

Information on recognition of foreign qualifications in the Nordic ENIC/NARIC offices

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Nordic National Recognition Information Centres (NORRIC) is a regional network established by the five Nordic ENIC/NARIC offices. The NORRIC network initiates joint Nordic projects to learn from each other and reduce barriers to the recognition of foreign qualifications in the Nordic region.

This report is also available on the NORRIC website: www.norric.org

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Summary

The report describes strategies, initiatives and practices of the Nordic national recognition information centres, i.e. the Nordic ENIC/NARIC offices, in providing and managing information about recognition of foreign qualifications. It is hoped that the report will be useful as a source of ideas and inspiration for further discussion and development in the Nordic recognition information centres and beyond.

The first and main part of the report deals with the provision of information to the public. In each of the Nordic countries, the ENIC/NARIC office is a recognition unit within a larger organisation: a government agency (Denmark, Finland and Sweden), an independent government body (Norway) or a university (Iceland). The recognition units face specific communication challenges, which they have addressed through specific analyses, strategies and measures. For example, the Swedish office has worked out a communication plan for recognition and launched a major project to improve information.

The Nordic offices have made efforts to understand the information needs of their target groups and adapt websites, publications etc. accordingly. Targeting information is considered important in ensuring access to fair recognition as well as making the offices more efficient. Several Nordic offices have also taken steps to limit the use of specialist vocabulary and bureaucratic style, which are often an obstacle to effective communication in the field of recognition.

Several offices have had user tests or surveys made in order to improve the provision of targeted information by "using the users".

The web is the most important channel of communication for the Nordic recognition offices. To an increasing extent the websites offer "self service" tools that allow users to find their way to the information they need and, if relevant, to prepare their applications online. Such online services include application forms and databases on education systems, general assessments or results of individual assessment cases.

Printed publications continue to play an important role in most offices, in particular when it comes to informing very heterogeneous user groups about application procedures etc., and when offices publish reports and other background material.

Even though the web plays an increasingly important role, the Nordic offices continue to conduct a large part of their communication with users through letters and e-mails, answering telephones etc. The report describes practices concerning standard letters and forms as well as direct contact.

Recognition units cannot reach broad target groups solely by relying on their own activities. That is one of the reasons why they try to build and maintain networks, i.e. to have good "information relays" and ambassadors among those who have direct contact with actual or potential applicants.

The information provided by the offices covers a wide range of recognition topics, some of which are described in the report.

Information, in particular the information directed towards applicants, is provided in more than one language. Parallel to the national language versions, web pages and brochures are available in English and sometimes more languages.

As already mentioned, each recognition unit is part of a larger organisation. The ways of organising information work varies between the offices, including how to divide work between the recognition unit and the unit responsible for communication in the organisation as a whole. Realising that the quality of communication depends on all of the staff, recognition units try to provide guidelines and increase awareness of communication issues.

The second part of the report deals with the "back office", describing various ways of managing information in the Nordic offices. This includes examples of strategies for the internal communication and how offices try to ensure the internal communication and the building and sharing of knowledge through meetings, archive systems and databases, intranets, manuals and libraries.

Several offices are working towards the integration or linking of systems, e.g. electronic application procedures and integration between internal assessment database and electronic records management system.

Introduction

The purpose of the present report is to promote cooperation and best practices in the field of information provision and management by sharing knowledge about the information activities and plans of the five Nordic recognition information offices¹.

The report is a result of a project on information work carried out within the framework of the Nordic National Recognition Information Centres network (NORRIC) and with the support of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Another part of the project consisted in setting up a Nordic website, which can be visited at www.norric.org.²

An important point of departure for the report is the Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Information on Recognition³ adopted in 2004 by the ENIC and NARIC networks⁴. The code of good practice emphasises that "the main problem facing credential evaluators and others called upon to assess or otherwise make use of foreign qualifications is not lack of information per se, but lack of authoritative, adequate, relevant, well targeted and easily available information".

This report focuses on examples of what is being done to deliver such high quality recognition information. It does not attempt to make comparisons between the Nordic offices or an evaluation of their information work.

The reader can choose to look up the themes of interest by clicking the corresponding item in the list of contents above. Under each heading, concrete examples from various countries are described. The amount of information about each country will differ from subject to subject. If on a specific theme no specific information was available concerning one of the countries, this theme is not dealt with as far as that country is concerned.

In describing external information the report focuses on information to users. It does not undertake to cover mass media/public relations issues.

The material for the report was provided firstly by information already available in self-study reports and other material. The editor then collected additional information from the offices, a process that included visits to the Norwegian and the Swedish office.

We hope that the report will allow readers to pick up ideas and inspiration, and that it may help increase the awareness of information work and the professional methods involved.

¹ See the list of Nordic offices in Annex 1: Nordic ENIC/NARIC offices.

² For more information about the project, see www.norric.org/Default.aspx?ID=4526.

³ The Code of Good Practice is available at www.coe.int/T/DG4/HigherEducation/Recognition/ENIC%20NARIC%20Code%20information%20provision_EN.asp

⁴ ENIC/NARIC website: www.enic-naric.net

I. External information provision

Strategies and plans for development

In each of the Nordic countries, the ENIC/NARIC office is a recognition unit within a larger organisation (a government agency in Denmark, Finland and Sweden, an independent government body in Norway and a university in Iceland). The recognition units face specific communication problems, which they have in some cases addressed through specific analyses, strategies and measures. In particular, the Swedish office has worked out a communication plan for recognition and launched a major project to improve information.

SWEDEN

In February 2005, a communication plan was elaborated specifically for the recognition activities of HSV (*Högskoleverket*, in English: Swedish National Agency for Higher Education).

The plan analyses the primary and secondary target groups, the existing channels of communication and difficulties experienced, and it formulates goals and strategies for overcoming those difficulties. This forms the basis for a project involving all of the staff in an effort to improve the recognition unit's external communication.

Target groups

The communication plan analyses information needs related to the following groups.

Primary target groups:

- Admissions officers at universities and other higher education institutions
They often call the recognition unit to ask for its assistance in making assessments. In order to save time and resources, the recognition unit tries to help the institutions build their own centres of expertise. See Support for admissions officers, p. 27.
- Holders of foreign higher education qualifications who wish to use their qualifications for work or further studies in Sweden, i.e. foreigners (mainly from Iraq, former Soviet Union, former Yugoslavia, large EU countries, French-speaking African countries, Spanish-speaking countries and China) as well as Swedish citizens. The differences in this target group – concerning language, education, age, personal networks, career plans etc. – make communication a challenge.

However, there are some common denominators concerning the majority of applicants, who are foreigners,

- know little about how Swedish public administration is structured and how responsibility for recognition is divided
- are not native Swedish-speakers
- have limited knowledge about the fact that certain professions are regulated
- need simple, concrete information

- have more trouble gaining foothold on the labour market than Swedes.
- **Employment service employees**
This group plays an important role in advising foreign qualification holders about the recognition possibilities and procedures. Employment service employees do not always know enough about recognition.
- **Employers**
This is a wide and heterogeneous group ranging from large municipal administrations to small businesses. Many employers are uncertain about the meaning of assessment statements or lack knowledge about the possibility of assessment for recruitment purposes. They may not even see any need for assessments because of the current unemployment situation.
One user survey showed that employers often look for information about education systems in order to create a better basis for their own assessments.
Some attempts have been made at reaching out to employers through brochures. While the employers' main organisation is not very interested, mainly a number of large enterprises contact HSV.
- **ENIC/NARIC offices and contact points in other countries**
- **Swedish degree holders wishing to use their credentials abroad**
As a rule, Swedish higher education institutions do not offer comprehensive information about the steps to take in order to plan studies or work abroad.

Secondary target groups:

- **Professional recognition bodies**
Some of the regulating bodies (competent authorities) need support because they are not often faced with foreign qualifications.

Several target groups were to be studied in more detail by one of the working groups of the communication project.

Goals

The communication plan sets up the following concrete goals in order to focus the communication work and be able to measure progress over a three-year period:

- A 50 % reduction (from 2005 to 2007) of the number of cases concerning support to higher education institutions in making recognition decision.
- HSV should be seen by foreign degree holders as the obvious place to start when looking for assessment of their degrees and information about how to use their competencies.
- HSV's credential evaluators should find that they spend less time on helping individuals understand the agency's written information.
- 50 % of the applications received in 2007 should be complete from the start.
- Improved understanding of the meaning and scope of the recognition unit's letters among job centre employees, qualification holders and employers, reducing the need for contacting HSV.

- Increased knowledge of the possibilities of being recognised as a teacher in Sweden, among principals, providers of information and guidance, various authorities concerned as well as holders of foreign teaching qualifications.
- Increased knowledge of HSV's role in promoting the recognition of Swedish qualifications abroad.

Strategy

The communication plan points out the following methods to reach the goals:

- Give the target groups the specific information they need, thus helping them to find their own way. See "Targeting information".
- Create a consistent and easily understandable vocabulary, which means less time spent on explaining the meaning to users. See Terminology.
- Provide easy access to the knowledge of the recognition unit, especially for educational institutions. See Self service: Support for admissions officers.
- Increase awareness of HSV's teacher recognition service. See Topics: Competent authority/Teacher recognition.
- Take responsibility for the whole process even if other authorities are involved, i.e. guide the users through the system. See Topics: How to apply for recognition.
- Make use of information relays (vidareinformatörer). See Networks.

Project

The activities have been organised in the form of a three-year project, "the Communication Project". The final objective of the project is to allow credential evaluators to use their expertise in a more efficient way.

The project consists of four sub-projects, each with a project leader and a working group, and dealing with the first four of the points mentioned under "Strategy":

- Sorting project (Sorteringsprojektet), concerning with targeting information
- Words and concepts (Ord och begrepp)
- Knowledge project (Kunskapsprojektet)
- Teacher project (Läraryprojektet).

NORWAY

In 2004, NOKUT (*Nasjonalt Organ for Kvalitet i Utdanningen*, in English: Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education) adopted a communication plan, i.e. a strategic plan for the the agency's information and communication. The plan applies to the information and communication effort of the agency as a whole and does not provide details on specific fields of activity such as recognition.

According to the communication plan NOKUT has to be active and dynamic in providing information about itself, the recipient has to be in focus when choosing the information channel, format and language, and NOKUT must actively gain knowledge about the target

groups and their knowledge and information needs. The information provided by NOKUT must furthermore be put in relation to other external sources of information, and the information must be supplied through several channels. Information needs and initiatives are to be considered at an early stage of all processes in order to make information an integral part of them.

The communication plan outlines the communication challenges facing NOKUT and identifies areas of priority action. It also includes manuals for media contact and crisis management.

Reference is made to the Norwegian government's "information policy", which stipulates five main principles for information:

1. Information on a subject must be coordinated so as to be experienced as one package even if it comes from different government body or levels within an administration ("Helhetsprinsippet").
2. Communication between the administration and the users must go both ways, and must take place on the users' terms ("Kommunikasjonsprinsippet").
3. Every government body or administrative unit is responsible for information within its field of expertise ("Linjeprinsippet").
4. The administration must take the initiative to provide targeted based on the users' needs. Information about duties and rights must have priority. ("Prinsippet om aktiv informasjon").
5. The leadership of each body is responsible for implementing the information policy and for ensuring that the staff has the information competence required ("Prinsippet om informasjon som lederansvar").

In April 2005 the NOKUT board decided to call on the Utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet to appoint a working party to perform a thorough evaluation of the existing systems for recognition of foreign education, including recognition information, examining in particular the division of work between all involved bodies and institutions. According to NOKUT the working party should propose measures to improve the coordination of these activities and look into the idea of a national information and service centre for the recognition of foreign qualifications.

Target groups

NOKUT's communication plan sets up goals for each target group, and the agency's annual plans include strategies for reaching those target groups.

- ***Foreigners with foreign higher education qualifications***

This group is seen to be the weakest of NOKUT's target groups because its members have less knowledge about the Norwegian society and less command of the Norwegian language than the population on average. NOKUT's decision can have a major personal impact on these applicants, and they therefore depend on good information.

Goals:

- That they know about NOKUT and what it can offer to them.

- That they understand what NOKUT needs in order to process their applications quickly and efficiently.
 - That they have confidence in NOKUT's handling of their applications.
- *Higher education institutions*

NOKUT has close relations to the institutions, directly and through their organisations. It is assumed that this group has a good knowledge of legislation in the field of recognition, but at the same time large variations in the competence and understanding can be expected within the target group, which means that NOKUT must make special efforts to ensure adequate information.

Goals:

 - That they understand NOKUT's role in the education system.
 - That they have up-to-date information about the outcomes of NOKUT's work and are able to use them.
 - That they have confidence in NOKUT's work.
 - *Employers*

A database on various foreign higher education systems and NOKUT's standards for assessing their qualifications has been published on the website. Employers were the main target group. A publicity effort towards employers was organised by the Association of Norwegian Students Abroad, which was a partner in producing the database. See: Landdatabasen: <http://www.nokut.no/sw2597.asp>.
 - *Society at large*

Goals:

 - That people know about NOKUT's existence and field of activity
 - That people have confidence in the quality and efficiency of NOKUT's work
 - That NOKUT inspires confidence in Norwegian higher education qualifications, *fagskole* qualifications and recognised foreign qualifications.
 - *Recognition bodies*

According to NOKUT's *Strategy plan* (2004), NOKUT is to assist other Norwegian recognition bodies in acquiring knowledge about international agreements and international developments in the field of recognition, and exchanging experiences and information.

DENMARK

An overall communication strategy for CIRIUS was adopted in 2005. The plan applies to the information and communication work of the agency as a whole and does not provide details on recognition information.

In March 2001, a specific strategy for recognition information was formulated (it has not been updated since). The strategy document mentioned the following **overall goals**:

- Making the possibility of having foreign qualifications assessed known in the target groups and providing guidance for the target groups about how to get an assessment.
- Building links to those target groups that are involved in the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications or in internationalisation of education and training
- Gathering knowledge about education and recognition matters through networks and through the recognition unit's activities.
- Providing domestic target groups with information about foreign education and recognition systems.
- Providing target groups in other countries with information about the Danish education and recognition systems.

Target groups

The 2001 information strategy defined the following target groups:

- Holders of foreign qualifications (at all levels)
- Guidance counsellors and similar staff at job centres, educational institutions, local councils, refugee services etc.
- Educational institutions
- Trade committees
- Unemployment funds
- Employers
- Organisations for ethnic minorities and integration, trade unions and employers' organisations, organisations in the field of education etc.
- Danish public authorities
- Foreign public authorities and organisations in the field of education.

Strategy

The strategy consisted of

- Developing the website as the main source of information for all types of users.
- Informing and participating in the debate about the role of the Danish ENIC/NARIC office in connection with the legislative process (taking place at that time),
- Producing information materials directed towards
 - holders of foreign qualifications
 - guidance providers
 - educational institutions, organisations, businesses etc.
- Taking special initiatives in order to ensure good communication with educational institutions and others involved in the assessment work

- Creating networks for assessment and recognition, e.g. by participating in external meetings and by initiating training courses, conferences etc.
- Informing about developments in the field of assessment and recognition by means of the website and possibly a printed newsletter
- Providing descriptions of the Danish as well as other countries' education systems on the internet and by answering inquiries from Denmark and from abroad, publishing factsheets and contributing to databases and publications on education.
- Preparing an annual report on the development in the field of assessment and recognition.

In 2004, a memorandum compared the recognition unit's current practice to the ENIC/NARIC code of good practice, listing suggestions for improving information. Furthermore, a development plan for the recognition web pages has been sketched out and is being carried gradually, within the framework of CIRIUS's annual work programmes.

FINLAND

For the organisation as a whole, the NBE (*Opetushallitus*, in English the Finnish National Board of Education) has an overarching information strategy (*viestintästrategia*) as well as more specific yearly information plans (*viestintäsuunnitelma*), which highlight a number of chosen topical themes. Within the organisation, the Finnish Enic/Naric unit has made a self-evaluation of its own information work, which includes charting the main target groups, their demands for information, the main channels of information, as well as outlining the main challenges involved in the overall work.

The small size of the unit (nine persons) and the fact that the staff is familiar with the activities of the others have made it possible for the unit to undertake the implementation of its information strategy informally. Implementation has been more in a set of attitudes and values than a fixed action plan; the unit's strategy is an iterative learning process where strategy is monitored and discussed regularly.

During the unit's bi-annual development and training days the unit has discussed a chosen topic concerning internal and/or external information management and services, and devoted thought to how it needs to respond to topical opportunities and challenges. The process has involved everyone in the unit as everyone is involved in information work by way of producing information, disseminating it, or both.

As the volume of activities related to recognition work is increasing, the need for more formal work is becoming relevant. A basis for this work is provided by the results of the customer survey the unit carried out in 2005/2006.

Strategy-wise, the unit has paid particular attention to the language used on the Internet pages and paper brochures with the purpose of providing information in an easily accessible and comprehensible manner.

Targeting information

The Nordic offices have made efforts to tailor information to meet the needs of their target groups. Targeting information is considered important in ensuring access to fair recognition as well as making the offices more efficient.

As it is explained in the Swedish office's communication plan:

"The target groups of this field of activity need information from us for different reasons and have different backgrounds for receiving our information. They all need information that is adapted to the particular situation in which they want to use it. What the target groups have in common is that if the information gets too general they will immediately need to talk to somebody in order to find out how to use that information."

Not only the content but also the form of communication matters, it is stressed in NOKUT's communication plan:

"Our communication has to take into account that our target groups have very different levels of competence. We need to reach the target groups in a way that is adapted to their situation and in a language they understand."

SWEDEN

On the basis of the target group analysis mentioned above, the recognition unit has carried out a project for targeting information (*Sorteringsprojektet*). It was based on the idea that the recognition unit must work with the target groups to ensure communication that works on their terms.

The following activities were planned:

- All of the recognition unit's information was to be revised so that it is adapted to each target group.
- The recognition web pages were to be revised, using the perspective of each target group and the outcomes of a previous user survey.
- The project group was to go through all of the brochures and come up with a plan for new brochures adapted to the information needs of the various target groups. A review of the information published in other languages.
- The assessment procedures were to be visualised by means of a diagram, including references to the relevant authorities.
- Groups and organisations that could serve as information relays, e.g. immigrant organisations, were to be mapped.

DENMARK

CIRIUS tries to make information as target group oriented as possible, in particular by means of the website, which has a specific entrance for each target group. The same principle is applied to factsheets and brochures. (See the sections on Website and Printed publications.)

FINLAND

In its information provision, the recognition unit has kept in mind 1) the type of recognition that is involved, i.e. professional or academic, and 2) the main groups of users that require the services, i.e. individuals; higher education institutions; employment authorities/employers; and other ENIC/NARICs.

The web pages are structured thematically rather than by groups of users only. However, in addition to general information on professional recognition that is targeted at any one individual, the website includes separate sections for certain major groups of users that require specific information on professional recognition, viz. teachers, social workers and persons holding the degree in the field of law. Teachers have also been informed on the recognition of teaching qualifications in the magazine *Opettaja* ("Teacher"). The article is available from the Teachers' Union and the NBE's web pages in Finnish and Swedish (soon in English).

In the field of academic recognition, information has been specifically targeted at higher education institutions. The web pages contain separate sections with instructions for drawing up Diploma Supplements (DS) at higher education institutions and on authoritative information related to joint degrees, for example.

Language and terminology

Several Nordic offices have taken steps to limit the use of specialist vocabulary and bureaucratic style, which are often a danger to effective communication in the field of recognition.

SWEDEN

An evaluation of the unit's web information showed that foreign as well as Swedish nationals had trouble understanding the content because they stumbled on difficult words. That is why the recognition unit's communication plan sets out to ensure an understandable and consistent vocabulary in all of the unit's written media: forms, letters, web, brochures etc. by carrying out a "Words and notions" (*Ord och begrepp*) project.

The ambition was not to abolish the use of special recognition terms. It was expected that some terms can be replaced by simpler terms, while others were necessary for the sake of precision but should be explained in plain terms.

The main objectives of the project were:

- Less time spent on explaining written material to individuals.
- More applications complete from the start (50 % by 2007).

Part of the project consisted of user tests – see User tests and surveys, p. 17.

An external consultant produced a report on "making assessment understandable" (*Begriplig bedömning*), which is to a tool for all of the unit's external communication. The report contains:

- an analysis of the web pages and brochures on recognition, with suggestions for improvements
- a manual for writing to applicants
- a word list explaining key words that may be difficult to understand
- a "black list" – words and phrases not to be used, and what to write instead
- suggestions for rewriting application forms
- instructions for filling in the forms.

NORWAY

NOKUT's English/Norwegian pamphlet "Recognition of foreign higher education qualifications" contains a short glossary of recognition terms.

An English/Norwegian glossary of higher education terms was published in 2004, at the initiative of Norwegian universities, see: <http://www.uhr.no/utvalg/utdanning/index.htm> ("Norsk-engelsk/engelsk-norsk terminologi").

The recognition unit normally asks an external consultant to review texts before they are published to weed out unnecessarily difficult words and simplify wording, performing a so-called "*språkvask*".

FINLAND

As a result of the customer survey carried out in 2005 – 2006, the accommodation of the terminology and style of different information materials will receive special attention.

User tests and surveys

Several offices have had user tests or surveys made in order to improve the provision of targeted information by "using the users".

SWEDEN

The Communication project included user tests of brochures, factsheets, applications forms and web pages.

In 2005, focus groups were used to test texts for applications forms and factsheets etc.

External consultants interviewed eight career's and education counsellors from job centres and adult education institutions. Before the interview, the interview persons received the printed material and a set of questions.

The focus group participants were able to point out words and phrases that are difficult to understand and they contributed suggestions for improvements.

A user test directed towards immigrants was conducted by another consultancy firm.

A previous user survey, in 2003/4, focused on the website. The survey was conducted at three levels:

- 1) 300 telephone interviews with former applicants (registered in the HSV database). Questions focused on: How had they got information about the assessment procedure, what information did they want, and what role had the website play in their application?
- 2) A pop up questionnaire was placed on the website, in two versions: one in Swedish, one in English. It was answered by 200 people over two weeks. It gave data about who visit the website and how they feel about it.
- 3) 19 in-depth interviews were carried out, following a semi-structured interview guide with scenarios/exercises adapted to the difference target groups: applicants seeking assessment, applicants seeking recognition as teachers and careers and educations counsellors. The purpose was to gain qualitative information about usability and suggestions for improving the website.

Based on the survey, a report listed a number of conclusions and recommendations.

NORWAY

NOKUT's recognition unit commissioned a user survey, which was carried out in December 2004 to February 2005. The survey report, *Godkjenning af utenlandsk høyere utdanning i Norge* ("Recognition of foreign higher education in Norway"), was completed in May 2005.

Individual in-depth interviews with conducted with persons from the following groups: 12 applicants (foreigners holding foreign higher education qualifications), 3 "helpers" (from a job centre and language schools for refugees), 3 employers and 3 persons working at higher education institutions. The interviews were made on the basis of an interview guide for each group was followed in a flexible way.

The choice of method was made in order to have an open and exploring approach to the problems at hand. It seems to have yielded a great amount of ideas and food for thought.

The 64-page report details their comments and suggestions, including many concerning NOKUT's communication.

The following questions were some of those explored in the interviews:

- knowledge of NOKUT's recognition services
- experiences communicating with NOKUT. For example, how understandable and useful are the various documents such as the application form, recognition decision, covering letter etc.?

FINLAND

The unit aims to continuously develop its work, especially methods and customer services according to received feedback. The unit conducted its first own customer survey in 2005. The survey was carried out by the NBE's Evaluation unit.

The aim of the survey was to measure how satisfied the applicants were with the application service process and to what extent the decision was perceived to influence their situation. The main questions included: How satisfied were the individuals who had applied for a decision on professional recognition with the service they had received from the National Board of

Education? Had the decision been clear and comprehensible? What kind of information sources do the applicants use when searching for information and advice regarding the application process? What kinds of effects has the decision had on the applicants' possibilities of finding employment? Finally the respondents were asked how they thought the NBE could improve its services regarding the recognition of foreign qualifications.

The survey's target group was selected by random sample from persons who had applied for a recognition decision from the NBE between 1998 and 2004. A customer feedback questionnaire in Finnish, Swedish, English and Russian was sent to the target group by post. In total, 293 people responded to the questionnaire. The response rate was 49.9 %. The participants were asked to indicate how much they agreed with each proposition, on a scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

On the basis of the average response for each question, the NBE was able to draw conclusions about user satisfaction and the usefulness of the recognition decisions. The answers concerning how the NBE's services could be improved showed points concerning information provision: distributing information on the services, the language used in the decision and the comprehensibility of the decision, and advice on what to do after receiving the decision.

The survey is to be repeated in five years.

DENMARK

In 2005, CIRIUS conducted a limited user survey directed at higher education admissions officers using the agency's web-based handbook and hotline service.

Also in 2005, the CIRIUS website, including the part on recognition, was tested by a focus group, mainly from educational institutions. The participants were asked to perform various tasks, e.g. finding information about the assessment application procedure. They put their finger on a number of problems and suggestions to make the web pages more user-friendly.

Websites

The web is the most important channel of communication for the Nordic recognition offices.

SWEDEN

The HSV website, Swedish and English versions, contains a section called Utländska utbildningar/Foreign Degrees, which appears on the frontpage main menu as one of seven tabs.

The recognition section contains:

Swedish:

- Bedömning av utbildning
- Reglerade yrken
- Behörighet för lärare
- Studera i Sverige

- Blanketter

English:

- Evaluation of Foreign Degrees
- Regulated professions
- Teaching certificates
- Studying in Sweden

HSV's web information takes the individual applicants as its primary target group. The texts speak directly to the (future) applicant.

According to a 2003/4 user survey, 59% of those who had received an assessment or a decision on teacher recognition had made use of HSV's web information. The users found that the web information was generally well-structured and clear. However, they had problems understanding the specialist terms used, and found that the application procedure could be presented in a more distinct way.

As a part of the project launched in 2005, an external consultant produced an analysis of part of the website and came up with a number of with suggestions for improvements.

NORWAY

NOKUT's main emphasis is put on the web based distribution of information since it has become the most frequently used means of obtaining information by the general public.

The NOKUT website, Norwegian and English versions, contains a section called Utenlandsk utdanning/ Foreign Education, which appears on the frontpage horizontal main menu as one of four options. The section on recognition is distinguished by its own colour code.

In 2005/6, the recognition part of the website has been remodelled and has been translated into better English.

Contents

The recognition section contains:

Norwegian:

- Søke arbeid?
- Studere videre?
- Søknadsskjema
- Dokument for godkjenning
- Kriterier for godkjenning
- Lover og regler
- Relevante nettverk og databaser
- Akademisk godkjenning
- Spørsmål og svar

- Veiledning for saksbehandlere (GM)

English:

- Applying for work
- Further studies
- Application form
- Recognition document
- Criteria for recognition
- Academic recognition
- GSU-list
- Diploma Supplement
- Frequently asked questions

The website informs the applicants about how and where to apply:

<http://www.nokut.no/sw407.asp>, from where application forms also can be printed out. The recognition frontpage addresses itself directly to the (future) applicant: "On these pages you will find information on how you can obtain recognition of your education."

The web information contains information on recognition types and procedures both at NOKUT and other recognition authorities. It also contains criteria, legal bases and rights with tools for application etc.

The website also contains information on the Norwegian system of higher education, links to various other information sources dealing with recognition issues and a various databases, e.g. a database aimed at employers which provides simple information on degree systems in a limited number of countries. (Read more under Self-service, p. 25).

Language

The website is published in Norwegian and English.

In 2005, the website was revised by an external consultant in order to make sure that the language used is correct and easily understandable.

Dialogue with users

Even if self-service is offered, users are invited to contact NOKUT if they have questions. For example, on the page Required documents for general recognition, there is a mail link "Questions? Do you have any questions about the content in this database? Send us an e-mail".

Questions about specific countries are directed to the right credential evaluator(s) by means of a database Country distribution (Landfordeling), <http://nokut.no/sw16542.asp>. By selecting a country, the following information is returned: name, telephone number and mail address of the credential evaluator(s) dealing with qualifications from that country.

DENMARK

The CIRIUS website (www.ciriisonline.dk) aims to be a gateway to information about recognition in Denmark.

The CIRIUS website, Danish and English versions, contains a section called Anerkendelse/Recognition, which appears on the horizontal main menu as one of eight options and on the tabs.

Several ways of accessing the recognition information are offered in the Danish version:

A vertical menu based on the user group:

- "Til undervisere og institutioner" (For teachers and institutions)
- "Til myndigheder" (For public authorities)
- "Til virksomheder" (For businesses).

In the main window of the Danish version's frontpage, assistance is offered to users in various situations, including "if you want to have your foreign qualifications assessed" and "if you want to use your Danish qualification abroad".

In addition, there are subsites directed towards Danes who consider going abroad ("Ud i verden") and foreigners who consider going to Denmark ("Study in Denmark").

The recognition section contains:

Danish:

- Guide til anerkendelse
- Spørgsmål og svar
- Eksamenshåndbog (optagelse)
- Landehåndbog
- Søg i vurderinger
- Lovregulerede erhverv (autorisation)
- Kvalifikationsnævnet (merit)
- Baggrund
- Links

English:

How to apply for recognition

- Regulated professions
- Entry to higher education
- Legalisation
- The Danish recognition system
- Our assessments

- Danish legislation
- International
- FAQ about recognition
- Links about recognition

CIRIUS tries to adapt the web information on recognition information to the needs of various target groups. Thus, the website offers specific information on recognition for the main target groups: holders of foreign qualifications, holders of Danish qualifications going abroad, Danish educational institutions, guidance counsellors, employers, professional recognition bodies and unemployment funds.

Guidance is available in particular on CIRIUS's assessments, access to regulated professions and access to higher education.

In addition, the website provides background information for those interested in learning more about various topics: the Danish system of recognition, including legislation; methodology; the Minister of Education's annual report on recognition of foreign qualifications, including statistics; international guidelines and networks; education systems of other countries; the Danish education system (in the English version).

Finally, there are recognition links and FAQ pages.

In addition to the section on recognition, a number of topics linked to recognition are covered in the transversal parts of the website, such as the Bologna process, transparency tools, qualifications frameworks and marking scales. Two CIRIUS sub-websites provide practical information for Danes who consider studying or working abroad (www.udiverden.dk) and foreigners who consider studying in Denmark (www.studyindenmark.dk), including information on recognition.

FINLAND

The significance of the Internet pages (www.oph.fi/info/recognition; www.oph.fi/europassi) in the Finnish office's information distribution has increased, and the content of the pages is constantly developed.

The NBE website, Finnish, Swedish and English versions, contains a section called Tutkintojen tunnustaminen ja kansainvälinen vertailu/ Internationell jämförelse av examina/ Recognition and International Comparability of Qualifications.

There are separate sections on a) the recognition of foreign qualifications in Finland (incl. professional and academic recognition), b) the recognition of Finnish qualifications abroad (incl. professional and academic recognition), c) the Finnish education system, d) international cooperation within recognition, and e) country-specific information that contains links to reliable information sources.

More specifically, the recognition section contains:

Finnish:

- Ulkomaisten tutkintojen tunnustaminen Suomessa

- Suomalaisien tutkintojen tunnustaminen ulkomailla
- Opetushallituksen lausunnot
- Tutkinnon tunnustaminen: hakuohjeita ja -lomakkeita
- Korkeakoulututkintojen tunnustamiseen liittyvä kansainvälinen yhteistyö (ENIC ja NARIC)
- Ammatillisten tutkintojen tunnustamiseen liittyvä kansainvälinen yhteistyö (NRP)
- Maakohtaista tietoa
- Finnish Education System
- Europassi
- Yhteystiedot

Swedish:

- Erkännande av utländska examina i Finland
- Erkännande av finländska examina utomlands
- Utbildningsstyrelsen sakkunnigutlåtanden
- Internationellt samarbete om erkännande av utländska högskoleexamina (ENIC&NARIC)
- Kontaktuppgifter
- Europass

English:

- Recognition of foreign qualifications in Finland
- Recognition of Finnish qualifications abroad
- Applying for Recognition: forms and instructions
- International co-operation on recognition of higher education qualifications (Finnish ENIC/NARIC)
- International Co-operation on recognition of Vocational Qualifications (Finnish NRP)
- Finnish Education System
- EUROPASS
- Contact information.

ICELAND

The Icelandic ENIC/NARIC homepage (http://www.naric-enic.hi.is/page/naric_enic) is part of the University of Iceland website. The homepage, which is available in Icelandic and English, presents the ENIC/NARIC office and explains the methods used in the recognition process, how to apply for recognition and what documents must be included with applications.

"Self service" information tools

Various measures have been taken in recent years to increase the amount of information readily available to users and to allow users to complete increasing parts of the application procedures online. Taking advantage of the widespread use of the internet, such measures can contribute to the development of e-government to the benefit of the users as well as the recognition units.

Online services described below include application forms, information about documentation requirements, support for admissions officers and databases on education systems and assessments.

More ideas are being considered. For example, the Swedish recognition unit considers granting the applicants access to check the status of their applications on a web page "My application".

Application forms

In Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, application forms and instructions are available for printing from the websites.

NORWAY

NOKUT is working towards a web-based application form. The idea is for application data to be integrated automatically into NOKUT's internal recognition database (see Internal archive systems and databases, p. 52), while the applicant should automatically receive a confirmation with a reference number to be indicated on the paper documentation, which still has to be sent in by post.

For the time being, the following pdf documents can be downloaded from the website:

- Application form
- Guidance notes for the application form
- International Transcript Request and Release Authorisation Form (which applicants are instructed to complete and send to the issuing institution).

SWEDEN

There is a plan to handle all of the application process electronically at a later stage.

DENMARK

So far, the application forms can be used in two ways: by downloading them (in pdf or rtf format) or by filling in a web form and then printing it. The web form has data validation.

CIRIUS is looking into the possibility of making electronic applications possible, i.e. applications from the website using a digital signature. It is considered that this would increase efficiency even if most of the documentation would still have to be sent by post.

FINLAND

Electronic administration is being developed within the Finnish National Board of Education (NBE). As part of the NBE, the Enic/Naric office will adopt changes to its application process duly. At present, application forms are available for printing from the web pages, and they may be filled in Finnish, Swedish and English. Instructions for filling the application forms are also available in Russian and Persian.

Documentation requirements

While all of the offices provide general information about documentation requirements, two of them have web databases about country specific requirements.

NORWAY

To assist users in preparing their applications, NOKUT has launched a database on required documents for general recognition (*Dokumentasjonsdatabase*): <http://nokut.no/sw14774.asp>.

For more than 30 countries, the database offers detailed information about which documents are required, including names of degree certificates etc. in the original language, and how these documents must be submitted.

SWEDEN

A web database shows documentation requirements that apply to each country of education. The database is maintained through the internal assessment database, by the credential evaluators according to their areas of specialisation.

Instead of sending a letter demanding further documentation, the recognition unit can refer the applicant to look up his/her country in the database.

Support for admissions officers

NORWAY

NOKUT is responsible for the maintenance of a **national recognition database** (NAG), which pools together recognition decisions made by the higher education and NOKUT. The database is meant to ensure consistency between the different institutions and NOKUT in processing individual cases of recognition. NAG is described in more detail below under Assessments and recognition decisions, p. 30.

The recognition unit has published and maintains an online **recognition manual**, which provides guidance to those who make recognition decisions, in particular at the higher education institutions. The manual includes all legislation and agreements of relevance to credential evaluators, recommended procedures and advice on finding and using information. Major updates are announced by means of a mailing list called "Inter-no". See: <http://www.nokut.no/sw14987.asp>.

SWEDEN

By the end of 2006, the recognition unit is to make a large part of its knowledge available to the institutions on the web in order to enable admissions officers to reach most of their decisions without contacting the agency. That is one of the targets of the communication project launched in 2005. With the support of an external consultant, a project group was to analyse the higher education institutions' information needs as closely as possible, to plan the structuring and presentation of information and to look into technical solutions. Contact persons at higher education institutions have been involved in this work through two workshops. Clear guidelines were to be worked out for the distribution of responsibility between HSV and the institutions.

The plan was to set up a password-protected web forum (extranet) providing institutions with

- Country information: a) education systems as well, b) standard assessments
- Methodology and recommendations
- A form for posting questions and a searchable list of answers, in order to promote an interactive process and to supplement the FAQ.
- Links and references
- Suggestion mail box
- Contact information.

The web forum would also include information about how to verify documents and which institutions have already dealt with various specific problems.

DENMARK

CIRIUS offers admission officers the following tools to facilitate the processing of applications from foreign qualification holders:

- **An "exam manual"** (Eksamenshåndbogen) concerning qualifications for the purpose of access to Danish higher education. See: <http://www.ciriusonline.dk/eksamenshaandbog>. The exam manual contains general as well as country specific information. By January 2006 the manual covered entry qualifications from 90 countries, 16 regions/provinces and 4 international high school exams. For each of them, the manual states which exams give general access to Danish higher education, how to compare subject levels and convert marks. Furthermore, there is an overview of the primary and secondary school system and a glossary. The largest amount of details is provided for EU/EEA countries and the international exams.
A limited version exists in English, aimed at foreign applicants.
- **A "hotline" for admissions officers**, who can submit their questions by telephone or e-mail. An important part of the requests concerning assessment are handled through this channel, and most of them are answered within one working day. After launching the hotline in January 2005, the number of formal assessment applications concerning secondary education dropped dramatically.

- **An annual seminar** for admissions officers. For example, the March 2005 seminar focused on China, Russia and the Nordic countries. See: <http://www.ciriusonline.dk/Default.aspx?ID=1571>.
- **A workshop** where admissions officers can ask questions about difficult cases.

FINLAND

The Finnish Enic/Naric's web pages contain information to support the work of admissions personnel. Links and materials with reliable information sources are available in the sections on International cooperation within recognition and Country-specific information. The policy on information provision has been to employ the information sources that are provided and updated by the respective national authorities of the different countries. For individual queries the unit has a centralised e-mail service (recognition@oph.fi), which is monitored during office hours. Telephone queries are also taken during all office hours.

The office plans and organises training, independently as well as in cooperation with its stakeholders, to cater for the needs of admissions personnel. The training has covered the general principles of academic recognition, issues related to the Lisbon Convention and information concerning foreign education systems, for example.

As another example of services tailored to admissions personnel support was provided for the development of a joint online application system of Finnish polytechnics to their English language Bachelor programmes and the hands-on admissions process involved.

ICELAND

Admission officers contact the ENIC/NARIC office directly to have recommendations regarding recognition of foreign qualifications. These cases are often solved during the conversation. The office has also offered seminars for the admissions officers.

Foreign education systems and qualifications, standard assessments

NORWAY

Database on recognition standards and education systems

A database on education systems and qualifications in selected countries has been published on the NOKUT website, mainly to provide information for employers and for students planning to study abroad.

For each country, the database gives a brief overview of the education system and recognition guidelines concerning higher education qualifications. More specifically the country database entries contain the following items:

- Recognition in Norway
 - Requirements for access to Norwegian higher education
 - Qualifications that are recognised as equivalent to Norwegian higher education
 - Qualification documents (incl. Diploma Supplement)

- Key facts about the education system:
 - Primary and secondary school
 - Post-secondary education (*fagskole*)
 - Higher education
 - Teacher education
 - Major education reforms
 - Quality assurance/accreditation of higher education
- Links and information sources

By August 2006, the database covered 46 countries. The web page containing the country database is the most visited page in the recognition section of the NOKUT website (apart from the recognition homepage). It had approximately 16,000 hits in the one year period ending June 2005.

Database on institutions of higher education in the world

The recognition unit has published a web database on recognised foreign higher education institutions. It is possible to search the database on the basis of country or free text. The data returned are name of institution in English and Norwegian, city and country. The data have been provided by the International Association of Universities (IAU, Paris). It is stressed that the fact that an institution appears in the database does not guarantee that it is publicly recognised. Procedures for updating the information have not yet been decided.

See "*Database over godkjente utenlandske læresteder for høyere utdanning*":
<http://www.nokut.no/sw1296.asp>.

DENMARK

A "country manual" (*landehåndbog*) was launched in 2006. It provides

- descriptions of education system
- standard assessments, i.e. how CIRIUS would normally assess typical qualifications from each country
- descriptions of the system of quality assurance and accreditation
- descriptions of marking systems
- glossaries.

At the outset, the manual has such extensive coverage of the 18 countries from which the unit most frequently gets qualifications for assessment. The database is intended as a help for businesses, educational institutions and individuals.

See "*Landehåndbog*": <http://www.ciriusonline.dk/Default.aspx?ID=5748>.

Assessments and recognition decisions

SWEDEN

The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education has made tens of thousands of assessments since it was computerised 1990. Most of these assessments have been published in an external web database, which is available on the HSV website and updated on a regular basis. The database can be accessed at

<http://www.hsv.se/utlandskutbildning/bedomningavutbildning/sokbedomningar>

The purpose of a public database is to give those interested an idea of the kind of assessment which can be expected if they submit an application for assessment of a particular foreign qualification. According to the recognition unit's communication plan (2005), the target groups seemed to appreciate the data offered, but they think that it should be easier to find and to use.

NORWAY

A **national recognition database**, *Nasjonal database for godkjenning av utenlandsk høyere utdanning* (NAG), draws together recognition and placement decisions by higher education institutions as well as the assessments/recognition decisions made by NOKUT. All higher education institutions are to enter data into NAG about each application for academic recognition of foreign higher education qualifications and the decision made by the institution. The database can be searched to see how NOKUT and institutions have assessed particular types of qualifications.

The database is intended to ensure

- efficiency and quality in recognition work
- more open procedures and uniform criteria in recognition
- improved statistical information about the contribution of foreign qualifications to the Norwegian society
- useful information for public guidance offices and private companies.

In addition, the database is expected to improve the basis for the national statistics concerning qualified persons entering the country.

Access to NAG is restricted to persons involved in recognition work at the higher education institutions and the recognition unit. They are registered on application from the institutions' administrative units.

NAG was launched in January 2003. By June 2005, more than 5,200 cases had been registered in the database. The technical aspects are handled by the University of Oslo centre for information technology (USIT). NOKUT has the overall responsibility.

The database was made possible by a government decision and by the fact that most of the Norwegian higher education institutions use the same administrative system (*Felles studentsystem*). NAG has been linked directly to this system.

NOKUT is required to use the national database as a tool for ensuring that academic recognition in Norway is consistent, reliable, and conducted according to regulations and official criteria. NOKUT is to monitor the assessments made by the educational institutions and make its own decisions known to the higher education sector through NAG.

Difficulties exist concerning the quality of data entered by the institutions: The responsibility for entering correct data rests with the individual admissions officers, and NOKUT can not verify all decisions and information provided by the institutions. Being closely linked to a large administrative system such as *Felles studentsystem*, NAG has become more complicated than necessary and part of the information automatically transferred to NAG is irrelevant for its purposes.

A user survey conducted in late 2004 showed that, as a rule, the higher education institutions find the database useful for sharing knowledge and exchanging experience. The above-mentioned problems were discussed with higher education institutions on the occasion of NOKUT's annual recognition seminar in April 2005.

NOKUT is also in the process of implementing a **public database** providing information on previous decisions on individual recognition cases.

DENMARK

Most individual assessments made by the Danish NARIC office since 2001 are published in an anonymous form through a searchable database. See <http://www.ciriusonline.dk/default.aspx?id=1558>.

Information materials

In all of the Nordic countries, information brochures etc. can be downloaded from the website or ordered from the NARIC office by clicking a mail link (or by telephone etc.).

NOKUT has a web form for ordering publications. See <http://www.nokut.no/sw3962.asp>.

Printed publications

Printed publications continue to play an important role in most offices, in particular when it comes to informing very heterogeneous user groups about application procedures etc., and when offices publish reports and other background material.

NORWAY

Brochures are an important channel for basic information about NOKUT's recognition activities. In particular, it is assumed that foreign citizens seeking recognition of foreign qualifications have access to the internet less frequently than do NOKUT's other target groups, and therefore need information through other channels, including brochures.

Information to the applicants for recognition is given in an extensive **bilingual brochure**, *Godkjenning av utenlandsk høyere utdanning/Recognition of foreign higher education qualifications* (16 pages A4, available for download from <http://www.nokut.no/sw231.asp>).

On each page, the same information is given in Norwegian (upper half of the page) and English. Apart from simplifying the distribution process, this solution may facilitate reading for those foreigners who are not fluent in either of the languages.

The brochure tries to cover many aspects of the complex recognition system and to respond to the information needs of all major target groups. These are listed on the frontpage: "Foreign persons seeking employment; Norwegian employers; Students; Education establishments; Advisory service." The brochure contains the following chapters: "Why apply for recognition?", "Why do I need information?", "Who recognizes what?", "How to apply", "Criteria for recognition", "Terminology/Glossary", procedures flow chart, "Documentation" and "Laws and regulations".

The brochure has been distributed to higher education institutions, immigration authorities, the municipalities, the labour offices, the Norwegian and foreign embassies etc.

A lot of money and effort has been put into the brochure but NOKUT considers it worthwhile. The publication is very much in demand. The latest edition was published in Summer 2005 with a print run of 10,000 copies.

In addition, there are **information leaflets** on particular subjects e.g. recognition of teachers' qualifications.

NOKUT's **annual report** includes a recognition topic and summary statistics. The report targets educators and persons with a specific interest in education matters.

NOKUT has sent a **poster** to educational institutions, language schools, embassies and immigrant organisations (7,000 copies). The poster contains a short text in seven languages (Norwegian, English, French, Spanish, Urdu, Chinese and Russian): "Have you received higher education outside Norway? Information on academic recognition: www.nokut.no". The poster gave a fairly great amount of response and increased the number of recognition applications.

SWEDEN

The recognition unit has produced a series of brochures and is in the process of revising its printed material as a part of the communication project launched in 2005. An external consultant has produced an analysis of the brochures on recognition and made a number of suggestions for improvements.

General information about assessment procedures etc. has been provided in a brochure ("Evaluation of foreign university/higher education programmes"), which is available in Swedish, Arabic, Bosnian/Croat/Serb, English, Persian, Russian and Spanish.

The following printed factsheets are available in Swedish:

- Employers: "Have you got job applicants with foreign degrees?"
- Guidance providers: "Do you provide guidance for holders of foreign degrees?"
- Holders of foreign degrees: "Do you have a completed foreign higher education qualification?"

- Holders of Swedish qualifications: "Do you want to use your qualification to work in the EU or EEA countries?"

Background information is available in Swedish in the following brochures:

- "*Nya regler för erkännande av utbildningsbevis inom Europa*" – A short introduction to the Lisbon Recognition Convention
- "*Ny konvention för erkännande av utbildningsbevis inom Europa*" – A more detailed presentation of the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Also includes the outline of the recommended procedure linked to the Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications.
- "*Bedömningsguiden*" (1999) – Assessment guidelines concerning higher education qualifications from 40 countries.
- "*Utländska tekniska utbildningar*" (2001) – Assessment guidelines concerning foreign technical qualifications.
- "*Att bedöma utländska utbildningar och yrkeserfarenhet*" (Swedish Integration Board, 2002) – A brochure describing the competence and procedures of the most important recognition authorities.
- "*Bluffuniversitet och falska examensbevis*" (2005) – A 48-page report on diploma mills and fake degrees, providing an introduction to the subject, a description of the situation in Sweden, recommendations, links and references.
(<http://web2.hsv.se/publikationer/rapporter/2005/0525R.pdf>)
- "*Värdering och erkännande av utländsk högskoleutbildning*" (1998) – 148-page report documenting the principles and methods used for HSV's evaluations, with the aims of making the process transparent and of forming a basis for its continuous re-examination. Includes a summary in English.

The publications can be downloaded the website.

FINLAND

The recognition unit has provided information in the following publications:

- Recognition of foreign qualifications in Finland guide book, available in Finnish, Swedish, English, Russian and German
- Recognition of foreign qualifications in Finland brochures, available in Finnish, Swedish, English, Russian, German, French and Spanish
- Leaflets on recognition; available in Arabic, Persian, Serbo-Croat and Somali
- The Finnish ENIC/NARIC brochure, available in Finnish and English
- The Finnish National Reference Point, NRP brochure, available in Finnish and English
- Information cards on recognition services, ENIC/NARIC and NRP, available in Finnish and English.

The unit has also produced several publications on foreign education systems, for example,

- Higher education in the People's Republic of China (2006, in English)
- Education systems in Iran, Iraq, the former Yugoslavia and Somalia (2000, in Finnish)
- Teacher education in Russia (1998, in Finnish)
- Education system of the United States (1997, in Finnish)
- Education system of the Soviet Union and Russia (1997, in Finnish)
- Education system of Russia (2006, in Finnish).

DENMARK

CIRIUS, and previously CVUU, has mainly published information material for holders of foreign qualifications, i.e. the largest category of users:

- The brochure "How to have your foreign qualification assessed" (a Danish and an English version).
- The brochure "Recognition of professional qualifications – a guide to the regulated professions in Denmark" (in a Danish and an English version).

In addition, there are factsheets for foreign qualification holders seeking admission to Danish higher education, for employers and for social workers, guidance counsellors etc. The factsheets are printed on demand, for use at external meetings, for giving to personal callers etc.

Direct contact

Even though web communication plays an increasingly important role, the Nordic offices are not trying to abolish direct contact with the users.

ICELAND

Located inside a university, the Icelandic ENIC/NARIC office is very close to its users. Many cases are solved in an informal direct conversation with institutions and applicants. Most applicants visit the office to hand in their application and talk to the credential evaluator. They can walk in directly from the street without making any appointment.

SWEDEN

An important part of the recognition unit's communication continues to be verbal. Most often it is guidance on the phone, for individuals as well as for higher education institutions, and concerning individual cases as well as system-related questions. In the experience of the recognition unit, many people want to talk to somebody about their case or question, and this verbal communication is necessary to some extent. However, it is often about information that could be delivered in a more efficient way.

The HSV reception helps personal callers fill in application forms and certifies their documents. As an expression of the culture of Swedish public administration, applicants can also make an appointment to see a credential evaluator about their case.

NORWAY

NOKUT makes extensive use of direct contact. Part of the applicants choose to visit NOKUT for guidance. The secretary (*forkontor*) answers all simple inquiries, which are mostly by e-mail. More complicated or specific inquiries are passed on to the credential evaluators, including ENIC/NARIC inquiries.

Basically, NOKUT sees direct contact is the best form of communication when it comes to ensuring that the information corresponds to the user's needs, simply because it lets you see if the recipient understands the message and adapt the information if necessary.

The recognition unit is trying to be as helpful as possible, and this has lead to a large number of inquiries, part of which are about education matters not related to recognition.

General enquiries on recognition of foreign higher education are possible by telephone (Monday to Thursday, between 12.00 and 15.00). Even though users are encouraged to contact NOKUT by telephone, e-mail or post, the recognition unit received 350 personal callers in 2004. NOKUT is considering how to handle personal callers, e.g. by establishing a reception.

NOKUT is expected to consider whether a guidance service should be offered in addition to recognition.

DENMARK

Users are encouraged to consult the website first, and then contact CIRIUS by phone or e-mail if any questions remain unanswered. Personal callers can hand in their application and get document copies certified at the reception.

Simple inquiries about recognition are often answered by the communication unit (e-mail inquiries) or by the reception (personal callers) according to instructions from the recognition unit.

There is an internal document with guidelines and standard phrases for answering inquiries about recognition. It corresponds partially to the FAQ pages of the website.

FINLAND

The unit has a centralised e-mail service recognition@oph.fi. The e-mail account is monitored during office hours by two employees. Telephone queries are taken during all office hours, and individual consultation is arranged if requested.

Standard letters and forms

An integral part of the recognition units' communication is made up of its application forms, instructions, letters containing the assessment or the recognition decision, accompanying letters and other standard letters.

FINLAND

Enclosures to decisions on professional recognition include information on the right to appeal the decision: how, where and when; and the act and decree on which the decision was based,

either EU/EEA or other countries. This information is given in the language in which the decision is issued, either Finnish or Swedish.

Decisions concerning teachers also include further information depending on the type of the decision, whether EU/EEA or other countries. The EU/EEA Teacher decisions include

- an information leaflet on what the decision on professional recognition means; leaflet available in Finnish, Swedish and English
- an information leaflet on completing the aptitude test for teachers; leaflet available in Finnish, Swedish and English
- an information leaflet on demonstrating language skills in the Finnish or Swedish language for teachers; leaflet available in Finnish and Swedish.

The teacher decisions for non-EU/EEA countries include

- instructions concerning the eligibility to work as a pre-primary teacher, a class teacher, a special needs teacher or a subject teacher in Finland; available in Finnish, Swedish, English and Russian
- an information leaflet on demonstrating language skills in the Finnish or Swedish language for teachers; leaflet available in Finnish and Swedish.
- application forms available in Finnish, Swedish and English; instructions available in Finnish, Swedish, English, Russian and Persian.

SWEDEN

The assessment procedures include communication by means of

- Application forms (for assessment or for recognition of teaching qualifications)
- Letter confirming receipt of the application. Sending this letter is considered worth the extra effort because the office would otherwise have to answer many applicant inquiries wanting to know whether the application has been received.
- Letter demanding additional information or documentation
- Assessment letter. The verso provides general information about the assessment.
- Teacher recognition decision letter
- Accompanying letter, which presents the assessment/decision letter. Includes general information, information depending on the professional context (e.g. architect, journalist). The accompanying letter is generated by means of the case processing database (see internal archive systems and databases, p. 53).

Evaluation and plans for improvement

The recognition unit staff had the feeling that the information contained in the above documents was not always interpreted correctly by the recipients. For example, recipients often did not understand how the assessment letter was to be used. This impression was confirmed by the results of a survey by the Swedish Integration Board ("*Integration 2003*").

Furthermore, employers responded in a sceptical way to the wording used in some of HSV's letters.

As a result of this kind of uncertainty about the meaning of letters sent to applicants, the credential evaluators often had to spend time answering questions on the phone.

This was part of the background for the project launched in 2005. An external consultant produced an analysis of the standard letters and the application forms, and this formal communication was also the object of a user survey (see User tests and surveys, p. 17). The outcome was a number of suggestions for improvements, which are currently being implemented.

DENMARK

Application forms

Ordinary application for assessment (two versions: Danish and English), application for recognition of teaching qualifications (two versions: Danish and English), application for assessment in connection with pay grading as a state employee.

Standard letters

Standard letters exist as Word templates, e.g. request for further information, assessment (e.g. ordinary, entry qualifications, state pay grading), teacher recognition decision (versions according to type of teacher and type of decision).

In addition to the templates, there are standard phrases to be used in assessment letters: When editing an assessment letter the standard phrases that are specific to the type of application or qualification at hand can be copied/pasted from a separate Word document. This document is frequently revised and updated by the credential evaluators.

CIRIUS is in the process of revising its assessment letters and other standard letters. General remarks about the assessment have been placed in an enclosure (factsheet), which explains the central notions of the assessment letter, the use and status of the assessment in various contexts, and where to look for further recognition information or career/educational guidance.

NORWAY

The language used in standard letters is constantly being revised in order to enhance clarity and readability.

Networks

Various efforts are being made to build and maintain networks, not least in order to have good "information relays" and ambassadors among those who have direct contact with actual or potential applicants.

NORWAY

NOKUT organizes annual training courses, seminars, conferences and single lectures that deal with recognition matters. In that context the unit cooperates closely with several institutions and organisations like the Ministry of Education and Research, The Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Higher Education (SIU), State Educational Loan Fund, student organisations, the immigration authorities and organisations as well as employers' organisations, and finally municipal authorities.

This cooperation is reflected in various initiatives. The most established one is the Recognition Seminar (*Godkjenningseminar*) organised by NOKUT, which is a well-established yearly event for both higher education institutions and other recognition authorities. The topics of each of these seminars take up different aspects of recognition, often combined with a country profile and often focusing on the recent developments. The above-mentioned Recognition Manual is a part of the package the participants receive.

NOKUT maintains two e-mail lists: Inter-no (on recognition) and DS-list (on the diploma supplement).

NOKUT also regularly gives lectures, orientations and training courses for immigration authorities and municipal authorities.

The Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Higher Education (SIU) and State Educational Loan Fund and student organisations are institutions which tasks have great relevance in terms of spreading information on recognition matters. This means that NOKUT cooperates with them by directly contributing to their provision of information and services.

NOKUT has furthermore cooperated with the Norwegian Immigration Directorate (UDI) in improving the information available to refugees and refugee-consultants in Norway. The unit has participated with presentations in numerous conferences for UDI staff and refugee consultants. From 2004 all municipalities offer an introductory programme for accommodated refugees, and information about recognition of education is one topic in the programme.

As information on recognition is necessary for employers, trade unions and also labour related ministries, NOKUT provides them with assistance by generating relevant information.

SWEDEN

The recognition unit's communication plan includes efforts to find information relays and "ambassadors" among the following groups and create networks with them:

- Immigrant organisations
There are a large number of so-called immigrant organisations in Sweden, and they often provide information about how to find a job etc.
- Employment service employees, asylum case workers and other authorities
People in these positions are often the first to be in contact with foreigners. HSV has provided information at meetings for employment service employees and at a series of special information meetings about recognition.
- Employers' organisations

FINLAND

The recognition unit actively cooperates with the Ministry of Education, higher education institutions, Centre for International Mobility, Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council and student organizations as well as other bodies involved with mobility and the coordination of immigrant affairs, e.g. Ministry of Labour.

The unit provides training based on demand from its stakeholder groups, e.g. the higher education institutions and employment authorities. Training is provided in the form of

- training sessions and lectures in conjunction with national seminars, etc.
- independent seminars on topics such as
 - recognition of higher education degrees from the Baltic countries, Russia, Soviet Union, Ukraine, Belorussia and Moldova, and the presentation of the education systems in these countries
 - higher education system and qualifications in China and India
 - recognition of teacher's qualifications completed abroad
 - the Lisbon Recognition Convention, good practices, accreditation and recognition of prior learning, joint degrees as well as other international developments.

Training events for labour administration officials dealing with immigrant affairs on evaluating foreign education have been arranged in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour. The unit regularly provides labour authorities with specialist assistance on issues concerning the comparability of foreign qualifications.

DENMARK

CIRIUS maintains regular contacts in the form of networks etc., mainly with

- educational institutions through annual seminars, a committee on the assessment of foreign qualifications for entry to higher education, and the agency's advisory board and advisory sector committee on higher education.
- competent authorities involved in recognition of professional qualifications by means of seminars and bilateral meetings.

From time to time, CIRIUS arranges ad hoc meetings with guidance counsellors, case workers, ethnic minority/integration-related organisations and other interested parties.

For example, in 2006, CIRIUS has participated in and partly co-organised a series of regional information meetings with social workers and guidance counsellors from local councils, job centres etc.

ICELAND

The Icelandic ENIC/NARIC office gives seminars on recognition procedures to the staff of the universities.

Information about various topics

The information provided covers a wide range of recognition topics, some of which are described below.

How to apply for assessment/recognition

In all of the Nordic countries, information on recognition procedures are given on the website and in the instructions attached to the application forms.

See also: Self-service: Application forms, p. 25.

SWEDEN

Application procedures are explained on the HSV website: From the recognition frontpage you choose *Bedömning av utbildning/Evaluation of foreign degrees*.

The recognition unit's communication plan notes that information to applicants is complicated by the fact that various kinds of recognition are performed by a host of different authorities. The conclusion is that in order to achieve its communication goals the recognition unit has to take responsibility for the entire recognition process and act as a guide for individuals as well as other authorities. As a consequence, the unit aims to

- provide clear and specific information through all of its channels
- depict the field of recognition in a flow chart that is based on a user perspective and tested by target groups before publication.

DENMARK

The CIRIUS website tries to guide potential applicants and their helpers step-by-step, asking first who the reader is:

- a holder of a foreign qualification wishing recognition in Denmark?
- a holder of a Danish qualification wishing to recognition abroad?
- a social worker, guidance counsellor etc. working with foreign education holders?
- an employer?
- an official making decisions about access to a regulated profession?
- an admission officer or other representative of an educational institution?
- an employment fund employee?

If the user has a foreign qualification, does he/she want recognition with a view to

- continuing education?
- seeking employment?
- seeking admission to an unemployment fund?
- being pay graded as a state employed graduate?

NORWAY

The recognition frontpage addresses itself directly to the (future) applicant: "On these pages you will find information on how you can obtain recognition of your education." The website informs the applicants about how and where to apply: <http://www.nokut.no/sw407.asp>, from where application forms also can be printed out. The web information contains information on recognition types and procedures both at NOKUT and other recognition authorities. It also contains criteria, legal bases and rights with tools for application etc.

The NOKUT website also has a special page about "Recognition of foreign higher education for refugees with insufficient documentation" describing the procedure offered in such cases and including a special application form for refugees. See <http://www.nokut.no/sw11112.asp>.

FINLAND

The frontpage of the website includes information on the various purposes and respective types of recognition in Finland and guides the reader to learn more on the type of recognition that is applicable in his or her case. The further sections contain more detailed information on the process of recognition and information on how to apply. Individual queries may be sent to the unit's centralised e-mail address.

Regulated professions

SWEDEN

On the website, "Reglerade yrken"/"Regulated professions" is a menu item directly under the recognition top-level. It gives access to a list of responsible authorities with names of professions, links and contact information. In addition, brochures are offered in Swedish and English ("Erkännande av yrkeskompetens inom EU-EES"/"Recognition of professional qualifications within EU-EEA. Working in a regulated profession in Sweden").

DENMARK

On the website, "Lovregulerede erhverv (autorisation)"/"Regulated professions" is a menu item directly under the recognition top-level.

Upon entering the pages on access to regulated professions the user is assisted in answering two questions:

- 1) Is your profession regulated?
- 2) Are you covered by EU rules?

On that basis, the user can find guidance about how to apply.

There is a list of all known regulated occupations with links to their competent authorities and, in most cases, to a factsheet with information about the competent authority, national legislation, EU directive, documentation requirements, board of complaint (if any), relevant organisations and information sources. The list is available sorted by professional title (Danish or English) or by competent authority (Danish or English).

Further information includes the brochure "Guide to the regulated professions in Denmark".

NORWAY

Information about regulated professions, procedures and competent authorities is available on the page "Hvem godkjenner hva?"/"Who recognises what?"

A professions database is to be developed in order to provide easy access to all information concerning one profession, e.g. the teaching profession.

FINLAND

The website focuses on the Finnish procedure for eligibility for public sector posts and specific professions, including e.g. teachers, social workers and lawyers. For individually regulated professions, if the competent authority is not the NBE, information is offered on the page "Oikeus harjoittaa ammattia"/"Rätt att utöva ett yrke"/"Right to practice a profession" with professional fields or titles, links and contact information to competent authorities.

Teacher recognition

In Denmark, Finland and Sweden, the ENIC/NARIC office is also the office responsible for recognition of teaching qualifications. Information about teacher recognition is available on their websites.

FINLAND

The web pages contain a separate section on the recognition of foreign teaching qualifications in Finland. There are subsections on

- Teaching qualifications taken in another EU/EEA country
- Teaching qualifications taken outside EU/EEA countries
- Teaching in a foreign language
- Steiner and Montessori education
- Teacher training in Nordic countries,

which describe the different types of decisions, their bases and applicability in Finland, and provide information on how to apply. The web pages also include information on the other eligibility requirements for teachers in Finland, apart from the National Board of Education's (NBE) decision, for example, the language proficiency requirements of teachers. Individual queries are directed to the unit's centralised e-mail service.

Training on the recognition of foreign teaching qualifications in Finland is arranged to persons in labour administration and personnel in educational administration at schools, for example. The training has involved introducing the eligibility requirements for teachers in Finland, an overview of the legislation behind the decisions issued by the NBE, interpreting the NBE's decisions as well as country-specific information on the teacher training systems and teaching qualifications in the top foreign countries from which teachers are received in Finland.

SWEDEN

On the HSV website, "Teaching certificates" is a menu item directly under the recognition top-level. The "Teaching certificates" pages are about to be changed and re-launched in 2007 as the first part of changing the recognition section of website.

At present, the web information for teachers includes

- Documents you must submit
- How the evaluation is made
- Other ways to work in Swedish schools
- Information material
- Contact persons

The recognition unit's communication plan mentions the need for improving information about the requirements for teacher recognition, which would allow persons who clearly do not fulfil the requirements to explore alternatives instead of waiting for a decision from HSV.

Other points for development include

- Finding new ways of reaching teachers and head teachers with information about the schools' responsibilities in recognising foreign teachers.
- Establishing contacts to the teacher unions.
- Carrying out a campaign on teacher recognition including newspaper ads, articles etc.

Entry to higher education

DENMARK

On CIRIUS's website, there are pages and a factsheet about entry to higher education on the basis of a foreign qualification. An "exam manual" (*Eksamenshåndbogen*) allows users to look up their country of origin by means of a database and see the requirements for eligibility, including the certificates etc. required for the country in question. A limited version is available in English. See also: Self-service: Support for admissions officers, p. 27.

NORWAY

On NOKUT's website, there are pages about entry to higher education on the basis of a foreign qualification. There is also a list of the general entrance requirements for applicants with higher education qualifications from many countries ("GSU list"). For more information about admission requirements, users are referred to the body responsible for receiving admission applications: Samordna Opptak/Universities and Colleges Admission Service

SWEDEN

On HSV's website, there are pages about studying in Sweden. For more information about entry to higher education on the basis of a foreign qualification, users are referred to Verket för Högskoleservice (VHS)/the Swedish National Agency for Services to Universities and University Colleges, which is responsible for assessments concerning access to higher

education. On the VHS website it is possible to find an application form as well as standard assessments (in Swedish) concerning foreign entrance qualifications from some countries (<http://www.vhs.se/templates/Page.aspx?id=1011>)

FINLAND

The NBE website has a link to the www.admissions.fi site, through which it is possible to apply to programs taught in English at Finnish polytechnics. This site also contains information addressed specifically to persons with a foreign qualification. In connection with the cooperation with the polytechnics on the joint application system, a list including the access qualifications for different countries is being created.

Explaining assessments/recognition decisions

Several offices attach an explaining letter/factsheet to their assessment/recognition letters. See Standard letters and forms, p. 35.

In Norway, there is also a page on the NOKUT website explaining the "recognition document". It has a small picture of the document and specifies what the document contains and how it can be used. Finally, some of the central recognition terms are explained. See: <http://www.nokut.no/sw422.asp>.

Recognition of national qualifications abroad

DENMARK

Those who consider going abroad can find information about recognition of Danish qualifications on a special page on the Danish website under "Anerkendelse" (Recognition) or via the "Ud i verden" (www.udiverden.dk) subsite.

FINLAND

A web page on the recognition of Finnish qualifications abroad is available in Finnish, Swedish and English.

NORWAY

There is a web page about recognition abroad when looking for a job "Søke arbeid i utlandet" and studying "Studere videre i utlandet?".

Recognition system, policies, methodology

The Nordic websites include varying amount of information about the national recognition systems. Two examples are provided below.

NORWAY

The English version of the NOKUT website has background information about recognition, which includes

- Criteria for recognition

- Academic recognition.
- Legislation (in Norwegian only).

The page on NOKUT's **criteria** for general recognition of foreign higher education qualifications provides a number of details about the use of criteria in assessing

- whether or not a foreign qualification can be considered equivalent to Norwegian higher education,
- its equivalence in terms of ECTS credits and
- the Norwegian degree level to which it can be compared.

There is additional information concerning the criteria for being able to assess qualification obtained through adult education, distance learning and transnational education. See <http://www.nokut.no/sw13118.asp>.

DENMARK

The Danish version of CIRIUS website has a "Background" chapter on recognition. Most of the information is also available in the English version, including

- General information about procedures and competence distribution
- CIRIUS's assessments
- Complaints procedures
- Translations of Danish legislation concerning recognition
- International guidelines.

Recognition statistics

DENMARK

The Danish Minister of Education reports annually on developments in the field of recognition. The report includes statistics on applications and decisions concerning CIRIUS's assessments and de jure professional recognition. For CIRIUS's assessments, the statistics provide figures for outcome of applications, purpose of the assessment, type and origin of applicants, level and field of qualifications, and case processing time.

NORWAY

NOKUT's annual report includes a summary statistics on the agency's recognition activities.

FINLAND

On request, the unit provides statistics to persons or institutions outside the Finnish National Board of Education (NBE). The most common of these include Statistics Finland, the labour administration authorities and individual researchers. The web pages include statistics on the decisions of recognition that have been issued by the NBE (1998 – 2005) sorted by 1) number of applications; 2) nationality of applicant; 3) top ten countries in which qualifications have

been completed; 4) type of decision; 5) decisions by their field of study; 6) decisions on teaching in a foreign language and in Steiner and Montessori education.

National education systems

DENMARK

The English part of CIRIUS' website includes descriptions of the Danish education system:

Short presentations of the education system, mainly for those who consider a stay in Denmark, with pages on

- Pre-school
- Primary and lower secondary education
- Upper secondary education
- Higher education
- Adult learning
- Educational and vocational guidance
- Values and Opinions

More detailed information about the education system, mainly aimed at education and recognition professionals and persons with a particular interest in the education system, includes:

- General organisation
- Quality assurance
- School education
- Upper secondary education
- Higher education (including the Danish “Qualifications Framework” for higher education)
- Teacher Education
- Grading systems
- Glossary

In the section about transparency of qualifications, there are descriptions of all vocational qualifications in the form of certificate supplements (in English, French, German and Danish).

CIRIUS has published a brochure, "The Danish education system" (2006, 12 pages A4):
<http://www.ciriusonline.dk/Default.aspx?ID=4688&M=News&PID=9447&NewsID=1555>.

Educational institutions: For primary, secondary and adult education, there are links to the Danish Ministry of Education's institution register, which is in Danish. For higher education, there is a list of addresses and links for each type of institution.

Links to further information about the education system are offered on the Links page.

FINLAND

The English part of NBE's website includes a section called "The Education System of Finland" consisting of a diagram and pages on:

- Pre-School Education
- Basic Education
- Upper Secondary Education
- Higher Education (including Polytechnics, Universities)
- Adult Education
- Education for Romanies in Finland
- Historical Overview
- Education Policy Definitions
- Key areas for development
- Administration
- Funding
- Sources

Several descriptions of the Finnish education system can be ordered from NBE.

Links to further information about the education system are provided on a special page (Publications in English > Sources of Information on Finnish Education System).

The website contains an independent section on the Finnish education system and qualifications. The section provides a description of the education system from preschool education to higher education, a further section on the vocational education and training system and yet another section on the higher education system. The section on vocational education and training includes detailed information on the upper secondary level system and qualifications as well as on the system and qualifications in vocational adult education and training. This section also includes links to the descriptions (Europass Certificate Supplements) of all existing vocational qualifications.

The section on Finnish higher education has information on the Finnish qualifications that give eligibility to higher education in Finland, on the higher education system and qualifications as well as on the structure of the different kinds of degrees. This section also includes a list of recognised Finnish higher education institutions and links to their websites.

These pages also provide links to reliable sources of further information made available and updated by the Ministry of Education, Eurydice and the other sections of the Finnish National Board of Education (NBE), for example. All the information is available in Finnish, Swedish and English.

ICELAND

The ENIC/NARIC homepage provides a short presentation of the Icelandic higher education system. It also links to the website of the Office of International Education of the University of Iceland, which contains a more detailed description and short presentations and links to the higher education institutions.

NORWAY

NOKUT's English version contains a section about "Education in Norway" including

- a short presentation and a diagram of the system of higher education
- information about and links to higher education institutions: Universities and specialized institutions at university level, State university colleges, National institutes of the arts and Private colleges.
- accreditation and quality assurance system
- the grading system.

NOKUT has published a brochure: "Norway – The system of education" (2006, 24 pages A4): http://www.nokut.no/graphics/NOKUT/Artikkelbibliotek/Brosjyrer_Publikasjoner/SUSA.pdf.

SWEDEN

HSV's English version has a section called "Higher education", which contains:

- The Higher Education Sector (including The Riksdag and the Government + Agencies in the sector)
- Higher Education institutions (including Function, Areas of responsibility, Organisation, Funding, History, University or University College? and Addresses)
- Undergraduate education (including Higher education, Admission, Swedish Scholastic Aptitude Test (SweSAT), Student financial support and Degrees and diplomas)
- Postgraduate programmes (including Organisation of programmes, University Colleges awarding doctoral degrees, Graduate schools)
- Research.

Language versions

In addition to the national language, the Nordic offices provide information mainly in English. In Finland and Sweden, information is also provided in other foreign and/or minority languages. In particular, information for applicants is provided in more than one language.

FINLAND

Recognition information on the website is available in three language versions: Finnish, Swedish and English. Brochures and guide booklets have been published in Finnish, Swedish, English, German, French, Spanish and Russian. Information leaflets on the professional recognition of qualifications are also available in Serbo-Croat, Somali, Arabic and Persian. The main languages of the materials are Finnish, Swedish, English and Russian.

SWEDEN

Recognition information on the website is available in two language versions: Swedish and English. Short presentations of the Swedish higher education system, including recognition, are available in Finnish, Bosnian/Serb/Croat, Albanian, Spanish, Somali, Turkish, Romani, Sami and Tornedal Finnish. They can be reached from all pages by clicking "Other languages"/"Andra språk".

Organisation of information work

NORWAY

NOKUT has an information unit, which is part of the office of the director and provides services to all of NOKUT's sections as well as to the management.

One of the recognition unit staff handles web information on recognition. NOKUT's web information is coordinated through a group consisting of information manager, webmaster and web editors from the three sections including the recognition unit, meeting approximately 6 times per year.

SWEDEN

HSV's information department takes care of information campaigns, designing of information material, web design, press work etc. in cooperation with the people responsible for the field of work in question.

The members of the recognition unit supplies content within their field of expertise.

In the information department there is a contact person for recognition as well as one for each of the other fields of work.

DENMARK

CIRIUS's communication unit has the overall responsibility for external communication.

The recognition unit has an information officer with a specific responsibility for the recognition part of CIRIUS's website as well as for databases, information standards and publications. However, all members of staff are involved in information work related to inquiries, web content, annual reports, project reports, presentations at external meetings, study visits etc.

There is a web group meeting once per month and consisting of CIRIUS's web editor and those responsible for web editing in the units. The "local" web editors are trained in using the content management system. The meetings and occasional training sessions are used to safeguard quality and conformity of the website and to channel input from the units.

FINLAND

The Finnish National Board of Education (NBE) has Information services for the organisation as a whole. They are in charge of an overarching information strategy (*viestintästrategia*) as well as more specific yearly information plans (*viestintäsuunnitelma*), which highlight a

number of chosen topical themes. The strategies of the Enic/Naric office are aligned with the overarching strategies of the organisation.

Within the Enic/Naric office, all the members are involved with information work. In line with its own information strategy, the responsibility of content provision and management in the unit is agreed upon according to personal inclination and expertise; the responsibility of web editing has been appointed to two staff members.

Communication guidelines and competences

All of those working in a recognition unit are involved in communicating with the applicant or other users when answering the phone, replying to an e-mail, writing an assessment statement, giving a speech at a seminar etc. These day-to-day activities account for most of the information actually being delivered, and the offices try in different ways to provide guidelines and increase awareness of communication issues.

SWEDEN

A manual on writing to applicants was produced by an external consultant (as part of the project report *Begriplig bedömning*, 2005).

It was considered important that the idea of providing targeted, user-oriented communication should be rooted among the staff. In Autumn 2005 the recognition unit held a one-day meeting dedicated to communication. Half of the day educated participants in communication in general. The other half was used for practical exercises working on the unit's own texts.

NORWAY

NOKUT has adopted a set of guidelines for web writing (*Retningslinjer for skrivning på nett*) containing rules and examples for focusing on the recipient (personas), language rules, readability, quality assurance (4 pages).

DENMARK

CIRIUS's communication unit has provided the following guidelines:

- Language policy: guidelines for writing in a correct and recipient-oriented way.
- Web writing manual.

II. Internal information management inside the offices

This part of the report describes various ways of managing information and building and sharing knowledge in the Nordic offices.

Strategies and plans for the internal communication

NORWAY

In 2006, a working party was set up to improve the internal communication in NOKUT. The working party produced a report on NOKUT's internal communication, which

- gave an overview of the existing internal information: channels (paper-based, electronic, meetings, informal) and types of messages (decisions, tasks, event calls, reports, minutes, publications, staff, rules & regulations).
- summed up a user survey carried out by means of a web-based questionnaire.
- looked at experiences from two other state institutions

The report concluded, among other suggestions, that the intranet should be developed and re-launched as the main channel of internal information. The intranet was considered the best way of combining large quantities of information, providing not only news but also access to work tools and background information.

It was suggested that the intranet should, to a large extent, be built and maintained locally by the units, but according to common guidelines and under the supervision of an editor. It was underlined that expanding the intranet would not lessen the need for meetings, in particular unit meetings.

DENMARK

A 2004 memorandum about information management in the recognition unit concluded that the information structure should be simplified, stressing the importance of 1) a common pool of document in the form of an Electronic Records Management System with good search facilities and 2) an intranet offering easy access to the information most suited for re-use.

Meetings

FINLAND

Every other week the unit has a unit meeting where it discusses topics on the rolling agenda involving the entire staff. Every other week, the unit holds a meeting among the persons issuing the decisions of recognition where it focuses on questions specific to decision-making.

The unit holds a development and training day twice a year. During these days the unit discusses a chosen topic concerning internal and/or external information management and services, and plans ahead. The day combines devising strategy and drawing up action plans.

DENMARK

Once or twice per month, credential evaluators and the head of division hold a short meeting about difficult cases, methodology and other development-oriented issues. Half-day seminars are organised a few times per year in order to dig deeper into selected subjects.

Internal archive systems and databases

Databases and electronic archive systems play an important role in sharing knowledge and ensuring consistency. Several offices are working towards the integration or linking of systems, e.g. electronic application procedures and integration between internal assessment database and electronic records management system.

DENMARK

Data and information of interest to the recognition unit are stored mainly

- in the electronic records management system. The system was introduced in April 2006. In addition to other search possibilities, it is possible to retrieve case information and documents on the basis of key words relating to the action being performed, the subject concerned and/or the forum in which cooperation takes place. The key words are picked from a taxonomy defined by the agency.
- on a shared drive, including an "employee manual"
- in databases for case processing (Access), one for assessment cases and one for cases concerning the professional recognition cases. Among other purposes, the databases are used to ensure consistency with previous decisions and serve as a tool for generating statistical information and overview of trends.

Finances allowing, the internal assessment database and the electronic records management system are to be connected for maximum efficiency.

NORWAY

All documents of interest to the unit are saved in the common International Recognitions Unit's folder on the NOKUT server, available to the colleagues.

From 1991 to 2005, Filemaker databases have been used to log individual applications for recognition, requests for information, external contacts, external activities and the minutes of the weekly unit meetings. They are also being used to generate statistics and reports to the board.

NOKUT uses an archive system called ACOS Websak. A new Websak module for recognition has been developed and is being implemented. In this way, Websak will replace the Filemaker database for recognition cases.

The database plays an important role in sharing knowledge and ensuring consistency. For example, it is possible to find cases that are similar to a pending case and compare data, including the specific considerations noted by the credential evaluator.

The database is also a tool for noting and monitoring the progress of each case while ensuring that the necessary steps are followed. Recognition statements and accompanying letters are easily generated in the database by selecting standard text elements. Finally, these documents are journalized automatically.

Assessment outcomes are automatically copied to the NAG database in order to share information with higher education institutions.

The recognition unit has a shared file drive.

NOKUT's has published its archive system on the web, that is, documents that have been released to the public can be downloaded. Case information and lists of ingoing/outgoing mail can be viewed. This does not include recognition applications.

SWEDEN

The recognition unit runs an internal assessment database, which is also a production tool with facilities for reusing data: Letters are generated and printed from the database. Standard text elements are easily selected from a list. It is easy to copy data from an old case to a new one.

In short, the procedure for data entry is as follows:

- Administrative staff enters basic data about the applicant and the application.
- The credential evaluators enter data on qualifications and assessments.
- Administrative staff enters final data.

The credential evaluator's overview is facilitated by various forms, e.g. a case list, which includes, for each application, the case processing time so far and buttons to go to editing, handling (*beredning*) and completion (*komplettering*), respectively.

The recognition unit is preparing the introduction of an electronic records management system. This system will incorporate the present internal assessment database.

FINLAND

The unit shares information and files via a shared drive. Information is structured into main files and sub-files thematically and according to countries.

All documents are registered as they arrive, and the applications as well as decisions with their background memoranda are kept in the NBE filing archives.

The background memorandum includes information on, e.g. the status of the institution and the qualification in the higher education system of the country of origin, the nominal duration of the studies leading to the qualification, the prior studies of the applicant, and if necessary, the professional competences the qualification provides in the country of origin; information on the applicant's studies, and statements from higher education institutions or other authorities obtained to assist the decision process. Copies of the decisions with their background memoranda are circulated among the experts and then filed in the unit.

Decisions, memoranda and statements are also saved in a FileMaker **database** where they can be accessed by the entire staff of the unit. The database allows for the decisions and

statements to be written in a ready-made format and the database may be searched for information on earlier applications, decisions and statements as well as their background memoranda.

The unit has developed an SPSS database for preparing statistics. The SPSS database and the FileMaker database are fully compatible.

Models of the most common decision types have been collected and are available for reference. The models are corrected and altered when necessary. Information concerning decisions is also saved in an SPSS statistical software program from which various types of reports, graphical and tabular presentations on applications and decisions can be generated. SPSS can be used to examine, e.g. the number of applications and decisions, the applicants' nationalities, the countries in which the qualifications have been completed and the eligibilities conferred. To some extent, SPSS can also be used to examine the qualitative aspects of the application procedure, such as the duration of the decision process, the amount and type of additional requirements the decisions have included, and how often and for what reason applications have not lead to a decision.

ICELAND

Formal registration of the queries received by the ENIC/NARIC-unit in GoPro, the University's records management database, began in November 2003. Information on education systems, programmes and institutions are linked as memos to each case in the database.

Only part of the queries received by the ENIC/NARIC-unit are processed formally: because of the proximity to the faculties and HEIs, many queries are dealt with informally, e.g. over the telephone or through a visit.

The ENIC/NARIC-unit also makes use of the University of Iceland's student record system, and attention is currently being given to whether a database on academic recognition should be established in connection with this system; the system itself is currently undergoing review.

Intranets

SWEDEN

HSV has had an intranet for about 10 years. It was a gradual process for staff to get used to using it. They have found that it is easier to find documents on the intranet than in folder tree structures.

Recognition specific contents include: guidelines for various aspects of recognition including assessment criteria, suspected forgeries, templates and frequently asked questions.

DENMARK

CIRIUS has an intranet, which has so far concentrated on general information and functions for the agency as a whole. In the field of communication, this includes manuals (see below), web statistics, calendar for the e-magazine etc.

The recognition unit's "employee manual" (mentioned below under Manuals) is to be integrated into the intranet.

Manuals

Several Nordic offices make use manuals for sharing information about how to perform various functions and for ensuring consistent practices. The manuals cover topics such as procedures, recognition methodology and qualifications from specific countries. Some of them are mentioned below – in addition to other information published on the web or in print.

NORWAY

The recognition unit has published a complete Recognition Manual ("*Veiledning for saksbehandlere*") to be used not only by NOKUT but also by other recognition authorities, especially the higher education institutions. Since 2006, the Manual is available only online, at <http://www.nokut.no/sw14987.asp>.

The recognition manual is updated on a regular basis and contains the following sections:

- Historisk oversikt (historical overview)
- Grunnlaget for godkjenning (legislation, conventions, directives)
- Prosedyrer (internal assessment procedure and methodology)
- Information (finding and using information)
- Land >saksbehandler (whom to ask at NOKUT depending on the country).

More specific manuals cover

- guidelines for web writing (*Retningslinjer for skriving på nett*) containing rules and examples for focusing on the recipient (personas), language rules, readability, quality assurance (4 pages).

and procedures for

- publishing reports
- publishing information on the website
- producing brochures
- writing the annual NOKUT report.

SWEDEN

The recognition unit maintains an assessment manual and country manuals. The assessment manual includes assessment criteria, guidelines or standard phrases for various assessment outcomes and guidelines for writing the assessment letters. A methodology coordinator is responsible for keeping these manuals up to date.

In addition, HSV has an administration manual for the entire agency, edited by the administration department.

DENMARK

The recognition unit has accumulated knowledge and best practice in an employee manual (*personalehåndbog*) and holds special training courses for the introduction of new employees.

CIRIUS as a whole has manuals or guidelines for

- writing for the internet
- writing in general
- punctuation rules
- content management system for the website
- publishing activities
- media contact.

FINLAND

The Finnish Enic/Naric office maintains an electronic manual (*Tunnustamiskäsikirja*) on its common network drive to ease and assist its own work on the recognition of foreign qualifications in Finland. The responsibility of the on-going updating of the manual is shared by the persons who issue the decisions of recognition. The manual is used by the entire staff and covers questions ranging from the details of the application process to general principles of decision-making. The common drive also includes country-specific files for Finland and foreign countries for storing information on education systems and questions pertaining to the recognition of qualifications.

Libraries

FINLAND

The unit has a small library consisting of handbooks and other reference materials related to professional and academic recognition and country-specific information.

NORWAY

Library: One of the credential evaluators is responsible for checking, each year, for new publications that should be ordered.

SWEDEN

HSV's information department runs a library staffed by a librarian. The recognition unit stores the international literature.

The library database is searchable via the intranet.

DENMARK

The unit has a small library, and its contents are registered in a searchable database.

Annex 1: Nordic ENIC/NARIC offices

SWEDEN

Högskoleverket (HSV), Avdelningen för bedömning av utländsk utbildning

English: Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, Department for the evaluation of foreign qualifications

Recognition homepage:

- *Swedish:* <http://www.hsv.se/utlandskutbildning>
- *English:* <http://www.hsv.se/foreigndegrees.4.539a949110f3d5914ec800056651.html>

Contact information:

<http://www.hsv.se/abouttheagency/contactus.4.539a949110f3d5914ec800059169.html>

NORWAY

Nasjonalt Organ for Kvalitet i Utdanningen (NOKUT), Seksjon for utenlandsk utdanning

English: Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, International Recognitions Unit.

Recognition homepage:

- *Norwegian:* <http://www.nokut.no/sw153.asp>
- *English:* <http://www.nokut.no/sw407.asp>

Contact information:

<http://www.nokut.no/sw411.asp>

ICELAND

Háskóli Íslands, NARIC/ENIC upplýsingaskrifstofa

English: University of Iceland, Office for Academic Affairs, Icelandic NARIC/ENIC office

Recognition homepage:

- *Icelandic:* <http://www.naric-enic.hi.is/>
- *English:* <http://www.naric-enic.hi.is/>

FINLAND

Opetushallitus (OPH), Suomen ENIC/NARIC

English: The Finnish National Board of Education (NBE), Finnish ENIC/NARIC

Recognition homepage:

- *Finnish:* <http://www.oph.fi/tutkintojentunnustaminen>
- *Swedish:* <http://www.oph.fi/svenska/SubPage.asp?path=446,469,3234>
- *English:* <http://www.oph.fi/info/recognition>

Contact information:

<http://www.oph.fi/english/page.asp?path=447,2797>

DENMARK

CIRIUS, 1. kontor, Anerkendelsesenheden

English: CIRIUS, 1st division, Recognition unit

Recognition homepage:

- *Danish:* <http://www.ciriusonline.dk/anerkendelse>
- *English:* <http://www.ciriusonline.dk/recognition>

Contact information:

<http://www.ciriusonline.dk/Default.aspx?ID=687>