



# TAICEP TALK

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## Coronavirus and Credential Evaluation: Challenges and Opportunities

My husband is a graduate student, pursuing a PhD degree in rehabilitation sciences at the University of Utah. He and his classmates are struggling to find ways to finish their degree programs, or even just the term. Classes have moved online. Projects are on hold and dissertation defenses are shifting to a virtual setting. They were discussing their options recently and one of them mentioned the grading choices that were now available. For each [registered course](#), students can opt to receive a normal letter grade or they can take the courses as credit/no-credit for this term. While I felt for their struggle, this was actually the first glimmer of hope for me.

As a credential evaluator, I was trained to be sensitive to social and political forces that may affect education. We know that all sorts of issues, from natural disasters to wars, can have ramifications on schools and schooling. I'm sure we can all come up with pertinent examples from our work, but I keep thinking about Lebanon. Throughout the Lebanese civil war, the *Baccalauréat* exams were often postponed or not given at all. It was an issue that had to be addressed in real time in Lebanon. Can you have a starting class of university students without national secondary exams? What metrics do you use to compare students without national exam scores? How do you compare students who were able to take the exam with those who were not?

I will be honest; I have not dealt with many secondary documents from the late 1970's and the 1980's from Lebanon. But they also have a more recent example that I find illustrative, mostly because I was able to research it in real time. In 2014, there was a major teacher strike. In Lebanon, as soon as the school year ends, teachers are then responsible for helping grade the national exams. So they timed their strike to start once students had already taken the exams for the year. Without the teachers, the ministry was in a tough position. There was no way to score the exams. In fact, since the first part of scoring was seeing who actually took the exam, there was no way to know who even showed up on exam day. But, due to the erratic

history of exams during the civil war, they did have experience on how to move past the issue in 2014. The ministry ended up issuing official authorization certificates to each student who had been registered for the 2014 exams. They stated that the student was legally allowed to attend university in Lebanon. Essentially, the ministry decreed that the 2014 students had the same rights as students from other years who actually earned the General Secondary Education Certificate.

As credential evaluators, we all have our internal guidelines and policies to follow when we do an evaluation. I don't know how others in the field deal with missing exams in 1987 or ministerial authorization certificates in 2014 in Lebanon. But educational systems are fluid and we have institutional methods of dealing with change over time. And we have seen dramatic changes in education around the world due to the threat of the novel coronavirus and COVID-19. Some of the changes are happening at a national level, with schools closing in unison. In other cases, like here in the United States, the changes are happening at state or local levels. And every school will have their own ways to address these changes. This is where my hope comes from. Even though we all face the unknown, be that personally, professionally, or existentially, we are experts who have been trained to research change and to find understanding in the unknown.

Here are some things to keep in mind as we look towards the future and the types of research we will need to do. It goes beyond knowing that all Italian universities are currently closed, so there is no one on campus to issue an official transcript. We will have to look at each country individually and see if there are national policies or new laws that impact education. The solution in 2014 in Lebanon was enshrined in law and many of the accommodations we are going to see will be as well. And we will have to look at each individual institution to see what they have done in response. There will be changes to grading, like I've seen at the University of Utah. And school calendars will be affected, so we will have to know if students are expected to make up time later or if school years are going to shift. This will look different in parts of the world where the school year starts in August or September and ends in the next month or two compared to places where the school year normally begins in March. Places with trimesters or quarters may have less of an overall interruption than places with semester terms.

Areas where there are national matriculation exams may have to delay or cancel exams. China has already [moved the Gaokao exams to July](#), but we won't know until later how that could impact the start of the 2020-2021 school year there. The [May/June sessions of the various UK external secondary exams](#) (GCSE and GCE O/AS/A Levels) have been cancelled, but we will need to look to each individual examining board to see what that means for their students. [WAEC has cancelled the 2020 WASSCE school candidate exams](#), which were supposed to start today (April 6, 2020). They are hoping to reschedule, but WAEC operates in

five countries and coordination is always a challenge. Besides, many African countries are only starting to face the pandemic and are at a different point in the disease progression than other regions. We will have to wait and see what happens with these students.

In the absence of benchmarks (if national exams are not rescheduled, for example), admission policies for the next tier of education may be altered. We need to understand that students this year may be treated differently than students in the same country from last year. We may have to do the same in our evaluations. In each country and each educational system, people are working to address these issues and plan the next steps. We won't be able to interpret their decisions until they start to affect the educational documents we analyze. But we can read about the impacts to education worldwide and feel confident that international credential evaluators have a role to play in interpreting and understanding the myriad issues and changes facing global education right now. Our skills and international knowledge base are perfectly aligned to help make sense of one aspect (education) of the global challenges we all face under the threat of coronavirus. We will have the opportunity to help our schools and other educational institutions overcome the challenges they face. We have a role to play and that gives me hope.

*Martha Van Devender – Martha Van Devender is a senior evaluator at ECE with nearly 15 years of credential evaluation experience. She has been a member of TAICEP from the early days and is currently serving as chair of the TAICEP Certificate Committee.*

## Innovating the Old World: A Sampling of Digitization in Asia and Europe

We all grapple with documentation issues in the best of times, but with the coronavirus pandemic limiting our access to sending, receiving, and processing paper documents, the Digital Student Data Task Force would like to provide some updates on a handful of countries with processes for sharing student records electronically.

In this article, we'll share updates from China, India, Italy, Norway, Singapore, and Sweden, with the focus on the credential evaluator experience – how to have the student access and share the credentials, and how to get usable documents into our systems.

### **People's Republic of China**

In China, we are working with two government agencies under the auspices of the Ministry of Education: the China Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development Center

(CDGDC) and the China Higher Education Student Information and Career Center (CHESICC). Both of these institutions verify different elements of Chinese educational records.

It is important to note that China awards dual credentials upon completion of academic programs. In China, qualifications and degrees are separate types of credentials that lead to separate documents. They are also verified by separate government institutions. In other countries, “qualifications” and “degrees” may be used interchangeably, but in the Chinese education system, they refer to two different documents that represent different points of completion for levels of study.

Certificates of Graduation are qualifications awarded upon completion of a recognized educational program at a defined level, ranging from primary school to doctoral study. Degree certificates are only awarded to graduates of Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral programs. Qualifications are awarded upon completion of coursework at a particular academic level, while degree certificates are awarded upon completion of additional requirements beyond just completion of the coursework. These additional requirements may include a Chinese College English Test (CET), a final paper, minimum grades in the major or minimum grade point average, and other requirements. In addition, students cannot have received any disciplinary actions for political reasons.

Since 1992, the degree certificate and certificate of graduation have been issued as separate documents. A 毕业证书 (Certificate of Graduation) is a qualification that may be awarded after completion of primary school (grade 6), junior middle school (grade 9), senior secondary school (grade 12), a *Zhuanke* (short-cycle undergraduate program of 2-3 years) program, a *Benke* (long-cycle undergraduate) program, a Master’s program, or a Doctoral program. The Certificate of Graduation indicates that the coursework was completed for that academic level, but despite the English translation, the Certificate of Graduation does not confer award of the degree.

Degree certificates include the 学士学位证书 (Bachelor degree certificate), the 硕士学位证书 (Master’s degree), and 博士学位证书 (Doctoral degree). Degree certificates are not awarded for *Zhuanke* (short-cycle undergraduate) programs.

More information about the dual qualification and degree system can be found in English directly from CHESICC:

<https://www.chsi.com.cn/en/news/201312/20131202/663878204.html>

### CDGDC

Among its other duties, CDGDC verifies degree certificates for Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral degree programs. CDGDC used to verify some high school transcripts, university transcripts,

and other educational records, but they currently only verify degrees. There is no fee to students or evaluators for this service. While the CDGDC has an English version of its website, students apply using the Chinese language version. After communicating directly with CDGDC in March, we were able to determine that they are still open for business and working as normal. There may be delays for some degree verifications, especially for older graduation dates, but they have not closed. The main CDGDC website is <http://www.cdgdc.edu.cn/> and is only available in Chinese, but the verification site was available in both Chinese and English as recently as last month.

Students request that their degree certificate to be verified by going to <https://www.chinadegrees.cn/cqva/gateway.html>

Along the left side of the screen, they will need to create an account by click on the 注册 (Registration) link and signing up for an account by entering their email address and creating a password. Students will then need to fill out the application form online and attach electronic supporting documents. Once they have submitted their application, they can check their application status at the same website. Students will be assigned one application number regardless of how many degrees they have, but each separate degree will have its own report number.

Evaluators check the validity of the CDGDC degrees <https://www.chinadegrees.cn/cqva/gateway.html>. Evaluators will enter the report number and the on-screen Captcha into the Chinese language website. Documents that appear in blue means that the verification confirms authentic documents while pink confirms fraudulent documents.

## CHESICC

CHESICC verifies educational qualifications at the secondary and higher education level. Academic secondary school certificates of graduation can be verified. CHESICC no longer verifies graduation certificates from vocational or technical high schools, and they stopped verifying all high school transcripts in May 2019. CHESICC also verifies higher education qualifications such as the certificates of graduation from *Zhuanke*, *Benke*, Master, and Doctoral programs and their accompanying higher education transcripts. In addition, CHESICC verifies some university entrance examinations.

CHESICC maintains an English website that allows evaluators to verify the reports in English. Please note that updates regarding COVID-19 have been posted only on the Chinese version of the website. Direct communication with CHESICC in March confirmed that they are still open but are working remotely, so students can apply online and communicate via email or using WeChat but cannot go in person or access services by phone. They are



continuing to process verification requests, but there may be delays with older qualifications awarded before 2000 since many schools and universities in China are still closed.

Students can apply online for their senior high school certificate of graduation, university transcripts, or university-level certificate of graduation to be verified by CHESICC via <https://www.chsi.com.cn/en/pvr/> (in English) which redirects to <https://www.chsi.com.cn/wssq/> (in Chinese). Samples of the various qualifications are available in English at <https://www.chsi.com.cn/en/pvr/brief.jsp>.

Secondary school graduates need to order the 中等教育学历 报告 / Secondary Education Qualification as proof of high school graduation. Higher education students would order the 中国高等教育学历认证报告 / Verification Report of China Higher Education Qualification Certificate (Certificate of Graduation) and 高等学校学生成绩报告 or 中国高等学校学生成绩认证报告 / Verification Report of China Higher Education Student's Academic Transcript. Evaluators can check the verification reports online and in English from <https://www.chsi.com.cn/en/pvr/check.jsp>

## **India**

Several digital platforms exist in India for accessing student records. However, the availability of electronic records can vary, depending on whether arrangements have been made between the examination boards and institutions of study and the digital service providers. At present, most notable are the National Academic Depository (NAD) and Truecopy.

The National Academic Depository was created by the government at the end of 2016, as a registry of student records at both the secondary and postsecondary level. Two providers, Central Depository Services Limited (CDSL, [www.cdslindia.com](http://www.cdslindia.com)) and National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL, [www.nsdl.co.in](http://www.nsdl.co.in)) have equal access to the NAD and can issue and verify electronic records that are stored in the registry.

- If the state board or institution of study is registered with the NAD, students can request CDSL or NSDL to have their records released.
- In the instance of CDSL, an email notification is sent to the designated recipient with a link to the portal.
- To view a particular student's records, one must select his/her name in the portal. Afterwards, a one-time password is sent to your email.

- The one-time password must be used within 30 minutes. Once this numeric code is entered, the electronic records become available for download and viewing as a PDF.
- It should be noted that the PDF may reflect that the digital signature is not verified or valid. In such instances, it is because the digital certificate used by the issuer is not present in Adobe's trusted identities stored on your specific computer. When this happens, one must "change the settings," informing the Adobe Acrobat Reader program that the source is a trusted one and validate the signature.

Truecopy is another service that works with numerous universities and educational providers in India ([www.truecopy.in](http://www.truecopy.in)). It is helpful to have an account set up, so that you can easily receive and manage the electronic records you receive.

- At the request of the student, an email notification will be sent, indicating that his/her records are available for access.
- The email will include the student's file number for reference, if provided by the applicant.
- Go into the portal and log in with your ID and password.
- Retrieve and download the student records (PDF).

## **Italy**

The *Diplome* service, implemented by CIMEA and fully operational since April 2019, represents the first use case of blockchain technology applied to credential evaluation. It aims to provide a "Wallet" for people, where it is possible to store certified qualifications with blockchain technology, creating a decentralized, transparent, certified, and unchangeable qualification management system. The qualifications and the certificates are uploaded to blockchain by certified authorities (universities, ENIC-NARIC centers, national administrations, etc.), and the source of the information is always linked to the information itself. In this way the certified qualification becomes easily shareable and portable, reducing the risk of falsification. The evaluation statement is also issued on the blockchain, ensuring fast and secure delivery.

*Diplome* is built as an open ecosystem, which institutions, awarding authorities, and certifying authorities can join without any change in their existing technologies, according to the concept of interoperability. This is possible since *Diplome* represents an example of private permissioned blockchain. It utilizes a standard Ethereum blockchain and can run on any Ethereum-based variants. The holder of the qualification is the only owner of the information and of the crypto key that constitutes the only way to access the user's data,



being fully compliant with the principles expressed by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) implemented in May 2018.

The implementation of this new system represents a cultural shift from analogic to fully digital credentials where only the most necessary information is shared. Paper can still be used according to national legislation and academic culture but at the same time the relevant information is kept secure on blockchain and can be shared in a simple, secure, and certified way. Blockchain is an example of a technology to exchange student data, and not a data format in itself. In a blockchain, data are no longer centrally stored (i.e. in a database), but a footprint of the data (i.e. a diploma) is stored. This can be done in different formats, from PDFs to structured data. The blocks can be accessible to third parties if given a “key” by the owner of these data to access the record.

The fully digital workflow and the implementation of blockchain in the assessment procedures and in issuing statements of comparability have been an element of resilience for CIMEA after the outbreak of the Covid-19, and the staff has been able to continue working from home since the lockdown measures to fight the spread of the pandemic. CIMEA is glad to share the *Diplome* system for free with other credential evaluation services, ENIC-NARIC centers, and Higher Education Institutions that need to deploy smart working during this period. It is time to share our tools, to be cooperative and inclusive, and not interrupt our services.

## **Norway**

There are currently eight Council of Europe member states that have fully operational online verification services, one of which is Norway. In 2017 they launched the Norwegian Diploma Registry *Vitnemålsportalen*. The service is connected to a student data repository that contains data from the mid-nineties and forward. Most of the country’s higher education institutions are connected to this multilingual service, which will gradually also include secondary educational credentials. The service is in accordance with Norwegian privacy laws and the student decides with whom the student data is shared. In simple terms, the authenticity of most Norwegian credentials can be verified by institutions and employers all over the world and for free.

Information from the NDR regarding electronic transcripts via *Vitnemålsportalen*:

Information for the sender

- Only you can decide who you want to share your results with.
- All transmissions are encrypted.

## Information for the recipient

- The results are collected directly from the educational institutions' databases.
- There are multiple things you can look for to check that the results are coming from the Diploma Registry:
  - Emails with links from the Diploma Registry will have donotreply@vitnemalsportalen.no as the sender.
  - The link address (the URL) will start with <https://vitnemalsportalen.no>....
  - After clicking the link, an icon showing a padlock will appear next to the link address.

## What does it mean that the PDF of the results is digitally signed?

Shared results can be downloaded as a PDF file. This PDF is digitally signed. This means that if someone tries to change the content of the PDF, the digital signature will immediately be invalid. To check if the signature is valid, we recommend using Adobe Acrobat Reader. A "ribbon" with information about the signature's validity will then appear at the top of the screen. Note that it is only possible to verify the PDF in its original electronic form. If the document is printed, it is no longer possible to verify the signature.

In order to share their results from higher education with you, the learners need to log in to the registry, select which results to share, whether they should be presented in Norwegian or English, which e-mail address they should be sent to, and when the link should expire. Then you receive an e-mail from the registry with a link giving you time limited access to the records of the person.

For more information on the registry see: <http://www.vitnemalsportalen.no/english/>

No one can log in to the registry without either being affiliated with one of the higher education institutions (through work or studies) or having a Norwegian personal number, bank ID, etc. An employer or credential evaluator can only access someone's records if that person shares them directly.

Note that it is the registry, not the student, that sends the recipient the link to follow. If somebody shares their academic results with you, you will receive an e-mail from the registry similar to this:

*To: [Your e-mail address]*

*From: ikkesvar@vitnemalsportalen.no*

*This is an automatically generated e-mail sent from the Diploma registry. You have received this e-mail because [applicant] wants to share his/her results from higher education with you.*

*By following the link below, you will access the results (use the code \*\*\*\*\*): <LINK>*

*This link expires 25/11/2017 [NB the European order: day/month/year]*

Additionally, the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) will soon be able to receive structured data directly to its processing system from EMREX and Digitary Core. There will be more information on these services in upcoming articles.

## **Singapore**

A student from Singapore recently applied for an evaluation of his secondary credentials. We requested that he submit official Certifying Statements of Marks for his Singapore-Cambridge GCE-O Level Examinations.

The student emailed our office in reply; the email included forwarded instructions and an attachment. The attachment was an “opencert” file, and the instructions were:

1. Save the .opencert document found in this email's attachment
2. Visit <https://opencerts.io>
3. Drop the .opencert file into the dropzone to verify the certificate
4. If the .opencert file is verified, the certificate will load in a new page

The following information was included:

“OpenCerts is a blockchain-based platform for issuing and validating certs. It is developed by the [Singapore Government Technology Agency \(GovTech\)](#).

Various education institutes work together to issue certificates that employers can easily verify. Using OpenCerts, you can view a certificate sent to you and validate it originates from the correct institution or if the certificate has been tampered with.

To find out more, visit <https://opencerts.io/>”

Dragging and dropping the attached opencert file into the website showed us the full examination results for the student in a downloadable format (note that you do not “open” the file itself). As part of the best practices protocol, we confirmed with the issuing institution or board (in this case Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board) that the third party

(OpenCerts) is authorized to issue or verify credentials on their behalf. On their website, SEAB confirms that OpenCerts has been adopted by the Singapore government.

Students can share their file either through the “share” button on the OpenCerts website, or they can email the OpenCerts files.

For now, this process seems to work better as a system of quick verification rather than a way to obtain official documents, however, we will continue to monitor it and hopefully will be able to retrieve documents this way.

Additional resources: <https://www.ssg.gov.sg/opencerts.html>

## **Sweden**

The digitalization of the Swedish Council for Higher Education’s (UHR) workflow started in 2007 by introducing an electronic processing system. In 2014 an electronic application system was launched. This was followed by the introduction of digital evaluation statements as of April 2019. Thus, the whole evaluation process from the application to the final product is now digital:

1. The applicant applies for an evaluation through UHR’s portal and uploads all necessary documents (usually PDFs, or, in some cases, the document is sent from the issuing institution);
2. The application is digitally processed;
3. The applicant receives a digital evaluation statement.

The Swedish higher education institutions are digitalizing as well. In December 2017 Linnaeus University started to award digital degree certificates (they now only issue digital degrees, which are legally the only official documents). This was followed by the University of Gothenburg in November 2018, and now twelve Swedish HEIs have introduced, or are in the process of introducing, digital credentials. In most cases the credentials have digital signatures. In the case of Linnaeus University, the “degree certificates” include the courses completed in the degree program, and credits, grades, and dates of completion for each course. They are bilingual, in Swedish and English.

The process for the sender is to apply for the degree certificate through Ladok, the national student registration system (<https://www.student.ladok.se/student/loggain>). When the degree has been issued, it can be sent to an email address designated by the student. Future plans include having a portal for students to log into and share credentials with a third party via a URL and password.

Other institutions who have followed suit are the KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Linköping University, Södertörn University College and Stockholm University.

*TAICEP Digital Student Data Task Force*

## Secondary Credentials with Undergraduate Credits

There are numerous secondary credentials that also encompass post-secondary education. The following is a basic overview of 2 common (to my office) secondary credentials that carry possible undergraduate credits, the Indian 3-year Diploma and the Russian Diploma of Intermediate Professional Education.

### **The Indian 3-Year Diploma**

First, we are looking at the Indian 3-year Diploma. The most common of these being the Diploma in Engineering, the Diploma in Technology, and the Diploma in Computer Science, although other programs exist.

Secondary education in India is offered at two levels: secondary, which covers grades 8 through 10, and general academic higher secondary, which consists of grades 11 and 12. Because of this two-tiered system, education in India is often referred to as a 10+2 system, where the “10” is comprised of primary and secondary education, and the “2” refers to the upper secondary studies. At the end of both of these levels of education, students in India sit for public examinations that are conducted by the state boards or the Central Board of Secondary Education.

As an alternative to academic upper secondary education, students may pursue a 10+3 technical upper secondary education program through their local state board of technical education and training. The Diploma is a 3-year program that completes the upper secondary education curriculum in a technical field and also consists of first year engineering / technology degree studies.

One of the tenets of credential evaluation is to assess what the student can do with their credential in their home country. In order to pursue further education and employment within India, graduates of a 10+3 Diploma in Engineering program are often eligible to enter into the second year of a 4-year Bachelor degree in a related field at universities in India.

Please note, it is not uncommon for students who have already completed higher secondary education (10+2) and have already earned a higher secondary school certificate, intermediate certificate, or other 12th grade diploma to enroll in a Diploma program. A Diploma from

India is usually undertaken by a student who has either not completed the two years of upper / higher secondary education. However, a higher secondary school graduate who has not fared as well on the mathematics or science examinations and would not be eligible to enroll in an engineering or technology degree program on the basis of those grades may also complete a Diploma program.

### **Russian Diploma of Intermediate Professional Education**

Next is a review of the Russian Diploma of Intermediate Professional Education (Кесипчилик техникалык билим тууралуу диплом / Диплом о среднем профессиональном образовании).

Basic general education, or Education Stage II, leads to the Аттестат об основном общем образовании or Свидетельство о неполном общем образовании (Certificate of Basic General Education), which leads to either academic upper secondary education or vocational education.

The Certificate of Basic General Education is comparable to completion of 9<sup>th</sup> grade in the United States, and grants access to the next stage of education. Education Stage III is offered in both academic and vocational fields.

Professional education in the Russian Federation can be categorized under three different levels: primary professional education (vocational secondary level), middle (non-university higher education) professional education, and higher professional education at the university level (a Specialist diploma program). Non-university higher education is unique in that it is a level of education that falls between lower secondary education and university level education, containing aspects of both. It is an alternative track through which students can qualify for entry into a recognized university in Russia with advanced standing.

Vocational, or professional, upper secondary education in the Russian Federation is offered in two programs. Completion of two years of professional secondary education, referred to as начальное профессиональное образование (Primary Professional Education), leads to the Свидетельство (Certificate). This is considered comparable to completion of a vocational high school diploma and does not grant access to higher education in Russia.

However, students in professional education may continue to Среднего профессиональное образование (Middle Professional Education), which is typically offered at a *tekhnikum* (technical school) or *kolledzh* (college). Usually middle professional education is a 2-year program following completion of the 2-year primary professional education (upper secondary vocational education); alternately, students may enroll in a 4-year program beginning after completion of lower secondary education from ninth grade.

Completion of middle professional education leads to the Диплом о среднем



профессиональном образовании, which may be translated as Diploma of Intermediate Professional Education, Diploma of Intermediate (Secondary) Professional Education, Diploma of Secondary Vocational Education, Diploma of Post-Secondary Vocational Education, and Diploma of Non-University Level Higher Education.

Placement recommendations for the United States suggest that the Диплом о среднем профессиональном образовании (Diploma of Intermediate Professional Education) may be considered comparable to a combined vocational high school diploma for the first two years of study and an Associate's degree in a vocational or technical track for the remainder of the program.

Please note, since no degree plan exists for the Diploma of Intermediate Professional Education studies, educational advisors in the region recommend that only the applicant's major-related courses be considered for higher education because all general education courses fall under the secondary education curriculum.

In closing, I hope this brief overview of these two credentials helps you navigate them a little easier the next time one comes across your desk.

*Olivea Dodson*  
*Senior Evaluator*  
*Transcript Research*

## Conference Night of Service with Janine

At the 2019 TAICEP Annual Conference in Vancouver, Janine Pacheco joined other attendees for the opportunity to participate in a night of service that was organized as an optional addition to the conference, connecting the participants to a local non-profit and issues that affect the international identity of the city.

Cabs were coordinated by Wendy Joyce from TAICEP's Conference Planning Committee to take Janine and the other participants to VAST, a refugee assistance non-profit in Vancouver. The charitable non-profit is focused on helping people who have recently arrived in Vancouver, whether they just flew into the city or they simply show up on the doorstep of the organization.



As an overview of just some of their services, VAST helps with job placement, bus passes, other assistance with transportation. They provide counseling for a lot of different experiences, both individual and in a group, trauma-related and as part of the job placement work. They have programs for kids. They provide temporary housing and clothing for people who live in that housing. They also have a food bank and a clothing bank that provide for people who live off-site.

After a tour of the four-floor building led by Frank Cohen, including the classroom and play area for the kids, where participants met people who were part of VAST's programming, they went to a neighboring church, in which an upper balcony was used to store clothing, dishes, and food, and they help organize and categorize.

Some VAST program participants came and spoke with Janine and the other volunteers from the TAICEP Conference, including Central and South Americans who had given up on achieving asylum status in the United States before arriving in Vancouver. A former teacher

in Mexico had fled persecution related to his sexual orientation. He didn't know the language and felt uprooted without a home and cut off from his former life as a teacher. There was another couple from Mexico that helped with sorting the clothes and food. They had two kids, ages four and six.

The experience put a human face on the work we do as credential evaluators, especially talking to people who couldn't bring all of their documents with them. Everyone thought it was a great way to spend the evening, to give back, generally had positive things to say about it. The plan is for future conferences to have similar service opportunities, where participants need only be willing and open minded. Janine noted that it's a great addition to the conference because it was a special view into the community there. Even if Vancouver is a nice beautiful city, it was nice to connect with the community and do something positive.

## Alternative Grading

I often say that one of the most time-consuming aspects of international credentials evaluation is the grading scale conversion. At the institutions where I have worked, including Transcript Research, we rarely utilize a single grading scale for an entire country. As more countries offer dual degree programs, international universities, transnational education, education system structural changes, and increased growth in the private education sector, grading scales will continue to evolve and change across the globe. As a result, we will continue to spend considerable time researching the grading scale used at that institution for that program at that moment in time rather than relying on a single scale for a country simply because that makes things easier for us.

A fascinating aspect of looking at grading practices worldwide is the unique ways that different countries and institutions approach the idea of grading. The goal of this article is to highlight just a few of the different types of alternative grading methodologies used so that those from other perspectives have a better understanding of how to utilize those grades when evaluating educational credentials.

### **D Grades**

At most institutions in Taiwan, a D grade is identified as 50-59% on the percentage scale. While it has a separate grade designation from the E or F grade that usually corresponds to those courses failed below a grade of 50%, it is usually not a passing grade at higher education institutions in Taiwan. At the undergraduate level, a 60% is the minimum passing mark, while graduate programs require a minimum passing grade of 70%. Historically,

students who have earned a grade in the 50s were eligible to retake just the final exam, though most contemporary institutions require the student to retake the entire course now.

In the United States, D grades may be considered passing or failing, depending on the subject. For subjects in the major or at higher academic levels (the final two years of a Bachelor degree, for example), a D grade often has to be repeated in order for the student to receive credit for the course. For introductory courses or elective subjects, a D grade might not need to be repeated since the student technically passed the course even though it was at a low performance level. In addition, D grades will typically not transfer from one higher education institution to another.

Unlike some of the other countries explored here, universities in Ghana don't follow a single model for their grading. Some universities follow a British model for grading, including degree classifications or descriptive grades like distinction, merit, and pass. Other institutions follow an American model for grading, using a 4.0 grading system and letter grades from A to F. It is important to note, however, that some Ghanaian universities treat the D grade as a failing grade while others treat the D grade the same way US institutions often treat the D grade for subjects not in the major field of study: a grade that does not meet the minimum requirements, but the course is not required to be retaken. Many Ghanaian universities technically consider a D grade to be a failed grade, but students are allowed to graduate with it.

### **Pass Grades in the Russian System**

In the Russian Federation and many members of the former Soviet Union, we often see students who have a number of subjects that are graded *Зачет* or *Зачетено*, which may be translated as credit, pass, passing, passed, completed, or any number of things that don't tell admissions folks much. I can't speak for other countries, but I know US admissions people have a tendency to treat this like many US schools treat pass/fail grades, which generally means a student wasn't doing as well as they wanted and switched to a pass/fail grade so it wouldn't hurt their grade point average (implying poor performance or lowered academic rigor), but the Russian grade is nothing like that. The Russian-based grade of *Зачет* is instead used because only a certain number of subjects are actually graded on the numerical grading scale; the remaining subjects are graded *Зачет* not because of anything the student did but because of the differences in the system itself.

This grade means that all requirements were met for the course, and the student met a grade of 3 or better on the 5-point scale, but there is no way to determine where the student's performance fell on that 3-5 range. This grade may be used in a variety of situations: to identify electives (this is the most common usage); when a subject spans more than one semester but the final semester/program has not been completed yet; or when a course does

not have a final examination. Regardless, a grade of Зачет/Зачетено (Pass or Credit) means that all requirements were met even if a final examination was not taken. Russia does not have the concept of a D grade; if courses are passed, they are successfully applied towards graduation requirements.

As a former university admissions officer, I like to use the analogy of how many U.S. institutions view Advanced Placement (A.P.) test results. Frequently, U.S. institutions have a minimum cut-off score, at which point students are given credit for the A.P. examinations that meet those minimum scores. Institutional policies vary, but a large number of U.S. institutions do not assign a grade to a particular A.P. score; they merely give the applicant credit for having passed the exam and assign a specific number of credit hours based on the curriculum. Even though we can't tell how well the student did on those particular classes grade pass or credit, we should not be penalizing them and assuming it is the lowest passing grade (a C grade) because we have no way of knowing if they were the top graded student in that subject or barely met the minimum requirements, and it is unjust to hold them to a different standard after the fact. Plus, you'll miss out on a lot of high caliber students if you incorrectly lower their GPA if your institution treats "pass" grades as a C for these students.

### **Francophone Condoned or Compensated Pass**

In Francophone education, grading is usually done on a 20-point scale with 10 as the minimum passing grade. At some levels of education and in some Francophone countries, grades below 10 may be considered condoned or compensated passes – even though they are technically below the minimum passing grade of 10 – if the entire year is passed. Generally, this means an overall average of 10 out of 20; however, some institutions may allow students with an overall average of 9.5 or higher to be considered passed.

Transcript Research considers a conceded, condoned, or compensated pass to be a US D grade, because the student did not actually meet minimal course requirements but is still allowed credit for the course and is not required to retake the course or examination.

### **British Research Degrees**

A practice that we see in the United Kingdom as well as other countries is the idea of a research degree. A research degree is a research-based program awarded after several years of independent research and defense of a dissertation. Research degrees in the United Kingdom are not composed of subjects, so there are generally no grades or transcripts. Rarely, we do see institutions outside of the UK that require their research degree students to complete one or two graded courses in research strategies or generalized studies in that field, but the bulk of the program is based on the student's independent research which culminates in a major paper.

Research degrees are advanced academic degrees that are obtained mainly (or entirely) through independent research. The basic requirement for the award of the degree is the student's successful defense of a major paper (thesis or dissertation). Degree classifications, grades or marks, and other systems of quantifying a student's progress are not associated with research degrees.

## Indian Grace Marks

Indian also has a number of grading strategies that are different than what many American higher education institutions are used to seeing: UGC grading, condoned or conceded passes, internal versus external marks, degree classifications based on only the final year or two of the program, letter grades that don't align with US concepts of letter grades, as well as concepts like marks carried over, Allowed to Keep Trying (ATKT), and grace marks. I'm going to wrap up this article by addressing the latter: grace marks.

Grace marks are extra points sometimes awarded by the institution to an examination subject on the marksheet to bump the marks obtained (grade earned) up to the minimum passing marks (minimum grade). What that means is that the student did not actually meet the minimum passing marks for that subject, but the institution determined that it was not necessary for the student to retake the course and granted an exception by giving the student a bonus to their grade such that it was able to meet the passing level.


Transcript Research considers "grace marks" to be a D grade, because the student did not actually meet minimal passing course requirements but is still allowed credit for the course.

This represents just a small glimpse of some of the different types of grading that we might see in international education credentials beyond the grades we expect to see from the grading scale.

*Peggy Bell Hendrickson*  
*Transcript Research*

## Interpreting the Numerical GCSE Grades

If you work regularly with GPA conversion for GCSEs, you'll know that a new numerical scale has been phased in, starting in 2017. The official statements of comparability from exam authorities look like this table from Ofqual to the right.



Grading new GCSEs from 2017

New grading structure	Current grading structure
9	A*
8	A
7	A
6	B
5	B
4	C
4	C
	D

GOOD PASS (DFE)  
5 and above = top of C and above

AWARDING  
4 and above = bottom of C and above



Some problems of interpretation became immediately obvious when this 1-through-9 grading scale was released. Is an 8 more A or A\*? Is a 5 more of a B or a C? If you consider the E and F grade to be significantly different, how would you see that different in the new grading structure? It was apparent to me that the lettered and numbered grading scales were not going to fit neatly over each other, so a little more research was needed.

The discrepancy is caused by the way that they describe the numbered grades in terms of passes and how the students progress past GCSEs. In a quote for Ofqual, Glenys Stacey said that "broadly the same proportion of students will get 4 and above as currently get C and above." However, that does not mean that a 1, 2, or 3 will be treated the same as a D, E, F, or G are treated.

“Grade 4 will be known as a 'standard pass'. Grade 5 will be known as a 'strong pass' and will be equivalent to a high C and low B on the old grading system. Grade 4 will remain the level that students must achieve without needing to resit English and Maths post-16” (quoted from the AQA website, using information from Ofqual).

The "4" grade is considered the lowest "standard pass", so at InCred, we have taken the approach that it is comparable to a U.S. 'C' grade (the lowest standard pass). We count the 1, 2, and 3 grades as U.S. 'D' grades (or a 'conceded pass') because the certificate is earned:

GCSE grade:	U.S. grade:
A, A* (7-9)	A
B, C (5-6)	B
D, E (4)	C
F, G (1,2,3)	D
H, U	F

This interpretation presents the problem of not taking the specific advice from exam boards and Ofqual, but our decision at InCred was to prioritize the most current information rather than forcing our old GPA conversion to fit into a new system.

*Garrett Seelinger*  
*InCred*

## From the TAICEP Website

### **Events Calendar**

<https://www.taicep.org>

Add your upcoming events to the TAICEP Website!

We invite you to submit relevant events and professional activities for our events calendar. Our calendar is visible to all credential evaluation professionals who visit the TAICEP website, and the current month is conveniently displayed in the right-hand corner of our homepage.

By sharing your event on our calendar with the TAICEP community, you can help increase the visibility of your networking events, webinars, or professional training activities.

Adding your events to our calendar is fast and easy! You can click [here](#) to learn more.

If you don't have any events to add, please consider supporting fellow members by checking our calendar regularly for activities that may be of interest to you and that can help spread the word to other professionals. We are always looking for innovative ways to engage with and support our members and we hope that this new service will be helpful to you all.

### **Member Benefit Program**

The primary reason for having member benefits is to provide TAICEP members with access to discounted or free products and services that will assist them with their jobs as international credential evaluators. A secondary reason for having member benefits is to develop productive and meaningful relationships with providers who support the mission and goals of TAICEP.

For those who wish to provide a member benefit under this program, please see the guidelines here: [Member Benefit Program Guidelines](#)

Submissions for consideration should be sent to Robert Prather at [robertpprather@gmail.com](mailto:robertpprather@gmail.com).

Check the website for updated information about current member benefits at <https://www.taicep.org/taiceporgwp/professional-development/member-benefit-program/>

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