Toolkit for the Recognition of Foreign Qualifications

A Reference for Asia-Pacific Practitioners

August 2013
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BRIEF HISTORY

- **1983:** The *Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas, and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific* was signed by 14 countries, namely, Australia, Bhutan, the People’s Republic of China, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, India, Indonesia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Turkey, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and Viet Nam.

- **1985:** The *1983 Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas, and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific* was implemented on October 23, 1985.


- **2005:** The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) proposed to revise the *1983 Regional Convention of Studies, Diplomas, and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific* during the “Eighth Regional Committee Meeting” held in Kunming, China.

- **2011:** The revised regional convention or its replacement entitled, *Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education*, was signed on November 26, 2011 in Tokyo, Japan. The countries that signed the new convention include the Republic of Armenia, the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, the Kingdom of Cambodia, the People’s Republic of China, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, the Republic of Korea, the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, the Republic of Turkey, and the Holy See.
DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

- **1983 Convention**: Refers to the *Regional Convention of Studies, Diplomas, and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific*, which was adopted in Bangkok on December 16, 1983.

- **2011 Convention**: Refers to the *Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education*, which was adopted in Tokyo on November 26, 2011.

- **Access to higher education**: The right of qualified candidates to apply and be considered for admission to higher education.

- **Accreditation**: The process of assessment and review that enables a higher education programme or institution to be recognised or certified as meeting appropriate standards.

- **Admission to higher education institutions and programmes**: The act of or the system for allowing holders of qualifications to pursue higher education at a given institution or programme.

- **Assessment of institutions or programmes**: The process of measuring the educational quality of a higher education institution or programme.

- **Competent recognition authority**: A governmental or non-governmental body that is officially authorised by a government to make decisions on recognising foreign qualifications.

- **Displaced person**: A person who is forced to move out of his/her locality or environment or to change his/her occupation.

- **General requirements for access to higher education**: Conditions that must, on all cases, be fulfilled for access to higher education.

- **Higher education**: Refers to post-secondary-level education, training, or research that is recognised by the relevant authorities of a party as belonging to its higher education system.

- **Higher education institution**: An establishment recognised by the relevant
authorities of a party that provides higher education.

- **Higher education programme**: A programme of study recognised by the relevant authorities of a party as belonging to its higher education system, the completion of which provides a student with higher education qualifications.

- **Non-traditional modes**: Refer to qualifications obtained through alternative delivery mechanisms.

- **Partial studies**: Any homogeneous part of a higher education programme that may not be complete in itself but can be equated to a significant acquisition of knowledge or skills.

- **Qualification that gives access to higher education**: Any qualification issued by relevant authorities that attest to the successful completion of an educational programme and give the holder the right to be considered for admission to higher education.

- **Quality assurance**: An ongoing process of evaluating and enhancing the quality of a higher education system, institution, or programme to assure stakeholders that acceptable standards of education, scholarships, and resources for delivery are being maintained and enhanced.

- **Recognition of prior learning**: A process to formally acknowledge the knowledge and skills a person has obtained as a result of formal and non-formal learning.

- **Recognition of qualifications**: A formal acknowledgement defined and given by competent recognition authorities of a party to recognise the value of a foreign education qualification.

- **Secondary education**: A stage of studies of any kind that follows primary, elementary, preparatory, intermediate, or basic education, the aims of which may include preparing students for higher education, leading to the receipt of a secondary school leaving certificate, or enabling students to enrol in higher education institutions.

- **Specific requirements for admission to higher education**: Conditions that must be fulfilled in addition to general ones to gain admission to a particular higher education programme or to award specific qualifications in
a particular field of study in higher education.

- **UNESCO Asia-Pacific Higher Education Qualification Statement**: A reference document in the Asia-Pacific region that provides a description of students’ qualifications and skills in an explicit and understandable manner. It could include providing a description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed by the individual named on the original qualification to which the statement is appended. It is an international and intercultural communication tool that can serve as a source of information for making mutual accreditation and evaluation decisions.
PREFACE

At the 11th Session of the Regional Committee, held in Seoul, the Republic of Korea in 2012, it was recommended that a Toolkit be developed to help Member States ratify and implement the Asia-Pacific Convention. The UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education established a technical Working Group (WG) which has prepared the Toolkit for the Recognition of Foreign Higher Education Qualifications.

The main goal behind the development of this toolkit is to provide a common reference guide for the Asia-Pacific region with regard to assessing higher education qualifications.

This toolkit specifically intends to:

- Inform recognition practitioners, policymakers, government officials, higher education institutions, and other stakeholders about the 2011 Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education
- Present a common language and concept used by academic recognition practitioners to facilitate easier alignment of studies, diplomas, and degrees
- Provide an additional reference on assessment requirements; basic principles related to qualification assessment; partial studies; recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced people, and people in similar situations; and implementation mechanisms for making informed decisions
- Facilitate the implementation of regional cooperation regarding the recognition of foreign qualifications in higher education through national, bilateral, sub-regional, and regional mechanisms.

The UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education in Bangkok wishes to express profound thanks to Tony Davies and Ethel Agnes Valenzuela for their help in drafting this Toolkit. Special thanks also to Margaret Proctor, Molly Lee, and Stamenka Uvalic-Trumbic as well as the Technical Working Group and other experts from the region for taking time out to check this document’s content.
WHAT IS THIS TOOLKIT FOR?

This toolkit was designed to serve as an easily understandable yet comprehensive reference for policy-makers, practitioners, educational institutions, and recognition officials who have limited information to extensively study the 2011 Asia-Pacific Regional Convention signed in Tokyo, Japan and the assessment procedure in order to facilitate the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications in the Asia-Pacific region.

WHAT IS IN THIS TOOLKIT?

This toolkit comprises four parts, namely:

- **Part 1**: Provides an introduction of the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education.

- **Part 2**: Focuses on the principles, procedures and requirements for assessing foreign qualifications.

- **Part 3**: Presents the procedures and criteria used for recognising qualifications, including the provision of access to higher education, partial studies, recognising foreign qualifications, and addressing substantial differences.

- **Part 4**: Provides descriptions of the tools required to facilitate the assessment of qualifications such as the National Information Centre and the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Higher Education Qualification Statement.
I. INTRODUCTION

The Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education is the latest of seven conventions adopted under the aegis of the UNESCO dating from the late 1970s to the 1980s to regulate mutual recognition of qualifications in higher education.

The Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education, adopted in Tokyo on November 26, 2011, desires to ensure that studies, diplomas, and degrees in higher education are recognised as widely as possible, considering the great diversity of educational systems in the region and the richness of its cultural, social, political, religious, and economic backgrounds.

KEY GOALS OF THE REGIONAL CONVENTION

The new Asia-Pacific Regional Convention is a legal framework that provides general guidelines to facilitate the implementation of regional cooperation in recognising qualifications. It aims to:

- Create conditions to facilitate greater and smoother mobility for educational and cultural exchange
- Facilitate student and academic mobility
- Be able to judge the comparability of educational experiences and qualifications
- Provide Asia-Pacific countries with a comparable basis for recognising foreign higher education qualifications whilst incorporating the principles of legally correct, timely, and transparent decisions
**MECHANISMS AND STRUCTURE OF THE REGIONAL CONVENTION**

Coordination of the regional convention will be managed through the Regional Committee, which consists of representatives of all contracting states and the Secretariat, which has been entrusted to the UNESCO Director-General. The regional committee meets every three years in order to facilitate the implementation of the regional convention.

Signatories are committed to developing and maintaining mechanisms at national and regional levels that support the implementation of the 2011 Asia-Pacific Regional Convention. Mechanisms include information sharing on topics related to the recognition of foreign qualifications in higher education.

**OBLIGATIONS OF THE PARTIES**

Under the regional convention, state parties are required to:

- take all feasible steps within the framework of their national systems and in conformity with their constitutional, legal, and regulatory provisions to facilitate academic mobility;

- establish “competent authorities” (i.e. ministries of education or a non-governmental body) to recognise foreign higher education qualifications;

- assess qualifications in a timely manner using procedures and criteria that are transparent, coherent, reliable, fair, and non-discriminatory;

- establish a National Information Centre (NIC), which provides information on higher education; and

- name a specific body to assess foreign qualifications in higher education for comparability purposes.
II. ASSESSMENT OF QUALIFICATIONS

PRINCIPLES OF QUALIFICATIONS ASSESSMENT

- Holders of qualifications shall have adequate access to an assessment of their qualifications in a timely manner.

- Each party shall make the appropriate arrangements for assessing qualifications, which primarily focus on learning outcomes.

- Each party shall ensure that the procedures and criteria used to assess and recognise qualifications are followed.

- Decisions on recognition shall be made based on appropriate information for which recognition is sought.

- The responsibility of providing information rests with the holders of qualifications who shall do so in good faith.

- The parties shall instruct, or encourage educational institutions to provide adequate and clear information on their national education systems for the purpose of assessing qualifications earned from the said institutions. The parties should encourage educational institutions to use a recognition tool such as the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Higher Education Qualification Statement.

- As long as information relevant to assessing qualifications is appropriately provided, the responsibility to demonstrate that an application does not fulfil the relevant requirements lies with the competent recognition authority.

- Each party shall ensure that adequate and clear information on its educational system is provided.

- Decisions on recognising qualifications shall be made within a reasonable time frame set beforehand by the competent recognition authority and calculated from the time when all of the necessary information for the case has been provided.

- If recognition is withheld, the reasons for refusing to grant such shall be
stated. Information shall also be given concerning the possible measures the holders of qualifications may take in order to obtain recognition at later stages. If recognition is withheld or if no decision is taken, the holders of qualifications shall be entitled to appeal through appropriate procedures for each party within a reasonable time frame.

**ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES**

*Roles and Responsibilities of Competent Recognition Authorities*

As much as possible, competent recognition authorities should strive to recognise applicants’ foreign qualifications. Where this is not possible, the competent recognition authorities should consider alternative forms of recognition, which may include:

- recognition of the foreign qualification as comparable to a qualification of the host country;
- partial or conditional recognition of the foreign qualification;
- full or partial recognition of the foreign qualification subject to the applicant successfully taking additional examinations, further study aptitude tests, or other compensatory measures; and
- full or partial recognition of the foreign qualification at the end of a probationary period, possibly subject to specified conditions.

**REQUIREMENTS FOR QUALIFICATION ASSESSMENT BY A COMPETENT RECOGNITION AUTHORITY**

- Granting partial recognition or that which is subject to the fulfilment of specific conditions does not, however, imply an automatic right to admission to any course designed to help an applicant remedy deficiencies in order to obtain full recognition.
• Only when competent recognition authorities find it impossible to grant even an alternative form of recognition should an application be rejected outright. It should, however, be kept in mind that, in some cases, the absence of recognition may be “fair recognition” based on previous case evidence.

• Substantial differences cannot be normatively defined. As such, competent recognition authorities should strive, wherever possible and in the spirit of the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention, to identify the rationale behind gaining recognition, as opposed to searching for reasons that could be construed as substantial differences.

• Where the recognition decision differs from that requested by the applicant, the competent recognition authority has an obligation to state the reasons for its decision and to inform the applicant of possibilities of appealing against the decision or fulfilling additional conditions for gaining full or partial recognition.

• It is important to allow applicants to appeal against decisions and to enable them to undertake remedial measures in order to obtain recognition at a later stage.

• The criteria for assessment should be chosen because of their suitability to indicate the quality of the qualification in question and of the applicant’s ability to undertake the activity for which recognition is sought (e.g. further studies, research, or gainful employment).

• A recognition decision should not only be based on quantitative criteria such as length of study without some attempt to assess the quality of applicants’ learning outcomes and qualifications. Learning outcomes emphasize the results of learning rather than focus on inputs such as length of study.

• The amount of time required for the average learner or typical student to achieve learning outcomes is decided not only by the volume of knowledge and skills taught and learned but also by the context in which the process of learning takes place. To a certain extent, substantial differences according to quantitative criteria may, however, be taken as an indication of differences in quality.
INFORMATION THAT SHOULD BE PROVIDED TO APPLICANTS

Information provided to applicants by National Information Centres and competent recognition authorities upon the receipt of applications should have at least the following elements:

- a complete list of documents required for the application which could include relevant authenticated and translated documents etc.;
- a description of the assessment process;
- descriptions of the assessment criteria;
- the status of recognition statements;
- the amount of time needed to process an application;
- any fees charged;
- a reference to the national laws and international conventions and agreements that may be relevant to the assessment of foreign qualifications; and
- conditions and procedures for appealing against a recognition decision, according to national legislations.

In principle, recognition decisions should be open to appeal. It is the duty of competent recognition authorities to inform applicants about how they can appeal including information on deadlines, rules and regulations. It is highly recommended that information on appeal processes be provided upon the receipt of applications. The competent recognition authorities may consider requiring applicants to sign acknowledgements confirming the receipt of information and that they have been acquainted with the possibilities of and procedures regarding appeals.
Consistency with regard to making recognition decisions is important to assure transparent and coherent treatment of applications for recognising foreign qualifications. It would be unfortunate if similar recognition cases were handled in substantially different ways and if substantially different decisions were reached. An overview of typical recognition cases may help assure the required consistency. Decisions should be well documented and archived so that previous cases can be easily accessed.

The question as to whether to make information available to applicants or not is complicated. It may help to give applicants an indication of what they can realistically expect and to help them formulate their applications. It may also help applicants to consider whether to appeal against a decision or not. On the other hand, applicants may not understand typical cases to provide legal precedents for “automatic” recognition of their own qualifications. It is, therefore, essential that information on typical recognition cases provided to applicants be accompanied by a clear explanation of the function of the provision, underlining that, in all cases, individual assessment of each application is undertaken.

**information on qualifications for which recognition is sought**

The requirements for complete information should be carefully weighed against the burdens fulfilling this need places upon applicants, specifically regarding concerns on requirements for the authentication and translation of documents, which tend to be time-consuming and costly. A consideration of requirements for authentication should weigh the necessity of minimising risks of fraud against the need to reduce the burden on honest applicants. It is suggested that it may, in most cases, be sufficient to require authentication of key documents such as qualifications, transcripts of records, and birth certificates. It should also be considered whether certified photocopies, rather than originals, may be required. It is important that all of the requirements be clearly described to applicants.
Verify if all of the necessary information and documents have been supplied. If not, get further information from the applicant/involved institution.

Verify if the applicant’s qualification is authentic and if the documents submitted were rightfully issued. Seeking assistance from National Information Centres is advised. If, for instance, the qualification is not authentic, recognition may not be given.

In case of third-party recognition awarded by a branch campus of an institution/joint establishment of a home country/region in a host country/region

Verify if the awarding institution/programme (including joint, franchised, and other programmes) is recognised as part of the home/host country’s system of higher education and complies with the home/host country’s quality assurance scheme.

If so, is it possible to grant alternative/partial recognition?

Verify if the programme (including joint, franchised, and other programmes) is accredited by a competent authority. Third-party recognition would normally not be granted.

Assess the foreign qualification, taking into account the purpose for which recognition is sought (including formal regulations, national laws, international conventions, directives, recommendations, good practices, etc.; past practices in similar cases; contents of qualification and learning outcomes; and information/advice from National Information Centres, higher education institutions, and other sources) and if the recognition is recognized in the country where it was issued.

Are the differences in learning outcomes so substantial that the foreign qualification cannot be fully recognised?

Are the differences for further activities for which foreign and home country qualifications so substantial that full recognition is not possible?

Are the differences in key elements of the programme leading to the qualification so substantial in relation to similar programs in the host country that full recognition cannot be granted in view of the purpose for which it is sought?

Is the quality of the programme/instruction from which the qualification was earned so different from similar programmes/institutions in the host country that full recognition is not possible?

Issue the assessment statement on the foreign qualification to the applicant or to whom it may concern (e.g. a current/prospective employer, a higher education institution, etc.). If the decision is negative, state the reasons for the decision in a clear manner. Inform the applicant of his/her right to appeal.

Questions

Are the differences in learning outcomes so substantial that the foreign qualification cannot be fully recognised?

Are the differences for further activities for which foreign and home country qualifications so substantial that full recognition is not possible?

Are the differences in key elements of the programme leading to the qualification so substantial in relation to similar programs in the host country that full recognition cannot be granted in view of the purpose for which it is sought?

Is the quality of the programme/instruction from which the qualification was earned so different from similar programmes/institutions in the host country that full recognition is not possible?

If so, is it possible to grant alternative/partial recognition?
ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Qualifications cannot be properly evaluated without taking into account the institutions that issued them. At the same time, national laws and practices with regard to assessing and assuring the quality of higher education institutions vary. Consequently, the kind of information that may be obtained on or from higher education institutions also varies. Section VIII of the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education outlines the kind of information that parties with or without established systems of formal assessment for higher education institutions should provide. Countries that have established national quality assurance agencies or cross-national quality assurance bodies should see these as valuable information sources.

STATUS OF AN INSTITUTION

The status of a qualification should be established by taking into account the status of the institution or programme that awarded it. Competent recognition authorities should seek to establish whether the higher education institution belongs to the higher education system of a state or not.

In the case of qualifications awarded by higher education institutions established through transnational arrangements, competent recognition authorities should analyse the arrangements based on the principles stipulated in the UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good Practices in the Provision of Transnational Education and the Recommendations on the Recognition of Joint Degrees.
If the countries have established quality assurance systems, including systems of formal assessment of higher education institutions and programmes, competent recognition authorities should take into account the results of the process when evaluating qualifications from such systems.

**Assessment of Individual Qualifications**

There is a direct connection between the assessment of foreign qualifications and the purposes for which recognition is sought such as further studies or employment. The recognition statement should be clear about its purpose and validity. A new assessment should be undertaken if recognition is sought. Qualifications may serve a wide range of purposes, including:

- general access to higher education;
- restricted access to higher education (i.e. access restricted to certain parts of the higher education system);
- general access to further studies at a given level (e.g. master or doctoral degrees);
- restricted access to further studies;
- access to professional training;
- general access to the labour market (i.e. as a qualification for a wide range of positions at a given level);
- access to a specialised area of the labour market; and
- access to a regulated profession.
FEES

Fees may constitute an impediment to recognition. If the assessment of foreign qualifications cannot be provided free of charge, fees should, therefore, be kept to a minimum. Any fee charged by a competent recognition authority is an addition to any other costs incurred for the translation or certification of documents. Fee practices considerably vary. It is difficult to give precise indicators of acceptable fee levels, as local conditions such as cost of living, salary levels, and student support, must be taken into account.

TRANSLATION

In the case of translation requirements, it should also be considered whether these are limited to key documents or not. It may, for instance, not be necessary for an applicant to provide detailed translations of his/her curricula or academic papers. It should also be considered whether it is strictly necessary to require translations to be carried out by certified translators or not. Where this requirement is maintained, the competent recognition authorities should provide applicants with lists of certified translators. It should further be considered whether certain documents can be accepted without being translated or not. This may apply to documents issued in widely spoken languages, languages that are linguistically close to those of the host country, languages that are widely understood in the host country, and/or languages for which the staff members of competent recognition authorities have sufficient competence.
III. PROCEDURES AND CRITERIA FOR THE RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS

RECOGNITIONS THAT GIVE ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

• Each party shall recognise the qualifications issued by other parties, unless substantial differences exist.

• When admission to a particular higher education programme depends on the fulfilment of specific requirements in addition to general requirements for access, the concerned parties may impose additional requirements on the holders of qualifications obtained from other parties (e.g. language proficiency).

• To satisfy parties that require school-leaving certificates only in combination with additional qualifying examinations as a prerequisite for access, other parties may make access conditions for these requirements or offer alternatives within their own educational systems.

• Admission to a higher education system may be restricted or selective. In this case, admission procedures should be designed to ensure that the accreditation of foreign qualifications in higher education is carried out according to the basic principles of fairness and non-discrimination described in Section III of the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education.

• Qualifications obtained via non-traditional modes shall be assessed in a fair manner by other parties, treating the mode as only one factor to consider in compliance with national laws and regulations.

• Each party may make recognition of qualifications by foreign educational institutions contingent upon specific requirements of national legislations or specific agreements with the origin of such institutions.
RECOGNITION OF PARTIAL STUDIES

- Wherever possible, each party shall recognise or at least assess partial studies within the framework of a higher education programme in the other party.

- Wherever possible, each party shall facilitate the recognition of partial studies if there has been a previous arrangement between the sending and receiving parties and if the higher education institution in which partial studies was completed issued a certificate or transcript of academic records attesting that the student successfully completed the stipulated requirements for the said partial studies.

PRINCIPLES FOR ASSESSING FOREIGN QUALIFICATIONS

Assessment of foreign qualifications in higher education should be based on the following principles:

- **Transparency** - points of comparison should be clear, yet flexible enough to handle qualifications from different state parties in the region;

- **Coherency** - decisions should be based on a qualification framework, usually based on outcomes and not on length of study; and

- **Reliability** - uses appropriate recognition tools, has databases for quality, and provides consistent and timely decisions.

ASSESSMENT OF SPECIAL CASES (REFUGEES, DISPLACED PEOPLE, AND PEOPLE IN REFUGEE-LIKE SITUATIONS)

The aim of the 2011 Asia-Pacific Regional Convention for the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education is to be inclusive. This means that each party to the Regional Convention shall make reasonable efforts within its educational system and in conformity with its constitutional, legal, and regulatory requirements to consider the needs and particular situation of refugees, displaced people and people in refugee-like situations. This means
developing procedures, including recognition for prior learning, designed to assess fairly and expeditiously if individuals of above mentioned status fulfil relevant requirements for access to higher education programmes or employment, even in cases in which they cannot prove their recognition through documentary evidence.

**VERIFICATION OF THE AUTHENTICITY OF DOCUMENTS**

States are encouraged to review their national laws and/or existing practices in order to simplify, streamline and update their rules on verifying the authenticity of documents. Some states have laws on document verification that make the process difficult. Such verification seeks to establish if the documents in question:

- are genuine (i.e. if these were issued by the institution indicated);
- have not subsequently been unlawfully altered by the applicant or other people; and
- have, in fact, been rightfully issued to the applicant.

**SUBSTANTIAL DIFFERENCES**

What may be defined as “substantial differences,” which may lead to partial or to non-recognition, will, to a large extent, depend on the purposes for which recognition is sought such as pursuing further studies or obtaining admission to an unregulated professional activity. In some contexts, broad-based education may be desirable; in others, a considerable degree of specialisation may be required.
Learning Outcomes

The following are some examples of learning outcomes:

- broad knowledge of a specific subject;
- understanding of research results for a specific subject;
- ability to analyse and solve problems;
- ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing with diverse groups on complex issues;
- ability to apply research findings using routine skills in a fixed domain;
- ability to apply research findings and adapt routine skills to new domains;
- ability to conduct research;
- ability to discern conflicting theories or paradigms; and
- ability to pursue a specific occupation or profession at the operational, management, or technological development level.

Qualifications Issued Several Years Earlier

A qualification certifies a certain competence obtained at a certain time. The value of a qualification may diminish over time or may be entirely lost, either because the holder of the qualification has not kept up the competence acquired by undertaking activities relevant to the field or because significant new knowledge has been gained in the field and the holder is not adequately acquainted with these developments. To what extent a qualification becomes outdated may depend on the field of knowledge concerned.
**LENGTH OF STUDY**

Length of study is one of the most frequently used assessment criterion and experience shows that it is also amongst the criteria most easily accepted by applicants whose qualifications are recognised only partially or not at all. The concept of “length of study” is somewhat problematic because whilst generally expressed in terms of years or semesters, there may be differences across countries and/or individual institutions in terms of number of weeks that make up a semester or year; working hours per week of study; and distribution of hours for teaching, self-study, and other learning activities (e.g. practice periods, laboratory work, etc.). Substantial differences in this respect can reduce the differences between two qualifications of seemingly varying lengths or can increase the differences between two qualifications of seemingly similar length. Length of study should, therefore, not be considered a uniform concept and should not be used as a sole criterion when assessing foreign qualifications.

In general terms, however, the length of study may be taken into consideration to give an indication of the level of a qualification. The wider the difference in the length of study normally required to obtain various qualifications, the more likely it would seem that the qualifications are not of the same level. The question as to what constitutes a substantial difference in length of study must also be seen in relation to learning outcomes. It should also be noted that whilst lengths of study may differ, these do not necessarily comprise a substantial difference nor should other factors necessarily be excluded from the assessment.

**ASSESSMENT OUTCOMES**

Competent recognition authorities should assist applicants by obtaining as precise indications as possible on what measures to take or, as appropriate, refer them to relevant written information or contact people in higher education institutions or other relevant bodies.
IV. ACCREDITATION AND RECOGNITION TOOLS

REQUIRED INFORMATION PACKAGES

Each party shall provide relevant, accurate, and up-to-date information on the following in order to facilitate the recognition of qualifications in higher education:

- a description of a higher education system;
- an overview of different types of higher education institutions and the typical characteristics of each type of institution;
- a list of recognised or accredited higher education institutions (i.e. public or private) that belong to its higher education system, indicating their power to award different types of qualifications and the requirements for gaining access to each type of institution and programme;
- an explanation of quality assurance mechanisms;
- a list of educational institutions located outside its territory, which the party considers part of its education system; and
- a list of locally recognised foreign education institutions located in the party’s territory.

NATIONAL INFORMATION CENTRES

The roles and responsibilities of National Information Centres include:

- providing information about their higher education systems whose forms may vary, depending on their respective countries’ structure and governance systems;
facilitating access to information on their higher education systems and qualifications;

facilitating access to information on the higher education systems and on the qualifications of other parties;

providing advice and information on recognition matters and qualification assessment in accordance with the Regional Convention, national laws and regulations;

contributing to a network of national information centres on academic mobility and recognition;

providing generic advice through the network with regard to qualifications; and

ensuring that a representative attends annual meetings and plenary sessions with other centres in the region.

Higher Education Qualification Statement

A higher education qualification statement intends to provide sufficient independent data to improve international transparency and to ensure fair academic and professional recognition of qualifications (e.g. diplomas, degrees, certificates, etc.). It is designed to provide a description of the nature, level, context, and status of studies that were pursued and successfully completed by an individual named on an original qualification to which the supplement is appended. Its content should be free of any value judgments, equivalence statements, or suggestions about recognition.

Structure of a Higher Education Qualification Statement

A higher education qualification statement is a communication tool that aims to describe a student’s qualifications and skills in an explicit and understandable manner. It can serve as a source of information when making mutual accreditation and evaluation decisions.
A higher education qualification statement is an appended documentation to a diploma issued to a graduate that describes a qualification that has been awarded. It describes the level, length, and entrance requirements to a programme. It differs from a transcript in that it is specific to the awarding institution and, as such, carries institutional identification.

**Contents of a Higher Education Qualification Statement**

- A brief description of the awarding institution
- The language of instruction
- The mode of study
- Access to further studies
- Professional status

A higher education qualification statement includes the following information as well:

- Information on the qualification holder such as:
  - Name
  - Date of birth
  - Student identification number
  - Nationality or citizenship
- Information identifying the qualification
  - Name of the qualification and title conferred (i.e. in the original language)
  - Main fields of study
  - Name and status of the awarding institution administering studies
  - Language of instruction
- Information on the level of qualification
o Level of qualification
o Official length of the programme
o Access requirements
• Information on the content and results gained
o Mode of study
o Programme requirements
o Grade scheme
o Overall classification of the qualification
APPENDIX

PRINCIPLES OF THE UNESCO CODE OF GOOD PRACTICES IN THE PROVIDING OF TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION

- **Transnational arrangement:** An educational, legal, financial, or other arrangement leading to the establishment of collaborative arrangements, such as franchising, twinning, and providing joint degrees, whereby study programmes or parts of a course of study or other educational services of the awarding institution are provided by another partner institution. Non-collaborative arrangements include branch campuses, offshore institutions, and corporate or international institutions, whereby study programmes or parts of a course of study or other educational services are provided directly by an awarding institution.

- **Transnational education:** All types of higher education study programmes or sets of courses of study or educational services, including distance education in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based. Such programmes may belong to the educational system of a state that differs from the state in which it operates or may independently operate of any national education system.

PRINCIPLES OF TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION

Transnational arrangements should be elaborated, enforced, and monitored to widen access to higher education studies; fully respond to learners’ educational demands; contribute to cognitive, cultural, social, personal, and professional development; and comply with national legislations regarding higher education in both the receiving and sending countries. In the case of collaborative arrangements, there should be written and legally binding agreements or contracts setting out the rights and obligations of all partners.
Academic quality and standards of transnational education programmes should at least be comparable to those of the awarding institution and of the receiving country. Awarding and providing institutions are accountable and fully responsible for quality assurance and control. Procedures and decisions concerning the quality of educational services provided by transnational arrangements should be based on specific criteria, which are transparent, systematic, and open to scrutiny.

The policy and mission statement of institutions established through transnational arrangements; their management structures and educational facilities; and the goals, objectives, and contents of their specific programmes, sets of courses of study, and other educational services should be published and made available upon request to authorities and beneficiaries from both the sending and receiving countries.

The information given by the awarding institution, providing organisation, or agent to prospective students and to those registered in a study programme established through transnational arrangements should be appropriate, accurate, consistent, and reliable. The information should include directions regarding the appropriate channels for particular concerns, complaints, and appeals. Where a programme is delivered through a collaborative arrangement, the nature of that arrangement and the responsibilities of the parties should be clearly outlined. The awarding institution is responsible for and should control and monitor information made public by agents operating on its behalf, including claims about the recognition of qualifications in the sending country and elsewhere.

Staff members of institutions or those teaching programmes established through transnational arrangements should be proficient in terms of qualifications, teaching, research, and other professional skills. The awarding institution should ensure that it has effective measures to review the proficiency of staff delivering programmes that lead to qualifications.

Transnational education arrangements should encourage awareness and knowledge of the culture and customs of both the awarding institution and receiving country amongst students and staff.
The awarding institution should be responsible for the agents it or its partner institutions appoint to act on its behalf. Institutions that use agents should conclude written and legally binding agreements or contracts with these, clearly stipulating their roles; responsibilities; delegated powers of action; and monitoring, arbitration, and termination provisions. These agreements or contracts should further be established in order to avoid conflicts of interest and protect the rights of students.

Awarding institutions should be responsible for issuing qualifications that result from their transnational study programmes. They should provide clear and transparent information on qualifications, in particular, through the use of the *UNESCO Asia-Pacific Higher Education Qualification Statement*, to facilitate the assessment of qualifications by competent recognition bodies, higher education institutions, employers, and others. This information should include the nature, duration, workload, location, and language of the study programme that led to qualification.

Admission of students to a course of study, teaching/learning activities, examination and assessment requirements for educational services provided under transnational arrangements should be equivalent to or comparable with programmes delivered by the awarding institution.

The academic workload in transnational study programmes expressed in credits, units, or duration should be comparable to programmes in the awarding institution. Any differences in this respect require clear statements behind the rationale and consequences with regard to qualification recognition.

Qualifications issued through transnational educational programmes that comply with the provisions of the present code should be assessed in accordance with the stipulations of the *Lisbon Recognition Convention*. 