2019

Benelux and Baltic countries: automatic recognition of diplomas

In November 2019 the Declaration of Intent [1] on the Automatic Mutual Recognition of Higher Education Degrees between the Baltic and Benelux countries was signed in Brussels.

The automatic recognition of degrees and diplomas implies that anyone who has obtained a recognised higher education qualification in one of the signatory countries is assured that this title will be recognised automatically in the partner countries, without any specific procedure to follow. This measure facilitates access to studies and the labour market in other countries. Automatic recognition also offers several advantages for students, higher education institutions, the private sector and the authorities, particularly in the areas of time and money, legal certainty and reduced administration.

Automatic recognition has existed within the Benelux since 2015, as well as between the three Baltic countries since 2018. The new multilateral treaty will be essential and will be open to other countries and regions. The EU Council urges [2] the 28 EU Member States to make automatic recognition of higher education qualifications a reality by 2025.

The state-funded assistant will also be available to university and college students with disabilities

Amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations "Arrangements for Granting and Financing Local Government Assistant Services" (available in Latvian [3] language) provides for assistant services for students in higher education and colleges as of September 2019.

The assistant service will be provided in accordance with the time needed to get to and from the educational institution and assist with the education programme, but not more than 40 hours per week and only during the academic year. Until now, only students with a first-group visual disability were eligible for the assistant service - and thus assistance at tertiary education level.

In order to provide the service this year, 32,000 euros have been reallocated to the Ministry of Welfare from the Ministry of Education and Science.

Professionals with attained higher education will obtain a teacher qualification within one year

In order to encourage talented and motivated new teachers to enter schools and to address teacher shortages, the Ministry of Education and Science, in cooperation with universities and partners, will
develop a one-year teacher training programme.

In designing the programme, universities will take over the experience that has been proven abroad and has so far been offered in Latvia by the "Mission Possible" - work-based learning for those who have already completed higher education in a particular field. The new study programme is being developed by the University of Latvia in cooperation with Liepaja University, Daugavpils University and Mission Possible. Implementation of the study program is planned to start in 2020.

The Ministry of Education and Science has prepared an informative report “Work-Based Study Programme for Teacher Training: Implementation and Development” (available in Latvian) to inform about the necessary measures for the design and approbation of the new study programme and to evaluate the sustainability of its funding. By June 2022, indicative additional funding of € 2,949,777 would be required to start implementing a one-year work-based study programme for teacher training.

Such a study program will enable to attract industry professionals to work at school. This is particularly important in STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) subjects where there is a severe shortage of teachers in Latvia now.

### 2018

**Implementation of reforms on quality assurance and a new financing model for higher education**

Implementation of the two major reforms launched in 2015 on quality assurance and a new financing model for higher education is ongoing. The Higher Education Quality Agency (AIKA) is currently undergoing a review process to be affiliated to the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). In June 2018, AIKA became a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). In accordance with the new financing model for higher education, additional performance-based funding for 6.5 million EUR was distributed to 14 HEIs that have successfully involved students in research and development, participated in international research projects and cooperated with businesses.

**Steps to internationalise higher education**

In March 2018, the Education Law was amended to allow state HEIs to accept Bachelor’s, Master’s and PhD theses and to hold examinations in EU languages if the related study programme is taught in a EU language. The number of foreign students has increased fourfold over the last ten years: in 2017, there were 8806 foreign students in Latvia’s HEIs, 11% of the total number of students. This is helping to cushion the impact of the reduction in the local student population. Currently, foreign academic staff and foreign guest professors, assistant professors and lecturers make up 5.64% of the total number of academic staff. The government’s objective is to increase the share of foreign teaching staff to 7% by 2020.

**Performance funding to qualitative teacher education programmes**

The Government made amendments to the Regulation on Procedures for Financing Institutions of Higher Education and Colleges from the Funds of the State Budget, so that higher education institutions can get additional funding if their pedagogy programme graduates have started to work at school or continue to work at school in the next school year after their graduation.
The approved measure [10] will enhance closer integration of study process and further careers of graduates. Also, higher education institutions will be motivated more carefully to select prospective teachers according to their abilities and skills to enter the teacher profession.

Performance funding will be assigned to higher education institutions whose initial teacher study programme graduates will work in pre-school education institutions, general, vocational, vocationally-oriented or interest-related education institutions.

2017

Increased amounts of state guaranteed study and student loans

In 12th of September, the government supported proposal of the Ministry of Education and Science to increase maximum amount of study and student loans. The amendment also clarify the procedure how students apply to loan remission.

The maximum amount of loan for every study programme will increase so that the state guaranteed loan covers study fee. As for student loan, the amount of it will increase to 80% of monthly minimum salary amount defined by the government.

More information, in Latvian only, is available on the Ministry of Education and Science website [11].

Quality approval of higher education studies in Latvia

According to amendments in regulations on licencing of study programmes and accreditation of HEIs, colleges and study directions, the Academic Information Centre [12] will be registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR [13]), and will become a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA [14]). In July, the Cabinet of Ministers decided that this happens until the 30th of December 2017. This accomplishment will allow domestic and international students be assured about the quality of study programmes in Latvia.

More information, in Latvian only, is available on the Ministry of Education and Science website [15].

Reform of teacher training system

In March, the Cabinet of Ministers took the decision regarding liquidation of the Riga Teacher Training and Education Management Academy (RPIVA [16]) by merging it with the University of Latvia [17] by the 1st of October, 2017. Some of the RPIVA study programs related to dance and music teachers’ training will be handed to the Music Academy of Latvia [18]. The reorganization is necessary to concentrate resources and ensure more effective use of state funding.

According to calculations of the Ministry of Education and Science, total economy from reorganization will be about 6 million euro for 2018-2022. Saved resources will be invested into development of teacher training programmes. Concentration of resources will allow to use the EU Structural Funds investment more effectively. On the basis of merged institutions there will be new teacher training centre within the University of Latvia, where prospective teachers' studies will be closely related to studies and research in the fields of humanities and social, natural, and life sciences.

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