

Restrictions; real or perceived?

Report 3: Legal obstacles on
Master's admissions in Europe

Table of contents

List of tables and charts	3
List of abbreviations used in this publication	4
1. Executive Summary	6
2. Introduction.....	7
3. Methodology	10
3.1. Background	10
3.2. Methods	11
4. Legal frameworks and regulations on admission.....	14
4.1. Austria	14
4.2. Belgium	15
4.3. Finland.....	18
4.4. Germany	20
4.5. Italy.....	22
4.6. Lithuania.....	23
4.8. Spain.....	27
4.9. The Netherlands	29
5. Legal obstacles' survey.....	32
5.1. Profile of surveys' respondents	32
5.2. Results' analysis and discussion.....	33
6. Experts' interviews	45
6.1. Ministries of Higher Education	45
6.2. Master coordinators.....	46
7. Conclusions.....	48
8. Bibliography	50
9. Annex.....	51
9.1. Online survey sample: Legal requirements for Master's level admissions	51
9.2. Extracts from Report 'Monitoring the Implementation of the Lisbon Convention'	55

List of tables and charts

Images and tables

Image 1. Countries used as object of study in this report

Table 1. Distribution of participants by country

Table 2. Participant profile by position

Table 3. Participant profile by type of institution

Charts

Chart 1. What legal conditions have to be met by students to access a Master?

Chart 2. What institutional regulations or criteria have to be met by students to access a Master?

Chart 3. Can students start with the admission process before all legal criteria have been fulfilled? (Conditional admission)

Chart 4. Which are the 3 biggest obstacles for student's admission deriving from laws and regulations?

Chart 5. How cumbersome, if at all, are visas/student permits for the admission process?

Chart 6. Please estimate what share of applicants does not get admitted because of visa/permits problems

Chart 7. How cumbersome, if at all, do you think that the recognition of degrees is for the admission process?

Chart 8. Please estimate what share of applicants does not get admitted because of recognition of degree problems

Chart 9. Do you think that non-EU/EEA students have more difficulties in the admission process than EU/EEA students?

Chart 10. Reasons why non-EU/EEA students have more difficulties in admission

Note: all the images, tables and charts have been produced by ACUP (Catalan Association of Public Universities). The tables and charts refer to the *Survey of Legal requirements for Master's levels admissions*

List of abbreviations used in this publication

ACA – Academic Cooperation Association

ACUP – Catalan Association of Public Universities

AEQES – The Agency for the Evaluation of the Quality of Higher Education

AFAM – Higher Education in Art, Music and Dance

ANECA – National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation

ANVUR – National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes

APS – Center for Academic Assessment

ECTS – European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

EEA – European Economic Area

EHEA – European Higher Education Area

ENIC-NARIC – European Network of Information Centres in the European Region - National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union

ENQA – European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

EQF – European Qualifications Framework

EQF-LLL – European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning

ETP – English-Taught Programmes

EU – European Union

FINEEC – Finnish Education Evaluation Centre

GMAT – Graduate Management Admission Test

GPA – Grade Point Average

GQF – German Qualifications Framework

HBO - Higher Learning and Professional Training

HE – Higher Education

HEI – Higher Education Institution

HRK – German Rectors' Conference

HS-QSG – Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education

ITS – High Technical Institute

KMK – Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs

LRC – Lisbon Recognition Convention

LTQF – Lithuanian Qualifications Framework

MECES – Spanish Qualifications Framework for Higher Education

NAKVIS – Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

NQF – National Qualifications Framework

NVAO – Netherlands-Flanders Accreditation Organisation

OER – Education and Examination Regulations

QF-EHEA – Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area

RAE – Specific Admission Requirements

RAG – General Admission Requirements

RPL – Recognition of Prior Learning

RUCT – Spanish Registry of Universities, Centres and Qualifications

SKVC – Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education

VAE – Validation of Prior Professional Experience

VLUHR – Quality Assurance Agency of the Flemish Universities and University Colleges Council

VUA – Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

WHW – Higher Education and Research Act

1. Executive Summary

The present report addresses one of the main problems affecting admissions in Europe nowadays: the perception by Master's programme coordinators and admission staff that some important admission requirements restricting a diverse international classroom are set by national laws. It tries to answer the question: is the perception that there are legal obstacles grounded in real facts?

The evidence obtained in this report has shown that the only legal requirement for Master admission found in laws from the countries analysed is a valid Bachelor, and that the main obstacle for student admission is the process of requesting a visa/student permit, which is cumbersome and time consuming and affects only students from outside of the EU. It is usually accompanied by the parallel process of degree recognition, which in some countries presents several difficulties for the student.

The report's methodology consists of a combination of three methods. The nine countries of the Mastermind Consortium members have been taken as a convenience sample. First, a description of the laws and regulations admission of the nine countries is given and put in the context of each country's university system.

Second, the research question is tackled through a survey which targeted a variety of admission staff from the Erasmus+ countries and was aimed at gathering data about specific obstacles and their explanation.

Third, as a counterbalance, five interviews to heads and directors of higher education of Ministries were run in order to get the view directly from the governments, and two interviews to Master Directors/admission coordinators were conducted in order to identify cumbersome elements in the admission process.

Besides the general conclusions schematised above, some implications for the overall project can be noted from the conclusions: the different ways in which the Lisbon Convention is applied has a crucial role in facilitating or, on the contrary, in complicating the admission process. Besides, it is worth noting that the paradigm shift in admissions that the Mastermind project has suggested, from a system currently based on the recognition of diplomas to one based on the assessment of competencies, is not perceived here as a factor that is likely to modify the education laws in the future.

2. Introduction

In 1999, with the signature of the Bologna Declaration, a complex reform process was initiated across signatory countries, leading to the creation of a common European space of education, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), in 2010. The aim of a cohesive EHEA would be to facilitate academic mobility, increase the comparability of studies across all the educational systems of the participating countries as well as promote Europe as a world education destination. Nowadays, 48 countries have joined the European Higher Education Area.

Mastermind Europe – Master's admission for a diverse international classroom project is a three-year initiative launched in 2014. The project is built on the assumption that current admissions at Master's level is often not appropriate for recruiting students for a diverse international classroom, and specifically that these processes are currently restrictive for 'outsider' applicants, i.e. applicants with a Bachelor or equivalent degree from another institution than the one offering the Master. The project aims to generate a paradigm shift in admissions at Master level in Europe, from a system currently based on the "recognition of diplomas" to one based on the "assessment of competencies". The project's objective is to generate a comprehensive set of guidelines and tools designed to facilitate this comprehensive change, tools that will be put at the disposal of admission officers across Europe.

Mastermind Europe is coordinated by the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VUA); the Consortium consists further of six universities: the University of Helsinki, Vilnius University, the University of Ljubljana, the Polytechnic University of Milan, the University of Graz, two interuniversity organisations: the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) and the Catalan Association of Public Universities (ACUP), one European umbrella organisation in international higher education: the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA), and two private companies, StudyPortals and Ziggurat. The project is co-sponsored by the Erasmus+ program of the European Union as a Key Action 2 Strategic Partnership.

The role of the present report is to revise what is referred to as "legal obstacles": among many stakeholders concerned with master's admission, there is a common perception that some important admission requirements are set by national laws, and that this often constitutes an obstacle. This report will therefore try to answer the following research question: is the perception that there are legal obstacles grounded in real facts?

The nine countries of the Mastermind Consortium members (Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Slovenia, Spain and the Netherlands) have been chosen as a sample. First, an

explanation of the university system, the laws and regulations affecting admissions of each country is given as an illustration of the legal point of departure. Then, the research question is tackled through a survey and interviews, in order to gather the perceptions of the actors that ultimately have a say on admission of Master's students.

An online survey was also conducted, targeting a variety of admission staff from the nine countries, aimed at gathering data about specific obstacles and their explanation; with 28 respondents. As a counterbalance, three interviews to directors of higher education in the Ministries were run in order to get the view directly from the governments, and two interviews to Master Directors/admission coordinators were conducted in order to identify cumbersome elements in the admission process.

The report team is composed of ACUP (Alícia Betts and Mariona Miret) with the collaboration of VUA (Kees Kouwenaar), ACA (Irina Ferencz) and Nuffic Netherlands (Bas Wegewijs).

The report would have not been possible without the assistance of the ENIC-NARIC offices and higher education institutions of the nine Consortium countries. We want to thank Ingrid Wadsack-Köchl (ENIC-NARIC Austria), Erwin Malfroy (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, Belgium), Céline Nicodème (NARIC, Ministry of the Federation Wallonia-Brussels, Belgium), Saara Louko and Carita Blomqvist (Finnish National Board of Education), Marius Michalski (Department of Higher Education, Germany), Dora Cornelia Longoni and Fabrizio Butto' (International Projects Service, Politecnico di Milano, Italy), Rima Zilinskaite (ENIC-NARIC Lithuania), Alenka Lisec and Iztok Žebovec (ENIC-NARIC Slovenia), Isabel Tolosana (NARIC, Spain) and Bas Wegewijs (EP-Nuffic Netherlands).

The team is also grateful to the interviewees: from the Ministries, Peter Greisler (Head of Directorate Universities, Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Germany), Noel Vercruysse (Director of the Ministry of Education and Training, Flemish community, Belgium), Elmar Pichl (Director General, Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy, Austria). From directors and admission staff of Master's, we want to thank Joan Ramon Borrell (Director of the Master's in Economics, Regulation and Competition in Public Services, University of Barcelona, Spain), and Fabrizio Butto (Coordinator of International Admissions, Politecnico di Milano, Italy). Thank you for your expertise, support and contribution to this project.

The report consists of five sections. Section 3, following this introductory section, gives information on previous Mastermind reports and information that constitutes the background of this report and helps explain the state of the art, and also provides key methodological information on the design and implementation of the surveys, the representativeness of the response groups and response rates.

Section 4 provides an overview on the Higher Education system of each of the nine countries of the Consortium, and presents the legal framework of each country and specific laws regulating admission.

Section 5 analyses the results of the survey results on legal requirements for master's admission.

Section 6 presents the highlights from the interviews to higher education experts' from Ministries and to programme directors.

Section 7, the last section of the report, presents the main conclusions and implications of the results for the wider project.

The survey sample and relevant extracts of the Monitoring report of the Implementation of the Lisbon Convention are included in the Annex section.

3. Methodology

In this section we provide further details on the background of the report and on the data collection methods used in the process of producing this report and interpreting the results.

3.1. Background

The present report complements the previous report by the ACA, Study Portals and VUA on the “Admissions to English-Taught Programs (ETPs) at Master’s level in Europe – Procedures, regulations, success rates and challenges for diverse applicants”.¹ The results of that report show that admissions are still primarily based on diploma recognition, the prior degree (94.7%) and the transcript of records (68.4%) being in the top 3 admission criteria used in the application process of most programs.

Moreover, the ACA report states that it is more difficult for domestic applicants and even more so for foreign applicants to go through the admission process at Master’s level than it is for internal students. The processing of application files from foreign and domestic applicants is more challenging to admission officers than those of internal candidates, making the fair evaluation of external applicants more cumbersome and subjective, leading to a lower success rate in their Master’s application process and impacting negatively on their perception of the whole process.

One of the key issues of this report, and as suggested by the previous Mastermind report, is diploma recognition; specifically of the Bachelor. Over the years, a number of developments have taken place in this respect: “equivalence, which requires an exact match in content as a precondition for recognition, has been gradually replaced by recognition, which requires a match in functions and general level of the academic qualification” (Kouwenaar, 1994). The evolution of diploma recognition and other instruments developed to address the increasing diversity of applicants can be found in the Mastermind Guiding Tool 0: Paradigm Shift.²

The most important document with regard to recognition is the Lisbon Convention. The increasing academic mobility over the past years led to the implementation of an international convention instigated jointly by the Council of Europe and UNESCO: the Convention on the Recognition of

¹ <http://mastermindeurope.eu/resource/evidence-report-admissions-to-english-taught-masters/>. The report looks at differences in admission for a) internal applicants (from within the same university), domestic applicants (from other universities in the country), and international applicants.

² <http://mastermindeurope.eu/resource/guiding-tool-0-paradigm-shift-full-report/>. This report examines how the transition from bachelor’s to master’s in Europe is changing from a one-on-one transfer from a bachelor’s programme to a master’s programme into a many-to-many transition.

Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, also referred to as The Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC).

Signed in Lisbon, Portugal, in 1997, the aim of this convention is to facilitate the recognition of foreign studies among the signatory countries. Unless a substantial difference is observed, a qualification issued by one of the signatory parties is recognised by the others. In the event of rejection of a qualification, the institution responsible for the evaluation must justify its decision. In terms of access to higher education studies, the Lisbon Convention guarantees that holders of a high school qualification that grants them access to tertiary education in their home countries, will also meet the general requirements to apply for higher education studies in the rest of signatory countries. Until now, the convention has been signed by 50 countries and international organizations, such as the European Union (EU), USA, Australia, Canada, Israel, Turkey, New Zealand, Ukraine, Turkey and Russia.

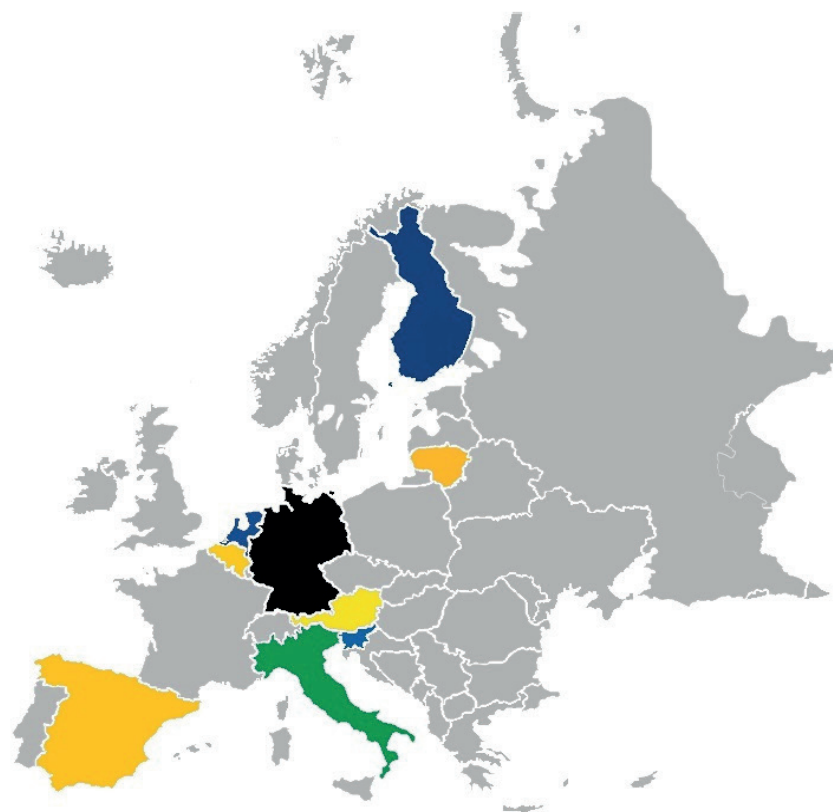
However, 20 years after the adoption of the Lisbon Recognition Convention there is still a lack of systematic and fair application of LRC and subsequent texts, as suggested by the report of the Committee that monitors the Implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. A selection of relevant extracts of the Executive Summary of this report can be found in the Annex 9.2.

3.2. Methods

The present report uses three methods to answer the research question: first, a description of the university system and legal requirements for Master's admission in each country; second, a survey of admission's staff; third, interviews of the Higher Education Ministries and of programme directors.

The nine countries of the Mastermind Consortium members (Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Slovenia, Spain and the Netherlands) have been taken as a convenience sample, due to practical considerations, that is to say, the facility to contact with agencies and HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) of these countries as members of the project. Despite covering a limited number of countries, the sample is solid because a) it is geographically balanced; b) the countries covered have different higher education systems –unitary and binary-; c) some are amongst the top destinations of international students in Europe while others receive fairly few international students. Consequently, the conclusions of this report apply to the sample countries but as a whole they want to show a representative picture of the admission's landscape in Europe.

Image 1. Countries used as object of study in this report



Countries: Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Slovenia, Spain and the Netherlands

Source: ACUP

The next section, which presents the Higher Education system of the nine countries, has the purpose of putting in context the admission system and requirements which are included in national laws. The information has been compiled from the European Commission's Eurydice Portal, and complemented and extended with information from the ENIC/NARIC agencies' staff from the nine countries.

The survey was originally designed by the Catalan Association of Public Universities (ACUP), and was improved based on the useful comments received from the Mastermind Project Manager, Kees Kouwenaar, and Irina Ferencz (ACA). It contained a mix of closed and open-ended questions, and it was designed so as to identify and separate legal requirements from institutional requirements in admission, as well as locating specific obstacles or challenges in the admission process.

The survey was run by ACUP from March to April 2017 using online survey software (see form in the Annex 9.1.). The form contained 14 questions: the first 3 were aimed at gathering the profile of respondents (country of origin, position and type of institution they are working for), and the other 11 are the core of the questionnaire.

In the process of getting the results of the online survey, it became evident to the team that given the heterogeneity of responses in question 13, which reflected percentages of specific Master's and could not be grouped, it would be more advisable to do without it.

The addressees of the survey were Master's coordinators or directors from 33 countries participating directly in the Erasmus+ program. The reason of this choice was keeping in line with the country sample used in the previous Mastermind report "Admissions to English-Taught Programs (ETPs) at Master's level in Europe – Procedures, regulations, success rates and challenges for diverse applicants" by ACA, Study Portals and VUA.

In parallel, the sample was chosen to be diverse enough in terms of profiles, institutions and countries of origin to enable drawing the necessary conclusions. It was sent to subscribers of the Mastermind newsletter, ENIC/NARIC offices from all the European Higher Education Area, and participants of the information session of Mastermind that took place in Barcelona on 28th March 2017.

The second research method was a group of five interviews: three to representatives from the Higher Education Ministries, and two to Master coordinators or directors.

The interview questions were the same for the five interviewees, and were based on the questions of the survey, with specific extra questions for each profile. They were carried out between late March-April. An analysis of the most important ideas from the interviews is given in section 6.2.

4. Legal frameworks and regulations on admission

This section presents the Higher Education system of the nine Consortium countries. It provides a brief explanation on the types of Higher Education institutions, the structure and duration of Bachelor-Master's programmes, the national qualifications' frameworks and quality assurance systems, and the admission's process and legislation. Links to laws regarding admission and other relevant regulations are provided at the end of each country presentation.

4.1. Austria

Types of institutions

Austria's university system consists of by 69 universities: 22 public universities, 21 universities of applied sciences, 14 university colleges of teacher education and 12 private universities.

University programmes focus on Arts, Economic Sciences, Engineering Sciences, Law, Medical and Health Sciences, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Teacher Training, Theology and Veterinary Medicine. Universities of Applied Sciences offer the following fields: technology, Engineering, Economics, Public health, Social Science, Design, Art, Science, and Military.

Structure of programmes

There are two types of degree programmes in Austria: the Diploma studies (Diplomstudien) and the Bachelor's and Master's programmes. Diplomas have a duration of 240-400 ECTS. Conforming to the Bologna Process, the Austrian universities have already organised most of their study programmes in the form of Bachelor's degree programmes (3 to 4 years, 180 to 240 ECTS) and master's degree programmes that build on the bachelor's degree programmes (1 to 2 years, 60 to 120 ECTS).

National qualifications frameworks and quality assurance

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) of Austria serves as a translation tool between the different qualifications systems and their levels for all areas of education in Austria. with an eight-level structure. National qualification levels were referenced to the European qualifications framework (EQF) in 2012.

The Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (HS-QSG) of 2011 led to the creation of the Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation. This external body governs the certification of quality management systems, the accreditation of degree programmes and of

educational institutions and the overall supervision of the aforementioned to ensure that they meet high standards and continuously enhance their quality.

Legislation and admission process

Admission in Master's programmes is subject to the successful completion of a specific Bachelor's degree programme or a degree of another equivalent programme at a foreign institution, as regulated by the Universities Act 2002 (*Universitätsgesetz*, amended in 2011 and 2013). For programmes in a foreign language, the respective rectorate decides on the number of students enrolled and the admission procedure. In addition, universities are entitled to lay down specific admission requirements for master's degree programmes in the curriculum, which already need to be fulfilled before admission. If the applicant has a foreign HE entrance qualification, its equivalency to the Austrian system must be reviewed. In many cases, equivalency is determined by bilateral/multilateral agreements; otherwise, it is decided on a case-by-case basis; sometimes supplementary examinations are required for admission.

Apart from these requirements, students need to have German language skills to enroll in a Master's in Austria.

In sum, the basic requirement to enroll in a Master's in Austria is a Bachelor Degree or a degree of another equivalent programme at a foreign institution. Master's programme directors are in charge of title recognition and may lay down specific admission requirements. Additional obstacles can be the requirement of German language skills.

Relevant laws

🇦🇹 Federal Act on the Organisation of Universities and their Studies ([Universities Act 2002](#))

For other laws regarding HE in Austria: [Eurydice Portal](#) of the European Commission.

4.2. Belgium

Types of institutions

Higher education in Belgium is generally categorised into the country's two main language communities: the Flemish community and the French community. German-speaking students typically attend a university in the French Community, or travel to study in Germany. HEIs in Belgium include Universities (5 in Flanders, 6 in the French Area), University colleges (20 in the

French Community [*Hautes Écoles*] and 13 in the Flemish one [*Hogescholen*], Art Colleges (16, called *Écoles Supérieures des arts*, only offered in the French Community).

Regarding Flanders, HEIs are associated to the fields of Education; Arts and Humanities; Social Sciences, Journalism and Education; Business, Administration and Law; Natural Sciences, Mathematics and statistics; Health and welfare; Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary; Engineering, manufacturing and construction; Information and communication technologies.

In the French area, universities have at least five traditional faculties: philosophy and humanities, law, science, medicine and applied science. Additionally, each university has a variable number of faculties that teach other disciplines like agricultural science, art history, archaeology, oriental studies, business and economics, social and political science, psychology, architecture, etc. Arts Colleges provide preparation for all artistic disciplines.

Structure of programmes

Following the Bologna process, the structure of higher education has been organised into three cycles (Bachelor, Master and Doctorate). A Bachelor programme consists of 180 ECTS (3 years of studying). Bachelor's degrees are categorized as a 'professional bachelor', which has a vocational element, or an 'academic bachelor', which is more academic and designed to prepare students for a master's degree. A Master's programme has a load of study of 60-120 ECTS (1 or 2 years of full-time studying). A Master programme may also have a load of study of 90 ECTS.

National qualifications frameworks and quality assurance

Flemish Community

In 2009, the Flemish Qualifications Framework was approved by the Flemish parliament, encompassing eight levels of qualifications.

By parliamentary act, the Quality Assurance Agency of the Flemish Universities and University Colleges Council (VLUHR) is responsible for organising external quality assurance in Flemish higher education. On 2003, as a result of the Bologna process, a treaty was signed between Flanders and the Netherlands relating to collaboration on the accreditation of programmes in HE, resulting in the creation of the joint Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation (NVAO).

French Community

The Agency for the Quality Evaluation of Higher Education (AEQES) is the independent body responsible for conducting regular evaluation of higher education curricula and ensuring the implementation of evaluation procedures in the Wallonie-Bruxelles area.

Legislation and admission process

Flemish Community

As stipulated in Flemish legislation (Codex Higher Education of 11 October 2013 / Codex Hoger Onderwijs), which includes all the old Decrees), a Bachelor's degree gives direct access to at least one Master's programme. Students who have obtained a professional Bachelor's degree are asked to follow a bridging programme first (from 45 to 90 ECTS).

While access is regulated by legislation, admission belongs to the HEIs both in Flanders and Wallonia. Admission to studies is based on general and specific criteria. HEIs have the right to establish specific requirements for admission. They may also take into account the competences of the student like informal learning, non-formal learning and professional experience and also the previously obtained qualifications of the student for admitting a student to a Master's degree programme. This Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) belongs totally to the competences of the HEIs and universities may also reduce the load of study of the Master's.

Nowadays, the percentage of foreign students at Master's level in Flanders is 15.67% (2015, Finish National Board of Education).

Flanders has an open access education difference that makes no difference in terms of access, admission and tuition fees between national students and students coming from other countries of the EU or the European Economic Area (EEA), according to the Lisbon recognition Convention. Flemish legislation stipulates that foreign (including non-EEA) students having access to HE in their country also may be (directly) admitted by the Flemish HEIs.

There is only one exception, the Chinese students. In December 2006 Germany and Flanders signed an agreement in which the "Akademischen Prüfstelle Beijing" was empowered to screen the qualifications of Chinese students wishing to study in Flanders and Germany from the academic year 2007-2008 onwards. Austria, Switzerland, the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles and the Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens joined this cooperation. Chinese students need a positive screening attestation (document validation and personal interview) to obtain a student visa for Belgium from the Belgian Embassy in Beijing (APS procedure).

French Community

As regulated by the Decree of November 7th, 2013, a Bachelor's degree of at least 180 ECTS gives direct access to a Master's programme in the same field. In other cases, universities can impose the completion of further credits (up to 60 ECTS). Students who have obtained a professional oriented Bachelor are asked to follow a bridging programme of maximum 60 ECTS.

The law only determines the basic conditions for the access. Admission (meaning the evaluation of content) is left to the discretion/evaluation of institutions (so called jury) and its internal regulations. Universities and HEIs can decide to take into account personal skills, study credits or professional skills/experience of the students (VAE).

Bologna has brought a change to the legislation, reflected in the November 7th, 2013 Decree: HEIs don't have the right to formally produce a decision of equivalence of a foreign Bachelor degree for admission anymore; they can only valorise it.

Like in the Flemish Community, the only difference made regarding students is the APS procedure applied to Chinese students. An extra requirement can be, in some cases, French language skills, especially in a master with didactic purposes.

Relevant laws

 [Codex Higher Education of 11 October 2013 / Codex Hoger Onderwijs](#) (in Flemish)

 [Decree of 7 November 2013](#) (in French)

For other laws regarding HE in Belgium: [Eurydice Portal](#) of the European Commission.

4.3. Finland

Types of institutions

The Finnish University system consists of two types of institutions: 14 Universities and 24 Polytechnics. Universities emphasize scientific research and education based on scientific research, while polytechnics are multi-field regional institutions with strong connection with labor market and regional development. They both offer Bachelor's and Master's degrees.

University education is divided into the following fields of study: Theology, Humanities, Law, Social Sciences, Economics, Psychology, Educational Sciences, Natural Sciences, Agriculture and Forestry, Sport Sciences, Engineering, Architecture, Medicine, Dentistry, Health Sciences, Veterinary Medicine, Pharmacy, Music, Art and Design, Theatre, Dance, Fine Arts.

Structure of programmes

The extent of a university Bachelor's level degree is 180 ECTS. The extent of a Polytechnic Bachelor's degree is generally 210–240 ECTS, corresponding to 3.5–4 years of full-time study. The minimum scope of the Master's degree at universities in most fields is 120 ECTS (2 years)

after completing the Bachelor's degree, thus complying to the 3+2 year structure (4+2 in a Polytechnic).

At Universities of Applied Sciences the extent of studies required for bachelor degrees varies (180/210/240/270 ECTS) and for Master degrees the extent of studies is 60-90 ECTS (the studies can be completed in 1.5-2 years).

National qualifications frameworks and quality assurance

The National Qualifications Framework of Finland was approved in 2009, and builds largely on the EQF: it has 8 levels, and the learning outcomes required by Finnish qualifications are described as knowledge, skills and competences in accordance with the EFQ level descriptors.

Universities and polytechnics evaluate their own education, research and artistic provision and undertake impact analyses. They are assisted by FINEEC, the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre.

Legislation and admission process

The legislation concerning universities (Universities Act 558/2009 and Decree 770/2009) includes provisions on the mission of the universities, research and instruction, organisation and administration, staff and official language, students, appeals against university decisions and students' legal protection.

A Bachelor's degree from an applicable field is the main requirement, but the Finnish universities and polytechnics have autonomy regarding student admission, and they can divert from this requirement as they are autonomous bodies, as provided by the Reform of the Universities Act in 2009, which extended the autonomy of universities by giving them an independent legal status. A bachelor's degree completed in the same field as the master's programme, or a related field is a significant criterion, constitutes grounds for arranging applicants to an order of preference. The admission criteria are detailed and programme specific (Finnish National Board of Education).

The legislation provides the terms of reference for admission, but the HEIs decide independently of the detailed admission criteria. The HEIs are responsible for their student admission decisions and these decisions can be appealed against, in the last resort to an administrative court.

The Universities Act also regulates that the HEIs are responsible for the specifics of the admission criteria and that the student selection criteria have to be consistent and equal.

The eligibility requirements for Master degree studies at Universities of Applied Sciences include three years' work or artistic experience (relevant for the master studies in question) which has been gained after a bachelor's degree is awarded (Act on Universities of Applied Sciences 932/2014 & Government Decree 1129/2014)

Nowadays, the percentage of foreign students at Master's level in Finland is 43% (2015, Finnish National Board of Education).

The application process and the criteria for student selection is the same for all applicants. There may be some differences in the documents required from foreign students from the EU and outside the EU (like proof of language skills, translations of documents).

Relevant laws

 [Universities Act 558/2009](#) and [Decree 770/2009](#) (in Finnish)

For other laws regarding HE in Finland: [Eurydice Portal](#) of the European Commission.

4.4. Germany

Types of institutions

Germany has a total of 426 state-maintained and state-recognised institutions of higher education (2015) and over 80 accredited universities of the following types: Universities and equivalent institutions of HE (16 *Technische Hochschulen/Technische Universitäten*, 107 *Pädagogische Hochschulen*, 16 theological colleges et al), Colleges of art and Music, and Universities of Applied Science (245 *Fachhochschulen*).

Universities and HEIs usually offer a range of subjects including languages, the humanities and sport, law, economics and social sciences, natural sciences, medicine, agronomy, forestry and nutritional science and engineering sciences.

Structure of programmes

A Bachelor's degree in Germany usually takes between 3 to 4 years of full-time study (180 to 240 ECTS or credits). A master's degree in Germany usually takes between 1 to 2 years of full-time study (60 to 120 ECTS).

National qualifications frameworks and quality assurance

On May 2013 the German Qualifications Framework (GQF) came into force. It transfers the eight-level EQF model to the German education system.

The supervision of higher education institutions is exercised by the relevant Land Ministry of Science and Research. The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder (Kultusministerkonferenz – KMK) has established a Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Courses in Germany (Stiftung zur Akkreditierung von Studiengängen in Deutschland).

Legislation and admission process

The admission requirement for a Master's study course is, as a rule, a Bachelor degree qualifying for entry into a profession. In exceptional cases for Master's study courses providing further education and for artistic Master's, an entrance examination may take the place of the requirement for a higher education degree qualifying for a profession. For quality assurance purposes or on grounds of capacity, additional admission requirements may be laid down for Master's study courses. Admission requirements are subject to accreditation. The Länder may reserve the right to approve admission requirements.

The general access requirements are regulated by the law Hochschulgesetze of the Länder, i.e. for Master's courses an undergraduate degree. Additional admission requirements for specific courses (e.g. grade of the first degree, specific language or specialized skills) are determined by the HEI. The admission requirements (set by the HEIs) are oriented towards the required skills of the Master's course and the capacity of the course. They are therefore different for each specific Master's course.

About 33% foreign students (counting those who come from other countries and German students who got their university entrance qualification abroad) were enrolled in Master's programs in Germany for the academic year 2015/16.

Generally the admission procedure for students from the EU or outside the EU is the same as for national students. In general prospective students with foreign certificates fulfil the admission requirements if they are allowed to study in their country of origin. Generally the HEIs decide about the recognition of the certificates. Additional requirements are German language skills.

Relevant laws

 [Hochschulgesetze of the Länder](#) (in German)

For other laws regarding HE in Germany: [Eurydice Portal](#) of the European Commission.

4.5. Italy

Types of institutions

The Italian university system consists of 98 universities, including more than 70 public universities, 18 private and 6 distance/online universities. Bachelor university programmes are organised in the sanitary, scientific, social and classical study areas.

Apart from universities, two other types of institutions offer higher education in Italy: High level Arts and Music Education institutions (Alta formazione artistica e musicale-AFAM), and Higher technical institutes (ITS), which issue qualifications corresponding to the Bologna structure.

Structure of programmes

Under the Bologna Process, Italy has implemented the nuovo ordinamento system, replacing the former vecchio ordinamento. Universities issue the following qualifications: Laurea triennale, corresponding to a first-cycle qualification, issued at the end of a three-year course (180 credits); and Laurea specialistica/magistrale, corresponding to a second-cycle qualification, issued at the end of a two-year course (120 credits) or to a 5-6-year single course (300-360 credits).

Universities also issue second-cycle qualifications which are professionally-oriented, called Master Universitario di primo livello (first-level University master), Diploma di Specializzazione (Specialisation diploma) and Master universitario di secondo livello (Second-level university master).

National qualifications frameworks and quality assurance

All qualifications are described in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The Italian Qualification Framework of Higher Education, created in 2010, comprises the three cycles of Higher Education, as defined by the Bologna Process, and provides the internal equivalence between qualifications issued by Italian Universities and AFAM institutions (Higher Education for Art, Music and Dance).

The evaluation and quality assurance of Italian higher education is carried out by the Agenzia Nazionale di Valutazione del Sistema Universitario e della Ricerca (ANVUR), which is an affiliate of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

Legislation and admission process

As stated on Decree n. 270, October 2004, to be admitted to a Laurea Magistrale it is compulsory to hold a *Laurea triennale* or three-year university degree diploma, or other academic qualifications obtained abroad, recognised as valid. Apart from this requirement, higher education institutions then decide on admission criteria according to internal rules, which are specific for each institution. Admission requirements are publicly declared in the provisions for admission to studies, approved by HEIs.

For non-Italian students, recognition of titles (Bachelor) is required in order to enrol in a Master in Italy; for most of the universities, this process is done by the countries' embassies, but some universities like the Politecnico di Milano have an international admissions' office which is in charge of verification and recognition of degrees. Furthermore, additional criteria are asked from foreign students and Italians who obtained their Bachelor abroad: certificate of English level, transcript of records, recommendation letters and/or portfolio, among others.

For non-EU students, additional legal requirements that can become an obstacle are student and residence permits, and financial assistance required to fulfil the Master's.

Relevant laws

 [Decree n. 270, October 2004](#) (in Italian)

For other laws regarding HE in Italy: [Eurydice Portal](#) of the European Commission.

4.6. Lithuania

Types of institutions

Currently there are a total of 43 higher education institutions operating in Lithuania: 21 universities and 22 colleges of higher education. A university carries out university studies, conducts research, experimental development and/or creates high-level professional works of art. A college of higher education (*kolegija*) provides college studies, develops applied research and/or creates professional works of art.

Universities offer university level degree granting studies and award Bachelor (*Bakalauras*), Masters (*Magistras*), and Doctoral degrees. Colleges offer college level degree granting studies and award Professional Bachelor degrees (*Profesinis bakalauras*).

Studies are carried out according to the study programmes of a particular study field. The study fields are grouped into six study areas: Biomedical Sciences, Physical Sciences, Technological Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts.

Structure of programmes

According to the general provisions of Law, workload of first cycle studies (professional bachelor, bachelor degree studies) can be of 180, 210 or 240 credits and workload of second cycle studies (Master studies) can be of 60, 90 or 120 credits. Workload of integrated studies is 300 or 360 credits. General provisions concerning workload will be more detailed in other legal acts regulating provision of studies according to a particular study cycle.

Magistras (Master) degree study programmes are designed to prepare for independent research activity or any other activity the performance of which requires scientific knowledge and analytical competence. The programmes require completion of 90-120 credits (1,5-2 study years of full-time studies). After completion of the studies *Magistro diplomas* (Master's diploma) is awarded. To be admitted to second cycle studies, a person must have obtained a Bachelor's or Professional Bachelor's degree or a comparable qualification, and meet requirements set by the accepting higher education institution.

The Master's degree may also be awarded after completion of integrated long-cycle (*vientisiosios*) university studies, which combine the 1st and 2nd cycle of university studies. Traditionally, these studies are offered in several fields of medicine, pharmacy, veterinary medicine, law, and religious studies. Applicants to the integrated long-cycle studies are required to have a *brandos atestatas* or comparable qualification. Workload of the programmes is 300-360 credits (5-6 study years of full-time study).

National qualifications frameworks and quality assurance

An eight-level Lithuanian qualifications framework (LTQF) was formally adopted through a government resolution in 2010. The LTQF is based on eight learning outcomes levels, and covers all officially recognised qualifications in primary and secondary general education, vocational education and training and higher education.

External quality evaluation and/or accreditation in Lithuania is carried out by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) which was established in 1995. Quality assurance in doctoral studies and research is carried out by the Lithuanian Research Council (*Lietuvos mokslo taryba*).

Legislation and admission process

Since 1st of January 2017, higher education system of Lithuania will be regulated by the new Law of Higher Education Studies and Research.

Admission to the second cycle (Master) and third cycle studies (Doctoral) is carried out by individual higher education institutions. Each HEI defines general number of study places according to study field or groups of study fields and study cycles, and taking into account the possibilities to assure the quality of studies. The Ministry of Education and Science determines minimal number of study places in state HEIs after the assessment of received proposals.

Following the Law, all HEIs are obliged to announce their criteria for admission to studies and principles of formation of competitive score each year until the 1st of December. The lowest competitive score has to be announced by each HEI until 1st of June, each year too.

Admission to studies is based on general and specific criteria. General criterion is to have qualification of appropriate educational level. Professional Bachelor and Bachelor or comparable qualification gives right to Master studies and Maturity Certificate or comparable qualification gives right to first cycle studies.

Foreign qualifications concerning higher education have to undergo the procedure of academic recognition with aim to identify its academic level. Academic recognition of foreign higher education qualifications and qualifications giving access to higher education is provided by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education for study and other purposes. Few HEIs are authorised to provide an academic recognition of foreign qualifications concerning higher education too, for their own study purposes.

HEIs have the right to establish specific requirements (like specific entrance examination (for example talking about studies in Fine Arts or Military studies, etc.), assessment of motivation, requirement to have professional bachelor or bachelor degree of particular study field, etc.) for admission. Admission requirements are publicly declared in the provisions for admission to studies, approved by HEI. Competitive score to select the best students is determined by each of HEI for admission to Master studies too.

Foreign students made up 4.3% of all the students in higher education institutions in Lithuania 2014 ([Lithuanian Education in Numbers, 2015](#)).

Relevant laws

 [Law of Higher Education Studies and Research](#) (in Lithuanian)

For other laws regarding HE in Lithuania: [Eurydice Portal](#) of the European Commission.

4.7. Slovenia

Types of institutions

The Slovenian university system is integrated by 4 universities and around 60 smaller independent higher education institutions that offer numerous study programmes in all areas.

In Slovenia, the tertiary education system comprises short-cycle vocational higher education and higher education. The short-cycle vocational higher education delivers two-year vocational programmes by the higher vocational colleges, which provide students with competences for employment in specific professions. The higher education is offered by the universities, composed of faculties, art academics, and higher professional colleges and by independent higher education institutions. The focus of faculties is on scientific research and educational work in science related disciplines. Faculties offer degrees in at least two cycles of qualification (the first and second, or second and third).

Study fields encompass fields from Social Sciences, Humanities, Natural Sciences, Arts, Business and Management to Engineering and Technology.

Structure of programmes

Following the Bologna process, the structure of higher education has been organised into three cycles (Bachelor, Master and Doctorate). Bachelor's degrees in Slovenia have a duration of 180-240 ECTS. Master's encompass 60 or 120 ECTS and last one or two years. Integrated Master programmes are also offered and require five years of study.

National qualifications frameworks and quality assurance

The Slovenian Qualifications Framework (SQF) is a unified system that classifies qualifications into 10 levels with regard to learning outcomes. The purpose of the SQF is to achieve

transparency and recognisability of qualifications in Slovenia and the EU. Its essential objectives are: to support lifelong learning; to integrate and harmonise Slovenia's qualifications subsystems; and to improve the transparency, accessibility and quality of qualifications with regard to the labour market and civil society. In 2013 and 2014, the SQF levels were referenced to the European Qualifications Framework.

The accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes is the responsibility of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (NAKVIS).

Legislation and admission process

The higher education in Slovenia is provided by law, namely the Higher Education Act. The amendments of 2004 and 2006 constitute the legal framework for the implementation of the three-cycle higher education system that recognises the goals of the Bologna process. The general requirement for admission into a second cycle study programme is the completion of a first cycle study programme, as provided by the law. Additional requirements are determined by the individual study programmes of universities.

If certain requirements are met, students have the option to transfer from one study programme to another at the same level. For candidates from other fields, there is a 10 to 60 credit point bridging obligation. Particular talents, psychophysical abilities or appropriate work experience may also be included as an admission requirement. The application requirements may also be fulfilled by the completion of equivalent education abroad.

Relevant laws

 [Higher Education Act](#) (in Slovenian)

For other laws regarding HE in Slovenia: [Eurydice Portal](#) of the European Commission.

4.8. Spain

Types of institutions

The Spanish university system consists of 85 universities, 50 of which are public and 35 private. University Bachelor and Master's degree programmes are associated to one of the following knowledge branches: Arts and Humanities, Experimental Sciences, Health Sciences, Social Sciences and Law, and Engineering and Architecture.

Structure of programmes

Spain has a Bachelor-Master system. Bachelors are worth 240 ECTS, and Master's range from 60 to 120 credits, corresponding to the structure 4+1/2 years; however, Bachelors of 180 ECTS are starting to be implemented in 2016-2017 (Interuniversity Council of Catalonia). Master's degrees can be professionally, academically or research oriented. The Master's recognised by the Ministry of Education are called 'Official Master's', but there are also University-specific Master's.

National qualifications frameworks and quality assurance

The National Qualifications Framework of Spain is MECES (Marco Español de Cualificaciones para la Educación Superior), which has four levels and corresponds to the Overarching Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA).

Quality assurance is provided through the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA), which is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Universities must meet the requirements asked by ANECA in order to be accredited and included in the Spanish Registry of Universities, Centres and Degrees (RUCT).

Legislation and admission process

The admission to Master programmes in Spain is regulated by a state law (Real decreto 1393/2007 de 29 de octubre, modified by the Real decreto 412/2014, de 6 de junio).

In order to apply for admission in Master's Programmes, the law provides that candidates must hold an official university Bachelor, issued by a Spanish university or by a HEI within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which qualifies for admission at this level. While this is the basic admission criterion (General Admission Requirements–RAG), the rest of criteria are left to every university and its Master programme directors (Specific Admission Requirements–RAE). These criteria may be related to the specific degree they are applying for, and may regard academic merit, knowledge of foreign languages, personal interview, etc.

Students that come from outside the European Union have to accredit (without the official validation of the degree) that their diploma gives them access to postgraduate studies in their home country. Currently it's the department that hosts the master programme that revises the documentation and decides on whether to admit or not the student.

In summary, students need a Bachelor degree to enroll in a Master's in Spain or an equivalent degree from an institution within the EHEA; which is subject to the recognition of the

programme directors. Additional obstacles can be extra requirements for applicants, specific to the Master they are applying for.

Relevant laws

 [Real decreto 1393/2007](#) / [Real decreto 412/2014](#) (in Spanish)

For other laws regarding HE in Spain: [Eurydice Portal](#) of the European Commission.

4.9. The Netherlands

Types of institutions

The Netherlands' university system consists of 51 higher education institutions funded by the government. There are different types of recognised higher education institutions: universities (including theological and humanist universities), universities of applied sciences (*Hogescholen/HBO*) which provide higher professional education; the Open University, which offers mainly initial education courses in the form of distance education; and private-sector institutions that do not receive government funding, but have legally recognised courses, as they are approved by the Education Inspectorate and the NVAO.

University programmes focus on different knowledge areas: Economics, Healthcare, Behavior and society, Agriculture and natural environment, Education, Law, Language and Culture, and Technology.

Structure of programmes

The Netherlands has a Bachelor-Master system, introduced in higher education in 2002. Universities offer the following programs: the HBO Bachelor, which is worth 240 ECTS; the University Bachelor, worth 180 ECTS; and the HBO/University Master, worth 60 ECTS, therefore offering both the 3+2 and 4+1 year-systems of the Bologna Qualifications Framework.

National qualifications frameworks and quality assurance

There are two qualifications frameworks in use in the Netherlands: the Dutch Qualifications Framework, consisting of 8 levels and based on the overarching European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF-LLL), and the National Qualifications Framework the Netherlands, consisting of 3 cycles of higher education and based on the Overarching Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA).

Quality assurance is provided through the Netherlands-Flanders Accreditation Organisation (NVAO). The government only recognises and provides funding to courses accredited by the NVAO, which is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The Inspectorate supervises the overall functioning of the accreditation system.

Legislation and admission process

Admission to Master's programmes is regulated by the Higher Education and Research Act (WHW) from 1993. To enrol in a Master's, a) a (Dutch) Bachelor degree is needed, or b) the knowledge, understanding and skills at the level of a Bachelor degree (article 7.30b-1, WHW). Both criteria are very general, and they leave most of the responsibility with the recognition by the higher education institution and programme directors.

In addition to regulations on recognition, there are also some regulations for the selection procedure in article 7.30b-2: programme directors may ask for extra requirements for applicants, which should be laid down in the OER (Education and Examination Regulations).

Legislation for admission has been changed a few times since 2002, first of all because of the introduction of Master programmes in the Dutch higher education system, and also because of the ratification of the Lisbon Recognition Convention by The Netherlands.

After ratification of the LRC, a new article 7.30d was inserted in the WHW, which regulates the application of the basic principle of the LRC: recognition of the qualification of students from of all the countries that ratified the LRC (almost all the EU countries), unless there are substantial differences. Nowadays, the percentage of foreign students at Master's level in the Netherlands is 20,6% (2015, EP-Nuffic).

No specific regulations are mentioned for students outside of the LRC countries for admission to master programmes. According to EP-Nuffic the Netherlands, it seems that students may be recognised under the general requirements of article 7.30b-1 (knowledge, understanding and skills at the level of a bachelor degree). In practice, there is not much difference in the evaluation of foreign qualifications from LRC countries and non-LRC countries, as the Dutch ENIC-NARIC applies the principles of the LRC to all countries world-wide. For non-EU students, additional legal obstacles that they may encounter are the usual national procedures regarding visa and permits required from them.

In sum, students are required a Bachelor degree to enroll in a Master's in the Netherlands or the knowledge and skills equivalent to a Bachelor degree; which is subject to the recognition of the programme directors. Additional obstacles can be extra requirements for applicants —specific for every case— (also laid down by programme directors and the OER) and national procedures like visa and permits.

Relevant laws

 [Higher Education and Research Act](#) (in Dutch)

For other laws regarding HE in The Netherlands: [Eurydice Portal](#) of the European Commission.

5. Legal obstacles' survey

5.1. Profile of surveys' respondents

The survey addressed three groups of people: subscribers of the Mastermind newsletter, ENIC/NARIC offices from all the European Higher Education Area, and participants of the information session of the Mastermind project in Barcelona that took place on 28th March 2017. In total, 280 people were addressed, and 28 full responses were received, therefore having a response rate of 10%.

The first three questions of the questionnaire were aimed at gathering the profile of the participants, asking about country of origin, position and type of institution they are working for. The survey was open to 33 countries (the Erasmus+ programme countries), but the survey has only gathered data from participants of 5 countries: Germany, Italy, Slovenia, Spain and the Netherlands.

Table 1. Distribution of participants by country

Country	Number of responses	Share (%) of responses of total survey responses
Germany	1	3,6%
Italy	2	7,1%
Slovenia	2	7,1%
Spain	22	78,6%
The Netherlands	1	3,6%

Source: Survey of Legal requirements for Master's levels admissions

These countries, by coincidence, are members from the Mastermind Consortium. It is worth highlighting the high proportion of Spanish respondents (78,6%) with regard to the other nationalities. For this reason, the results have a particular value for Spain, but due to the low response rate of the survey, they don't allow extracting reliable or representative conclusions, but rather pointing out general tendencies in perceived and legal obstacles within this report's scope and countries-objects of study. The trends suggested by the survey are further explored in the interviews of the next section.

Table 2. Participant profile by position

Position	Number of responses	Share (%) of responses of total survey responses
Master coordinator/director	25	60,7%
Admission's officer/secretary	2	10,7%
Others	1	28,6%

Source: Survey of Legal requirements for Master's levels admissions

Table 3. Participant profile by type of institution

Type of institution	Number of responses	Share (%) of responses of total survey responses
Public	25	89,3%
Private	2	7,1%
Mixed	1	3,6%

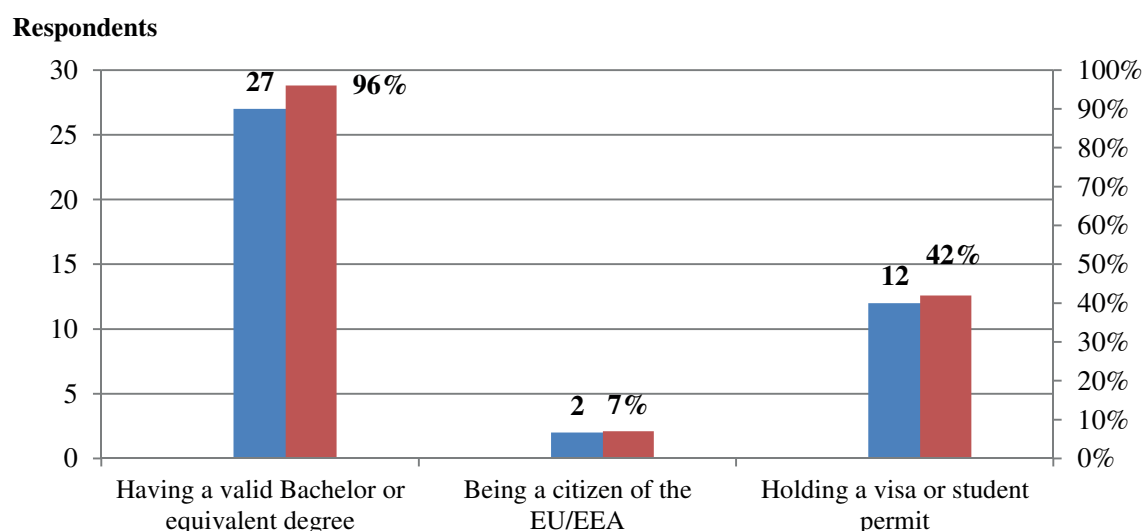
Source: Survey of Legal requirements for Master's levels admissions

As can be seen from Tables 2 and 3, the dominant profile among the questionnaire's respondents is a position that deal with admission, either as a programme director (60,7%) or as admission officer (10,7%), and for the most part, coming from a public HE institution (89,3%). Other respondents' positions are associate/permanent professors, senior lecturers or vice-deans.

5.2. Results' analysis and discussion

In this section, the results of the survey's core questions are represented in charts and discussed. The total number of responses is provided in each chart as the left bar, next to the share of responses (in percentages). The decimal points have been removed and the percentages rounded off to simplify the information and facilitate chart interpretation.

Chart 1. What legal conditions have to be met by students to access a Master?



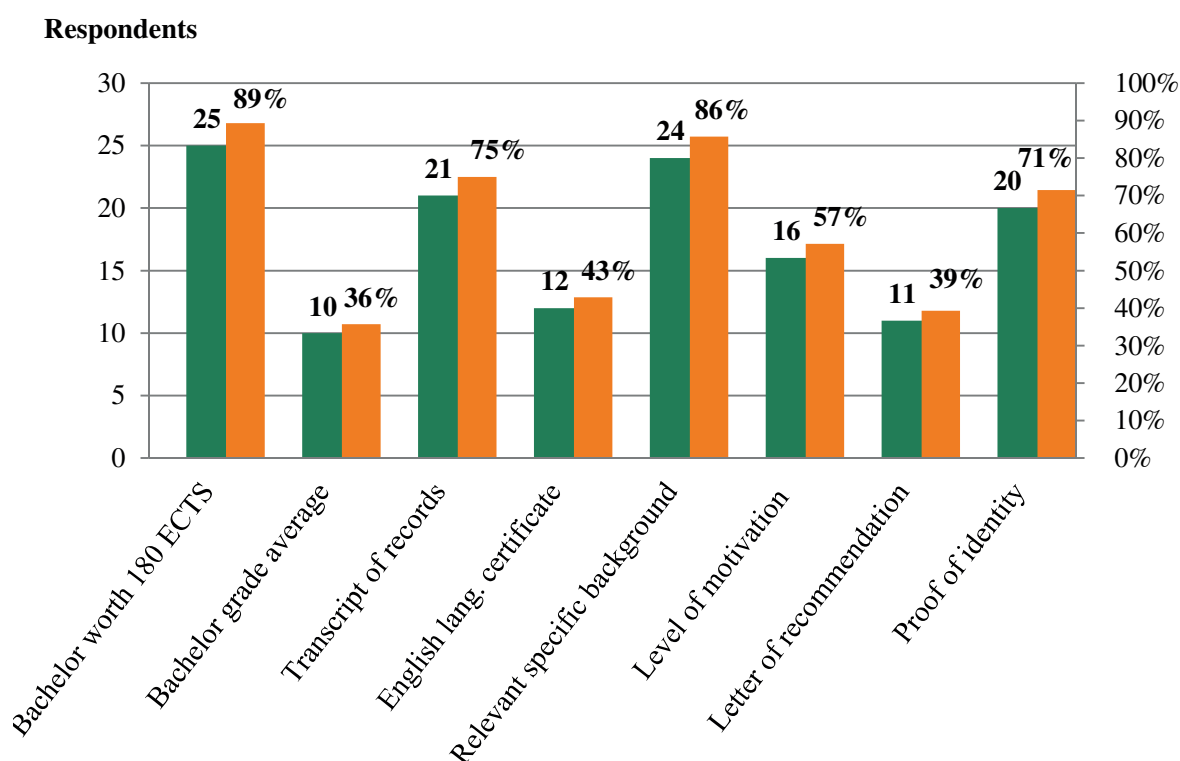
Source: Survey of Legal requirements for Master's levels admissions

The first question, a three-option multiple choice type, shows that the possession of a valid Bachelor is the predominant answer (96%), and matches the information gathered in Chapter 3 of this report: the only legal requirement in common in the nine countries analysed is a valid Bachelor, or equivalent title. While this requirement isn't an obstacle in itself, the process of establishing "equivalency" can become a difficulty, as will be seen later in this analysis.

The respondents indicate that in 42% of cases it is necessary to have a visa or student permit, but this very likely applies to students from outside the EU; besides, this requirement is general to higher education and does not only apply to Master's levels. Furthermore, it hasn't been located as an access requirement in the articles of the laws concerning Master's admission.

A small percentage of participants (7%), but worth mentioning, answers that being a EU/EEA citizen is a legal condition to be admitted in a Master in Europe. The open-ended option reflects an additional situation: "As not all the students have the diploma supplement they have to ask for a certificate that enables the student to do a master in their country. It is sometimes very difficult to understand for foreign universities". An observation in this respect is that in general, little or no distinction is made between criteria-norms/levels-test, which is the key value proposition of Mastermind Europe.

Chart 2. What institutional regulations or criteria have to be met by students to access a Master?



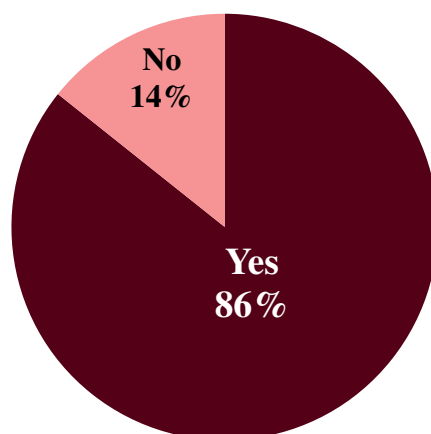
Source: Survey of Legal requirements for Master's levels admissions

This eight-option multiple choice question was aimed at identifying the criteria that higher education institutions' regulations require for Master admissions. In the respondents' experience, the most-asked element is a Bachelor, worth at least 180 ECTS since Bologna (89%), followed by relevant academic background in a specific field (86%), a transcript of records (75%) and proof of identity, through ID card or passport (71%).

Less chosen options are proof of English language knowledge (43%), letters of recommendation (39%) and Bachelor grade average (36%). As open-ended answers, respondents indicate Curriculum vitae (11%), specific tests (7%) like GMAT, scholarships (3%) and the diploma supplement (3%) are often required. Two longer answers talk about an extra procedure required: legalisation of the Bachelor, for students from outside the EU, and official translation of documents when not written English or in the national language.

Note: looking at this overview the elements which are used by universities in the admission process, one may observe that in general, little or no distinction is made between a) criteria, b) norms or levels, and c) testing mechanisms. This distinction is one of the key value propositions of the Mastermind Europe project. As elaborated in the Guiding Tool 0 “Paradigm Shift”, Guiding Tool 1 “Coherent Admission Framework” and in the “Mastermind Europe Manual”, admission may be improved by making a distinction between a) what students have to be good at (criteria), b) how good they have to be at it (norms/levels), and c) though which testing mechanisms and instruments a Master’s programme assesses if students are. The Coherent Admission Framework provides tools, based on research and best practice, to articulate these criteria, levels, and tests for A) Subject-Related Knowledge and Skills, B) General Academic Competencies, C) Personal Competencies and Traits, and D) Language Competencies.

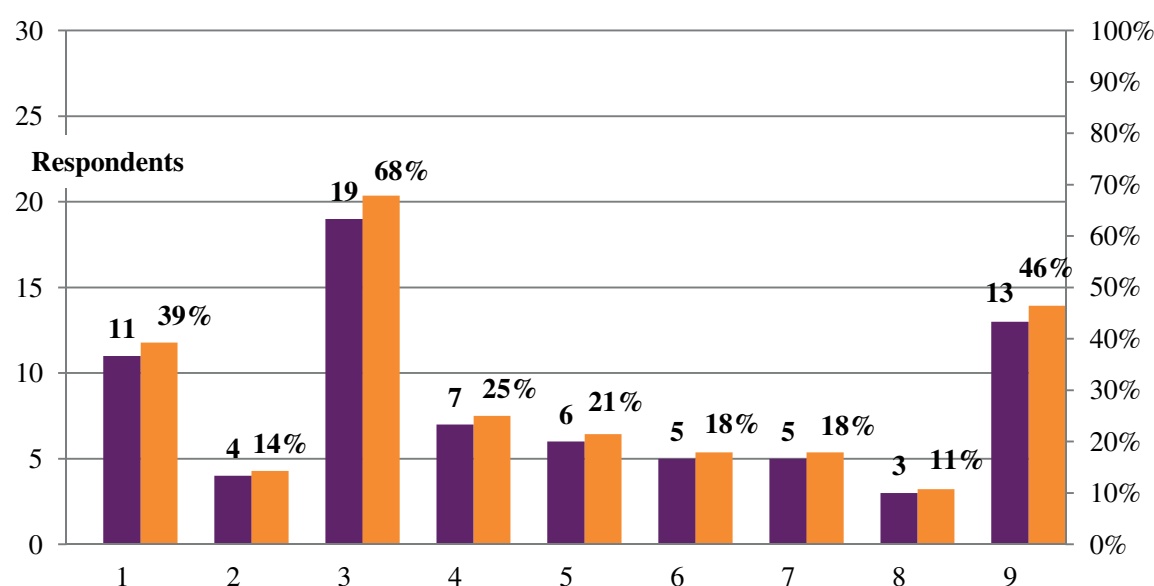
Chart 3. Can students start with the admission process before all legal criteria have been fulfilled? (Conditional admission)



Source: Survey of Legal requirements for Master's levels admissions

The third question, wanted to check whether students can be admitted without having all the necessary criteria at the time of registration. Provisional admission is given on the condition that they meet all the criteria at the moment of starting the course. This is a facility given to students who e.g. have to go through the legal process of title recognition, often through the embassy. The majority of survey respondents offer this facility (86%), but a 14% states that they don't give conditional admission, what could be interpreted as an institutional obstacle for students.

Chart 4. Which are the 3 biggest obstacles for student's admission deriving from laws and regulations?



Source: Survey of Legal requirements for Master's levels admissions

Legend

1. Not having a valid Bachelor degree
2. Not being a citizen of the EU/EEA
3. Having to obtain a visa/permit
4. Having a Bachelor from different field
5. Having a less than 180 ECTS Bachelor
6. Having below required Bachelor grade
7. Not having an English language certificate
8. Not giving proof of identity
9. Financial costs of application

This multiple choice question is the key question of the survey. Nine options were proposed as potential obstacles for admissions, related to the requirements proposed in the previous questions; this time regardless of the legal or institutional nature. In order to rank them, the survey asked to pick the 3 biggest obstacles.

The three most-chosen options are, in this order: having to obtain a visa/student permit (68%), the financial costs of application (46%), and not having a valid Bachelor degree (39%). Out of the three, it can be observed that the only legal requirement, having a valid Bachelor, is only an

important obstacle for admission staff/coordinators in 39% of the cases. The top two obstacles are related to bureaucratic procedures: having to obtain a visa is a legal requirement which is general to all the levels of higher education, and 2/3 of respondents find it a relevant obstacle.

Interestingly, the only option which is not a requirement, the financial costs of application, stands out as the top second barrier for admission (with a 46% of responses). It refers to the amount of money that students have to spend to validate/legalise, translate documents and other bureaucratic procedures that have a cost and may result in the abandoning of the application process. This difficulty will be commented later in the interview's section with Master's coordinators.

It is also worth highlighting that the top two obstacles especially apply to students from outside the EU/EEA, and make evident the fact that obstacles are not only legal but also administrative/bureaucratic. Going back to question 1, if the option 'being a student from the EU/EEA' was only highlighted as a requirement for admission in 7% of the cases, here we see that not being from the EU/EEA however implies a series of difficulties which certainly have an impact in the admission process of foreign students.

Concerning the open-ended option 'others', the participants suggest extra disadvantages: having certificates of knowledge of the national language, if the Master is in that language; and the lag in the timing of the application to grants from the country of origin in regards to the timing of admission of the Master's country. One respondent comments: "It is very difficult to go through a reliable interview".

Question 5. Explain why you think your choices above are the 3 biggest obstacles

The next question is open-ended and goes on to ask about the reason for the choice of the previous response: "Please explain why you think your choices above are the 3 biggest obstacles, in your view". It was answered by 16 participants, corresponding to 57% of the total number.

The answers can be grouped under two broad obstacles, which coincide with the top 2 of the previous question: on the one hand, the complicated and time consuming process of validation / legalisation of degrees and documents through the consulates, indicated by 5 respondents; on the other, visa procedures, explained by 6 respondents. Both issues are often linked, and in some answers they appear combined. As the focus of this question is the reasoning, some answers will be copied here. From the first group:

- “Some international students can only apply to a grant from his/her country after they have been admitted to the master's program, but the deadlines for grant applications may take place before the admission period has finished”.
- “The academic year ends in July and the master program starts in September. There is not enough time for administration tasks in case of non-EU students”.
- “Italian Consulates are slow; it would be costly to have some trusted personnel taking interviews in each of the several countries of origin of applicants”.
- “Sometimes we refuse potential good students and very motivated just because they cannot have some certificates or documents”.

The last answer of this group accentuates to what extent the bureaucratic process of obtaining or validating documents abroad not only complicates admission, but it can become a refusal factor in some cases. This can be linked to the 14% of admission staff/coordinators who declare that they do not give conditional admission in Chart 3.

From the second group of answers, the following explanations are illustrating:

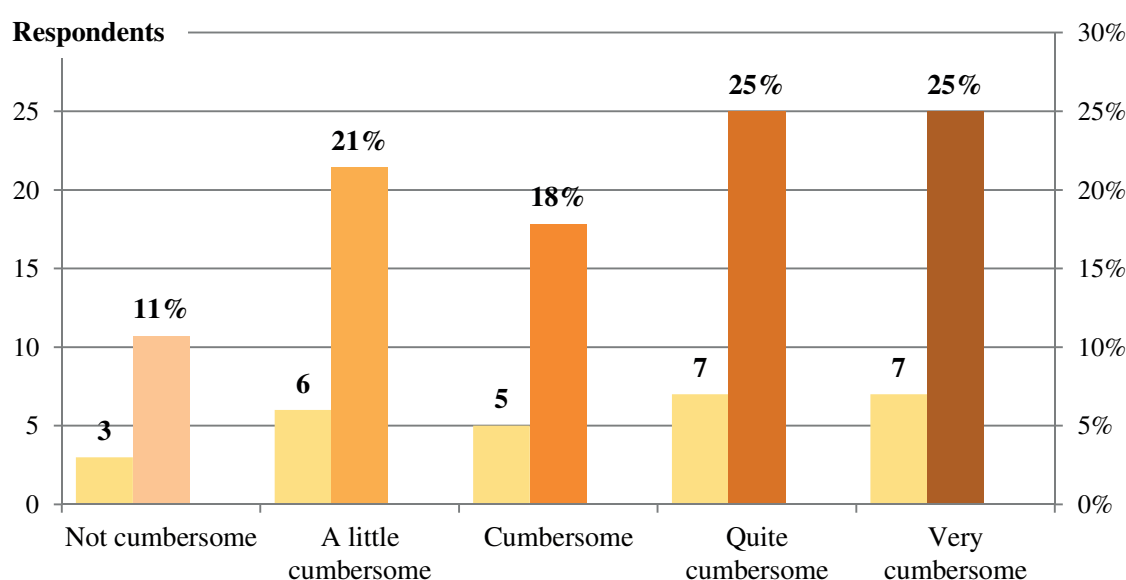
- “Spain takes a lot of time to authorise visa for students and some of them arrive very late or never”.
- “Some conditionally admitted students from outside EU/UEA cannot finally enroll in the Master because they do not succeed in obtaining their visa”.
- “Obtaining a visa depends on embassies and therefore on an external agent. True copies, legalisation and translation are obstacles as they also depend on embassies and some students they are away from hometown. They depend on appointments and some embassies do not make true copies of non-legalised academic documents”.
- “It is a long and difficult process to get a student visa for non-EU students coming from some specific countries”.

Question 5 also collected a small number of interesting arguments apart from the two big groups, related with the financial costs of application, the grade point average (GPA) or having a Bachelor from a different study field:

- “Applicants from poor or developing countries experience difficulties in paying the application fee”.

- “We are a technical university and it is difficult to get admitted if your background is not related to the field of the master you are applying to. But this is not a legal obstacle, I would say it is linked to the expectation of the professors regarding the composition of the classes”.
- “Although we do not required a minimum GPA, and this may vary from one year to another, the academic background of the pool of candidates is very strong. Many candidates are not admitted because of low GPA”.

Chart 5. How cumbersome, if at all, are visas/student permits for the admission process?

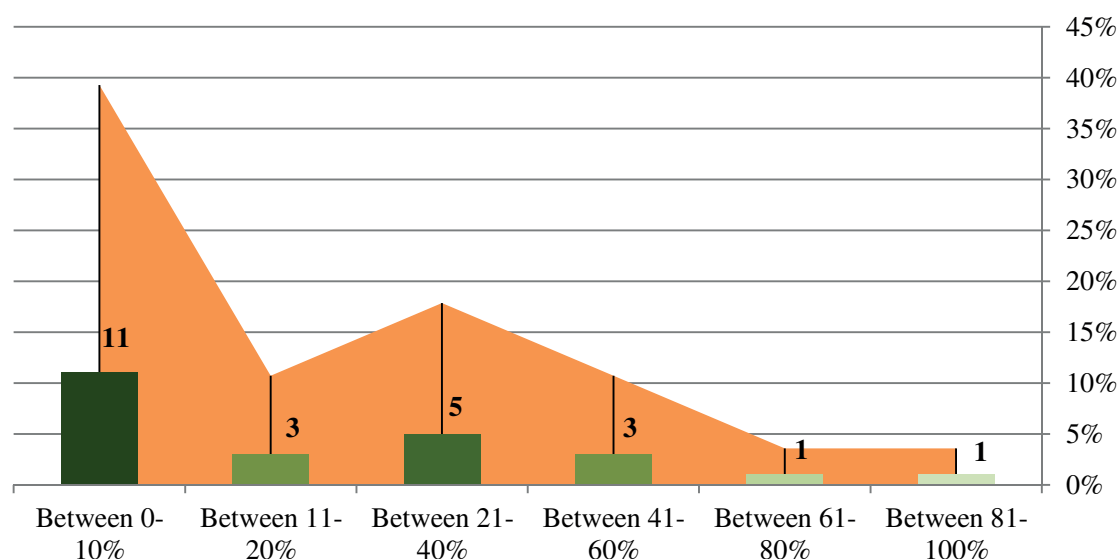


Source: Survey of Legal requirements for Master's levels admissions

The sixth question of the survey goes hand-in-hand with question seven (Charts 5 and 6), which try to check the level of cumbersomeness of visas and student permits for admission as perceived by Master's coordinators and administrators. These questions are at the same time opposed to questions eight-nine (Charts 7 and 8), which want to analyse the level of cumbersomeness of degree recognition for admissions. Chart 5 shows the results of question six. Respondents were asked to rate how cumbersome visas are in a scale of 1-5, where 1 = not cumbersome at all, and 5 = very cumbersome. The results, as can be observed in the chart, don't show a clear picture, but rather indicate a pattern towards the right side of the graph: more than half of the responses are accumulated towards the 'cumbersome', 'quite cumbersome' and 'very cumbersome'; in other words, for many respondents visas and student permits are a real difficulty in the admission process.

Chart 6. Please estimate what share of applicants does not get admitted because of visa/permits problems

Respondents

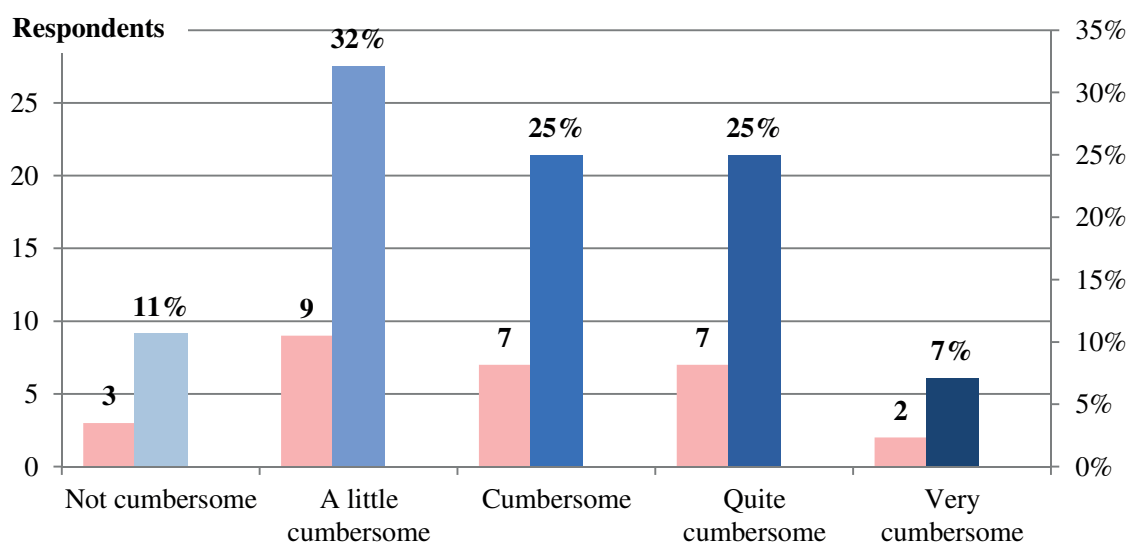


Source: Survey of Legal requirements for Master's levels admissions

Question 7 asked to estimate the percentage of applicants that fail in admission because of visas. The data gathered has been grouped in numerical ranges every 20 units, and every 10 units between 0 and 20%, to show significant data and facilitate the interpretation of the results.

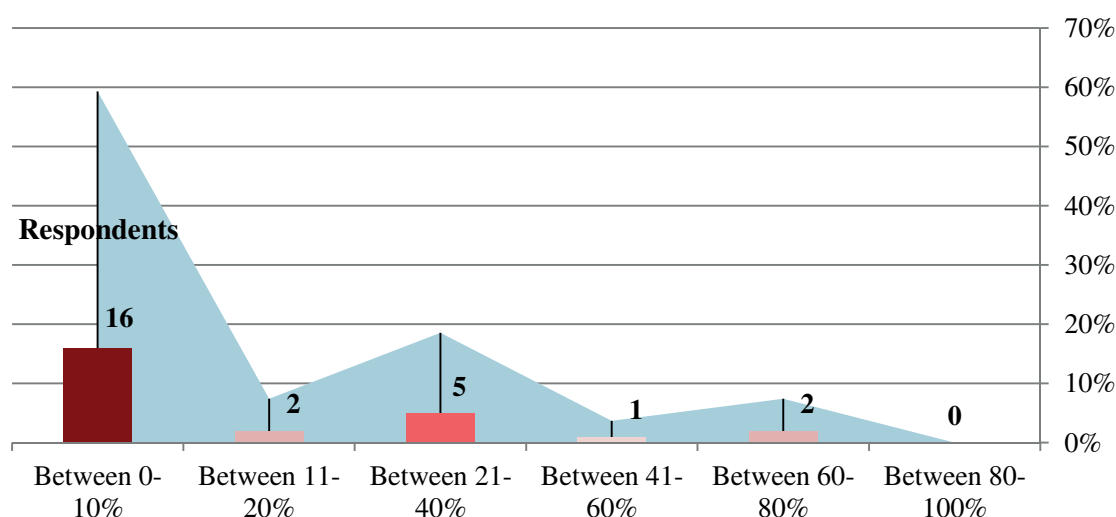
The chart shows that half of the responses accumulate in the ranges between 0-10% and between 11-20%, especially in the 0-10%. For half of the respondents, therefore, the majority of students goes through the process of getting a visa and gets accepted in the Master's. There is also a smaller but significant portion of the responses that indicates that between the 21-40% and between 41-60% cannot complete admission because of visas, which suggests that these permits can be an obstacle for a relatively high number of applicants in the admission process. Finally, the percentages 61-80% and 81-100% have little significance with respect to the total number of responses.

Chart 7. How cumbersome, if at all, do you think that the recognition of degrees is for the admission process?



Source: Survey of Legal requirements for Master's levels admissions

Chart 8. Please estimate what share of applicants does not get admitted because of recognition of degree problems



Source: Survey of Legal requirements for Master's levels admissions

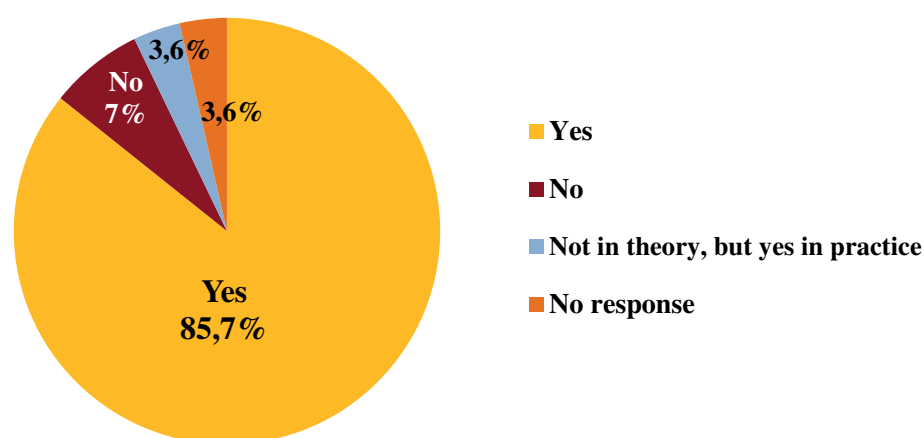
Charts 7 and 8 illustrate a slightly different situation about recognition of degrees. Chart 7's results are not conclusive either, but they rather indicate a pattern towards the left side of the

graph: almost half of the responses are gathered around the 'not cumbersome' and 'a little cumbersome' options.

Chart 8 evidences that more than half of the responses accumulates in the range between 0-10%, with some responses pointing at 11-20% and 21-40%. Also in this case, the percentages 61-80% and 81-100% have little significance with respect to the total number of responses.

Throughout the previous questions, visas and degree recognition have proved to be the most important obstacles in Master's admission. In comparison, questions 6-9 reveal that visas are a little more cumbersome and to some extent a more relevant factor in the failure of admissions than degree recognition. As a whole, the differences between both factors are small, but it can be said that visas and degree recognition are certainly perceived as cumbersome, to different degrees, by the respondents, and as genuine causes in the failure of Master applications and admissions.

Chart 9. Do you think that non-EU/EEA students have more difficulties in the admission process than EU/EEA students?

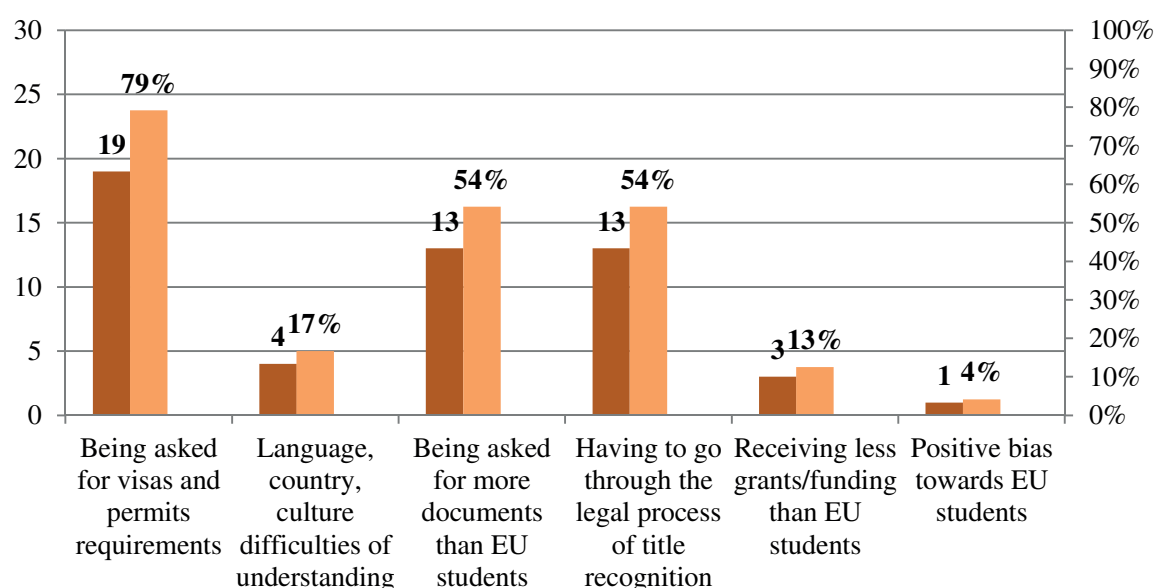


Source: Survey of Legal requirements for Master's levels admissions

The last question of the survey was an eight-answer multiple choice question aimed at detecting potential differences in the amount of obstacles/difficulties in admission based on being from the EU/EEA vs. being from outside of it. The first part of the question asked about the opinion on whether this statement was true or not. The options given were six 'yes, because...' which presented obstacles already mentioned along the survey, one 'no', and the option 'not in theory, but yes in practice'. For a large majority of respondents (85,7%), foreign students have more

difficulties than EU/EEA students. A 7% argues no difference regarding origin, a 3,6% believes that 'not in theory, but yes in practice', and a 3,6% does not respond.

Chart 10. Reasons why non-EU/EEA students have more difficulties in admission



Source: Survey of Legal requirements for Master's levels admissions

Chart 10 goes on further to scrutinise the 'yes' options, in other words, the reasons for the obstacles based on origin: as can be seen, visas and permits requirements (79%), followed by 'being asked for more documents than EU students' (54%) and having to go through the legal process of title recognition (54%) are the most prominent options among the results, and once more confirm what has been observed along the survey analysis: in general, students from outside the EU/EEA have more problems in Master's admission because of the difficulties in the process of visa or student permits request, because of the validation/legalisation of the Bachelor title and extra documentation requirements.

6. Experts' interviews

This section presents a brief summary and commentary of the interviews to directors of higher education in the Ministries, on the one hand, and to Master directors and coordinators, in the other hand.

6.1. Ministries of Higher Education

These interviews had the aim of getting the view from the governments regarding admission policies and their experience as highest experts responsible for higher education. The interview consisted of eight questions, seven of which were similar to the survey questions; and the last one asked about the policies and opinion of the Ministries with regard to the paradigm shift towards competencies, which is the common thread of Mastermind Europe and the centre of the interview.

Regarding the first seven questions, we have observed that there is general agreement in these ideas:

- Laws make clear that a Bachelor is needed to enter any Master, and this is the only requirement in countries that have open admission processes, like Belgium (Flanders) and Austria. In countries with selective admission processes, the basic legal requirement is the same, but institutions have the responsibility to set specific access requirements.
- There are differences in recognition of degrees: some countries like Austria don't issue recognition, they only check the validity of titles. This is an institutional process, done by universities and higher education institutions. It is for work purposes that titles are legally recognised. In Germany, recognition is done by the portal Uni-assist, which checks if titles are comparable to German titles on behalf of all its universities, so it can be classified as an institutional process.
- Visas are referred as the main obstacle to study in a European country, but in general the Ministries don't consider them a process not related to admission to higher education, rather as independent legal processes.
- Even though there may be little differences in admission criteria or in the time involved for foreign students, the admission process is the same regardless of the countries of origin. Students are treated the same, as perceived by the Ministries of Germany, Austria and Flanders (Belgium).

The eighth question is the most interesting one in order to grasp the direction of competency based-assessment in admission with regards to the current system of title recognition: for the Ministries of Austria, Germany and Flanders, admission is and should be as open as possible.

Even though there are differences between the degree of open/selective admissions of these countries, the three of them observe a tendency towards the restriction of numbers. The interviewee from Germany offers a reason for this: “universities are trying to offer good quality, and for that there is an interest not to take everybody”.

The respondent from Austria strengthens his opinion that students should be interdisciplinary in background, and explains the hope for a diverse classroom that he expected from Bologna is not applicable to his country.

However, in the translation from theory to practice, both the Ministers of Germany and Flanders point out the difficulties of this paradigm shift:

- “In theory everybody in the university staff is looking for competencies, but this is more difficult and expensive: recognition is an automatic procedure; it is easier to differentiate by using the title and the grades. Taking into account competencies means more work and it is difficult to regulate at the law level”.
- “In general, I think there is not a tendency towards competencies, at least in legislation. It is difficult to regulate the law, it implies limitations in the number of students, and this is a taboo in Belgium, because politicians want open access for everyone, and universities are pushing to restrict it a bit”.

6.2. Master coordinators

These interviews had the aim of identifying cumbersome elements in the admission process. The interviewees’ ideas point to the same direction and can be summarised as follows:

- Spain and Italy are countries with selective admission processes for Master, where a Bachelor is the basic legal requirement, and HEIs are allowed to set specific admission criteria.
- Asking for a visa/student permit is remarked as a cumbersome, time-consuming bureaucratic process that involves administrative and legal steps in Spain and Italy, as also suggested by the survey’s responses. Visas and admission are interdependent procedures in these two countries.
- Validation and/or recognition of degrees is a legal and institutional process in Spain and Italy: in brief, first students have to obtain the degree and transcripts from their university, then obtain and place the Hague Apostille on the original of these documents, and then have those documents translated into Italian or Spanish, depending on the country, by an official translator.

- In theory, the admission process is the same regardless of the countries of origin of the student, but the interviews illustrate how the bureaucratic processes of asking for visa and getting titles recognised poses an additional obstacle for foreign students.

As suggested by the Spanish respondent, legalisation/the Hague Apostille, which are the key requirements used in Spain for checking for authenticity, are listed as not recommended and outdated tools in *The European Recognition Manual for Higher Education Institutions*: instead, preferable measures would be country specific sources for verifying certain documents or checking that qualifications are issued by the appropriate authority.

7. Conclusions

The present report has tried to address one of the main problems affecting admissions in Europe nowadays: the perception by Master's programme coordinators and admission staff that some important admission requirements are set by national laws.

Through a survey and five interviews, the report has analysed the data and experiences provided by respondents from different institutions and profiles from the nine countries of the Mastermind Consortium members.

Regarding the surveys, the pool of respondents isn't wide and diverse enough to answer the research question rigorously —“Is the perception that there are legal obstacles grounded in real facts?—”, but some insightful observations from the survey and the interview can be picked out as conclusions:

- The only legal requirement that all analysed countries have in common is a valid Bachelor or equivalent, in general, which should be worth 180 ECTS. Therefore, the perception that other criteria besides the Bachelor are set by national laws is not based in facts.
- The requirement of having “a Bachelor, or equivalent” is not an obstacle in itself. Differences arise regarding the type of equivalency/recognition of the Bachelor degree:
 - Formal recognition, legalisation and automatic recognition imply different types of procedures. As seen through the survey and the interviews, the countries that ask for legalised titles in order to check authenticity and issue recognition are the ones that emphasise this procedure as an obstacle: in Spain, the process involves administrative and legal steps that can take an important amount of time.
 - Some open-ended answers of the survey accentuate to what extent the bureaucratic process of obtaining or validating documents abroad not only complicates admission, but can become a refusal factor in some cases, when it is not achieved in time. This report cannot provide data for the numbers of failure in admission that this represents, but suggests it as a future path of research.
 - The Lisbon Convention and the way it is understood and implemented in every country plays and will play a crucial role in degree recognition, and therefore in the whole process.

- The main obstacle that the participants of this report mention are visas and student permits. This requirement applies to all levels of higher education, and is only necessary for students from outside the EU/EEA. It is described as a cumbersome, time-consuming procedure that in some cases is linked with admission, as a letter of admission is asked in order to get a visa.
- Additional legal obstacles can be the requirement of English/national languages' knowledge, depending on the language of instruction of the country of the Master. Looking at HEIs webpages/national information centres, language can also be an obstacle when the education laws of the target Master country are only offered in the national languages, and therefore information offered to students is insufficient and not transparent.
- The paradigm shift in admissions at Master level in Europe that the Mastermind project has noted—from a system currently based on the recognition of diplomas to one based on the assessment of competencies—is not perceived by Higher Education Ministries as affecting the law in the future: regulating competencies is difficult and costly. Legislation should facilitate automatic recognition, in their point of view; in accordance with the current trend towards limiting the number of students (selective admission), institutions will get more autonomy to decide on specific admission criteria.

8. Bibliography

Academic Cooperation Association, Study Portals, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (2016). “Admissions to English-Taught Programs (ETPs) at Master’s level in Europe – Procedures, regulations, success rates and challenges for diverse applicants”, Mastermind Europe. Retrieved from: http://mastermindeurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Mastermind-Europe_Report_FINAL.pdf

Committee of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education In The European Region (2016). “Monitoring The Implementation of The Lisbon Recognition Convention, Final Report”, Paris. Retrieved online from: http://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/Monitoring_the_Implementation_of_the_Lisbon_Recognition_Convention_2016.pdf

“European Recognition Manual for Higher Education Institutions. Practical guidelines for credential evaluators and admissions officers to provide fair and flexible recognition of foreign degrees and studies abroad” (2016). Retrieved online from: <http://eurorecognition.eu/Manual/EAR%20HEI.pdf>

Kouwenaar, K. (1994). “Recognition Instruments in Europe”, *Higher Education in Europe* 19.2, pp. 7-26.

Mastermind Europe Project (2016). “Introduction to the Paradigm Shift Report. Changing paradigms in admission to master’s programmes in Europe”. Retrieved online from: <http://mastermindeurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/GT0.pdf>

9. Annex

9.1. Online survey sample: Legal requirements for Master's level admissions

mastermind EUROPE
Master's admission
for a diverse international classroom

Legal requirements for Master's level admissions

1. Please specify the **country** in which you are working:

2. Please indicate your **position** within the higher education institution:

3. Please indicate for which **type of institution** you are working:

- ☐ Public institution
- ☐ Private institution
- ☐ Other (please specify)

4. What **legal conditions (national laws)** have to be met by students in the process of Master's admissions?

- ☐ Having a valid Bachelor or equivalent degree.
- ☐ Being a citizen of the EU/EEA.
- ☐ Holding a visa or student permit.
- ☐ Others (please specify):

5. What **university/institutional regulations** (or criteria) have to be met by students in the process of Master's admissions?

- ☐ Having a Bachelor Degree in a related field and worth at least 180 ECTS.
- ☐ A minimum Bachelor grade average.
- ☐ A transcript of records.
- ☐ Certificate of English language level by a recognised authority.
- ☐ Relevant academic background in a specific/related field.
- ☐ Level of motivation for the subject.
- ☐ Letter of recommendation.
- ☐ Proof of identity (ID card or passport).
- ☐ Others (please specify):

6. Can students **start with the admission process before** all legal criteria have been **fulfilled?** e.g. Do you select the student before he/she obtained the bachelor degree, or before he/she has obtained a visa, giving conditional admission?

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No

Please give further details for your answer above:

7. Please select the **3 biggest obstacles** for student's admission deriving from laws and regulations:

- ☐ Having a valid Bachelor degree.
- ☐ Not being a citizen of the EU/EEA.
- ☐ Having to obtain a visa or student permit.
- ☐ Having a Bachelor Degree from a different field.
- ☐ Having a Bachelor Degree worth less than 180 ECTS.
- ☐ Having a Bachelor Degree with a lower grade than required.

- ☐ Not having a certificate of English language level/the required level.
- ☐ Not giving proof of identity (if ID is not asked, do you consider that an obstacle too?).
- ☐ Financial costs of application.
- ☐ Other (please specify):

8. Please **explain why** you think your choices above are the **3 biggest obstacles**, in your view:

9. How **cumbersome**, if at all, are **visas/student permits** for the admission process? Please indicate on a scale of 1-5, where **1 = not cumbersome at all**, and **5 = very cumbersome**.

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

10. Please estimate what **share of applicants does not get admitted** because of **visa problems**:

0% 100%

11. How **cumbersome**, if at all, do you think that the **recognition of degrees** is for the admission process? Please indicate on a scale of 1-5, where **1 = not cumbersome at all**, and **5 = very cumbersome**.

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3

- ☐ 4
☐ 5

12. Please estimate what **share of applicants does not get admitted** because of **recognition problems**:

0% 100%

13. Please estimate the share of **internal, domestic and foreign students** of all students **enrolled in your Master's programmes** (please enter NUMBERS without the % sign):

Internal students (those that obtained their Bachelor's or equivalent at your institution):

Domestic students (those that obtained their Bachelor's or equivalent at another institution in your country):

Foreign students (those that obtained their Bachelor's or equivalent abroad):

14. Do you think that **non-EU/EEA students have more difficulties** in the admission process than EU/EEA students?

- ☐ Yes, because of visas and student permits requirements.
☐ Yes, because of country, language or culture difficulties in the understanding of the webpage/admission process.
☐ Yes, because they are asked for more documentation than EU students.
☐ Yes, because they have to go through a legal (embassy) process of title recognition.
☐ Yes, because they receive less grants/external funding than EU students.
☐ Yes, because there is a positive bias towards EU students.
☐ No.
☐ Not in theory, but yes in practice.
☐ Other (please specify):

15. Please enter your contact email:

9.2. Extracts from the Report ‘Monitoring the Implementation of the Lisbon Convention’

Assessment and recognition criteria and procedures

Assessment criteria and procedures are important for the fair recognition of qualifications, and the LRC requires the Parties to ensure that the criteria and procedures used in assessment and recognition are transparent, coherent and reliable (Article III.2). In some countries, however, the criteria and procedures are entirely a matter for the HEIs. Most countries reported that the criteria are regulated at national level, but this was not reflected in the national legislation. In most cases, the regulations are rather general and it is for the HEIs themselves to decide on the detailed criteria to be applied. Unfortunately, some countries still use nostrification or seek equivalence when making recognition decisions (2016: 6)

In those countries where the assessment criteria and/or procedures are not regulated at national level, the HEIs have rules on acceptance procedures. Criteria regulated at institutional level are not transparent and generally not made available to applicants (2016: 7).

The admission procedure may include time limits, the documents required and fees, but generally speaking there are no rules governing access criteria and procedures, or the latter are not published and are not available for applicants [...].

In 31 out of the 50 countries, the assessment and recognition criteria and procedures are regulated. There are some countries where there are rules either for criteria or for procedures but not for both. In 13 countries the criteria and procedures are established by HEIs, and in most of these countries there is no oversight of the implementation of the LRC provisions at national level.

In the countries where criteria and procedures are regulated at national level, the nature, content and level of the rules vary considerably. In most countries the procedures are detailed and clear, but the criteria, in most cases, are general or missing. 32 countries reported that criteria are regulated at national level, but we found that only in 12 countries were the criteria really reflected in national legislation. Interestingly, more countries use input criteria (such as nominal duration and list of courses and content) than output criteria (such as formal rights and learning outcomes).

The quality of information on criteria and procedures varies considerably. In 25% of countries, the assessment criteria and procedures are transparent, meaning that the information is easily available for applicants. The majority of countries have a link from the website of the national ENIC office or ministry to the relevant legislation, which in most cases is in the national language but without any translations in widely-spoken languages. Moreover, the legal texts are difficult for applicants and because the laws in question are lengthy, it is not easy to find the relevant articles (2016: 6).

Time limit

There is a time limit for assessment and recognition (or for all administrative services, including for recognition) laid down in 36 countries. Overall, the time limit in these countries varies from one to six months, but in the vast majority (35 out of 36 countries) it is within the four-month limit recommended by one of the subsidiary texts to the LRC.

The LRC states that a decision on recognition shall be made within a reasonable time limit. The *Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications* calls for applications to be processed as promptly as possible, and this processing time should not exceed four months. It was noted that the time taken to assess foreign qualification is relatively long (between two and four months), because the number of applications increases every year and there is a shortage of staff in the relevant departments. However, a time limit should not be an obstacle for applicants in admission to HEIs or in applying for employment (2016: 7).

Right to appeal

In general, all countries have overarching national administrative procedures which include a right to appeal. Consequently, the individual's right to appeal is provided for in all countries. Some countries did not provide evidence of existing legislation. The right to appeal is regulated both nationally and internally. [...]

It is not always easy to find the information on the right of appeal. 15 countries failed to provide any online links providing evidence that information on the right of appeal is included in the recognition statement (2016: 8).

Substantial differences

Many respondents pointed out that substantial differences must also be interpreted in the light of the purpose of the recognition process. A recognition decision or statement may have different

outcomes depending on whether the assessment is to be used for access to the labour market or access to further education. The absence of a thesis or a less demanding thesis in a Master's-level programme may not be a substantial difference if the purpose of the recognition process is access to employment, but it may be considered a substantial difference if the purpose is access to doctoral studies (2016: 73). [...]

Only seven countries replied that they had a nationally regulated definition of substantial differences. Of these, only five submitted documentation in this respect, and only in two countries can it be said that the definition of substantial differences is very detailed, in compliance with the principles and procedures of the Convention text (2016: 8).

Furthermore, the vast majority of countries replied that they have no definition of the term. [...]

Several countries have pointed out that the final decision on a finding of substantial differences between the foreign programme and a similar national programme cannot be reduced to a single criterion but is taken when the competent recognition authority, after comparing the programmes, can establish a combination of criteria which are found to be substantially different.

A number of countries replied that the criteria used for examining possible substantial differences must be weighed against the purpose of the recognition (2016: 8). [...]

28 countries consider different access requirements to be a possible substantial difference. Other countries focus on the formal rights of access and make decisions or advisory statements concerning access based on the formal rights attached to the applicant's qualifications.

35 countries replied that they consider a shorter nominal duration of study of more than one year to be a substantial difference. [...]

18 countries replied that the lack of final thesis is regarded as a substantial difference, while only four countries stated that a less demanding final thesis is a substantial difference. [...]

35 countries (over two thirds of the countries that responded) consider differences in programme content/courses to be a substantial difference. It is not clear if this leads to non-recognition. [...]

13 countries replied that online studies may be considered a substantial difference and six countries stated that part-time studies might be regarded as a substantial difference (2016: 9) [...]

10 countries consider the fact that there is no similar programme in their national systems to be a substantial difference (2016: 10).

Information on education systems

Most countries include information on their school education system, the higher education legal framework and administration, access qualifications, types of HEIs, higher education qualifications, and quality assurance system/accreditation. Around 75% of countries include information on their national qualifications framework and credit and grading system. Only 20% of countries include examples of credentials in online information sources (2016: 11) [...]

20% of countries provide online information on their national education system only in the national language which cannot be considered as good practice. Accordingly, countries should also provide information in a widely-spoken language, preferably English.

Information on higher education institutions

The LRC states that each Party is to ensure, in order to facilitate the recognition of qualifications, that adequate and clear information on its education system is provided (Article III.4) (2016: 76) [...].

The way in which institutions and programmes are reflected in the online tools varies from country to country, with the result that users are not always able to find the institution or programme they are looking for. National information centres should improve online information, based on the premise that any institutions and programmes mentioned in the national online sources are quality assured and recognised. HEIs should provide a minimum of information about study programmes (level, degree awarded, credit points etc.) (2016: 58).

While all the countries have lists of institutions available online, 24% provide information only in the national language(s). This cannot be regarded as good practice as information provided only in the national language(s) complicates the task of the credential evaluators (2016: 58).