



UK NARIC Special Report

Guide to Recognition Issues in International Distance Learning

Edition 2
December 2020

Foreword

With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of quality assured distance learning has been brought to the foreground as schools, colleges and universities around the world have adapted to the crisis, to ensure continuity of quality education to learners during these challenging times.

With 5 million students studying abroad before the crisis hit^[1], the recognition of transnational distance learning is now, more than ever, a matter of critical importance to the global higher education sector.

Furthermore, the implications of this global crisis are likely to be felt far beyond this year: quality assured distance learning will play an increasingly key role in education internationally for the foreseeable future. The significant shift to online learning will amplify pressing questions around the quality and recognition of distance learning for providers, students, and national authorities.

As a leading national recognition agency, UK NARIC knows only too well the barriers to recognition that distance learning can face internationally.

This report series – highlighting recognition issues in international distance learning – is designed to provide an essential resource for the international education sector, from those involved in international admissions, recruitment and partnerships through to those in policy and accreditation aspects.

This publication forms part of a much wider strand of UK NARIC's resources to support the education sector in driving progressive change in the international understanding and fair recognition of credible, quality assured distance learning, supporting global mobility and opportunity for graduates and providers.

This invaluable resource is periodically updated to reflect the most recent developments. I am pleased that we have now released the second edition to build on and expand the guidance in the first edition, which was published earlier this year.

UK NARIC would like to thank the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ), the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (Oman), the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA), the Education & Training Evaluation Commission (ETEC) (Saudi Arabia) and the Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC) for their feedback and assistance with this report.

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^[1] UNESCO (2019), *Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications*.

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Introduction

Online and distance learning¹ has significant potential. It can play a key role in widening access to quality education to sectors of the population who might otherwise not be able to pursue their studies of choice. It also has a lower carbon footprint than other forms of international education; and, as we are witnessing with the COVID-19 pandemic, distance learning can be a way to guarantee continuity of education to students during challenging times.

Blended or hybrid learning, in which a programme is studied partly online and partly face-to-face, has also been an approach widely adopted during the pandemic. This mode of study also offers flexibility and accessibility and has potential to be expanded in the future.

However, the growth of distance and blended learning has its own challenges: from the development of IT infrastructures and resources allowing reliable and equitable access to students; to concerns on the capacity of distance learning to provide education of the required quality and standards. This guidance focuses on the latter challenge.

The recognition of qualifications awarded through distance learning has long been a complex issue. Recognition is often essential for admission to further study (especially in public universities), for employment (particularly in public sector organisations) and, in certain countries, to obtain a visa². Whilst many countries may accept distance learning as a temporary and necessary measure to the COVID-19 pandemic, qualifications obtained through distance learning are not universally recognised.

In November 2019, UNESCO's General Conference adopted the [*Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education*](#) stating that qualifications which are "subject to **comparable quality assurance mechanisms** and which are considered part of the higher education system... will be assessed...using the same criteria as those applied to similar qualifications acquired through traditional learning modes"³.

As such, it is important to understand who is responsible for the oversight of distance learning provision. In some countries, distance learning forms an integral part of the national quality assurance system, where higher education institutions must demonstrate how they maintain standards across all modes of learning. In others, distance learning may fall outside of the national quality assurance system, whether being self-regulated or falling under the remit of a specialised distance learning accreditation agency. In all cases, recognition is

¹ Hereafter referred to collectively as 'distance learning'

² Professional recognition – for degrees in professional fields such as medicine, allied health, engineering and accounting – often lies with the relevant professional body in each country: such bodies may have further requirements in terms of modes of learning and assessment.

³ The Convention, published by designed to promote transparency, consistency and trust in international recognition and quality assurance, will build upon and consolidate regional recognition conventions for Africa, Arab States, Asia-Pacific, Europe and North America; and Latin America and the Caribbean.

typically only possible where the awarding institution is subject to external oversight by an appropriate competent authority.

However, as this report highlights, even where there is educational oversight of distance learning, this does not necessarily result in international recognition. In countries like [India](#) with its own large-scale distance learning provision, no foreign distance learning is recognised; whilst in [Oman](#), only certain international institutions are recognised for distance learning. Some recognition agencies may recognise qualifications awarded by an institution which also offers a counterpart programme through full-time face-to-face study, but not those awarded by distance-only institutions.

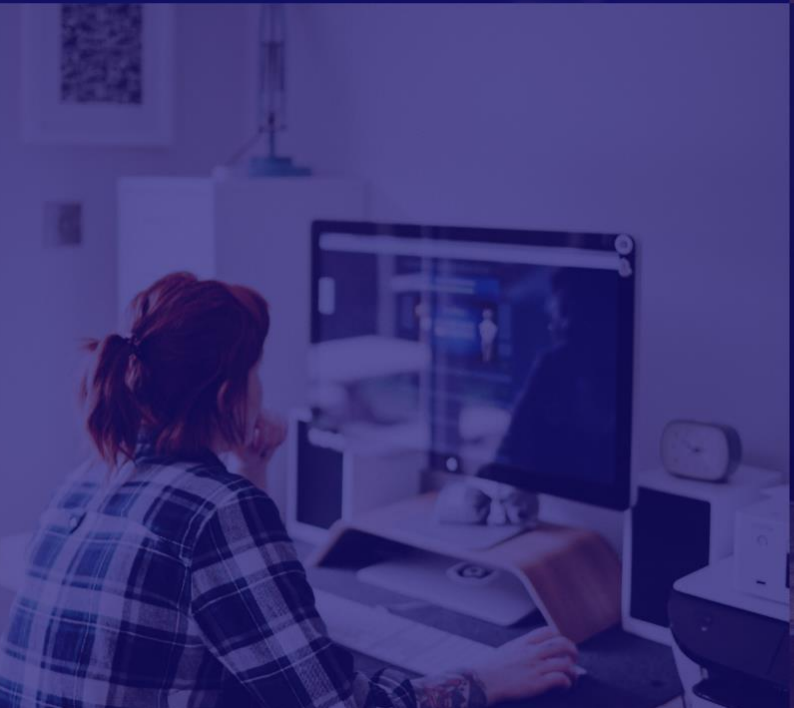
Crucially, recognition agencies look for reassurance that providers have robust systems in place capable to safeguard the integrity of academic or professional standards, and the quality of the student experience, for their distance learning provision.

To support and guide stakeholders in their understanding and recognition of international qualifications, UK NARIC holds information on the accreditation and quality assurance systems of over 200 countries and territories on its [International Comparisons](#)⁴ database, along with specific information on the recognition and regulation of transnational education in 61 countries.

This report is designed to complement the information on quality assurance and qualifications made available to UK NARIC members on the database. The first edition was published in May 2020 and looked at the recognition of distance learning in nine countries. This second edition focusses on distance and blended learning in 15 key countries highlighting, where relevant, potential barriers to academic recognition for applicants holding qualifications obtained in this way. As such, this report may be of particular relevance to higher education staff involved in admissions, recruitment or international partnerships development.

⁴ Login required.

Guidance on recognition by country



China

Qualifications awarded by overseas institutions through distance learning are not recognised.

This does not apply to students who have switched to online learning as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic to complete their degrees: their degrees will be recognised.



Relevant authorities

Regulation of higher education

- Ministry of Education (MOE) (*Jiaoyu Bu* 教育部)
- Provincial departments of education
- Academic Degree Committee of the State Council (*Guowuyuan Xuewei Weiyuanhui* 国务院学位委员会)

Regulation of distance learning

As above

Recognition of overseas qualifications

Chinese Service Centre for Scholarly Exchange (CSCSE) (*Zhongguo Liuxue Fuwu Zhongxin* (中国留学服务中心))

Policies and guidelines on qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Specific policies / guidelines for distance learning?



Specific policies / guidelines for blended learning?



Recognition of overseas qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

International qualifications obtained through distance and blended learning are not recognised.

However, the CSCSE released a [statement](#) on 3rd April 2020 explaining that a more flexible approach would be adopted for students who had switched to distance learning as a result of the suspension of face-to-face delivery due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This will not affect the recognition of their degrees in China, even if they do not meet the usual requirements for time spent studying at the overseas institution.

National distance learning provision

There are a number of Chinese higher education institutions approved to offer distance learning. The largest provider is the Open University of China (国家开放大学), which has had degree awarding powers since 2012.

Lists of distance learning providers or programmes

Approved list of national distance learning providers?



Recognised distance learning institutions are included within the list of adult education institutions published by the Ministry of Education. Some have degree-awarding powers; others only award sub-degree level (*zhuanke* 专科) qualifications.

Approved list of international distance learning providers?



There are no approved overseas distance learning providers.

Applying for recognition: the process for individuals

Graduates of overseas programmes must apply to the Chinese Service Center for Scholarly Exchange (CSCSE) (*Zhongguo Liuxue Fuwu Zhongxin* (中国留学服务中心)) for recognition of their degrees.

The CSCSE does not currently recognise international qualifications obtained via distance learning.

China is a signatory of the [Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education 2011](#).

Hong Kong

Overseas degrees studied online are recognised in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) through either one of the following routes:

- (i) **Programme recognition** under the HKQF after non-local programme accreditation by Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ); **or**
- (ii) **Assessment of individual qualification** by HKCAAVQ under the HKQF.

Online learning programmes recognised in the provider's home country and offered in Hong Kong can, after successful accreditation by HKCAAVQ, be recognised under the HKQF and listed within the Hong Kong Qualifications Register (HKQR).



Relevant authorities

Regulation of non-local higher education

- Education Bureau (Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance, Chapter 493, Laws of Hong Kong)

Programme recognition under Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF)

- Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) (Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance, Chapter 592, Laws of Hong Kong)

Assessment of non-local qualifications under Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF)

- Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) Ordinance, Chapter 1150, Laws of Hong Kong)

Policies and guidelines on qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Specific policies / guidelines for distance learning?



Specific policies / guidelines for blended learning?



Non-local qualifications studied through online delivery mode and blended learning seeking recognition under HKQF

Programmes that are offered purely via distance learning are not required to be registered with the Education Bureau under the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance. However, non-local (transnational education (TNE)) programmes, regardless of their delivery mode, offered in Hong Kong are required to be registered with the Education Bureau and accredited by HKCAAVQ before the programmes can be recognised under HKQF and listed in the [Hong Kong Qualifications Register](#) (HKQR).

Accreditation of online learning programmes

In 2018, HKCAAVQ launched an accreditation service specifically for online study programmes. An online programme is defined as one in which at least 50% of the instruction is delivered online. Both local and non-local online programmes can, after successful accreditation by HKCAAVQ, be benchmarked against the HKQF and listed in the HKQR.

Lists of distance learning providers or programmes

Approved list of local distance learning providers?



Any local distance learning programmes accredited by HKCAAVQ are listed in the [HKQR](#), but there is no separate list of accredited distance learning providers.

Approved list of overseas (non-local) distance learning providers?



Any non-local distance learning programmes registered with or exempted to be registered with the Education Bureau are listed in the Non-local Courses Registry of Education Bureau:

- [List of Registered Courses*](#)
- [List of Exempted Courses*](#)

**: The above two lists are not comprehensive as the distance learning programmes listed therein refer to those voluntarily applied to be regulated under Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance.*

Any non-local distance learning programmes accredited by HKCAAVQ are listed in the [HKQR](#), but there is no separate list of accredited distance learning providers.

Applying for recognition: the process for individuals

Individuals can apply to HKCAAVQ through the Qualifications Assessment service (click here: [iPortal](#)) for recognition of their non-local qualifications under the HKQF, in particular, whether the learning outcomes of their specific qualifications meet a particular level of qualification under the HKQF.

The assessment is neither an institutional nor a programme accreditation, and the assessment outcome pertains only to the individual applicant being assessed. It is a matter of discretion for individual employers, organisations, or educational institutions to recognise or accept the qualifications of candidates for employment, registration or study purposes.

India

Overseas degrees studied through distance or blended learning are not recognised by the Association of Indian Universities (AIU).

Qualifications of a shorter duration than counterpart programmes in India (such as accelerated degrees); those with flexible admissions requirements; or those representing a pathway programme may not be eligible for equivalence with the AIU.



Relevant authorities

Regulation of higher education

- Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD)
- University Grants Commission (UGC)

Regulation of distance learning

Distance Education Bureau (DEB) of the University Grants Commission (UGC)

Recognition of overseas qualifications

Association of Indian Universities (AIU)

Policies and guidelines on qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Specific policies / guidelines for distance learning?



Specific policies / guidelines for blended learning?



Recognition of overseas qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

As stated above, overseas degrees studied through distance or blended learning are not recognised by the AIU. All degrees issued by foreign universities need to meet a number of eligibility criteria in order for the student's qualification to be recognised by the AIU.

To be eligible for recognition, degrees should:

- **Have at least the same entry requirements as a comparable programme in India** - in the case of a Bachelor degree this would mean Standard XII, the upper secondary school qualification in India
- **Be of at least the same overall duration as the counterpart programme in India** – in the case of Bachelor degrees then this would mean at least three years for BA, BSc, and BCom degrees, and two years for a Master's degree. This means accelerated two-year Bachelor degrees offered by some UK universities are unlikely to be recognised; UK one-year Master's degrees have encountered similar issues.
- Be awarded by a university which is **recognised/accredited in its own country**
- Be delivered through **full-time on-campus study**.

There are a number of further policies relating to the eligibility requirements for the recognition of transnational education qualifications, including offshore campuses and franchise arrangements. More detail is available on [International Comparisons](#)⁵ and in the AIU [Advisory to Students](#).

National distance learning provision

Higher education through open and distance learning is regulated by the Distance Education Bureau (DEB) of the University Grants Commission (UGC). The DEB has approved over 100 universities and institutes to offer degrees and postgraduate diplomas through distance learning. These institutions must also obtain approval for their higher education programmes from the respective regulatory bodies (e.g. the UGC, the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) or the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE)).

⁵ Login required.

Lists of distance learning providers or programmes

Approved list of national distance learning providers?



The UGC maintains a list of [recognised distance learning programmes](#).

Approved list of overseas distance learning providers?



Distance learning programmes offered by overseas providers are not recognised.

Applying for recognition: the process for individuals

Individuals can apply to the AIU for recognition of overseas qualifications in India. The AIU's remit covers equivalence for qualifications from the Grade 10 secondary certificate up to PhD level, evaluating these for the purpose of admission to further study and employment.

Applicants are asked to provide all preceding qualifications as well as proof, typically in the form of a letter from the awarding school or university, confirming that the applicant was a full-time student on the campus.

Degrees in professional fields such as architecture, law, medicine, nursing and pharmacy should be evaluated by the relevant professional body.

Malaysia

Overseas degrees studied through distance learning are recognised if they are recognised in the home country.

Distance learning programmes offered by local providers must be accredited by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), but this is not required for overseas distance learning providers.



Relevant authorities

Regulation of higher education

- Ministry of Higher Education
- Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA)

Regulation of distance learning

As above

Recognition of overseas qualifications

MQA

Policies and guidelines on qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Specific policies / guidelines for distance learning?



Specific policies / guidelines for blended learning?



Recognition of overseas qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Degrees delivered through distance and blended learning are recognised in Malaysia if they are recognised by the relevant authorities in the home country of awarding institution.

National distance learning provision

The MQA has a [Code of Practice](#) for the accreditation of open and distance learning programmes. The first edition of these guidelines was published in 2013, and they were updated in 2019. A programme of study can be regarded as open and distance learning if more than 60% of the courses offered in the programme are conducted in open and distance mode and delivery meets other requirements outlined in the Code of Practice such as having regional centres, provision of support through self-instructional materials, a learning management system platform that supports synchronous and asynchronous learning and other learning support services.

Lists of distance learning providers or programmes

Approved list of national distance learning providers?



Higher education qualifications in Malaysia must be accredited by the MQA. Accredited programmes, including those delivered through distance learning, are listed in the [Malaysian Qualifications Register \(MQR\)](#). There is no separate list of approved distance learning providers.

There are several open universities in Malaysia, including Open University Malaysia, Wawasan Open University, Al-Madinah International University and Asia e-University. Many other institutions also offer distance learning programmes.

Approved list of overseas distance learning providers?



There is no list of approved overseas providers; degrees delivered through distance learning are recognised if they are recognised by the relevant authorities in the home country of the awarding institution.

Applying for recognition: the process for individuals

The MQA carries out the verification of recognition of overseas qualifications for the general purposes of entry to higher education and employment.

Mauritius

Overseas degrees studied through distance learning are recognised if they are recognised in the country of origin. Distance and blended learning higher education programmes offered in collaboration with a local partner must be accredited by the Higher Education Commission (HEC).



Relevant authorities

Regulation of higher education

Higher Education Commission (HEC)

Regulation of distance learning

- Higher Education Commission (HEC)
- Mauritius Qualifications Authority (MQA)

Recognition of overseas qualifications

- HEC (higher education)
- MQA (technical and vocational education)

Policies and guidelines on qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Specific policies / guidelines for distance learning?



Specific policies / guidelines for blended learning?



Recognition of overseas qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Degrees delivered through distance and blended learning are recognised in Mauritius if they are recognised by the relevant authorities in the home country of awarding institution.

National distance learning provision

A [Distance Education Policy](#) was published in 2013 by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) (predecessor of the HEC). 'Distance education' is used as an umbrella term to encompass distance learning, e-learning, flexible learning and open and distance learning (ODL).

The Open University of Mauritius is the largest distance learning provider. It was established by the [Open University of Mauritius Act 2010](#) as the national focal point for open and distance learning. Other institutions also offer distance education.

The MQA also sets out standards and guidelines for distance learning in the [Quality Assurance Framework for the TVET Sector in Mauritius](#).

Lists of distance learning providers or programmes

Approved list of national distance learning providers?



All programmes delivered in Mauritius must be accredited by the HEC or MQA. Accredited programmes are listed on the HEC and MQA websites. There is no separate list of accredited distance learning providers.

Approved list of overseas distance learning providers?



There is no list of approved overseas providers.

Applying for recognition: the process for individuals

Individuals can apply for recognition and / or equivalence of international qualifications. The HEC is responsible for recognition and equivalence of overseas qualifications at post-secondary level. The MQA recognises and evaluates international vocational and technical qualifications.

Mauritius is a signatory country of the [Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States 2014](#).

Nigeria

UK NARIC is not aware of any recognition issues in regard to overseas degrees awarded through distance learning.

Distance learning is well established in Nigeria, but there is insufficient local provision to meet demand.



Relevant authorities

Regulation of higher education

National Universities Commission (NUC)

Regulation of distance learning

NUC

Recognition of overseas qualifications

Ministry of Education

Policies and guidelines on qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Specific policies / guidelines for distance learning?



Specific policies / guidelines for blended learning?



Recognition of overseas qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

There are no published policies on the recognition of overseas qualifications studied through distance learning. Recognition of international qualifications falls under the Ministry of Education; however, the evaluation criteria are not currently published.

National distance learning provision

Approval of distance learning falls under the NUC as part of its wider remit as the statutory body responsible for ensuring the quality of all academic programmes offered in Nigerian universities. NUC approval must be achieved at both the institutional and programme level.

There is a dedicated unit within the NUC – the Directorate of Open and Distance Education – focussed on distance learning and transnational education provision. Its [Guidelines for Open and Distance Learning in Nigerian Universities](#) sets out a number of eligibility criteria Nigerian universities must meet to offer degree programmes through distance learning. Included within this is the requirement that applicants must meet the minimum national requirements for admission. For programme approval, the individual programme must score at least 70% across core areas of pedagogy/learning resources; academic learner support, advice and guidance; evaluation and assessment; and staffing.

Lists of distance learning providers or programmes

Approved list of national distance learning providers?



The NUC maintains a list of [approved distance learning providers](#). It is also important to check the list of programmes which have been approved at each centre: this can be found on the same webpage as the list of providers.

Approved list of overseas distance learning providers?



There is no particular list of approved overseas distance learning providers.

Applying for recognition: the process for individuals

Individuals can apply for evaluation through the [Evaluation and Accreditation Division](#) of the Ministry of Education, which provides statements for the purposes of employment or admission to further study. Criteria for recognition are not published; however, the Ministry of Education links to the [International Handbook of Universities](#) for a list of international higher education institutions.

Nigeria is a signatory country of the [Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States 2014](#).

Oman

Distance learning is only recognised for certain MA and PhD programmes, and only when awarded by selected UK, Australian, New Zealand and US institutions.

Students wishing to study at non-Omani institutions should seek written approval from the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation prior to enrolment. Only 49 UK universities currently appear on the list of recommended institutes for distance learning.



Relevant authorities

Regulation of higher education

Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA)

Regulation of distance learning

OAAA

Recognition of overseas qualifications

Ministry of Higher Education – Department of Qualifications and Recognition

Policies and guidelines on qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Specific policies / guidelines for distance learning?



Specific policies / guidelines for blended learning?



Recognition of overseas qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Overseas higher education programmes offered purely via distance learning are only recognised when studied at an institution listed by the Ministry. Undergraduate programmes by distance learning are not recognised. For students looking to continue their undergraduate or postgraduate studies at an overseas institution, the Ministry states that Diploma, Bachelor and Master's degree programmes must be studied full time. Master's and Doctoral programmes may be recognised when awarded by an institution that appears on the Ministry's list of recommended e-learning institutions, although certain subjects – those requiring practical skills such as medicine, allied health or engineering – will not be recognised.

For blended learning programmes which require students to attend workshops, lectures or examinations in-person, students must attend these at the main campus of the university, not at a partner or third-party institution.

National distance learning provision

The OAAA undertakes institutional and programme accreditation in Oman. The scope of this accreditation encompasses programmes through all modes of learning, including distance learning. Institutions are expected to ensure that course materials are designed appropriately and accompanied by adequate student support. Completion rates in courses delivered by distance education should also be monitored by the institution.

Lists of distance learning providers or programmes

Approved list of national distance learning providers?



There is no distinct list of national distance learning providers. In addition to the Arab Open University, other universities may offer programmes accredited by the OAAA.

Approved list of overseas distance learning providers?



The Ministry of Higher Education maintains lists of recommended overseas universities, by country; however, the only countries with recommended institutions for distance learning are the UK, Australia, New Zealand and the USA. Currently, **only 49 UK universities** appear on the list.

Applying for recognition: the process for individuals

Omanis or non-Omanis who hold overseas qualifications and wish to work in the Sultanate should apply to the [Department of Qualifications Equivalency and Recognition](#) (DQER) within the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation for equivalency of their qualifications. The application is online via the website of the ministry.

Students will have to be able to demonstrate campus-based study through a copy of their passport showing entry and exit stamps for the country of award.

For students who obtained their qualification based on e-learning, the DQER checks the location of the examinations as they must be taken on the university campus or online via the virtual environment of the university. Arrangements in which third parties in partnership with universities provide additional locations for exams, workshops or classes are prohibited in Oman. The communication must be between students and the university directly and any type of attendance must be on-campus.

As stated above, local students are additionally required to seek approval before enrolment, as it required for their qualifications to be recognised after graduation.

Oman is a signatory country of the [Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab States 1978](#).

Pakistan

Degrees awarded by overseas distance learning providers may be recognised providing they meet three key criteria set out by the Higher Education Commission (HEC)

Degrees issued by universities that *only* deliver online are not eligible for recognition. The requirement for distance learning programmes to be “indistinguishable” from campus-based programmes may also mean that individual degrees may not be recognised.



Relevant authorities

Regulation of higher education
Higher Education Commission (HEC)

Regulation of distance learning
HEC

Recognition of overseas qualifications
HEC

Policies and guidelines on qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Specific policies / guidelines for distance learning?



Specific policies / guidelines for blended learning?



Recognition of overseas qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

The HEC [Policy on Distance / Virtual / On-line Education](#) sets out three key factors for the recognition of distance learning offered by foreign universities, specifically that:

- The institution should be accredited/chartered by a body recognised by the HEC and
- Have both on-campus and distance education programmes
- Degrees granted by the institution through on-campus and distance learning modes should be “indistinguishable”.

National distance learning provision

Guidelines on distance education in the public domain is limited: nonetheless, the scope of the [Institutional Performance Evaluations](#) conducted by the HEC encompasses all modes of learning: it may place restrictions on or close any distance learning centres identified as not meeting performance standards. The HEC has also put out [specific guidelines for quality programmes](#) under Covid-19.

Lists of distance learning providers or programmes

Approved list of national distance learning providers?



There is no standalone list of national distance learning providers. The HEC maintains a [list](#) of all recognised institutions able to award degrees and may place restrictions on some universities in terms of the distance education centres which are able to operate.

Approved list of overseas distance learning providers?



There is no standalone list of approved overseas distance learning providers. The HEC maintains a [list](#) of foreign institutions allowed to provide collaborative degree programmes in Pakistan.

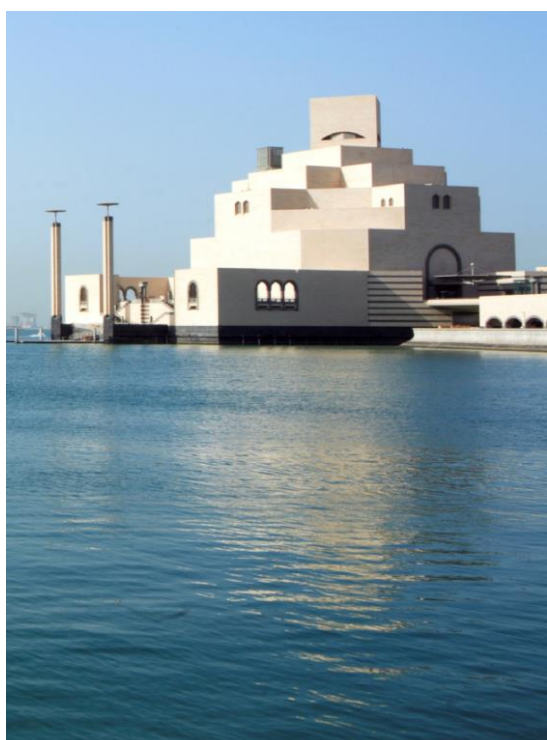
Applying for recognition: the process for individuals

Individuals seeking recognition of overseas degrees should [apply for equivalence](#) with the HEC. Whilst the *Policy on Distance / Virtual / On-line Education* demonstrates that degrees should be recognised where the three criteria have been fulfilled, the [SOPs for Foreign Degree Equivalence](#) state that the individual is expected to be able to present a copy of their passport indicating “visa, entry and exit in respective country” for the duration of their studies.

Qatar

Overseas degrees studied via distance learning are generally only recognised when awarded by selected universities in Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the USA.

Distance learning programmes in applied subjects, such as engineering, medical fields and sciences, and qualifications from institutions which *only* offer distance learning are not recognised.



Relevant authorities

Regulation of higher education

Ministry of Education and Higher Education

Regulation of distance learning

As above

Recognition of overseas qualifications

Ministry of Education and Higher Education

Policies and guidelines on qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Specific policies / guidelines for distance learning?



Specific policies / guidelines for blended learning?



Recognition of overseas qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

According to [Cabinet Resolution No. 3 of 2017](#) on the university degree equivalency system, distance learning qualifications are generally only considered for recognition if certain criteria are met. Awarding institutions must meet the specified requirements for accreditation and be ranked among the top 100 universities in the USA, top 50 in the UK, top 20 in Australia or top 5 in New Zealand. Qualifications awarded by highly ranked institutions in other countries may also be considered for recognition on a case-by-case basis. The institution must also offer programmes delivered on campus, alongside distance learning programmes.

Distance learning qualifications in applied fields, such as engineering, medical fields and sciences, are not recognised.

The definition of distance learning encompasses the following: e-learning, blended learning, flexible (including self-paced and self-directed) learning and open learning. Degrees for which up to 25% of the credits have been acquired through distance learning may be recognised in the same way as traditional programmes, so do not need to meet the additional requirements for distance learning qualifications.

Students must also gain prior approval from the Ministry before enrolment.

National distance learning provision

[The Licensing and Accreditation Standards for Higher Education Institutions in Qatar, 2nd edition \(2018\)](#) do not include any specific guidelines for distance learning.

Recognised distance learning providers

Approved list of national distance learning providers?



There is no approved list of Qatari distance learning providers.

Approved list of overseas distance learning providers?



There is no list of approved overseas providers. However, [Cabinet Resolution No. 3 of 2017](#) states that universities ranked in the top 100 in the USA, top 50 in the UK, top 20 in Australia and top 5 in New Zealand may be approved for distance learning. Top 5 universities from other countries may also be considered for approval.

Applying for recognition: the process for individuals

Individuals can apply to the Ministry of Education and Higher Education for recognition of overseas degrees and to obtain an equivalency certificate. Students are also able to apply for prior approval before studying overseas to ensure that their degree will be recognised.

Qatar is a signatory country of the [Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab States 1978](#).

Saudi Arabia

Overseas degrees studied through distance learning are not recognised.

Only qualifications that are studied on a full-time basis and delivered on-campus are recognised.



Relevant authorities

Regulation of higher education

- Ministry of Education
- National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA), part of the Education & Training Evaluation Commission (ETEC)

Regulation of distance learning

As above

Recognition of overseas qualifications

Ministry of Education

Policies and guidelines on qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Specific policies / guidelines for distance learning?



Specific policies / guidelines for blended learning?



Recognition of overseas qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Currently, degrees delivered through distance or blended learning are not recognised in Saudi Arabia. Only degree programmes that are studied full-time and on-campus are eligible for recognition. However, it is expected that it will be officially announced that the governance framework for quality assurance of e-learning and distance education within the Kingdom, in addition to a set of other regulations, will enable the recognition of overseas degrees studied through distance learning either provided abroad or through international institutions hosted in KSA.

National distance learning provision

The Saudi Electronic University offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes through blended learning (around two thirds online and one third face-to-face delivery). Recently, a number of selected universities have begun to pilot distance education degrees.

Saudi Arabia has set an integrated governance framework for quality assurance of e-learning and distance education within the Kingdom, including licensing, provisional accreditation and academic accreditation. While the National eLearning Center is responsible for licensing institutions and programs, the Education & Training Evaluation Commission (ETEC) is responsible for the provisional and definitive academic accreditation of institutions and programs offering e-learning and distance education.

The same policies and guidelines for distance learning are applied to the distance learning modules within blended learning programmes, while the traditional policies, guidelines and quality assurance standards are applied to other parts of the programmes.

Lists of distance learning providers or programmes

Approved list of national distance learning providers?



[A list of recognised universities](#) is available on the Ministry of Education website. Distance learning institutions are included, but not listed separately.

Currently, only the Saudi Electronic University is licensed to offer accredited e-learning, while other institutions will gradually also be allowed to, according to an executive plan for the implementation of the quality governance framework. However, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, universities have shifted to provide learning via the distance mode using the available technologies and learning management systems.

Approved list of overseas distance learning providers?



Distance learning programmes offered by overseas providers are not recognised.

Applying for recognition: the process for individuals

Individuals can apply to the Ministry of Education for recognition and evaluation of overseas qualifications. Qualifications studied through distance and blended learning are not eligible for recognition.

Saudi Arabia is a signatory country of the [*Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab States 1978.*](#)

Singapore

There is no central authority in Singapore that assesses or grants recognition to degrees awarded by overseas universities, whether studied via distance learning or face-to-face. Decisions about qualifications are made at the discretion of the employer or admitting institution.

Recognition of degrees in professional subjects, such as accountancy, engineering, law and medicine, is the responsibility of the relevant professional body.



Relevant authorities

Regulation of higher education

Ministry of Education (publicly funded higher education only)

Regulation of distance learning

As above

Recognition of overseas qualifications

N/A

Policies and guidelines on qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Specific policies / guidelines for distance learning?



Specific policies / guidelines for blended learning?



Recognition of overseas qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

As the Ministry of Education does not grant recognition to private or overseas institutions or their qualifications, there are no national policies or guidelines relating to the recognition of distance and blended learning.

Recognition of distance learning for professional registration

Qualifications accepted for professional registration are determined by professional bodies, such as the Singapore Medical Association and the Board of Professional Engineers. These bodies maintain lists of approved degrees from overseas universities. Policies and guidelines on qualifications studied by distance learning vary. For example, the [Board of Professional Engineers](#) stipulates that at least 50% of approved engineering degrees must have been studied on-campus. Degrees in accountancy studied by distance learning from [recognised overseas institutions](#) are acceptable for membership of the [Institute of Singapore Chartered Accountants](#) and eligible for enrolment on [Singapore Accountancy Commission](#) Chartered Accountant qualification. The [Singapore Medical Association list of recognised degree programmes](#) does not include any distance learning qualifications.

Recognised distance learning providers

Approved list of national distance learning providers?



Under the Private Education Act, private providers must register with the [Committee for Private Education \(CPE\)](#). The [list of approved programmes](#) includes programmes offered by distance learning.

Approved list of overseas distance learning providers?



The [CPE list of approved programmes](#) also includes distance learning programmes offered by overseas providers in Singapore, often through a local partner.

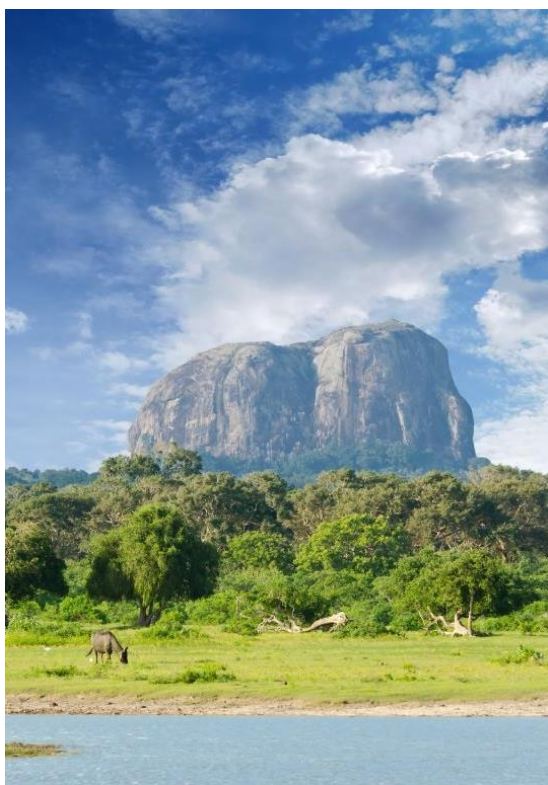
Applying for recognition: the process for individuals

There is no central authority which recognises overseas qualifications; decisions are made by employers and admitting institutions.

Sri Lanka

UK NARIC is not aware of any recognition issues in Sri Lanka relating to overseas degrees awarded through distance learning.

Transnational education has seen considerable growth in Sri Lanka at undergraduate level, with institutions from Australia and the UK the main providers.



Relevant authorities

Regulation of higher education

University Grants Commission (UGC) – Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council

Regulation of distance learning

UGC

Recognition of overseas qualifications

UGC

Policies and guidelines on qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Specific policies / guidelines for distance learning?



Specific policies / guidelines for blended learning?



Recognition of overseas qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

There are no specific policies in place for the recognition of overseas distance or blended learning qualifications.

National distance learning provision

In 2019, the UGC published the [Manual for Review of Undergraduate Study Programmes of Sri Lankan Distance Higher Education Institutions](#). This sets out criteria, best practices and standards for quality assessment in distance learning, along with guidelines for institutions. It replaced an earlier toolkit published under the Distance Education Modernization Project in 2009.

Lists of distance learning providers or programmes

Approved list of national distance learning providers?



There is no specific list of providers recognised for the purposes of distance learning: the UGC maintains a list of recognised universities and higher education institutions and programmes. In addition to the Open University of Sri Lanka, other universities may offer programmes through their Centers of Distance and Continuing Education.

Approved list of overseas distance learning providers?



There is no list specifically relating to distance learning: the University Grants Commission recognises higher education institutions listed in either the [Commonwealth Universities Yearbook](#) or the [International Handbook of Universities](#).

Applying for recognition: the process for individuals

Individuals need to apply for a Certificate of Recognition from the [University Grants Commission](#).

Trinidad and Tobago

Holders of recognised overseas degrees, including those delivered through distance learning, can obtain a Statement on Recognition to use for employment or further study in Trinidad and Tobago.

International distance learning providers delivering programmes with local partners can apply for recognition from the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago (ACTT).



Relevant authorities

Regulation of higher education

- Ministry of Education
- Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago (ACTT)

Regulation of distance learning

As above

Recognition of overseas qualifications

ACTT

Policies and guidelines on qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Specific policies / guidelines for distance learning?



Specific policies / guidelines for blended learning?



Recognition of overseas qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

There are no specific criteria for the recognition of overseas qualifications studied by distance or blended learning. These qualifications are eligible for recognition in Trinidad and Tobago if they are recognised in the home country.

National distance learning provision

The Distance Learning Secretariat under the Ministry of Education is responsible for the development and implementation of strategies related to distance learning, including the development of national standards.

Recognised distance learning providers

Approved list of national distance learning providers?



[A list of accredited distance learning providers](#) is available on the Trinidad and Tobago government website. [The ACTT website](#) also provides lists of accredited and registered institutions and local awarding bodies; distance learning providers are included, but not listed separately.

Government Assistance with Tuition Expenses (GATE) is available for blended learning programmes offered by local institutions, but not for 100% distance learning programmes.

Approved list of overseas distance learning providers?



The ACTT has a [list of recognised foreign awarding bodies and institutions](#), which have partnerships with local institutions. Some of these offer distance learning programmes supported by local study centres, but there is no separate list of distance education providers.

Applying for recognition: the process for individuals

Individuals can apply for a Statement on Recognition or an Equivalence Assessment for overseas qualifications from the ACTT.

United Arab Emirates

Overseas degrees studied through distance learning are recognised if they meet certain criteria.

Students are recommended to apply to the Ministry of Education prior to enrolling on an overseas degree programme to ensure that the programme is recognised and they will be granted equivalency upon completion. Distance learning programmes in scientific and applied fields may not be recognised.



Relevant authorities

Regulation of higher education

- Ministry of Education
- Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA)

Regulation of distance learning

As above

Recognition of overseas qualifications

Ministry of Education

Policies and guidelines on qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Specific policies / guidelines for distance learning?



Specific policies / guidelines for blended learning?



Recognition of overseas qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

The Ministry of Education has specific guidelines on the recognition of overseas distance learning qualifications. The minimum period of study and number of credits required for completion must be no less than those required for the corresponding programme delivered face-to-face.

Distance learning programmes in scientific fields which generally require practical and laboratory work are not recognised.

National distance learning provision

The Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) has guidelines for courses taught through e-learning in its [Standards for Institutional Licensure and Program Accreditation](#). Programmes of study must be indicated as 'online' on student transcripts if 50% or more of the credits can be obtained from online courses.

Recognised distance learning providers

Approved list of national distance learning providers?



[A list of accredited programmes](#), including those offered by distance learning, is available on the CAA website.

Approved list of overseas distance learning providers?



The Ministry of Education does not publish a list of approved overseas distance learning providers.

Applying for recognition: the process for individuals

Individuals can apply to the Ministry of Education for recognition of overseas qualifications and to be issued with an equivalency to local qualifications.

The Ministry of Education also recommends that students submit an application prior to enrolling on an overseas degree programme to ensure that the programme is recognised and that they will be issued with an equivalency upon completion of their studies.

The UAE is a signatory country of the [Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab States 1978](#).

United States of America

Degrees earned outside of the United States through distance learning are widely recognised by higher education institutions and employers.

The US Department of Education does not implement a process recognition or evaluation of international qualifications.



Relevant authorities

Oversight of higher education quality

- US Department of Education (USDE)
- Council for Higher Education (CHEA)

Quality assurance for distance learning

- Accreditation agencies recognised by the USDE or CHEA

Recognition of overseas qualifications

Educational institutions, employers, state-level licensing agencies, federal immigration authorities.

Policies and guidelines on qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Specific policies / guidelines for distance learning?



Specific policies / guidelines for blended learning?



Recognition of international qualifications earned through distance learning

A centralized authority responsible for the recognition of international qualifications does not exist in the United States. The system of review for academic credentials earned outside of the United States is carried out on an individualised basis by educational institutions, employers, state-level licensing agencies for employment in regulated professions and federal immigration authorities for visa purposes.

There are many independent, private, non-governmental organizations that provide credential evaluation services for individuals and businesses in the United States. These services are not regulated by the U.S. Department of Education or any other regulatory body within the United States. In general, credential evaluation services are available for all academic degrees that are recognised in the country of origin, including those studied via distance learning.

National distance learning provision

Although higher education in the United States operates in a highly decentralized and autonomous manner, the Office of Postsecondary Education within the U.S. Department of Education maintains a definition of distance education often referred to as the federal definition of distance education.⁶ Effective July 1, 2021, accredited institutions in the United States must adhere to this definition in order for their distance education programs to qualify for federally funded student aid programs.

Distance Education

(1) Education that uses one or more of the technologies listed in paragraphs (2)(i) through (iv) of this definition to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor or instructors and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor or instructors, either synchronously or asynchronously.

(2) The technologies that may be used to offer distance education include:

- (i) The internet;*
- (ii) One-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices;*
- (iii) Audio conference; or*
- (iv) Other media used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in paragraph (2)(i) through (iii) of this definition.*

(3) For purposes of this definition, an instructor is an individual responsible for delivering course content and who meets the qualifications for instruction established by an institution's accrediting agency.

⁶ 34 CFR Parts 600, 602, and 668; RIN 1840-AD38 at <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/reg/hearulemaking/2018/distanceandinnovationunofficialreg.pdf>

(4) For purposes of this definition, substantive interaction is engaging students in teaching, learning, and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion, and also includes at least two of the following:

- (i) Providing direct instruction;
- (ii) Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework;
- (iii) Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency;
- (iv) Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency;
- or
- (v) Other instructional activities approved by the institution's or program's accrediting agency.

(5) An institution ensures regular interaction between a student and an instructor or instructors by, prior to the student's completion of a course or competency--

- (i) Providing the opportunity for substantive interactions with the student on a predictable and regular basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course or competency; and
- (ii) Monitoring the student's academic engagement and success and ensuring that an instructor is responsible for promptly and proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the student when needed on the basis of such monitoring, or upon request by the student.

In the United States, institutional accrediting agencies primarily review quality and accountability for distance education programs. Each accrediting agency sets its own standards for distance education quality in areas that include curricula, faculty qualifications, facilities, administrative capacity, student services, and recruitment/admissions.

Lists of distance learning providers or programmes

Approved list of national distance learning providers?



The U.S. Department of Education's [Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs \(DAPIP\)](#) provides a list of institutions accredited by accrediting agencies that are recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

Accrediting agencies gain approval status with the U.S. Department of Education called "recognition." Recognition is granted when an accrediting agency has met all federal requirements and demonstrates that it has procedures and standards in place for serving as reliable authority regarding the quality of education offered by the institutions or programs it accredits.

Accrediting agencies set their own quality standards and may or may not accredit distance learning programs. The US Department of Education has a [list of accrediting agencies recognised for distance education](#) and includes the institutions approved for distance education in the Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs.

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) also provides a [list of recognized accrediting bodies](#) and a [directory of approved institutions and programs](#). Recognition by CHEA affirms that the standards and processes of the accrediting body fulfil the academic quality, improvement and accountability standards that CHEA has established. CHEA indicates its recognition of distance education quality assurance within the CHEA Recognized Scope of Accreditation that is provided for each accrediting organisation recognised by CHEA. The directory of approved institutions and programs includes institutions and programs approved to offer distance education.

Approved list of international distance learning providers?



The United States Government does not maintain a list of approved distance learning institutions and providers that operate outside of the United States.

Applying for recognition: the process for individuals

Decisions about recognising or accepting credentials earned outside of the United States are made on an individual basis by employers, institution admissions offices, professional licensing bodies and immigration authorities. There is no national framework for this process.

Individuals may be required to present a credential evaluation report that is performed by a third-party credential evaluation service. It is important to request clarification about this requirement when seeking recognition of a degree credential. Credential evaluation services are offered by many organisations in the United States.

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