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Comparative Report

**ONLINE COURSE CATALOGUES
AND DATABASES
FOR TRANSPARENCY AND RECOGNITION**

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The opinions expressed are those of the author(s) only and should not be considered as representative of the European Commission’s official position.

1 The partner was suspended from the project after the invasion of Russian Federation in Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Information presented in this report is from the Russian Country Report submitted to the project coordinator in December 2021.

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Abbreviations

AIC	Academic Information Centre (Latvia)
CROQF Register	Croatian Qualifications Framework Register
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EHIS	Estonian Education Information System
ENIC	European National Information Centre
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
EQF-NCP	National coordination point for European Qualifications Framework
HE	Higher education
HEI	Higher education institution
IQR	Integrated Qualification Register (Poland)
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
LQD	Latvian Qualifications Database
NACID	National Centre for Information and Documentation (Bulgaria)
NARIC	National Academic Recognition Information Centre
NEIS	National Education Information System (Latvia)
NQD	National qualifications database and register
NQF	National qualifications framework
NRQ	National Register of Qualifications (Bulgaria)
OCTRA	Online course catalogues and databases for transparency and recognition
The Guide	ECTS User's Guide (2015)



Introduction

Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on Promoting automatic mutual recognition of HE and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad² emphasises that in cooperation with NARIC centres, HEIs, quality assurance agencies and other key stakeholders, national guidance should be developed to support HEI in producing and effectively implementing transparency tools. The Council Recommendation also suggests that NARIC centres are expected to provide expert support and training to HEIs to implement such national guidance and monitor its implementation.

To support cooperation between NARIC centres and HEIs, ENIC and NARIC centres from seven countries – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia (coordinator), Poland, Russia – and two representatives of higher education sector – BA School of Business and Finance (Latvia) and Council of Rectors of Latvia – joined in a project to focus on enhancing the implementation and the use of two transparency tools – online course catalogues and national qualifications databases and registers (NQD).

According to the ECTS User's Guide (2015) (the Guide)³, HEIs are free to choose how to inform public on education opportunities they provide; however, course catalogue is one of supporting documents facilitating ECTS recognition for the purpose of mobility. Therefore, following a common structure makes course catalogues more comparable and improves transparency of qualifications. The Guide provides comprehensive perspective of student view on course catalogues, but the document does not focus on recognition of qualifications. Furthermore, the Guide does not include or propose possibility to create course catalogues as open online tools that can be accessed from any place in the world by all the stakeholders. Therefore, the focus of this project is to explore already existing publicly available online course catalogues and promote dialogue with HEIs to improve course catalogues for the use of recognition of qualifications.

Based on Council Recommendations of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of EQF for lifelong learning, initiative to develop (or improve) national qualifications databases and registers (NQDs) in the Member States was initialised, with an aim to provide a reliable source for information for "access to information and guidance to stakeholders on how national qualifications relate to the European Qualifications Framework through national qualifications systems"⁴. NQDs are information systems developed by various institutions at national (usually national coordination points for EQF) or sectoral level to reflect qualifications referenced to national qualifications frameworks (NQF). Although the status, scope, stage of development and availability of NQDs vary by country, these databases are significant information sources to be yet appreciated in recognition of qualifications.

The **aim** of the Erasmus+ project "Online course catalogues and databases for transparency and recognition – OCTRA" (2020-2022) is to promote a dialogue between credential evaluators and HEIs by agreeing on a template for the structure of course catalogues and improvements of NQDs that would guide to structured and transparent learning outcomes of HE qualifications. By working towards this aim, the project also addresses and encourages the automatic recognition of HE qualifications in future and use of NQD in recognition of foreign qualifications. In the terms of project, the guidelines concerning a common structure of course catalogues and suggestions for the improvements in the NQDs were elaborated to facilitate fair and transparent recognition of Bologna cycle qualifications. The guidelines generally reflect position of credential evaluators and are targeted at HEIs and institutions developing NQDs.

2 Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad // [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32018H1210\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32018H1210(01))

3 ECTS users' Guide (2015) // <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/da7467e6-8450-11e5-b8b7-01aa75ed71a1>

4 Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning // <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A32008H0506%2801%29>



To achieve the aim of the OCTRA project, the project partners explored situation in their countries with regards to the legal framework and the use of course catalogues in HE, as well as the national qualifications databases or registers. The OCTRA project focused on HE qualifications of all Bologna cycles (including short-cycle) or full HE qualifications referenced to the EQF level 5/6-8 in the project partner countries. When exploring situation, the project partners carried out desk research, conducted an online survey of HEIs, as well as interviews with the credential evaluators at ENIC/NARIC centres. The methodology of study was discussed and approved during the project meetings. The study was carried out in three stages: first a survey of HEIs, then case studies of selected course catalogues, interviews with credential evaluators, last step was preparation of a country report representing data collected by the project partners. This report outlines the comparison of the country reports prepared by the project partner institutions and provides suggestions for preparing guidelines on course catalogues and possible improvements in the NQDs at a national level. The guidelines can be used by HEIs, ENICs, NARICs, as well as by institutions developing and/or maintaining NQDs.

This report is divided in introduction, two chapters, conclusions and the guidelines. The first chapter contains results from the comparison of country reports with a brief insight in each project partner country's higher education system and legal framework in terms of publicly available information on HE study programmes and courses, as well as information on NQDs. The second chapter describes results of interviews with credential evaluators to outline information valued in course catalogues during the recognition of qualifications. The conclusions are based on the country reports prepared by the project partners, as well as national level recommendations included in the country reports. The guidelines address such issues as concept of course catalogue, its structural elements, content, as well as availability of course catalogue (public availability/accessibility and its language).

Course catalogues

One of significant references about course catalogues used in this project is the ECTS User's Guide (2015); therefore, the following paragraphs briefly summarise description of course catalogues available in this document.

The Guide states that the most significant purpose of course catalogues is to ensure quality information for potential students to help them "to make the right choices and use their time most efficiently". The main information should be in the national language and in English. Furthermore, the course catalogue should be published online on the website of HEI, as well as include contact information of the staff working with student enrolment to promote availability of the data and access to studies. Thus, according to the Guide, the course catalogues are targeted at potential students when they choose their learning pathways.

Although the Guide admits that HEIs may decide on the format and information structure of course catalogues, the document provides some recommendation about elements to be included in the course catalogues to foster transparency and comparability of qualifications. The Guide differentiates provision of information on three levels: institutional, programme and course. See the lists of elements in the Annex 1.

The Guide explores the purpose and content of the course catalogue, but the document does not provide definition of the concept. Therefore, this project will clarify how the term "course catalogue" could be defined in the context of recognition. Moreover, the project focuses only on the online course catalogues, while the Guide refers to course catalogues in general, although, according to the Guide, course catalogues should be published on the HEI website.



Chapter I. Analysis of country reports

The seven country reports (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Russia) were elaborated by the representatives of project partner ENIC or NARIC centres based on the methodology and the content agreed on by all the project partners (see the template of country report in Annex 2). The purpose of the country reports was to learn about presence and accessibility of course catalogues at HEIs, reflection of ECTS and learning outcomes in course catalogues, as well as development and content of NQDs. Therefore, all the project partners developed an online questionnaire for the representatives of HEIs about their course catalogues. The questionnaire was designed to clarify whether and how existing course catalogues were in compliance with The Guide. To gain further insight, case studies of at least three course catalogues in each partner country were carried out by the respective ENIC or NARIC centres. The in-depth case studies were conducted following the fiche elaborated for the OCTRA project by the project partners. As only three NQDs were identified in the initial stages of the project, no specific methodology for the case studies of NQD was developed, but the project partners explored available online information sources about HE qualifications in their countries.

The country reports covered, as agreed, the succeeding topics:

- Overall situation in the country regarding regulatory framework and existing guidelines (national/regional level documents) on course catalogues;
- Analysis of data collected in the survey of HEIs;
- In-depth case studies of at least three course catalogues;
- Description of NQD and other online information sources;
- Conclusions and proposed national level recommendations for improvements of course catalogues and NQD (if applicable).

The main difficulties faced in conducting desk research were reaching HEIs and receiving fully completed questionnaires. The project partners reported that there have been several aspects that hindered survey process, e.g. invalid e-mail addresses and technical problems with mailing, and COVID-19 pandemic (changes in internal operation of HEIs due to pandemic causing additional workload).

When the project partners submitted their country reports, AIC conducted analysis of the reports and elaborated this comparative report following structure of the country reports: 1) analysing provided data on existing legal framework, guidelines or recommendations regarding course catalogues and other information sources on study programmes or courses in the country; 2) results of the surveys of HEIs; 3) results of in-depth case studies (course catalogues and NQDs). The report was reviewed by the project partners and discussed during the project meetings. Information provided in the country reports, as well as discussions with the project partners were used for elaborating the guidelines in terms of the implementation and use of online course catalogues and NQDs for HEIs, NARICs, ENICs and institutions responsible for NQDs.

1. Outline of HE systems in the project partner countries

OCTRA project did not aim to have an in-depth analysis of project partner countries HE systems, but a brief insight was considered as beneficial to understand whether some aspects have to be taken in account while analysing gathered information. In the terms of OCTRA project, various features of HE systems in seven countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Russia) were explored to clarify general context of course catalogues and NQDs in the partner countries. The results of comparison indicate that no major differences in HE systems may be observed in the seven countries, since all are involved in the Bologna Process and are part of European Higher Education Area.



The elaboration of NQDs is closely related to strengthening and supporting visibility and transparency of qualifications referenced to the NQF. Four of the project partner countries have referenced their NQFs to EQF:

- Croatia – 8 NQF level system (with two sublevels in 4th, 7th and 8th levels), HE qualifications are at NQF level 5-8 and corresponds to EQF levels 5-8;
- Estonia – 8 NQF level system, HE qualifications are at NQF level 6-8 and corresponds to EQF 6-8 level;
- Latvia – 8 NQF level system, HE qualifications are at NQF level 5-8 and corresponds to EQF 5-8 level;
- Poland – 8 NQF level system, HE qualifications are at NQF level 5-8 and corresponds to EQF 5-8 level.

Bosnia and Herzegovina (8 levels⁵, at the moment HE qualifications are considered to be at 6-7 EQF level⁶) and Bulgaria (8 levels and “zero” level, HE qualifications – at NQF level 6-8) have also developed NQFs. However, the NQFs in both countries are not compared or referenced the EQF. In Russia, the NQF is under the development: nevertheless, at present the levels of education are already strictly linked both to Bologna cycles and ISCED-2011.

In all the project partner countries higher education is organised into three Bologna cycles – first (bachelor), second (master) and third (doctor). In three countries (Croatia, Latvia, Poland) there are also short-cycle higher education programmes (see Table 1).

Table 1. Higher education cycles in the project partner countries

Country	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Bulgaria	Croatia	Estonia	Latvia	Poland	Russia
Cycle							
Short-cycle programmes	n.a.	n.a.	X	n.a.	X	X	n.a.
Bachelor	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Master	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Doctor	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Higher education institutions in the project partner countries either use ECTS credits or a national system is in place providing guidelines of transfer of local credit point system to ECTS credits. As shown in Table 2, use of credit points varies by the project partner countries. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia and Poland ECTS credits are the only credit points used. In Latvia, ECTS are used side by side with national credits and information on ECTS is included in Diploma Supplements. In Russia, HEIs only use national credits, but system of transference is in place. Thus, there is a possibility to visibly provide information on ECTS credits both in each HEIs course catalogue and in national level information systems.

5 Information on Bosnia and Herzegovina National Qualification framework // http://cip.gov.ba/images/pdf/Legislativa/Bosanski/Nacionalni_kvalifikacijski_okvir_bos.pdf

6 Information on higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Centre for Information and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education // <http://cip.gov.ba/en/he-system-eng>



Table 2. Use of ECTS in the project partner countries

Country	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Bulgaria	Croatia	Estonia	Latvia	Poland	Russia
Use of ECTS as the only credits system	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
ECTS transfer system	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	1 LV credit point = 1.5 ECTS	n.a.	1 ECTS credit = 36 academic hours

Following the Guide, course catalogues should provide reliable, up-to-date and quality assured information; therefore, quality assurance of HE programmes is significant aspect to be considered. In all the project partner countries, external quality assurance of study content is carried out, while institutional quality assurance is performed in all the partner countries except Poland where institutional quality assurance was carried out for a short period (2012-2016), then this procedure was suspended, and changes were made to the programme evaluation criteria for general academic and practice-oriented profile.⁷

Although external quality assurance practices are in place in all the project partner countries, slightly different approaches and periods of quality assurance are used; hence, highlighting the importance of publicly available and easy to find information on external quality assurance for both applicants as well as credential evaluators.

2. Legal framework on publicly available information about study programmes and courses

In terms of this report, “publicly available information” is understood as an intelligence that can be accessed online by any user without registration, subscriptions, or any other type of additional inquiry on an information platform. National level legal framework and guidelines/recommendations are understood as documents that are developed to support HEIs on national level, parallel to existing international supporting documentation.

To analyse the development process of existing course catalogues in the project partner countries, present national legal framework in this context was explored in the seven countries. First, the project partners clarified whether a national level regulation mandates HEIs to have a course catalogue. Second, if no legal framework was in place regarding course catalogues, legal documents stipulating HEIs to provide publicly available information on study courses or programmes were analysed. Lastly, project partners explored whether there are any national level recommendations or guidelines that HEIs can use when developing and maintaining course catalogues.

The legal framework of information provision on study programmes and courses varies by the project partner country (see Table 3). The partner countries as regards legal regulations on information provision can be divided in two parts:

- Regulation mandating publicly available information (Poland, Russia) or
- No such regulation (Latvia, Estonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia).

No legal regulation requiring HEIs to provide information in foreign language on their website or any other information source may be observed in any of the project partner countries.

In Croatia and Latvia, a regulation was identified that mentions either preparing or having information on certain aspect of study programmes. These practices suggest that HEIs prepare the information and possess the data, but not necessarily make this information available for public.



Although in Croatia no regulation stipulates provision of publicly available information, according to the Croatian law, bylaws and subsidiary texts in the context of higher education, all the Croatian higher education institutions, both public and private, have obligation to have all relevant information about their study programmes with clearly described:

- learning outcomes (expected learning outcomes),
- assessment and awards,
- quality assurance,
- progression routes,
- ECTS credits,
- time framework.

Other relevant information may be defined on the level of higher education institution.

In accordance with information provided by the project partners from Croatia, Act on Scientific Activity and Higher Education⁸ (17.07.2003) obligates HEIs to have all relevant information about HE study programmes, but the law does not define the form of data provision, so each HEI create their bylaws where they specify their approach to information publication. HEIs may choose to publish information in form of a course catalogue, or somewhere on their website or in other sources. In addition, each HEI can decide to what extent this information should be publicly available. At national level, regulations of accreditation procedures provide recommendations to make the information about HE study programmes publicly available.

Similarly, in Latvia no regulation or recommendations on provision on publicly available information can be found. However, Law on Higher Education Institutions (1995) Section 56.1 "Study course" provides regulation for the content of study course description, but does not specify where and how information must be presented. This section of the Law mandates that five criteria must be included in study course description:

1. Requirements to enrol in the study course;
2. Aim of the study course and expected learning outcomes;
3. Outline the content of the study course needed to achieve the learning outcomes (study calendar, list of required literature etc.);
4. Description of students' self-directed work organisation and tasks;
5. Regulation for assessment.

Based on this law, short recommendations on how to create a study course description were developed by Academic Information centre – Higher Education Quality Agency (AIKA) that propose listing the following information in study course description:

1. Study course title;
2. Responsible person (head) of the study course and/or the developer(s) of the study course;
3. Study course implementer(s);
4. Number of credits (ECTS);
5. Number of contact hours;
6. Requirements for enrolling study course;
7. Purpose of study course (implementation);
8. Expected learning outcomes;

8 Act on Scientific Activity and Higher Education. Official Gazette 123/03, 198/03, 105/04, 174/04, 02/07, 46/07, 45/09.



9. Study course content;
10. Study course calendar;
11. Organisation and tasks of students' self-directed work;
12. Criteria for evaluating the learning outcomes;
13. Mandatory literature, additional literature;
14. Other sources of information.

In Poland and Russia, HEIs by legal framework are required to ensure publicly available information on their study programmes. In all other project partner countries, no legal regulations were observed mandating publicly available information. In Croatia, recommendations were issued to make information publicly available (e.g. within accreditation procedure etc.). In Latvia, short recommendation has been set on how to create study course, but the document does not suggest making this description publicly available. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria and Estonia, no legal acts or recommendations were identified by the project partners that address mandatory elaboration of the course catalogues or mandatory provision of publicly available information on study programmes and courses. In Estonia, legal framework mandates HEIs to provide information on study programmes and modules to Estonian Education Information System, i.e. an information system that is maintained by the Government of Estonia.

The country reports showed that even in countries where publicly available information is mandatory, no guiding documents are provided regarding the manner of publishing the data, and no guidelines are available on the content of course catalogues.

Slightly different situation as regards publicly available information may be observed in Estonia comparing to other partner countries. Although no guidelines are set on the use of course catalogues or publishing information on HE studies programmes, on basis of consortium agreements between HEIs, two private and voluntary data systems (not part of HEI websites) exist that collect information on study programmes using standard format, including data on single study courses and modules belonging to study programmes.

Table 3. Summary of legal framework and national supportive documents in the project partner countries

	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Bulgaria	Croatia	Estonia	Latvia	Poland	Russia
National legal framework (LF) on course catalogues	No LF	No LF	No LF	No LF	No LF	No LF	No LF
National level recommendations/guidelines on course catalogues (G)	No G	No G	No G	No G	No G	No G	No G
Legal framework (LF) on providing publicly available information about study courses/programmes	No LF	No LF	LF requiring to have information on HE study programmes, but no LF mandating public availability of the information	Mandatory information provision on programmes and modules in the national education registry – Estonian Education Information System	No LF to provide publicly available information	Law mandates HEIs to provide publicly available information on study process and programmes (provisions are mentioned in more than one legal act)	Regulation mandating to provide publicly available information on study programmes/courses and study process
Nacional level recommendations/guidelines on providing publicly available information about study courses /programmes (G)	No G	No G	No G	No G	Short recommendations on study course description content (do not mandate public availability)	No G	No G





In two project partner countries (Poland and Russia), legal regulations are in force mandating publicly available information. The case of each country is described in the following paragraphs.

Poland

In Poland, all institutions executing public functions must share certain information required by law in a specific section of their website. Those sections are connected into a platform named Public Information Bulletin (BIP; *Biuletyn Informacji Publicznej*) – is used for all the authorities executing public functions to share vital information. The platform provides information only in national language. Although this system is beneficial as data is provided in a single source using unified layout, most intelligence is uploaded in the form of a simple text or PDF files; thus, limiting access to or interoperability with other databases.

The Polish project partners reported: “Although the BIP websites should be accessible from the relevant institution’s main website, they are, in fact, separate entities and a HEI (or other institution) can introduce only limited scope of changes into the basic structure. With form quite strictly determined, institutions are rarely willing to spend more energy and time on the content and presentation than what is necessary to meet legal requirements.”

According to Polish Law on Higher Education and Science⁹ (2021), certain documentation must be published in the BIP section of HEIs website: the statutes of the HEI, study regulations, student financial support regulations, modes and rules of recruitment. These documents cover most official information on the institution, as well as its internal regulations. The following information on study programmes must be published in the BIP section of the website:

- Mode/-s of study and the number of semesters,
- Total number of ECTS credits to be obtained to graduate at the particular level of study,
- Qualification awarded (title obtained by graduates),
- Courses or groups of courses regardless of the mode of teaching,
- Learning outcomes of courses or groups of courses and contents leading to achievement of these learning outcomes,
- Total number of hours,
- Verification and assessment methods during the entire cycle of study,
- Number of ECTS credits to be obtained during activities in direct contact with academic staff or other teaching staff,
- Duration, rules and forms of work-based components of the programme/work placements with number of ECTS credits to be obtained from those components,
- For fields of study other than humanities or social sciences: number of ECTS credits to be obtained from courses in humanities or social sciences (not less than 5 ECTS).

Although a common platform where specific information must be shared has been established, several drawbacks of the system were identified by the Polish project partners. First, the format in what most information is uploaded limits access to or interoperability with other databases, and only limited scope of changes can be introduced into basic structure. The BIP platform is a separate entity from HEIs websites, which does not motivate HEIs to invest time, energy, and financial resources on presentation of information and content in addition to the data required by legal framework.

To conclude, in Poland, there is a legal framework requiring HEIs to provide publicly available information online, which covers wide information on study programmes, but this information does not have to be provided in any other language than Polish. The information can be uploaded in formats that are not machine readable and, thus, may not be translated by freely accessible online translations tools.

9 Law on Higher Education and Science. Journal of Laws of 2021, item 478 and 619.



Russia

Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 582 “On approval of the Rules for posting on the official website of an education organization in the information and telecommunications network “Internet” and updating information about an education organization” (10.07.2013) mandates all the education institutions, regardless of education level, on their website to publish variety of information on their institution and provided education programmes. The legislation specifies that HEIs websites should have subsection “Education” where relevant information must be published. In this section of website, the descriptions of the implemented education programmes should include. Information published on study programmes is divided in two parts: 1) implemented education programmes in the section “Education”, and 2) description of the study programme that must be published in the form of an electronic document or in the form of active links.

In the section “Education” the succeeding information must be published:

- Forms of education,
- Standard period of study,
- Validity period of the state accreditation,
- Language(-s) of instruction,
- Subjects and courses,
- Disciplines (modules),
- Practice provided by the relevant education programme,
- Use of e-learning and distance learning technologies in the implementation of the education programme.

More detailed information on study programmes in subsection “Education”, provided in form of electronic documents or active links, is:

- Forms of education,
- The standard period of study,
- The validity period of the state accreditation of the education programme,
- The language(s) in which education (training) is provided,
- Academic subjects, courses, disciplines (modules),
- The practice provided by the relevant education programme,
- The use of e-learning and distance learning technologies,
- Description of the education programme,
- The curriculum with its application,
- The annotation to the work programmes of disciplines (for each academic subject, course, discipline (module), practice) with the application of work programmes,
- The calendar study schedule with its attachment,
- Methodological and other documents developed by an education organisation to ensure the education process.

In Russia, although no legal framework requires to create a course catalogue, regulation in force specifies where and what information should be published. Whereas in Poland publicly available information has to be published on HEIs website, moreover a specific section is also identified. This way HEIs have ability to impact their autonomy in deciding the way how to publish information, as well as have incentive to provide wider information by having possibility to interlink different sections of the website.



The comparison of legal frameworks in the partner countries shows that in the countries where publicly available information is mandatory, descriptions of HE programmes/courses are comparable and cover most essential elements of HE study programmes. Although the regulation on publicly available information is in force, for a foreign person or a regular user without specific knowledge of system sometimes the information may not be easy to find. In some cases, the descriptions are published outside the website of HEIs or are available in a specific sub-section of the website requiring additional search to access the necessary information.

Having publicly available internal regulation of HEI may be beneficial for students, but not to great extent to credential evaluators who would have to analyse lengthy documentation to find necessary information, e.g., on practices of recognising or validating informal and non-formal learning or other validation practices of previous learning. The use of an external platform is valuable for those who are aware of such portals, but not for foreign students or credential evaluators, who are not familiar with the existing information sources in particular country. Both Polish and Estonian project partners pointed out that occasionally a link to external information platform on HEIs website is provided, yet only citing acronym of the platform or no explanation of the link is provided. Thus, the users of platforms should have some basic knowledge of HE system in the country to be able to navigate through the available online information sources.

3. NQDs and alternative information sources on qualifications

Main aim of the OCTRA project is to promote dialogue between credential evaluators and HEIs, the project also aims to explore information sources providing information on Bologna cycle qualifications, available in each project partner country. Primary the project focused on NQDs, as they are developed to support access to information on how national qualifications relate to the EQF, in order to promote international visibility and transparency of qualifications. NQDs status, scope, stage of development, availability, as well as purpose vary by country.

In this section of report, the content of NQDs in the project partner countries (if available and provide information on Bologna cycle qualifications) are analysed. In addition, in each project partner country, there are alternative information sources or platforms that provide reliable state-maintained information on HE qualifications for various target groups.

Only three project partner countries (Croatia, Latvia, Poland) have launched NQDs in the context of developing their national qualifications framework (see Table 4).

All the project partners reported that at national level several information sources provide various information on HEIs and implemented study programmes, but most are developed for specific purpose and do not always include comprehensive information on study programmes and courses. Table below names few of the information sources available in the project partner countries. Six of project partner countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Russia) also have dedicated websites, e.g. "Study in..." that were developed as part of European initiative, where relevant information for HE applicants is provided.



Table 4. NQD and other national information sources in the project partner countries

Country	NQD	Alternative information sources
Bosnia and Herzegovina	n.a.	n.a.
Bulgaria	n.a.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Register of Qualifications (NRQ)¹⁰ –substantial data granularity, not available publicly. Various national registers, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Register of Higher Education Institutions, maintained by NACID with level of description all individually approved HE programmes¹¹ Bulgarian University Ranking System¹²
Croatia	Croatian Qualifications Framework Register ¹³	The Directory of Study Programmes ¹⁴
Estonia	n.a.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Estonian Education Information System (EHIS)¹⁵ that is regulated by the Government of Estonia The Study Information System (ÕIS¹⁶ (older) and TAHVEL¹⁷ (new))
Latvia	Latvian Qualifications Database ¹⁸	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Education Information System (NEIS)¹⁹ maintained by the Ministry of Education and Science E-platform²⁰ maintained by Quality Agency for Higher Education
Poland	Integrated Qualification Register ²¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RAD-on²² (Reports, Analyses and Data On Higher Education and Science in Poland) Public Information Bulletin²³
Russia	n.a.	n.a. ²⁴

As mentioned above, only three NQDs were identified at the time of conducting the comparative study. One database was stated in Latvia – Latvian Qualifications Database (LQD), another in Poland – Integrated Qualification Register (IQR), third in Croatia – Croatian Qualifications Framework Register

10 No link is available, as the database is not publicly available.

11 <https://rvu.nacid.bg/HomeEn/IndexEn>

12 <https://rsvu.mon.bg>

13 <https://hko.srce.hr/registar/>; <https://hko.srce.hr/registar/standardi>

14 <https://mozvag.srce.hr/preglednik/?lang=en>

15 <http://www.ehis.ee>

16 <https://ois2.ut.ee/#/dashboard>; <https://www.ois.ee>

17 <https://tahvel.edu.ee>

18 <https://www.latvijaskvalifikacijas.lv/en>

19 <https://www.viis.gov.lv>

20 <https://eplatforma.aika.lv>

21 <https://kwalifikacje.gov.pl/en>

22 <https://radon.nauka.gov.pl/dane>

23 <https://www.gov.pl/bip>

24 Information on the Russian national information sources is not available.



(CROQF Register). The legal status of NQDs in Croatia, Latvia and Poland are different – LQD is informative data source, CROQF Register and IQR are official registers. NQDs in Latvia and Poland at core are similar as these sources collect and provide data on available formal education qualifications referenced to the NQF in respective countries (not only higher education qualifications), while data on separate courses or modules is not collected. CROQF Register has information on occupational and qualification standards and HE programmes harmonized with the qualification standards.

Croatia

The Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF) Register is a national database of occupational and qualification standards (hosted by the Ministry of Science and Education) which are mutually aligned through units of competences and learning outcomes. CROQF Register also provides information on programmes harmonized with the qualification standards, the specific requirements that should be met in order to obtain a qualification, and which institutions have the authority to award these qualifications. Filling the CROQF Register with data is an ongoing process. The data in CROQF Register is available in Croatian and includes:

- Full and partial qualifications standards,
- Occupational standards,
- ECTS (for HE),
- ISCED code,
- ECVET,
- Type of qualification,
- Level of qualification,
- Field of qualification,
- Awarding body.

In addition, national **Directory of Study Programmes** has been launched including information on all the accredited study programmes and accredited HEIs/awarding bodies in higher education in Croatia. The Croatian Directory of Study Programmes is maintained by the Agency for Science and Higher Education and all information is available in Croatian and English. On each programme the following information is listed:

- Issuing institution (link to institution),
- Education provider (link to provider),
- Programme type,
- Degree type,
- Programme duration,
- ECTS Credits,
- Mode of delivery,
- Field of study,
- Subject,
- Qualification type,
- Location,
- Year of last evaluation.

The advantage of this system is availability in English and link to relevant issuing institution, which may ensure additional information on the study programme.



Latvia

Latvian Qualifications Database (LQD) is an information platform where data from different sources (legal acts, other national platforms and separate HEIs) is collected and presented in a user-friendly way. The database was launched in 2016 by AIC as part of Erasmus+ project “Databases and registers for qualifications (EQF-NCPs)”; therefore, the LQD follows the structure and layout stipulated by the European Commission to promote visibility and comparability of national qualifications. LQD includes core information on the Latvian education system, as well as Latvian Qualifications Framework (LQF) and its core terminology. LQD outlines information on all level formal qualifications referenced to the LQF that are (or were) awarded by accredited education institutions in Latvia since 2016.

The LQD has a wide range of information on qualifications:

- Full title of the qualification,
- ECTS credits (if applicable),
- Duration,
- Qualification level,
- ISCED code,
- Form of studies,
- Type of qualification (professional/academic),
- Awarding body.
- EQF and LQF level,
- Learning outcomes,
- Study field,
- Qualification acquisition requirements (requirements for previous education, possible way of acquisition, possible duration),
- Issuing period (period of accreditation),
- Links to awarding bodies,
- Allocation and type of qualification within Sectoral Qualification Framework (for professional qualifications) and
- Link to related qualifications if the professional qualification is referenced to a Sectoral Qualification Framework.

The descriptions of qualifications are available in both Latvian and English.

National Education Information System is a state-maintained register of all registered, licenced, and accredited education institutions and programmes including HE sector. The law stipulates that responsible body must enter information in this system when education programme is registered, licenced and accredited. The system is partly publicly available and is available only in national language (Latvian). The system for all users provides rudimentary information on education institution and education programmes. The following elements on education programmes are available for public:

- Code of the study programme in accordance with the Latvian Education Classification,
- Group (also title) of education programme,
- Date of licencing and its number,
- End date of accreditation.

The succeeding publicly available information on education institutions is posted on the system:

- Title,
- Type,



- Date of registration,
- Legal status,
- Contact information (phone, email, website),
- Registration number,
- Head of the institution,
- Status (active or inactive),
- Status of accreditation.

This system is valuable for credential evaluators as it also has information on historic education programmes, but this system does not provide information on individual study courses.

E-platform is maintained by the Academic Information Centre – Quality Agency for Higher Education, i.e. institution responsible for organising licencing and accreditation of HE and its study programmes. This platform has both publicly available and restricted access information, and provides information on all the state accredited higher education institutions and programmes. The platform contains information on study programmes both in Latvian and English, but the database does not have information on separate study courses. Information on study programmes includes the following fields:

Title of study programme,

- Study field,
- Code of the study programme in accordance with the Latvian Education Classification,
- EQF level,
- Study programme type and its short name,
- Thematic group,
- ISCED code and title,
- Latvian credit points,
- Degree to be acquired,
- Qualification to be obtained,
- Study type and form,
- Study length,
- Language,
- Licence information (number, licencing and expiration date),
- Accreditation information (number of accreditation statement, accreditation and expiration date, duration in years),
- Learning outcomes,
- History of study programme.

The succeeding information elements are provided about HEI:

- Title of HEI,
- Registration number,
- Type of HEI,
- Legal status,
- Head of the HEI,
- Contact information (address, phone, email, homepage, fax),
- Registration and accreditation information (date of establishment, date of registration and date of accreditation),



As a drawback of this platform could be mentioned that there is no information on ECTS or how the Latvian credit points transfer to ECTS, and also no information on individual study courses is available.

Poland

Integrated Qualification Register (IQR) is a public register that collects information about all the qualifications included in the Integrated Qualifications System (IQS) independently of other registers and catalogues available in Poland. IQR was developed to support IQS and is one of the main components of the system. The system provides information on the specific requirements that should be met in order to obtain a qualification, and which institutions have the authority to award these qualifications. The register includes the following types of qualifications:

1. Full qualifications (awarded exclusively in the general and higher education systems),
2. Partial qualifications (awarded in vocational education),
3. Regulated qualifications, market qualifications and market qualifications in crafts.

The IQR also serves as a liaison for institutions that cooperate within the framework of the IQS. The information on HE study programmes included in the database is limited, but basic data is covered:

- ECTS credits,
- Duration,
- Qualification level,
- ISCED code,
- Form of studies,
- Language of instruction,
- Type of qualification (professional/academic),
- Awarding body.

The database has an English version, but the translation is incomplete. i.e. it covers grid information and defined categories, while some sections remain available only in Polish.

RAD-on database also offers access to data on HEIs. RAD-on is a system created for the Polish Ministry of Education and Science to store, process and share data and information on higher education and science in Poland. The data on study programmes offered by each HEI that is presented in RAD-on come from another system: POL-on (available only in Polish). RAD-on is partly available for public use and specific data on HEIs, including their study programmes, branches, scientific activities, and certain financial data. The database is complex to navigate, but it contains a list of fields of study programmes offered by each HEI, i.e. information on study programmes includes:

- Title of study programme,
- Level,
- Profile,
- Disciplines covered,
- Date of establishment,
- Form,
- Professional title awarded on completion,
- The language of instruction,
- Launch date,
- Number of semesters,
- ECTS points,
- Status and specific additional features (dual studies, bridging studies, programmes conducted in cooperation with a professional organisation).



Although the system was primarily designed for the use of national authorities, this database provides wide information on HE study programmes. The way the information is presented is not very user-friendly and easy to access. Especially for users who do not work with the database regularly or have little knowledge on the Polish higher education system, its categories and terminology.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, no national level information sources on HE study programmes were identified by the project partners.

Estonia

In Estonia, each HEI, following the law, provides information about their qualifications on the State maintained education information system – **Estonian Education Information System** (EHIS; *Eesti Hariduse Infosüsteem*, available only in Estonian). In addition, almost all HEIs, according to Consortium Agreements between HEIs, publish publicly available information both in Estonian and English on the Study Information System (ÕIS or TAHVEL) using identical information layout.

The EHIS contains the data on the following elements of HE study programmes:

- Title of the study programme and courses,
- Short description,
- (Expected) learning outcomes,
- Full title of awarded qualification,
- Courses/modules of study programme,
- Workload in ECTS,
- Assessment methods and criteria.

The information on study modules in the EHIS includes the succeeding fields:

- Name of module;
- Aim of module;
- Learning outcomes;
- List of courses with titles;
- Course codes;
- Workload in ECTS credits.

The Study Information System (ÕIS and TAHVEL) is database created based on agreement between HEIs and maintained by Technology Management Department of Estonian Ministry of Education and Research. Information on study programmes includes the following fields:

- Title of programme in Estonian,
- Title of programme in English,
- Code of programme,
- Faculty/college operating the programme,
- Language of instruction,
- Level (cycle) of study,
- Workload in ECTS credits,
- Nominal duration,
- Study programme group,
- Title of degree awarded,
- Study programme aims and objectives,
- Learning outcomes,



- Graduation requirements,
- Content (courses/modules) of the programme, including all information about the courses listed above in this chapter.

Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, several national higher education registers have been developed, as most of them were launched for a particular reason, the structure of data varies by each source. Only the Register of Higher Education Institutions provides information both in Bulgarian and English.

The most comprehensive system is **National Register of Qualifications (NQR)**, but currently this database is not fully publicly accessible. The Bulgarian project partner noted that this system “incorporated data from different national sources from national competent authorities, including the Ministry of Education and Science, the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency, the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training, etc. The purpose, nature, coverage and structure of the cited resources appeared to be so differentiating that the raw data among them proved to be hard to be integrated for the purposes of the National Register of Qualifications. As a result, their incorporation in NRQ unfortunately had substantial internal data granularity, which prevented the database to be launched for public access and remained available with restricted access only.” Detailed list of included information for this information source is not available as it is not publicly accessible.

Two information sources, one maintained by the Bulgarian NARIC centre – NACID, and the other maintained by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science, provide public information on HEIs and study programmes:

- **The Register of Higher Education Institutions** – provides general information on registered and accredited HEIs, as well as on accredited study fields and individually approved HE programmes with links to individual HEIs course catalogues.
- **Bulgarian University Ranking System** – includes information about the programmes that are offered in each HEI, described comparatively via a number of indicators.

As described by the project partners in the country reports, in most cases information in other platforms is available only in the national language, although built-in automatic translation functions or use free of charge translation of full documents tools may be available on the platforms, these functions do not work on all websites and cannot be applied to scanned documents. Therefore, some steps still need to be taken in order to promote visibility and transparency of information on HE qualifications awarded in the project partner countries.

4. Results of HEIs survey

To explore the situation in the project partner countries regarding the implementation and use of course catalogues by HEIs, a survey (see Annex 3) of HEI representatives was conducted by all the project partners in their countries. The Guide suggests that course catalogues should provide reliable and up-to-date information on HE programmes and “single educational components”. The course catalogue should include accurate description of HE programmes outlining such details as “structure, components, learning outcomes, workload, learning/teaching approaches, assessment methods, assessment criteria, and progression rules”. According to the description of course catalogues provided by the Guide (see Annex 1), a questionnaire was designed especially for the purposes of this project by Academic Information Centre (AIC) and discussed and approved by the project working group. The final version of the questionnaire was agreed upon by the partners at the beginning of April 2021. The questionnaire consisted of 10 questions addressing:

1. Availability of publicly accessible online course catalogues,
2. Language of course catalogues,
3. Information provided in course catalogues,
4. Use of ECTS.



Thereafter, the project partners (in Latvia by AIC and Council of Rectors of Latvia) disseminated the online questionnaire to respondents at national level (in spring and summer 2021) either in English or in national language. Following the agreement of the project working group, each partner could decide on the language of questionnaire (English or national language) and time frame for collecting data, taking into account that country reports have to be submitted by 19th July 2021. The number of HEIs to include in the survey also was left for the decision of the project partners for the best way to reflect the situation in their country (see Table 5 below). However, the project working group agreed that a minimum five completed questionnaires should be collected. The project partners collected and analysed data of survey, and included the results and conclusions in their country reports.

This section of the report outlines the results of national surveys presented in the country reports. Although the number of respondents is not great, some tendencies could be observed and conclusions could be drawn on international transparency and comparability of HE qualifications. In total, 258 questionnaires (see Table 5) were completed providing quantitative data on HE sector regarding course catalogues. In terms of the OCTRA, the guidelines for structuring course catalogues and improving NQDs were developed considering the results of the survey in HEIs.

Table 5. Number of respondents per country

Country	Number of disseminated questionnaires	Number of completed questionnaires
Bosnia and Herzegovina	47	16
Bulgaria	5	5
Croatia	100	47
Estonia	13	9
Latvia	53	38
Poland	397	131
Russia ²⁵	60	12 ²⁶
Total	675	257

The results of survey indicate that 73% of surveyed HEIs have a course catalogue, i.e. 191 HEIs have a course catalogue, 38 HEIs replied that course catalogue was under development, and 28 HEIs do not have a course catalogue. The next question clarified whether the course catalogues were available online, and 79% of respondents noted that their course catalogues are already online and 18% of HEIs have online course catalogues under development (see Figure 1), most (148 of 244 or 60%; question 5) of the course catalogues are also publicly available (can be used without additional registration). Despite this positive tendency, small number of respondents (as shown in Figure 1 below) have not developed and are not in process of developing a course catalogue. The project partners in Bosnia and Herzegovina speculated that perhaps “some institutions realised the lack of concrete action in this area and did not want to participate in the survey in order not to jeopardize their reputation as higher education providers but even a reception of this survey would help them understanding what they can do in the next period to improve their course catalogues and make them visible to domestic and foreign students and other stakeholders.” That could be the reason why project partners in Bosnia and Herzegovina already see the benefits of the project so far as survey of HEIs, both for these HEIs that did and did not replay, has created ground for understanding that online course catalogue could be a very important tool for internationalization but also for their quality assurance system.

25 Information present in this report regarding Russia is from the Russian Country Report submitted to the project coordinator in December 2021.

26 The Russian project partner reported that 53 completed questionnaires were received, but data was provided on 12.



Figure 1. Availability of (online) course catalogues (%)

Existence of course catalogues in HEIs

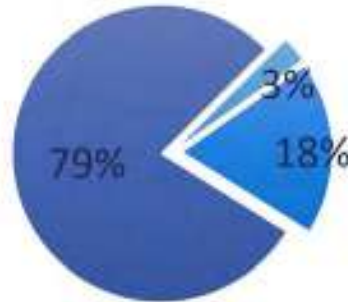
(total responses 258; question 2)



■ Yes ■ No ■ In development

Availability of online course catalogues

(total responses 220; question 4)



■ Yes ■ No ■ In development

According to the results of survey, most HEIs (180 respondents of 191 that have course catalogue or 94%) have course catalogues only in national language, while in Bosnia and Herzegovina – in three languages officially used in the country (see Figure 2). Survey data shows that approximately half of respondents' (101 of 213 responses or 47%) HEI course catalogues are partly available in other languages. In the following question (survey question 6), the respondents, who have course catalogues in foreign language, were asked to identify what information is provided in foreign language. The respondents remarked that succeeding elements are published in a foreign language:

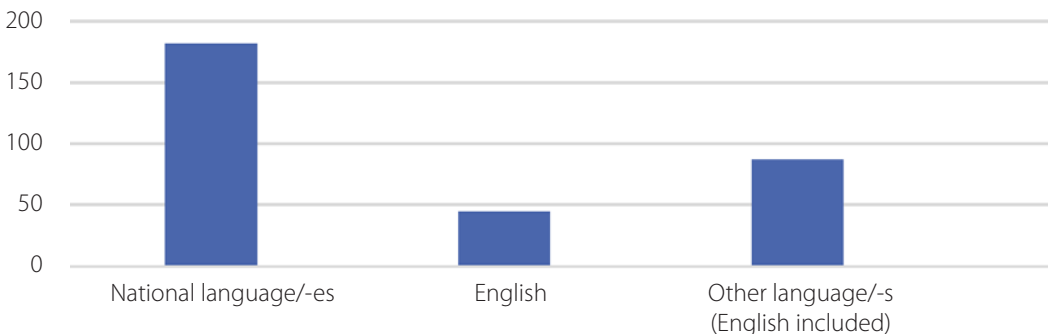
General information on HEI (on HEIs website);

- Study courses and programmes available for exchange students or study programmes/courses offered in a foreign language;
- Basic information on study programmes/courses, i.e. title, ECTS or workload expressed in hours/national credits, short description, learning outcomes, information on examination.

Figure 2. Language of course catalogues

Language of course catalogues

(total responses 314; question 3)



The content of course catalogues varies by HEI, there is no specific correlation between collected data to suggest that specific aspect of course description is more important in one country and is not considered as important in another. The results of survey show that most likely HEIs provide



information in a way to best present the study programmes for potential students and not in a way that would foster recognition of qualifications. In surveyed HEIs, the course catalogues usually provide information on the following items (question 8):

- Title of study course (213 of 219 or 97%),
- ECTS credits or other credit points (208 of 219 or 94%),
- Short description of study course (184 of 219 or 84%),
- Field of study (176 of 219 or 80%),
- Learning outcomes (169 of 219 or 77%).

The course catalogues include other elements, which were noted by less than 100 respondents: specific admission requirements (if applicable); mode of study (full-time/part-time/e-learning etc.); examination regulations; grading scale; obligatory or optional mobility windows; work-based learning; access to further studies after attainment of particular qualification; and information of course interconnectivity (shown as part of specific study programmes). As results of survey point out, quite often grading scale and examination regulation is provided in the course catalogues, but not all HEIs publish information on admission requirements.

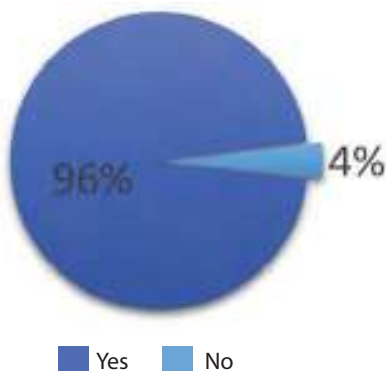
Although the Guide does not propose including information on external quality assurance in course catalogue, the project working group considered this to be important issue in credential evaluation; therefore, the next question (question 7) of survey focused on external quality assurance. As the results of the survey show, around half of HEIs (109 of 210 or 51%) does not include information on external quality assurance in their course catalogues, one respondent noted that the information is included only partly. Data provided by the survey shows that information on external quality assurance is not present in all course catalogues explored in the in-depth study (see Table 7.). Although the procedures of HE quality assurance may be well understood within the country, the system may not be as clear to foreign students or credential evaluators; thus, publishing information on quality assurance in course catalogue would be beneficial in order to comprehend the status of acquired qualifications.

The following questions of survey clarified the use of ECTS in the HEIs. The results of survey reveal that 96% of surveyed HEIs not only measure workload in ECTS credits, but also 93% of respondents use them as a credit system for the transfer of credits for students' learning outcomes achieved in another HEI (see Figure 3). However, approximately half (111 of 221 respondents use ECTS as a credit system for the transfer of credits within country) HEIs do not provide information about ECTS on their website (question 10). Expressing workload in ECTS is useful for fostering international comparability and transparency of issued credentials.

Figure 3. Reflection of ECTS in the course catalogues (%)

Study programmes workload measured in ECTS

(total responses 220; question 9)



ECTS used as a credit system for the transfer of credits within country

(total responses 221; question 10)





To summarise the results of survey, in the project partner countries most HEIs have already developed online course catalogues that are publicly available, not only for academic personnel or registered users. The content of course catalogues varies by HEIs, all course catalogues explored in the survey cover most basic information on HE study programmes. Yet rarely course catalogues include all the aspects mentioned in The Guide. The use of ECTS credits to measure workload may be considered as a step towards international comparability and transparency of issued qualifications. As one of the drawbacks in terms of course catalogue content may be mentioned the lack of information on external HE quality assurance. Data on external quality assurance of qualifications has a significant role in credential evaluation; therefore, this information should be part of all the course catalogues not only for recognition purposes, but also for fostering trust in issued qualifications.

Regarding the results of HEIs survey, a conclusion may be drawn that not only reaching a common understanding of the concept of course catalogue is necessary, but also the content of online course catalogue should be discussed. For comparing qualifications, the course catalogues should be structured similarly to cover the main elements considered during recognition (see Chapter II); thus, fostering structured and transparent learning outcomes of HE qualifications.

5. Results of the in-depth case studies

To gain more thorough data of overall situation regarding course catalogues in-depth case studies of at least three course catalogues in each project partner country was carried out. A fiche was drafted by the Latvian project partner AIC and discussed and approved by the project working group (see Annex 4). The fiche was drafted following the content of HEI questionnaire, as well as to address user friendliness, accessibility of information, and layout. The fiche was completed and analysed by each project partner (in Latvia by AIC). The results of analysis were presented in the country reports and are compared between the countries in this section of the report.

The course catalogues for case studies were chosen individually by the project partners based on results of national surveys of HEIs and according to the following criteria agreed by all the partners:

- minimum of three case studies,
- one regional HEI,
- one private HEI
- one national HEI.

In total, 28 course catalogues²⁷ were analysed in the project countries:

- three in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Poland,
- four in Estonia and Latvia,
- 11 course catalogues from five HEIs in Bulgaria.

The fiche focused on several aspects of existing course catalogues – how easy the course catalogue may be found; the language of course catalogue; and the content. All the project partners commented that information reflected in the fiche may be provided in other online sources, but it is not necessarily ensured in course catalogue, e.g. descriptions of study courses may be published in other sections of the HEI's website. In Estonia, HEIs even use a platform outside their websites.

As shown in table below, most course catalogues (and HEIs websites) have wide information on study opportunities and study content. Furthermore, the information is provided in English. Link to the course catalogue can be easily found either on HEI's or faculty's website. The course catalogues also include general information on institution and study procedures.

²⁷ In addition, three course catalogues in Russia were analysed, since more specific data was not provided by the project partner, the data on Russia was not included in further analysis.



Table 6. General description of course catalogue and HEI (frequencies)

General information on course catalogue ²⁸								
	Overall availability of information			Link to course catalogue can be found			Languages	
	With links, additional info.	With additional info.	Title, short description	Main page	Faculty/study field page	Hard to find	National lng(s)	EN
Freq. of fiches	23	4	1	14	14	1	28	25

Information on institution ²⁹		
Content	Frequencies	
	Yes	No
Name and address	28	0
List of programmes offered	28	0
Admission requirements, including language requirements, and registration procedures	27	1
Arrangement of recognition of prior learning (formal, informal, and non-formal), and credit transfer	20	8

The data collected by the fiche on information on study programmes and courses confirms the findings of the survey of HEIs. Range of the information included in the course catalogues varies by HEI (see table 7).

Most commonly course catalogues (in total, analysed 28) reflect the following data fields:

- Workload (for programmes – 27 course catalogues; for courses – 27 course catalogues);
- Field of study (for programmes – 26; for courses – 24);
- Graduation requirements (for programmes – 26; for courses – 26);
- Learning outcomes (for programmes – 26; for courses – 26);
- Course title (for programmes – only 24; for courses – 28);
- Aim of the course (for courses – 26).

Although most course catalogues explored in this study provide information on awarded qualifications, interestingly some exceptions were observed. Providing full title of awarded qualification is important for finding the necessary information in credential evaluation.

28 Total count of represented fiches – 28, which does not include data from Russia.

29 Total count of represented fiches – 28, which does not include data from Russia.

**Table 7. Information on study programmes and study courses in HEI's course catalogue and website (frequencies)**

Information on study programmes / study fields³⁰		
Criteria	Frequencies	
	Yes	No
Information on study programmes or study fields		
Qualification awarded (and professional qualification if applicable)	24	2
Workload in ECTS or other credits	27	1
Level of qualification (NQF, EQF or/and Bologna cycle)	20	9
Field(s) of study (main field)	26	2
Type of study (academic or professional study program)	24	4
Quality assurance or accreditation	20	8
Admission requirements	24	4
Information on validation of prior learning	11	17
Graduation requirements	26	2
Learning outcomes	26	2
Matrix of learning outcomes	8	20
Programme structure diagram with credits (ECTS or other)	21	8
List of obligatory courses	24	2
Mode of study (full-time/part time/e-learning etc.)	23	5
Mode of teaching	18	10
Examination regulations and grading scale	17	11
Obligatory or optional mobility windows	10	18
Obligatory or optional course windows	17	11
Work placement(s)	18	10
Work-based learning	12	16
Programme coordinator (name, contact information)	6	21
Occupational profiles of graduates	21	7
Length of study programme (minimum time required to receive qualification)	27	1
Information on study courses		
Title of course	28	0
Study programme the course is included	22	6
Field(s) of study (area/branch)	24	4
Level of programme (Bologna cycle or EQF level)	22	6
Workload in ECTS or other credits	27	1
Language of instruction	25	4
Aim of the course	26	2
Course contents (description)	27	1
Learning outcomes	26	2

30 Total count of represented fiches – 28, which does not include data from Russia.



Requirements to pass the course (tests, essays, attendance etc.)	26	2
Assessment methods	23	6
Assessment criteria	20	9
Information on validation of prior learning	5	23
Course interconnectivity (information on other courses that further explore the same route of study/speciality)	20	8
Visibility of course interconnectivity (information on study programmes that can include the particular course)	8	20

The results of case studies indicate that analysed course catalogues contain information only on courses and/or study programmes (in all the project partner countries), less on other study related aspects. For example, HEIs internal regulation regarding study process, as well as validation of previous learning is not described in the course catalogues (in all the partner countries). Information on regulation of study process and, in some HEIs, even admission requirements are available in a different section of the website, which is not always interlinked and can be found only if the user has a specific knowledge of HE system. The links to internal documentations also can be found in different parts of HEIs websites.

Different aspects of information may be published in various places of HEIs' website:

- For those who plan to study in HEI (and applicants), where general information on study programmes and admission requirements are presented:
- For those who already study providing more in-depth information on courses and further guidance possibilities.

This approach to information representation creates information fragmentation and complicates finding necessary data on particular study programme or course.

Information in foreign language is usually provided for study courses available in the respective foreign language and for study programmes available for mobility students. The reasons behind the selection of information for translation may be varied, e.g. the target audience and its needs, as well as a simple fact that if the catalogue is available in other language (not only in language course or study programme is available), the information may be misleading to potential and current students as they could assume that particular programme is provided in a foreign language; thus, creating more work for staff and potential disappointment to candidates.

All but the Estonian project partners noted the need to agree on unified template or layout of information, as practices are different and finding necessary information for credential evaluation is time consuming within different labyrinths of information. The Estonian HEIs can be considered as examples of good practice in developing course catalogues. There are advantages of this practice as information is presented using same terminology and template. Yet the drawback of this practice is that link to external platform (previously described Study Information System, ÕIS or TAHVEL), as noted by the project partner, is provided by only stating the acronym of the platforms, thus, potentially hindering access to these portals to users who do not know the meaning of these abbreviations.

In conclusion, entire information on the HE qualifications proposed to be published in course catalogue by the Guide may be found on HEIs websites, but the descriptions are not available in one section or sub-section. Publicly available HEIs course catalogues are primarily designed to attract new students. Information in English (or other foreign language) is available for the use of mobility/foreign students. Although this information has a specific target audience, the descriptions of study programmes still can be used by credential evaluators if clear information on full title of qualification and all other elements necessary to obtain the qualification is provided.



Chapter II. Information on qualifications valued by credential evaluators

To foster meaningful dialogue between credential evaluators and HEIs about the online course catalogues, initially various aspects considered by credential evaluators in recognition of foreign qualifications should be explored. In order to clarify recognition practices in the project countries regarding the information about qualifications necessary for recognition, the project partners (ENIC and NARIC centres) carried out non-structured interviews with their colleagues. The interviews were conducted after survey of HEIs and case studies from October to November 2021. The results of interviews were collected by the project partners and sent to the AIC for further analysis and comparison. The main results of the interviews are outlined in this chapter.

These aspects of information on qualification are used in credential evaluation after the particular qualification has been identified by using its full title. In total, fourteen elements of information were highlighted during the interviews with the representatives of ENICs and NARICs, which are important for the recognition of qualifications. Fourteen elements are listed by the frequency they were mentioned in the interviews:

1. **Level of the study programme and the study course** can either be identified by Bologna cycle or by using NQF level (mentioned by all seven countries). As the Bulgarian experts noted, when only NQF level is provided, a link to information on how NQF level relates to EQF should be included.
2. **Formal rights** persons are granted by successfully completing the study programme or course, i.e. access to further studies (level of studies) or labour market (mentioned by all seven countries). The Estonian experts seek information on application of the qualification in labour market. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, experts also analyse how these rights apply in their country.
3. **Workload** expressed in a measurable way (national credits, hours or other way that can be measured) and how the credits correspond to ECTS credits (mentioned by all seven countries).
4. **Information on external quality assurance** – quality assurance/accreditation of higher education institution, study programmes or programme groups according to the national system and regulations. Including information on the status of both awarding institution and study programme (mentioned by six countries – Bosnia and Herzegovina; Bulgaria; Croatia; Estonia; Latvia; Russia).
5. **The status of awarding institution** – legal status, type of institution, whether the institution is a recognised institution in the home country (mentioned by six countries – Bosnia and Herzegovina; Bulgaria; Croatia; Estonia; Russia, Poland). The Polish experts proposed that a link to website of all recognised HEIs in country should be added, too.
6. **The composition of the study programme** – data on obligatory and elective study courses, amount of credits for each course not only study programme, practical training, theoretical training, exams and other elements that are essential to identify particular programme (mentioned by three countries – Poland, Bulgaria, Latvia).
7. **Access and admission requirements** – minimum level of qualification or professional activities that are required for accessing and enrolling study programme (mentioned by three project partner countries – Poland, Russia and Croatia). The Russian experts emphasised that, in some cases, credential evaluators have to understand whether and how the particular qualification from previous education level is considered for access or admission in the home country.
8. **Grading system** in the home country or institution (mentioned by three project partner countries – Poland, Estonia, Bulgaria).
9. **Graduation requirements** (mentioned by three project partner countries – Poland, Estonia, Bulgaria). In Estonia, particular attention is paid to the qualification attained in countries, which provide opportunity to have a degree with failed grades.



- 10. Certificates issued to graduates** – full title of the awarded qualifications (especially important for joint and other forms of collaborative study programmes) and whether a professional qualification is also awarded (mentioned by two project partner countries – Poland, Bulgaria). The Polish experts pay attention to the full title of the awarded qualification both in national and in English language. Type (joint degrees, international study programmes) and title of awarded certificate are important as various qualifications may entitle different rights for their owners, as well as each HEI may issue separate certificates with different titles.
- 11. Nominal length of the full-time programme** (mentioned by two project partner countries – Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina).
- 12. Speciality or field of study** – information needed both about study courses (general or specialised courses, ISCED-2011 code) and study programme (mentioned by two project partner countries – Latvia, Russia).
- 13. Form of studies** – full-time or part-time etc. studies (mentioned by two project partner countries – Bulgaria, Russia).
- 14. Detailed information on awarding institution** – description of HEI (titles of HEI, structure, merges with other institutions) and information on changes the institution has gone through (mentioned by one project partner country – Poland).

The information on qualifications that is crucial for credential evaluators and was outlined in the previous paragraphs HEIs most often provide in the online course catalogues on their websites. HEIs publish rather varied information that is essential in the work of credential evaluators, such as nominal length of study programmes, ECTS or national credits, composition of the course. As results of HEIs survey showed, HEIs do not consider the necessity to publish information on external quality assurance. The project partners suggested that perhaps this information is not shared because external quality assurance is mandatory in particular countries and HEIs are not allowed to issue state recognised qualifications if they are not accredited. However, not all credential evaluators or all applicants have in-depth knowledge on each country's education system and regulations regarding issuing state recognised education credentials. Thus, transparency and comparability of qualifications is hindered creating obstacles for cross-border mobility.

The results of interviews indicate that another aspect not covered by course catalogues (according to the case studies) should be regarded – information on the HEI. Rarely course catalogues do not provide HEI's contact information, but almost none has information on institution's history, e.g., changes in institutions title or status, reorganisation activities etc. The historical information on HEIs has been identified as one of the aspects that credential evaluators require when exploring a qualification. Perhaps the place of historical information does not have logical place in course catalogues, it is also not listed as information to be provided in course catalogue in the Guide. However, the historical information not only on institution, but also on its study programmes fosters trust and transparency of issued credentials.

In addition, all the project partner countries have signed and ratified Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region³¹ (Lisbon Recognition Convention). This convention sets basic principles and procedures to be used in HE qualification recognition. The methodology of recognition may be individually created by each country, but there are several documents and recommendations to use as a reference: Council of Europe and UNESCO Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications (Recommendation, 2010)³² adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee and

31 Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region. Chart of signatures and ratifications of Treaty 165 (11.04/1997) – Special conditions of opening for signature // <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=signatures-by-treaty&treatynum=165>

32 Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications. Adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee at its fifth meeting, Sèvres. Strasbourg/Paris: 23.06.2010 // [https://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/FINAL_REVISIED_Recomm_for_Rec_Foreign_Qualif_29%2006%2010_\(PUBLISHED\)\(1\).pdf](https://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/FINAL_REVISIED_Recomm_for_Rec_Foreign_Qualif_29%2006%2010_(PUBLISHED)(1).pdf)



European Area for Recognition Manual (EAR Manual, 2012)³³. Using these documents, a list of twelve recommended criteria for assessment and recognition was drafted³⁴:

1. Type and competence of the awarding institution,
2. Recognition of the awarding institution in home country,
3. Accreditation or any other quality assurance of the awarding institution,
4. General access requirement to the programme (previous education),
5. Accreditation or any other quality assurance of the programme,
6. Nominal duration and/or workload of the programme,
7. Graduation requirements,
8. Level of the programme in the national education system (qualifications framework)
9. Function of the qualification (formal rights the qualification gives to the holder for further studies),
10. Learning outcomes,
11. Workload,
12. Profile (encompasses the orientation of the programme and qualification).

Information valued by the project partner ENIC and NARIC experts partly overlaps with the list of criteria in above mentioned Recommendation (2010) and EAR Manual (2012); thus, assumption may be made that elements that overlap may be strongly recommended to be included in course catalogues, the rest of them can be listed as optional.

There are five elements, which do not overlap in both lists, and may be considered as optional:

1. Learning outcomes – only aspect not mentioned by any of the project partner country ENIC and NARIC experts, listed in Recommendation (2010) and EAR Manual (2012).
2. Grading system – mentioned by three project partner countries – Poland, Estonia, Bulgaria, not listed in Recommendation (2010) and EAR Manual (2012).
3. Education documents issued to graduates – mentioned by two project partner countries – Poland, Bulgaria; not listed in Recommendation (2010) and EAR Manual (2012).
4. Form of studies – mentioned by two project partner countries – Bulgaria, Russia; not named in Recommendation (2010) and EAR Manual (2012).
5. Detailed information on awarding institution – mentioned by one project partner country – Poland; not listed in Recommendation (2010) and EAR Manual (2012).

Hence, when designing or improving their course catalogues, HEIs may use the lists mentioned in this chapter to promote the comparability and transparency of the qualifications they provide. Of course, the lists are not absolute and may be adapted to the needs and national context as far as the information is clearly structured.

33 Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee and European Area for Recognition Manual (2012) // <http://ear.enic-naric.net/emanual>

34 Adapted from: Ramiņa, B., Kinta, G., Prikule, Dz., Vaht, G., Valeikienė, A., Sutkutė, Kr., Žilinskaitė, R. (2015). Automatic Recognition 8 between Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Riga: Academic Information Centre, Archimedes Foundation, Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education // <https://aic.lv/en/par-aic/projects/aurbell-automatic-recognition>



Conclusions

This section of the report outlines conclusions based on the comparison of the country reports and the results of the interviews with credential evaluators. The section includes national recommendations for improvement of course catalogues proposed by the project partners, as well.

The online survey conducted by the project partners covered 258 HEIs in seven countries, which is not a significant number of HEIs to represent general situation on presence of course catalogues in European Higher Education Area, yet the results provide insight in tendencies in East and South-East Europe. In addition, 27 course catalogues were analysed further as part of in-depth case studies using the fiche agreed upon by all the project partners. To outline practical opinion of credential evaluators, non-structured interviews with ENIC and NARIC experts were carried out and fourteen essential elements of information identified that are used in credential evaluation.

The results of survey suggest that HEIs already see advantages of having course catalogues as these tools have already been developed. Identifying the existing and potential benefits are outside the scope of this project. Although the survey of HEIs was not focused on to understanding rationale of HEIs for designing course catalogues, the results of survey indicate several purposes of course catalogues:

1. Course catalogues may be used to keep track of study courses by making a digital catalogue;
2. Course catalogue may be as an advertisement tool for attracting new students;
3. Course catalogues serve as information exchange platform for present students and/or academic personnel.

Regardless of application of existing course catalogues at each HEI, the project partners highlighted that providing another perspective of how course catalogues can be used by credential evaluators is significant for fostering the transparency and comparability of qualifications across the borders. However, for HEIs understanding the purpose of their course catalogues may be valuable in order to make them more responsive to users' needs and requirements.

Survey of HEIs and case studies of course catalogues

The results presented in all the country reports show that legal framework in the partner countries, stipulating HEIs to elaborate publicly available course catalogues, is poorly developed. Lack of legal regulation may explain why the project partners did not find any national level recommendations or guidelines regarding the online course catalogues. However, the OCTRA project did not explore the reasons why such legislation is poorly developed. Important aspect in this context is keeping balance between national regulations and respecting autonomy of HEIs – although results of study suggest that HEIs need some guidance as regards elaboration of online course catalogues, this support should take into account autonomy of HEIs.

The OCTRA project analysed not only how existing course catalogues correspond to The Guide, but also the project focused on course catalogues from the perspective of credential evaluation. The Guide is a useful tool considering the perspective of (prospective) students, less the document represents standpoint of credential evaluators. According to the Guide: "The Course Catalogue includes detailed, user-friendly and up-to-date information on the institution's learning environment that should be available to students before entering and throughout their studies to enable them to make the right choices and use their time most efficiently."³⁵

Lack of national level guidelines or agreement on information layout has shown to create different approaches to information presentation and colourful design solutions for course catalogues that can and in some cases leads to inability to find necessary information in the course catalogue or HEI's website. Creativity is not negative aspect as a course catalogue must be useful for the purpose HEI

35 ECTS users' guide (2015) // <https://op.europa.eu/lv/publication-detail/-/publication/da7467e6-8450-11e5-b8b7-01aa75ed71a1>



has designed the tool for; however, perhaps a common information layout may serve to enhance this purpose in order to minimise possibility of misinterpretation by users, credential evaluators included. The information provided in existing online course catalogues varies by individual HEIs, although core information on study programme or course is provided in almost all case studies analysed in the project. According to the results of survey of HEIs and in-depth case studies, the following elements of information are published online by most HEIs:

- Title of the course,
- Short description of the course,
- ECTS (and other credits if they differ from ECTS),
- Learning outcomes,
- Field of study.

This core information is valued by credential evaluators, but the mentioned descriptions of qualifications do not cover all important aspects in recognition. The survey of HEIs showed that HEIs rarely publish information on external quality assurance and the legal status of the HEI. Almost no HEIs provide information on formal rights graduates are granted by successfully completing study programme or course. According to the project partner discussions, in the countries where state recognised credential can only be issued by institutions that are successfully externally evaluated, this information is not included in a course catalogue or HEIs website. Providing information on external evaluation fosters transparency of issued credentials and promotes trust in HEI among the prospective students. Similarly, the information on formal rights provides perspective of lifelong learning pathways available in the country, hence, promoting international mobility and access to education.

The differences in the content of course catalogues could be explained by the evidence found in country reports – rather poor understanding of concept of course catalogue among HEIs may be observed, since no common definition or explanation is available. The Polish project partner noted: “The concept of “course catalogue” is not a basic, popular concept in the Polish higher education system. Other documents (like “study plan”, “study programme” or “syllabus”) are traditionally used to present study programmes and individual courses.” In Latvia, both from the answers in the survey of HEIs and conducting in-depth case studies, conclusion could be drawn that representatives of HEIs may lack a unified understanding of course catalogues – whether a course catalogue only lists study programmes and their information, or study courses and their information. In some cases, a course catalogue contains only study courses with no or little information on study programmes. For example, admission requirements are listed for study programmes, not for separate study courses. The descriptions of study course that include admission requirements usually are available as separate units of learning or are in specific study programmes that require previous knowledge on the subject. The Russian country report mentions that course catalogues primary are used for listing online courses, and a sub-section “Education” of HEI websites is used to publish information on all the study opportunities and related information. According to the Croatian country report, a need to “introduce a unique name and template for the information contained in the course catalogue in accordance with the European practice” may be observed in the country. Also following the country report of Bosnia and Herzegovina, different understanding of a definition of the course catalogue may have caused hesitancy of some HEIs to participate in the survey. These findings allow concluding that national level discussions should be facilitated on course catalogues to explore their role in transparency and recognition of qualifications.

To promote the understanding of HEIs regarding course catalogues, OCTRA project working group proposes the following **definition of course catalogue**:

“Online course catalogue is a publicly available data system developed and maintained by higher education institution which includes organised, detailed and descriptive information on higher education institution and study components that form study programmes offered by the higher education institution.”



The Guide provides description of the content of course catalogue, emphasising that course catalogues should be used by prospective students and students. Such approach is limiting and to some extent does not fully draw on potential of ECTS. The ECTS is a tool designed not only for making studies and study courses transparent to (potential) students (addressed by description given in the Guide), but also to foster transparency and transferability of issued credentials (credential evaluation and recognition, not mentioned by the Guide). The Guide focuses on finding and using education opportunities, less on recognition of awarded qualifications and mobility and transparency of issued credentials. These concepts and views are not mutually exclusive; in fact, this project has proven that they are mutually complimentary.

The Guide provides insight into what elements should be included in course catalogues and points out that course catalogues “should be published on the institution’s website [...] so that all interested parties can easily access it”³⁶. Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area in “Standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance” under criteria “Learning resources and students support” subsection “Public Information” note that HEIs “should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible”³⁷. Data collected in this project from the project partner countries point out that most HEIs already have online course catalogues, but there is still a small number of HEIs in the partner countries that has not elaborated online course catalogues (see Chapter I).

Data collected in the project highlights that in the opinion of credential evaluators course catalogues should follow several general principles:

1. Public availability,
2. Availability online,
3. Availability in commonly used language.

This study identified a possibility that in some countries HEIs can agree to have unified approach on how information is shared. This practice is present in one of the project partner countries – Estonia, where most HEIs have agreed upon a common layout and a platform where information on study courses and programmes is shared by HEIs. This practice also has fostered the use of similar layout for describing qualifications by all HEIs in entire country. As a result, information on study programmes and courses is similar in all the course catalogues and can be easily found and understood.

The results of case studies presented in the country reports indicate that course catalogues contain information only on courses and/or study programmes (in all the project partner countries), less on other study related aspects. Information describing study process is fragmented as may be found in different parts of the HEI’s website and is rarely interlinked. And the translation of information quite often is published on study programmes and/or courses available in foreign language or for mobility students. Importantly, the results of in-depth case studies allow drawing conclusion that HEIs provide information proposed by the Guide somewhere on their websites. If this information is translated to commonly used foreign language and interlinked in course catalogue to make it easier to find, the data can be used by credential evaluators given that there is a clear information on full title of degree qualification and all elements necessary to obtain the qualification is provided.

Several aspects that can enhance course catalogues were found (see the list by country below) by OCTRA project partners, but these aspects do not necessary apply to all the countries. Nevertheless, in all the partner countries further dialogue between credential evaluators and HEIs is necessary to achieve a better understanding on the use of course catalogues for recognition.

Based on the information provided in country reports, four project partners (Croatia, Latvia, Poland, Russia) proposed national level recommendations for the development and/or improvement of the course catalogues in their countries.

36 ECTS users’ Guide (2015) // <https://op.europa.eu/lv/publication-detail/-/publication/da7467e6-8450-11e5-b8b7-01aa75ed71a1>

37 Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (2015) // https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf



Croatia

- The terminology and templates at the national level should be harmonised – introduce a unique name and template for the information included in course catalogues in accordance with the European recommendations as outlined in ECTS User's Guide (2009) "Checklist for the Course Catalogue"³⁸ and the Guide "Course Catalogue".
- Even wider availability of course catalogues in English, or in other foreign languages should be ensured.
- Future harmonisation of the form should be considered, i.e. how course catalogues are presented via websites of HEIs, so that it is easier for students and all interested parties to follow the relevant information published in the catalogues.

Latvia

- Wider development of online course catalogues would be fostered if clear information on what a course catalogue is and how course catalogue could promote transparency of issued qualifications had been introduced in HE environment.
- Recommendations or template providing clear outline on information to be published in the course catalogues should be designed and discussed among HEIs.
- Layout template could be introduced – case studies showed that HEIs provide information in different forms and even use slightly different terminology.

Poland

- A general recommendation at the state level – the existing national provisions on information requirements applicable to HEIs should be reviewed to ensure availability of information important for different groups of recipients.
- Such a review needs to be done in cooperation with HEIs and should take into account not only the content but also the form of presentation, including current limitations of BIP websites.
- Moreover, the review should focus rather on the organization and completeness of information than adding new information requirements without improving those already in force.
- Fragmentation of information on the same programme/field of study as well as duplication of the same information in different places of the website should be avoided. The links to relevant content should be provided instead.
- Course catalogue should be presented as a separate entity or tab in HEIs' websites, with entrance link easy to find for users both from the main website and in the menu.
- Information on study programmes should be always accessible to general public, not only to registered students and/or staff.
- Taking into account the limited resources and motivations shaping HEIs language policy, as well as modern possibilities of automatic translation, the scope of the key content should be considered to be provided in a popular foreign language.
- Considering the structures of information offered in national and foreign language(s) – the same structure and labels help in efficient navigation and content search even if certain part of information is only available in national language. Linking should be promoted between the same elements of content offered in Polish and English versions of the website.
- Ensuring availability of information on study programmes from earlier years should be considered (cost of storage, update vs. usefulness for different groups of recipients).

38 ECTS users' Guide (2009) // http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/ECTS_Guide/77/4/ects-guide_en_595774.pdf



Russia³⁹

The following recommendations were prepared for the education authorities in order to improve the online courses catalogues and recognition of qualifications:

- To develop a common standard for the structure (layout) of online courses and online courses catalogue, both for national use and for promotion at the international level. To do this, it is obligatory to study the experience of international platforms for describing online course catalogues and foster an option for transparency and fair recognition.
- To make additions to the regulatory framework regarding the description of the workload in ECTS and descriptions of courses in English.
- To train the HEIs' academic and methodological services in preparing and formulating recognition algorithm and a unified structure of the online course catalogues in open educational space, taking into account the recommendations developed during the project.
- To include in the guidelines for HEIs and NARICs the following subjects:
 - the unified standard of layout;
 - the comparative tables for the transfer of loans of various systems, Russian credits, assessment systems;
 - list of course catalogues by countries, online training on which is excluded in accordance with the national legislation.

All four countries recommend developing a common template, structure, or layout for course catalogues. Three of four project partners suggested that national level recommendations (in the absence of national legislation) should outline common understandings on the term of course catalogue, as well as the use of terminology regarding course catalogues. Two of the project partners expressed opinion that discussion with HEIs should be promoted about need to translate more of the course catalogues in other commonly used language(-s).

Although four of the project partners proposed making an agreement on a common template or layout, in practice a common template may be implemented only by HEIs that currently are developing or planning to design a course catalogue, while HEIs with already functional course catalogue may be reluctant to make additional investments. A common or similar information layout can be agreed upon as far as individual HEIs website architecture allows it. In the opinion of the project working group, a discussion on information that should be included in course catalogue should be arranged to improve existing course catalogues, as well as provide a guidance for HEIs that are elaborating publicly available course catalogues or to HEIs that plan to update or improve their course catalogues.

The use of language in course catalogues also is an issue that ought to be addressed. Both considering a unified terminology, as well as providing a translation into commonly used foreign language should be promoted. The application of various terminology within country leads to confusion and different interpretations. The aim of an international competitiveness of the EHEA started by Bologna Process⁴⁰ cannot be reached if a common language is not used. The recommendation to provide information in commonly used foreign language is also supported by the Guide: "The Course Catalogue should be published on the institution's website, indicating the course/subject titles in the national language (or regional language, if relevant) and in English, so that all interested parties can easily access it."⁴¹ The language use is further emphasised by Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2022⁴² where providing an

39 National level recommendations for improvement of the Russian HEIs' course catalogues were provided in the Russian Country Report submitted to the project coordinator in December 2021.

40 Bologna Process – Key documents // <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/bih-higher-education/bologna-process.html>

41 ECTS users' Guide (2015) // <https://op.europa.eu/lv/publication-detail/-/publication/da7467e6-8450-11e5-b8b7-01aa75ed71a1>

42 Erasmus+ Programme Guide (2022) // <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/erasmus-programme-guide-2022>



updated course catalogue for international students can be covered by an organisational support grant.

In general, the exercise of in-depth case studies of course catalogues may be very valuable because the analysis of particular examples revealed advantages and drawbacks of course catalogues that are already in use. The fiche elaborated during the project could be used by HEIs or other institutions wishing to conduct self-evaluation of their course catalogue or data sources.

Information valued by ENIC and NARIC experts

Several key elements were identified during the non-structured interviews with national ENIC/NARIC experts in each project partner country (see Chapter II) that would foster a better understanding and use of course catalogues in credential evaluation. The main conclusion drawn was the necessity to create an open and ongoing dialogue between HEIs and national ENIC/NARIC office, which would be valuable for both sides. By having a strong dialogue, common terminology may be established and understanding of concept of a course catalogue and its role in promoting transparency of the issued qualifications may be ensured.

The list of aspects of qualifications submitted for evaluation, which are considered by ENIC and NARIC centre experts was prepared in the OCTRA project. This list was compared to the list of elements compiled using various sources, i.e. results of previous projects managed by the project coordinator (AIC), based on Council of Europe and UNESCO Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications (2010)⁴³ and European Area for Recognition Manual (2012)⁴⁴. **Ten elements**, which overlapped in both lists, as well as **full title of the qualification**, are suggested to be included in all online course catalogues for them to foster mobility and transparency of qualifications for credential evaluation:

- 1. Level of the study programme and the study course** – can either be identified by Bologna cycle, by using EQF level.
- 2. Formal rights** persons are granted by successfully completing study programme, i.e. access to further studies (level of studies) or labour market.
- 3. Workload** – expressed in measurable way (national credits, hours or other way that can be measured) and how the credits correspond to ECTS.
- 4. Information on external quality assurance** – quality assurance/accreditation of HEI, study programmes or programme groups according to the national system and regulations, including information on the status of both awarding institution and study programme.
- 5. The status of awarding institution** – legal status, type of institution, whether the institution is a recognised institution in the home country.
- 6. The composition of the study programme** – data on compulsory and elective study courses, amount of credits for each course not only study programme, practical training, theoretical training, exams and other elements that are essential to identify particular programme.
- 7. Access and admission requirements** – minimum level of qualification or professional activities that are required for accessing and enrolling study programme/course.
- 8. Graduation requirements.**
- 9. Nominal length of the full-time programme.**
- 10. Speciality or field of study** – information needed both about study courses (general or specialised courses, ISCED-2011 code) and study programme.

43 Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications. Adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee at its fifth meeting, Sèvres. Strasbourg/Paris: 23.06.2010 // [https://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/FINAL_REVISSED_Recomm__for_Rec_Foreign_Qualif_29%2006%2010_\(PUBLISHED\)\(1\).pdf](https://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/FINAL_REVISSED_Recomm__for_Rec_Foreign_Qualif_29%2006%2010_(PUBLISHED)(1).pdf)

44 Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee and European Area for Recognition Manual (2012) // <http://ear.enic-naric.net/emanual/>



Five elements of information were proposed as optional for the inclusion in course catalogues:

1. Learning outcomes;
2. Grading system;
3. Certificates issued to graduates;
4. Form of studies;
5. Detailed information on awarding institution (historic information).

Both lists indicate that quite many aspects of qualification are not commonly described in existing online course catalogues explored in the OCTRA project, which hinders the use of course catalogues as reliable source of information in credential evaluation.

National qualifications databases and registers

Functional NQDs have been launched only in three project partner countries – Croatia, Latvia, and Poland. The country reports point out that the use and purpose of NQDs are different, as NQDs have different legal status. The status of databases is different, yet at core they collect and provide information on available formal education qualifications, but data on separate courses or modules is not collected. In all the project countries, alternative information sources on higher education programmes were identified. In rare cases information on separate study courses is included in these registers or databases.

The recommendations for the improvement of NQDs and alternative information sources provided by the project partners are listed below.

Bulgaria

The greatest reserves for a possible development of transparent and comparable course catalogues at national level, can be explored and found in a future redesign and further development of the National Register of Qualifications and making it publicly available, which requires overcoming and overpassing all its existing drawbacks, as a result of which the register is currently with restricted access. To improve the register, first effective and efficient solutions should be sought for its existing data granularity, then the primary data sources should be better integrated, and appropriate linking and interconnectivity with other registers and systems should be ensured both at national level and with the existing course catalogues of individual HEIs at institutional level.

Estonia

The Estonian Education Information System (EHIS) includes names of education documents, not the title of qualifications. Estonian project partner recommended to include titles of qualifications in the database.

Latvia

Although NQD only provides information on accredited qualifications, this information is not explicitly available anywhere on the website. Therefore, information on external quality assurance should be made clearly visible and understandable.

No common recommendations for further development of NQDs or other information sources were identified during the OCTRA project; thus, further actions as regards national level information sources are to be taken and explored on national level.



Guidelines on improvement of course catalogues for the use in credential evaluation

Based on the conclusions of the studies conducted in all the partner countries, the project working group prepared a set of guidelines about online course catalogues that would make them more valuable for credential evaluators. These guidelines are targeted for the use of HEIs and institutions maintaining national online information sources on Bologna cycle qualifications.

The information concerning course catalogues provided in the Guide is more focused on students and does not show how transparency and mobility of qualifications involve credential evaluation. Understanding the content of qualification is needed not only to select study programme for further learning, but also understanding the content of qualification is important, perhaps even more, after receiving a credential after graduation. Qualifications are valuable in education and labour market if they may be recognised. Thus, ensuring information on available and provided study programmes for the use of credential evaluators can benefit both HEIs and students, as issued credentials would be easier recognised and transferred.

Online course catalogues

In the context of the OCTRA project and credential evaluation, publishing information on the website should be understood as providing publicly accessible online information that can be used at any time by anyone (both students and credential evaluators). Therefore, OCTRA project working group proposes the following definition:

Online course catalogue is a publicly available data system developed and maintained by a higher education institution, which includes organised, detailed and descriptive information on the higher education institution and study components that form study programmes offered by the higher education institution.

Course catalogues may include information on various conceptual layers – institutional, study programme and course/module layer. The type and detail of provided information varies by the conceptual layers. These conceptual layers should be interlinked when possible.

Course catalogue for the purpose of credential evaluation should include at least these elements of information on study programmes to ensure transparency:

1. Full title of the awarded qualification.
2. Level of the study programme and the study course (Bologna cycle, NQF/EQF level).
3. Workload.
4. Nominal length of the full-time programme.
5. The composition of the study programme.
6. Profile – speciality or field of study.
7. General access requirement to the programme.
8. Graduation requirements.
9. Function of the qualification (formal rights the qualification gives to the holder for further studies and labour market).
10. The status of awarding institution and recognition of the awarding institution in home country.



11. Information on external quality assurance of institution and study programme and/or programme group.

Course catalogue for the purpose of credential evaluation should include at least these elements of information on study courses/modules to ensure transparency:

1. Title of the study course/module.
2. Level of the study course/module (Bologna cycle, NQF/EQF level).
3. Description of study course/module (including learning outcomes, recommended literature)
4. Workload.
5. Course/module design.
6. Profile – speciality or field of study.
7. Course prerequisites.
8. Evaluation and assessment.
9. Function of study course/module (formal rights the study course/module gives to the holder for further studies and labour market).

National guidelines or recommendations should be provided by a competent institution for HEIs on the development of course catalogues – layout, content and template. The project OCTRA working group proposes for countries adopting the OCTRA project guidelines to the national requirements and context, which would promote international comparability of qualifications.

Providing information is only the first step, there are several questions to be considered when developing a course catalogue:

- Can the information be found?
- Can the information in terms of terminology be understood nationally?
- Can the information in terms of terminology be understood internationally?

The OCTRA project working group recommends that course catalogues should:

- be easy to find on HEIs main website,
- be easy to navigate (interlinked),
- provide information in commonly used terminology,
- available in commonly used international language.

The HEIs or other institutions wishing to improve their course catalogues or information sources could take **several steps**:

1. Self-evaluation of the course catalogue – the information or aspects (layout, design, language) that are important for the staff of HEI or are required by law/recommendations should be considered publishing in the course catalogue. HEI may create a checklist including essential features of course catalogue and then conduct an in-depth study of the existing database. OCTRA project team proposes to refer to the fiche elaborated during the project (see Annex 4).
2. Users' survey – understanding the needs of users and the purpose of database is crucial to make the source "user-friendly"; HEIs may develop a short online questionnaire (posted on their course catalogue or website) to gather opinion of frequent users. HEIs may also use the questionnaire or topics included in the OCTRA report for this exercise (see Annex 5).
3. Analysis of gathered data.
4. Practical measures to improve the course catalogue.



Proposals regarding ECTS User's Guide

The OCTRA project working group suggests – the Guide should explicitly show that course catalogues are fully publicly available and online.

Online information sources/NQDs

NQDs are examples of good practices of comparing qualifications; therefore, countries, which have not developed such national data sources, are encouraged to consider possibility to develop new database or revise existing data sources.

Although there were no universal recommendations found for the improvement of NQDs in the project, list of information valued by credential evaluators was prepared. The information (listed above in the definition) also should be considered as the minimal data to be provided on qualifications for NQDs to be successfully used by credential evaluators.

There are other aspects which can enhance NQDs for the use of credential evaluators. NQD could become a platform that provides wide information on:

- education system in the country,
- external quality assurance practices in the country,
- correlation of NQF with EQF and Bologna cycles,
- transference system of national credits to ECTS,
- links and description of reliable national information sources on HE;
- glossary of frequently used terms on a national level.

The NQDs and other sources in a country should apply principle of consistency as regards terminology in English (as a foreign language) for both the titles of fields (grid of information) and their content.



Annexes

Annex 1. The Guide and the elements of course catalogue

The Guide recommends the following elements of general information about HEI to be included in the course catalogue:

- name and address,
- description of the institution (including type and status),
- academic authorities,
- academic calendar,
- list of programmes offered,
- admission requirements, including language policy, and registration procedures,
- arrangements for the recognition of credit mobility and prior learning (formal, informal and non-formal),
- ECTS credit allocation policy (institutional credit framework),
- arrangements for academic guidance.

The Guide also lists the elements regarding resources and services provided by HEI:

- student affairs office,
- accommodation/housing,
- meals,
- cost of living,
- financial support for students,
- medical facilities,
- insurance,
- facilities for students with disabilities and special needs,
- learning facilities,
- international mobility possibilities,
- practical information for incoming mobile students,
- language courses,
- work placement possibilities,
- sports and leisure facilities,
- student associations.

Regarding the level of programmes, the Guide suggests the following elements of information:

- qualification awarded,
- length of programme,
- number of credits,
- level of qualification according to the NQF and the EQF,
- field(s) of study (e.g. ISCED-F)
- specific admission requirements (if applicable),
- specific arrangements for recognition of prior learning (formal, non-formal and informal) (if applicable),



- qualification requirements and regulations, including graduation requirements (if applicable),
- profile of the programme,
- programme learning outcomes,
- programme structure diagram with credits (60 ECTS per full-time equivalent academic year),
- mode of study (full-time/part-time/e-learning etc.),
- examination regulations and grading scale,
- obligatory or optional mobility windows (if applicable),
- work placement(s) (if applicable),
- work-based learning,
- programme director or equivalent,
- occupational profiles of graduates,
- access to further studies,
- information on the form of the diploma and Diploma Supplement (joint/double/ multiple) – for joint programmes,
- members of consortium and their role – for joint programmes,
- mobility structure of the programme – for joint programmes.

The level of “individual educational components”, e.g. courses, modules, should include the succeeding elements of information:

- code,
- title (in national language and English),
- type (compulsory/optional),
- Bologna cycle (short/first/second/third),
- year of study when the component is delivered (if applicable),
- semester/trimester when the component is delivered,
- number of ECTS credits allocated,
- name of lecturer(s),
- learning outcomes,
- mode of delivery (face-to-face/ distance learning etc.),
- prerequisites and co-requisites (if applicable),
- course content,
- recommended or required reading and other learning resources/tools,
- planned learning activities and teaching methods,
- assessment methods and criteria,
- language of instruction.



Annex 2. Template of country report

Table of content

List of acronyms and abbreviations

Terminology (if applies)

Summary

Country report methodology

Chapter 1 – Overall situation in country

Existing recommendations of regulatory framework regarding course catalogues

Analysis of data from survey of HEIs

Chapter 2 – In depth case studies

2.1. Case study A

2.1.1. Content and layout of course catalogues (reflection of learning outcomes, reflection of ECTS, and compliance with ECTS Users' guide (2015))

2.1.2. Availability of course catalogues according to study periods (consistency, language, user-friendliness)

2.2. Case study B

2.2.1. Content and layout of course catalogues (reflection of learning outcomes, reflection of ECTS, and compliance with ECTS Users' guide (2015))

2.2.2. Availability of course catalogues according to study periods (consistency, language, user-friendliness)

2.3. Case study C

2.3.1. Content and layout of course catalogues (reflection of learning outcomes, reflection of ECTS, and compliance with ECTS Users' guide (2015))

2.3.2. Availability of course catalogues according to study periods (consistency, language, user-friendliness)

2.4. Case study of NQD (if exists)

2.4.1. Content, languages and layout

2.4.2. Inclusion of learning outcomes and ECTS

2.4.3. Correspondence of information in the NQDs with the selected HEI course catalogues

Conclusions

Recommendations for improvements at national level

Annexes

Annex I – Survey of HEIs

Annex II – Case study fiche



Annex 3. Questionnaire of HEIs

This survey is conducted as part of case studies within Erasmus+ project “Online course catalogues and databases for transparency and recognition” that aims to increase a dialogue with higher education institutions by agreeing on a template of course catalogues and improvement of National Qualifications Databases that would guide to structured and transparent learning outcomes of higher education qualifications facilitating the automatic recognition.

According to ECTS User’s guide, course catalogue includes general information on the institution, its resources and services, as well as academic information on its programmes and individual educational components.

Survey should take up to 20 minutes to complete.

1. Name of the organisation _____

2. Does your institution have a course catalogue?

- a. Yes
- b. No (if “no” all further questions do not apply)
- c. In development

3. Your course catalogue is available in:

- a. National language
- b. Other language/-s _____

3.1. if “b” – is entire course catalogue available in other language:

A – entire course catalogue

B – part of course catalogue (please specify what is available in other language)

4. Is your course catalogue available online?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. In development
- d. Other _____

5. Is your course catalogue available for public use? (multiple answers)

- a. Yes, entire information is available to public
- b. Yes, part of the information is available to public
- c. Yes, entire or part of the information is also available in national/international platforms

Please name the national platform/-s _____

Please name the international platform/-s _____

- d. No, it is available only for registered students and staff
- e. No, only available for staff



6. Does your course catalogue include all available study courses?

- a. Yes
- b. No

6.1. If “no” – what courses are included in course catalogue?

7. Does your course catalogue include information on quality assurance/accreditation of study programme or field of study?

- a. Yes
- b. No

8. What information is included in course catalogue? (multiple answers)

- a. Title of the course
- b. Short description of the course
- c. ECTS / number of credits
- d. Learning outcomes of course
- e. Field(s) of study
- f. Specific admission requirements (if applicable)
- g. Mode of study (full-time/part-time/e-learning etc.)
- h. Examination regulations
- i. Grading scale
- j. Obligatory or optional mobility windows
- k. Work-based learning
- l. Access to further studies after attainment of particular qualification
- m. Information of course interconnectivity (show as part of specific study programmes)

9. Is the workload of study programmes and study courses measured in ECTS?

- a. Yes
- b. No

10. Is ECTS used as a credit system for the transfer of credits for student learning outcomes acquired in another institution within the country?

- a. Yes, information on recognition is available in course catalogue
- b. Yes, but information on recognition is not available in course catalogue
- c. No

Thank you for completing the questionnaire!

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Annex 4. Fiche of course catalogues

Higher education institution: _____

Study programme: _____

General information on course catalogue

Evaluation of course catalogues		Yes / No	Description
Overall availability of information	Information is presented with links and additional information is easily accessible		
	Information is presented and some additional information is provided		
	Only title and short description of the course is available		
Course catalogue can be found	Link available on main page		
	Links available on faculty/ study field page		
	Links are hard to find		
Languages	National language		
	English		
	Other		

Information on institution

Content	Yes / No	Description
Name and address		
List of programmes offered		
Admission requirements, including language requirements, and registration procedures		
Arrangement of validation of prior learning (formal, informal and non-formal), and credit transfer		
Arrangements for available academic guidance		
Practical information for incoming mobile students		
Other		



Information on study programmes / study fields

Content	Yes / No	Description
Qualification awarded (and professional qualification if applies)		
Workload in ECTS / other credit points		
Level of qualification (NQF, EQF or/and Bologna cycle)		
Field(s) of study (main field)		
Type of study (academic or professional study programme)		
Quality assurance or accreditation		
Admission requirements		
Information on validation of prior learning		
Graduation requirements		
Learning outcomes		
Matrix of learning outcomes		
Programme structure diagram with credits (ECTS or other)		
List of compulsory courses		
Mode of study (full-time/part time/e-learning etc.)		
Mode of teaching		
Examination regulations and grading scale		
Obligatory or optional mobility windows		
Obligatory or optional course windows		
Work placement(s)		
Work-based learning		
Programme coordinator (name, contact information)		
Occupational profiles of graduates		
Length of study programme (minimum time required to receive qualification)		
Other...		

**Information on study courses**

Content	Yes / No	Description
Course title		
Study programme the course is included		
Field(s) of study (area/branch)		
Level of programme (Bologna cycle or EQF level)		
Workload in ECTS or other credits		
Language of instruction		
Aim of the course		
Course contents (description)		
Learning outcomes		
Requirements to pass the course (tests, essays, attendance etc.)		
Assessment methods		
Assessment criteria		
Includes information on validation of prior learning		
Course interconnectivity (information on other courses that further explore the same route of study/speciality)		
Visibility of course interconnectivity (information on study programmes that can include particular course)		
Other		

Other information

Other important elements for recognition (if any)	Description

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Annex 5. Questionnaire of users

This questionnaire was designed in terms of Erasmus+ project “Online course catalogues and databases for transparency and recognition” (2020-2022) to support higher education institutions and other institutions developing and/or maintaining course catalogues for them to explore the needs of users.

1. What is your role?
 - a. Student
 - b. Potential student
 - c. Teaching staff of HEI
 - d. Administrative staff of HEI
 - e. Credential evaluator
 - f. Other. Please specify:
2. Why do you use this database/course catalogue?
 - a. Education opportunities (looking for a programme/course to apply)
 - b. Studies (looking for information necessary for my present studies)
 - c. Research
 - d. Other. Please specify:
3. How often do you use this database/course catalogue?
 - a. Every day
 - b. Every week
 - c. Every month
 - d. Few times a year
 - e. Once a year
4. Can you find the information you need on the database/course catalogue?
 - a. Yes
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. No
5. Please evaluate from 1-4 points (1 – strongly agree, 4 – strongly disagree) the following statements:
 - a. Information on the database/course catalogue is clear
 - b. Provided information on the database/course catalogue is consistent
 - c. Layout of database/course catalogue is visually attractive
 - d. The database/course catalogue is easy to navigate
 - e. The database/course catalogue is interlinked with other information sources
6. What aspects should be improved in the database/course catalogue?
7. What are the advantages of the database/course catalogue?

ONLINE COURSE CATALOGUES AND DATABASES FOR TRANSPARENCY AND RECOGNITION

