



# Towards a Nordic Recognition strategy

Gränshindersprojektet: Final report

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# Preface

Gränshindersprojektet (Barriers to recognition) is a joint Nordic project, supported by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

In the Nordic countries, the Enic/Naric offices have been given different organisational solutions and varying mandates and duties. This has resulted in somewhat differing practices in recognition work. The focus of the project has therefore been on the methodologies and procedures the Nordic Enic/Naric offices have developed in their task of recognising foreign qualifications.

The basic question has been: How may remaining structural barriers for recognition be confronted and removed – barriers amongst the Nordic countries, between these countries and Europe and ultimately between these countries and the rest of the world?

Underlying these considerations has been a vision of a more integrated and comprehensive system of recognition of foreign qualifications: a desire to bring the Nordic offices closer together; to make better use of the expertise and know-how of the offices; to share experiences and best practices and to act more as an integrated whole in the community of recognition services.

In this final report, the project findings are presented together with a background of how recognition of foreign qualifications is organised internationally. Finally, various recommendations for improvements and further cooperation between the offices are suggested.

Gränshindersprojektet has served as a framework for analysing different problems and discussing and suggesting solutions. Within the framework, the five reports have dealt with a distinct subject matter – specific problems in recognition. Separate reports address the quality of evaluation work. During the three-year period all the Nordic offices have been evaluated.

One of the subject matter projects has analysed the information services provided by the offices. Within this project it quite soon became apparent that a joint information website would be very beneficial for co-operation. The NORRIC website was created and became a publishing forum for the project, and a potential source of facts and figures about Nordic recognition (see [www.norric.org](http://www.norric.org)).

Many of the recognition problems initially stated have been able to be solved in the process. Measures to reduce other problems are suggested in the concluding remarks, but some obstacles remain outstanding.

A more integrated recognition community in the Nordic countries can look back on a dynamic and successful period of cooperation and forward towards new challenges.

# Section I: Introduction

## **Background to the project**

In the Nordic countries, academic recognition of foreign higher education is carried out both by institutions of higher education and by Enic/Naric offices. Requests for professional recognition are resolved by both Enic/Naric offices and by field-specific authorities (authorising bodies) in each country. The division of work between these bodies may differ from country to country, but the Nordic Enic/Naric offices are the main decision-making and information delivery bodies concerning recognition in the region.

Although agreements between the Nordic governments about recognition of higher education have been in force since 1975 (the Sigtuna Agreement) formal cooperation between the Nordic Enic/Naric offices was only elaborated upon at the beginning of 2000.

At European level, practices concerning the recognition of qualifications have developed considerably over the past decades. Whereas earlier an assessment of foreign qualifications often entailed a detailed comparison of curricula and lists of material studied (“equivalence”), the emphasis has shifted to a broader comparison of the qualifications earned (“acceptance”).

Over the past decade a tendency towards formal international regulations of recognition principles and methods has also become increasingly apparent.

In the Nordic countries, a growing concern about remaining obstacles to mobility between the systems of higher education surfaced round the turn of the century.

## **Nordic cooperation in recognition**

“Gränshindersprojektet” was initiated to bring the Nordic Enic/Naric offices closer together, to establish efficient means and channels to share information and build common expertise. Where possible the project would enhance integrative processes, i.e. to share and divide work tasks, to establish inter-office work forces for specific investigations and to plan and implement study tours. Additionally the initiative was meant to bring about a deeper understanding among the offices and a wider consensus as a ground for a joint presence on the international arena.

## **Identification of obstacles to mobility**

Instruments for these overreaching purposes and knowledge-building aimed at a more concrete/practical level have been developed through the analysis and description of obstacles to mobility between a) the Nordic countries, b) between the Nordic and European systems of higher education, and c) between the Nordic and more distant systems in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The detection of obstacles is important. More important however is to locate the bodies where decisions can be taken to remove the obstacles and build strong co-operation between recognition structures.

In a range of areas the Nordic recognition offices experience a lack of information about systems of higher education in foreign countries and/or difficulties in reaching authorities in these. Attempts at developing information and the search for contacts have already been initiated, but continuous and deepened cooperation has been an important aspect of the development of a Nordic recognition strategy. Information channels and national databases have been studied in order to tune these instruments for common use.

In concrete recognition work certain issues perpetually cause problems. Evaluation of documents and degrees from certain countries/geographical areas poses difficulties to a degree where constant surveillance is needed. Examples partially dealt with in the project have been the Middle East and Russia (former SU), where problems in contacting both national authorities and universities are manifest. Another set of problems is related to different types of fraud – from falsification of documents to documents from “non-existent institutions”, the so-called Diploma Mills.

The Nordic recognition organisations have, in co-operation, built a considerable knowledge base about these and related problems and created ways to share information and experiences. All this strengthens the know-how of the offices in the recognition and assessment of foreign higher education and creates more equal and comparable procedures in their work.

### **Comparative analysis and evaluation**

A second set of aims is related to the structure in the Nordic countries for recognition of foreign higher education. Given the variations in mandates, tasks, organisation and procedures, a comparative evaluation of the work the offices do would clarify differences as well as similarities and build trust between the offices. The long-term intention here was to start a movement towards more sharing of ways of conduct, routines and methods for recognition.

The Nordic countries differ in their organisation of higher education. As recognition work also is carried out in somewhat different ways in the region, where job market relations are largely shared, it seems reasonable to illuminate, analyse and evaluate recognition work and to develop a greater concordance and consensus in recognition principles and methods.

With regard to regulated professions, all countries are subject to the same EU Directives.

### **Project organisation**

The project has been organised as a co-operative project, i.e. activities and project work have been shared by the Nordic offices. Funding has been provided in accordance with responsibilities for sub-projects, project management and other activities.

A steering committee consisting of the five Enic/Naric heads has managed the project. A project manager was appointed on a part-time basis to manage day-to-day responsibilities throughout the project. The various work groups have been in charge of respective sub-projects (see below).

### **The main activities of the project**

In terms of activities the project has been organised in sub-projects, each of which has been treated as a separate part. Representatives from all the Nordic countries have taken part in each project group. The following sub-projects have been conducted:

1. Recognition problems in the Nordic countries
2. Teacher recognition within the Nordic area
3. Recognition of foreign higher education degrees in the Nordic countries - similarities and differences
4. Deviation from the 3+2 degree structure model and recognition issues ("The Bicycle project")
5. Information on recognition of foreign qualifications in the Nordic Enic/Naric offices

Evaluation studies have been carried out in parallel with the sub-projects and other project activities, including the participation of external experts. The evaluation reports are:

1. Recognition work in Iceland – evaluation of the Icelandic Enic/Naric office.
2. Recognition work in Finland – evaluation of the Finnish Enic/Naric office
3. Recognition work in Norway – evaluation of the Norwegian Enic/Naric office
4. Recognition work in Denmark – evaluation of the Danish Enic/Naric office
5. Recognition work in Sweden – evaluation of the Swedish Enic/Naric office

"Gränshindersprojektet" has triggered a considerable amount of side activities and results. For example, we believe that the NORRIC website, when fully developed, will be a very successful instrument for recognition information.

Various study visits to recognition services in other nations have been organised in parallel with the project. The visits have each had their own agenda and budget, but have benefited from the various project networks.

Within the different projects, seminars have been arranged as arenas for discussions and problem solving. Projects have also reported their findings at external seminars and conferences and the Nordic recognition conference. This joint seminar is organised annually and started with the initial discussions of "Gränshindersprojektet".

## **The international recognition framework**

The Nordic Enic/Naric offices take part in wider frameworks consisting of inter-state agreements, international networks and bi-, or multilateral working parties.

### **The Lisbon Convention**

The main and most important inter-state agreement among these is the Lisbon Convention (The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region). The convention is ratified by all Nordic countries as an international agreement on recognition of foreign higher education.

Its main points are:

- holders of qualifications issued in one of the Parties to the Convention are entitled to a fair assessment of their qualifications by the others,
- a qualification issued in one of the Parties to the Convention should be recognised unless the qualification is substantially different from that of the host country,
- the Parties ensure that information on assessment of HE institutions and programmes and on recognition matters is available.

A government appointed committee (The Lisbon Convention Committee) monitors the implementation of the Convention in each country. The committee meets biannually to upgrade the principles of the convention and evaluate its goals. Among the results of the committee's work, the Code of good practice in the recognition of foreign qualifications is especially important. Nationally the convention relies on the ENIC offices to monitor, promote, and facilitate the implementation of the convention.

### **The Reykjavik Declaration**

The Nordic countries have a long tradition of recognising and accepting each other's qualifications from higher education. The Sigtuna Agreement from 1975 has been the basis for the good relations that have existed for the past decades. This agreement has now been replaced by the "Reykjavik Declaration on Recognition of Qualifications from Higher Education" signed by all Nordic ministers of education/research in June 2004. This new declaration states the principles for a further strengthening of the Nordic cooperation. The declaration gives the Enic/Naric offices the responsibility to monitor the principles decided upon. Recognition problems are to be analysed and reported every second year to the Nordic Council of Ministers.

### **The EC Directives**

The recognition of qualifications for professional purposes is based on legal instruments concerning the recognition of diplomas, applicable solely to the regulated professions. They are adopted at a European community level.

The principle of the European Union system for the recognition of qualifications permits professional competence earned by EU/EEA nationals in an EU/EEA country to be recognised by all member states. (In addition to EU/EEA countries, Switzerland has been included in this system since May 2002.)

The general system for recognition has been based on two EC Council Directives: Directive 89/48/EEC on a general system for the recognition of higher education diplomas awarded on completion of professional education and training of at least three years duration, and Directive 92/51/EEC on a general system for the recognition of professional education and training, which supplements Directive 89/48/EEC. In addition to the Directives on a general system for recognition, there are special Directives governing the professions of physician, nurse, midwife, dentist, veterinary surgeon, pharmacist and architect.

A new directive, directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications was accepted September 2005 and will now replace all earlier directives. A code of conduct has been drawn up under the auspices of the EU with guidelines for how the appropriate authorities of the member states should administer the rules.

### **The Bologna Declaration and the reform of higher education systems**

In addition to the Lisbon Convention and the EC Directives, the Bologna process has affected the recognition process in the region. This process started in 1999 in Bologna, where the European ministers of education signed a declaration for a European higher education area. The aim of the Bologna Declaration is to increase the mobility of students, teachers and the work force alike, and to improve both the quality and competitiveness of European education. The declaration includes action lines as recommendations for the signatory countries.

For recognition of qualifications, the most important action lines are as follows:

- adopting a system essentially based on two cycles (Bachelor–Master),
- adopting a system of easily readable and comparable degrees (using tools such as the Diploma Supplement and ECTS system of credits),
- promoting European cooperation in quality assurance.

All Nordic countries have started to adopt the two-cycle system in line with the action lines of the Bologna Declaration. In Finland, Norway, Iceland and Denmark, the system is already fully operational. Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Norway have implemented ECTS in their higher education systems. Finland introduced the two-cycle system in most fields from the mid-1990s and the new two-cycle system was introduced in all fields in August 2005. Sweden implemented part of the Bologna principles in 2003 and is developing reform

plans to further strengthen the process. Full implementation is taking place in 2007.

Since 2003 and the Berlin follow-up meeting the Lisbon Convention is an integral part of the Bologna process.

### **The Enic and Naric networks**

The Nordic offices are part of a larger network with a central position in the recognition framework.

The NARIC network includes all EU/EEA countries. The European Commission co-ordinates its work. The ENIC network includes the above stated countries plus nearly all other European countries and the United States, Canada, Australia, Turkey and Israel. The ENIC network is co-ordinated by the Council of Europe and UNESCO. The two networks show a high degree of integration.

The NARIC and ENIC networks exchange information and experience on the education systems and higher education qualifications in other countries as well as on recognition good practice. The working groups and projects functioning under ENIC/NARIC deal with topical questions on the recognition of foreign qualifications.

One of the ENIC/NARIC working parties has put forward Recommendations on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications, which was adopted in 2001 by the Lisbon Convention Intergovernmental Committee. The aim was to get procedures and principles of recognition to be as similar as possible irrespective of the country in which the qualification is recognised. The recently published “Joint Charter of Activities and services” (June 2004) represents the latest initiative of the network.

### **The Nordic recognition area – offices with differing responsibilities**

All the Nordic offices are governmental bodies, but differ in their administrative/organisational model. All the offices have a national responsible body for the provision of information about the national educational system to other countries and collecting information on foreign educational systems (for national purposes). All offices, apart from Denmark, currently have national responsibility for implementing the Diploma Supplement. To date, only Iceland has national responsibility for the implementation and supervision of the ECTS system. The Finnish office has been appointed National Reference Point for vocational education and Europass. However, the Danish Enic/Naric office is part of CIRIUS, an authority within the Danish Ministry of Education, which is responsible for all of the tasks mentioned here.

Three out of five offices (Sweden, Finland and Denmark) are designated national contact points for the EU Directives. Further, the Danish office is responsible for coordinating the activities of the relevant authorities and ensur-

ing that the general directives are implemented uniformly in the professional fields concerned.

### **Recognition for different purposes**

The difference between academic and professional recognition lies in the fact that the first is for further study purposes and the second is for entering the job market. Sometimes an applicant requires an assessment valid for both purposes. All Nordic Enic/Naric offices are involved in both types of recognition except the Icelandic office, which is not involved in professional recognition at all.

Academic recognition is done both by Enic/Naric offices and by higher education institutions (HEIs) in all Nordic countries. However, there are national differences regarding the character of the decisions. A decision can be legally binding and must thereby be followed by the HEIs or it can be an advisory statement that may or may not be adhered to by HEIs.

Both Denmark and Norway make legally binding decisions concerning academic recognition. Denmark makes decisions about general admission requirements to higher education including all final degrees. The Norwegian office also makes binding decisions on the scope of the recognised education, indicated in credit points. In the three other countries the institutions are more autonomous in this respect. They may or may not follow the advisory statements given by the Enic/Naric offices, but they reportedly normally do so.

There are two types of professional recognition differing in scope and degree of regulation. De facto professional recognition concerns recognition of qualifications for professional activities. De facto professional recognition is not regulated. The second type - De jure professional recognition – concerns qualifications for regulated professions and is therefore subjected to rules and regulations for the professions in question.

Permission to practise a regulated profession (de jure recognition) is given by the national authority that controls access to the profession in question. The Enic/Naric offices in Denmark, Finland and Sweden act as expert authorities in the field of teacher recognition. In addition, Finland also serves as expert authority for professions within the public sector e.g. lawyers and social workers. The Danish office is responsible for coordinating the activities of the national relevant authorities and is the generally contact point where all applications are sent. According to Danish legislation the Danish Enic/Naric office shall be involved in cases where a relevant authority does not fully recognise a foreign diploma. Enic/Naric office decisions are binding for the relevant authority.

De facto recognition for non-regulated professions may be done by Enic/Naric offices. Normally those decisions can only be of an advisory nature but to some extent the Norwegian and the Danish offices issue binding decisions for instance according to the level of salary.

### **Considering differences in recognition in the Nordic countries**

The Nordic offices share most core activities.

- They are responsible for fast, fair, and transparent recognition, including high quality in recognition methods and procedures in accordance to the Lisbon convention.
- They have a vast responsibility concerning information (about the own national education system to other countries, and to their own national students, institutions, employers, trades unions etc. about education in other countries).
- They assist HEIs in matters related to academic recognition, either by binding decisions or by giving advice.

In many ways the differences in recognition policies and practices are minor and possible to overcome/cope with. They are shown in different mandates: differences in purpose and types of decisions, and in form and content of the statements.

In professional recognition (“de jure”), the Nordic network can be used to support quality and equality in recognition, as three out of five offices are involved in this task. The new directive (Directive 2005/36/EC on Recognition of professional qualifications) will probably gradually move towards similarity in methods and procedures.

Another issue is differences in the systems of higher education and the consequences for recognition. Type of system (binary/unitary) and differences in length and/or depth of the programme generally cause recognition problems. An illustrative example is to be found on the second degree/masters degree level. The second degrees of Finland and Sweden are not recognised as being on a par with Danish and Norwegian second degrees because of system differences. This may lead to difficulties concerning admission to doctoral studies. Assessments in connection with admission to doctoral studies are done “case by case”. Older degrees, post-secondary qualifications and non-completed studies are all problematic to assess for transfer of credits into higher education degrees.

All these aspects: length of programmes, binary/unitary system, difference in qualifications and to some extent differences in contents of the programmes are components that must be evaluated in order to develop and deepen the debate on recognition in the Nordic countries.

The question however is not to set out these differences and describe them. The question is how they should be treated. Are differences in these aspects substantial or can they be regarded as minor, possible to cope with and accept? And under what conditions could we turn considerable differences into minor ones and recognition into acceptance?

## Section II: Recognition practice in the Nordic area: Major projects within the “Gränshinder” framework

Within the “Gränshinder” framework five major projects have been organised with the overall purpose of making recognition practices more convergent in the Nordic region. While the problems are quite different in direction and scope they all exclusively deal with inter office practices.

The first project – Recognition problems in Nordic higher education – focuses on how we recognise each other’s degrees within the Nordic region. It reveals that efforts over recent years have improved recognition practice considerably. In most ways Nordic recognition authorities live up to the agreements that have long been in force within the Nordic region.

The second project – “Teacher recognition in the Nordic countries” – delves deep into the varying practices of teacher training that make recognition of the teaching profession difficult. The project has developed insightful discussions and established useful practices needed for future professional work in recognition of teachers.

In the Bologna process the distinction between the Bachelors and Masters degree levels has been intensively discussed. “The Bicycle project – deviations from the 3+2 degree structure model and recognition issues” has studied this division in some elected Nordic degrees.

The project “Recognition of foreign higher education in the Nordic countries” looks at higher education credentials from other parts of the world with a pan Nordic eye. It reveals different national practices in recognition, but they are not of a magnitude that endangers the close relations that have been developed through the “Gränshinder” project. Rather they pose challenges for future cooperation.

The Information project “Information on recognition of foreign qualifications in the Nordic Enic/Naric offices” investigates the production and distribution of recognition information, and starts the process of merging information from the five offices. Within the realms of this project the joint Nordic recognition website – [www.norric.org](http://www.norric.org) – has been developed.

Due to the differences in scope of the projects the structure of the summaries vary somewhat. The reports in full may be found on the NORRIC website – [www.norric.org](http://www.norric.org)

### **I. Recognition problems in Nordic higher education**

The report, Recognition problems in the Nordic countries, documents that there are no substantial problems related to inter-Nordic recognition, and

with full implementation of Bologna principles from 2007, the challenges will mainly be related to older degrees.

Inter-Nordic applications are rather low in number and have been surprisingly stable for the last ten years (see Appendix). The overall trend is a gradual decrease in percentage from 7 to 3 percent in Norway, stable conditions, 1-2 percent, in Sweden, whereas Denmark and Finland have a shorter record, and shows a slight rise (from 6 to 11 percent and from 7 to 12 percent, respectively). Over the last three years, applications have numbered between 50 and 120, with fewest in Finland and most in Denmark. The Icelandic records are from 2003, showing stable conditions where inter-Nordic cases represent about 10 percent of recognition cases.

The problems reported by the offices can be grouped into five themes (some problems reported fall outside these five themes):

**a) Duration and in-depth studies**

All Nordic countries have reported that recognition problems are related to the duration of studies. The problems differ slightly between us but all are similar in that differences in the nominal length of studies create problems. Norway, Sweden and Denmark have also reported recognition problems in connection with lack of in-depth studies.

**b) Terminology**

The names of qualifications and degrees vary across our borders. The names that are readable in one national context, are sometimes more difficult to understand when taken abroad. Norway and Denmark have reported that recognition problems are related to confusion in terminology.

**c) Older degrees/qualifications**

Reforms in higher education are oriented towards the future. But many graduates hold qualifications that date from older systems. Recognition is done in comparison with the present national systems and older degrees therefore sometimes create recognition problems. Norway and Denmark have reported this type of problem.

**d) Post-secondary vocational education**

All countries offer post-secondary education qualifications. In connection with educational reforms these types of qualifications are often upgraded to higher education qualifications. All countries except Sweden have reported problems of recognition in this field.

**c) Information**

We all need official information to assess foreign qualifications. Sometimes it can be very difficult and time consuming to find the correct information. And sometimes official information is not updated or in some cases not even incor-

rect. Sweden has reported this problem in connection with recognition and the problem is also pointed out in the report by Prof. Peer Maassen (appendix 2 in the project report) in connection with meeting growing demands in internationalisation and at the same time not having updated information about our systems of higher education.

**Table: Inter-Nordic recognition cases within the Enic/Naric offices.**

Country	Year	Norway	Sweden	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Total #	% of total applications
N O R W A Y	1995	NA	30	10	6	7	53	7.2
	2000	NA	31	40	11	14	96	7.5
	2003	NA	27	33	13	3	76	4.9
	2004	NA	24	28	11	3	66	3.6
	2005	NA	32	27	9	1	69	3.2
S W E D E N	1995	2	NA	2	5	2	11	0.9
	2000	18	NA	9	11	2	40	1.6
	2003	30	NA	14	23	4	71	1.9
	2004	25	NA	19	27	4	75	2.1
	2005	20	NA	22	25	3	70	2.1
D E N M A R K	1995	-	-	NA	-	-	-	-
	2000	-	-	NA	-	-	-	-
	2003	21	56	NA	4	3	84	6.3
	2004	38	55	NA	4	14	111	8.2
	2005	36	75	NA	4	4	119	11.1
F I N L A N D	1995	-	-	-	NA	-	-	-
	2000	0	24	3	NA	0	27	7.4
	2003	3	54	5	NA	0	62	12.5
	2004	3	71	2	NA	0	76	12.6
	2005	6	44	1	NA	0	51	10.0
I C E L A N D	1995	-	-	-	-	NA	-	-
	2000	-	-	-	-	NA	-	-
	2003	11	11	6	5	NA	33	10.9
	2004	12	8	11	5	NA	36	11.5
	2005	6	6	20	4	NA	36	10.6

## **2. Teacher recognition in the Nordic countries**

### **The purpose of the project:**

- To identify barriers for professional recognition of teachers within the Nordic countries.
- To discuss recommendations for future actions.
- To compare and analyse practices in the process of teacher recognition.
- To strengthen co-operation among the Nordic countries in the field of teacher recognition, update knowledge on Nordic teacher training programmes and establish a permanent co-operation in the field of teacher recognition.

The overall conclusion reached in the project was that general professional recognition of teaching qualifications within the Nordic countries is done in a non-restrictive way. Nordic teachers have good opportunities to gain teaching credentials in other Nordic countries.

Through the project a thorough understanding of Nordic teacher training programmes and of the recognition processes in each country was obtained. This new knowledge and the discussions in the project group have already removed barriers to recognition of specific teacher training programmes.

### **The role of the Nordic offices in the field of recognition of teaching qualifications**

The offices in Finland, Sweden and Denmark are expert authorities for the recognition of teaching qualifications, whereas the offices in Iceland and Norway are not directly involved in teacher recognition cases.

As long as all offices do not have a central role in teacher recognition, it will not be possible to agree on best practice etc. within the NORRIC network for teacher recognition in all Nordic countries. The wording in the report is more accurate:

“If a common Nordic framework for recognition of teacher qualifications is to be established, standard procedures and methods of recognition should be based on a common understanding of good practice. In this respect centralisation of the recognition process in all Nordic countries would guarantee that Nordic agreements and EU legislation are properly implemented in the case of teacher recognition.”

### **Legal framework**

The legal framework for professional recognition are the EU Directive, Nordic agreements on teacher recognition and national laws. All Nordic teaching qualifications are treated in line with the EU Directive. In Finland, Sweden and Denmark the offices – as expert authorities – apply the rules of the directive directly. In Norway implementation of the directive is the responsibility of the ministry and local authorities make specific decisions.

There seems to be different practices on compensatory measures within the Nordic countries, which in the report is expressed as:

“Even though Directive 89/48 applies in all the Nordic countries the actual implementation of the directive varies among the Nordic countries, including the use of aptitude tests and adaptation periods as compensatory measures.”

The validity of the Nordic agreements on teacher recognition was also discussed during the project. These agreements stem from the mid-eighties. Parts of the agreements are outdated. If the Nordic agreements are to be applied they should have some added value for the applicant compared with the rules and regulations of the EU Directive. For class teachers there is some added value, but for subject teachers the Nordic agreements are less favourable for the applicant than the EU Directive.

The added value of the Nordic agreements is not clear and is limited. In the future the legal status and added value of the agreements compared with the EU Directives need to be clarified and the agreements need to be updated.

### **Principles and procedures for recognition**

The principles and procedures for teacher recognition in the Nordic countries are based on the same basic criteria (admission level, duration of programme etc.) However, there are also differences in procedures and principles:

- While the other countries have a centralised process of professional recognition of teachers and the relevant authority resolves on recognition, Norway has a more decentralised process. The local education authority is responsible for recognising qualifications of foreign applicants with foreign teacher qualifications for teaching vacancies, normally based on a binding general recognition and assessment from NOKUT of the teacher's academic qualifications and based on the national law, which incorporates the EU Directive and the Nordic agreements. However, no formal certificate of recognition is issued and if the foreign teacher is not employed, no decision is taken on whether the teacher's qualifications can be generally recognised in Norway. As of 1 January 2007, the responsibility for assessing foreign teacher qualifications will lie with the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. All other Nordic countries issue national decisions.
- Only Denmark and Finland issue conditional recognition.
- Denmark, Finland and Sweden give applicants a free choice between different compensatory measures.
- Sweden is the only country that makes language assessments as part of their decisions on teacher recognition.

### **Recognition of specific teacher training programs**

The report states that a Nordic country's hesitation on direct recognition of a teacher training programme from another Nordic country is often due to difficulties in finding natural ways for the programme to be introduced into the educational system and the structure of its own teacher training programmes.

### **Remaining structural barriers**

Structural barriers cause certain recognition problems. Denmark, Iceland and Norway have unified teacher-training programmes, while Finland and Sweden distinguish between class teachers and subject teachers. This means that Finnish and Swedish class teachers do not have the same broad teaching expertise from 1-10 classes, because they are trained to teach classes 1-6 in Finland and 1-7 in Sweden, while unified teacher training programmes develop teaching skills from classes 1-10. It also means that Finnish and Swedish subject teachers are more specialised and take more credits in their subjects than teachers in the other countries. Recognition is not then always automatically granted or recognition is given for a more narrow teaching expertise compared with that in the teacher's country of origin. A common definition on substantial differences may also help to overcome more barriers.

## **3. The Bicycle project – deviations from the 3+2 degree structure model and recognition issues**

### **The purpose of the project**

At present, the 3+2 degree structure model is not a single degree model in any of the Nordic countries or the EHEA. Their first cycle degrees can be over three years and second cycle degrees less than two years in duration.

The aim of the Bicycle project was to examine the boundaries between cycles of higher education, i.e. between the first and second cycle on one hand, and the second and third cycle on the other, and to examine if and how the differences in length and/or content of study programmes might affect the mobility of students across these boundaries.

### **Principles and procedures for recognition**

After a preliminary study of the different types of higher education degree programmes in the Nordic countries, for study purposes it was decided to choose study programmes in three different fields of study for closer investigation. The first programmes were chosen from the field of Engineering, the second from Nursing and the third from History. Information was obtained by circulating a questionnaire to the Nordic Enic/Naric offices and one higher education institution per subject area in each country.

## Conclusions

The conclusions are to be taken with reservations attached as only a limited number of institutions participated in the study. Further, the different countries participated to a varying degree. Nonetheless, we believe the findings reflect the underlying issues.

The assessments of the engineering programmes made by the higher education institutions showed that at first degree level, none of the degrees in the study was considered as being at Bachelor's level in all participating countries when the institutions assessed them for the purpose of admission to Master's programmes. Nonetheless all the degrees were recognised by some other institution as fulfilling the stipulated requirements.

Furthermore, all participating institutions agreed that the one-year Master's programmes in the field of Engineering, Nursing and History were not considered comparable to the level of the one and a half and two-year Master's degrees, although they were considered for credit transfer.

Within the field of History the 3+2 degree structure seemed to be dominant across the Nordic countries, and only a few obstacles for mobility from one Nordic country to another were perceived.

All in all, the main finding of the study was that the different degree structures may cause, or are more likely to than not, recognition problems. For example, the shorter degrees in Nursing were considered not to be comparable with longer ones when it came to admission to higher level programmes. Likewise, in the fields of Engineering and History, one-year Master's degrees were generally not recognised as comparable to a one and a half or two-year Master's degree. How the differences in structure may hinder mobility from one level to the next, was most clearly shown by the example of the Swedish "*civilingenjörsexamen*", comparable to a one-year Master's degree, although it is a degree that gives access to third cycle studies in Sweden. On the other hand, the study showed that students from longer programmes did not gain any benefit from obtaining advanced status, for example, for their extra credits either.

There were differences in the assessments made by the higher education institutions on the one hand, and the Enic/Naric offices on the other. The differences are explained by the different approaches of the offices in comparison to the institutions, and by the different mandates and tasks. The Enic/Narics may look more to the structure, whereas universities may put more emphasis on content. The Enic/Narics might therefore recognise a Bachelor's degree from another Nordic country as comparable to a local Bachelor's degree, while the university would not consider it comparable to its own Bachelor's degree. This difference becomes particularly clear in the assessment of the engineering degrees between the Icelandic Enic/Naric office and the University of Iceland.

The Nordic countries form a common Nordic education area. At its best, this would entail students freely moving from one cycle of higher education

to another across all the Nordic countries. Our findings, however, conclude that at this point in time this is not always the case.

## **4. Recognition of foreign higher education in the Nordic countries**

### **The aims of the project**

The aims of this subproject were to identify similarities/differences in evaluating foreign degrees, to analyse and discuss the differences and to suggest further action to decrease the differences. The data for the work of the project comprised different recognition cases from every Nordic country, 31 cases altogether. Credential evaluators at the different offices handled the cases as if they were applications addressed to them.

### **Principles and procedures for recognition**

Evaluations were divided into three groups according to the degree of variation in the evaluations by the different offices. Group 1 includes cases in which the evaluations are very similar with only minor differences. In group 2 there are some more variations, e.g. differences of at least one year in the length of degrees/studies to which they have been compared. Group 3 contains those cases where the variations are the largest, at least two years in the length of the degrees/studies to which they have been compared and/or different levels of education.

**Group 1, minor or no differences:** sub-degree level studies; Bachelor-level or Master-level degrees in a two-tier system from Europe, the Near East, Latin America and Africa; German Fachhochschule degree.

**Group 2, more differences: sub-degree level studies;** Russian and former Soviet Union degrees; four-year Bachelor's degrees from Morocco and Pakistan; one-tier university degrees from Bulgaria and Germany; teacher from UK, Bachelor + induction period; four-year Bachelor's degree from the US; "Nordic" (Iceland + Sweden) two-tier degree; joint degree.

**Group 3, large variation:** degrees from Bangladesh, China, India, Pakistan, The Philippines; Estonian long one-tier degree; recognised Master's degree based on unrecognised Bachelor's degree; Iraqi Bachelor's degree for teaching profession.

The reasons for variations between the evaluations by the different Nordic Enic/Naric offices were grouped under six headings. Based on the discussions the project group decided to put forward the following suggestions for further action:

- *more efficient exchange of information between the Nordic Enic/Naric offices,*

- *discussions on Chinese adult higher education degrees in order to achieve common understanding,*
- *discussions on what constitutes a substantial difference referred to in articles IV.1, V.1 and VI.1 in the Lisbon Convention. This could give an input to the ENIC/NARIC working group on substantial differences or be a follow-up to their work,*
- *discussions on how to assess education in which part of a degree or the basis of admission is non-recognised post-secondary education or assessment of prior learning,*
- *discussions on recognising joint degrees in a Nordic conference.*

## **Conclusions**

The main finding of the investigation carried out in this project is that there are more similarities than differences in the outcome of the evaluations of foreign qualifications by different Nordic Enic/Naric offices. In slightly fewer than a quarter of the cases the variations in the evaluations were extensive.

Parts of the differences in evaluations are due to differences in the education structures in the Nordic countries. Other differences can be explained by the differences in the type, purpose and use of the recognition decisions/statements. The following criteria are used by all of the offices: the status of the institution, the status of the qualification, the level of qualification, the nominal length of education, access requirement and access to further studies. Other criteria used by some of the offices include for example admission level, content of education, marks achieved. Additional criteria used in professional recognition (teacher training) are scope of teaching skills, skills in the language of instruction and requirement to teach two subjects.

## **5. Recognition information in the Nordic countries**

### **Introduction**

The report of this project describes the 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. 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.

### **Challenges and strategies**

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 developed a communication plan for recognition and launched a major project to improve information provision.

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 commissioned user tests or surveys in order to improve the provision of targeted information by “using the users”.

### **Information: targets and channels**

The internet is the most important channel of communication for the Nordic recognition offices. To an increasing extent websites offer “self service” tools that allow users to find their own 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 internet plays an increasingly important role, the Nordic offices continue to conduct a large part of their communication with users through letters and emails, answering telephones etc. The report describes practices concerning standard letters and forms as well as direct contact.

Recognition units cannot reach broad target groups by relying on their own activities alone. 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 information directed towards applicants, is provided in more than one language. Website pages and brochures are available in English and sometimes other languages in parallel with the national language versions.

As previously 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.

### **Internal communication**

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 internal communication and how offices try to ensure internal communication and the development 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 databases and electronic records management systems.

## Section III: Evaluation of the Nordic Enic/Naric offices

### Introduction

The Evaluation Project was a joint initiative to bring together the principles and work of the five offices within the recognition field. All national recognition agencies will be studied and discussed in the project.

The most basic aim of the project was to establish transparency and produce insights into the modes of work of the different offices by focusing on core aspects of what they do. In addition to creating transparency, the method applied has been developed to suggest measures for quality improvement of recognition agencies.

The evaluation followed the classical “peer-review” model. An evaluation manual was developed to support the offices in their self-assessments. External experts were recruited to establish strong evaluation teams. The teams conducted site visits and presented their findings in separate reports.

Five evaluation reports, one for each country, have been published on the website [www.norric.org](http://www.norric.org). Here we summarise the most important findings and discussions in the evaluation reports. First however a short note on the national Enic/Naric offices and their position in their respective system as well as the conclusions of the evaluation team. A more elaborate description of the office mandates is found elsewhere in the report.

### Country specific conclusions of the evaluation study

**Iceland’s Enic/Naric** office operates in a small environment. The academic community forms only a small proportion of the population and interesting to note, academics in Iceland are often trained abroad. This situation is however slowly but surely changing.

The University of Iceland (UoI) has a central position in the system of higher education in Iceland. It is also within the UoI where the Enic/Naric office is located. The office draws on different personal skills within the university administration. Enic/Naric tasks roughly take up two full-time positions handled by around five individuals.

In their report the evaluation team concluded that the organisational set-up was supported by a very professional and effective group of staff. Due to its small size the Icelandic Enic/Naric unit has sought to work with Enic/Naric units in the other Nordic countries and elsewhere and has formed good networks. Vulnerability was found in the staffing situation – in numbers as well as in regard to possibilities for skills training.

To work more efficiently it was suggested the office work more closely and separately with the Office of International Education.

The office self-assessment indicates a need to install new and transparent administrative principles which the evaluation team strongly concurred with, for instance a recognition database, where recognition cases and information can be documented.

Although well known and appreciated in its environment, the unit must be given a more distinct profile in the future. This may be arranged either by informative measures or by changing the organisation to a more high profile and independent status.

**The Finnish Enic/Naric** was established in 1997 at the National Board of Education (NBE). Prior to this date, the Ministry of Education handled Enic/Naric work. The National Board of Education primarily deals with primary education, secondary education and adult education. The Enic/Naric office comes under the Adult Education Division.

The Enic/Naric office has one head of unit and eight employees.

The evaluation team stressed that the Finnish Enic/Naric office is a well functioning office with skilled and capable staff. Beside professional recognition, which is their major task, the office has a wide range of duties within recognition and information across educational sectors.

The office's administrative principles are characterised by a high level of transparency and a very structured approach to recognition. However, at the time of the site visit, the evaluation team found that the combination of tasks and the staffing situation is vulnerable and it is evident that the office can only undertake new duties or become more proactive in its actions with difficulty. Further, standardised recognition information and an external database with information on prior assessments could prove helpful for both applicants and institutions.

**The Norwegian Enic/Naric office** has conducted systematic recognition of foreign higher education since 1991. In the period 1991-2002 the office issued advisory statements regarding recognition with the power to formally recognise foreign higher education. Through a revision of legislation in 2003 NOKUT was established as an independent government agency. NOKUT was given the core role of promoting and supervising the implementation of the Lisbon Convention in Norway. The International Recognitions Unit has one head of office and eight employees, and may draw administrative support from a unit servicing all departments.

The Norwegian office is very experienced within the recognition field. Although the office has had difficulties with its turnover rates for some time, the evaluation team emphasised in particular that there was no doubt that the Norwegian Enic/Naric office held a key position in the national system of higher education in terms of dealing with questions concerning international education, credential evaluation and recognition.

The expertise of the staff is outstanding from a national perspective and is also utilised by international organisations and authorities. Good relations with institutions of higher education and other authorities complete the overall picture.

**The Danish Enic/Naric office** – was established as the Centre for Assessment of Foreign Qualifications (Center for Vurdering af Udenlandske Uddannelser/CVUU) and is an authority within the Danish government system. It was originally established within the Ministry of Education but was eventually integrated with a new governmental agency, CIRIUS in 2005. It is an authority within the Danish Ministry of Education with the aim of supporting the internationalisation of education and training in Denmark

The recognition unit within CIRIUS has 13 full-time employees. Of these, seven are primarily engaged in credential evaluation for academic recognition and professional de facto recognition, while two primarily deal with professional recognition within the regulated professions.

The evaluation team found an office that is modern in outlook and function. What was especially underlined in the evaluation report was the unit's work with modern information technology, something that has influenced the other Nordic offices through the "Gränshinder"-project.

The staff is skilled, insightful and flexible – and also adept in fields outside the core task of credential evaluation. The CIRIUS recognition unit is a very high profile office and very busy on the national and international scenes.

The office has strong relations to the ministries, but few connections with some of the other stakeholders in the recognition arena. Building relationships with employer organisations, employment agencies etc. should add to the evident strength and profile of the office.

**The Swedish Enic/Naric office** was set up by national authorities on an experimental basis in 1985. It became permanent in 1987 and since 1995 has been based within the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education. The department for evaluation of foreign education has a head of department and 20 employees. Of these 16 are credential evaluators working either primarily with professional de facto and academic recognition or recognition of foreign teaching qualifications.

Although the recognition function could be found in all Nordic administrative systems from the mid 1980s, the Swedish office has followed a relatively unbroken line since 1985. The authority in which it has been located has changed somewhat, but the recognition unit has remained intact. It has therefore been able to collate and register recognition cases and document changes and developments in methodology and procedures over an extended period of time. The evaluation team underlines that the value of such experiences should be more systematically shared to the benefit of the whole network.

The evaluation team concluded that highly qualified personnel at the Department handle recognition work professionally for the evaluation of foreign higher education. With its long experience and good services, the department is an important and highly esteemed member of the recognition scene in Sweden. The department delivers high quality work based on internal quality assurance mechanisms, structured work processes and recognition specific knowledge.

Recommendations to the Swedish office included looking more closely at the role of recognition in relation to higher education, the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Recognition Convention and within the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education and institutions of higher education.

## **General conclusions from the evaluation study**

### **Strengths**

There is no doubt that the Enic/Naric offices hold a key position in the national systems of higher education when questions concerning international education, credential evaluation and recognition are dealt with.

The recognition functions (the Enic/Naric offices) in the Nordic countries can rely on considerable political support. They are given a high degree of autonomy in the development and use of recognition principles, methods and procedures. Besides their engagement in the integration and immigration policies of their respective country, they are continuously being given new and exacting tasks in the development of a “European area of Higher Education”.

It is evident that the institutions of higher education recognise the expertise of the offices. The evaluation studies underline the expertise of the staffs. The expertise of personnel is outstanding in a national perspective and also often utilised by international organisations and authorities. Personnel from the Nordic offices are regularly involved on working parties within the area of international education. They are well educated, introduced effectively to recognition work and show skill and enthusiasm. They know what they are supposed to do. As the profession is quite new in some of the countries it is clear that office personnel have got up to speed on international institutional wisdom in this field in a surprisingly short time.

In building the functions and organising the offices the management has developed internal relationships and working processes in a systematic and efficient way. The planning and organisation of work are important aspects needed in all organisations, and the evaluations show that the offices have mastered these functions. The offices are managed professionally and well.

An evident lack of prestige in the processes has fostered good relations, fine cooperation and effectiveness. Information technology has been efficiently developed for practical use to the benefit of customers of the offices. Transparency, high profile, expertise and availability are good ways of describing

the virtues of the Nordic offices. Naturally these vary in degree from office to office and from time to time, but the evaluation teams nevertheless gave the offices high marks in assessing these categories.

Control structures and quality assurance mechanisms are established to enhance correct and fair assessments.

### **Weaknesses**

Most offices have their own documentation systems. They vary in quality and sophistication. In some offices a register or system of documentation is not in place. This is of course a major administrative failing. Without a register it may prove difficult to see how office assessments develop over time, and which could be a problem guaranteeing fair and just assessments. The issue of a joint integrated Nordic system of documentation has been raised in the evaluation study. It is not possible to foresee if such a system could be implemented. The offices must first develop national documentation systems where such systems are missing. The lack of effective documentation however means the offices cannot effectively draw on each other's expertise or engage in the continuous development of methods and assessment procedures.

The Nordic Enic/Naric offices vary to a considerable degree in their contacts with the institutions. In some cases the relationships are well developed. Other offices have few relationships outside the higher education community. This not only limits the possibilities of assuring good assessments and hence good recognition, but also the possibilities of actively persuading institutions and other stakeholders to take on more responsibility for recognition.

The evaluation team concluded that relationships with other stakeholders were generally too vague and underdeveloped. It is important to develop relationships with employers, trade unions, job agencies, immigration authorities or other organisations in the interface between higher education and work. The development of fair and acceptable practice in the assessment of prior and experiential learning is contingent on good working relationships with these parties.

Although quality measures for the specific handling of recognition cases are mostly in place in the Nordic offices, comprehensive quality structures for whole units are not established. Attempts to develop a quality culture within the offices have not resulted in a systematically developed programme for quality assurance. The evaluation team found that parts of such programs were being evolved, especially in areas related to methodology and procedures in credential evaluation, but a quality assurance structure for offices as a whole was lacking.

### **Threats**

The Enic/Naric offices have grown considerably over the past decade, and there has been a tendency to add tasks continuously. The offices have shown that they have been able to grow to handle new and more advanced challenges.

One problem however is that office mandates have not changed accordingly in some countries. As a consequence the roles of the offices have become somewhat unclear to clients and stakeholders, and from time to time office work has become overloaded. Both these problems are counterproductive in the short run. In the long run they may lead to serious setbacks.

The offices' self-perception is that of an expert organisation, which provides information and advice on demand. It is evident – expressed in the interviews during the site visits - that the offices have a high level of national visibility, although, as stated above, changing reality in recognition, sometimes demands substantial and recurring information efforts. At the same time a more proactive role is called for: arranging seminars, training sessions and national recognition networks.

As a consequence the personnel situation has become vulnerable. In addition, given the increased amount of recognition cases and new areas of work, the present mode of organising recognition work may have reached its limits. This becomes even more evident when the recently accepted Enic/Naric Charter is taken into consideration, which outlines new and broader tasks for the offices.

### **Opportunities**

With their varying but relatively long experience and good services, the Enic/Naric offices are important and highly esteemed organisations on the recognition scene. They deliver high quality work. Although they have internal quality assurance mechanisms and structured work processes, they usually lack an overarching quality structure for the office. The development of such a structure and the consequent fostering of a quality culture in the offices offer apparent opportunities for future improvement. The offices have a solid base for further development in the recognition of qualifications and in information dissemination in international higher education.

Given a formative role in academic recognition the Enic/Naric offices would be effective instruments for the tightening of assessments made by higher education institutions. Given the necessary means they could be front-runners in the next step in the detection and integration of qualifications – the assessment of prior learning and experience (APL, PLAR etc.). In some countries this has already been recognised and such work has been started. Along with the approval of the European Qualification Framework this will become more important and visible. A great deal of international co-operation will also be needed.

The use and handling of information is, as mentioned, in progress. Further development in information technologies applied in the area of recognition represents a tremendous opportunity. Such a development would make the recognition field more visible, methods and procedures more transparent and systems information more accessible. Knowledge and skills in credential evalu-

ation are there on a high level and further skills development should focus on information gathering and management.

The Nordic Enic/Naric offices are in close proximity to offices dealing with functions like accreditation and quality assurance. In some cases the offices are integrated with wider ranging authorities where the three functions (accreditation, quality assurance and recognition) are located. Although close in location and similar in kind, accreditation and quality assurance seem to overshadow recognition in prestige and internal values. Co-ordinating these three functions, making them develop side by side sharing knowledge and experience may not only strengthen recognition, but all three aspects of quality.

## **Future challenges**

Without doubt many of the agencies represent the best national expertise in such strategic fields as quality assurance, accreditation and recognition. In most countries however, the expertise seems to be somewhat locked in. When analysing the results of the evaluations studies it is not possible to find systematic use of such expertise outside the specific recognition units themselves. Even when the units are structured with closely related areas, such as quality assurance and international student mobility programs, knowledge and experience are to a large degree confined to the unit. If this observation is correct one evident recommendation would be to arrange internal skills and knowledge seminars to make the collective expertise available to all, as a first step towards full utilisation of the potential of the national agencies.

Another problem is related to transparency. In most countries many authorities share recognition services. There are strong arguments for such a structure, but it cannot be denied that the multitude of units/offices due to this division of labour and tasks makes for difficulties, and almost impossible to penetrate for clients. The establishment of one national gateway to all different kinds of credential evaluation would reduce this problem. In the long run it may be necessary to take a more distinct grip on the structuring of recognition. The upcoming task of assessment of prior and experiential learning (APL, PLAR etc.) will pose challenges to the present structure soon enough. When introducing such measures it might be necessary to reconsider the total structure. For transparency reasons it would therefore be wise if the governing authorities updated and rephrased the mandates of the offices.

An updating of the mandates should aim at a clear division of within and between the national offices dealing with recognition. In such changes new tasks also must be considered – new investigative and information processing positions should be developed and recruitment should aim at strengthening such future-related areas of work. The evaluation teams argue strongly that future recognition work has much more to gain from expertise in the gathering, processing and disseminating of intelligence, than from more and more detailed and very specialised knowledge in international education.

Although the “Gränshinder” project has brought the offices closer together there is still a lot of exchange of experience and integrative work to be done. There is a broad consensus within the offices for further work to adjust national differences in methodology and procedures.

One starting point for such integrative efforts could be a joint effort on the recently published “Codes of good practice in recognition” (The Lisbon Convention Committee). These need to be implemented into the Nordic countries and explained to and discussed among the Nordic institutions. The Reykjavik Declaration on recognition resolved by the Nordic Ministers of Education in 2005 represents a “Half-way House” in this process.

The differing interests that exist within the integration area represent another important area of development. To date all the Enic/Naric offices have not been able to relate purposefully to other organisations on the scene. Building good working relations with employer organisations, employment agencies etc. should add to the evident strength and profile of the office.

The self-assessments by the offices suggest a need to implement new and transparent administration procedures, a view strongly supported by the evaluation teams. For instance a recognition database, where recognition cases and information could be documented. By organising information and recognition on a more formal basis it will be possible to search for previous cases of individual degrees and qualifications. Such changes will give the units, where this has not been done a “collective memory” and may also, if it is made open to the public, create a base for the development of an answering service for the institutions as well as for the public in general. Standardised recognition information and a database with information on prior assessments could prove helpful for both applicants and institutions.

## Section IV: Conclusions and recommendations

In earlier sections of this report conclusions have been drawn about recognition in the Nordic countries and recommendations have been made for future development. In this section we summarise some main conclusions and results of the projects and highlight some of the recommendations given to both the Enic/Naric offices and in a couple of cases the Nordic Council of Ministers.

“Gränshindersprojektet”, financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers, and which has been running for the last three years, has definitely contributed to an extensive increase in co-operation between the Nordic Enic/Naric offices. This very development would not have been possible otherwise and is in itself an immediate and very concrete result of the work done so far. Indirectly, it has also had an impact on other areas of recognition work such as joint efforts on the international recognition arena and not least a common platform for information provision through the launching of the joint web-portal [www.norric.org](http://www.norric.org).

### **Increased co-operation between the offices**

Since one of the main purposes of the project was to increase co-operation between the Nordic offices it could be interesting to describe the amount of co-operative interaction that has taken place within and in connection to the project: There have been five methodology sub-projects with working groups involving, in most cases, staff from all five offices. All offices have been quality audited by external peer review groups, including members of the other offices and external experts. The heads of offices have, through their work in the steering group, been able to meet regularly and thereby share experiences on strategic matters. In relation to the project we have arranged an annual Nordic recognition seminar, to which most of the various office personnel have been invited. At the seminars the project has been one of the major topics, but there has also been room for presentations and discussions on other relevant international issues, such as questions in connection with the Bologna process. In the last two years we have also arranged joint study visits to Morocco and India/Pakistan.

All this interaction has led to a strengthening of the ties between us and a more natural way of helping each other out, through the simple fact that we now know each other so much better.

### **Strengthening of the national offices**

A natural consequence is that each office has gained a lot from this co-operation, through increased knowledge about each other's educational systems and

the way each office conducts recognition work. The evaluation project also gave each office a unique opportunity to scrutinise their own work and get an external view of their work with clear recommendations on continued quality improvement. Feedback from the evaluation reports shows that this process has been very useful. Each office has found support for changes and acted accordingly and been given new ideas for future development.

Valuable recommendations to the offices from the review teams for future consideration include: further work on adjusting the Nordic diversities in methodology and procedures, implementation of comprehensive internal quality systems and installation of transparent administrative tools, for example recognition databases where such are not in place. Another important aspect dealt with in the evaluations is the relationship or co-operation with other stakeholders, such as higher education institutions and the job market, which according to the review teams could be improved.

### **Information sharing – a key component**

Information provision and sharing are identified, not only in the project on information but through all of the sub-projects, as key components for a well-functioning recognition service. These results have strengthened the steering-group's belief in focusing on the need to jointly develop information for different stakeholders and to develop information sharing between the offices.

As shown in the sub-project about recognition of foreign higher education it is evident that the differences in outcome of the recognition cases are greater for credentials from countries that are furthest away from us, geographically and culturally. This implies that the knowledge and the access to information about these educational systems differ among the offices and this also stresses the continuous need for information sharing and joint expertise building, for example through joint study visits.

The common website is becoming an important forum for information exchange between the offices as well as externally towards other Nordic stakeholders and international recognition colleagues.

### **Recognition at the institutions and the Reykjavik declaration**

“Gränshindersprojektet” has mainly focused on the tasks of the Enic/Naric offices. It has been described, foremost in the subproject “Recognition problems in the Nordic countries”, that existing problems of recognition between the Nordic countries are few and mostly minor. The number of recognition cases is also relatively small and several of the types of difficulties and obstacles identified in the project will probably be reduced with the introduction of a Bologna degree structure in all Nordic countries.

The findings in the sub-project on the 3+2 degree structure clearly shows that recognition between the Nordic countries should benefit from the fact that the countries, in different ways, are or have been adapting the degree structure in accordance with the Bologna process. As differences and difficul-

ties have mostly been found in relation to the length of study programmes a move to the Bologna structure should facilitate mobility for students who want to continue studying on another level in another country. However, within the project institutions rather than the Enic/Naric offices emphasised differences in content. It is hard to say if this is an international recognition problem or an inter-institutional recognition problem.

Having said this, the project has not been able to provide a comprehensive picture of the extent to which major recognition problems occur between institutions across the Nordic borders. The offices have, however, the responsibility to monitor the Reykjavik Declaration and analyse and report recognition problems to the Nordic Council of Ministers every other year. This could, if the Council so wishes, be a means of increasing knowledge on how the principles of the declaration (and the Lisbon Convention) are fulfilled throughout the higher education sectors in the Nordic countries. For this the offices need a clearer brief from the Council and the wherewithal to carry out this task.

### **Organisation of recognition**

Some obstacles to recognition still remaining can be traced to the fact that the different offices have different roles and mandates in their respective national education systems. We will not here suggest changes in the national structures regarding responsibilities for recognition. We will settle for the recommendation that when a national system regarding these issues or in connection with these tasks is under review the Nordic (and international) perspective should be taken into account. As the project concludes, especially concerning the recognition of teaching qualifications, a comparable national structure in terms of organisation and mandate helps to ensure that Nordic agreements and EU legislation are properly implemented, thereby helping to ensure a fair recognition process.

Another recommendation taken from the evaluation reports, with regards to the national structures for recognition, concerns transparency. Bearing in mind all the organisations involved in different forms of credential evaluation depending on the level, purpose of recognition, division of responsibility etc. it is very hard for clients, guidance officers or counsellors, to find the right path through the system. In view of upcoming tasks such as assessing future development of prior learning there might be a need to include looking at ways of considering one entrance point on a national level for all types of credential evaluation.

### **The Nordic agreements on teacher recognition**

Through the work in the project on teacher recognition it has become evident that the Nordic agreements on teacher recognition, are outdated in parts. If the Nordic agreements are to be applied they should have some added value for the applicant compared with the rules and regulations of the EU Directive. At this stage the agreements for some applicants are less favourable than the

EU Directive. If the agreements are to play a role in Nordic recognition they need to be revised or updated, so that the added value is clear.

### **Looking ahead**

The outcomes of “Gränshindersprojektet” have clearly shown that there is plenty to gain in the area of Nordic co-operation in recognition. Therefore we are eager to create conditions for and be given the opportunity to continue such work, with the vision of a “Nordic recognition area”. Future plans have been set out in the application for a renewed project (see Appendix) and include working together in monitoring the Reykjavik declaration, continuous annual recognition seminars, other networking and joint expertise developing activities and further work in adjusting national variations in methodology, for example in relation to the concept of substantial differences.

