



**UNESCO/OECD guidelines on “Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education”
Drafting Meeting 1
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Proposal on an international database on recognised higher education institutions

There is no easily accessible authoritative list of institutions/providers at the international level that in one way or another have been recognised and/or accredited by competent authorities to operate in their territory. Such a listing would be a useful resource and a tool for protecting consumers including students, employers, professional bodies, educational institutions, credential evaluators, and the general public.

It is proposed to establish an international database listing all degree-granting higher education institutions that are recognised, registered, authorised, licensed, accredited etc. (for the purpose of this note, the term “recognised” will be used), to operate within each country. Such an initiative would build on and improve past and on-going efforts. The database will include explanatory notes that helps understand different types of national regulatory systems.

It is acknowledged that many countries have limited capacity to build up quality assurance and accreditation systems and that they therefore might have difficulties to provide the data that is suggested in this note. On the other hand such a database along with the work on the UNESCO/OECD guidelines on quality provision in cross-border higher education and a whole range of other national and international initiatives might encourage a number of countries to increase their capacity in this area. It is also conceivable that in order to increase such data provision and enhanced transparency in the area of quality assurance and accreditation, specific capacity building projects are designed in response to needs as expressed by interested countries.

The attached annex highlights several national and international initiatives to make information available on recognised higher education institutions. The main conclusion from this overview is that there are initiatives and information available on which the proposed database can be based but it is needed to do this in a much more user friendly and consistent way.

Guiding principles for the database

The following principles could guide the work to explore whether it would be feasible to establish such an international database:

- Access to the database should be free, easy and user friendly.
- The database should be under the responsibility of the competent national authorities of the cooperating countries, and will be hosted on the Internet by a highly respected global organisation such as the UNESCO.
- Each country on a voluntary basis will supply the list of institutions recognised in its respective territory. The list provided by countries cannot be changed by the organisation hosting the international database unless there is an agreement to do so between the country and the hosting organisation.

- The database will include a list of nationally recognised degree granting higher education institutions (name and address), the list of recognised programmes in the institution (when the recognition process concerns programmes rather than institutions), and a list of the organisation(s) (name and address) which have recognised the institution.
- All individuals, students, parents, employers and other interested should have free access to information on the database through the Internet. A user friendly search mechanism should help the research. The database should serve as a portal including up-to-date information of recognised degree-granting higher education institutions globally.
- The list of institutions should be classified by country and would include all recognised higher education institutions operating in a country whether they are public/private, not-for-profit/for-profit or national/foreign. This would imply for example that a university branch campus of a foreign university which has been recognised in the receiving country would be included in the list of the receiving country. It will also be included in the list of the sending country, if the foreign campus activities have been recognised by the sending country as well.
- The database will be updated once a year on the basis of information provided by individual countries.

Issues concerning the database to be further elaborated

Several issues will have to be addressed concerning definitions and typologies used to identify information which will be available in the international database:

- The terms “recognised, registered, authorised, licensed, accredited, etc.” are sometimes used with different meanings in different countries. The differences in national regulatory systems should be taken into account and clarified while keeping the international database as simple as possible.
- A key issue is which type of post-secondary education institution to include in the database. It is suggested that the database at least would include all recognised degree-granting higher education institutions. It could however be left up to the countries to decide whether they would like to include other types of post-secondary institutions as long as these have been recognised nationally.
- In several countries it is not institutions but their programmes which are being recognised. There are cases where some degree-granting programmes have been recognised and others not of the same institution. It is important to determine a comprehensive typology for the database which includes all recognised institutions and programmes.
- Technical issues concerning how best to access the database need to be addressed.
- The cost issue related to establish and manage the international database should be addressed.
- The language(s) in which information on the international database would be made available needs to be determined.

Expert Group to make suggestions concerning the database

In order to analyse the above mentioned issues in detail, it is suggested to create a small Experts Group to come up with suggestions on the international database. This would then be discussed by the Drafting Group of the UNESCO/OECD guidelines to reach a consensus between the countries as part of the discussions on UNESCO/OECD guidelines on quality provision in cross-border higher education.