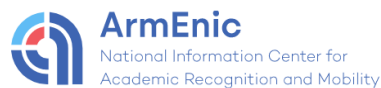


# NORWEGIAN – ARMENIAN COOPERATION IN ADMISSION AND RECOGNITION (NACAR)

Higher education systems, qualifications and admission procedures in Armenia and Norway



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## Introduction

This document is a result of a four-year collaboration between partners from Armenia and Norway, participating in the project “Norwegian-Armenian Cooperation in Admission and Recognition” (NACAR), lasting from 2018 – 2022. The project was funded through the Eurasia Programme, which is financed by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and administered by the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills.<sup>1</sup>

The participating institutions in the project were, on the Armenian side, the Armenian National Information Center for Academic Recognition and Mobility (ArmEnic); Brusov State University (BSU), Yerevan State Medical University (YSMU), and, on the Norwegian side, the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) and the University of South-Eastern Norway (USN).

The NACAR project has focused on capacity building between Armenia and Norway to enhance further cooperation between higher education institutions. One of the main objectives has been to contribute to improvements in university management in Armenia, including the implementation of reforms related to the Bologna process.

The project was organized in five work packages, 1) Project development and administration, 2) Information on higher education systems in Armenia and Norway, 3) Development of good practice on admission of international students, 4) Development of recognition procedures more in accordance with the aim of the Yerevan Communiqué (automatic recognition), and 5) Development of a recognition procedure for recognition of refugees’ qualifications and persons with unverifiable documentation.

This document sums up the work carried out in the following work packages:

- 2) Information on higher education systems and qualifications in Armenia and Norway
- 3) Development of good practice on admission of international students

## 1. Information on higher education systems and qualifications in Armenia and Norway

### 1.1 An overview of the Higher Education System in Armenia

Armenia is a landlocked country, situated in the South Caucasus and fronting the north-western extremity of Asia. To the north and east Armenia borders Georgia and Azerbaijan, while its neighbours to the southeast and west are Iran and Turkey. The capital is Yerevan. The current population of Armenia is 2,970,072 based on the latest United Nations data<sup>2</sup>. Due to high emigration rates as well as to the socio-economic situation, the population of the country is decreasing.

The South Caucasus region is distinguished for its ancient and rich cultural traditions that have served as a basis for diverse national education systems<sup>3</sup>. However, the region has for many centuries suffered from political and religious conflicts and wars. Especially in the late 1980s and early 1990s, all the Caucasian countries, like those of central and eastern Europe, underwent dramatic political

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<sup>1</sup> “The Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills” is formerly know as Diku, Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education.

<sup>2</sup> Worldometer. <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/armenia-population/>

<sup>3</sup> The Lisbon Recognition Convention at 15: making fair recognition a reality, Council of Europe Higher education series No.19, 2014; pp.61-69

changes which resulted in the overall collapse of the communist regime and socialist economy, which seriously challenged their education systems.

Since its independence in 1991, Armenia has gone through a profound transformation, struggling to reform its education system. One of the foremost transformations was marketization of education, which resulted in the emergence of private institutions, and some of them with international capital. This caused growth in the total number of educational institutions in Armenia, and in 1999/2000 it reached 134. Then, over the years, the number of HEIs decreased and now stands at 61.

The reforms granted institutions more autonomy and they became more competitive. Nevertheless, the number of HEIs and funding constraints faced by the HEIs have created serious problems for the development of the institutions, including quality of education, access, and equity for students, and for several decades, the main focus of the Ministry of Education<sup>4</sup> has been new sustainable educational approaches for improving access, quality and equity of the education system.

The reforms in higher education that started in the 1990s were further shaped by two key developments: in 2004 the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education (Lisbon Recognition Convention) was ratified, and in 2005, Armenia together with Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine joined the Bologna Process by signing the Bergen Communiqué.

The new European dimension of the reforms included the structure of higher education, its content and governance, with the purpose of ensuring the integration of Armenia's higher education system into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), thus providing competitiveness in the international education arena.

Further important steps were the establishment of the National Information Centre for Academic Recognition and Mobility (ArmEnic) in 2005 and the National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance (ANQA) in 2008.

As the part of the EHEA, Armenia introduced tools that have been central to the European harmonization process: degree structure, European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), Armenian National Qualification Framework (ANQF), Diploma Supplement (DS), European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for Quality Assurance.

**European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)** has been adopted as a national credit system and it is used for design, description, delivery of programmes and students' knowledge assessment. Credits express the volume of studies based on the defined learning outcomes and their associated workload. One academic year is equivalent to 60 credits and corresponds to 1800 hours of student workload. The academic year, as a rule, starts on 1 September and consists of two semesters with durations of 20 and 22 weeks.

**Quality Assurance:** Since 2008, the National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance (ANQA) has been responsible for assessing the quality of higher education institutions and programmes based on the European Standards and Guidelines. Institutional accreditation is an obligatory process, while programme accreditation is voluntary and is carried out only in the case of a positive result of institutional accreditation when launching a new education programme. The

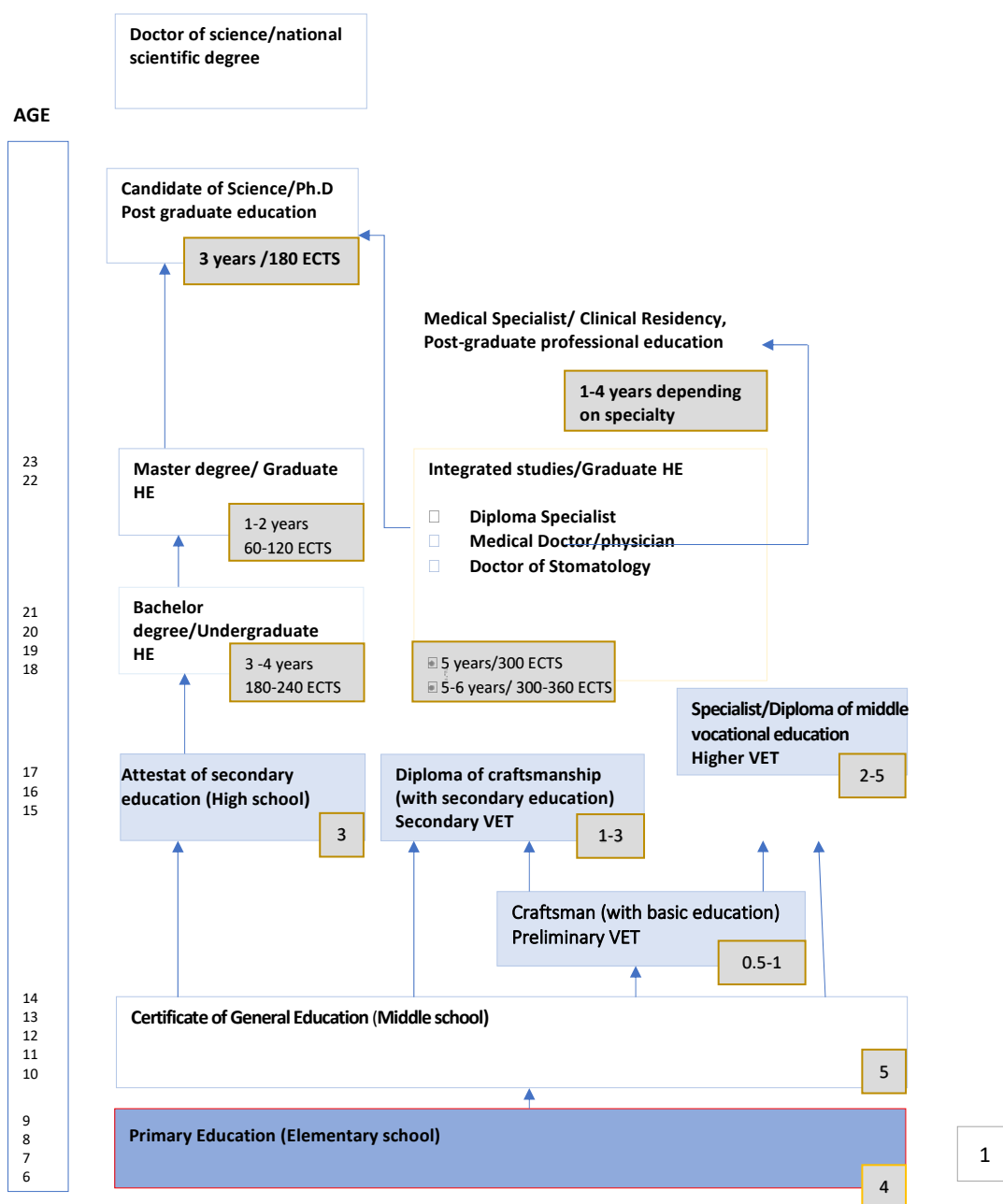
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<sup>4</sup> Presently, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport (MoESCS)

positive accreditation decision is granted for 2 (conditional), 4 or 6 years, depending on level of significance of shortcomings.

The Armenian education system consists of general secondary education (primary, basic and high school), vocational education, higher and postgraduate education. Compulsory education lasts 12 years from age 6 to age 17. The overall structure of the Armenian education system is presented below in **Chart 1**.

## Armenian Education System



The academic year begins on 1 September and ends on 31 May, and is divided into two semesters. Each semester ends with tests and exams specified by the State Educational Standard (SES). There are public and private secondary schools and some of the private schools offer international programmes. Education at public schools is free.

Minimum content of a secondary educational programme is established by the SES. It also defines the learning outcomes for each subject, their workload, assessment methods and quality requirements for graduates.

Vocational education and training are provided in vocational schools (preliminary vocational education/craftsman) and colleges. This sector of the education system suffered the most after the independence in 1991, as a result of the collapse of the economy. Although there have been some improvements at the policy level, VET continues to face challenges and restrictions at the structural level. Generally, vocational education is considered less attractive among the public.

The system of formal vocational education and training is regulated by the Law on Primary Vocational and Secondary Vocational Education and is offered in two stages: preliminary vocational education (1/2 -3 years, craftsmanship/arhestavor) and middle vocational education (2-5 years, specialist/masnaget). There are three types of VET programmes based on basic education and higher secondary education:

Secondary vocational education is provided in colleges and higher education institutions. Admission to institutions of primary and secondary vocational education is based on applications submitted by persons with at least basic general education, on a competitive basis, as prescribed by legislation.

According to the RA "Law on Education", 12-year general secondary education and primary vocational (handicraft) or secondary vocational education are compulsory until the learner attains the age of 19, if that right has not been realized at an earlier age. Secondary education in state educational institutions is free of charge.

Presently, higher education represents a three-level degree structure. At the first level bachelor (bakalavr) degree programmes are offered, and upon their completion students are expected to have basic knowledge, skills and competence in a specialty necessary to pursue further studies at the next level and for commencing work. Bachelor's degree qualifications (corresponding to level 6 of the ANQF and EQF) are set to 180-240 credits (with a duration of 3-4 years of full-time studies<sup>5</sup>). A necessary condition for admission to bachelor programmes is a Certificate of Secondary Education (Full) or a vocational education diploma.

At the second level, master degree programmes are offered, as well as integrated and clinical residency programmes that aim to give students an in-depth knowledge of the sector, skills and competence to work independently and pursue studies at doctoral level. Qualifications awarded upon successful completion of a programme correspond to level 7 of the ANQF and are comparable to EQF level 7. Master (*magistros*) degree qualifications are set to 60-120 credits (with a duration of 1-2 years of full-time studies). A necessary condition for admission to a master's degree programme is a bachelor degree qualification.

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<sup>5</sup> According to the present Law on Education and the Law on higher and post graduate education, universities are allowed to offer 3-year bachelor programmes or 1-year master programmes. In practice, all bachelor programmes are 4-years/240ECTS and master programmes are 2-years/120 ECTS. Applicants to master level studies need to have bachelor or comparable to bachelor degree qualifications.



The integrated (long cycle: bachelor and master) programmes are offered in medicine and dentistry, and upon their completion the qualifications corresponding to a master's degree are awarded. For the qualification of an MD physician (bzhishk) 360 ECTS credits are set (6 years of full-time studies) and for the Doctor of Stomatology (bzhishk-stomatolog) 300 ECTS credits are set (5 years of full-time studies).

For further medical education and for independent medical practice in different areas, students are offered clinical residency programmes that further deepen the theoretical and practical knowledge in the chosen area. The duration of these programmes varies from 1 to 4 years depending on clinical specialty, and upon successful completion of these programmes the qualifications of Medical Specialist in various medical specialties (bjishk masnaget) are awarded.

At the highest level of higher education Doctorate (aspirantura) programmes are offered that aim to provide students with the most advanced theoretical and practical knowledge for further independent research and professional creative work. A necessary condition for admission to doctoral programmes is a master's degree or other comparable qualification. The duration of the programmes is 3-4 years of full-time studies (180 credits). Upon successful completion of doctoral studies and upon defence of a thesis, the Candidate of Science (gitutyuneri teknatsu) degree is awarded. Candidate of Science is equivalent to a PhD.

Doctor of Science (gitutyunneri doctor) is an advanced scientific degree, which is awarded to individuals holding a candidate of science degree as an acknowledgement of their scientific achievements and after successful public defence of a doctoral thesis.

**Armenian National Qualifications Framework (ANQF):** In 2017 the Government of Armenia adopted the revised ANQF (See Chart 2), comparable with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?docid=107371>.

ANQF is an 8-level framework starting with elementary secondary education up to doctoral (aspirantura) education. Levels are described by the three broad categories of knowledge, skills and competence covering all types and all levels of the qualifications.

In 2019 the government decided to develop sectorial QFs, and so far around 10 sectorial QFs have been developed which still need to be approved by the government (<https://www.gov.am/files/docs/3347.pdf>). For the sectorial QFs learning outcomes are more specific. HEIs are developing education programmes based on ANQF and sectorial QFs.

## Types of higher education institutions and qualifications

Higher education is currently provided in a variety of institutions, including institutes, universities, academies and conservatories. There are public, private and transnational HEIs. Among the latter ones are also institutions established within intergovernmental agreements with the participation of the state. The American University of Armenia/AUA is the oldest international provider that was established after the severe earthquake in 1988 by the efforts of the Armenian Diaspora. The

university is affiliated with UCLA and the programmes have been developed with the support of UCLA. Presently, the university is offering 4-year bachelor and 2-year master programmes. The university is accredited by the US WASC, which is allowed by the Armenian legislature. The degrees awarded by the AUA are recognized by the Armenian Government and do not require formal recognition.

There are also theological seminaries under the Armenian Apostolic Church. Today, the national higher education system comprises 26 state and 24 private higher education institutions, and 11 transnational/cross-border higher education institutions, including the 4 with State participation. The bulk of higher education institutions (80 per cent of state and 76 per cent of private) are located in the capital, Yerevan.

All types of HEIs can offer bachelor, master and PhD (Candidate of science) programmes once they get a license from the MoESCS (EQF levels 6-8). All the higher education degrees are both academic and professional, and do not have any limitations in terms of further studies. Presently, long-cycle educational programmes are offered only in medical studies.

**Chart 2. National Qualifications Framework**

NQF level	Qualification	Education level/program
1	Elementary education /graduation exams after 4 years of study	1 <sup>st</sup> level of secondary education-elementary school; 4 years
2	Basic education certificate	2 <sup>nd</sup> level of secondary education-middle school; 5 years
3	Craftsman (on the basis of basic education)	Preliminary VET program; 6 months - 1 year
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secondary education certificate</li> <li>• Craftsman (on the basis of secondary education)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3<sup>rd</sup> level of secondary education-high school; 3years</li> <li>• Preliminary VET program; 1- 3 years</li> </ul>
5	Specialist	VET program, 2-5 years
6	Bachelor	1 <sup>st</sup> level of HE, 4 years, 240 ECTS
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Master</li> <li>• Diploma Specialist</li> </ul>	2 <sup>nd</sup> level of HE; 2 years/120 ECTS 2 <sup>nd</sup> level of HE; 5 or 6 years (medical, architecture)
8	Candidate of Science	3 years, 180 ECTS

## Admission to higher education institutions

Admission to the recognized Armenian HEIs is regulated by the

- Law on Education,
- Decree of the Government on admission procedures for public and private HEIs,
- Decree on procedures for admission of foreigners.

International providers do not fit this framework and they organize their own admissions.

In the case of the foreign applicants, the MoESCS is responsible for the application process and verification of the required documents of the foreigners. Based on the documents, the ministry makes a decision on admission to the universities. As a good practice, some of the universities request an advisory statement from the ArmEnic.

Applicants with secondary and vocational education are eligible to continue their education at universities without any restrictions. Each year, the ministry approves the list of professions and the number of free places for each profession, which are competitive.

Admission exams are divided into joint/unified and inter-university exams, and are organized and conducted by the Armenian Test Center (ATC). Applicants who successfully pass the joint/unified exams are in some cases requested to take additional inter-university exams, depending on the chosen specialization.

Araratian Baccalaureate is recognized by the ministry as an alternative upper secondary school education programme, and upon its successful completion graduates are awarded a qualification comparable to UK GCE A Level and US AP qualifications. Since 2016, the Armenian Government added the Araratian Baccalaureate (AB) exams to the official admissions examinations for the Armenian universities, and ATC is the official body for conducting the AB exams.

## Grading system

The educational institutes in Armenia follow multiple grading systems. In the secondary education sector the following grading systems are used:

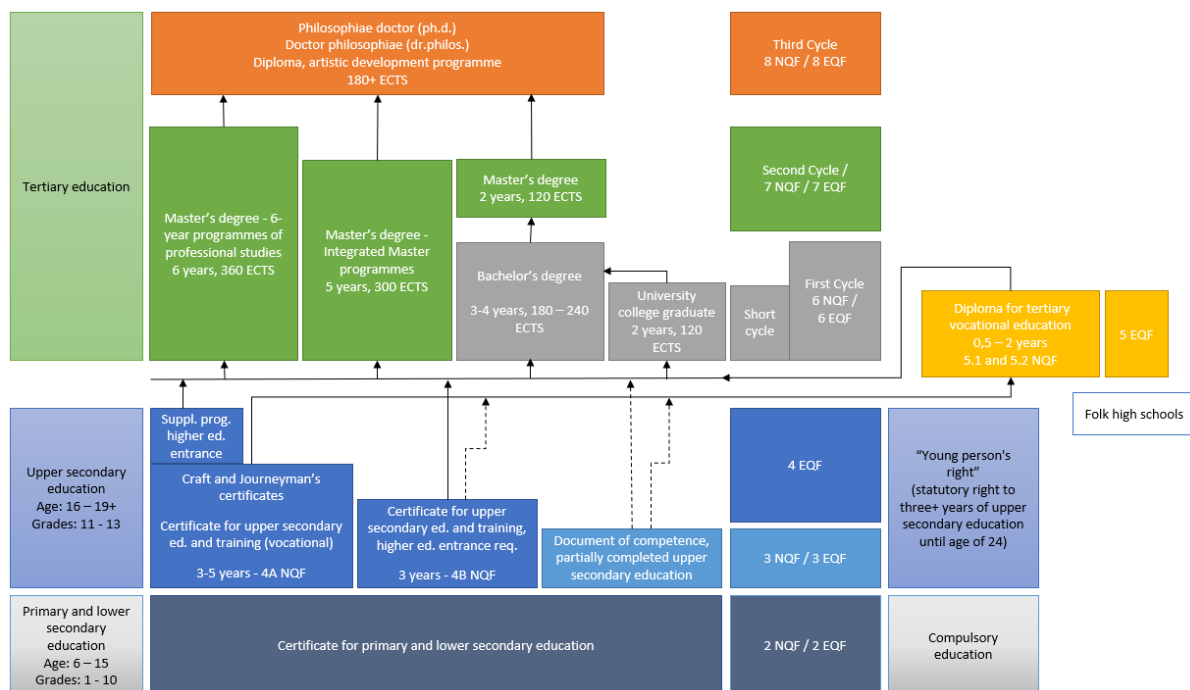
General	Examination	
9-10	18-20	Excellent
7-8	13-17	Good
4-6	8-12	Satisfactory
1-3	1-7	Unsatisfactory/ Fail

HEIs use a multi-factor grading system where students' assessment knowledge, activity, independent work, and examinations are taken into account. The equivalents of these factors are different in the final assessment and depend on the subject. Letter grades and their numeric grade equivalents used at the Armenian universities are presented below.

	Description	Letter	Rating Point	20-Point Scale	5-Point Scale	4-Point Scale
Exam	Excellent	A <sup>+</sup>	95-100	20	5	4.0
		A	87-94	19		4.0
		A <sup>-</sup>	81-86	18		3.7
	Good	B <sup>+</sup>	75-80	17	4	3.3
		B	67-74	15-16		3.0
		B <sup>-</sup>	61-66	14		2.7
	Satisfactory	C <sup>+</sup>	55-60	13	3	2.3
		C	46-54	9-12		2.0
		C <sup>-</sup>	40-45	8		1.7
	Unsatisfactory	D	<40	Fail	2	0
F		0	Incomplete	0		
Test		S	≥40	Satisfactory		-
		U	≤40	Unsatisfactory		-

## 2.2 An overview of the Higher Education System in Norway

**Diagram of the Norwegian education system:**



### Qualifications framework

The Norwegian Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (NQF) from 2011 provides a description of the formal Norwegian education and training system. The Norwegian qualifications framework (NQF) consists of seven levels (there are no qualifications at level 1).

NQF was referenced to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in 2014. A report referencing the levels of the NQF to the levels of the European Qualifications Framework of Lifelong learning (EQF) was presented by the Ministry of Education and Research in June 2014. In addition, the report presents the self-certification (assessment of compatibility) of the qualifications framework against the Bologna framework (QF-EHEA).

Levels 2-8 in the NQF are referenced to levels 2-8 in the EQF, while levels 6-8 of the NQF also correspond with the first, second and third cycle of the QF-EHEA.

NQF levels are formulated in terms of learning outcomes, which are expressed in the categories of knowledge, skills and competence that graduates at various levels should have achieved. The NQF also gives an overview of degrees, diplomas, certificates, craft or journeyman's certificates and documents of competence.

The Norwegian Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (NKR) was adopted in December 2011. The Ministry of Education and Research provided the regulation of NQF and EQF in November 2017. The learning outcomes approach is an integral part of the work on quality in primary, secondary and tertiary education in Norway.

**Table of qualifications in the NQF**

NQF Level	EQF Level	QF-EHEA Cycle	Qualifications in Norwegian	Qualifications in English
2	2	N/A	Vitnemål fra 10-årig grunnskole	Certificate for primary and lower secondary education
3	3	N/A	Kompetansebevis for grunnkompetanse i videregående opplæring	Document of competence in basic competence, partially completed upper secondary education
4A	4	N/A	Fagbrev, svennebrev og vitnemål for videregående opplæring	Craft certificate Journeyman's certificate
4B		N/A	Vitnemål fra videregående opplæring	Certificate for upper secondary education and training
5.1	5	N/A	Vitnemål fra fagskoleutdanning (fagskole 1)	Diploma for tertiary vocational education 1
5.2		N/A	Vitnemål fra fagskoleutdanning (fagskole 2)	Diploma for tertiary vocational education 2
6.1	6	Short cycle	Høgskolekandidat	University College Graduate (Partial level qualifications/intermediate qualifications)
6.2		First cycle	Bachelorgrad Vitnemål fra grunnskolelærerutdanning og allmennlærerutdanning	Bachelor's degree General teacher training programmes
7	7	Second cycle	Mastergrad  Master i rettsvitenskap Candidata/candidatus medicinae (cand.med.) Candidata/candidatus medicinae veterinariae (cand.med.vet.) Candidata/candidatus psychologiae (cand.psychol.) Candidata/Candidatus theologiae (cand.theol.) Master of Business Administration (MBA) Master of International Business (MIB) Master of Technology Management	Master's degree (Master of Arts, Master of Science, Master of Philosophy) Master i rettsvitenskap (laws) Candidata/candidatus medicinae (cand.med.) Candidata/candidatus medicinae veterinariae (cand.med.vet.) Candidata/candidatus psychologiae (cand.psychol.) Candidata/candidatus theologiae (cand.theol.) Master of Business Administration (MBA) Master of International Business (MIB) Master of Technology Management
8	8	Third cycle	Philosophiae doctor (ph.d.) Doctor philosophiae (dr.philos.) Diploma, artistic development programmes	Philosophiae doctor (ph.d.) Doctor philosophiae (dr.philos.) Diploma, artistic development programmes

## Quality assurance and accreditation

Accreditation and recognition are processes intended to ensure that all new study programmes and tertiary vocational education meet national quality requirements stipulated by the Ministry of Education and Research as well as NOKUT. The University and University Colleges Act<sup>6</sup> and the Tertiary Vocational Education Act<sup>7</sup> provide the legal background for accreditation. Accreditation is a precondition for the provision of higher education or tertiary vocational education.

### Categories of accreditation

#### **Institutional accreditation – institutions accredited by NOKUT**

An accredited higher education institution is granted the right to offer educational provision, without having to apply to NOKUT for specific (programmes) accreditation, in accordance with the powers that its institutional category implies. Such institutions are known as self-accrediting institutions. On NOKUT's website there is a [list of higher education institutions accredited by NOKUT](#). Please refer to the institutions' own websites to see a complete list of their accredited study programmes.

There are three categories of institutional accreditation in Norway:

- **Universities (*Universitet*)** are authorized to autonomously accredit new study programmes at all levels, without having to apply to NOKUT for specific (programmes) accreditation.
- **Specialized university institutions (*Vitenskapelig høyskole*) and accredited university colleges (*Høyskole*)** may also autonomously accredit study programmes at the bachelor's degree level, in addition to all levels in subjects in which they have been granted the right to award doctoral degrees. Over and above the doctoral degree subject areas, these institutions must apply to NOKUT for accreditation of new master's degree and PhD study programmes.
- **Tertiary vocational education providers who have been granted subject area recognition (*fagskole med fagområdeakkreditering*)** are authorized to recognize tertiary vocational programmes in a limited subject area.

#### **Non-accredited university colleges and tertiary vocational education providers with study programmes accredited by NOKUT**

University colleges and tertiary vocational education providers that are not accredited institutions must apply to NOKUT for accreditation of study programmes at all levels. Institutions with accredited study programmes may call themselves University College or Tertiary vocation education providers (*Fagskole*), respectively, depending on the type of study programmes they have been accredited for. There are lists of [study programmes](#) and [tertiary vocational education programmes](#) (in Norwegian only) accredited by NOKUT on NOKUT's website.

### The accreditation and recognition process

Each institution must have procedures in place to ensure that the requirements are met. The institutions' own accreditation and recognition processes have characteristics in common with NOKUT's accreditation processes. Important elements in the process include:

- **Documenting the basis for quality:** It must be documented how the study programmes meet the requirements for accreditation or recognition.
- **Assessment:** The assessment must ensure that all the requirements of applicable laws and regulations are met. A good assessment provides clear answers to whether and how the

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<sup>6</sup> <https://lovdata.no/NLE/lov/2005-04-01-15>

<sup>7</sup> <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/2018-06-08-28>

requirements are met, and what should and/or must be changed for the programmes to achieve sufficient quality.

- **Adjustments:** The academic assessment will point out changes that must be made while also identifying possibilities for improvement. The procedures should therefore include steps describing how to make such adjustments, and the extent to which the established programmes may deviate from the original documented plan.
- **Decision:** The authorization to accredit or recognize new study programmes is granted to the board of the institution. The board can delegate this authority but is responsible for the decisions.

When accreditation or recognition has been granted, it is valid until NOKUT revokes, or the institution itself withdraws, the accreditation if a supervisory assessment concludes that the quality does not meet the requirements of the Academic Supervision Regulations or the Regulations on Quality Assurance in Higher Education. The institution may also withdraw the accreditation without supervision having been carried out.

## Higher education

The current degree system was introduced in 2002-03. In Norway, the reform was known as the Quality Reform, and was intended to comply with the Bologna Process in the European Higher Education Area. The main changes included a switch from the old system of Latin degrees to the three cycles of higher education qualifications used today (bachelor, master and PhD). The former system was fragmented both in terms of degrees offered and institution types. The historic degree structure consisted mainly of four-year undergraduate *Cand.mag.* degrees followed by two-year advanced (graduate) degrees, including the *Cand. philol.*, *Cand. scient.*, or *Cand. polit.* degrees. The advanced degrees gave access to doctoral degrees<sup>8</sup>.

Other changes included replacing the former number grading scale (with 1.0 as the best possible grade and 4.0 as the minimum passing grade) with the A to F letter scale. It also changed the former system credits of *vektall* (with nominal 10 vektall per semester) to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) with nominal 30 credits per semester.

### **General, qualitative descriptions for the grades A – F<sup>9</sup>**

Symbol	Description	General, qualitative description of valuation criteria
A	Excellent	An excellent performance, clearly outstanding. The candidate demonstrates excellent judgement and a very high degree of independent thinking.
B	Very good	A very good performance. The candidate demonstrates sound judgement and a high degree of independent thinking.
C	Good	A good performance in most areas. The candidate demonstrates a reasonable degree of judgement and independent thinking in the most important areas.
D	Satisfactory	A satisfactory performance, but with significant shortcomings. The candidate demonstrates a limited degree of judgement and independent thinking.
E	Sufficient	A performance that meets the minimum criteria, but no more. The candidate demonstrates a very limited degree of judgement and independent thinking.
F	Fail	A performance that does not meet the minimum academic criteria. The candidate demonstrates an absence of both judgement and independent thinking.

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed description, please see also <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED399870.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.uhr.no/temasider/karaktersystemet/karakterbeskrivelser/>



## Diploma Supplement

The Diploma Supplement (DS) is an official document accompanying the diploma of higher education. Both documents are to be issued by the higher education institutions to all their graduates. The DS gives a supplementary description of the obtained qualification. The Norwegian DS follows the international standardized model, which is divided into eight sections:

1. The holder of the qualification
2. The qualification
3. Length and level of the qualification – placement within the national qualifications framework, and access requirements
4. The study programme and obtained results, the student's learning outcomes, description of the grading system
5. Information on the function of the qualification, further studies and professional status
6. Additional information on mobility period and other matters
7. Signature and certification of the DS
8. Information on the national system for higher education. Section 8 of the Norwegian DS is a fixed text developed by NOKUT, which is updated regularly<sup>10</sup>.

**Table of qualifications<sup>11</sup>**

Qualification in Norwegian	Qualification in English	EQF level / Cycle	Length or ECTS	Access requirement	Access to further study
Høgskole-kandidatgrad	University college graduate	6.1 / Short cycle	120 ECTS	The Higher Education Entrance Qualification or corresponding qualification	Access / transfer to bachelor's degree
Bachelorgrad	Bachelor's degree	6 / 1st Cycle	180-240 ECTS	The Higher Education Entrance Qualification or corresponding qualification	Master's degree
Mastergrad	Master's degree Master's degree – long-cycle	7 / 2nd Cycle	120 / 300 ECTS	A bachelor's degree or equivalent qualification. Additional requirements may apply.	PhD degree
Doktorgrad (ph.d.)	PhD degree	8 / 3rd Cycle	180 ECTS	A master's degree or equivalent qualification. Additional requirements may apply.	n/a

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.nokut.no/en/about-nokut/international-cooperation/diploma-supplement/>

<sup>11</sup> For more information on the key features of each degree, please see the addendum.

## Professional education programmes

Certain education programmes in fields such as education, engineering, law, medicine, nursing, odontology, pharmacy, psychology, social work and theology have traditionally been known as professional education ("*profesjonsutdanning*") in Norway. Although no formal definition exists, the term is still used in various settings.

Some, but not all<sup>12</sup>, lead to regulated professions, most notably within the health professions, legal professions, animal health professions and schools and kindergartens. There are approximately 170 professions that are regulated by law in Norway. NOKUT maintains a list of regulated professions and their responsible authorities<sup>13</sup>.

Whereas most professional education programmes are placed within the regular degree system, some have a different structure and/or have maintained traditional degree names. Some of these have been explicitly named in the NQF:

Level 6: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• General teacher training programmes – 300 ECTS</li></ul>
Level 7: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Master i rettsvitenskap (laws) – 300 ECTS</li><li>• Candidata/candidatus medicinae (cand.med.) – 360 ECTS</li><li>• Candidata/candidatus medicinae veterinariae (cand.med.vet.) 330 – 360 ECTS</li><li>• Candidata/candidatus psychologiae (cand.psychol.) – 360 ECTS</li><li>• Candidata/candidatus theologiae (cand.theol.) – 360 ECTS</li></ul>

## Medical education

The Candidata/candidatus medicinae (cand.med.) is the basic medical degree in Norway. It is a six-year integrated degree placed at level 7 in the NQF. As of now (2022) it is offered by the four major universities in Norway: the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, University of Bergen, University of Oslo, and University of Tromsø; but other institutions are in the process of seeking accreditation (e.g. the University of Stavanger). The programme includes extensive clinical service that covers a wide range of patients. The requirements for admission are the general higher education entrance requirements (see below) with additional science subjects.

## Short programmes

Universities and university colleges offer many one-year programmes, supplementary programmes and short programmes in many different fields and subjects. Some variations include:

- Short programmes that can be taken independently, or form part of bachelor's degrees, such as one-year programmes (*årsstudier*).
- Short programmes that form the basis for programmes of professional study in the subject, for example in psychology or education. These programmes are awarded ECTS but are not necessarily enrolled in the NQF.
- Short programmes offered specifically as further education (see below).

If ECTS credits are awarded, these programmes are subject to the same rules of accreditation as the higher education institution at large.

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<sup>12</sup> Engineer and architect are not regulated professions in Norway.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.nokut.no/en/surveys-and-databases/list-of-regulated-professions/>

## Continuing and further education programmes

Continuing and further education programmes allow people to update their competence and ensure that enterprises and organizations have employees with the necessary knowledge and skills.

There are two basic types:

- **Further education** (*videreutdanning*) programmes lead to new formal qualifications at university and university college level (programmes for which ECTS credits are awarded)<sup>14</sup>.
- **Continuing education** (*etterutdanning*) consists of shorter courses updating existing qualifications. No ECTS credits are awarded. Continuing education is not considered higher education in Norway.

## Upper secondary qualifications that give access to higher education

[The Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service](#) (NUCAS, in Norwegian: *Samordna opptak*) coordinates admission to ordinary undergraduate study programmes at all universities, university colleges, and some private university colleges in Norway. Please note that some study programmes have requirements in specific subjects and/or grades from upper secondary school, in addition to the general requirements.

### Applicants with Norwegian secondary education

There are several ways in which the general higher education entrance requirements can be fulfilled:

- The Certificate of upper secondary education and training (*Vitnemål for videregående opplæring og har oppnådd generell studiekompetanse*) is based on 13 years of schooling. It sets the basis for, and fulfils all general higher education entrance requirements.
- There are bridging courses available for those who have achieved vocational competence (with or without a trade or journeyman's certificate), which will also fulfil the general higher education entrance requirements.
- For those who have not completed upper secondary education, there are specific requirements that combine bridging courses and work experience which will fulfil the general education entrance requirements, often known as the "23/5 path". Requirements include a minimum age of 23, documented completion of six specific subjects taught in upper secondary school<sup>15</sup>, and at least five years of work experience and/or education.
- Adults without the right to upper secondary education and training are entitled to have their formal, informal and non-formal competence assessed. Requirements include a minimum age of 25 and relevant work experience or education for the study to which admission is sought.

In addition, there are supplementary ways in which the general higher education entrance requirements can also be fulfilled, e.g. by completing upper secondary education in a Steiner Waldorf school, completing an upper tertiary vocational education, or a university or university college education.

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<sup>14</sup> For an *individual*, all formal education completed after the age of 35, or after a break from previous education consisting of at least one year of work experience and/or job seeking activities is considered further education. Hence, both short programme such as a one-year programme or a master's degree may be considered further education. <https://nifu.brage.unit.no/nifu-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2375197/NIFUrapport2015-39.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

<sup>15</sup> Norwegian, English, history, social studies, mathematics and natural sciences.

## Applicants with foreign secondary education

Applicants with foreign secondary education must fulfil requirements as outlined for each country according [to the higher education entrance qualifications for foreign applicants \(the “GSU List”\)](#). The Norwegian Certificate of upper secondary education and training (*Vitnemål for videregående opplæring og har oppnådd generell studiekompetanse*), which is based on 13 years of elementary and secondary education, sets the basis for the entrance requirements. Hence, completion of upper secondary education, equivalent in length and scope to the Norwegian Certificate of upper secondary education and training, is the general basic requirement for entry to Norwegian universities and university colleges. For students from certain countries, at least one year of completed studies at the university level is also required. Norwegian and English language requirements, as well as other academic requirements, may also apply. Please see the “GSU list” for details<sup>16</sup>.

## Norwegian vocational education and training (VET)

VET is part of the formal upper secondary education system in Norway. From the school year 2020/21, upper secondary VET in Norway covers 10 education programmes that lead to more than 180 different trade or journeyman’s certificates. Most upper secondary VET programmes follow the 2+2 model. The model entails two years of education in an upper secondary school followed by two years of apprenticeship training and productive work in a training enterprise or public institution. The final exam is a trade or journeyman’s test leading to an EQF level 4 qualification. The upper secondary schools are responsible for the first two years of education and training, while the enterprises are responsible for the final two years.

During the two years, the VET student is given a general introduction to the vocational field and an opportunity to specialize in a chosen craft or trade. The teaching focuses on common core subjects (Norwegian, English, mathematics, physical education, natural sciences and social sciences), and common programme subjects which cover trade-specific theory and practice. During the first year (Vg1-upper secondary level 1) these subjects offer a general introduction to the vocational field. During the second year (Vg2-upper secondary level 2) these subjects become more specific as VET students decide which trade they want to pursue.

The apprenticeship period gives the apprentice an opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge in a vocational field and prepare for the trade or journeyman’s test. The two-year apprenticeship is formalized through a signed contract between the apprentice and the training enterprise. The county authorities have an overarching responsibility for all aspects of public upper secondary education and training, including apprenticeship training. Thus, the apprenticeship contract must be approved by the county authorities.<sup>17</sup>

It is possible to achieve general university admissions certification by successfully completing the Vg3 supplementary programmes for general university admissions certification after having successfully completed Vg1 and Vg2 from a vocational education programme or achieved vocational competence (with or without a trade or journeyman’s certificate).

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.nokut.no/en/surveys-and-databases/nokuts-country-database/GSU-list/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.udir.no/in-english/norwegian-vocational-education-and-training/>

## Tertiary vocational education in Norway<sup>18</sup>

Tertiary vocational education and higher education are two different alternatives to education after upper secondary school, each with its own legislation and objectives. Tertiary vocational education provides vocational education founded on upper secondary education or equivalent prior learning and work experience, and comprises the equivalent of at least one-half and usually no more than two entire academic years. In special cases, and only after approval by the Ministry of Education and Research, some tertiary vocational education programmes can be up to three entire academic years in duration.

The Tertiary Vocational Education Act<sup>19</sup> defines vocational education as "education that provides competence for working life without further general training measures". Pursuant to the Act, the tertiary vocational colleges must provide education of high quality and equip students with satisfactory skills and conditions.

There are both public and private vocational schools. The county authorities are responsible for ensuring the provision of accredited tertiary vocational education that considers local, regional and national competence requirements within priority sectors. Among other things, the county authorities offer publicly funded technical and maritime programmes as well as health and social work programmes. Private providers offer many different programmes in the areas of creative, commercial, service, media, multimedia and ICT studies.

All tertiary vocational education must be approved by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT). In order to be accredited, the education must satisfy national performance standards stipulated by regulation. NOKUT supervises tertiary vocational education and accredits tertiary vocational colleges' internal quality assurance systems. Lists of [accredited tertiary vocational education providers](#) and [tertiary vocational education programmes](#) can be found on NOKUT's website (in Norwegian only).

Tertiary vocational education constitutes a small part of the Norwegian education system, with approximately 15,000 students.

### Useful links:

- [The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research](#)
- [Framework plans for higher education](#) (current and expired framework plans in Norwegian, with links to English translations where available): Kindergarten teacher education, teacher education, several health personnel education programmes, engineering, accounting, etc.
- [NOKUT \(Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education\)](#)
- [The Norwegian Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning \(NQF\) – NOKUT](#)
- [Recognized higher education institutions – NOKUT](#)
- [Accredited study programmes at university colleges – NOKUT \(in Norwegian only\)](#)
- [The Higher Education Entrance Qualifications for foreign applicants \(GSU list\)](#)
- [The Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service \(NUCAS\)](#)
- [Information on upper secondary education and training \(vilbli.no\)](#)

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/education/fagskoleutdanning/innsiktsartikler/what-is-tertiary-vocational-education/id2353818/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://lovdata.no/NLE/lov/2018-06-08-28>

## Addendum: Key features of Norwegian degrees

### University college graduate

#### Key features:

- Qualification: Høgskolekandidat
- Qualification in English: University college graduate
- EQF level: 6.1
- Cycle: Short cycle
- Thesis required: Regulated by the institutions
- Nominal length: 2 years / 120 ECTS
- Access requirement: Higher Education Entrance Qualification or corresponding qualification
- Access to further study: Bachelor's degree
- Learning outcomes: as defined in the [Norwegian qualifications framework for lifelong learning \(NQF\)](#)

#### Programmes

The university college degree is obtained after successful completion of higher education programmes of two years' duration. Graduates can obtain a bachelor's degree by one further year of study within the same field.

The university college degree represents an intermediate level within the bachelor level (first cycle) in the NQF. This means that the programmes is taught at bachelor level, but does not represent completion of the level.

#### Degree titles

- Norwegian: Høgskolekandidat i [field of study]
- English: University College Graduate in [field of study]

### Bachelor's degree

#### Key features:

- Qualification: Bachelorgrad
- Qualification in English: Bachelor's degree
- EQF level: 6.2
- Cycle: First cycle
- Thesis required: Regulated by the institutions
- Nominal length: 3 years / 180 ECTS (240 ECTS for some programmes)
- Access requirement: Higher Education Entrance Qualification or corresponding qualification
- Access to further study: Master's degree
- Learning outcomes: as defined in the [Norwegian qualifications framework for lifelong learning \(NQF\)](#)

## Programmes

Bachelor programmes provide students with a broad academic foundation as well as specialist knowledge combined with theoretical, applied and analytical skills. Some bachelor's programmes have a fixed structure, while others allow the student to choose between different courses after completing the first part of the programmes. In study programmes with more freedom of choice, the combination of courses must comply with the guidelines of the educational institution in order to confer a bachelor's degree. The programmes prepare students for occupational functions and for studies for the master's degree (second cycle).

### Four-year general teacher education programmes (grunnskolelærerutdanning)

From 2010 – 2016, four-year teacher education programmes (240 ECTS) have been offered by university colleges in accordance with [framework plans for primary and lower secondary teacher education for years 1 – 7 and 5 - 10](#). Candidates can be awarded the bachelor's degree after three years if the programme meets the requirements for a bachelor's degree set out in the regulations for the university college. Teaching qualifications for primary and lower secondary school can, however, only be achieved after four years. The four-year teacher education programmes have been replaced by five-year integrated master's programmes starting with admissions to the 2017-18 academic year (see below). Students enrolled in the four-year programme may sit their exams until 31 December 2023.

### Bachelor's degree within the fine arts

The bachelor's degree within the arts is awarded after 3 years of study (180 ECTS). A bachelor's degree (BA) in music is awarded after 3 or 4 years of study (180/240 ECTS). Admission is usually conditional on passing an entrance examination. The programmes are based on research and artistic research. Programmes are offered within the area of fine arts, architecture, design etc. The degree normally gives access to master's (master) programmes in the same field.

### Degree titles

- Norwegian: Bachelor (BA) i [field of study] or Bachelor (BSc) i [field of study].
- English: Bachelor of Arts (BA) in [field of study] or Bachelor of Science (BSc) in [field of study]. Legal studies: Bachelor of Law (LL.B.). Fine arts: Bachelor of Arts in [field of study], Bachelor of Fine Arts in [field of study].

## Master's degree

Key features:

- Qualification: Mastergrad
- Qualification in English: Master's degree
- EQF level: 7
- Cycle: Second cycle
- Independent work required: Yes, at least 20 ECTS, as specified by the [Regulations concerning Requirements for Master's Degrees](#) (in Norwegian only). Can be carried out as individual or group work.
- Nominal length: 2 years/120 ECTS
- Access requirement: Bachelor's degree or corresponding qualification
- Access to further study: PhD programmes
- Learning outcomes: as defined in the [Norwegian qualifications framework for lifelong learning \(NQF\)](#)

## Programmes

A master's degree programme is usually a two-year course of studies (120 ECTS credits); in addition there are some master's degree programmes with a duration of 1-1½ years as defined in section 7 of the [legal regulations for master's degrees](#) (in Norwegian only). These are typically MBA programmes etc., but the clause is not restricted to any one field of study.

The master programmes build on academic specialization in the bachelor's degree and include independent work. They provide students with a broad academic foundation as well as specialist knowledge combined with theoretical, applied and analytical skills. Students are required to submit a piece of independent work (a thesis or equivalent) with a minimum 30 ECTS workload before graduation, as defined in the [legal regulations for master's degrees](#) (in Norwegian only).

The programmes prepare students for occupational functions and for studies for the PhD degree (third cycle).

A master experience-based programme has a scope of either two years (120 ECTS credits) or one and a half years (90 ECTS credits). The admission requirements are a relevant bachelor's degree and at least 2 years of relevant work experience. It includes a piece of independent work of at least 30 ECTS.

## Degree titles

- Norwegian: Master i [field of study]
- English: Master of Arts (MA) in [field of study], Master of Science (MSc) in [field of study], Master of Fine Arts in [field of study]

## Master's degree – long-cycle

### Key features:

- Qualification: Mastergrad
- Qualification in English: Master's degree
- EQF level: 7
- Cycle: Long cycle
- Independent work required: Yes, at least 20 ECTS, as specified by the [Regulations concerning Requirements for Master's Degrees](#) (in Norwegian only )
- Nominal length: 5 years/300 ECTS (330 ECTS for some programmes)
- Access requirement: Higher Education Entrance Qualification or a corresponding qualification
- Access to further study: PhD programmes
- Learning outcomes: as defined in the [Norwegian qualifications framework for lifelong learning \(NQF\)](#)

## Programmes

### Integrated master's degree

The integrated master's degree is a five-year study programmes (300 ECTS) which results in a master's degree, with no intermediate bachelor's degree. An exception is the Master of Architecture programme at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design, which has a scope of 5½ years (330 ECTS). Students are required to submit a piece of independent work with a minimum 20 ECTS workload before graduation, as defined in the [legal regulations for master's degrees](#) (in Norwegian only).



### **Five-year integrated master's degree – general teacher education programmes (grunnskolelærerutdanning)**

Starting with admissions to the 2017-18 academic year, the four-year teacher education programmes (see above) have been replaced by five-year integrated master's programmes in accordance with [framework plans for primary and lower secondary teacher education for years 1 – 7 and 5 - 10](#). The degree includes independent work of at least 30 ECTS and at least 110 days of supervised, varied and assessed practice.

### **Long cycle professionally oriented degrees**

In the fields of medicine, psychology and theology, professionally oriented degrees/qualifications of six years' duration (360 ECTS) are awarded; in the field of veterinary science: 5½-6 years.

### **Degree titles**

- Norwegian: Master i [field of study]
- English: Master of Arts (MA) in [field of study], Master of Science (MSc) in [field of study], Master of Law (LL.M.)
- The professionally oriented degrees have retained the title *candidata/candidatus* from the former degree system, e.g. *Cand.med.*, *Cand.med.vet.*, *Cand.psychol.*, and *Cand.theol.*

## **PhD degree**

Key features:

- Qualification: Ph.d-grad
- Qualification in English: PhD degree
- EQF level: 8
- Cycle: Third cycle
- Thesis required: Regulated by the institutions
- Nominal length: 3 years
- Access requirement: Master's degree
- Access to further study: n/a
- Learning outcomes: as defined in the [Norwegian qualifications framework for lifelong learning \(NQF\)](#)

### **Programmes**

The PhD degree is based on a master's degree or equivalent qualification and is the highest academic degree in Norway. The study programmes must be based on independent research conducted in cooperation with academic supervisors and other researchers, and it can be carried out within the framework of a researcher training programme.

### **Philosophiae doctor (ph.d.)**

Awarded after three years of study, following the completion of a master's degree or a five to six-year professionally oriented degree/qualification.

### **Doctor philosophiae (dr. philos.)**

Conferred on graduates who have qualified for a doctoral degree on their own, without formal research training.

**Diploma, artistic research fellowships programmes (kunstnerisk utviklingsprogramme)**

A three-year programme in the field of creative and performing arts. Replaced on 1 February 2018 by the new doctoral degree, ph.d. i kunstnerisk utviklingsarbeid.

**Degree titles**

- Norwegian: ph.d.-grad
- English: PhD degree

## 2. Development of good practice on admission of international students

This chapter focuses on Work Package 3 of the project, “Development of good practice on admission of international students” (WP3). The aim of WP3 is, by exchanging knowledge and best practices, to contribute to the improvement of admission procedures and evaluation of diplomas from international applicants to Armenian HEIs.

The participating institutions in WP3 were ArmEnic; Brusov State University (BSU), Yerevan State Medical University (YSMU) and the University of South-Eastern Norway (USN), all presented below.

In this chapter, the project seeks to provide useful information for officers carrying out the process of admitting international students to their university. Originally, the plan was to create a detailed manual for evaluating international educational documents, but the project team decided to rather provide recommendations, and instead refer to an already detailed manual for further instructions concerning handling of foreign educational documents. The EAR HEI Manual can be found here: [European Area of Recognition - EAR Manual \(enic-naric.net\)](http://ear.enic-naric.net)<sup>20</sup>

The chapter also gives an overview of the general process, including the cooperation with MoESCS, and suggests the necessary administrative steps based on best practice by participating institutions and literature in the field.

### 2.1. Participating institutions (WP3)

The participating institutions, sharing their experiences in this part of the NACAR project, are presented below.

#### Yerevan State Medical University after Mkhitar Heratsi (YSMU)

YSMU is a higher education institution with its century-long rich history, located in the heart of Yerevan. More than 31,000 graduates have specialized in faculties of the university and accomplished their mission in Armenia and all over the world since 1920. At present, the university has around 8,000 YSMU graduates who are leading specialists in many well-known public or private hospitals in almost 40 countries of the world.

Currently the university has about 6,000 students, and out of them 1,900 are international students. According to this data, the university is included in the list of the top 100 best international universities. At present, YSMU hosts representatives of 18 nationalities and 6 religions from 36 countries. They all have many differences but one common aim – to receive undergraduate and postgraduate education and become professionals in the field of medicine, dentistry and pharmacy.

#### Brusov State University (BSU)

Established in 1935, Brusov State University is the Republic of Armenia’s leading university in modern languages and social sciences. BSU has gradually evolved to meet the learners’ needs and respond to

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<sup>20</sup> <http://ear.enic-naric.net/emanual/>

the global challenges affecting higher education. Today, BSU also excels at language research and training.

BSU has 4 faculties that offer undergraduate (BA), graduate (MA), and postgraduate (PhD) study programmes in Linguistics, Pedagogy, Translation Studies, Journalism, Service, European Studies, Political Science, Education Management, Intercultural Communication, etc. Moreover, the university offers educational programmes in eight foreign languages as majors (English, Russian, Spanish, French, German, Italian, Chinese and Korean) and about 20 foreign languages as minors. BSU has more than 3,000 students and 500 staff.

Thus, taking into consideration the profile of the university, internationalization has always been a strategic priority for BSU. The university collaborates with over 85 leading universities, academic and research centres, and international and academic organizations from more than 25 countries, conducting various educational, scientific and exchange programmes (ERASMUS+, Jean Monnet Module, European Solidarity Corps, etc.).

Being a leading university for the enhancement of cross-cultural communication, BSU has always been open for the admission of international students. Among other values, the university promotes diversity and strives to create a multilingual and multicultural environment. Every academic year the university welcomes international students from different countries (overall more than 100). The students are mainly from the Armenian Diaspora, including students from Georgia, Russia, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Kazakhstan, Belarus, etc.

The BSU's External Affairs and International Cooperation Department is responsible for the administration of admission and educational processes of international students, as well as providing daily assistance, while the BSU's Education division and Faculties provide the necessary academic framework for the quality of education of international students.

## **The University of South-Eastern Norway (USN)**

USN is Norway's fourth largest university, formed in 2018 after a merger from 2014 of three previous university colleges. The university has approximately 18,000 students and 1,700 staff and is spread over eight campuses. USN offers a variety of study programmes within health, engineering/technology, arts, business, social sciences, teacher education etc. Studies include master programmes taught in English for international applicants from all over the world, and shorter exchange studies with partner universities. All bachelor programmes are taught in Norwegian, and all exchange students (shorter stays; one-two semesters) must be nominated from partner universities.

USN has 14 English taught programmes at master level (in 2021) open for international applicants, and over 4,000 applicants apply from outside the Nordic countries (2021 numbers). Exchange students come in addition to these, and there are also applicants that live in Norway but have been educated abroad.

## **National Information Center for Academic Recognition and Mobility (ArmEnic)**

Armenian National Information Center for Academic Recognition and Mobility (ArmEnic), a body responsible for evaluation and recognition of foreign qualifications in Armenia, was established in

2005 by the Decision of the Government of the Republic of Armenia (RA) after ratification of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) and joining the Bologna Process in 2005.

ArmEnic's responsibilities include:

- assessing qualifications in Armenia based on the national legislation, bilateral agreements and main principles of the LRC;
- providing information and counselling on various education systems and awarded qualifications, national qualifications frameworks, and transparency tools (credit systems, diploma supplement) to local and foreign institutions as well as individuals;
- facilitating academic and work mobility and contributing to the visibility and internationalization of national higher education.

## 2.2. Content

The process of admitting international students should aim to be a fair and transparent one, so information and recruiting is an important part. Our first chapter focuses on this. The next chapter deals with the whole application process, from receiving an application to sending out results, and also includes some main points on how to welcome new international students. As the main part of processing applications from international students is about evaluating foreign documents, we have included a part on recognition, while also referring to the manual mentioned in the introduction. As a different Work Package in the project focuses on this in more detail, we will here provide an overview of ArmEnic's role and relevant links for further information.

## 2.3. The Backdrop

The Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) is an international treaty that establishes the framework of fundamental criteria and procedures for recognition in the European Region. The LRC was jointly developed by the Council of Europe and UNESCO and was adopted in 1997 in Lisbon. 55 countries of the European and other regions of the world ratified the treaty. Armenia ratified the LRC in 2005 and Norway in 1999.

The overall aim of the LRC is to foster mobility of individuals through the fair recognition of their qualifications awarded by foreign education institutions. The countries that have ratified the LRC are responsible for following the basic principles for recognition, as well as providing information on education systems. The convention guarantees that:

- requests for recognition should be assessed in fair and timely manner;
- recognition decisions should be issued unless substantial differences can be demonstrated;
- national information centres as well as competent authorities of the countries should provide reliable information on their education systems and qualifications, quality assurance systems, recognized higher education institutions and programmes;
- enic-naric networks should serve as a platform for sharing experience and knowledge regarding practices and tools, education systems, admission requirements, qualifications, etc.
- Cooperation between countries should be based on mutual trust linked to quality assurance.

The LRC is a key area in policy and political initiatives in the European region. The Bologna Process that was launched in 1999 considered recognition essential for creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). While recognition is one of the main objectives of the Bologna process, it is simultaneously a tool to pursue other objectives. Thus, all the objectives of the EHEA are connected

to recognition. Moreover, the LRC is the only legally binding document of the EHEA and per se provides a common and agreed basis for recognition for 49 member countries.

All the EHEA communiqués reflect the important achievements on recognition, and also formulate a strong message to policymakers in member countries to foster implementation of the LRC.

One of the main commitments of the 2015 Yerevan Communiqué was to ensure that qualifications from one EHEA country are automatically recognized at the same level in the other EHEA countries. Later, the 2018 Paris Communiqué and the 2020 Rome Communiqué once again highlighted the importance of recognition and its full implementation that would enable automatic recognition. The original definition of the automatic recognition that was agreed by the EHEA member countries is still the only one and is used by them:

*“Automatic recognition of a degree leads to the automatic right of an applicant holding a qualification of a certain level to be considered for entry to the labour market or programmes of further study in the next level in any other EHEA-country (access)”.*

An important aspect of the automatic recognition concept is based on the automatic right of an individual for access to the next level of education. There are different models of implementation of automatic recognition depending on the national circumstances. However, it is well known that each qualification is described by five elements: level, quality, workload, learning outcomes and profile. Application of the automatic recognition procedure means that quality, level and workload of a qualification are recognized automatically, while profile and learning outcomes of a qualification still need evaluation. It is important to understand whether a qualification fulfils access requirements for admission to a particular study programme. Thus, automatic recognition is linked to quality assurance systems and qualification frameworks.

Enic-naric networks provide support to higher education institutions to allow for automatic system level recognition and ensure consistency in approach and equal attitude towards foreign qualifications. Higher education institutions should rely on the thorough understanding of qualifications' systems, knowledge of the directions of the EHEA and experience developed by the enic-naric networks.

## 2.4. ArmEnic's Role in Recognition of Foreign Qualifications

Internationalization of the national higher education system is one of the strategic priorities for Armenia. International students enhance the academic image of the country and contribute to the economy. According to recent estimates, the number of international students in Armenia is about 4 %. Therefore, it is important to ensure smooth and fair recognition with transparent admission procedures both at national and institutional levels. Though the mobility numbers are not high when compared to other European countries, the challenges related to the recognition of foreign qualifications, short study periods and transfer of ECTS credits should be regularly analysed and solved.

The basic principle of the Lisbon Recognition Convention is that qualifications giving a holder access to higher education in one party should give the same right in other parties, unless a substantial difference can be demonstrated.

Along with the growth in academic mobility numbers, it is necessary to develop procedures at universities for the recognition of foreign qualifications and prior education, based on the main principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. The responsibilities of HEIs for assessment of education and qualifications received abroad increase along with the mobility growth. Thus, the legal framework of the education sphere, as well as the admissions requirements/procedures of HEIs, should be consistent with the main principles of the Convention, respecting the autonomy and academic freedom of HEIs<sup>21</sup>.

Fair recognition of qualifications will ensure the maintenance of the real value of qualifications awarded to further continue education or take up employment. The recognition procedures should also enable the recognition of credits/short-term mobility results.

## Recognition Procedures in ArmEnic

The recognition advice/recommendation issued by ArmEnic is not a legally binding decision. However, it gives the stakeholders a chance to make the right decision.

The recognition procedure for individuals is based on the documentation provided by them and is of two types – recognition procedure for applicants with full documentation and for those with insufficient documents (refugees or people in a refugee-like situation).

If the applicant is fully documented, the procedure is the following

- Application
- verification of completeness of the file
- verification of the status of the institution and/or programme
- verification of the authenticity of documents
- assessment of the qualifications
- conclusion/recognition advice or recommendation

If the applicant is a refugee or a person in a refugee-like situation, then the recognition procedure is carried out according to the Recommendation on the Recognition of Qualifications held by Refugees, Displaced Persons and Persons in a Refugee-like Situation as well as using the Toolkit for Recognition of Refugees' Qualifications.

If the applicant is not fully documented, he/she is requested to fill in the application form and the questionnaire and describe the qualification obtained.

- Provided documents are analysed and assessed based on the relevant country's education profile and centre's experience
- Supplementary documents are requested, and the procedure of the Qualification Passport for Refugees is offered
- The documents on higher achieved qualification are checked for authenticity, in case of non-verifiable documents - interview based tools are applied

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<sup>21</sup> Strategy for Internationalization of Higher Education in the Republic of Armenia, 2020

- Based on the information provided through documentation analysis, self-evaluation and a face to face interview, the final decision is made

Once the information has been collected, the “background document” (the generic term for the standardized statement) can be created. According to the Recommendation, the background document should include the following information<sup>22</sup>:

- personal data of the applicant
- name, in the original language, of the qualification obtained
- name, in the original language, of the institution where the qualification was obtained
- status of the institution and of the programme in the education system where the qualification was obtained
- level of the qualification obtained
- name, in the original language, of the programme in which the qualification was obtained
- nominal duration or workload of the programme
- formal rights given by the qualification obtained
- the year(s) in which the qualification was earned, or the period of study undertaken.
- relevant supporting documentation presented

It is explicitly stated that the background document is not a formal recognition of the qualification of the individual refugee, but can be used to support the actual recognition process if it takes place.

The recognition increases employment opportunities and the possibility to get access to further education as well as providing hope and guidance in a difficult situation.

The section regarding the recognition of refugee’s qualifications is included in the new Law on Higher Education of RA which is still in the process of adoption.

## 2.5. Recruitment

### 2.5.1 Introduction

This part of the document provides instructions for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) concerning how to manage the recruitment process on their own. Recruitment is one of the most important parts of internationalization and educational export of the HEIs. Thousands of people travel abroad for professional education annually, and being involved in and benefiting from this huge stream is undoubtedly significant for the sustainable financial and ranking progress of HEIs. In this chapter, we intend to introduce the general mechanisms of the recruitment process, in order to show how to properly highlight the most important parts of the given information, what kind of invitation documents are required or mostly needed for the international applicants and also to share the best practice of Yerevan State Medical University after Mkhitar Heratsi and Brusov State University.

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.enic-naric.net/recognise-qualifications-held-by-refugees.aspx>



## 2.5.2 How to prepare the university systems for hosting international students

Before starting the recruitment process, the environment of the university should be prepared for hosting international students. In this respect, three main sectors can be singled out: academic, administrative and residence.

In terms of the academic block, it is necessary to start doing the main revising and renewing of the curricula and also making them correspond to modern international standards. The curricula should be translated into English as the most widespread language. Yet, if the HEI intends to export education to specific markets (such as China, Latin America and Francophone countries) translation into another language is also acceptable. It is the academic staff that are supposed to provide the curricula. With regard to this, certain measures should be taken for the implementation of their training. The academic staff should be properly prepared and ready to teach in English, taking into consideration also the cultural differences. It is worth mentioning that professional terms and mnemonics are applied in teaching and fluency in them is of primary importance. The library block should be ready likewise.

The library should be supplemented with literature in different languages. Manuals should be released in the English language which will conform to the curriculum. The starting point can be to make the online professional resources available to students. Remember that all this should be continued. The HEI can single out special work groups which will elaborate on the anglicisation plan of the academic block and will gradually accomplish the work involving the corresponding specialists.

As to the administrative block, the available resources of the HEI (such as the Dean's Office, the Academic Department, etc.) should also be prepared to host their prospective students. The administrative staff should distinctly command the required documentation, perceive all the difficulties the future student might confront and prepare their solutions.

Given that hosting foreign students is done based on other principles than that of the local ones, it is desirable to have a single admission board included in the administrative work. The admission board should include consultative, supportive and revision functions. At the very beginning, applicants must have an opportunity to apply to the admission board to get the necessary information and check the appropriateness of submitting documents. Depending on the admission deadlines of the HEI, another board can function throughout the entire year or can be created upon request.

In the administrative block, it should be taken into account that the recruitment process is comprehensive. Hence, a special work group is necessary for this process too. It is desirable to involve in these work groups, not only those who have a full perception of the HEI structure, but marketers, experts and alumni of higher education as well. Only in the case of their balanced work will it be possible for future applicants to get the required information about the university.

The inclusion of HEI students' self-governmental organizations is important in administrative affairs. Student-to-student contact always positively promotes the recruitment process. The information provided by HEI is often formal, but applicants are also interested in the information which cannot be found in formal papers.

From the perspective of providing proper conditions for residence, the survey of the real estate market is necessary to be carried out. It should be considered that the applicant differs from the tourist. First of all, the student will live in your country for years, use infrastructure (public transport, food spots) and his/her residence should be convenient. Having a campus is a wonderful solution for the HEI where there is a hostel available. However, if the HEI does not have an opportunity like this, then that kind of area can be rented with privileged conditions. Concerning the choice of the hostel, it is important to have the best possible conditions for a normal life available for the students such as:

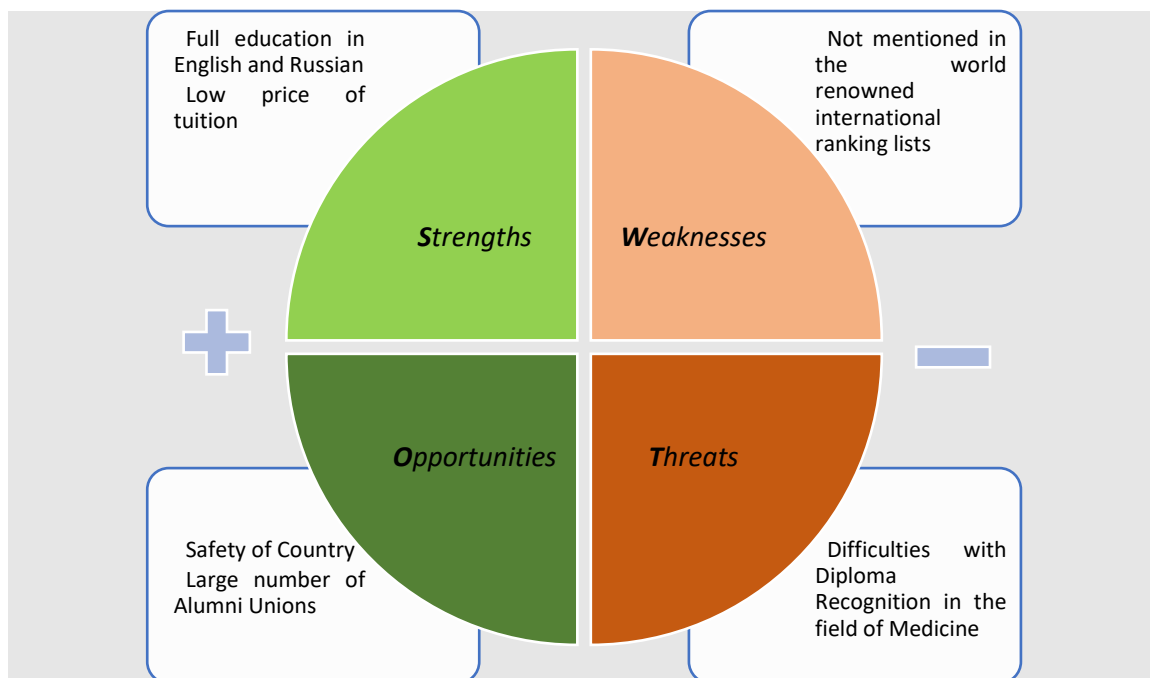
- to be as close to the HEI as possible,
- to be near the food points of sale (supermarket, not too much expensive fast food),
- to have available sport facilities (a private or a nearby gym, pool, etc.),
- to be provided with the internet,
- to have first aid available (nearby first aid spots, healthcare establishments, etc.)
- laundry, etc.

### 2.5.3 The main steps of recruitment

Recruitment is a process which includes many tools of marketing. For the successful outcome, the involvement of professionals in that field is required, but sometimes the HEIs do not have sufficient financial and human resources. We will try to explain how the process is conducted, focusing on the main important steps, using the simple examples and experience of YSMU.

The first step is strategic planning, which will be followed by the plan of action.

At the beginning of the process, there is a need to make an appropriate analysis of the HEI. There are several methods and mechanisms for this process, but we will create our example using the most common form of analysis: a SWOT matrix. A SWOT matrix is used for strategic planning to help organizations identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to project planning. In our case, we will show the simple SWOT analysis of recruitment for the “MD Physician” Degree (Doctor of Medicine) awarded by Yerevan State Medical University [Figure 1].



**Figure 1: Simple SWOT analysis**

This simple analysis shows the strengths and opportunities for successful recruitment. This kind of analysis helps to stress the key points in the information platform, to understand what to say and what to show.

The necessary information: What, how and where?

First of all, HEIs should take into consideration the fact that by choosing them, applicants also choose the country with its culture, traditions and lifestyle. This means that along with the information provided on education, it's very important to provide as much thorough information about the country and its features as possible as well. It can be, indeed, argued that plenty of information about the given country can be found in the open resources [Figure 6] and this issue should be the last thing that HEIs should think about. This is nevertheless extremely important for the applicants and their families. If HEIs do not want to spend much time and resources to make their own content in this area, they can use the public ones to make the information platform more complete. The best option can be sharing the experience of the students and alumni. *International applicants must know how to “survive” in your country.*

The second thing that HEIs should do is provide the applicants with detailed information about the educational programme. The basic aspects should be mentioned, using internationally understandable terms – full information about duration and outcomes, awarded qualifications, tuition fees, etc.

The third one is the necessary information about the admission process. HEIs should provide legal information about admission regulations and requirements, lists of the required documents, admission deadlines and make the admission procedure easy to understand for applicants (see *Chapter 3: Admission*).

HEIs should use as many platforms for sharing the official information as they can. The most common way is the official webpage of the HEI. It is important to design it to be user-friendly, in at least in two languages. If it is difficult to find necessary information in the existing structure of your webpage, ask your IT team to create a separate subsection specifically for admission. Based on the quality surveys, YSMU learned that some applicants face difficulties while looking for the necessary information about admission on our official webpage ([www.ysmu.am](http://www.ysmu.am)). Since 2019, each year, during the recruiting and admission period we place an item “Admission to the current academic year” on the front page of the English version of our webpage. After this small action, the success rate grew by 12 percentage points.

Currently, YSMU uses the official YouTube channel for sharing its own video materials [Figure 2]. Following this link, you will find a few short videos in English targeting international applicants, telling them about YSMU and its important infrastructure available for students.

YSMU actively uses the “culture of guides”. There are several step-by-step guidelines for the admission process published and shared via the official webpage. The printed forms are used in face-to-face meetings during YSMU officials' external visits.

The main sources of sharing information are those mentioned above, but in the period of active recruitment, based on the marketing plan, YSMU uses a wide range of SMM tools to spread the information about admission.

Based on this simple analysis presented in Figure 1, we can see that in this case YSMU can simply use the source of its alumni to involve them in the recruitment for the benefit of their Alma Mater. The information definitely sounds more trustworthy for applicants and their families, as in this case it is spread by the graduates, i.e. people who represent the university, received their education there, lived in that country and are sharing their own experience and not only the “official version”. *Trust between the university, its representatives and applicants is the most important factor for successful recruitment.*

As mentioned in “Point 2.2 Introduction to Yerevan State Medical University after Mkhitar Heratsi”, approximately 8,000 YSMU graduates are leading specialists in many well-known public or private hospitals in almost 40 countries of the world. At present, there are more than 15 YSMU Alumni Unions and Active Initiative Groups of our graduates, who are periodically involved in the recruitment process.

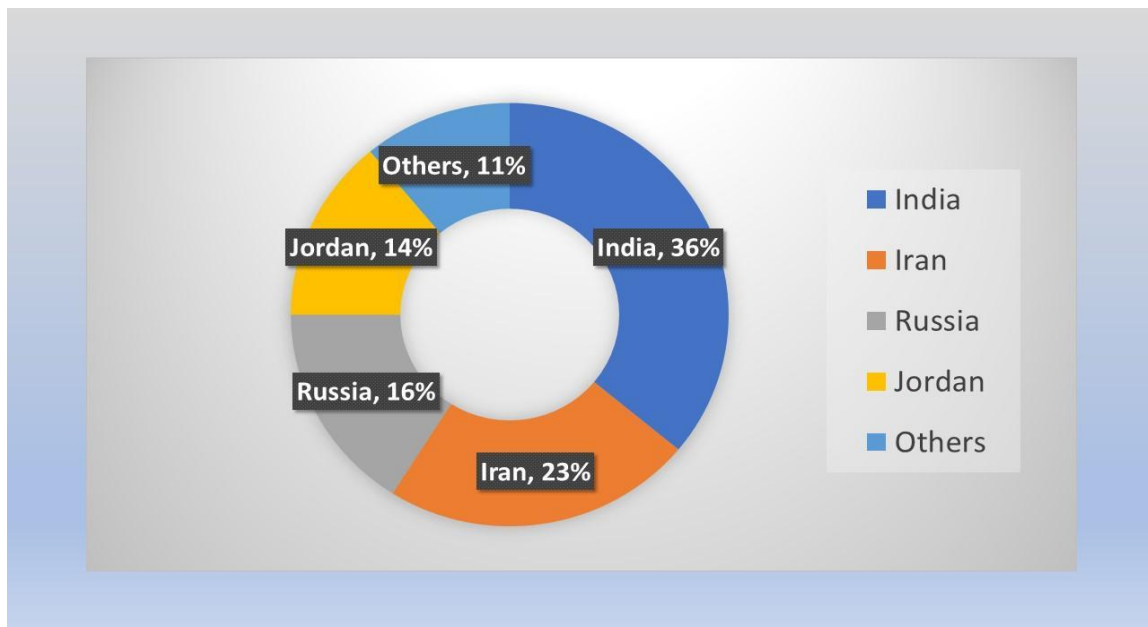
Where HEIs do not have access to such structures, they can apply to the governmental bodies or use the service of agencies specialized in the field of educational export. Most of the countries have an official body in the state external affairs institutions (Ministry, Embassies, Departments, etc.) which can assist in this regard.

There are a couple of useful tools also, like “open day” events, presentations during famous education expos, meetings with the target auditorium, online seminars. Based on their own needs and marketing plan, each HEI should decide which one of the above tools, as well as other existing opportunities, should be used while talking to its prospective applicants.

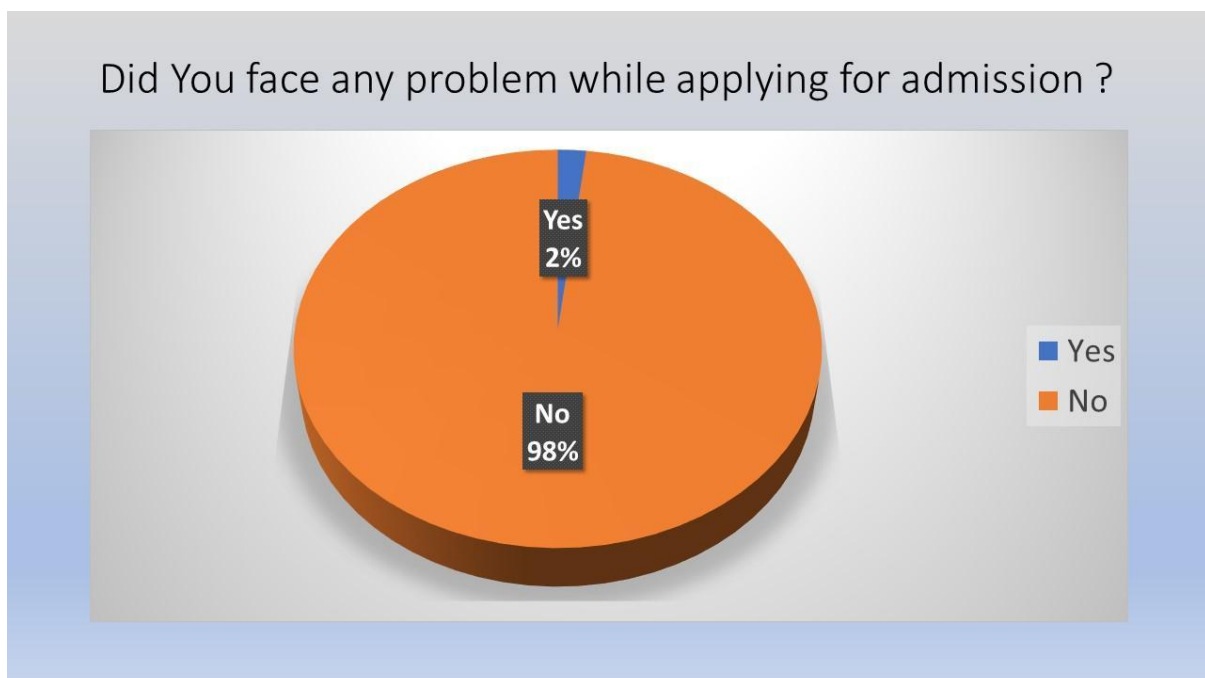


### Brief data on YSMU recruitment self-assessment

During the “NACAR” project, YSMU conducted a short survey among our international students about the admission procedure, to explore difficulties they had faced on the stage of applying to the University. The survey was made by the Faculty of General Medicine. 689 students from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> year of education took part in this survey. It was done anonymously, which gave them the possibility to express their opinions more frankly. The outcome of the results turned out to be very useful. It was presented to YSMU authorities and resulted in taking some corrective measures and necessary actions for the improvement of the “Recruitment action plan 2020-2025”.



*Figure 3: Citiznships of students involved in survey*



*Figure 4: Percentage of students whose face problems*

Do You think that applicants need more information ?

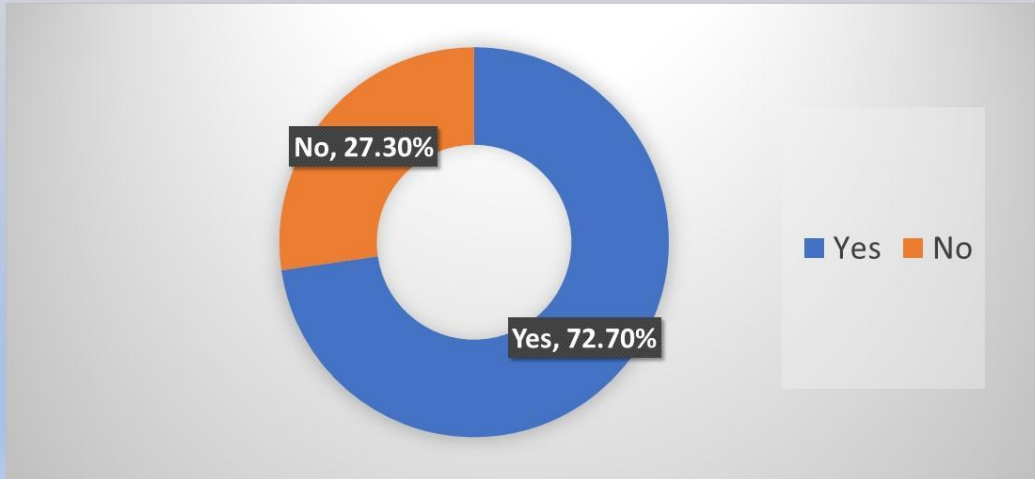


Figure 5: About need of more information

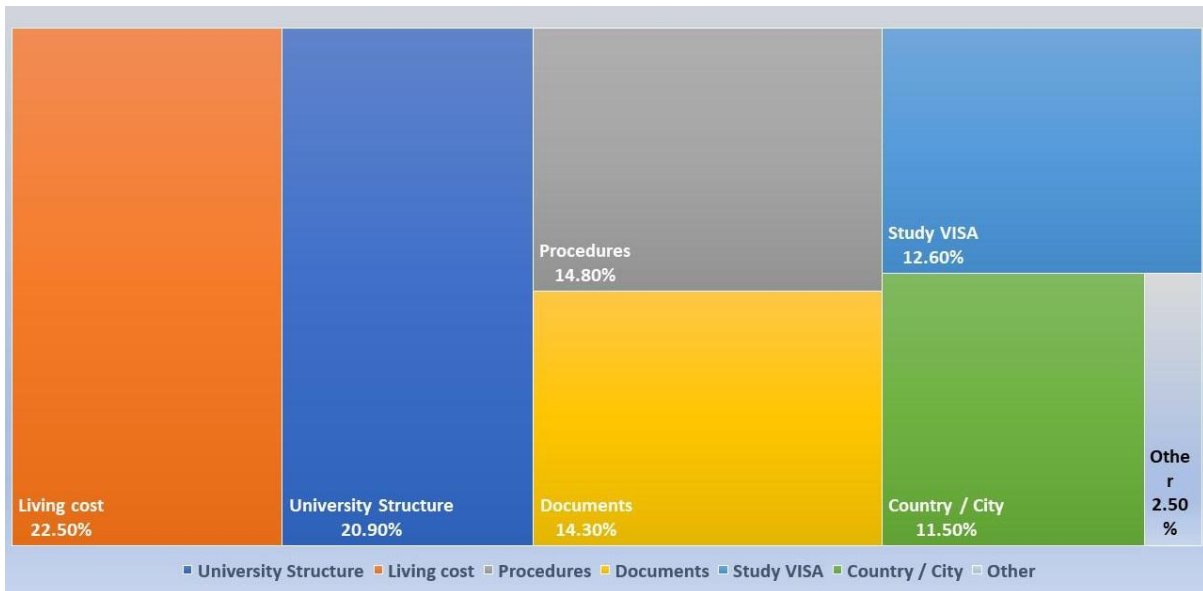


Figure 6: Structure of needed information (several choices were allowed)

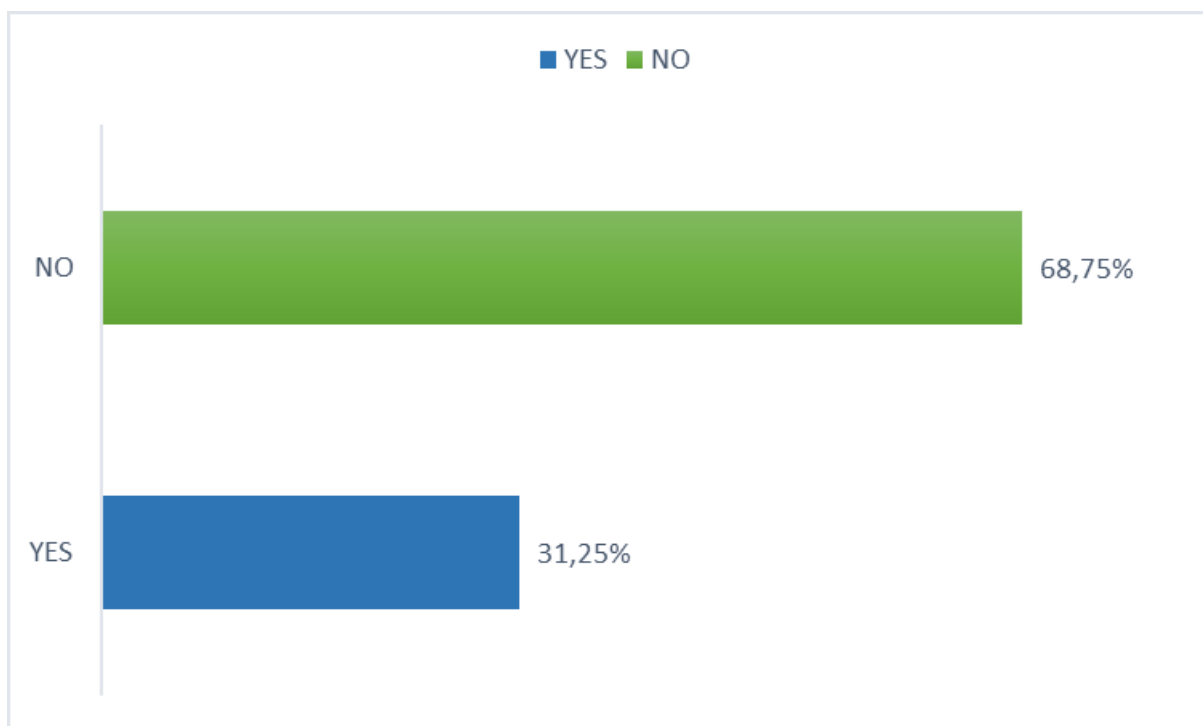
Brusov State University: Evaluation of International Student Admission and Lessons Learned

This part of the chapter summarizes the results of the international students’ admission survey conducted among BSU international students, and aims at improving the recruitment and admissions process organized by BSU. Moreover, the analysis of the responses reveals the strengths and weaknesses of the process.

The questionnaire was completed by 16 international students from Syria, Russia, Georgia, Iran, Lebanon, USA, Serbia, Jordan, etc. The majority of the students were studying at the following faculties:

- Social Sciences and Service (37.5%);
- Faculty of Russian and Foreign Languages (25%);
- Faculty of Education and Professional Pedagogy (25%);
- Faculty of Translation and Intercultural Communication (12.5%).

When choosing the HEI, 31.75 % of respondents applied to several universities in Armenia, while the majority of them (68.75%) only applied to Brusov State University (see Figure 7).

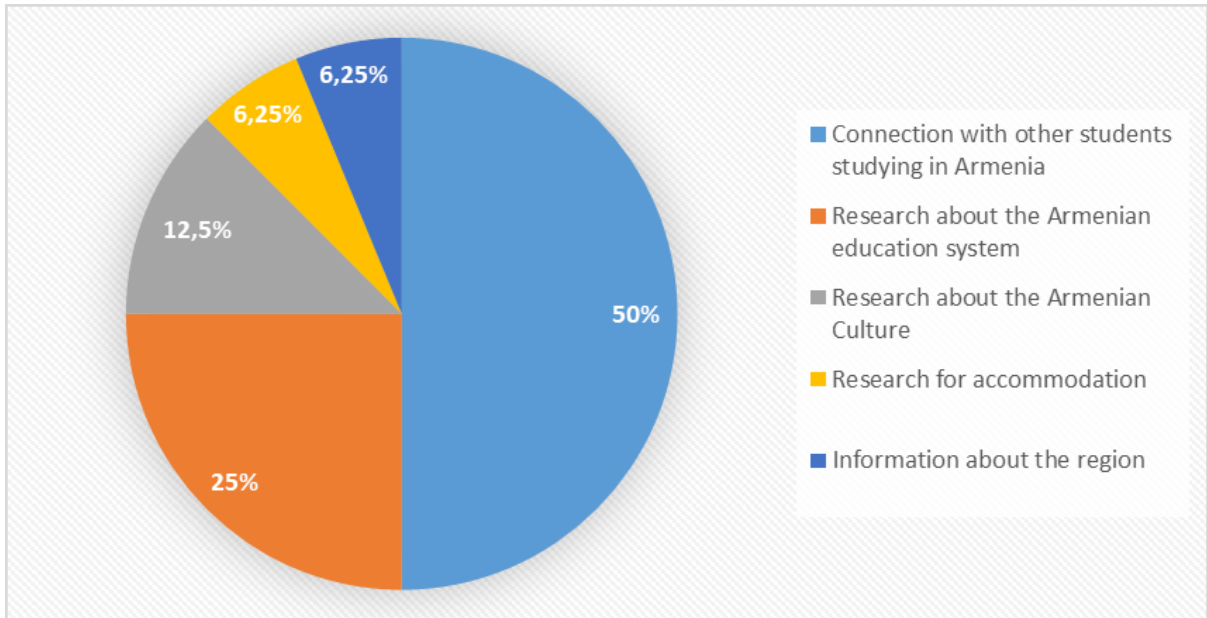


**Figure 7: Did you apply for admission to several Universities in Armenia?**

The choice of BSU was based on the fields of studies, a rich variety of languages taught at BSU, recommendations of alumni, as well as the fact that BSU is considered to be the best HEI for language education and teaching in Armenia.

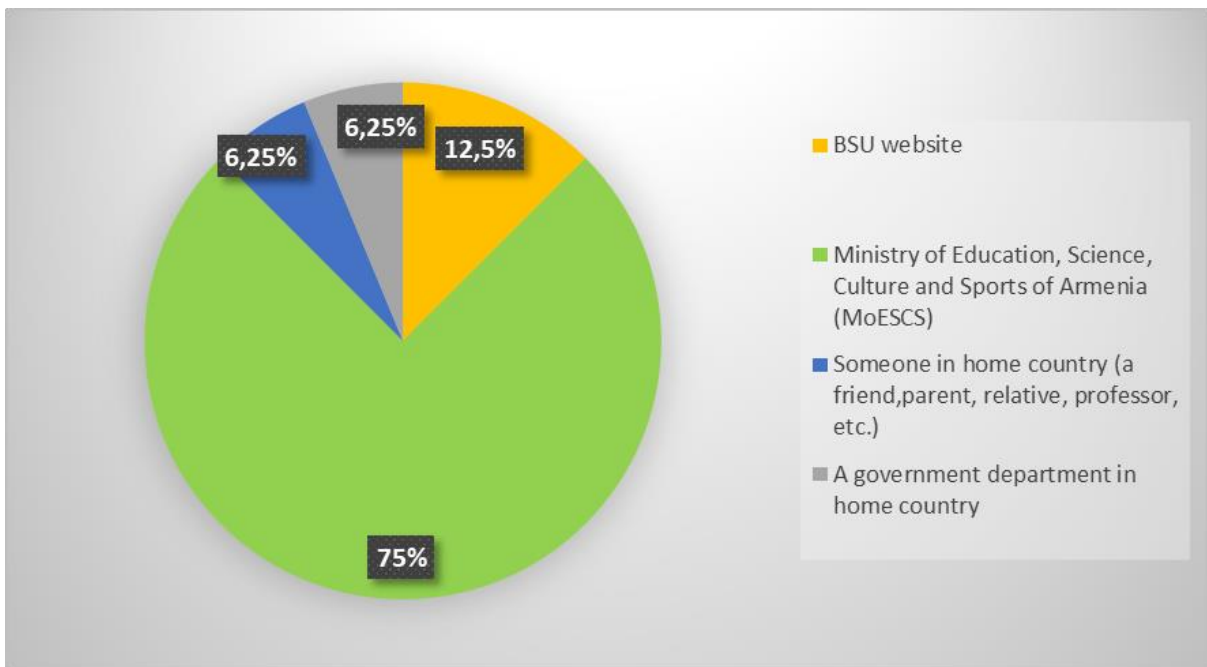
The majority of the students (62.5%) learned about BSU from someone in their home country (a friend, parent, relative, professor, etc.), so the word of mouth prevailed. Others mentioned the BSU website, online forums and blogs, and alumni.

The following actions were taken before arriving to study at BSU: connection with other students studying in Armenia (50%), research about the Armenian education system (25%) and Armenian Culture (12.5%), search for accommodation (6.25%), information about the region (6.25%) (see Figure 8).



**Figure 8: Actions taken before arriving to study at BSU**

Regarding the application process, the majority of the students (75%) learned about the process from the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Armenia (MoESCS), the latter is the responsible authority for the admission of international students. Moreover, 12.5 % learned from the BSU website, and 6.25% from a government department or someone in their home country (see Figure 9). Therefore, 87.5% applied and submitted documents directly to the MoESCS, nevertheless 12.5% of the students applied to BSU as well.



**Figure 9: Information source for the application process**



During the application process, the respondents faced some difficulties, such as language barriers, too much documentation, and bureaucracy.

75% noted that the necessary information concerning the study programme before the application process was well-received, moreover, the majority of them (56.3%) received the required support and assistance from BSU. Nevertheless, 25% mentioned that they had not received any necessary information at all, but they still applied to BSU.

The students indicated some difficulties they encountered during their studies at BSU, such as:

1. Armenian language;
2. Finding books;
3. Problems related to the schedule.

Thus, taking into account all the difficulties with the application process and studies at BSU, 68.75% stated that they would definitely and 31.25% would probably recommend BSU to other international students.

Moreover, foreign students would recommend Armenia as a study destination to other students, keeping in mind that there may be difficulties.

From the lessons learned, it should be mentioned that preparatory courses, especially Armenian language courses, would be beneficial for the students. The application process also needs improvement, making it more user-friendly with less documentation. Counselling services are also needed for students, especially a more in-depth explanation of the study programme, grading system and exam requirements.

Furthermore, it should be noted that although in Armenia the MoESCS is the responsible authority for the admission and recruitment of the international students, the survey shows that more than half of the students contacted BSU for admission related guidance and explanation.

#### 2.5.4 Admission procedure for International Students

The admission of foreign citizens in Armenia is done in accordance with the decree of the Government of the RA № 700-Ն dated 28.04.2011 “On procedures for admission of international citizens, as well as family member of diplomats working in the diplomatic institutions of the RA abroad to the higher education institutions of the RA”.

First and foremost, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of the RA (MoESCS) initiates a call for applications from foreign citizens as well as Armenian Diaspora applicants to study in education institutions.

Applicants, who are willing to study in a higher education institution in Armenia are eligible to submit the required documents to the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of the RA:

- Directly by the applicant or by the authorized person.
- By the higher educational institution
- By RA diplomatic representatives in the foreign countries.

Prior to applying to the RA MoESCS, applicants are more than welcomed to consult with the International Relations Division of the HEI to find out about the available programmes, admission procedures, deadlines, tuition fees, etc.

## Required Documents

Applicants are required to submit the following documents:

1. Filled-in application form;
2. Filled-in application-questionnaire form;
3. Copy of passport;
4. For Diaspora Armenians, a copy of birth certificate certified by a notary or a copy of baptism certificate;
5. Copy of the graduation certificate with the grades, translated and certified by the Notary. In certain specific countries, international certification (Apostille) may be needed;
6. Medical certificate about health status (can be provided by the RA medical organizations);
7. Four photos (3x4 cm);
8. CV/autobiography in Armenian, Russian or English;
9. For PhD applicants: a scientific essay on the chosen major topic in Armenian, Russian, or English (approx. 20 pages).

## The Admission Deadlines

The admission deadlines for international students are set by the MoESCS and are usually as follows:

Deadlines for applications		
Programme	Full-time	Part-time
Bachelor	Mid July - end of September	Mid July - mid October
Master	Mid July – beginning of October	Mid July - mid October
PhD	Mid July - beginning of December	Mid July - mid December

## The Admission Procedure

After examination and verification of applicants' documents by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport, applications are transferred to the HEIs for further admission processing of international applicants. The entrance requirements are set by the HEI, and might be either interview and/or exams for knowledge assessment, including language criteria, previous education and overall background.

Finally, after examination of documents and knowledge assessment the applicant and the MoESCS are informed about the final decision concerning their admission.

For all international students a “Welcome Day” is organized and the necessary information regarding tuition fees, university faculties and programmes, residence permit, etc. is provided.

More information about the admission of foreign students can be found at the following links:

To BSU:

[https://brusov.am/en/page\\_list/information/#sthash.bwlwYiw.ynFPXB2y.dpbs](https://brusov.am/en/page_list/information/#sthash.bwlwYiw.ynFPXB2y.dpbs)

To YSMU:

[https://ysmu.am/en/page\\_list/admission\\_2020-2021\\_for\\_foreign\\_citizens/#sthash.EQACbAzb.dpbs](https://ysmu.am/en/page_list/admission_2020-2021_for_foreign_citizens/#sthash.EQACbAzb.dpbs)

## Getting a residence permit

The legislation of the Republic of Armenia requires all international students to obtain residence permits from the Government of the Republic of Armenia. The International Relations Divisions of HEIs assist incoming international students in organizing and completing the most important procedures for their legal stay in the Republic of Armenia. The residence permit is free of charge for international students, except charges for the translation of the documents, printing and copying of required documents, as well as the medical certificate to be covered by the applicant.

Detailed information on getting visas and residence permits is available on the website of the [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the RA](#).

## Handling of international applications at USN

Applications for undergraduate studies in Norway are processed by “The Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service” if taught in Norwegian. All applicants apply via one portal, and when handling applications for undergraduate studies, Norwegian universities use the GSU list to evaluate the general requirements: [General requirements - English \(samordnaopptak.no\)](#). For the few English taught bachelor programmes in Norway, applications are sent directly to the institution in question, but the same rules apply (apart from the Norwegian language requirement).

Applicants for exchange studies (from shorter stays to two semesters) are handled by the International Relations Office, and partner universities nominate their students directly.

So far there is no national portal for master applicants, although this is under consideration and a project group consisting of members from different universities is working on this, hopefully concluding in 2022.

At master level, international applicants for all our English taught master programmes apply directly to USN through our portal and upload all required documents there. USN evaluates the applicants’ educational background and ranks the qualified applicants for the different programmes. Offers and rejections are sent directly to the applicants by USN: [How to apply? - Universitetet i Sørøst-Norge \(usn.no\)](#)

NOKUT provides valuable information about different countries’ education systems and other helpful resources: [NOKUT’s country database | Nokut](#), and also offers guidance for the institutions in specific

cases. Applicants already residing in Norway have often applied for general recognition at NOKUT already, but are not obliged to do this before applying for admission.

At USN we have over the years tried to gather country information from other sources as well, concerning handling of documents, grade conversions, verification etc. We also have some dialogue with other universities on the matter, having common experiences and challenges, and have planned a seminar in 2022. Often applicants apply to several Norwegian institutions.

We are looking forward to a joint national handling of all master applications in the future, giving even more equal treatment and especially a more effective handling of such a large number of applications.

### ArmEnic's Study and Recognition Procedure in Armenian HEIs

In 2019, ArmEnic conducted a study to foster the recognition of foreign qualifications and short-term studies/credit mobility performed by the higher education institutions (HEIs) of RA. The conclusions and recommendations drawn based on the results of the study aim at improving the process of institutional recognition in the RA and bringing the recognition process in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC).

From the analysis of the responses provided by the HEIs, it is obvious that different subdivisions are responsible for recognition in the HEIs, which is in line with international experience. However, in the case of foreign qualifications, the decisions of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports (MoESCS) serve as a basis for the HEIs.

Regarding the cooperation with ArmEnic, in terms of recognition, it is obvious that the majority of HEIs only apply to ArmEnic for additional information in certain cases, and sometimes they direct the applicant to ArmEnic. However, admissions deadlines can become a serious issue for such cases. ArmEnic has good experience with some HEIs, where the applicants are informed that depending on the response provided by ArmEnic, the HEI will make its final decision.

As previously mentioned, the admission of international students in Armenia is organized centrally by the Ministry of Education and Science according to the Decree of the Government of RA on "Admission of Foreign Citizens and Family Members of Diplomats working in the Diplomatic Service Bodies in the Republic of Armenia". International students submit their documents to MoES for further expertise. In this regard, there are some concerns.

International experience shows that admission to a HEI and recognition of foreign qualifications to continue education are the responsibility of the HEI, based on the fundamental principles of academic freedom and institutional autonomy. Undoubtedly, the HEI should be in direct contact with the applicant and have the right to make a final decision on the foreign qualification based on the advice provided by the National Information Center. Such cooperation between an HEI and the National Information Center provides a basis for making reliable and trustworthy decisions on recognition of foreign qualifications.

Moreover, knowledge about the differences between national education systems is important in the field of recognition. Assessment and recognition of a foreign qualification belonging to another national system imply its comparison with a similar national qualification, for which it is necessary to

take into account educational diversity and complexity. That is why the legislation of most European countries stipulates the mandatory requirement of a "comparability certificate", and the decision made by the National Information Center is binding.

Thus, the N-700-N Decision of the RA Government of April 28, 2011, contradicts the principles of the LRC as well as the principles of academic freedom and institutional autonomy. The HEIs admit applicants "automatically" based on the decisions of the MoESCS. However, when it turns out that the HEI has conducted the admission process based on a wrong decision, it is not clear who is responsible for that. The LRC signifies the origin of qualifications, while the decision of the Government of the RA is entirely based on the nationality of the individual. Moreover, the MoESCS makes the admission decisions limited to verifying the authenticity of foreign applicant's documents and consular ratification. The recognition process is much broader in terms of both content and procedures. It is not clear how the MoESCS verifies the authenticity of the submitted educational documents.

The inclusion of information on the recognition of foreign qualifications in the admission requirements is crucial both for the applicant and HEI. The provision of reliable information on the national education system is important as it greatly contributes to mobility and internationalization. Individuals with foreign qualifications may need to be informed in advance of recognition procedures. However, given that the MoESCS is responsible for accepting foreigners, the majority of the HEIs do not include recognition information on their official websites.

Hence, based on the main conclusions of the research, the following recommendations have been developed for the MoESCS and HEIs:

- Review the procedures for admission of foreigners to HEIs of the RA following the basic principles of the LRC;
- Separate the responsibilities of the MoESCS and HEIs based on the basic principles of university autonomy and academic independence;
- Review quality assurance criteria and procedures, including the requirement to assess institutional recognition procedures;
- Include in the university admission requirements the mandatory requirement of the recognition statement;
- Develop institutional procedures for the recognition of foreign qualifications per the main principles of the LRC based on the learning outcomes;
- Cooperate with ArmEnic, using the expert potential of the centre;
- Participate in the training and seminars organized by ArmEnic<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Recognition of Foreign Qualifications and Short-Term Studies/Credit Mobility Performed by the HEIs of the RA, 2020



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