



Mobility, Qualifications Recognition, and International Accreditation

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What types of mobility?

- Most research into international student mobility has focused narrowly on outbound ‘in-sessional’ mobility (e.g. semester abroad and exchange programmes) and student feedback on this.
- However, increasingly, other forms of mobility are growing in importance, notably academic progression to a higher degree or to research placements/internships. Arguably, graduates finding initial suitable employment overseas are also benefiting from a form of mobility.
- Of course, faculty and staff exchanges/secondments can facilitate or be an adjunct of student mobility programmes.



Who are the stakeholders in mobility?

- Students and graduates are the most obvious participants in outbound mobility.
- Universities and their employees can be active participants in both outbound and inbound mobility.
- Students can be beneficiaries of inbound mobility through the opportunity to mix with students from other countries.
- Governments also can be stakeholders; the policies of many national governments serve as a driver of both inbound and outbound mobility initiatives.



What are the motivations for mobility?

- For outbound students and graduates, the motives most often cited in surveys have been: developing an awareness of other cultures, making contacts that will prove beneficial in a future career, and enhancing language competence. Recently, greater employability at home and overseas, and research opportunities have become significant objectives.
- For universities, being able to offer the prospect of suitable outbound mobility can be a competitive advantage in student (and staff) recruitment/retention. Inbound mobility offers them a path for cultural diversification of the campus.
- For universities in many countries, such as UK, USA, Canada, Australia and Malaysia, the main motives for accepting inbound mobility have been financial: generating an important income stream from overseas student fees. Sometimes, as in the case of UK universities' acceptance of EU students, (even though these are counted in the home student quota), inbound students are recruited to courses, such as 'hard' sciences, for which there is an insufficient supply of qualified local students.



Why do some governments encourage outbound mobility?

- It can be used to underpin manpower planning as in the case of Malaysia's support for overseas study in the 1990s (e.g. BCHEM and Northern Consortium) or Kazakhstan's current generous scholarship programme. It offers an opportunity to bring back graduates able to diversify an economy, as exemplified by scholarship support by State Governments in Nigeria (e.g. HIPACT).
- Some governments see outbound mobility as an antidote to relative isolation as in the case of Australia, anxious for its young people to have an increased global awareness, which funds three initiatives: International Student Exchange Program, Study Overseas Short-Term Mobility Program, and VET Outbound Mobility Program.



Why do some governments encourage outbound mobility?

- In August 2016, the Government of India introduced legislation permitting credit from semester or year abroad programmes to be counted towards the requirements for graduation at Indian universities. This was specifically to give an opportunity for international exposure that could improve the nation's economic competitiveness.
- In many of these initiatives the risk of a brain drain is countered by bond and loan schemes.



Why do some governments support inbound mobility?

- Motives for countries, such as France and Germany, encouraging and even subsidising inbound mobility include fostering long-term economic and trade benefits, but also disseminating national cultural values.
- Under the Blair administration in the UK, the so-called Prime Minister's Initiative was aimed at greatly increasing the number of overseas students in the UK, both as an immediate major injection of income into the economy and also for the longer term benefits of international trade and influence.
- Ironically, the biggest threat to higher education mobility also comes from governments in the shape of restrictive immigration policies and the extension of these to overseas students. Already, there are strong indications that negative changes to policies in the UK and USA are causing a downturn in global student mobility.



What role does international accreditation need to play in helping stakeholders in mobility to achieve their varied objectives?

- International accreditation must provide information which can give confidence to those investing time and money in mobility.
- Appropriate recognition of higher education qualifications and credit portfolios is essential for all types of mobility.
- Although experiencing ‘otherness’ is to be valued as an aspect of time spent overseas, it should also be possible to derive a reliable baseline of both academic and support provision from international accreditation data, which will guide the choice of study destinations.



What is international accreditation?

- There is no legitimate supranational world body, dedicated to higher education accreditation globally; organisations that claim to be, such as the Worldwide Accrediting Commission, are bogus.
- Currently, genuine accreditation bodies that operate internationally, start from a basis of national recognition in their own country; this includes our own ASIC, where we are approved by the UK Government's Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Home Office (Ministry of the Interior).
- International accreditation can be institutional, which judges the overall performance of a university in every aspect of its work (e.g. ASIC inspects 9 broad areas of operation and 60 sub-areas) which obviously includes academic delivery.



What is international accreditation?

- Or it can be programmatic, looking in depth at one discipline area such as Engineering (e.g. ABET – Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology), or Business (e.g. AACSB – Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business).
- Accrediting bodies assist mobility not just by offering a measure of suitability, but by offering networks of like-minded universities by virtue of having gone through the same accreditation process.



Institutional accreditation

The 9 areas of operation in the ASIC process provide as good a guide as any to what needs to be inspected.

These are:

- Legal status and history of the university; its place within its national system
- Physical Infrastructure, including health and safety management
- Governance, management and staff resources
- Learning, teaching, and research activity
- Quality assurance and enhancement
- Student welfare
- Awards and qualifications



Institutional accreditation

- Promotional activity, public information, and student recruitment
- Systems management, including compliance with immigration regulations
- We believe ASIC is currently the most international of the institutional accreditors, not simply because we work in around 50 countries, but because we accredit universities involved in many different educational systems, not just those following US or UK-type models. Rather like ISO, we judge institutions by how well they work within their own values to reach international standards.



Internationalisation

- Engaging in mobility is no longer the preserve of a few countries such as the USA, UK and Australia. LinkedIn now lists 86 countries actively seeking to attract inbound students. 15 years ago 85% of mobile students went to the top 5 receiving countries, now it is only 35%. China now has more students entering the country than leaving.
- All this means many relative newcomers are seeking to internationalise their operation.
- Increasing the effectiveness of internationalisation in higher education is thus becoming already an aspiration of universities globally, fuelled both by expectations from students and their sponsors and by key criteria in most of the current university ranking systems worldwide. Without question, internationalisation will be a dominant feature of the higher education landscape by 2020, but what does this mean in practice?



Internationalisation

- A recent pilot project by ASIC in collaboration with universities in a dozen countries has focused on how to assess the validity of internationalisation strategies in universities. The project covers mission, teaching and learning, human resources, services, the role of students, and research. Emerging overarching issues are that internationalisation must not just be an income-generating sideshow, that it needs to be systematically managed, that it must be owned at every level, and, most importantly, has to be measurable in order to underpin effective leadership.
- As a result of the pilot scheme, ASIC is now offering guided self-evaluation or an additional inspection focusing on effective internationalisation through the use of an Internationalisation Index which I can briefly show to give an idea of the format.



Internationalisation Index

- Internationalisation has become an important aspect of higher education in the context of globalisation and the rapid growth of transnational patterns in employment and in study programmes. It is no surprise that internationalisation figures increasingly as a criterion in ranking systems, both domestic and international. A demonstrable commitment to internationalisation encompasses a range of provision and expertise that brings reassurance to potential partners, to funding agencies, and to students and their sponsors.
- A set of indicators means that every individual Higher Educational Institution has a clear idea of what internationalisation means in their various areas of performance.



Implementation of the Internationalisation Mission

- Expected standards for accreditation are that:

| A.1 | Vision on Internationalisation | Evidence | Points |
|-------|---|--|--------|
| A.1.1 | Does your institution have a clearly defined strategy for internationalisation? | <i>Explicit statement in institutional mission statement and strategic objectives regarding internationalisation</i> | |
| A.1.2 | Does the internationalisation strategy include verifiable, measurable objectives, benchmarks and KPI's? | <i>Internationalisation strategy</i> | |
| A.1.3 | Does your internationalisation strategy include a defined set of Quality Assurance indicators? | <i>What are the Quality Assurance Indicators for internationalisation?</i> | |
| A.1.4 | Is internationalisation incorporated into the strategy/target agreements within your Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with partner institutions? | <i>Documented Evidence : MOU</i> | |
| A.1.5 | Does your institution participate in national, regional or local networks supporting internationalisation? | <i>Evidence of networking events via minutes of meetings and agenda notes.</i> | |



Implementation of the Internationalisation Mission

B Student Welfare

Institutions in many countries now seek to recruit international students from other countries. Such students often need support in addition to that provided for home students.

Expected standards for accreditation are that:

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| B.1 | Do students receive advice/information and assistance in relation to such topics as living costs, police registration, and registration for medical treatment, banking and travel cards? | <i>Pre –arrival information for home and international students.</i> | |
| B.2 | Is on-going welfare support is available to students from identified staff? | <i>Details of responsible staff indicating relevant experience and qualifications</i> | |
| B.3 | Is there is an induction programme for new students? | <i>Written student induction programme; Student handbook; Records to show that students have signed confirming receipt of their copy of the Student Handbook at induction.</i> | |



Implementation of the Internationalisation Mission

C Marketing and Recruitment of Students

Expected standards for accreditation are that:

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|-----|---|---|
| C.1 | Do all staff and education representatives/agents adopt an honest, ethical approach in the marketing of the Institution and its courses and in the recruitment of students? Is there an appropriate infrastructure exists for dealing with student enquiries? | <i>Ethics policy in relation to: the marketing of the Institution; the recruitment of students; the ethical practice of staff and agents; Written administrative procedures for processing student enquiries.</i> |
| C.2 | Are agents working on behalf of the institution overseas recruited in the context of formal appointment criteria? Are they fully briefed and provided with relevant institution literature so as to be able to assist prospective students with visa applications, if appropriate, and with the course application process and associated aspects of course entry? Does the institution have effective systems to monitor agents' practices and procedures? | <i>Written criteria for the appointment of agents; Written briefing documents for agents; Copy of agent agreement; List of active agents and their contact details (there should be a file for each agent); Evidence of monitoring the performance of agents such as:</i> |



Implementation of the Internationalisation Mission

D Systems Management and Compliance with Immigration Regulations

ASIC expects all of its accredited institutions to have written procedures for all of their policies and actions, and that the person with responsibility for each procedure is able to explain it to the Inspectors. This has the added advantage that if staff undertaking particular roles leave or are unavailable at short notice, other staff assuming these roles will know exactly what is expected of them. This applies in particular to procedures for the recruitment, enrolment and the monitoring of attendance and academic progress of home and international students.

Expected standards for accreditation are that:

| | | | |
|-----|--|---|--|
| D.1 | Does an appropriate infrastructure exist for dealing with student applications and making offers? Are there written administrative procedures for: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• processing applications;• monitoring the number of offers made and accepted; | <i>Student application form; Written administrative procedures for processing applications; Sample offer letter and visa letter (if appropriate); Written administrative procedures for</i> | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the admission of students, to include verification of students' academic qualifications, including competence in English language or other | <i>monitoring the number of visa letters issued and accepted (if appropriate); Confirmation of</i> | |



Complementary forms of international recognition

- Apart from accreditation in the strict sense, there are three other major sources of external evaluation relevant to mobility. An accrediting body can take note of a university's engagement with these complementary processes, or even assist with it through consultancy.
- World university rankings can provide valuable data on suitable mobility matches.
- Qualification comparison and recognition networks such as the European Network of Information Centres (ENIC-NARICS) have played a crucial role in facilitating the mobility of students, workers, and refugees, including many from outside Europe.
- Credit transfer frameworks such as the European Qualifications Framework and the concomitant use of ECTS credit points, although only providing relatively superficial data, have facilitated mobility.



World university rankings

- There are several of these. The most used are QS, Times Higher, and Shanghai Jiao-Tong.
- A common denominator is the very high proportion of points given to research in one form or another, and to perceptions of reputation among employers and fellow academics. This can make for a self-electing club, but it is useful for those whose priority is research or employability. Certainly, these schemes are weighted against new players in the international arena.
- ASIC carried out a survey of almost 10000 students around the world joining overseas universities. Of undergraduates, 92% said they considered WUR to be of little relevance to their choice. Of postgraduates, only 42% had paid much attention to WUR.



World university rankings

- These findings are interesting given the current dialogue in the US and UK around prioritising student learning outcomes and teaching excellence.
- Perhaps mindful of some of these issues, QS has been introducing more subtle approaches through its 5 star system, where the quality of internationalisation and of student care are more heavily weighted. ASIC has been cooperating on these initiatives, which seem to match the concerns of students and parents/sponsors.



ENIC-NARICS

- These centres provide two main services: a comparative evaluation of qualifications from every country in the world against the qualifications of the centre's home country; and the provision of statements of comparison to individuals seeking employment or study.
- I am a member of the Quality and Standards Committee of UK NARIC and have seen many statements issued to Iranian nationals for example.
- The ENIC network includes every European country, but also has regional partners in other countries, notably USA, Canada, and Australia.



Evaluation Process and Criteria

1. The identification of an overseas qualification will be made in the context of its native education system. The criteria UK NARIC uses in assessing a qualification include:
 - an examination of the status of the awarding institution, i.e. whether it is accredited/recognised in the country of origin*
 - an examination of the standing of the qualification within the country's education system, i.e. whether it constitutes a national standard and/or forms part of the national qualifications framework / national education system
 - an evaluation of the level to which the qualification has been benchmarked in the country of origin
 - an evaluation of entrance requirements in the country of origin and in the UK
 - an examination of the duration of a course of study
 - a review of the course structure
 - an analysis of course content



Evaluation Process and Criteria

- an analysis of method of study
 - an analysis of the method of examination.
- * In the case of higher education institutions (HEIs) these must be listed as officially recognised HEIs in the country / territory of origin. Where accreditation and quality assurance procedures are not fully articulated, UK NARIC reserve the right to evaluate HEIs on an individual basis, based on information available.
2. Once these criteria have been applied, the next step will be the identification, where possible, of a comparable qualification within the UK, bearing in mind the purpose of the assessment.
 3. Finally, UK NARIC will determine whether any identified similarities are sufficient for comparability. An overseas qualification that meets these criteria will be recognised, where appropriate, by the issuing of a NARIC Statement of Comparability and a NARIC Certificate.



Credit frameworks

- I know that Iranian universities are familiar with ECTS as well as the US credit system and are able to issue transcripts clarifying weightings.
- Elsewhere, the rough and ready formula of UK CATS 120 = ECTS 60 = US 30 has benefitted the mobility of countless students. There is certainly scope for more work to be done to harmonise credit equivalences in the interests of students worldwide.