

THE RECOGNITION OF NON-COUNTRY SPECIFIC AWARDS

INTRODUCTION

What is a non-country specific award?

For the purpose of this guidance, the definition of a non-country specific award is: “a qualification¹ that does not form part of any one education system and is consequently outside of the remit of any national educational regulatory body”.

Non-country specific awards are distinct from qualifications designed for and delivered in one country only, but which are not accredited as part of that country’s educational framework, or which are part of a national system but where the programme is delivered in another country.²

A non-country specific award may fall within one (or more) of several categories.

Types of non-country specific awards

1. **Regional:** these qualifications are issued by a non-country specific body which operates across a specific regional area e.g. the West African Examinations Council, Caribbean Examinations Council
2. **Academic:** these qualifications are issued in multiple countries across the globe and are not specific to a single country e.g. the International Baccalaureate. Some qualifications within this category may also be referred to as “international access awards” for access to higher education studies.
3. **Professional/Sectoral:** these qualifications in professional or sectoral/technical fields are not specific to a single national education system and are issued by a non-country specific body e.g. Microsoft or Montessori qualifications, IMO Seafarers Training
4. **Language proficiency:** these qualifications are often short-term, or language proficiency tests that follow their own framework of language proficiency and are not linked to the formal national education systems e.g. IELTS
5. **Religious:** whilst certain religious study programmes are formally part of a national qualifications framework, such as the Holy See qualifications, other qualifications may be non-country specific and not officially part of national education systems
6. **International organisations:** these are qualifications issued by supra-national or international bodies e.g. the United Nations University, UNRWA, World Maritime University

RECOMMENDATIONS

Assessment of qualifications

Credential evaluators should assess qualifications, complying with the provisions of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and Recommendation on procedures and criteria for the assessment of foreign qualifications.

¹ For the definitions of terms, including ‘qualification’ and ‘accreditation’, please see the EAR Manual Glossary, <http://ear.enic-naric.net/emanual/glossary/glossary.aspx>

² For information on these scenarios, please see EAR Manual Chapters 14 and 16 on TNE and Non-recognised but legitimate institutions, <http://ear.enic-naric.net/emanual/Chapter%2014/default.aspx> and <http://ear.enic-naric.net/emanual/Chapter%2016/default.aspx#>

Competent recognition authorities should refuse to recognise qualifications or credits from diploma mill providers and institutions accredited by bogus accrediting agencies, known as “Accreditation Mills”.

When assessing non-country specific qualifications, it is recommended to check:

The status (accreditation) of the body responsible for the non-country specific qualifications.

This is usually of primary importance to determining whether recognition can be offered. By their nature, non-country specific awards are not qualifications within one education system and therefore will typically be outside the remit of national bodies to recognise or accredit; the body responsible for the qualification may be unable to proceed with the normal procedures of national recognition and accreditation on this basis. It is therefore recommended to check firstly whether national recognition and accreditation were possible for the qualification (and were, despite availability, not sought) or whether, conversely, legal or administrative barriers were present to gaining recognition or accreditation.

Additionally, not all legitimate external accreditation is national and it may be possible to determine whether non-country specific accreditation, or multi-country accreditation, has been obtained.

- Criteria or considerations which may assist in determining whether to proceed with an assessment may include:
 - The qualification is issued by a body which has gained accreditation through a known accreditation agency;
 - The qualification is issued by a body which has not obtained recognition or accreditation through a known national body but was unable to do so due to legal or administrative obstacles;
 - The body has supra-national or regional recognition or accreditation;
 - None of the above;

If the body issuing the non-country specific qualification has a base in an EHEA country, further information on the nature of the qualification may be sought from that country’s ENIC-NARIC. This may assist in determining whether the issuing body has the opportunity to become accredited within a national system, or whether it is deemed to sit outside that system.

If the qualification in question was delivered by an issuing body which is recognised for the purpose of providing country-specific awards, but which also issues non-country specific awards that are not accorded national recognition due to administrative obstacles, the credential evaluator should take into consideration the national operations of the issuing body when assessing the non-country specific awards being issued.

The quality assurance arrangements of the awarding institution.

Where no formal accreditation has been obtained, evidence of legitimate external quality assurance methods may enable centres to offer recognition in some form.

- Criteria or considerations which may assist include:
 - Evidence of only internal quality assurance measures;
 - Evidence of internal and external quality assurance provided by a recognized quality assurance body;
 - Evidence of internal and external quality assurance by specialized quality assurance bodies

If sufficient evidence of formal accreditation and quality assurance is present, it may be possible to proceed with full recognition. Other considerations may be taken into account to determine whether partial or nationally-oriented statements of recognition could be offered.

National considerations.

The general recognition of the award by providers of education, employers, or government bodies in the country in which the ENIC-NARIC centre is located may indicate to a centre whether partial or local recognition might be considered.

National considerations may include:

- e.g. do most or all national educational institutions accept the award?
- Do any government bodies, particularly sectoral bodies, give formal acceptance to the award for progressing to (for example) licenced status in a profession?
- Does it have status through national legislation³ (e.g. European Baccalaureate, International Baccalaureate)?;
- Is it widely accepted by educators (e.g. credit transfer)?;
- Is it widely accepted by employers?;
- Or, is there no evidence of being accepted?

Links to any qualifications frameworks or quality standards.

In particular, how these links have been determined is of key importance. If the body has self-referenced, absent any external input, this may not be of relevance to the recognition decision. If a robust referencing process has been following, the centre may wish to consider:

- Links to both qualification frameworks and quality standards;
- Links to a qualification framework;
- Links to quality standards;
- No links to frameworks or quality standards.

Learning outcomes

- Have clear and comparable learning outcomes outlined;
- No learning outcomes identified.

If recognition can be offered, the credential evaluator should also consider the general characteristics necessary for an evaluation including:

³ Certain countries enshrine the recognition of specific qualifications in national law

- the content, duration, link to specific occupational roles and other aspects related to the comparison of the award

Possible outcomes

The outcomes or forms of recognition offered by centres vary, and centres should proceed based on their own processes and systems; however, some possible outcomes to the evaluation may include:

Full recognition

If the award is deemed to meet the necessary requirements of the centre's processes, the centre can offer full recognition.

Partial or conditional recognition

The centre can offer partial, alternative or conditional recognition in cases where the centre applies this option within its processes.

For example, if a qualification does not meet the full criteria, partial credit for the qualification can be offered.⁴

Advisory statement

The centre can elect not to formally recognise the qualification or present a comparable level, but instead present contextual information on the nature of the qualification in question.

Non-recognition

If the qualification is deemed not to meet the necessary requirements of the centre's processes, the centre can reject recognition (and recommend that the applicant present the qualification directly to institutions or employers for consideration, where applicable within the form of a centre's decisions).

Examples

Full recognition:

- Global academic awards used for higher education access (European Baccalaureate, International Baccalaureate, International Cambridge Examinations), based on the LRC recommendations on international access qualifications.

Consider full recognition:

- Qualifications offered by international inter-governmental institutions (e.g. the UN awards)
- Qualifications offered by sectoral (specialised) institutions outside of the formal system of education

Advisory Statement or Partial Recognition:

- Qualifications which cannot be fully recognized.
- Possible to provide recommendations and contextual information after going through the "Criteria for Recognition" as listed above;
- Providing recommendations on how to articulate the gained skills and knowledge by way of RPL or competence assessment or similar pathways into the national system of education.

⁴ See EAR Manual Chapter 11 on Alternative Recognition, <http://ear.enic-naric.net/emanual/Chapter%2011/default.aspx>

Example 1 – qualification awarded by a well-recognised provider of secondary education awards

An applicant is seeking access to a first-cycle university degree. He holds an International Baccalaureate.

The credential evaluator should therefore assess the IB award in line with the centre's approach to international higher education access awards, taking into account the LRC recommendations. Therefore full recognition is recommended.

Example 2 – qualification awarded by a sectoral body

The competent recognition authority has received a training certificate in beauty therapy from a non-country specific sectoral qualifications awarding body.

The recognition authority reviews the accreditation status of the training body, but it does not have any recognised accreditation and the information about quality assurance for the award is lacking. Therefore the recognition authority decides it is unable to offer recognition.

Example 3 – qualification awarded by a non-state organisation

The applicant holds a Bachelor degree from a non-state international body.

The recognition authority reviews the accreditation status and general recognition of the education arm of the international body. While not accredited by a national body, the international body has global recognition and provides robust quality assurance of its programmes, as well as submitting to external reviews. The content, duration and other factors considered in assessing qualifications are reviewed. No substantial differences are found, and therefore the body issues full or partial recognition in accordance with its own procedures.

SOURCES AND REFERENCES

[EAR MANUAL](#)

[TNE Code of Good Practice](#)

[OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education](#)

Non-Country Specific Award Evaluation Profile

Qualification Title:

Body issuing the qualification:

Assessment information:

Accreditation / Recognition (status of the body responsible for the qualification):

Quality assurance arrangements:

National considerations:

Level of Learning Outcomes / Links to Qualification Frameworks:

Additional information (e.g. information from other NARICs):

Proposed outcome:

(e.g. full recognition / partial / non-recognition / advisory statement)

If recognition is possible, examine additional criteria for determining a comparison (e.g. structure, entry requirements, duration etc.) in accordance with internal institutional procedures.

References / sources of information:

Non-Country Specific Award Evaluation Profile *EXAMPLE*

Qualification Title: Master of Arts in Gender and Peace Building

Body issuing the qualification: University for Peace (*Universidad para la Paz*)

Assessment information:

Accreditation / Recognition (status of the body responsible for the qualification):

University for Peace (*Universidad para la Paz*) is a United Nations mandated institution located in Costa Rica.

Quality assurance arrangements: Some of its Master's programmes have been accredited by the SINAES (*El Sistema Nacional de Acreditación de la Educación Superior*) since 2014. However, it is not mandatory for degree programmes at recognised Costa Rican universities to have SINAES accreditation. It is understood that degree programmes offered at private universities must have their programmes registered with CONESUP (*Consejo Nacional de Educación Superior de Universidades Privadas*).

National considerations: The University for Peace is neither a public nor a private Costa Rican university as it is administered directly from the UN.

Level of Learning Outcomes / Links to Qualification Frameworks: Unclear. However, the admission page for the MA states that the applicant requires a Bachelor 'or equivalent'. This suggests that it should be assessed at least to the standard of Bachelor degrees in the region.

Requires the submission of a 'final graduation project' rather than a dissertation/thesis.

Additional information (e.g. information from other NARICs): None at this time.

Proposed outcome:

Possible partial recognition. However, the University of Peace is not a normal university and there is a lack of knowledge of the standard of education offered to be confident of providing assessment.

References / sources of information:

<https://www.upeace.org/academic/accreditation>

Non-Country Specific Award Evaluation Profile **EXAMPLE**

Qualification Title: Master of Science in Maritime Affairs

Body issuing the qualification: World Maritime University

Assessment information:

Accreditation / Recognition (status of the body responsible for the qualification):

The World Maritime University (WMU) in Malmö, Sweden is a postgraduate maritime university founded by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), a specialized agency of the United Nations. Established by an IMO Assembly Resolution in 1983, the aim of WMU is to further enhance the objectives and goals of IMO and IMO member states around the world through education, research, and capacity building to ensure safe, secure, and efficient shipping on clean oceans. WMU is an organization by and for the international maritime community.

Quality assurance arrangements:

Accreditation of the MSc Degree:

Internal quality assurance prior to 2014. From 2014 the MSc in Maritime Affairs is accredited by ZEVA (Zentrale Evaluations- und Akkreditierungsagentur Hannover), the Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency Hanover, Germany.

National considerations:

Would not be accepted for further study, but possibly could be accepted by employers. It may be also accepted for certain sectoral purposes globally.

Level of Learning Outcomes / Links to Qualification Frameworks:

None identified. After accreditation it has been benchmarked to specific standards of the master level. The WMU states that it uses ECTS, but again, no clear formulation of learning outcomes have been found in publically available information.

Additional information (e.g. information from other NARICs):

Centre A: Master degree from WMU was assessed at NQF Master degree level.

Centre B: One application, recognition denied because of non-country issue and lack of recognised quality assurance, which are considered substantial differences.

Centre C: No formal assessment; an advisory letter stating that “WMU is an international university established by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), an agency that belongs to the United Nations (UN). WMU is a legitimate higher education establishment but does not belong to any national educational system” and due to this the agency cannot evaluate the qualification.

Proposed outcome:

(e.g. full recognition / partial / non-recognition / advisory statement)

Advisory statement (if gained before 2014); consider full/partial recognition after 2014.

If recognition is possible, examine additional criteria for determining a comparison (e.g. structure, entry requirements, duration etc.) in accordance with internal institutional procedures.

Content and duration are consistent with what is expected of Masters programmes.

References / sources of information:

WMU website:

http://www.wmu.se/sites/default/files/documents/files/Academic-Handbook-2016_0.pdf

<http://www.wmu.se/sites/default/files/documents/files/Certificate-Accreditation-MSc.pdf>