external QA procedures?*

1. Filter: Which QA agencies address recognition directly in the uploaded reports? Please refer to the page where you found your information. Only consider the uploaded reports as your sources.
2. Analyse only XY mentioned above: How do QA agencies include recognition in regular external quality assurance procedures? (*Lireqa rec 1 > consequently for all Lireqa recommendations*)
 - a. Please refer to the page where you found your information. Only consider the uploaded reports as your sources.
 - b. Please, if possible, give overall answers/trends and then underline them with examples.
 - c. Additional Question: is recognition part of institutional or programme level review?

Annex 2: Survey - Information Collection Template

Information Collection Template for WP 5 / T5.1.1. / Step 3

Recognition in External Quality Assurance & QA-ENIC-NARIC Cooperation

With this short survey we collect information from **Quality Assurance agencies** on how they address **recognition** within their reviews, and from **ENIC-NARIC centres** on how they cooperate with QA agencies.

A. General Information

Field	Response
Agency/Institution Name	[Enter text]
Type (QA Agency / ENIC-NARIC Centre)	[Enter text]
Country	[Enter text]
Contact Person	[Enter text]
Position/Role	[Enter text]
Email / Phone	[Enter text]
Website	[Enter text]

I answer for (Please select)

- Quality Assurance Agency
 - ENIC-NARIC
 - both
-

B. For Quality Assurance Agencies

1. Recognition in QA Frameworks

Recognition falls into two main types of 1) academic recognition (for further study purposes) and 2) professional recognition (for employment purposes). Academic recognition typically encompasses recognition of full qualifications from abroad (in the context of admissions); Recognition of Prior Learning (including non-formal and informal learning), and credit transfer after study periods abroad or in another study programme.

1. Inclusion in QA standards or criteria: Are recognition issues explicitly included in your QA standards or criteria?

Question	Yes / No	If yes, please specify the level external QA procedures at which standards on recognition are included, such as institutional reviews, programme-level evaluations, or quality system audits.
Is recognition referenced in QA standards?	☐ Yes ☐ No	[Enter text]
Recognition of prior learning?	☐ Yes ☐ No	[Enter text]

Please specify the *exact* standards, indicators, or documents where recognition is referenced and copy/paste the relevant passage:

[Enter text]

2. Operationalisation in Reviews

2.1 Methods applied to evaluate recognition

(e.g., self-assessment, documentation review, interviews, site visits)
[Enter text]

2.2 Do review panels include specific expertise in recognition?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, how? [Enter text]

2.3 How frequently are recognition issues identified as an area of concern in reviews?

Frequency: ☐ Common ☐ Occasional ☐ Rare

Typical [Enter text]	issues	found:
-------------------------	--------	--------

3. Cooperation with ENIC-NARIC Centres

3.1 Do you collaborate with ENIC-NARIC centres?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please describe the nature and level of cooperation:

- Frequency of communication: [Enter text]
 - Types of cooperation:
 - ☐ Joint projects
 - ☐ Joint events [please comment]
 - ☐ Shared tools [please comment]
 - ☐ Development of QA methodologies [please comment]
 - ☐ Expert involvement [please comment]
-

For ENIC-NARIC Centres

1. Engagement with QA Agencies

1.1 Do you cooperate with QA agencies?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, which agencies and on what matters?
[Enter text]

1.2 Purpose of cooperation

(e.g., advising on recognition practices/standards, sharing information/data, joint training)

[Enter text]

1.3 How are you involved in QA reviews or consultations on methodology?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If ☐ yes, please describe your involvement?
[Enter text]

2. Challenges and Opportunities

2.1 Main challenges in working with QA agencies

[Enter text]

2.2 What are opportunities or enabling factors in collaborating?

[Enter text]

2.3 How could cooperation between QA agencies and ENIC-NARIC centres be improved?

[Enter text]

Annex 3: Interview Guidelines

DIGI-REQA PROJECT: Digital Tools and Quality Assurance for Automatic Recognition

(101228790 – DIGI-REQA – ERASMUS-EDU-2024-EHEA-NARIC)

WP 5: Empowering Automatic Recognition Through Quality Assurance Procedures

- Task 5.1.2. Extended data collection and analysis
 - o Step 2: Conduct targeted interviews with potential good practice identified through desk research. Address both: QA agencies and HEI with potential good practice (with focus on transnational education, joint degrees, and micro-credentials).
-

Purpose of the interviews:

Within the framework of the DIGI-REQA project, and specifically for WP5 (Empowering Automatic Recognition Through Quality Assurance Procedures), the main objective is to operationalise the link between automatic recognition and quality assurance (QA). Interviews with higher education institutions (HEIs) aim to identify **good practices and challenges in the implementation of automatic recognition** and its **integration into internal quality assurance (IQA) systems**.

Expected outcome: an inventory of good practice approaches to QA addressing recognition.

Guidelines for conducting the interviews:

- Selection of interviewed institutions: Project partners select a minimum of 2 higher education institutions of their country as interview partners. It is recommended to select HEI from different sectors (e.g. public, private) and – if possible – HEI who implement automatic recognition.
- Selection of interview partners: Interviewees should be representatives of HEI who are involved in recognition processes and / or strategic approaches to recognition and quality assurance. This could be heads of or team members from: admission office, recognition office or quality assurance department. If unsure of a relevant contact person, please check with the Quality Assurance department of the HEI.
- Set up interview: Approach your potential interview partner with information on the project and purpose and relevance of the interview. Feel free to include the definition of automatic recognition and share the guiding questions of the interview in advance.
- Interviews can be held online, be recorded and outcome reported **via outcome templates** (see MS teams folder WP 5 > Interviews).
- Language of interviews: If possible, conduct in English, if interviews are conducted in other languages, please provide outcomes in English.
- Recordings or written records of interviews will be used **only** by the project partner for the purpose of comparing and analysing outcomes. Interview outcomes will be anonymized before the conduction of comparative analysis.

- Publication: the project report will contain interview outcomes on an anonymized and aggregated basis. Country references will be included where necessary. A list of interviewed institutions and countries will be part of the report annex, however no names of interview partners will be published.

Guiding Questions for Interviews with HEIs:

1. Introduction to the interview:

- Introduce the DIGI-REQA project and added value from the interview contributing to the project goals: <https://skvc.lrv.lt/en/digi-reqa/>
 - The insights we gain through interview partners into good practice and challenges of implementing automatic recognition and integrating recognition in internal quality assurance are necessary and add value to the relevance and practical use of the report and the following position paper. Good examples identified through research and interviews will feed into the recommendations of the project group and the following position paper with guidance on how to incorporate (automatic) recognition in quality assurance.
 - Clarify interview setting (see all infos above):
 - o Recording and/or note taking
 - o Use of date
 - Provide definition of "Automatic recognition" according to the definition of automatic recognition as per EU Council Recommendation [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210(01)):
- **Automatic mutual recognition of a qualification:** the right for holders of a qualification of a certain level that has been issued by one Member State to be considered for entry to a higher education programme in the next level in any other Member State, without having to go through any separate recognition procedure. This shall not prejudice the right of a higher education institution or the competent authorities to set specific evaluation and admission criteria for a specific programme. It does not prejudice the right to check, if the qualification is authentic and, in case of an upper secondary education and training qualification, if it really gives access to higher education in the Member State of issuance or, in duly justified cases, if the granted qualification meets the requirements for accessing a specific higher education programme in the receiving Member State.

2. Approaches to automatic recognition

Introduction: There are four possible approaches to automatic recognition³⁹ (already identified by ENICs-NARICs:

5. Automatic recognition arranged in bilateral and multilateral agreements;
6. Automatic recognition based on a list of countries to be decided by a competent recognition authority (unilateral);
7. Non-legal recommendations (Baltic-Nordic admissions manual);

³⁹ <https://www.nuffic.nl/sites/default/files/2020-08/the-triangle-of-automatic-recognition%20%281%29.pdf>

8. De facto application of automatic recognition, accepting for many countries that in practice MA=MA, BA=BA, and quickly evaluating qualifications in an automated process

Questions:

- a. Do you use any of the above-mentioned approaches?
- b. Do you use any other approach? Please describe!

3. Automatic Recognition Practice

- a. How does your institution define and apply "automatic recognition" in practice for qualifications from other EHEA countries?
- b. What steps and specific tools (e.g. IT systems) have been taken to implement Automatic recognition?

4. Integration into IQA

- a. Existence of specific regulation for different types of recognition: Does your institution have an institutional policies and/ or internal regulations on recognition? If yes, does it encompass the different types of recognition: recognition of foreign full qualifications, recognition of prior learning, recognition of study periods?
- b. If Automatic recognition of qualifications is part of an institutional policy: How is this institutional policy on academic recognition (including automatic recognition) integrated into your Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) system and/or linked with the institutional strategy?

5. Implementation Challenges

What are the primary legal, organizational, or technical challenges your institution faces when implementing automatic recognition for incoming students?

6. Micro-credentials

How are recognition procedures for Micro-credentials currently managed and quality-assured within your institution? Are there specific challenges to recognition of Micro-credentials?

7. Joint Degrees and TNE (applies to HEIs that implement Joint Degrees and TNE programmes)

For joint degrees and transnational education (TNE) programs, how do you ensure that recognition practices are consistent across all partner institutions and appropriately covered by QA procedures?

8. Monitoring and Evaluation of Recognition

What mechanisms (e.g., student surveys, monitoring of appeals, or thematic analyses) does your institution use to evaluate the recognition processes and decisions regarding eg. its effectiveness, fairness and consistency? Which types of recognition (academic recognition for admission, recognition of study periods, Recognition of prior learning) are monitored and evaluated?

9. Capacity Building

Are there initiatives or training modules provided to staff involved in recognition (both administrative and academic) to ensure they are competent in the latest EHEA recognition tools and standards?

10. Use of Digital Tools

To what extent does your institution utilize digital tools (such as AR-go, DEQAR, or EMREX) to facilitate recognition?

11. Stakeholder Cooperation

a. How would you describe the current level of cooperation and dialogue between your institution's recognition office, your quality assurance unit, and the national ENIC-NARIC centre regarding the improvement of recognition practices?

b. What types of activities (e.g. information sharing, joint projects, joints events, join expert training activities, other - asking to specify) are you jointly involved in and what is their frequency (e.g. monthly, quarterly, semi-annually, yearly)?

Annex 4: Interview Outcome Template

DIGI-REQA PROJECT: Digital Tools and Quality Assurance for Automatic Recognition

(101228790 – DIGI-REQA – ERASMUS-EDU-2024-EHEA-NARIC)

Interview Outcome Template

Interview information

Project Information	
Interviewer Information	Project partner: xxx Interview conducted by: xxx
Interview partner information	Institution of interview partner: xxx Position of interview partner: xxx
Interview data	Date: xxx Duration: xxx Modus: online/in person Language: xxx Recorded: yes/no

Interview Outcomes (will be separated from interview information for the purpose of analysing the results)

Nr Question	Interview question	Main outcomes (in full sentences)	Additional information / remarks
2.a	Approaches to AR: Do you use any of the above-mentioned approaches?		
2.b	Approaches to AR: Do you use any other approach? Please describe!		
3.a	AR practice: Definition and application of AR in practice		
3.b	AR Practice: Steps and specific tools to implement AR		
4.a	Integration into QA: Regulation		
4.b	Integration into IQA yes: integration of policy into IQA		
4.c	Integration into IQA no:		
5.	LRC Compliance		
6.	Implementation Challenges		
7.	Microcredentials		
8.	Joint Degrees and TNE		
9.	Monitoring and Evaluation		
10.	Capacity Building		
11.	Use of Digital Tools		
12.	Stakeholder Cooperation		

Annex 5: Results of analysis of DEQAR reports per QA agency and procedure

	Agency	Procedure	Number of reports	Frequency "recognition"	Average weight of analysis	Topics
1.	AAQ	Institutional accreditation in Switzerland	3	100%	2	General procedures, LRC, credit recognition
2.	ACQUIN	Institutional accreditation abroad	9	100%	1	General procedures, procedures for recognition of prior learning
3.	AHPGS	Institutional evaluation outside Germany	1	100%	3	LRC, credit recognition
4.	AQAS	Institutional accreditation international	1	100%	3	Non-formal and informal learning
5.	ANQA	Institutional accreditation	9	50%	2.75	General procedures, Credit recognition, transparency of procedures, LRC, Non-formal and informal learning, prior learning, training

6.	ASHE	Re-accreditation of higher education institutions (second cycle)	18	83%	2,3	Credit recognition, prior learning, transparency of procedures
7.	BAC	Accreditation of higher education institutions (home)	15	27%	1	Prior learning
		Accreditation of higher education institutions (abroad)	54	17%	2	Non-formal and informal learning prior learning, transparency
8.	CYQAA	Departmental Evaluation-Accreditation (abroad)	57	91,5%	0.2	Credit recognition, ENIC-NARIC, prior learning, transparency
		Departmental Evaluation-Accreditation (home)	5	100%	0.5	Credit recognition, ENIC-NARIC, prior learning, transparency
		Institutional evaluation – accreditation (home)	27	100%	0.3	ENIC-NARIC, LRC, transparency

9.	Evalag	International institutional accreditation	2	0%	n/a	n/a
10.	ECAQA	Institutional accreditation of Higher Education Institutions	2	0%	n/a	n/a
		Institutional Accreditation of the Postgraduate Medical Education	5	20%	1	credit recognition, collaboration, ENIC-NARIC
		Accreditation of the clinical skills centre (simulation-based healthcare education) of medical higher educational institutions	1	0%	n/a	n/a
		Cross-Border Institutional Accreditation of Higher Education In	3	67%	1.5	General procedure LRC Credit recognition collaboration
11.	ECTE	Institutional and programme accreditation	23	91%	1.6	Collaboration, credit recognition, LRC, non-formal and informal learning, prior, learning, procedures, transparency

12.	FIBAA	Micro-credential providers reviews	2	100%	0.5	non-formal and informal learning
		Institutional accreditation in accordance with the FIBAA quality standards	7	26%	0,5	General procedures, LRC
		FIBAA Seal Excellence in Digital Education (institutional)	1	0%	na	na
13.	FINEEC	Institutional quality audits (abroad)	1	100%	3	collaboration non-formal and informal learning prior learning procedures recommendation transparency
		Institutional quality audits (home)	2	100%	2.5	prior learning

14.	HAKA					procedures recommendation training transparency
		Thematic evaluations	1	100%	3	Prior learning
		Institutional accreditation of higher education institutions (home)	5	100%	1.8	credit recognition non-formal and informal learning prior learning general procedures recommendation transparency
		Institutional accreditation of higher education institutions (abroad)	5	100%	3	credit recognition fair recognition non-formal and informal learning general procedures

						transparency
15.	HCERES	Evaluation of foreign institutions - holistic reviews	8	25%	2	General procedures
16.	IEP	Institutional evaluation	5	60%	2	Credit recognition
17.	KAA	Accreditation of institutions	7	100%	1.7	credit recognition, collaboration
18.	MusiQue	Critical friend reviews	3	67%	1.5	Non-formal and informal learning
		Quality enhancement reviews of institutions	3	0%	na	na
		Institutional accreditation	2	100%	1.5	Credit recognition Prior learning General procedures
19.	NVAO	Combined institutional and programme assessments in Luxembourg	6	17%	1.5	Prior learning

20.	QAA	International Quality Review	19	94%	1.5	Credit recognition, prior learning, general procedures
		Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) (abroad)	1	0%	na	non-formal and informal learning prior learning procedures transparency
		Educational Oversight Review (EOR) (abroad)	2	0%	na	na
		Educational Oversight Review (EOR) (home)	0	0%	na	na
		Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review (TQER)	22	0%	na	na
		Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight	4	50%	1	General procedures, credit recognition ENIC-NARIC
		Quality Enhancement Review (Wales)	2	0%	na	na

Project: 101228790 — DIGI-REQA — ERASMUS-EDU-2024-EHEA-NARIC

Nursing and Midwifery Council Quality Assurance Review (home)	39	100%	1	Prior learning
Higher Education Review (Foreign Providers)	1	100%	1	Prior learning
Higher Education Review (Alternative providers)	1	100%	1	General procedures
Gateway Quality Review (Wales)	4	25%	1	General procedures transparency prior learning fair recognition non-formal and informal learning
Elective Quality Review	1	100%	1	procedures transparency prior learning
Educational Oversight (home)	2	50%	3	Transparency

21.	QQI				prior learning
		Educational Oversight - Exceptional Arrangements	4	0%	na
		Degree Awarding Powers (DAP) scrutiny (Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland)	1	0%	na
		TrustEd International Education Mark (abroad)	1	100%	1
		TrustEd International Education Mark (home)	26	100%	2.5
					collaboration ENIC-NARIC+combinations fair recognition LRC prior learning procedures training transparency

		Institutional quality monitoring and review (*) (home)	13	92%	2.2	ENIC-NARIC non-formal and informal learning prior learning general procedures
22.	SKVC	Ex-post institutional review in Lithuania	6	100%	2.33	collaboration credit recognition ENIC-NARIC fit for purpose LRC non-formal and informal learning prior learning general procedures transparency
23.	Unibasq	CEQUINT	2	50%	1	General procedures
24.	ZeVa	International institutional accreditation	2	100%	3	General procedures, credit recognition

Project: 101228790 — DIGI-REQA — ERASMUS-EDU-2024-EHEA-NARIC

Annex 6: Good practices outlined in the DEQAR reports

1 European level

Initiative / Practice	Responsible institution/body	Explanation
Spotlight LRC Self-Assessment Tool	European University Association; in partnership with the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), the Spanish Rectors' Conference (Crue) and the Dutch organisation for internationalisation in education (Nuffic)	Helps institutions assess compliance with Lisbon Recognition Convention

2 National level

Initiative / Practice	Country	Responsible institution/body	Explanation
VÖTA system for recognition of prior learning and work experience	Estonia	Estonian system	National framework for recognizing formal and experiential learning
Validation des acquis de l'expérience (VAE)	Luxembourg	Luxembourg Ministry of Research and Higher Education	Combines a national guidance with decentralized institutional procedures for validating experience.

Project: 101228790 — DIGI-REQA — ERASMUS-EDU-2024-EHEA-NARIC

Manual for the Recognition of Prior Learning	Estonia	Archimedes Foundation	Guidance on RPL design and QA
National RPL in Higher Education Project	Ireland	Technological Universities Association and Irish Universities Association	Builds consistent RPL practice through shared tools, staff development, institutional cooperation, and employer engagement.

3 Agency level

Initiative / Practice	Country	Responsible institution/body	Contribution
QAA Quality Code	UK	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)	Provides a shared quality reference point for admissions, assessment, prior learning, monitoring, student support, and appeals.
Guidelines for Recognition of Formal, Non-Formal and Informal Learning	cross-border focus	ECTE	Operational guidance on recognition procedures
TrustEd Quality Mark	Ireland	QQI	Particular standards focusing on recognition and admission procedures, as well as compliance with LRC principles

4 Institutional level

Initiative / Practice	HE system	Responsible institution/body	Explanation
Institutional implementation of VÖTA	Estonia	Estonian Academy of Arts	Recognition of previous studies and experiential learning. Supports assessment and accreditation of prior formal, non-formal and experiential learning.
International Admissions Policy and Procedures	Ireland	Dundalk Institute of Technology	Fair and transparent qualification recognition
Recognition of Prior Learning framework	Ireland	Technological University Dublin	Formal, non-formal and informal learning recognition framework supporting access, progression and credit awards.
Recognition of Prior and Concurrent Learning Policy	Ireland	University College Dublin	Admission, credit and transfer framework
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy	Ireland	Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology	Formally evaluates formal, non-formal, and informal learning for access, advanced entry, or module exemptions
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy	Ireland	Munster Technological University	Comprehensive RPL system enabling access, exemptions, progression and credit recognition based on prior learning
TUS Policy on Recognition of Prior Learning	Ireland	Technological University of the	RPL policy governing assessment and recognition of certified, experiential and non-formal learning.

		Shannon: Midlands Midwest	
Collaboration with ENIC-NARIC Ireland	Ireland	Maynooth University	Stakeholder collaboration. Admissions staff use ENIC-NARIC guidance and credential databases to support recognition decisions for international applicants.
Policy on RPL	Ireland	Atlantic Technological University	Institutional framework for recognition of prior certified, experiential and non-formal learning for access and advanced entry.
Recognition of Prior Learning section; Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes; &	Ireland	South East Technological University	RPL policy and Policy that regulates the entry to students who successfully complete a linked FET programme in partner Colleges of Further Education and who meet certain criteria
Procedure for Assessment and Academic Recognition of Foreign and International Qualifications	Lithuania	Vytautas Magnus University	Recognition and appeals procedures
Procedures for Recognition of Foreign Qualifications, Partial Studies,	Lithuania	LCC International University	Establishes procedures for recognising foreign qualifications, credit earned elsewhere, and prior non-formal and informal learning.

and Prior Non-Formal and Informal Learning			
Teaching Quality Assurance Manual	UK	University of Exeter	Integrated framework governing academic standards, programme quality, credit accumulation, student mobility and recognition processes.
Transform4Europe mobility infrastructure	European	Transform4Europe Alliance	Supports mobility and recognition cooperation
Practical guide on RPL through credit transfer	Finland	University of Helsinki	Tool of comparison, guidelines on the procedure and further information
Policy on Recognition of Foreign Qualifications	Ukraine	Lutsk National Technical University	Lutsk National Technical University Provides guidance and procedures for evaluation of foreign qualifications and admission of international applicants
Regulations for Student Mobility	Kosovo ⁴⁰	Faculty of Islamic Studies	Defines mobility procedures, learning agreements, transfer and recognition of credits completed at partner institutions.
Life Long Learning Policy , Policy on	Malaysia	The Maldives National University	Comprehensive framework governing credit recognition, prior learning assessment, transfer of credit and student mobility arrangements.

⁴⁰This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

Recognizing Prior Learning and Transfer of Credit&Policy on Student Mobility			
University of Fiji Handbook	Fiji	University of Fiji	Defines Recognition of Prior Learning and outlines procedures for assessment, admissions and credit exemptions.
Academic policies and procedures for undergraduate programmes	Kazakhstan	Nazarbayev University	Contains provisions on transfer credit, recognition of prior study, progression requirements and academic mobility.
University RPL policy	UK	Glasgow Caledonian University	Institutional policy regulating recognition of prior certified and experiential learning for admission and credit purposes.
Middlesex University Recognition of Previous Learning Guide	UK	Middlesex University	Provides transparent guidance for applicants on eligibility, procedures and evidence requirements for recognition of previous learning.
Integrated student-data management and digital mobility tools	Spain	Cardenal Herrera-CEU University	Supports monitoring and recognition decisions by utilizing centralized information management frameworks across all campuses, ensuring that student data is digitized and standardized

Project: 101228790 — DIGI-REQA — ERASMUS-EDU-2024-EHEA-NARIC

Advance Standing and Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) Policy and Policies & Procedures Manual (contains PLAR Policy)	United Arab Emirates	Ajman University	Establishes procedures for recognition of prior learning, transfer credits and advanced standing decisions.
Rulebook on Mobility	Finland	Arca University of Applied Sciences	Regulates outgoing and incoming student mobility, learning agreements, credit transfer and recognition of studies completed abroad.
Policies for Recognition of Learning & Website on Recognition of Learning	Finland	University of Oulu	Provides principles, criteria and procedures for recognition of prior learning and transfer of credits from other institutions.
Regulations on Academic Recognition of Foreign Higher Education Qualifications and Periods of Study for the Purpose of	Croatia	University of Split	Establishes procedures and criteria for recognition of foreign qualifications and study periods completed abroad.

Project: 101228790 — DIGI-REQA — ERASMUS-EDU-2024-EHEA-NARIC

Continuing Studies			
--	--	--	--

Annex 7: Mapping of digital tools used by interview partners⁴¹

Based on the responses to the **"Use of Digital Tools"** question (Question 10) across all **22 interview sources this matrix shows** which digital tools and databases are used by each source:

Digital Tool / Database	Type / Scope	Mentioned / Used by Interview Source(s)	Operational Status & Usage Notes
ARDI (Automatic Recognition Database Italia)	National / Regional ENIC-NARIC Database	CIMEA Interview 1 CIMEA Interview 2 CIMEA Interview 3	Used extensively to generate Statements of Correspondence and verify EHEA qualifications.
Kwalifikator	Polish National Recognition Database	NAWA Interview 1 NAWA Interview 2 NAWA Interview 3 NAWA Interview 4 CIMEA Interview 1	Primary national digital tool used by Polish HEIs to determine degree access rights and check legal eligibility for automatic recognition.
Anabin (Germany / KMK)	National Qualifications Database	AIC Interview 3 AQ Interview 2 AQ Interview 3 Nuffic Interview 1 SKVC Interview 1	Used on a daily basis as a support mechanism to check foreign system comparability, degree titles, and institution accreditation.
Hochschulkompass	German HE Database	AQ Interview 3	Consulted alongside Anabin to compare foreign qualification titles.

⁴¹ AI Tool Gemini Notebook was used to extract the digital tools used by the interviewed HEI. Sources were checked manually.

Nuffic Country Modules / Profiles	ENIC-NARIC Comparative Education Guides	Nuffic Interview 1 Nuffic Interview 2 CIMEA Interview 1 NAWA Interview 1 NAWA Interview 2 NAWA Interview 3 NVAO Interviews 1–3 AQ Interview 2	Primary reference guide for comparative degree structures and AR advice across Dutch, Polish, Flemish, Italian, and Austrian HEIs.
DEQAR (Database of External Quality Assurance Results)	European QA / NQF Database (EQAR)	AIC Interview 3 CIMEA Interview 2 NAWA Interview 2 NVAO Interviews 2 SKVC Interview 1 SKVC Interview 2	Actively used by several HEIs for institutional accreditation and QA verification. Note: SKVC Interview 2 is registered in DEQAR but does not use it in daily practice.
UK ENIC / Ecctis Database & Verification Service	Global Database & Paid Verification	NAWA Interview 2 NAWA Interview 3 NVAO Interviews 2, 3 Nuffic Interview 1 Nuffic Interview 2 SKVC Interview 2	Consulted for global credential evaluation; NAWA Interview 3 uses paid Ecctis online verification to resolve complex cases or potential document fraud.
Q-Entry	CIMEA Secondary Qualification DB	CIMEA Interview 1 CIMEA Interview 2 NAWA Interview 1	Consulted to assess upper secondary school qualifications giving access to higher education.

IAU WHED (World Higher Education Database)	International HEI Directory	NAWA Interview 1 NVAO Interviews 2	Used to verify institutional recognition status worldwide.
Scholaro Database	International Evaluation Portal	NAWA Interview 1 NAWA Interview 2	Used as a supplementary reference tool for foreign system descriptions.
ECE Connection & TAICEP Resources	Credential Evaluator Networks	CIMEA Interview 1 (ECE) CIMEA Interview 2 (TAICEP) SKVC Interview 2 (TAICEP)	Resources, databases, and peer networks used for specialized international evaluation advice.
Secondary & High School Verification Portals (IBIS, WAEC, RUCT, EDBO)	Specialized / National Verification	NAWA Interview 1 NAWA Interview 4 (e.g. Indian DBs)	Direct verification portals used for International Baccalaureate (IBIS), WAEC certificates, Spanish RUCT, Ukrainian EDBO, and Indian national databases.
World Directory of Medical Schools	Discipline Accreditation Register	NAWA Interview 2	Consulted specifically to confirm foreign medical school accreditation for regulated programs.
EUA Spotlight Tool	Self-Assessment Tool	Nuffic Interview 2	Used secondarily to evaluate and align institutional recognition procedures.
EMREX	Electronic Transcript Exchange	NVAO Interviews 3 Nuffic Interview 1 (Not accessible) SKVC Interview 2 (Registered, NOT used)	Used within specific faculties; reported as inaccessible or unused in daily practice by others.
AR-go	Automated Recognition Software	SKVC Interview 2 (Known/Viewed as useful, NOT used) All other interviews (Unused / Unknown)	Consistently identified across interviews as either unknown or not utilized in daily institutional operations.

Erasmus+ OLA / ORI Platforms	Mobility Credit Exchange Software	AQU Interview 1	Used specifically for managing exchange study agreements and mobility credit transfers.
------------------------------	-----------------------------------	-----------------	---

Annex 8: AR Implementation Challenges & Good Practice from HEI interviews

Cross-Cutting Implementation Challenges & Good Practices

Core Cross-Cutting Challenge Categories

Challenge Category	Project partners interviewed HEI	Synthesized Description & Operational Impact
1. Authenticity & Fraud Prevention	<i>AIC, AQ, NAWA, SKVC, AQU</i>	Bypassing preliminary ENIC-NARIC reviews shifts full responsibility to HEIs to detect forged diplomas, verify awarding body accreditation, and authenticate digital/scanned credentials without specialized tools.
2. Structural & Systemic Complexity	<i>AQ, NAWA, CIMEA, NVAO</i>	Staff struggle with non-standard qualifications, franchise/transnational education (different teaching vs. awarding HEI), disputed territories (e.g., Northern Cyprus), and upper secondary non-EU certificates.
3. Governance & Organizational Silos	<i>CIMEA, NVAO, Nuffic, AQU</i>	Tensions and communication gaps between centralized admissions offices (handling initial AR screening) and autonomous faculty committees (evaluating qualitative/artistic prerequisites and grade conversions).
4. IT Infrastructure & Database Deficits	<i>NVAO, NAWA, AQ, SKVC, AQU</i>	Legacy admissions software (up to 25 years old) lacks automated AR logic, while external national databases (e.g., Anabin) are often incomplete, outdated, or technically inaccessible.
5. Staff Capacity & Compressed Timelines	<i>NVAO, SKVC, NAWA, CIMEA</i>	High application volumes combined with tight national admission deadlines (e.g., LAMA BPO in Lithuania) and lack of dedicated, formally trained evaluation teams lead to heavy workloads and processing backlogs.

Identified Good Practices in AR Implementation

Good Practice Mechanism	Adopting Partners / Examples	Operational Benefits & Value Realized
In-House Knowledge Repositories	<i>NAWA 1, NAWA 4, NVAO 3, CIMEA 3/4, Nuffic 2</i>	Maintaining internal, anonymized archives of previous credential decisions ensures decision consistency, speeds up repeat evaluations, and preserves institutional memory.
Integrated Admissions Software with AR Logic	<i>NAWA 3, AIC 3, AQU 1</i>	Building internal portals that automatically detect whether a qualification falls under an AR treaty or requires individual referral significantly reduces manual screening time.
Pre-Approval Tools for Study Abroad	<i>AQ 2 (Austria), AQU 1</i>	Utilizing digital pre-approval workflows for exchange students guarantees seamless credit transfer and recognition upon return.
Practitioner Networks & Capacity Building	<i>CIMEA, NAWA, Nuffic, ENIC-NARIC Austria</i>	Active participation in national and European credential evaluation networks (APICE, TAICEP, IROs Forum) provides staff with rapid peer-consultation channels for complex cases.