

Students Urge All Stakeholder to Take Action Regarding Proper Degree and Credit Recognition!

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The mutual acceptance of academic education is one of the key factors allowing individuals to travel across borders seeking knowledge and education in one country and to apply attained education and skills in practice by commuting to work in another country. Education achieved in one country is being recognized by other states based on the Lisbon Convention signed by 53 states. This essential framework is unknown to broad part of public, but the theory behind is easily doable, yet the process of recognizing accomplished courses, studies, diplomas and degrees in higher education seems a little bit complicated in the real practice, full of tedious and complex bureaucracy and uncertain outcomes. We, the students from the universities of the capitals of Europe consider that the following issues are the main problem areas in the field of courses and degree recognition and acceptance of achieved education in another country:

Centralized Availability of Information. Many times, students are not aware of their rights regarding credit and degree recognition and this is a major cause for unexpected difficulties and therefore awareness must be raised with accessible, automated platforms, such as mobile apps or websites, with extensive centralized information on the recognition and acceptance process. To support students with additional information that may help them to make the right decision for choosing the correct courses that have high probability of being recognized by the academic institution, statistical information on previous results of recognition processes of given courses available to students of the particular institution may be provided. Furthermore, in order to provide relevant centralized information, a manual of what to do may be published through the information and communication means in addition to a training of the staff that cares for students going to and coming from other academic institutions.

Learning Agreement. When a student goes on a mobility program, it is of utmost importance to all parties that education in the foreign educational institution will be recognized and build up the integral part of the student's study. The Learning Agreement (LA) embodies the agreement among the student and both High Education Institutes (HEI). However, only 73% of students attending the student mobility programs finalize this agreement before departing to the host university and if there are any modifications to the content of the LA, the final LA may not get recognized. Because of this, many students have to retake courses after their return impacting their studies in overall. The recently digitized version, the Online Learning Agreement (OLA), denotes an integrated interactive platform informing all parties about the recognition issues at the time of a change, so that students may take actions already during their stay abroad.

Proposal of Competence Curricula. In order to support student mobility and movement of workforce beyond national borders, a clear standard of required core knowledge and skills in particular field should be set out and established across the EHEA/EU. Since the educational process involves considering several aspects - level, workload, quality, profile, and learning outcomes, there has to be a widely accepted and consistent agreement on what should be considered as the achievement of certain level of EQF LLL or EHEA-QF. This solution would also denote the backbone for more clear recognition procedure and comparison of degrees, titles, diplomas and certificates in particular fields for graduates inside as well as outside EU/EHEA. The introduction of competence curricula may also provide a guarantee for the private sector and further employers on the skills and knowledge of graduates across the globe.

Internationally Accepted Examinations. Most of the recognition issues arise from the lack of trust among higher education institutions or countries. Establishing an international certification in given fields could be considered as a solution to enhance trust among different countries and institutions by providing objective assessment of acquired skills and knowledge. Creation of common ground for the assessment of study programs across Europe is a long and difficult process. However, by agreeing on competences, an international examination could be even conducted by any academic institution or other third party, even from private sector, that would provide objective assessment of examinee skills and build a ground for international acceptance without the need of undergoing further recognition process. Considering the fact, that the value of a third party certification is depending in large part on the reputation of the certifier, establishing a new certification process may denote an arduous process

requiring the support and guarantee of established institution(s) with practice and reputation in given field. Therefore, the European Commission (EC) may play a significant role in backing this process on the European level by offering certifications for third party providers as EC certified examiners.

The proposal for internationally accepted examinations should not be considered as substitution for currently existing final assessments held at higher education institutions but rather as an additional opportunity to receive certification which would be automatically recognized throughout the EU/EHEA and build an integral part of it that may be extended by the academic institutions according to their needs.

Recognition of Education. Technically the Lisbon Recognition Convention already settled the recognition process of degrees, titles and education achieved abroad by HEI. For the simplification of the process due to language differences, the European regulations already oblige universities to provide and accept transcript of records in English. However, concerning real applications, academic institutions consider their study programs as unique indicating that the substantial difference is present. Furthermore, many academic institutions still require a certified translation of the transcript of records into the respective official language of country.

Therefore, we call upon all relevant stakeholders to take action!

For Higher Education Institutions:

- HEIs should use the Online Learning Agreement (OLA) and inform students about it.
- Gathering the information about which courses were easily recognized and converted, for next students to use and have more information, this part can be integrated in the system.
- To make the recognition of degrees more available to students, they should publish clear guidelines, stating the amount of subjects, needed to join a specific study program. Publish the additional course requirements for advanced studies, given in the past to students with a degree obtained in another country.

For European Commission and European Agencies:

- Improving the currently developed Online Learning Agreement (OLA) by providing sufficient funding and taking measures necessary to involve more countries.
- Making OLA a working platform, that is accessible to all the students of EU, by finishing it, as it is in beta stage, updating it, and involving more HEI`s to use this as a mandatory program, working with HEI`s and using their information.
- Take measures to increase usage of OLA by higher education and make sure that all mobility program students has one.
- Finance and create a platform which provides an overview of admission requirements filled by universities.
- Set European wide standards for what a person holding a specific title is required to be able to do
- EHEA or EU level authorities should initiate creation of descriptions of learning outcomes (competences) for study fields. Creation of these descriptions should involve scientist, social partners and students` representatives from all member states.
- Provide assistance and support for national countries and higher education institutions on improving recognition procedures on the basis of European Area of Recognition Manual.
- Facilitate discussions and exchange of experience in the form of working groups among national and higher education institution decision makers and personnel from all around the Europe on recognition and procedures regulating it.
- Setting internationally accepted examinations.

For governmental and local instances:

- All of the participants of a mobility program has a Learning Agreement, so that HEI`s uphold the agreements for Erasmus+ program.
- Provide translation services and equivalent checks for transcript of records in embassy, for degree recognition
- Improve laws in order to bring the Lisbon Recognition Convention into effect by forcing universities to

explain explicitly on a study program to study program basis what “Substantial differences” exist

For Student Councils/Unions/Representations and other student organizations:

- Inform the students about OLA, by informative sessions, through buddy or mentor systems, etc.
- Gathering feedback from the students, to share with the HEI, European agencies, so that they can improve the platform of OLA
- Create online student forums to help the exchange experiences gained during past recognition processes

For Students:

- should use the OLA system,
- should always ask for an English transcript of records at the host university,
- should share previous experiences regarding study programs from host and home universities.