

TAICEP TALK

S E P T E M B E R 2 0 2 3

Catching Up

Catch up with the latest news and happenings in the TAICEP community

Selected synopsis of sessions from TAICEP's 8th annual conference in Glasgow

Looking Back

Looking Forward

Looking forward to the next 10 years/coming soon

Table of Contents

Insights from the Presidential Pen Marina Malgina.....	4
Resources	6
Are You Proactive When it Comes to Document Security? Fiona Mason, Susan Whipple.....	8
Upper Secondary Education and University Admissions in Sweden Elsa Layme, Louai Wafai, Simon Junström-Skott.....	15
Quality and Qualifications Ireland & the National Framework of Qualifications Explained Orla Barry.....	19
We Are Evaluated! First Recognition of Credential Evaluation Profession in Europe Chiara Finocchietti, Serena Spitalieri, Francesca Villa.....	22
Accreditation in U.S. Higher Education Kate Freeman, Jennifer Collins.....	26
Special Update from SQA Navin Vasudev.....	29
Looking Forward	31
TAICEP Certificate Program	32



Authors wanted!

Do you want to share your knowledge with the international education community, but are unable to attend a conference? Perhaps you are too shy or nervous to present a session? Maybe you have this really amazing thing to share, but it is months until the next conference you can share it at.

Have you considered writing an article to share? TAICEP Talk always accepts articles about topics relevant to credential evaluation.

Would you like to write an article, but not have a topic in mind? Here are a few topics to consider:

- Transnational education
- Updates to education systems
- New resources
- Events and happenings
- New ways to get involved
- Happenings around the world that may impact the industry
- Country/region updates
- Best practices

For more information or to submit an article, contact Olivea
olivea@transcriptresearch.com

Insights from the Presidential Pen

July 2023 was quite an exciting time for the global higher education community. As I am writing this message, the first session of the intergovernmental Conference of the State Parties to the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education is taking place at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris.

I was extremely honored and excited to have an opportunity to represent TAICEP, as an official observer and witness this historic moment. The conference brought together 22 UNESCO States, which ratified the convention so far, along with more than 50 other countries and representatives of the global higher education community that joined as observers. Key agenda items include the election of the Bureau, the adoption of the Rules of Procedure, and the work program for 2023-2025 as important steps towards operationalizing the Global Convention.

Adopted during the 40th Session of the UNESCO General Conference in November 2019, the Global Convention entered into force in March 2023, becoming the first United Nations treaty on higher education with a global scope. The Global Convention establishes an inclusive framework to ensure fair, transparent, and non-discriminatory recognition also across the regions. It brings credential evaluation professionals to the forefront of the implementation activities.

The community of credential evaluation practitioners is ready to contribute to this new exciting chapter of the credential evaluation history with their experience, knowledge, and dedication to the profession. Together we bring innovation, discovery, and research to the services we provide worldwide, and we are always open to sharing, exchanging, and learning from each other.

Insights from the Presidential Pen

In this edition of the TAICEP Talk, we are delighted to share the updates to the Digital Document Providers, Verification Sources for Educational Documents, and invite you to visit our newest resource - the Global Directory of National Qualification Frameworks.

Looking back on a great conference in Glasgow in October 2022, I am pleased that we are able to present some compelling examples of good practice in fighting documentation fraud, and recognition of refugees' qualifications, as well as timely insights on accreditation in US higher education, development and use of the qualifications frameworks in Ireland and systems of admissions to higher education in Sweden. Setting standards for the profession and recognition of the credential evaluation profession in Europe is another exciting topic that was discussed during the conference.

There are many exciting things to look forward to! Soon an amazing wiki for TAICEP members will be in place, the results for the 2023 elections are out and the registration for the 9th annual conference is open. Don't miss the deadlines and stay tuned!

With my thanks to the publication committee, I hope that you enjoy reading this edition of TAICEP Talk.

Wishing you all a delightful September and see you in October!

Marina Malgina
TAICEP President

CATCHING UP

Resources

New providers are being added regularly to the Digital Document Providers! This online tool, designed specifically for credential evaluators, has student educational record verification and document issuer information. The project is a collaboration among international education agencies and credential evaluation professionals to create a web-enabled, self-service, one-stop source of trusted document and verification providers around the world.



TAICEP is happy to receive suggestions for additional providers. To suggest a provider, please complete the form found [HERE](#)



Several updates have been made to the Verifications Sources for Educational Documents. You can check them [HERE](#)

Did you know that TAICEP maintains a Global Directory of National Qualification Frameworks? You can view them [HERE](#)

If there is a framework you know about but you do not see it listed, you can suggest the framework to be added. You can also suggest changes under a published framework if you have any new/additional information.



TAICEP also has an email spoofing guide [HERE](#)



We encourage you to view all resources available to TAICEP members [HERE](#)

LOOKING BACK



We had a wonderful time meeting in person again in Glasgow. If you were unable to attend, here is a brief overview of a selection of sessions.



ARE YOU PROACTIVE WHEN IT COMES TO DOCUMENT SECURITY?

Considering aspects of an organizational document fraud assessment plan

Fiona Mason, IELTS Global Account Manager (Immigration and Visa Authorities), British Council
Susan Whipple, Senior Credentials Evaluator, SpanTran: The Evaluation Company

Fraud is not new. News reports of elected officials, CEO's, university administrators and celebrities who "enhanced" their resumes or CV's with unearned degrees have become common in recent years. Stories about diploma mills still populate our news feeds.

What happens when suspected fraud is discovered during the application process or, worse, if fraud is discovered during a student's tenure, or even after a student graduates?

As admission and credential evaluation officials we are concerned with document authenticity, take steps to ensure the authenticity of academic documents, and may even develop policies for reporting or sharing discovered fraud. How often do we consider the authenticity of non-academic documents, such as test scores, evaluation reports, email or other communication? Admission offices and universities may have honor codes in place to prevent cheating and plagiarism but who is involved in their development and their enforcement?

What happens when suspected fraud is discovered during the application process or, worse, if fraud is discovered during a student's tenure, or even after a student graduates?

What happens when suspected fraud is discovered during the application process or, worse, if fraud is discovered during a student's tenure, or even after a student graduates? Do our plans address these scenarios?

As you ponder the above questions, consider these four scenarios:

- Your institution experiences a large increase in applications from country A. All applicants use the same mailing address, email address, and submit the same or similar essays. They also submit unofficial IELTS scores and copies of a credential evaluation report. These applicants also submit identical emails asking for immediate issuance of visa documents.
- Applicants submit transcripts where grades look to have been changed and/or whole years are missing. When you enquire, you are told the teacher changed it or there are no grades due to COVID.
- Applicants from country B submit copies of national exams with perfect scores. The applicants claim their school cannot provide any verification or additional documents and that there is no contact information for their school. (This is not a country in crisis and other applicants from this same country can and do provide this information.)
- When you contact a school counselor in country C to request additional information about an applicant, they tell you they don't have a student with that name at their school.

As you read the above scenarios, did any “red flags” or concerns strike you? Applicants with perfect grades, using the same address and/or email or stock messages don’t indicate nefarious intentions, but the submission of “duplicated” essays, altered transcripts and/or missing years rightly cause concerns for admission personnel. All schools have an employee tasked with providing academic information though the school may not have a traditional “guidance counselor”. Verifying test scores and evaluations (if your institution accepts evaluations) is an important - but often overlooked - step in the admissions process. All four scenarios above were experienced by US-based admissions officers, many of whom were met with skepticism from colleagues when their concerns were shared. It’s not uncommon to hear: “Does this really happen?” or “Do people actually do this?” Colleagues may ask: “How do you know for certain?” Given these common scenarios how can we be proactive about identifying potential fraud and protecting our institutions, but not penalize applicants?

How can we be proactive about identifying potential fraud and protecting our institutions, but not penalize applicants?

Take another look at the scenarios. If you experienced any of the scenarios, what would you do? Who would you contact? Does your organisation have a plan? Is it the same plan regardless of citizenship? Does your plan or campus culture assume that fraud or cheating primarily involves international students or non-citizens? Is there unofficial bias in your organisation that one country or nationality is riskier for fraud than others? Conversely, is there naivety in play which considers applications from other countries “safe”? Who are the campus stakeholders involved? Do you have external reporting requirements and/or guidelines?

It’s important to remember that a plan can’t be formed in an hour or a day. Effective plans take time to develop. They require input from others across your organisation and buy-in from everyone involved in the day-to-day assessment of applications. The plans need to be revisited and revised regularly. As with many things in our profession, it is best to have a plan BEFORE it is needed.



Exploring fraud in the context of IELTS scores and how results can be verified.

IELTS is the world's leading English Language proficiency test. It is recognised by over 11,500 institutions and available to take in over 140 countries. Successful test takers use their IELTS results to gain access to higher education, to further their career, or to emigrate to the country of their dreams.

Like students who purchase fraudulent documents or alter documents to ensure admission, if test takers perceive that their inability to achieve the IELTS score they require is the only thing that stands between them and the fulfilment of their dreams, desperation may set in, and they may attempt to circumvent the system. Unfortunately, there is now an industry online made up of unscrupulous individuals supporting such attempts.



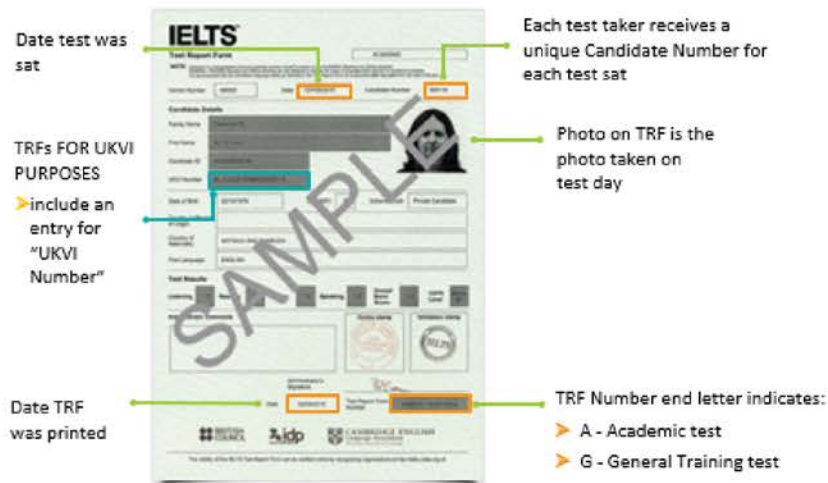
Some of the fraudsters just take the applicant's money and disappear. Others deliver counterfeit Test Report Forms, sometimes with fake covering letters and supporting emails. And some go even further, by creating fake verification sites to back up the fake Test Report Forms.

At IELTS, security is fundamental across our organisation. Security is not something we build on top of the test; consideration of security matters is an integral part of all our operations. We take a multi-layered approach to security to make sure that if one layer of our process is breached, it does not result in a loss of integrity of the test results. The global policy and governance of IELTS is the foundation of our multi-faceted approach. Different aspects incorporated into the policy result in a robust consistency of delivery across our global test network; rigorous recruitment, training and performance monitoring encompassing all staff roles; and secure and continuous development and deployment of new test content.

The post-test day results processing procedures for marking, score analysis and pre-release investigations ensure that results are issued to test takers only once our teams are satisfied with the integrity of the results. IELTS manages the security up to the point of test results issuance, but after that point there is a potential for attempted fraud. This risk is mitigated by the security features that are embedded in our Test Report Forms, and by the provision of services for organizations that use IELTS results to verify scores are legitimate.

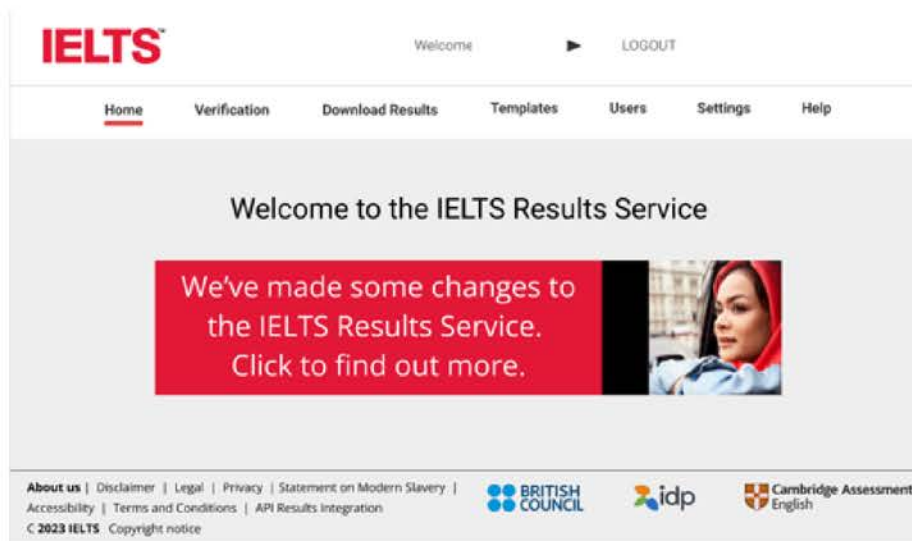
IELTS Test Report Form security features include both physical features built into the paper, as well as uniform layout features, which your institution can look for if they receive result copies electronically from your applicants:

IELTS Test Report Form details



Additional to the details in the diagram above, the IELTS Test Report Form has been designed with shaded boxes over the critical identity details, test scores and the unique Test Report Form Number to prevent tampering. The paper of our hard-copy Test Report Forms has a green micro-print running diagonally across it, and both watermark and UV-light reactive images.

An increasing number of institutions are choosing to receive electronic results directly via our results portal or take advantage of the API plug-in which can send the IELTS test results directly to your CRM systems. If your organization prefers to receive the results from your applicant alongside the rest of the applicant's documentation, then we strongly urge you to use the IELTS Results Service to verify all test scores received.



This verification step should be built into your organization's process for documentation assessment. We have been told by many higher education institutions, that because the IELTS verification process is so quick, they utilize it at the start of the document assessment process, before spending time assessing other academic credentials that may take longer.

We cannot emphasize enough the importance of verifying every test result. Just last year a new starter in a higher education institution's admissions team began implementing IELTS verification checks, which had until then not been part of their standard process. Using our online platform for verifying IELTS results the new employee initially identified a few fraudulent Test report Forms. Upon further scrutiny, a large-scale fraud operation was uncovered. IELTS supported the institution with historical verification checks which found that a significant number of students had submitted counterfeit certificates that had all come from the same source.

We cannot emphasize enough the importance of verifying every test result.

Many had already begun their courses of study, and this resulted in a considerable amount of disruption for the institution, including reporting to local authorities, expulsion of students, legal challenges being made, and, ultimately, potential reputational damage. The IELTS Security and CounterFraud teams worked closely with the organization to bring this case to a close. If you have concerns over the validity of test scores received, IELTS will always respond to your enquiry.

Millions of international students per year take English proficiency tests as part of their international student journey. It is a very small percentage that will attempt to commit fraud. Unfortunately, the reputational impact is disproportionate to the number of cases. One bad apple can spoil the barrel!

At IELTS, we take our responsibility towards recognizing organizations very seriously. We understand the impact our test results have on both the organizations and test takers that use them. We have strong controls in place to ensure high levels of security and control the process until the Test Report Form dispatch. You can rest assured your organization will be safe if you receive results directly downloaded through our IELTS Results Service, verify every test result you receive from applicants, and contact us in case of doubt.

Other Good Practices

In our earlier scenarios, applicants submitted copies of credential evaluation reports. Fraud was confirmed when the evaluation agency shared how to verify their evaluations. As with other documents, copies should be verified at the source. Be sure to require an official evaluation or use an organization's secure online portal to verify an evaluation. If your institution accepts emailed evaluations, be sure you (or the authorized recipient at your institution) knows how to discern that the email is from a legitimate sender (email domain), that it's a legitimate message that accompanies the evaluation and that it matches other official evaluations securely received. Be wary of any unsolicited emails that you might receive that look like they come from legitimate sources validating a certificate. It is becoming easier to spoof email addresses that replicate legitimate ones, and your team should know how to perform an IP Address lookup. It is best to always contact the evaluation organization, or test provider, like IELTS, should you have any concerns. It's also good practice to connect with the evaluation organizations sending evaluations so you can learn about changes to their procedures, documents, and delivery methods, including any changes to their email addresses and formats.

We cannot emphasize enough the importance of verifying every test result. Just last year a new starter in a higher education institution's admissions team began implementing IELTS verification checks, which had until then not been part of their standard process. Using our online platform for verifying IELTS results the new employee initially identified a few fraudulent Test report Forms. Upon further scrutiny, a large-scale fraud operation was uncovered. IELTS supported the institution with historical verification checks which found that a significant number of students had submitted counterfeit certificates that had all come from the same source.

When you contemplated the four scenarios above and listed your campus stakeholders, who did you include? Was your campus IT office on that list? If they weren't they should be. Campus IT offices can help screen for electronic fraud, assist your office in developing plans and procedures and share upcoming implementations to improve functionality. They can also assist in gathering evidence of suspected fraud and help prevent future fraud. Likewise, your general counsel (university legal office), campus safety office or campus police force can be helpful members of your stakeholder team. If your campus risk management office isn't part of your general council office, be sure to include them. Many IT offices and campus police forces have staff dedicated to preventing and investigating fraud. They will also know about procedures for required reporting to outside agencies in your state, province, region, or country.

Resources to Assist

As you consider – or help develop – your institution's plan, know that many resources exist to support you. Some of these resources include: [TAICEP](#), (Resources for Members including [TAICEP's Digital Credential Providers Hub](#)), the TAICEP Gaggle, [AACRAO](#), [NAFSA](#), [NACAC](#) (especially their Guidelines for resources for DEI policy making), [International ACAC](#), [NAGAP](#), and the websites and publications of TAICEP members. The Registrar (or official tasked with confirming authenticity of academic records) will be your greatest ally in this process. They can help you develop your list of stakeholders and assist. They may even wish to lead the process. Ask colleagues at other universities to share their plans so you can see if yours overlooks topics others include, to compare language used, and to learn options for explaining complex topics or scenarios. Consider interviewing colleagues at other institutions to learn about their stakeholders, plan development process and inviting them to speak (virtually) with your campus stakeholders and/or campus officials to gain support for these efforts. You will also need to determine if student representation will be part of your group. Student representation may be required by law, it may be campus culture, or it may be a chance to develop an inclusive policy that prevents stereotyping of student groups.

Developing and Updating an Institutional Plan

Now that your research has been conducted, you have a list of stakeholders, ideas for your plan and how to make improvements, gather your working group. You may need to explain the purpose of the group and why a plan is important multiple times and to multiple people. Allies such as the Registrar, legal counsel/risk management, IT and your campus' academic integrity office can help convince other stakeholders of their importance in the process. Once you do convene, establish a timeline that includes future updates. Be sure to keep your supervisor informed of the plan's progress and to seek their support, if needed. Your institution may already have an established timeline for policy updates, but if not, you may wish to begin with an annual review of the policy then, as a committee of stakeholders, determine when future reviews will occur.

As part of procedures, you will need to define what constitutes fraud at your institution, what channels exist and need to be added to share potential fraud, how staff will be trained (or received updated training) to recognize fraud, who is responsible for verifying academic transcripts and test scores submitted as part of the admissions process, who determines that fraud has occurred, what the consequences of that fraud is – for applicants, current students, alumni and past students – and who is authorized to communicate those consequences. It is imperative that your plan balances the need to act with the need to avoid bias and stereotyping. If laws or statues require the reporting of fraud to local and/or national officials, who will be tasked with this responsibility? If your institutional policy is to deny admission to applicants who violate the academic integrity policy (commit fraud) does your denial letter state this as the reason – assuming your denial letter states a reason? If there is a permanent admission ban or if there are any reapplication restrictions, those policy stipulations should be included. The process may seem overwhelming, but it is important to have a policy, and important to communicate it clearly with your applicants. Remember your resources. Compare tips with colleagues throughout the process, seek their feedback and learn from others as you share your experiences. Soon, you'll be sharing tips with others, too.

Does your institution have a policy for discerning and communicating suspected and confirmed fraud?

What are the laws of your country, province, state related to fraud and its reporting?

How do you report? Who reports fraud?

What constitutes “proof” for your campus or organization?

How do you communicate this to applicants? To stakeholders?

Advocate for on-going training. Share resources and examples of fraud with leadership and campus stakeholders.

Resources and Additional Reading:

ECE Connection – <https://theconnection.ece.org/ResourcesByType/8/1>

ECE Guide to detecting spoof emails – [Email-Spoofing-Detection-Guide-Final.pdf \(taicep.org\)](#)

Fake Degrees and Fraudulent Credentials in Higher Education, edited by Sarah Elaine Eaton, Jamie J Carmichael and Helen Pethrick, 2023.

IELTS Results Service Homepage: <https://results-service.ielts.org/>

IELTS Results Service – Information about signing up: [Add a little bit of body text](#)

IERF Vault – <https://ierf.org/for-institutions/ierf-vault/credentials-vault-login/>

Inside Higher Ed: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2005/07/08/pa-attorney-general-shutters-diploma-mill>

Karin Fischer article about application fraud: <https://www.opencampusmedia.org/2021/11/22/its-an-emergency>

The Many – always deleterious – faces of credential fraud, Nathan M. Greenfield, University World News, June 11, 2023:

[The many – always deleterious – faces of credential fraud \(universityworldnews.com\)](#)

WES Webinars – <https://www.wes.org/partners/events/>

WES Newsletter – <https://wenr.wes.org>

UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION AND UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS IN SWEDEN

Elsa Layme

Louai Wafai

Simon Junström-Skott

The Swedish Council for Higher Education (ENIC-NARIC Sweden)

This article aims to give an overview of the Swedish upper secondary education system and how admission to higher education in Sweden works. It also offers an introduction to the method used by the Swedish Council for Higher Education (ENIC-NARIC Sweden) when assessing foreign upper secondary qualifications for admission to higher education in Sweden.

Swedish upper secondary education

The Swedish primary education consists of nine years of compulsory school and is followed by three years of voluntary upper secondary school. All schools, whether public or private, are obliged to follow the national legislation known as the Education Act, which regulates the content of the education, the grading scales etc.

There are 18 national upper secondary school programmes. Six are higher education preparatory programmes and twelve are vocational programmes. All programmes last three years and all can grant access to higher education. The six higher education preparatory programmes automatically make pupils eligible for further studies. Pupils enrolled in vocational programmes can actively choose certain courses to qualify for further studies.

In addition to the national programmes, there are specialized programmes, such as the International Baccalaureate (IB). There are also introductory programmes for those who do not yet qualify for the national programmes.

All national programmes consist of foundation subjects, programme specific subjects and elective courses. The national programmes are concluded by a diploma project. Once having passed that project, pupils receive a higher education preparatory diploma / vocational diploma (högskoleförberedande examen / yrkesexamen).

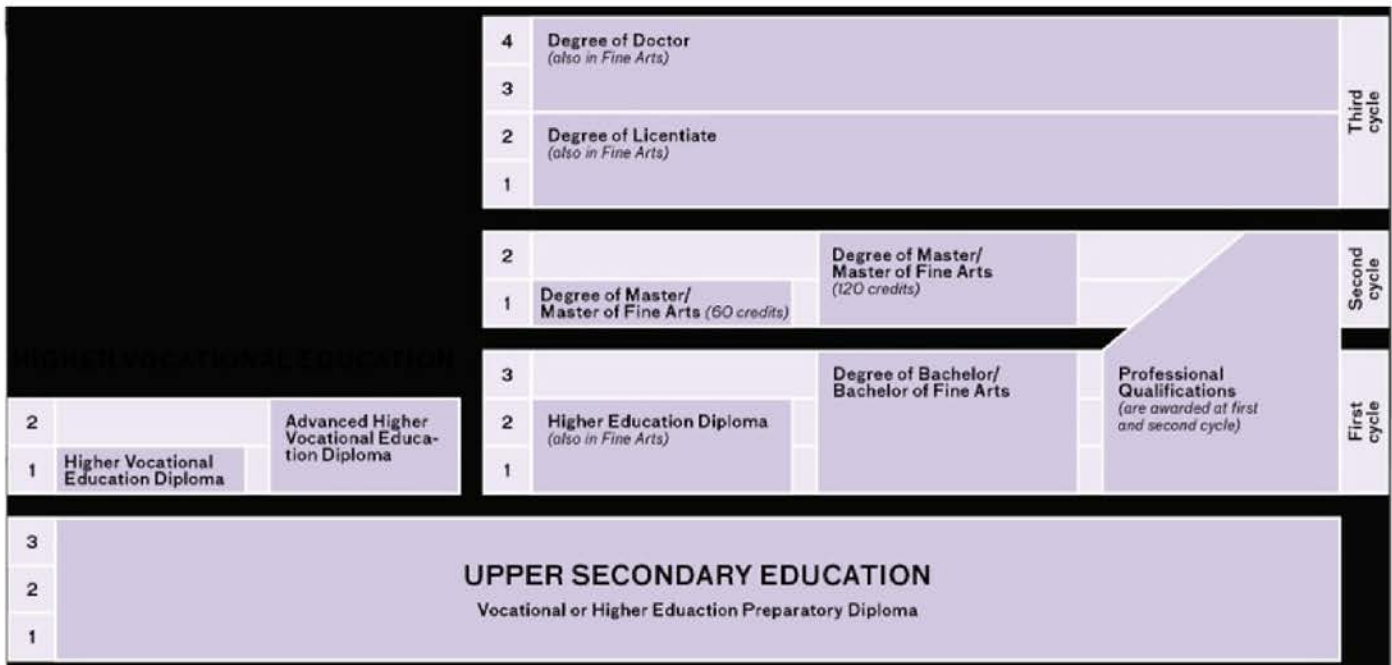
The national programmes normally contain 2500 credits. Courses comprise of 50-150 credits. To receive an upper secondary diploma, pupils must pass 2250 credits out of 2500 credits.

The grading scale has six levels: A-F. A-E represent passing results, and F marks a failed grade. The Grade Point Average (GPA) is based on the grades of all courses.

The current grading system has been criticised for fragmentising the education and for placing a lot of stress on pupils. A low grade can have a big impact on the GPA, which in turn affects the possibility of being admitted to certain courses or programmes.

A reform which will be implemented on July 1, 2025 will introduce a new way of grading subjects. Entire subjects will be graded rather than separate courses, and courses will be replaced by levels within each subject. The final grade in the subject will be based on the most recent level that the pupil concludes.

The expected outcome of the reform is that teaching will be based on a holistic view, and pupils will be given more time to immerse in a subject before the final grade is set. The GPA will be based on the final grade of the subject. This differs significantly from the current grading system, in which the GPA is based on the grades of all separate courses within the same subject.



Admission to Higher Education in Sweden

Admission to higher education in Sweden is mainly regulated in The Higher Education Ordinance (Högskoleförordning, 1993:100). Here, it is specified that the universities are locally responsible for decisions regarding admission. However, Sweden's universities have typically chosen to coordinate the bachelor's and master's level studies admissions process. This coordination is administered by the Swedish Council for Higher Education.

With some exceptions, applications to bachelor's and master's level studies in Sweden are submitted through the web portals universityadmissions.se and antagning.se. These web pages enable prospect students to apply to several higher education institutions simultaneously. The applications are typically submitted in national, university-common and streamlined application rounds. Through the web pages, the applications are submitted to a joint application and credentials database. The database is then used by Higher Educational Institutions in their current and future admissions processes.

The entry requirements to higher education in Sweden are divided into two levels. First, the applicants need to meet the general entry requirements. These requirements apply to all tertiary studies and comprise of a higher education qualifying upper secondary degree combined with sufficient knowledge of English, Mathematics and Swedish (the latter is normally exempted when English is the language of instruction).

In addition to these requirements, specific entry requirements must sometimes be met. For example, an engineering programme might require a certain level of mathematics and physics, whereas a humanities programme might require a certain level of history.

The specific entry requirements are often defined in terms of courses from the Swedish upper secondary school system. They can also be defined by the university in terms of for instance a work portfolio, a number of ECTS or professional experience. Swedish universities do not normally use entrance examinations. Instead, they rely on the specific entry requirements. Local exceptions can be made by the universities.

If a prospect applicant lacks a course needed for meeting any entry requirement, they can take the course within the nationwide system of upper secondary education for adults.

Not all Swedish upper secondary courses can be used as specific entry requirements. The Swedish council for Higher Education is the government agency responsible for deciding which courses can be used as a specific requirement, and also which courses are needed for certain regulated programmes. The universities decide which courses are needed for non-regulated programmes.

Once the assessment of the entry requirements is done, the qualified applicants are ranked, and the top applicants are admitted. The ranking is mainly based on the GPA or on the Swedish university studies aptitude test (Högskoleprovet).



Comparing curricula: a way of ensuring fair competition for applicants with foreign qualifications

To ensure fair competition regardless of the country of education, there is a need to establish the content and level of the different subjects in foreign upper secondary qualifications. This way, they can be compared to the Swedish upper secondary education, and the entry requirements for higher education can be met by the foreign qualification.

The task of establishing the guidelines for these comparisons is carried out by the Swedish Council for Higher Education. The method used is by comparing curricula. That is, the curricula of the Swedish courses are compared with the content of the foreign curricula of the same subjects. If there is no substantial difference between the foreign curricula and the Swedish, the specific entry requirement is granted.

For example: the Spanish curriculum of the course Biología (second year of bachillerato) is compared to the content of the Swedish course Biology 2. No substantial difference is found and the course is found to be equal to the Swedish course. This means all Spanish applicants with a passing grade in Biología will be considered to have fulfilled the specific entry requirement of Biology 2.

Once the comparisons are made, the final report is presented to a council representing the universities. If approved, the guidelines will be published on a public website, which is commonly used by credential professionals.

This method has many advantages. It is suitable for large-scale use, as the conclusions can be used on many qualifications. Furthermore, it ensures that the students will have the required knowledge for the program they have applied for. However, there are also some challenges: it is time-consuming, and prioritising is necessary. The structure of curricula may differ between countries, which makes comparison difficult. Also, some countries may have national curricula while others have different curricula depending on the state, etc.

Summary

The structure of Swedish upper secondary education is largely based on courses, and these courses are important in the process of admission to higher education. This poses a challenge in assessing foreign qualifications for admission to higher education in Sweden.



QUALITY AND QUALIFICATIONS IRELAND AND THE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF QUALIFICATIONS EXPLAINED

Órla Barry

Senior Manager, Qualifications Information and Learning Opportunities, QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is the state agency with responsibility for promoting the quality, integrity and reputation of Ireland's tertiary education and training system and for providing trusted information on the qualifications included in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The ten-level national framework of qualifications was established in 2003 and has become a key reference point for qualifications made in Ireland.

QQI also promotes the use of the NFQ by awarding bodies, protects the reputation and integrity of the NFQ and ensures that the NFQ continues to be a trustworthy structure for establishing and comparing qualifications. The NFQ is referenced to two European meta frameworks, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Additionally, the qualifications authorities in the UK and Ireland have agreed broad correspondence between qualifications frameworks in operation across the five jurisdictions. A joint publication, Qualifications Can Cross Boundaries offers a short guide to the broad comparable levels of UK and Irish qualifications.



Currently, only statutory awarding bodies have the power to have their awards included in the NFQ. This includes QQI, the universities, technological universities, institutes of technology and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.

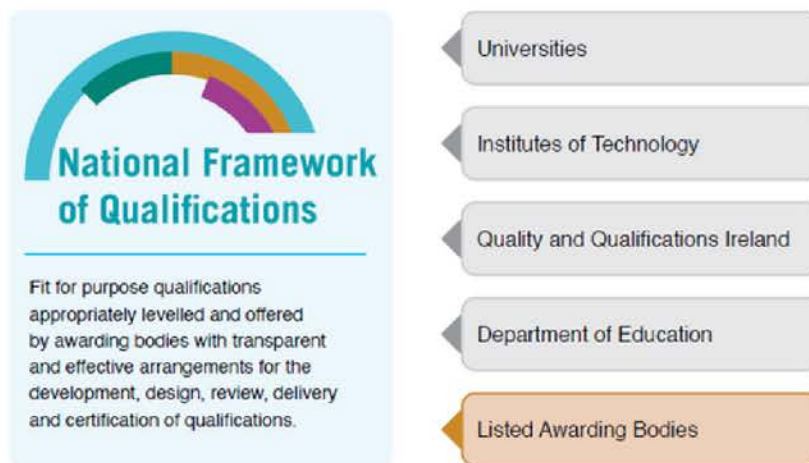
Historical 'Alignment' with the NFQ

QQI was established under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 which amalgamated several agencies. Before 2012, professional and sectoral bodies benefited from recognition processes which referenced professional and other qualifications offered by these bodies to the NFQ. This process was often referred to as 'alignment'. Unfortunately, the 2012 Act rendered these processes inactive and as a result qualifications currently offered by such bodies in Ireland do not have connection to the Irish NFQ.

Bodies that offer the same qualifications in both the Ireland and the UK, which are already recognised on the UK's national framework, can consult the Qualifications can cross boundaries publication or the NARIC recognition service to establish the comparative level on the Irish NFQ.

Listed Awarding Bodies

Amending legislation published in 2019 created a new type of awarding body called 'Listed Awarding Bodies' (LABs). LABs are professional, sectoral, and international awarding bodies without statutory awarding powers in Ireland. This new designation will provide organisations, with voluntary, regulated access to the NFQ.



There is no mandatory requirement for an awarding body to apply to be a Listed Awarding Body, but establishment as a LAB will allow an awarding body to make NFQ awards. This will bring several anticipated benefits, including strengthened external quality assurance, enhanced reputation of the organisation and its awards and a link to the European Qualifications Framework. Other likely features are improved employment opportunities for learners, improved access to additional study, the ability to apply for and use recognition of prior learning (RPL) and finally the standing of the qualifications nationally and internationally.

Purpose of the LABs Scheme

- To ensure a wider range of quality assured awards are available for learners
- To provide assurance and confidence to learners about awards being undertaken and the awarding bodies delivering them
- To recognise the learning already being undertaken by learners by providing a mechanism to include such awards in the Framework
- To ensure the National Framework of Qualifications remains relevant and responsive in a changing education and training landscape
- To preserve alignment with international frameworks such as the European Qualifications Framework

Applying to become a Listed Awarding Body

Applicant awarding bodies will soon be able to apply to QQI to be established as a LAB. This application process will include a due diligence assessment of corporate fitness, submission of quality assurance procedures and evidence to support the implementation of specific QQI policy and criteria.

Applicants will also submit evidence of awards for approval for inclusion in the NFQ. Only awards approved for inclusion by QQI will be considered as Framework awards. All Framework awards will be communicated in terms of a level (ie) level 1-10; an award type, a credit volume and learning outcomes. If approved, Listed Awarding Bodies and the awards included in the Framework will be published on the [Irish Register of Qualifications](#).

Those awarding bodies approved for establishment as a Listed Awarding Body will be required to engage in regular monitoring by QQI, will be subject to various conditions, and will be subject to an effectiveness review at least once every 7 years.

QQI is currently developing its policy and criteria to underpin the Listed Awarding Body scheme and intends to publish documents for consultation in Q1 2023, with the scheme opening in September 2023.



QQI AWARD

WE ARE EVALUATED!

FIRST RECOGNITION OF CREDENTIAL EVALUATION PROFESSION IN EUROPE

Chiara Finocchietti - Director, CIMEA - NARIC Italia / Vice-President, APICE

Serena Spitalieri - Head of Credential Evaluation Department, CIMEA - NARIC Italia / President, APICE

Francesca Villa - Senior Credential Evaluator, CIMEA - NARIC Italia / Director, APICE

Mobility of students and workers is constantly increasing. According to the latest UNESCO data, the number of international students tripled in the last 20 years. This is one of the reasons that explain why recognition is up in the political agenda at a global scale.

In the European context, recognition is one of the 3 key pillars of the European Higher Education Area, together with quality assurance and qualifications frameworks. Regional Conventions on recognition are in place in all the UNESCO regions and in March 2023 the Global Convention entered into force. In this scenario fair and transparent recognition processes are key as a way to support mobility of graduates and professionals. In parallel, the definition of knowledge, skills, and abilities of professionals working in recognition is an important dimension of transparency and accountability of credential evaluations.

There is not at international level clear and transparent framework of what should be skills and competences of credential evaluators, what tasks they should be able to perform and the relevant levels of autonomy and responsibility. The job titles used, and the stakeholders involved, change from Country to Country and very few of them proved to have clear and transparent frameworks regarding the profession.

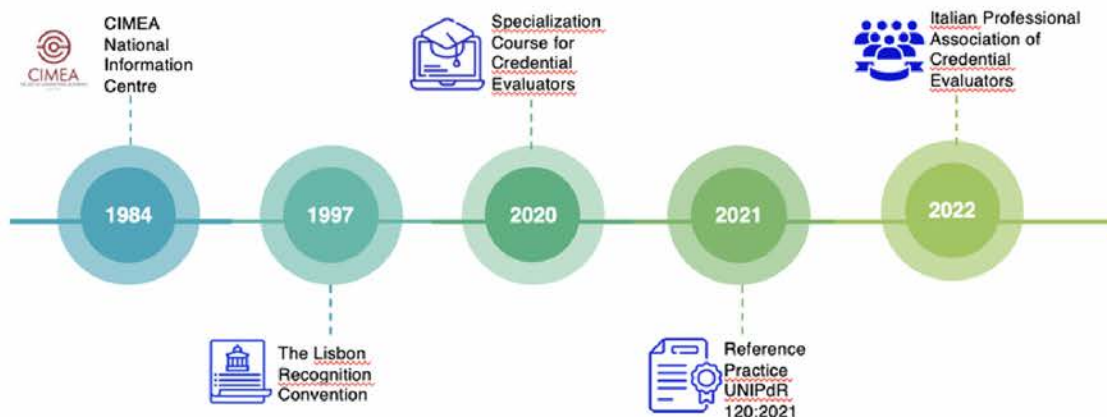
This lack of common and transparent definition and framework does not imply, however, the absence of professional awareness on the Credential Evaluators side. Following the need of setting a transparent framework for the tasks, knowledge and skills of credential evaluators, applying international standards in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the international convention setting the legal framework for recognition in Europe, Italy has reached two important achievements in the recognition of the figure of the credential evaluator:

- In 2021 the formalization of the professional figure of Credential Evaluator within the framework of Italian non-regulated professions through the UNI Reference Practice Number 120: 2021, effective from 22 October 2021, as first initiatives of the kind in Europe;
- In 2022 the birth of the first Italian Professional Association of Credential evaluators (APICE) with the aim of guaranteeing the professional and ethical standards defined by the Practice and being the spokesperson for the enhancement of the profession at a national level.

The Pathway to Recognition

The establishment of a National Information Centre, the adoption of the Lisbon Convention, and the creation of the ENIC-NARIC networks were key to supporting implementation of a culture of recognition, based on principles such as fair and transparent assessment procedures, consistent, accurate, and reliable information provision, right to appeal, etc.

The Italian ENIC-NARIC centre CIMEA, founded in 1984, has performed since then its specific activity of information and advising on the procedures of qualifications recognition and on themes linked to Italian and international higher education and training, supporting academic mobility in all aspects, and sponsoring the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention on qualifications recognition.



The CIMEA 40 years of experience in recognition, the consultancy activities about recognition and evaluation of qualifications, the implementation of the Comparability and Verification services of foreign qualifications and the training and exchange initiatives with the personnel at Higher Education Institutions have been a laboratory and the environment for the evolution and the definition of the professional figure of the credential evaluator in Italy. This laboratory was key to create a network of professionals and to support higher education institutions and the system with regard to student mobility and internationalization of the Italian Higher Education system. While CIMEA is the national information centre providing authoritative advice, the responsibility for recognition decision stands in Higher education Institutions, according to their autonomous status.

In this scenario, the need for a transparent definition of the profession has been strongly felt for years, especially among higher education professionals as it was demonstrated by the significant participation in the three academic courses for professional Credential Evaluators in 2020, 2021 and 2022 by CIMEA, where more than 120 professionals took part coming from admission offices, international relations offices, at Higher Education Institutions. On one hand, one of the outcome of the course, as highlighted by participants, was the need for a national network enabling the exchange of best practices as well as the debate on hot topics in the field. On the other hand, it made it clear that a common awareness on the relevance and of some common principles for the profession was already a practice, although it was not yet mirrored by any formal definition of standards.

For this reason, throughout 2021 CIMEA worked with UNI (Italian Standardization Body) to draft the Reference Practice for the figure of the Credential Evaluator within the framework of Italian non-regulated professions. The UNI/PdR 120:2021 Reference Document was officially adopted on October 22, 2021.

UNI Reference Practice Number 120: 2021

The UNI Reference Practice Number 120: 2021 can be defined as a transparent and analytic framework of the requirements related to the professional figure of the Credential Evaluator in terms of knowledge, skills, abilities deemed essential for the profession and the way these elements interact with each other.

First, the practice offers a clear definition of Credential Evaluator.

“Credential evaluator: Professional, capable and qualified, whose responsibility is the evaluation and recognition of scholastic and academic qualifications, professional qualifications, and any other certification, even partial, present in one or more sectors of education and training of a country in terms of comparability, equivalence and nostrification of qualifications from other foreign systems, in consideration of the specific components of a qualification, i.e. the level, duration, workload, entry requirements, academic and/or professional rights. The credential evaluator is also an expert in matters of national and international legislation on the subject of recognition of qualifications and use of the tools and documentation developed in this sector (national and international qualifications frameworks, grading systems, credit accumulation systems, supporting documentation linked to qualifications, diploma supplements, etc.).”

Secondly, it defines the specific tasks and activities and their related contents - in terms of knowledge and skills, also identifying the level of autonomy and responsibilities of each level, Junior and Senior, in line with the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

PRASSI DI RIFERIMENTO

UNI/PdR 120:2021

Non-regulated professional activities - Credential evaluator - Requirements for knowledge, skills, autonomy and responsibilities

Attività professionali non regolamentate - Profilo professionale del credential evaluator - Requisiti di conoscenza, abilità, autonomia e responsabilità

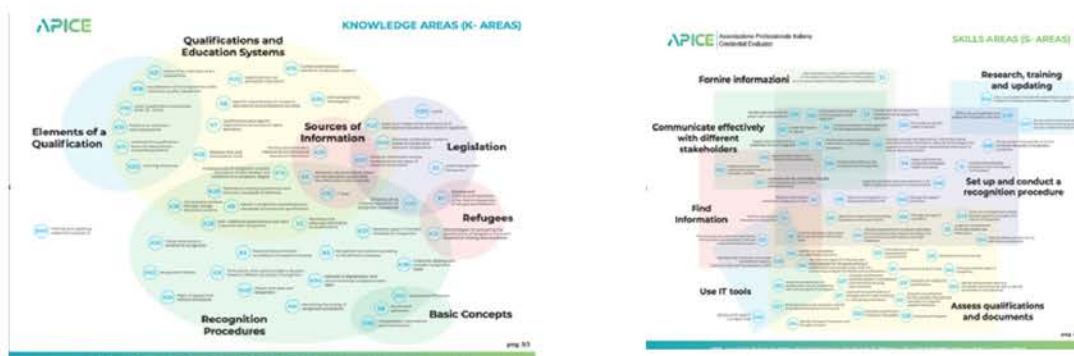
This document specifies the requirements relating to the professional activity of the credential evaluator, i.e. the expert in the evaluation and recognition of academic and professional qualifications. The credential evaluator has advanced professional skills in the management of recognition procedures and in the evaluation and comparison of qualifications, with knowledge of the different models of education and training at national and international level. These requirements are specified, starting from the specific tasks and activities and the identification of the related contents, in terms of knowledge and skills, to also clearly identify the level of autonomy and responsibilities in line with the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

Published on 22 October 2021

ICS 03.040



Thirdly, it maps 44 pieces of knowledge and 51 skills the Credential Evaluator must possess in order to perform their activities.



Finally, it defines the requirements in terms of formal, informal and non-formal training as well as work experience and the methods to assess professionals' compliance to the Practice.

The Italian Professional Association of Credential Evaluators: APICE

Moving from Reference Practice, [APICE - The Italian Professional Association of Credential Evaluators](#) was first launched in Italy during the event organized by CIMEA in Venice on May 6th, in the occasion of the celebrations for the 25th anniversary of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

A professional association organised in accordance with the Italian legislation framework for non-regulated professions, APICE supports the development of professional figures contributing daily to guarantee the right of each individual to an evaluation of their qualifications according to transparent, consistent and reliable criteria.

The Association aims to determine and guarantee the professional standards and ethical norms of the Credential Evaluator profession as defined by the Reference Practice, recognising the role of evaluators in the implementation of national and international policies regarding the recognition of qualifications.

As a national network of experts in the evaluation and academic recognition - operating both in National Information Centres and Higher Education Institutions - it enables the exchange of best practices at national level and helps to build connections among professionals. Moreover, APICE focuses on the enhancement of its members' professionalism of its members, protecting their interests and looking after their permanent professional training.

With regards to the continuous training and updating, which is one of the fundamental aspects of the Credential Evaluation profession, APICE, according to the relevant section of Reference Practice, also identifies the amount of training activities a Credential Evaluator is expected to attend yearly to comply to the professional standards and maintain such compliance over time.

In 2022, training events for Italian Credential evaluators included:

- Second Edition of the Specialisation course for Credential Evaluators developed in collaboration with CIMEA-NARIC Italia and the European University of Rome - UER leading to the first Microcredential in the sector of Credential Evaluation
- A 2-day Workshop on the topics of:
 - document fraud and the forensic techniques to combat it;
 - the recognition of foreign PhD qualifications in Italy;
 - the Foundation Course in Italy.

ACCREDITATION IN US HIGHER EDUCATION

Kate Freeman - SpanTran: The Evaluation Company
Jennifer Collins - Georgia Institute of Technology

The U.S. Department of Higher Education states that the goal of accreditation is to "... ensure that education provided by institutions of higher education meets levels of quality." Accreditation in higher education is voluntary, comprehensive, collaborative and periodic.

While higher education in the U.S. dates back to the founding of Harvard College in 1636, the concept of accreditation was not introduced until 1885 when it was designed to be a mechanism to distinguish institutions with higher standards of education from those that were essentially secondary schools. By 1934, eight accrediting bodies had been established; however, it was the passing of the GI Bill in 1944 that made the need for higher education accreditation more evident.

One facet of the GI Bill made federal funds available to for military veterans to attend a college or university. There was concern that these funds would be used to attend low quality institutions, and the federal government weighed whether or not to create its own list of approved higher education institutions or rely on lists that individual states were creating on their own. The Veterans Readjustment Assistance Act of 1952 directed the federal government to create a process to recognize non-governmental accrediting bodies. The 1965 Higher Education Act mandated that federal financial aid funds could only be used at higher education institutions that were accredited by recognized accrediting bodies.

The period between 1965 and 1992 was a time with great concern about the lack of oversight across the many accrediting bodies as well as accreditation fraud, especially at proprietary schools. Section 496 of the 1992 Higher Education Act Reauthorization Act addressed this by mandating standards and criteria for recognition of accrediting bodies; it also created the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity/NACIQI. The purview of NACIQI is the review and approval of accrediting body recognition every five years; it has members appointed by Congress and the Secretary of Education. All NACIQI decisions must have the final approval of the Secretary of Education.

RECOGNITION OF ACCREDITING BODIES

Accrediting bodies cannot work in a vacuum and must go through a recognition process. The U.S. Department of Education/USDE and the Council on Higher Education Accreditation/CHEA are the two entities that recognize accrediting bodies in the US. Accrediting bodies can be recognized by either USDE or CHEA or both. USDE and CHEA have established standards and criteria for recognition. The maximum recognition length is seven years, and accrediting bodies must submit an interim report at the midpoint of the recognition timeframe.

TYPES OF ACCREDITING BODIES

There are four types of accrediting bodies:

- National career-related accrediting bodies
- Regional accrediting bodies
- Programmatic accrediting bodies
- National faith-related accrediting bods

National career-related bodies

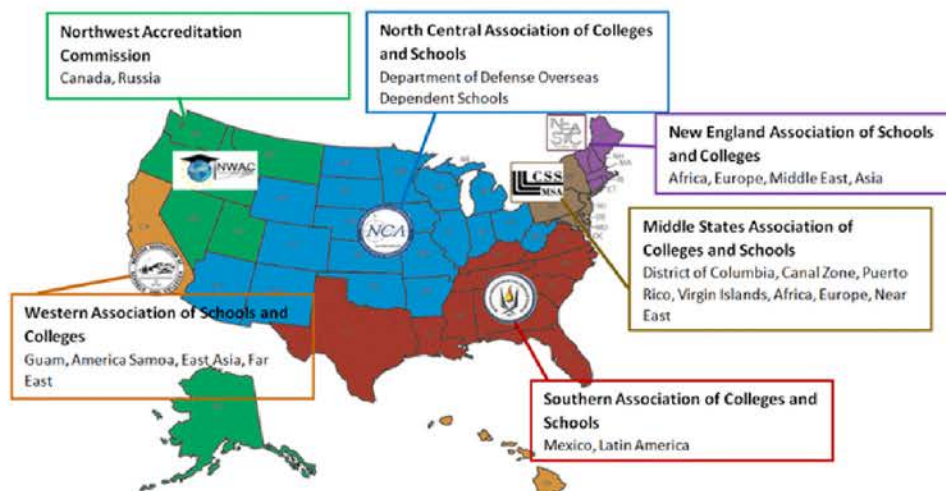
The Distance Education Accrediting Commission is currently the only recognized accrediting body that currently falls under this category. It accredits institutions that only offer strictly distance education or online programs.

Regional accrediting bodies

Regional accrediting bodies grant accreditation to an institution as a whole with no guarantee of the quality of individual programs within the institution. Until 2019, regional accrediting bodies only accredited institutions within an established geographic area as well as institutions outside of the US; however, new 2019 Department of Education rules allow institutions to apply for accreditation from a regional accrediting body outside of the geographic area where it the institution is located.

Accreditation is based on a review of the institution's financial status, level of faculty staffing and their educational credentials, physical plant (conditions of buildings and other parts of the campus), and administrative staffing. Institutions must submit an extensive self-study that is followed by a site visit by representatives of other educational institutions. These representatives submit a report to the accrediting body; this report and the institution's self-study are reviewed by the accrediting body, and a final report is issued. Positive accreditation decisions are final for 3-10 years.

In addition to ensuring a measure of quality, institutional accreditation is required for students who apply for federal financial aid and for institutions who apply for federal research and other grants. In addition, students may have trouble transferring credits or gaining advanced standing at a new instititon if their previous institution is not accredited.



Programmatic accrediting bodies

Programmatic accrediting bodies accredit individual programs within an institution. They accredit various programs of study, including engineering, teacher education, pharmacy, architecture, interior design and many more. State licensure boards, especially those in allied health professions, such as nursing, physical therapy, and speech-language therapy, will only license applicants who have graduated from a program that holds the appropriate programmatic accreditation. Like regional accrediting bodies, programmatic accrediting bodies also accredit programs at institutions outside of the U.S.

National faith-related accrediting bodies

There are currently four faith-related accrediting bodies that accredited Biblical colleges, rabbinical and Talmudic schools, theological schools, and Christian schools and colleges.

LOSS OF INSTITUTIONAL OR PROGRAMMATIC ACCREDITATION

A higher education institution can lose its institutional or individual program accreditation for a number of reasons. Loss of institutional accreditation is most often due to severe financial issues usually brought on by low enrollment. Accrediting bodies give the institution a written timeline to come into compliance with accreditation standards and must submit evidence of compliance within a certain date. Failure to submit evidence of compliance results in termination of accreditation.

Termination of accreditation nearly always means the institution must close, and this has vast implications for students and staff, but most especially for students. Institutions must submit a teach-out plan to the accrediting body; a teach-out plan describes how the institution will help currently enrolled students complete their programs of study. This usually involves working with one or more institutions, usually geographically close to the institution that is closing, to allow students to seamlessly transfer so that they can complete their program of study and graduate.

LOSS OF ACCREDITING BODY RECOGNITION

While it is rare, accrediting bodies can lose recognition. Once an accrediting body loses its recognition, all schools that the accrediting body has accredited are no longer accredited. The body that withdrew the accrediting body's recognition gives these schools a timeframe to find a new accreditor, and the affected schools are sometimes prohibited from enrolling new students.

UNRECOGNIZED ACCREDITING BODIES

There are hundreds of unrecognized accrediting bodies around the world with 200+ in the U.S. alone. These unrecognized accrediting bodies frequently have names similar to recognized accrediting bodies; for example, the unrecognized "Middle States Accrediting Board" which is not to be confused with the recognized "Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools". Institutions accredited by unrecognized accrediting bodies are nearly always diploma mills or award degrees based on limited coursework. It is best to check the USDE and CHEA websites to determine if the accrediting body is recognized.

Resources:

CHEA Database of Institutions and Programs Accredited by Recognized U.S. Accrediting Organizations:
<https://www.chea.org/directories>

US Department of Education Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs:
<https://ope.edu.gov/dapip/#/home>

SPECIAL UPDATE FROM SAQA

Navin Vasudev - South African Qualifications Authority

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, sub-Saharan Africa hosts more than 26% of the world's refugees. This number has soared over the years.

In November 2021, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and the World Education Services (WES) signed a partnership agreement to initiate a pilot project ensuring a special dispensation for the recognition of qualifications of eligible refugees and asylum seekers in South Africa. Soon after, a press release was published on various platforms.



A significant number of individuals seeking SAQA's foreign evaluation services are refugees and those who have been forcibly displaced. They often face challenges in meeting SAQA's application criteria to have their qualifications assessed for recognition. WES serves as a collaborative partner to SAQA in developing an initiative in line with its model for the recognition of qualifications of refugees and asylum seekers and especially those with incomplete or partial documentation.

In her statement when inaugurating this project, the SAQA CEO, Dr Julie Reddy added, "SAQA is committed to providing lifelong learning opportunities, and enabling access to meaningful and sustainable livelihood opportunities to all people who live in South Africa."



SAQA is working with a local NGO based in Cape Town, Scalabrini, in 3 provinces of the country for a period of 1 year, testing the methodology and process for this special dispensation. Scalabrini fosters the cultural, social, and economic integration of migrants, refugees, and South Africans into local society. The pilot project focuses on Recognition of Qualifications of Refugees and Asylum Seekers who do not have complete documentation of their qualifications. This is the 1st Phase of the project currently being implemented. The 2nd Phase which to be undertaken in 2023 - 2024 will focus on access of the applicants to the world of work and further studies.

Implementation has been completed in the Western Cape and Gauteng and 40 applicants have so far been interviewed and evaluations of their qualification are being undertaken by SAQA.

To show-case the preliminary results of the project, several presentations were made during 2022. These include the SADC Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA) at the end of April 2022. Further, presentation was also made at the Groningen Declaration Network (GDN) meeting in Netherlands as well as at the Association for International Credential Evaluation Professionals (TAICEP) Conference in Glasgow, both in October 2022. During that period, a virtual presentation was made to the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in East Africa. Plans are also underway to share the project findings at a conference in Berlin hosted by DAAD (German Academic Exchange Services). A unique characteristic of these presentations includes combining the 'discussion' with 'visual and audio narratives' shared by the refugees and asylum seekers themselves.



LOOKING FORWARD

There are many exciting things ahead!

**9th Annual Conference
October 2-5**

Click [HERE](#) for more information



The Wiki Advisory Group is hard at work on an amazing wiki for TAICEP members. Stay tuned for updates!

The 2023 Election results are coming soon!

Stay tuned and check the results at www.taicep.org.



TAICEP Certificates

TAICEP's Certificate Program is designed to test and showcase your knowledge and skills. The program is not meant as a training tool - it is used to demonstrate the prior learning you have gained through training and educational content offered by TAICEP and other organizations.

CURRENT CERTIFICATES (click on each for more information)

Foundation Certificate in International Credential Evaluation

What you'll showcase: Foundational knowledge of best practices in credential evaluation and assessment

What is involved: Professional development, an online assessment, and a practical credential evaluation assessment (capstone)

Secondary School Certificate

What you'll showcase: A detailed understanding of secondary educational systems around the world and how to analyze their comparability

What is involved: Self-guided review of materials and an online assessment

Bologna Process Certificate

What you'll showcase: An in-depth understanding of the Bologna Process, including its history and components, as well as how non-signatory countries to the Bologna Declaration are changing their postsecondary educational systems in response

What is involved: Self-guided review of materials and an online assessment

Research Certificate - COMING SOON

What you'll showcase: An in-depth understanding of credential evaluation and educational system research, including resources, methodology, and relevance to the profession

What is involved: Sharing your original research, along with a written explanation of the process behind your project

All questions about the TAICEP Certificate programs can be sent to
certificate@taicep.org

LOOKING TO GET INVOLVED?

How does TAICEP support our professionals?

TAICEP offers an opportunity to take charge of your career. We provide opportunities to participate in activities that relate directly to our profession such as country-specific webinars, in-person conferences, and a forum for networking within other international credential evaluation professionals. TAICEP fills the gaps that currently exist among the various professional organizations by providing a one-stop-shop for resources, professional development, networking, and one-on-one access to highly specialized expertise across the profession.

How does TAICEP support the field?

International credential evaluation is a small, highly specialized field that will need to grow to take care of the influx of international students and professionals who are increasingly sought after and mobile. TAICEP is an official organization committed to moving the field of international credential evaluation forward, through activities such as research, determining best practices, supporting professional development.

How can you become involved with TAICEP?

- Become a member or sponsor of this unique professional organization
- Attend a conference
- Participate in committees, task forces, or on boards
- Do research and offer conference sessions

Where can I find information on professional development activities offered by TAICEP?

The TAICEP website includes all of the information on professional development opportunities offered by the organization itself. In addition, Members of TAICEP can access the Compendium of Professional Development activities around the world, a list conferences, training opportunities, and other professional development opportunities arranged geographically and available for credential evaluators across the globe. Become a member today to gain access to this exclusive information!

Do I have to be a member of TAICEP to participate in these activities?

Information on professional development is available to TAICEP's website for members and non-members alike. However, membership grants access to exclusive opportunities as well as discounted registration to the general meeting and other events.

Can I volunteer as trainer for professional development activities such as webinars?

Yes! TAICEP thrives due to volunteer efforts of the credential evaluation community. Please contact TAICEP's Executive Director, Robert Prather at answers@taicep.org.