



**Should I recognise or
should I not?**

***Recognition of qualifications
and substantial difference***

**Chiara Finocchietti
Deputy Director of CIMEA**

Substantial differences and the ENIC-NARIC debate: a long story...



1997: Lisbon Recognition Convention + Explanatory Report



2005-2008: ENIC-NARIC Working Party on substantial differences



2012-2016: EAR Manual



2015-2016: Monitoring of the LRC – How do the Parties interpret ‘substantial difference’ and whether there are regulations of the term substantial differences.

New generation of Regional Recognition Conventions (1997-2019)



Lisbon Recognition Convention: no definition and no list of substantial differences



Tokyo Recognition Convention: no definition and no list of substantial differences



Addis Recognition Convention: no definition and no list of substantial differences



Draft text of the Global Convention: definition of substantial differences but no list

Substantial differences: significant differences between the foreign qualification and the qualification of the Party that would most likely prevent the applicant from succeeding in the desired activity such as, but not limited to, further study, research activities or employment opportunities.

ENIC-NARIC WP on substantial differences 2005 - 2008 (1/2)



At the **NARIC** meeting held in Brussels on **November 26, 2005**, the Italian ENIC/NARIC pointed out that there seemed to be **different interpretations of the concept of “substantial differences”**, which is a key term in the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention.

Since it is up to the competent recognition authority to demonstrate the existence of a substantial difference, **the NARIC meeting suggested that a Working Party be established to explore the issue and put forward suggestions for recommendations.**

ENIC-NARIC meeting in Tallinn (2006), in Bucharest (2007) and in Qawra (2008).

ENIC-NARIC WP on substantial differences 2005 - 2008 (2/2)



Substantial differences:

- Demonstrated by competent authority, not by applicant
- Reason for non-recognition...but no obligation not to recognize
- Difference: substantial in relation to function and purpose
- Difference in formal terms only is an insufficient argument
- 5 elements of a qualification (Level, Workload, Quality, Profile, Learning outcomes)

EAR Manual (1/3)



Use of Manual recommended in the **Bucharest Communiqué (2012)**

LRC: *“Foreign qualifications shall be recognised unless there is a substantial difference between the foreign qualification for which recognition is sought and the corresponding qualification of the host country”.*

5 key elements of a qualification: level, workload, quality, profile and learning outcomes

EAR Manual Definition of substantial differences: *Substantial differences are differences between the foreign qualification and the national qualification that are so significant, that they would most likely prevent the applicant from succeeding in the desired activity such as further study, research activities or employment.*

EAR Manual (2/3)



Not every difference should be considered to be “**substantial**”

The existence of a substantial difference entails no obligation to deny recognition to the foreign qualification

The difference should be substantial **in relation to the function of the qualification and the purpose for which recognition is sought.**

The **ENIC and NARIC** Networks **promote flexible attitudes** and to move away from rigid and legalistic interpretations.

EAR Manual (3/3)



The interpretation of substantial differences is very much linked to the **overall outcome of a qualification, programme and/or programme components**, since this determines whether the applicant has been prepared sufficiently for the desired activity.

A difference that is only related to input criteria (such as workload and structure of the programme) **is not likely to have a direct effect on the abilities of the applicant**, and should therefore not be considered automatically as a substantial difference.

Definition of substantial difference



MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LISBON RECOGNITION CONVENTION (2016):

Only 2 countries on 50 have an extensive definition of substantial difference at national level

BUT: in practice there is a common understanding of what substantial difference is

Info: <https://www.enic-naric.net/the-lisbon-recognition-convention-97.aspx>

Top 10 SDs

Question: **Please provide a list of what may be considered a substantial difference between a foreign qualification and a corresponding national qualification.**

1. Institution or a programme is not accredited (quality assured) (49 out of 50)
2. Nominal duration of study is shorter by more than one year (35 out of 50)
3. Differences in programme content/courses (35 out of 50)
4. Different access requirements (28 out of 50)
5. No final thesis (21 out of 50)
6. Online studies (13 out of 50)
7. The programme is not provided in the home country (10 out of 50)
8. Part-time studies (6 out of 50)
9. Less demanding final thesis (5 out of 50)
10. The institution is recognised in the home country, but is not listed in the international databases (4 out of 50)

1. SDs related to the **elements** of the qualification

2. SDs related to the elements/structure of the higher education **national system**

3. SDs related to **how** the qualification was obtained

Our starting point is the function and purpose of recognition

Categories of substantial differences



- Official name of the qualification (in the original language)
- Official name and status of the institution that has awarded the qualification (*awarding institution*)
- Official name and status of the institution which provided the tuition – where different from the former case (*teaching institution*)
- Accreditation/recognition of the course
- Nature of qualification
- Level of qualification
- Length of course
- Number of credits
- Academic and professional rights
- Specific elements (e.g. the presence of a final thesis)
- Study curriculum

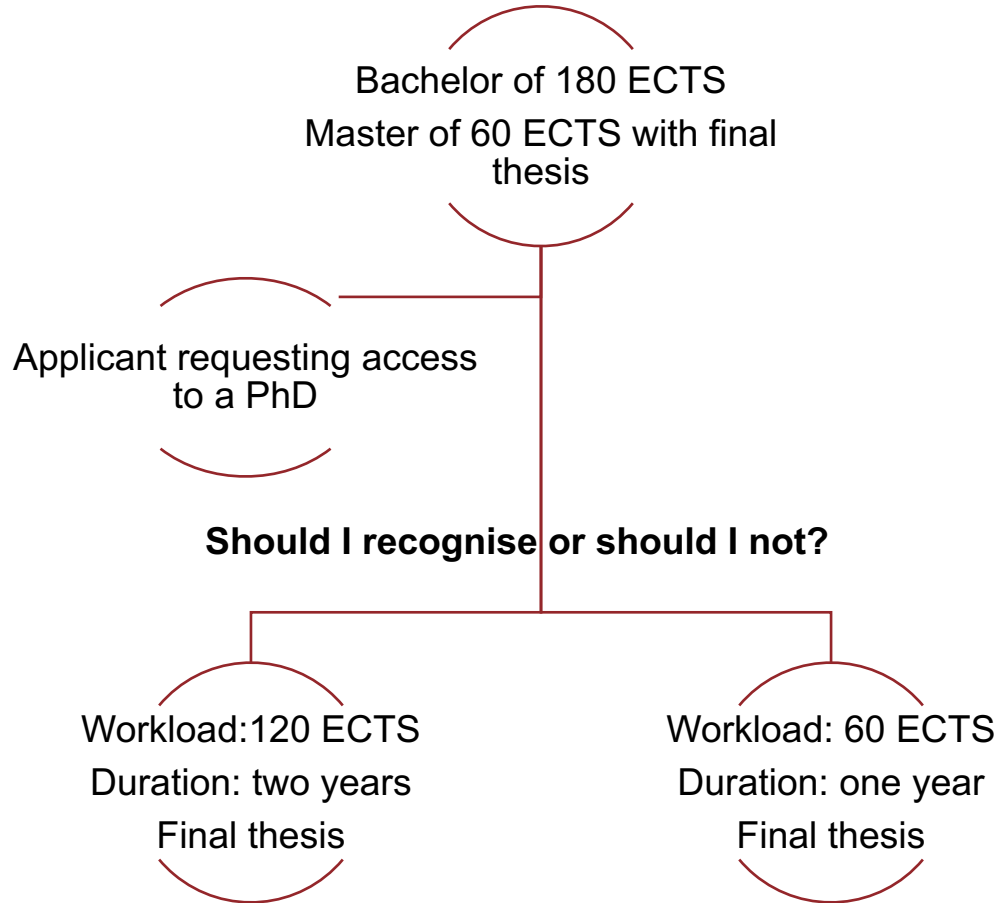
These elements can be found directly in the official documentation provided by the holder of the qualification, or through official sources in the country that awarded the certificate.

Elements of qualifications



Elements of the qualification

Case 1



Elements of the qualification

Case 2

Bachelor
Pass

Two-year duration

Pakistan

General studies
curriculum

No final thesis

The applicant seeks access to a Master level degree

Should I recognise or should I not?

School education and final qualification

- Years of schooling required for access to higher education
- Existence of different scholastic institutions and of different final qualifications in upper secondary schools (diversified/non-diversified systems)
- Denomination of diploma(s) awarded at end of secondary school and the higher education institutions they provide access to
- Existence of a mandatory national exam to proceed to higher education
- Existence of specific elements required by institutions to access higher education
- Institution or body that awards final qualification

Elements of the national HE system / 1



Higher education

- Binary or unique system of higher education
- Denomination of academic qualifications and their specific qualifications
- System of evaluation of progress and methodology used by institutions for grades
- System of credits or of measurement of “weight” of each course
- Institution or body which awards final qualification
- Qualifications which permit access to subsequent courses
- Consequential or non-consequential higher education system
- Nature of higher education courses in consideration of the status of the institution and the type of final qualification
- Obligation of a final exam and its type
- Existence of an academic qualification awarded together with the study title
- Existence of a professional qualification awarded together with the study title

Elements of the national HE system / 2



Further elements

- Legislation and national rules: laws and principal norms on the subject of secondary and higher education
- International, bilateral or multilateral agreements on the subject of recognition of qualifications and/or the standardisation of systems
- Rules for accreditation/recognition of higher education institutions
- Rules for accreditation/recognition of single study programmes
- Existence of a quality control system at a central or local level, or devolved to other bodies
- Existence of a quality control system for institutions belonging to a national system that operate abroad

Elements of the national HE system / 3



Elements of the national HE system

Case 1

Master's degree in Applied
Computer Science with a
final project

meet the needs of
employers in the area of
information technology

apply theory to the
practical problems of
developing information
systems

provide technological
and managerial
perspectives on
information management

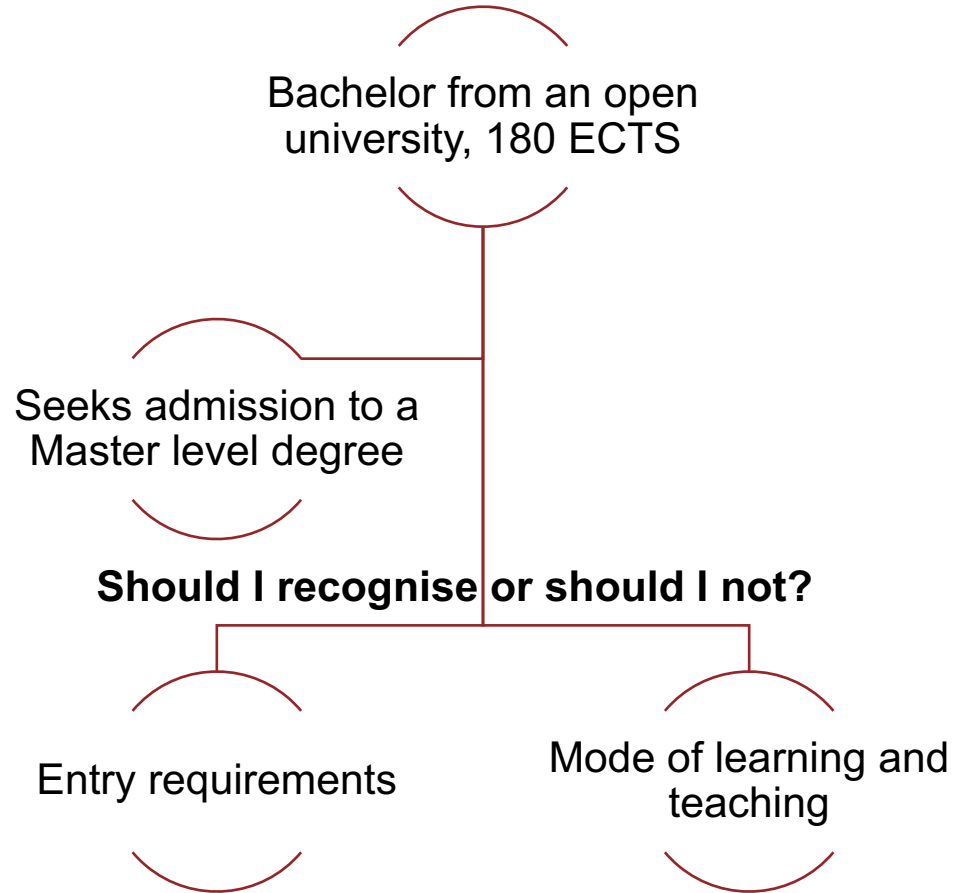
Seek admission to a PhD programme
in Informatics

The requirement for admission to the
PhD programme is a relevant master
degree and research skills

Should I recognise or should I not?

Elements of the national HE system

Case 2



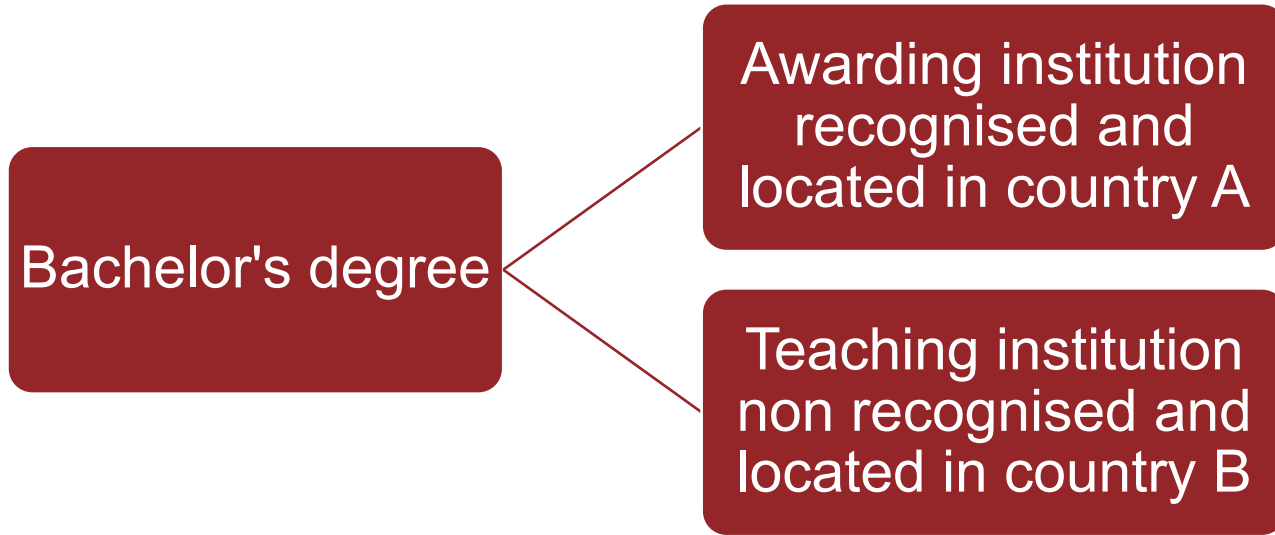
How the qualification was obtained

- Mode of learning and teaching
- Teaching institution different from the awarding institution
- Transnational Education
 - Branch campuses
 - Off-shore institutions
 - Franchised institutions
 - International Higher Education Institutions
 - Multinational corporate universities



How the qualification has been obtained

Case 1

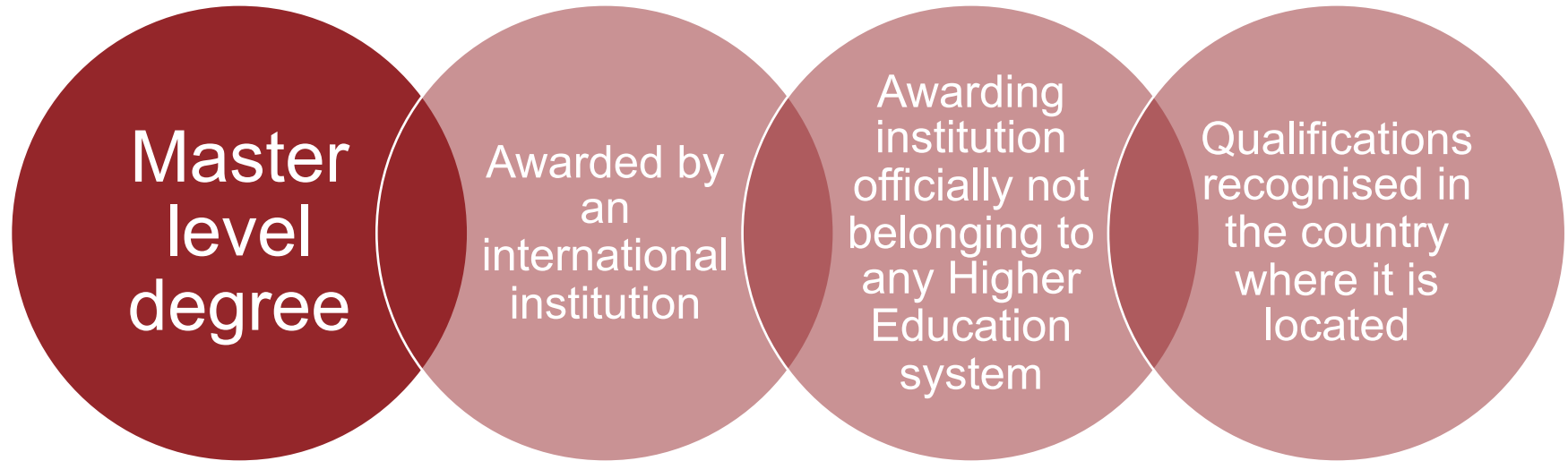


Seeks admission to a Master programme

Should I recognise or should I not?

How the qualification has been obtained

Case 2



Seeks admission to a Phd programme

Should I recognise or should I not?



Thank you

Chiara Finocchietti

info@cimea.it

[@CIMEA_Naric](https://twitter.com/CIMEA_Naric)