



Thematic Peer Group B on Lisbon Recognition Convention

Second Meeting, Hosted by Italy, Online*
Tuesday, January 18, 2022,
09.30-12.45 (Brussels time)

Minutes

List of Participants

Country	Name	Last Name
Albania (Co-Chair)	Linda	Pustina
Armenia	Gayane	Harutyunyan
Austria	Stephan	De Pasqualin
Belarus	Maryna	Shalupenka
Belarus	Ina	Mitskevich
Belgium Flemish Community	Erwin	Malfroy
Croatia	Leonardo	Marusic
Cyprus	Alexandra	Petridou
Czech Republic	Veronika	Schmidtova
Denmark	Allan Bruun	Pedersen
EDC	Ildiko	Mazar
EDC	Anthony	Camilleri
Estonia	Gunnar	Vaht
Estonia	Margit	Brückel
EQAR	Colin	Tück
EQAR	Aleksandra	Zhivkovikj
ESU – European Students’ Union	Pegi	Pavletic
EUA – European University Association	Helene	Peterbauer
European Commission	Lucie	Trojanova
European Commission	Celine	Jambon
France (Co-Chair)	Hélène	Bekker
France	El Mehdi	El Moufid
Georgia	Salome	Abramishvili
Germany	David	Akrami Flores
Germany	Iris	Kimizoglu
Greece	Bessy	Athanassopoulou
Holy See	Melanie	Rosenbaum
Ireland	Andrina	Wafer
Italy (Co-chair)	Chiara	Finocchietti
Italy	Silvia	Bianco
Italy	Emanuela	Gitto
Italy	Gioia	Vicinanza
Italy	Elisa	Petrucci

Italy	Teresa	Morales
Latvia	Baiba	Ramina
Latvia	Daiga	Ivsina
Lithuania	Aurelija	Valeikiene
Lithuania	Sarūnas	Salkauskas
Netherlands	Bas	Wegewijs
Netherlands	Jenneke	Lokhoff
Netherlands	Lucie	de Bruin
Norway	Dag	Hovdhaugen
Poland	Hanna	Reczulska
San Marino	Remo	Massari
Sweden	Ulrika	Axell
Switzerland	Christine	Gehrig
Ukraine	Kateryna	Suprun
UNESCO	Peter	Wells
UNESCO	Sacha	Roch
United Kingdom	Cloud	Baiyun
European Commission (Guest)	Koen	Nomden
EBSI (Guest)	Lluís	Ariño
Nuffic (Guest)	Evelien	Willems
BFUG Secretariat (Head)	Oltion	Rrumbullaku
BFUG Secretariat	Kristina	Metallari

Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Council of Europe, EI-ETUCE, EURASHE, Kazakhstan, Malta, Moldova, North Macedonia, Portugal, Russia, Spain and Hungary did not attend the meeting.

***Note:** Due to the extraordinary circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic, this meeting was held online.

1. Welcome and introduction to the meeting by the Co-chairs

The TPG B Co-chairs welcomed everybody to the second meeting of the 2021-2024 work period. Linda Pustina (Co-Chair) expressed her desire for the future TPG B on LRC meeting to be held in person, if the pandemic situation allows. Ms. Pustina emphasized the importance of the second TPG B on LRC meeting to share experiences to optimize the use of digital technology and the Diploma Supplement for the recognition agenda. She highlighted that the meeting offers an opportunity to gain knowledge about initiatives and practices.

Data from the survey among the TPG B members and consultative members distributed in June 2021, indicated that the main focus is on the development of digital platforms for secure data exchange, digital credentials and online recognition services. Based on the survey results and from the discussions that occurred during the first TPG B meeting, three dimensions of digitization have been addressed:

- i. Secure, trusted, and transparent data provision;
- ii. Platforms for credential sharing;
- iii. Criteria and principles of the LRC applied to the digitization of the recognition process.

Ms. Pustina underlined that this meeting was structured into 2 main sessions. Firstly, a plenary session would be organized to provide an overview of the latest developments in the field, as well as hands-on expert experience for each of the three dimensions of digitalization. Secondly,

participants would be divided into three working groups to share the main challenges and solutions for the implementation of the three dimensions of digitization at a national level.

For more detailed information, please see: [Objectives of the meeting](#)

2. Overview of the TPG B Work Plan

Hélène Bekker (Co-Chair, France) provided an overview of the Workplan 2021-2024, focusing on general information and country profiles. The Working methodology included the application of peer support approach and the organization of a combination of panel meetings and smaller group activities. The monitoring of the outcomes would be conducted based on the country profiles and through two questionnaires to be organized on summer 2022 and at the end of the working period, respectively. An overview of the TPG B on LRC activities and a list of the completed country profiles was provided, with a total of 24 countries delivering this information.

Latest developments on the work regarding the LRC Monitoring Report were provided, with information on two additional items included in the report: automatic recognition (AR) and digitalization of recognition. It was proposed that sharing information on the LRC monitoring report to TPG B's work when available, would be highly beneficial.

For more detailed information, please see: [Objectives of the TPG B Work Plan](#)

3. Outcomes of the survey among TPG B members

The plenary session of this meeting was opened by Chiara Finocchietti (Co-Chair), with the purpose to receive updates on certain developments and practices in digitization with relevance for recognition on an international level. The relevance of these topics and practices was highlighted to support the implementation of the LRC. The three topics to be discussed were chosen based on the sub-topics that emerged from the TPG B survey on digitalization:

3.1. Secure, trusted, and transparent data provision

Colin Tück (EQAR) presented an overview of the Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR), aimed to enhance access to external quality assurance reports and decisions on higher education institutions/programs. As a Pan-European reference point for ESG quality assured higher education, DEQAR was stated to allow transparency for all stakeholders, facilitation of AR and interoperability. New areas of work related to connecting DEQAR with other systems/initiatives were presented:

- ENIC-NARIC Integration: Facilitation of the process of recognition workflow and digital credentialing.
- European Digital Credentials for Learning: Creation of an interface that is essential for the reliability and trustworthiness of digital credentials.
- EBSI Diploma Use Case: Creation of a system where QA results are listed and DEQAR data can be exported in the format that EBSI institutions require.

Next steps highlighted the work on the topic of alternative providers of micro-credentials on DEQAR, with more information on this to be provided in the upcoming meetings.

For more information, please see: [DEQAR CONNECT Conference](#)

3.2. Platforms for credential sharing

- Europass

Koen Nomden (European Commission) presented an overview of Europass, a European platform of lifelong learning and career management, aimed in supporting digital recognition and digital credentialing. The framework for digitally-signed credentials was outlined,

containing the respective definition, digital signature (e-Seal) and The European Learning Model. Further, Further, the European Digital Credentials for Learning infrastructure was presented, with the aim of encompassing the technical specifications to implement the framework. The infrastructure building blocks and system functions to help operationalize the framework were also listed.

Foreseen technical developments included digitalization of diploma supplements to be finalized in the first quarter of 2022, as well as long-term developments such as archive wallet, digital recognition statements, etc.

Conclusively, Europass was identified as the largest European wallet provider, promoting a system of interoperable wallets based on its standards, with the European Commission's support to ensure maximum uptake and interoperability.

- o European Blockchain Services Infrastructure (EBSI)

Lluís Ariño (Universitat Rovira I Virgili) presented the European Blockchain Services Infrastructure (EBSI), as a user centric, decentralized network that is reusable in multiple contexts and is based on open standards to stimulate interoperability and the creation of cross-border public services.

The Diploma Use Case was introduced, with the purpose to provide reusable specifications and services to manage educational credentials across borders. The desired outcome included a common underlying building block to issue, manage and verify diplomas using the highest levels of security and privacy by leveraging EBSI blockchain technologies.

The next evolution of educational credentials was underlined to focus on citizens, lifelong learning, personal learning pathways and stacking credentials. Interoperability was highlighted as a key element of the EBSI Diploma Case. From a technical perspective, EBSI developed a generic framework for issuing and sharing credentials, and a new method of communicating with citizens. From a governance dimension, Mr. Ariño stressed that all actors, particularly business actors, must be in place, and existing solutions must support the governance of existing member states. In terms of development/standards consortia, it was emphasized that EBSI interacts with important global/European businesses.

3.3. Criteria and principles of the LRC applied to the digitization of the recognition process

Evelien Willems (Nuffic, Dutch ENIC-NARIC) presented the findings from Digital Innovations in Credential Evaluation and the Networks (DigiNet) and Digital Student Data & Recognition (DigiRec) projects. The DigiRec project (2018-2020) explored the relationship between digital student data and LRC compliant credential evaluation.

DigiNet project (2020-2022) advanced LRC-compliant digital strategies and solutions from policy to practical implementation. Nuffic was said to be working on implementation plans to automate its own digital credential workflows with other ENIC-NARIC centers and a steering group of experts, with the goal of connecting common challenges and efficient digitalization strategies, to be published in the form of guidelines later this year. The various stages of the implementation process were presented. The input stage was designed to accommodate a variety of data sources, standards and maturity levels. The creation of interoperable and privacy-protected systems, and the integration of trusted sources to facilitate automation, were the main goals of the throughput stage. Output stage focused on delivering digital output that supports the digital learner data ecosystem and fosters a "digital culture" among stakeholders.

For more detailed information, please see: [Digitizing credential evaluation in line with the LRC](#)

4. Working groups on the TPG B Work Plan

During this session, the members of TPG B were divided into 3 groups to discuss the selected thematic priorities included in the questionnaires:

- 4.1. Platforms for credential sharing (Group 1);
- 4.2. Criteria and principles of the LRC applied to the digitization of the recognition process (Group 2 & 3).

Each group indicated the main challenges and shared possible solutions for the implementation of the three dimensions of digitalization at national level.

5. Reporting from the working groups

In a follow-up plenary session, three pre-assigned rapporteurs reported back on the discussions' topics of each group, as summarized below:

5.1. Group 1 (Rapporteur: Pegi Pavletić, European Students' Union)

The group identified main challenges and possible solutions of managing and sharing trusted educational credentials using digital systems, specifically on a national level through respective country outlooks, as summarized below:

Challenges for credential sharing in a national context:

- More data on the association between national programs and digital systems is required;
- In some countries, a platform to issue digital credentials has yet to be implemented, on an institutional and national level;
- Consideration of legal requirements of stakeholders/organizations;
- Agreeing on acceptable standards (i.e., content, security) among EHEA countries.

Challenges in inclusion:

- Receiving digital information without a context (i.e., cultural context) can prove harmful for credential sharing. Thus, while developing new systems, inclusivity should be a priority. National credential sharing systems should be built at a broad level, according to country examples from Ireland and Norway, to allow credentials to be recognized more widely;
- In addition to credential issuers and recognized authorities/agents' perspectives, credential holders' perspectives (individual level) should be considered.

Possible Solutions:

- The future use of EBSI was highlighted, with countries creating their own credential sharing systems and using the blockchain infrastructure to share credentials amongst them;
- Europass was emphasized as a user-friendly technology for countries to implement;
- Ambassadors (i.e, ENIC-NARIC Centers) ought to establish trust and promote collaboration to improve acknowledgement of credentials;
- The development of a national credential sharing system.

In conclusion, it was observed that national credential sharing systems ought to be more associated with existing (global) digital system technologies, as well more inclusive (i.e., cultural context). Finally, national and international digital systems ought to establish trust and promote collaboration to improve acknowledgement of credentials.

5.2. Group 2 (Rapporteur: Veronika Schmidtová, Czech Republic)

The group identified main challenges and possible solutions related to the digitization of the recognition process, taking into account the criteria and principles of the LRC applied to the digitization of the recognition process.

Challenges:

- Uneven rates of digital development and countries being at varied degrees of digitalization of the recognition process;
- Requirement of digital signatures to receive digital documents;
- While some HEIs produce digital diplomas, their systems may not be interoperable with other systems (i.e., Europass, EBSI, DEQAR, ENIC-NARIC);
- The security and legal components of digital technologies should be examined;
- Lack of a centralized process: multiple national digital systems may be incompatible/not fully interoperable on a national/European level.

Possible solutions:

- Consultations and information sharing should be done at a national and international level, as well as among all TPGs (i.e., discussion on the information systems and interoperability);
- Creation of guidelines for using the digital process.

The key challenges for this group were found to be uneven rates of digital development in terms of the degree of digitalization of the recognition process, as well as the degree of interoperability and compatibility between national digital systems and international digital systems.

5.3. Group 3 (Rapporteur: Hélène Bekker, France)

The group identified three sections on the challenges of the criteria and principles of the LRC applied to the digitization of the recognition process:

1. Input stage

- Although most countries have digitalized their processes, there is still a paper dimension;
- Data maturity is an issue due to the lack of structured data, with only a small percentage of centers able to properly process digital credentials electronically;

2. Throughput stage

- Interoperability, automatization, use of mature data, system updates and connectivity to DEQAR were the primary hurdles in developing a digital recognition system.
- Other challenges included connecting databases to HEIs and central admissions portals.

3. Output stage

- The majority of facilities provide digital organized output in PDF format. Some centers use a hybrid approach, combining metadata with data stored in digital databases. The usage of blockchain technology with "multi ledger" statements was suggested as a way to allow data to be uploaded to different blockchain systems.
- The difficulty of connecting Europass through the DigiNet project was emphasized.

In conclusion, automatization, interoperability, secure identification, use of mature data, and linkage to international digital systems were identified as key challenges by this group.

6. Wrap up and conclusions

Chiara Finocchietti (Co-Chair) made a few final remarks on the next steps to be undertaken by the group. She emphasized the importance of focusing on good practices and peer support, through information obtained from the survey (2021) and from the Work Plan (2021-2024). Hence, a Peer Learning Activity on digitalization was decided to be organized, to allow countries to share their respective national examples.

Helene Bekker (Co-Chair) wished that the upcoming TPG B meeting be held in person in France (France Education International, Sèvres) if the pandemic situation permits. The provisional dates for the third TPG B meeting have been set for June 9-followed with a public seminar on June 10, 2022.

No other business was brought forward, therefore, the second meeting of the TPG B on LRC was concluded.