



UNESCO Secretariat

**REVIEW OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION SYSTEMS IN
UNESCO MEMBER STATES**

OECD/Norway Forum on
Trade in Educational Services
Managing the internationalisation of post-secondary education

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Review of Quality Assurance and Accreditation Systems in UNESCO Member States

Introduction

This paper aims to provide a brief overview of quality assurance and accreditation systems in all UNESCO regions: Africa Region, Arab States Region, Asia and the Pacific Region, Europe Region (including North America) and the Latin America and Caribbean Region. It aims to provide a short sampling of the rich activities taking place in all UNESCO Regions in the area of quality assurance and accreditation. It is by no means an exhaustive sample, but mainly based on currently available data.

The majority of the data provided in this document was produced in the framework of the activities of the UNESCO Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications. The Global Forum responds to the growing demands of the international community to have UNESCO proactive in the debates on borderless higher education and trade in higher education in frameworks such as the GATS as well and the related key issues of quality and recognition. The Global Forum reflects UNESCO's mission to respond to the ethical challenges of globalization. The objective of the Global Forum is to provide a platform for dialogue between international frameworks dealing with quality assurance, accreditation and the recognition of qualifications.

The UNESCO Global Forum will be undertaking further activities in the field of quality assurance and accreditation in the 2004-2005 biennium. Global Forum activities focus on UNESCO's standard-setting, capacity-building and information dissemination functions.

1. Africa Region

***Kenya*¹**

The Commission for Higher Education is the sole accrediting body for Higher Education in Kenya. However the Commission only deals with degree programmes offered by universities. In 2002 it was concentrating on accrediting private universities.

An accredited institution has the authority to award its own Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates. Students from such institutions have access to loans from the Higher Education Loans Board. The Commission for Higher Education regularly publishes the names of accredited institutions, those with letters of Interim Authority and those that are registered. A letter of Interim Authority is a sort of provisional accreditation to allow an institution to assemble resources and improve the quality of its offerings.

Non-university institutions do not receive formal accreditation. However public institutions and a large number of private institutions teach curriculum that is developed by a professional public organ, the Kenya Institute of Education. They receive prior inspection before they are registered.

Professional bodies are involved in approving curriculum offered or taken by prospective members of their profession. The Engineering Council of Kenya for example has to approve the curriculum taken by prospective engineers. The Council on Legal Education has to approve the curriculum taken by prospective lawyers. Public and accredited universities have responsibility under the general direction of the Commission for Higher Education to ensure the quality of the institutions offering their programmes.

A number of transnational providers wish to retain accreditation in their home countries. At the same time they are required to obtain accreditation by the Commission for Higher Education. For example the United States International University is accredited both in Kenya and USA. This could easily lead to conflicts when the standards of accreditation and quality control are different. In addition the Distance Education mode of provision will require different rules and standards from the rules and standards for the traditional modes. Policy decisions and great effort have to be made to ensure that the standards are comparable to those of residential programmes.

Regulating authorities in Kenya expect education offered in the country to be relevant to the country's needs. Some of the new providers are however expected by their parent institutions to offer a curriculum identical to that offered at home which in some cases may not be relevant to Kenya's needs.

South Africa²

The establishment of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) in May 2001, marked the beginning of a single national Quality Assurance system for all public and private higher education institutions in South Africa. The HEQC is in process of developing new systems for institutional audits and programme accreditation, as well as licensing institutions to offer new programmes.

A number of Professional Councils and Quality Assurance (QA) structures connected to the Department of Labour are also active in specific professional and vocational fields of higher education. Cooperative structures between the HEQC and other QA structures are being investigated in order to develop a coherent national QA system. However, many tensions remain due to conflicting understandings and expectations of quality.

Currently the HEQC is using a separate accreditation application process for public and private Higher education institutions. Trans-national and for profit institutions form part of the private higher education sector. The accreditation procedures for both public and private institutions are based on policies and instruments inherited from other HE structures formally responsible for these processes. However, these instruments and criteria have been refined over time by the HEQC accreditation structures. Copies of the accreditation application forms are available on the Council on Higher Education (CHE) website.

The accreditation of programmes for public institutions by the HEQC is directly linked to funding by the Department of Education (DoE). In terms of public access to quality assurance information, the accreditation and registration outcomes of private HE institutions are available on the DoE's website. The HEQC is in the process of developing an information disclosure policy in relation to programme specific information in both sectors.

In terms of its QA functions, the HEQC is also in the process of developing a national, single accreditation and institutional audit framework. It is envisaged that the full implementation of the new frameworks would take place in 2004.

The Higher Education Act (Act no. 101 of 1997) makes provision for the registration of new private higher education institutions by the Department of Education. It also requires institutions to apply for the accreditation of their programmes to the Higher Education Quality Committee, of the Council on Higher Education (CHE). The CHE is a statutory body, which reports to the Parliament on an annual basis. Private institutions may only register new learners for programmes accredited by the HEQC and registered by the DoE. The Department of Education is also in the process of finalizing the Regulations for Private Higher Education Institutions. The HEQC is developing a new single, national accreditation framework for both public and private HE institutions.

There are a large number of private institutions offering HE programmes illegally. They pose a serious threat to the production of quality knowledge and other socio-cultural issues such as equity and redress in the HE system. These institutions target mainly the previously disadvantaged groups who pay significant amounts of money in return for qualifications of dubious quality.

The DoE and the CHE have started an advocacy campaign, which will focus on empowering learners and their parents to make more informed choices on HE programmes. The HEQC is also initiating site visits, which will begin to exercise greater pressure on poor quality provision.

2. Arab States Region

Quality Assurance and Accreditation in the Arab States Region³

Quality assurance and accreditation of higher education institutions and programs are quite new in most of the Arab States, and still absent in many of them. The Arab Regional Conference on Higher Education (Beirut, 1998) has strongly recommended that all Arab States establish quality assurance mechanisms. In fact, Article 6 of the Beirut Declaration states that "All higher education systems and institutions should give a high priority to ensuring the quality of programmes, teaching, and outcomes. Structures, procedures, and standards for quality assurance should be developed at the regional and national levels commensurate with international guidelines while providing for variety according to the specificities of each country, institution, or programme".

The Beirut Plan for Action devotes seven articles to quality issues. In particular, Article 12 states that "each Arab State should establish a mechanism for evaluating the quality of its higher education at the systemic, programme, personnel, and outcomes levels". It adds that "quality assurance methods may include academic accreditation, institutional evaluations or sector reviews by disciplines and professional areas, performance funding, competency-based approaches to professional education and training".

Some institutions of higher education have, in the recent years, requested, and sometimes obtained, accreditation for some of their programs, from foreign internationally recognized bodies, such as ABET or other American or European boards.

The Arab State that took the lead in adopting rules and regulations concerning accreditation in particular has been Jordan, which has established a national body for quality assurance and accreditation as early as 1996. However, the activity of the board has mainly been restricted to licensing and recognition of programs more than been extended to in-depth assessment leading to accreditation as usually practiced at the international level.

Other Arab States which have adopted or are in the way for adoption of rules and procedures for quality assurance and accreditation, among which Egypt, Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and the Palestinian Authority. In addition, at the request of the Council of Ministers responsible for higher education, the Association of Arab Universities has established a Regional Committee for Quality Assurance and Accreditation, to which UNESCO is an active participant, and which has already set standards for licensing new universities and a guide for self-assessment and accreditation of universities.

However, it clearly appears that one of the major issues confronting the implementation of large-scale quality assurance enterprises resides in the lack of sufficient numbers of qualified faculty members able to perform the tasks needed both for self-assessment and for accreditation.

A project led by UNDP, and to which UNESCO is a partner, is now under implementation concerning the assessment of informatics and management programs in a sample of universities in the Arab states. This project includes a components aimed at training faculty members to perform self-assessment exercises.

3. Asia and the Pacific Region

Quality Assurance in Asia and Pacific Region⁴

With the rapid expansion in the number of higher education institutions and the advent of the new private providers in Asia-Pacific countries, ensuring quality has become the major concern. China for example has a dramatically growing private sector with more than 500 private post secondary institutions, most of which are neither accredited nor formally approved by the government. It is true in Vietnam, Cambodia and other central Asian nations that were formerly part of the Soviet Union. During the last decade or so, more than 3000 self-financing private colleges have come up in India, out numbering the public ones in many states. However, the redeeming development is the growing trend and effort to establish National Quality Assurance Agencies (NQAA). Though the importance of the National Quality Assurance bodies as the effective mechanism to ensure quality in higher education than the traditional governmental regulatory control used earlier is well recognized, the process of establishing and using such bodies is yet to be completed. Among the major importers of education of the region, Japan, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Hong Kong have already established their national quality assurance bodies. In Korea, Quality Assurance (QA) is taken care of by the Korean Council of Universities, while in China, it is looked after by the existing governmental regulatory mechanisms in the absence of any dedicated agency. The national QA mechanisms in the countries like Cambodia, Vietnam and Sri Lanka are at various stages of development and are yet to be operational. The priority therefore is to encourage and facilitate all the countries of the region to establish their national quality assurance bodies with the internationally accepted instruments and methods to assess and accredit the institutions to ensure credibility and comparability of educational offerings with those of the rest of the world.

India⁵

There are two bodies that do accreditation in the Indian higher education sector: The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and National Board of Accreditation (NBA) which are accrediting the higher education institutions and programs in the country since 1994. NAAC accredits institutions of higher education and their units. NBA accredits the engineering and related areas exclusively at the program level. These are federal government supported, but fairly independently functioning bodies through appropriate provisions of which NAAC is by far the largest and fully autonomous body catering to more than 90 per cent of educational offerings in the country. It is a member of INQAAHE and listed among the 50 well-credited Quality Assurance Agencies in the world.

The principal task of NAAC is to carry out evaluation of higher educational institutions and their units and thus to contribute to ensuring and enhancing the quality of education. Accordingly, a substantial part of the council's work consists of regular and systematic evaluation of the units (institution and programs) with a rotation cycle of five years. It has developed appropriate instruments and protocols to assess various types of units following a three-step process in line with the international trend. The process includes 1. Self-study and self-analysis by the unit of assessment, 2. Validation of the Self-analysis by site visits by well-trained team of peers and 3. Preparation of the assessment outcome in the form of a report and a grade on a multi point scale. NAAC has targeted December 2003 for the university level institutions and December 2005 for the 12600 and odd colleges to complete the first assessment cycle. NBA also has a similar mandate and target dates for the engineering programs.

The outcomes of such assessment and accreditation process are used for the benefit of the stakeholders - governments, parents, students, employers and the institutions themselves. The public universities and

colleges get two categories of grants from the governments. One is the Block Grant for meeting the annual maintenance expenditure and the other is the Development Grant for further expansion, diversification etc.,. The development grants are generally provided once in five years. The development grant disbursed through the University Grants Commission (UGC) is now linked with the accreditation status of the institutions and this is applicable only to the public institutions. Other incentives to the institutions like greater autonomy, privilege to be an international provider of education, freedom to charge higher tuition and other fees and further diversification of programs of studies are also linked to the accreditation status. Both monetary and non-monetary incentives indicated above have strengthened the Quality Assurance movement in the country. Though the monetary incentives may not be relevant to the private and international providers, the non-monetary incentives are bound to benefit the NPHE in a large way.

The accreditation status as public information to other stakeholders is becoming important and is being increasingly used by the students and employers while choosing the institutions/programs. In fact many of the in-country private providers have undergone the assessment for accreditation with NAAC and NBA voluntarily because of the above non-monetary advantages as well to attract students to their institutions. Assessment for accreditation is undertaken only with the established institutions that have been in place at least for five years or sent out at least two batches of students.

In addition to the accreditation of established educational institutions, the council undertakes other evaluations at the request of either ministry of education or the UGC. Very recently, NAAC has been asked to prepare for the responsibility of accrediting the transnational educational offerings in all forms - private or public, formal or non-formal, traditional or electronic. Already, both the accrediting agencies are assessing the national NPHE. It is the intention of the government and its statutory bodies that the same Quality Assurance agency that assesses the national education system should assess the programmes offered by the transnational providers with the same yardsticks. Even though India is a large country with a huge network of higher education institutions, there are no regional or state level independent accrediting bodies as of now. It is planned to locate regional offices of the NAAC to facilitate the assessment task within the targeted time frame.

In the case of professional institutions like medicine, engineering, law, pharmacy and nursing, their establishment has to be approved additionally by the corresponding professional councils. They are empowered to approve or disapprove based on their review of the applications and on the financial and other infrastructure soundness of the proposals. When once established as a college, both the university and the speciality councils are empowered to 'inspect' and review the institutional function periodically to ensure the minimal threshold level of quality of their educational offerings.

As there is no official regulatory control or stipulations to the extent, the overseas NPHE are not expected to undergo accreditation by the national quality assurance agencies. In the case of in-country institutions part of the development grants from the federal and state government sources are linked to the outcome of their accreditation which in a way makes the accreditation essential for them. It is very much like in United States of America, where the student-aid funds provided by the government are linked with the Accreditation status of the institutions even though the accreditation *per se* is voluntary. As the new providers - both the national and international - are not supported by the governments, the linkage of grants with accreditation may not be relevant for them.

Malaysia⁶

The Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education co-ordinates and monitors the activities of institutions of public higher learning. Polytechnics are regulated by the Technical and Vocational Education Department of the Ministry. The Department of Private Education (JPS) in the

Ministry of Education regulates private providers in relation to their establishment, registration, premises, fees and student and staff affairs. The JPS has the power to ensure that providers offer quality education, comparable to that in the public sector, or face legal action. The National Accreditation Board (LAN) was established to provide quality standards and guidelines for the courses offered in the private sector institutions. It conducts accreditation to ensure compliance with minimum standards and monitors the implementation of compulsory subjects. The LAN also advises the Registrar General of Private Education on the establishment, registration and approval of courses from these institutions.

Universities can only be established in accordance with an Incorporation Order signed by the King and only on the invitation of the Minister of Education. Since 1996, all educational institutions must be licensed in a two-stage process that first provides approval to establish, and second requires registration to acquire a license to offer courses. Approval must be based on the recommendation of the National Accreditation Board, which assesses the suitability of facilities and the quality assurance arrangements in place in a close scrutiny process based on standard procedures. Courses can then be offered before applying for accreditation of the courses from the LAN. These procedures also apply to joint programmes run in association with public or private universities. Currently there are separate agencies accrediting courses for public and private providers.

The LAN process covers the accreditation of individual courses at private universities and there are 3 levels of assessment: mandatory approval of courses of study, mandatory Minimum Standards' assessment and optional certificate of accreditation. Approval of course is granted for 5 years and assessment for Minimum Standards is carried out once in five years although spot checks can occur at any time in the period. Periodic comparative assessments are made (through a peer review process) of private sector qualifications against those set by examinations boards in the public system.

Public universities are generally self-accrediting, but require Ministry approval to conduct new courses and all qualifications are subject to recognition by the Public Service Department, including qualifications achieved through overseas' study (Suleiman, 2002). In 2001, a Quality Assurance Division (QAD) was set up in the Ministry with a similar remit to the LAN. The QAD aims to provide continuous quality assurance to improve programmes and promote public confidence in a five-yearly cycle through a quality audit process at faculty and discipline level. Trial audits began in January 2003 in 3 disciplines: IT, medicine and engineering. All professional courses must also seek approval from relevant professional bodies in order to recruit students in Malaysia. Foreign professional qualifications must be accredited in their country of origin before they can be recommended for approval in Malaysia. For some professional courses, recognition from a local counterpart professional body is required before approval can be given to the private institution to offer the course. Technical committees that include representatives from accreditation authorities (including LAN) manage the accreditation exercises and cover all institutions, public or private.

The Private Higher Education Act of 1996 required distance learning courses to be approved and accredited by the LAN according to the same standards as other campus-based courses. All courses offered externally must have corresponding internal courses in Malaysia and students studying by distance learning mode are also required to have at least 20 hours face-to-face with their tutors. Also, if overseas-based distance learning institutions are not licensed by the JPS, they must have a local partner, even if they are totally on-line (British Council, 2001).

All trans-national providers are subject to Malaysian laws and the Malaysian quality assurance framework. Foreign providers can either apply to be licensed as a private higher education institution (i.e. through a branch campus) or deliver courses through a local partner licensed as a private institution. All trans-national providers with a local presence must meet the government requirement that home nationals must hold 30% of the equity and they must also fulfil local registration requirements (Suleiman, 2002). For franchised courses, the Private Higher Education Act states that the curriculum should be exactly the same as the home-campus version and this creates some problems for distance education programmes that are not taught at-a-distance at home. Both local private colleges and their partner universities must submit annual progress reports on 3+0 programmes including details on the academic progress of students, staff development and student exchanges. In addition, in some countries (such as the UK and some US state accrediting agencies) the home quality assurance or accrediting agency will monitor the overseas' activities of its national providers; the new Australian agency may follow a similar path.

The regulatory framework appears to be strong in Malaysia with clear government encouragement for adherence to externally monitored quality assurance standards and systems. There is a high level of recognition of the relationship between quality, quality assurance and international competitiveness. There is also considerable experience of quality assurance through foreign involvement and overseas' study (GETIS, 2000). A number of Malaysian institutions have embedded Total Quality Management practices in their institutions and there is a comprehensive programme that includes ISO registrations for government ministries. There are new plans to integrate the public and private sector systems by bringing together the LAN and QAD in a single quality assurance body, independent of the universities, by 2005 (Ministry of Education, 2003). The National Accreditation Board is also currently working with the Private Education Division in the Ministry of Education on new criteria for the assessment and quality assurance of qualifications across the private and public sectors, as part of a new national framework of qualifications (MQF).

4. Europe and North America Region

Bulgaria⁷

The Bulgarian National Assembly is empowered to establish, reform and close down educational establishments. The Council of Ministers develops higher education policy, advised by the Ministry of Education and Science which itself receives guidance from the Bulgarian Rectors' Council. The Council's members are all the Rectors (Presidents) of all the legally recognised public and private higher education institutions in Bulgaria. The National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation (NEAA) develops and approves the procedures and respective documentation for the process of accreditation. It also stores data on accredited institutions, faculties and specialties. In relation to the recognition of qualifications, the National Academic Recognition and Equivalence Information Centre (ENIC) in the Ministry provides relevant information to all stakeholders while the Higher Attestation Committee (HAC) works with the Council of Ministers on regulating the award of Bulgarian qualifications and recognising overseas doctoral qualifications. A new National Attestation Agency concerned with the awarding of academic degrees and titles is in the process of being established.

An institution is legally recognised following a positive decision from either the National Assembly (for new universities and equivalent institutions) or the Council of Ministers (for colleges, faculties and

branch campuses) after an accreditation process has been undertaken. There are two types of accreditation (institutional and programme) and two modes (regular and provisional). All higher education institutions established before the 1999 amendments to the Higher Education Act are subject to periodic licensing – every 5 years – through institutional accreditation under the regular mode. New institutions established after 1999 need first to achieve accreditation in the provisional mode in order to achieve recognition (and appear in the State Gazette where details of new institutions, faculties or branch campuses are published). Within an 18-36 month period, they must then apply for ‘regular’ mode accreditation. Only accredited institutions can apply for programme accreditation. All institutions were expected to be accredited by the NEAA by 2002 and all programmes by 2004 (including the publicly-funded universities). Since 2002, institutions and programmes accredited with the highest scores can admit extra students on a full-cost basis. Professional courses are also regulated by the Ministry, in co-operation with relevant professional bodies.

Private institutions have institutional accreditation, but have had problems complying with the criteria for programme accreditation since these are based on disciplinary structures and criteria that fit the traditional public sector (Slantcheva, 2002). The system may shift towards subject rather than programme-based accreditation in the future (as programme accreditation is costly and can be burdensome).

Foreign institutions cannot open subsidiaries or faculties in Bulgaria. They can collaborate with local higher education institutions, but only if based on intergovernmental agreements for educational co-operation. Foreign branch campuses have had to be transformed into national institutions. Franchised forms of trans-national provision have not to date been controlled by the government and they are not subject to quality review and accreditation by the Bulgarian educational authorities; quality is considered the responsibility of the awarding institution. These arrangements exist outside the Higher Education Act so are treated as ‘non-existent’ rather than illegal. Authorised local agents can register under the Trade Law.

The NEAA has co-operated with the regional network of 18 nationally recognised Quality Assurance Agencies in Central and Eastern Europe since 2000 in order to share information and good practice. This regional network is now becoming a formal legal entity with a centre in Budapest. The Network has applied for membership of the European Network of Quality Agencies. Bulgaria is also a signatory to a range of bi-lateral agreements on educational co-operation of various kinds.

Russia⁸

Quality assurance in Russia is based on three consecutive procedures, licensing, state accreditation and attestation based on state standards. The process was made the object of legislation in the 1992 Law on Education. State standards describe minimum programme content, workload and requirements. Licensing, granted by state or local authorities gives institutions the right to offer study programmes in the field and at the levels for which licensing is granted. The experts check whether or not the conditions for education have been met, whether the institution and its programmes meet legislative and infrastructure requirements and whether staff qualifications are adequate. Licensing is an administrative process conducted by external experts and federal and local educational authorities.

Accreditation is the legislated product of a decree of the State Committee for Higher Education. It confers on both state and private institutions the right to issue state-recognized degrees. Accreditation testifies type of institution (professional school, technical school (also humanities and social sciences), college, institute,

academy, university) and its level (general education, vocational education, non-university or university higher education), and whether or not the contents and quality of training comply with the State Educational Standards. The process of accreditation combines institutional and programme assessment and extends to all the programmes of the evaluated institution. Accreditation is granted for a maximum of five years for institutions and programmes and encompasses self-evaluation by higher education institutions and an external peer review. The review team, made up of academics and non-academics, writes a report, which forms the basis for accreditation. Non-universities are accredited by state authorities in the region in which the institution is located. Universities are accredited by the Ministry of General and Professional Education.

Attestation is the task of an expert commission, which also includes non-academics. Its purpose is to assess the knowledge of graduates as compared to the State Educational Standards and is regulated by the 1994 decree of the State committee for Higher Education on State Final Attestation of Graduates of Higher Education Institutions. Attestation is a rigorous exit examination procedure for graduates, which includes a final examination in the graduate's discipline, a final examination in the specialization and the defence of a thesis or project conducted by a state attestation commission, involving academics and non-academics, set up by the body responsible for accreditation. Attestation is a precondition for the award of individual degrees as well as part of the process of accreditation at the institutional level.

The focus of the National Accreditation Centre is to provide information to the Accreditation Council. The Council, established in 1997, is a unit of the Ministry of Education. It has forty two members drawn from the Ministry and from various educational and non-state organizations. It organizes reviews and invites review teams. Review teams evaluate the institution and all its programmes and consist of five to fifteen experts in different fields, including management education, and research. The role of the Centre is to compile documentation for the Ministry that makes accreditation decisions based on the report of the Accreditation Council.

The Centre works with a staff of about fifty full-time and about twenty part-time employees. The permanent staff of the Centre includes five academics and eight top managers with one director and three deputy directors; There are six departments at the headquarters in Yoshkar-Ola and one branch in Moscow. A major part of the work of the Centre is to compile data on higher education institutions, their programmes and the accreditation status of both. The Centre also conducts research into accreditation and quality assessment. It designs assessment procedures and develops computer software for different stages of quality assessment. Another important service offered by the Centre is to provide information on accreditation status and procedures. This information can be obtained via the website of the Centre (<http://www.nica.ru>). The Centre staff includes academics and professionals with academic degrees.

5. Latin America and the Caribbean

Jamaica⁹

Jamaica has established the only statutory accreditation body, the University Council of Jamaica (UCJ), in the English speaking Caribbean. Elsewhere in the region, a number of associations promote professional development, collaboration and mechanisms for integration (such as the standardisation of credit systems or common structures for associate degrees). In addition, since 1996, the University of the West of Indies has developed quality assurance units in each of its three campuses. The theological colleges in the region are accredited by the Caribbean Evangelical Theological Association.

The UCJ is a statutory body reporting directly to the Ministry of Education Youth and Culture, the ministry that administers, finances and co-ordinates the public institutions and regulates the private

institutions. In addition to UCJ, the National Council on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (NCTVET) certifies and provides accreditation, quality assurance, certification and standards for technical and vocational programmes up to technician level. Professional bodies also exist in areas such as medicine, law, engineering and accountancy.

The UCJ has a range of functions including:

- Registering tertiary level institutions: a process that certifies that they have met minimum operating standards. Institutions must register if they seek accreditation and an institution gains accredited status when all of its programmes are accredited;
- Establishing course/programme accreditation criteria;
- Accrediting courses;
- Awarding degrees on behalf of institutions without degree-awarding powers;
- Providing guidance on the equivalence of foreign qualifications.

All government-funded institutions are automatically registered by the UCJ. At programme level, universities are accredited on a voluntary basis although institutions must be accredited if qualifications are to be awarded. In practice, most institutions seek accreditation as a mark of public confidence; the process is seen as a guarantee of quality by the public and employers (British Council, 2001). The UCJ recognises and accredits private higher education institutions in Jamaica, but does not register distance learning courses with no face-to-face provision in the country. For local distance education provision, the criteria for accreditation are designed to suit the medium, rather than being the same as for face-to-face provision.

Foreign institutions wishing to offer courses taught in Jamaica (either by indigenous or foreign staff) must have them accredited by the UCJ, even if they are accredited in their home country. If an institution is licensed in its home country, no license is needed from the UCJ. The UCJ also has close relationships with overseas' agencies through membership of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).

The three universities operating in Jamaica have their own procedures for recognising overseas' qualifications.

*Argentina*¹⁰

The Higher Education Act (LES) was passed in Argentina, on August 7, 1995. As regards accreditation in bachelor's degrees (*carrera de grado*), the LES sets forth in sections 42, 43 and 46 the general conditions upon which such processes are to be conducted: - the curricula must apply the minimum course hours set; - degrees awarded in those professions where public interest is involved shall be accredited. The curricula shall take into consideration the contents of basic study programs and the criteria related to practical training intensity determined by the Ministry of Education in agreement with the Consejo de Universidades (*Universities Council*) and the respective courses of studies shall be regularly accredited by the Comisión Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación Universitaria (CONEAU) (*National Commission of University*

Assessment and Accreditation) or by private entities organized to such end and duly recognized; - the Ministry of Education in agreement with the *Universities Council* will define the standards upon which accreditation processes will be conducted.

With respect to the new modes of higher education supply, the LES, in section 74, authorizes the creation and operation of other forms of university organization provided such forms are previously subject to an assessment of viability and quality of their academic offer, all pursuant to the regulation timely ordered by the National Executive Power.

Resolution 1423/98 issued by the Ministry of Education provides for minimum rules and guidelines to govern distance education. In section 4, such resolution provides that any university institution intending to implement the distance education mode for a course of studies where the degree awarded has official validity for attending programs shall have to expressly request a specific official recognition by submitting an application together with the relevant information. Such Resolution was abrogated upon approval of Resolution 1716/98. This new resolution does not amend the process to apply for official recognition but grants the Ministry of Education the authority to externally evaluate the performance of non-university distance courses of study or study programs with the purpose of suggesting the corrections and revisions required to maintain the offer's quality.

The executive order 276/99 sets forth the rules to be complied with by *foreign university institutions* willing to open offices in the country. Section 1 of the executive order provides that such foreign institutions shall require the legal recognition of their legal capacity and shall then follow the proceedings set forth in Chapter 5 of Book IV of Act No. 24.521. It is worth mentioning, however, that said chapter governs private university institutions. Therefore, the executive order does not set forth a special regulation for assessment and control to authorize foreign universities but applies the mechanism prescribed for the authorization of private universities as well as the supervision, control and inspection regime applicable to such institutions. Pursuant to Section 2, once the foreign university institution is authorized, it shall be subject to the requirements, conditions, control and supervision mechanisms set forth by the LES.

Pursuant to Resolution 236/91 issued by the Ministry of Education, temporary official recognition is granted to postgraduate degrees corresponding to courses of studies whose curricula are implemented in "*non-attending*" or "*distance*" educational mode when requested prior to the date on which accreditation processes become effective, provided the Dirección Nacional de Gestión Universitaria (*National Division of University Management*) issues the applicable report in advance. Such recognition shall become ineffective if, within a one-year term as from the first call for accreditation by the CONEAU, the course of studies is not submitted for accreditation. If such accreditation is obtained, the Ministry shall grant final official recognition.

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