

Manual

For evaluation aimed at Mutual Recognition of Nordic National Recognition and Information Centers (ENIC/NARIC-offices) 2003-2005

The manual was originally designed for the evaluation of National Agencies of Quality assurance, within a project mutually developed by the Nordic Evaluation Agencies (Nordic Network on Quality Assurance).

This version has however been modified for the purpose of serving as an instrument in the evaluation of National Recognition and Information Centres (Enic/Naric-offices) by the Nordic Recognition Network (NRN).

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1 Introduction

This manual is part of a Nordic project on evaluation aimed at Mutual Recognition of National Recognition and Information Centres. The Nordic Recognition Network (NRN) initiated the project in 2003 with the purpose of starting a process towards establishing more consistent approaches, procedures and methods in recognition of foreign qualifications.

This evaluation initiative aims at establishing transparency and insight in the different offices modes of work by illuminating central aspects of their function. In addition to creating transparency, the method applied will try to forward measures for quality improvement of recognition agencies. It is, therefore, an aspiration that this evaluation project will establish a basis for discussions on common standards and criteria in recognition. Mutual recognition is therefore a future possibility and not an expected result of this initiative.

All five Nordic Recognition Agencies will be evaluated in the period 2003-2005. The methodological approach includes a self-study, a site-visit by a review panel and a report.

This manual for evaluation aimed at Mutual Recognition of National Recognition and Information Agencies follows in essence the methodology developed for mutual recognition of Nordic evaluation agencies by the Nordic Network on Quality Assurance.

The manual consists of two sections:

- Self-study protocol
- Site visit and evaluation report.

2 Self-study protocol

The office under review should provide a self-study drafted in correspondence with the self-study protocol. The focus of the protocol is primarily on presentation and explanation rather than analysis and assessment as the aim of the project is establishing transparency and insight in the different offices modes of work. The content of the protocol is primarily based on discussions within the Nordic Recognition Network.

The protocol consists of the following four main sections:

- A Background, purpose and ownership
- B Recognition method
- C Procedures for quality assurance of agency
- D Concluding analysis

It is important that the self-study can be read independently without supplementary documentation to support the statements in the report. The self-study is though expected to contain references to supplementary documentation to support the statements in the report. The documentation should preferably consist of material produced prior to the self-study. This is especially relevant to sections A, B and C of this protocol.

The self-study should be written in English and enclosed documentation in either English or a Scandinavian language. The self-study is expected to be between 10 and 15 pages and should be sent to the review panel no later than a month before the visit.

A Background, purpose and ownership

This section should provide the background information necessary to understand the context in which the agency is working and an account of the ownership of the agency and of its purpose. The section is expected to include:

A.1 A brief account of the history

This account should include:

- The history of the agency
- The history of recognition of foreign higher education in general.

A.2 Duties and purpose of the agency

This account should include:

- Duty of agency and frame of competence (Professional and/or Academic recognition, binding assessments or guidance, description of supplementary duties etc.).
- Description of other responsibilities of the agency than recognition of foreign higher education.
- International activities of the agency, including formal agreements as well as other activities, e.g. participation in conferences, participation of working groups and staff exchange.
- Documentation and information systems, databases, networks etc.

A.3 Internal organization of the agency

This account should include:

- Organisation
- Number of staff and competence/composition of staff.
- Work load: number of cases per year.

A.4 Rules, regulations and laws governing recognition work

This account should include:

- Ownership in terms of:
 - Who initiated and established the agency (government, higher education institutions, others)
 - Institutional/structural framing (i.e. independent, part of ministry etc.)
 - Status of office in relation to the government and HEI's
 - How the agency is financed
 - The nomination and appointment of the head
- Description of the legal framework and other formal regulations concerning the agency (e.g. parliamentary laws, ministerial orders or decrees);

A.5 Information on recognition

This section should describe the agency's information on recognition.

A.6 Evidence that the agency is recognized as a national or regional recognition and information agency by the relevant public authorities.

A.7 Evidence that the agency has not been constituted as a profit-making concern.

B Recognition Method

This section concerns the methods and models used in recognition. It is divided into three subsections. The first is about the methodological approach to recognition, the second covers the documentation needed for recognition, and the third is about the recognition statement.

B.1 Transparent methodological procedures

This subsection should contain an account of the agency's methodological approach to recognition and include evidence that the agency is working on the basis of transparent methodological procedures. The subsection is expected to include:

- Information provided by the agency to applicants on what is needed to get a degree recognised.
- An account of the reference(s) for recognition (predefined criteria, legal documents, professional standards etc.)
- Information on the extent to which the methodological elements may be modified to specific recognition cases.
- Evidence that the agency is working on the basis of transparent methodological procedures.

B.2 Documentation

This subsection should contain an account of documents needed for recognition and procedures. It is expected to include:

- Documents needed to conclude a recognition case

This account should include:

- A list of documents needed to support a recognition case
- Supplementary documents.

- An account of procedures

This should include:

- If possible, a specification of content in the guidelines provided by the agency;
- If existing, procedural advice provided by the agency;

- Other kinds of documentation

This account should include information of other kinds of documentation not mentioned elsewhere including how the agency deals with applicants with no documents.

B.3 The recognition statement

This subsection should contain an account of recognition statements. It is expected to include:

- A description of the mode(s) of recognition statements used by the agency.
- Examples/copies of statements used by the office.
- Examples of non-recognition or refusal to conduct recognition.

C Procedures for Quality assurance of agency

This section concerns the quality assurance procedures of the agency and the effect of recognition documented by quality assurance.

C.1 Procedures and systems

This subsection should contain an account of the quality assurance procedures. It is expected to include:

- Continuous quality assurance systems in place both regarding internal working procedures (dissemination of knowledge and experience) and external relations and output (e.g. feed-back from applicants, institutions, experts and stakeholders)

- Qualifications and skills of professional staff and management, including notes on recruitment, training and qualification development;

- General initiatives to keep the agency informed regarding the state of the art and new developments within the field of recognition of foreign qualifications (membership of domestic and international organisations, partnerships and networks).

C.2 Effect documented by quality assurance

The agency should report on the effects of its work documented by the quality assurance system mentioned above. The agency should account for.

- The results of its work to improve procedures, systems and methods in recognition.
- The overall and indirect impact of the agency's recognition work on integration and mobility
- The general status of the agency among owners, stake-holders and others.

D Concluding analysis

This section should include an analysis of the agencies' strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, in order to give an account of the capacity of the agency to adapt to new demands and trends and to permanently improve its actions while maintaining a solid and credible methodological framework and governance model.

3 Site visit and evaluation report

This section describes the site visit by a review panel and the final evaluation report.

3.1 The site visit

The agency under review should send the self study to the review panel no later than a month before the visit. The Chair and the secretary of the review panel are responsible for planning and organising the visit including:

- contact with the agency under review
- providing the review panel with draft interview-guides for the site-visit no later than one week before the visit.

The day before the site visit the review panel meet to finalize the preparation of the site visit. As the purpose of the site-visit is to validate the self-study all planning and preparations including the interview-guides should be done with this perspective in mind.

The site visit is recommended to have a duration of at least two days, preparation and follow-up not included. The visit should include separate meetings with members of the leadership, staff, owners/key stakeholders (i.e. ministries), other stakeholders (users) and if possible individuals whose degrees have been recognized by the agency. Each meeting should last approximately one hour.

The office under review submits a program for the visit, which has to be approved by the chair. The chair will preside the meetings. All members of the review panel are invited to ask questions. The secretary takes minutes of the meetings.

The review panel should consist of four persons. The panel should comprise the following competences or profiles:

- Knowledge within the field of recognition
- Managerial experience within the field of recognition
- Representation from each of the four Nordic agencies not under review
- Knowledge within the field of quality assurance and evaluation of higher education.

For the purpose of dissemination and ensuring legitimacy of the evaluation process it is suggested that the review panel invites 1-2 experts not related to the Nordic recognition agencies to take part in the site visit.

3.2 The evaluation report

The evaluation report should be brief and follow the self-study protocol. The review panel should assess the agency's approach to recognition taking the context into consideration, as well as the possibilities for development and future improvement.

The day after the visit, the review panel should meet and outline the general conclusions. On the basis hereof the secretary will provide the review panel with a tentative report. The other members will comment in a written form to the secretary and the chair. The chair and the secretary will incorporate the comments in a second draft to be approved by the panel. The approved version should thereafter be sent to the office under review for comments on factual errors. The secretary will incorporate the comments in cooperation with the chair. The final report will finally be sent to all Nordic Naric offices.