Programs, Providers and Accreditors on the Move: Implications for Recognition of Qualifications

Background Paper for the Bologna Seminar on
'Improving the Recognition System of Degrees and Study Credit Points'
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1.0   Introduction

1.1   Increasing Demand for Higher Education

There is ample evidence that demand for higher education in the next twenty years will outstrip the capacity of some countries to meet the domestic need. Furthermore, there is growing interest in 'international higher education' as a way to gain an internationally recognized qualification for future study and work in other countries. The Global Student Mobility 2025 Report (2002) prepared by IDP Education Australia predicts that the demand for international education will increase from 1.8 million international students in 2000 to 7.2 million international students in 2025.

By all accounts these are staggering figures and present enormous challenges and opportunities. Students moving to other countries to pursue their studies will continue and remain an important part of the international dimension of higher education. But student mobility will not be able to satisfy the enormous appetite for higher education from densely populated countries wanting to build human capacity to fully participate in the knowledge society or from students wanting an internationally recognized award. Hence the emergence and growing importance of transnational/ crossborder education programs and providers. It is not known what proportion of the demand will be met by student mobility but, it is clear that there will be exponential growth in the movement of programs and institutions/ providers across national borders. New types of providers, new forms of delivery and new models of collaboration are being developed in order to take education programs to students in their home countries.

1.2   Purpose and Parameters of Paper

The purpose of this background paper is to focus attention on the challenges and questions relating to the 'recognition' of the qualifications that students earn from the delivery of education courses and programs across national boundaries. The emphasis is clearly placed on education programs and providers crossing national jurisdictional borders- not the students. There are enormous implications for national education regulatory and policy frameworks resulting from crossborder education. This does not in any way diminish the importance of complementary regional /international regulatory and normative initiatives, but the challenges for both sending and receiving countries require special attention. The discussion goes beyond mobility of providers and programs within the Bologna zone.

1.3   Terminology

The vocabulary of quality assurance, accreditation, recognition can aptly be described as either a maze or minefield. Each country uses these concepts in ways that make sense in terms of their regulatory, policy, cultural and linguistic environment. It is thus very easy to get confused and lost in the maze of different approaches or accidentally trip on interpreting a concept in a different way than was intended. Therefore, the use of the terms related to recognition of programs, institutions and qualifications is based on the set of definitions provided in the background report for the seminar.

The language of internationalization is also changing and differs between countries and regions. Therefore, a few comments are necessary about crossborder education. The term education providers is now becoming a more common and inclusive term as it includes both the more traditional HEIs as well as the organizations, networks, governments and companies all of whom are providing tertiary education. This paper uses the term providers to mean all types of entities that are offering education programs and services. There is some criticism directed towards the use of the term 'providers' as it seems to be buying into the 'marketization and corporatization' agenda. This is a sign of the times and indeed, every attempt is made in this paper not to adopt the trade and commercial language of 'suppliers, consumption abroad, commercial presence' etc. A more inclusive term is needed to acknowledge the diversity of actors who are delivering all levels of tertiary education and therefore the term providers is used. Yet, it is also important to distinguish between the more traditional institutional providers and some of the new types of providers, many of whom are commercial in nature and purpose. (Included in Appendix one is a proposed draft typology of the different types of providers involved in delivering education courses and programs across borders.)

 There is great confusion in the sector about the meaning and use of the three terms 'transnational, crossborder, and borderless' education. All three have important distinguishing features. But, in the world of practice and policy, they are often used interchangeably and this causes some misunderstanding. In this paper, the newer term 'crossborder education' will be used in order to emphasize the implications of crossing national boundaries in terms of establishing/acknowledging national legislation, policy and practice related to quality assurance and accreditation of education programs/ institutions, and subsequently the recognition of qualification. Transnational education is a more established term and is used differently in various parts of the world. For instance, in Australia the term emerged as a way to differentiate between international students who were being recruited to Australian based universities and those students who were being enrolled in Australian programs offshore. In Europe, the Lisbon Convention has defined transnational education in terms of 'the learner being located in countries from the one where the awarding institution is based'. (UNESCO/Council of Europe, 2001). This has been a helpful definition and is most useful when referring to the movement of programs through franchise, twinning and distance education operations. A new question emerges with regards to crossborder education providers that are not 'home based' or part of a national education system and for the sake of a better term are 'stateless'. This raises the question of whether the learner is in fact located in a different country than the awarding institution. It is probably true (and even desirable) that crossborder will eventually be replaced by a term that will highlight the notion of international recognition rather than the nuance of national borders. However, this will take some time, as appropriate national, regional and international mechanisms need to be in place to ensure reliable, transparent and comparable

recognition procedures. The discussion on the meaning of transnational, crossborder, borderless education is meant to illustrate how different countries/regions use the term, but also to signal that there are significant implications for how crossborder data is collected and how regulatory frameworks are created.

2.0 Complexities of Transnational/Crossborder Provision - Implications and Challenges for Recognition of Qualifications

There is a new level of complexity in recognizing qualifications that are offered by non-domestic institutions/ providers. The recognition of a qualification is usually based on a national system which registers/licences the education institution/provider and secondly, requires a quality assurance assessment or accreditation for the programs and /or for the institution/provider. In the past decade, more than sixty countries have established some type of evaluation/accreditation system. This is a significant accomplishment. However, many of the new and existing systems are appropriately oriented to the recognition of qualifications offered by traditional domestic institutions. They are not equipped yet to register/license or assess the quality of crossborder programs and qualifications offered by foreign institutions and providers some of whom are private for-profit companies. . The development of this capacity is an important challenge and undertaking for the next decade.

New mechanisms and frameworks at regional and international levels also need to be considered to complement and strengthen the capacity of national level governmental, non-governmental and professional bodies with this challenge. This section discusses the current complexities of crossborder provision and the subsequent challenges and implications for the recognition of qualifications.

2.1 Complexities

- *Diversity of Providers- traditional and new*

  Traditional higher education institutions are no longer the only deliverers of academic courses and programs at home or across borders. International conglomerates, media and IT companies, new partnerships of private and public bodies are increasingly engaged in the provision of education both domestically and internationally.

  The increase in different types of crossborder providers includes non-traditional type of institutions/providers that are not part of any national education system and are in essence 'stateless'. Therefore, the advantage of knowing the status of the provider in their "home" country does not apply to these types of providers. As a result, they are 'unknown' entities in terms of quality of the education course/program and the acceptance/ trustworthiness of their awards.

  One common response to 'not being part of a national education system' is to obtain 'accreditation status' from different types of accreditation bodies or agencies. This in turn leads to the question of whether the accreditation agency is bona fide and can be trusted.

- *Diversity of Accreditors- recognized and rogue*

The increased awareness of the need for quality assurance and/or accreditation has lead to several new developments in accreditation, some of which are helping the task of domestic and international recognition of qualification, some of which are only serving to hinder and complicate matters.

First, it is important to acknowledge the efforts of many countries to establish criteria and procedures for quality assurance recognition systems and the approval of bona fide accreditors. At the same time, it is necessary to recognize the increase in self-appointed and rather self-serving accreditors, as well as accreditation mills that simply sell 'bogus' accreditation labels.

The desire for accreditation status is leading to a commercialization of quality assurance/accreditation as programs and providers strive to gain as many 'accreditation' stars as possible in order to increase competitiveness and perceived international legitimacy. The challenge is how to distinguish between bona fide and rogue accreditors, especially when neither the crossborder provider and accreditor are nationally based or recognized as part of a national higher education system.

A second aspect of the race for accreditation is the growth in the international dimension, or perhaps more aptly put, the international market for accreditation. First, it is important to acknowledge the upside of the internationalization of accreditation. New initiatives for mutual recognition of accreditation processes among countries, especially in the regulated professionals, have been a positive development. Countries lacking fully developed quality assurance systems have also benefited from the assistance of foreign bona fide accreditors. However, there are also instances when commercial and competitiveness motives have fuelled the desire for more accreditation stars resulting in inappropriate and non-reliable quality assurance processes. While this can apply to both crossborder and domestic provision, it is particularly worrisome for crossborder provision as attention to national policy objectives and cultural orientation is often neglected. In both cases, there is no clear understanding if the accreditor is bona fide and if the qualifications will be able to be acceptable for academic or professional purposes.

- *Different modes of mobility - Program and Provider*

The different forms of program and provider mobility introduce yet another level of complexity. To date, much of the discussion about program and provider mobility has consciously or unconsciously linked the type of provider with a certain mode of delivery. This has been a contributing factor to the general state of confusion about recognizing providers and programs. Therefore, it is important to separate the type of provider from the mode of crossborder delivery. Secondly, it is helpful to distinguish between whether it is a course/program being delivered in another country or whether the provider itself is moving.

Franchising, twinning, double/joint and other articulation models are the more popular methods of crossborder program mobility. Credits towards a qualification can be awarded by the sending

foreign country provider or by an affiliated domestic partner or jointly. The foreign and/or local partners may or may not be recognized as part of the national education system of their respective countries.

Forms of crossborder provider mobility are different and can include branch campuses, mergers with or acquisitions of domestic providers, independent institutions, study and support centres plus other types of innovative affiliations. Credits and qualifications are awarded by the foreign provider (through foreign, local or self-accreditation methods) or by an affiliated domestic partner or jointly. It cannot be assumed that either of the partners is necessarily part of a national higher education system or have been accredited by a bona fide accreditor. (See Appendix A for examples and further information on types of program and provider mobility)

The difference between program and provider mobility is one of scope and volume in terms of programs/services offered and the local presence (and investment) by the foreign provider. A key question to ponder is whether, under certain forms of provider mobility, the learner is actually located in a different country than the awarding institution.

- *Diversity of collaborative arrangements*

The diversity of new types of providers has lead to more innovative and complex collaborative arrangements for the delivery of education programs and degrees. The combination of partners (local/foreign, traditional and new providers, recognized/not-recognized, private/public, non-profit/for-profit) results in major difficulties in determining whose study program is being offered, who is responsible for delivery, who is ultimately granting the qualification and most importantly, who has licensed and quality assured the program/provider.

These are some of the realities of crossborder movement of programs and providers that have significant implications for the qualify assurance of programs and providers and consequently for the ultimate recognition of qualification for academic and professional purposes.

2.2   Key Issues and Challenges

- The development of national capacity and clear criteria to register/license, quality assure and recognize qualifications being offered by or through
  - different types of foreign providers
  - new modes of delivery including online
  - different forms of program mobility
  - different forms of provider mobility
  - different types of partnerships and collaborative arrangements
  - new types of programs

- Improved systems to monitor, report on, and inform students, employers, higher education stakeholders and society in general about low quality education providers, dubious degrees and bogus accreditation agencies

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- Increased cooperation between professional regulating bodies, quality assurance/accreditation organizations and related government departments to ensure that students receive appropriate professional recognition for academic qualifications and that employers have access to information and assistance in the recognition of foreign qualifications

- The creation of regional and international networks among organizations responsible for credential evaluation and recognition of qualifications to facilitate the exchange of information, good practice, new knowledge and the identification of common reference points.

- The establishment and implementation of quality assessment criteria and procedures which accommodate learning outcomes and competencies in the recognition and comparison of national and international qualifications

- The development and use of international mechanisms that provide information on the nature, level, type, source of qualification to ensure that employers, education institutions and society in general have clear, reliable and comparable information to assess academic qualifications regardless of type or location of education provider

- UNESCO regional conventions on the recognition of qualifications constitute an international legal framework but they need to be updated to reflect new realities and challenges of crossborder education. More countries need to ratify the convention and greater efforts directed to develop national level legislation/capacity to recognize foreign qualifications.

3.0 International developments related to Recognition of Qualifications and Crossborder Education

3.1 UNESCO/OECD joint initiatives

Both UNESCO and OECD have identified the accelerated growth and increasing importance of crossborder education as a priority area for the higher education sector. The changes in the landscape of crossborder education present important new opportunities and potential risks. Individually the organizations are undertaking initiatives in the form of Global Forum meetings, expert working groups and new publications. Important outcomes of these activities are two new joint projects. They are:

- *UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Crossborder Higher Education*
- *UNESCO/OECD Information Tool on Recognized Higher Education Institutions*

The purpose of the Joint Guidelines is to 'ensure that the quality of cross-border provision of higher education is managed appropriately to limit low quality provision and rogue providers and to encourage these forms of cross-border delivery of higher education that provides new opportunities, wide access and increases the possibilities of improving the skills of individual students'. A key assumption and intention of the guidelines is that quality provision is a fundamental way to protect students who are seeking and participating in crossborder education.

The Joint Guidelines are based on the principle of mutual trust and respect among countries and recognize the importance of national authority and activity in education policy making. The guidelines make recommendations for six key stakeholder groups: national governments, higher education institutions/providers, student groups, quality assurance and accreditation agencies, credential and qualification evaluation groups and professional bodies.

The guidelines are an important step towards increasing the awareness of key education actors and beneficiaries of the new opportunities, risks, and challenges of crossborder education. As guidelines, they are without any regulatory power, but they are critical to ensuring that crossborder education provision is a priority issue and receives attention and action by key stakeholders.

A second joint activity is the development of "An Information Tool on Recognized Higher Education Institutions". This is an important adjunct to the guidelines and will provide concrete information about higher education institutions that are recognized by a competent body in participating countries. Each country voluntary supplies and is responsible for the reliability and currency of the information. Clearly there are many challenges involved in designing, implementing and updating such a tool in a field that is growing and changing at such fast pace. For instance, how does one define higher/tertiary education institution? It is obvious that many providers of higher education are not traditional higher education institutions, will they be included? Secondly, the terms 'recognized' and 'competent body' often mean very different things in different countries, and therefore common reference points will need to found among the diverse interpretations. What kind of quality assurance or accreditation mechanisms are necessary to be acknowledged by a country as a 'recognized institution' and therefore be included in the 'international information tool'. The ability of many countries to produce and update this kind of list on national institutions, let alone crossborder providers, is still lacking and will necessitate national capacity building strategies. It is clear that a simple list of 'recognized institutions' is not enough. A consensus is needed on what supplementary information is desirable and feasible. The benefits of such a tool are many, so are the challenges in developing and updating it; however, it is an important and welcomed step and contribution to the field. The critical questions about the quality and recognition of those education providers that are outside of a national education system still remain and hopefully will be addressed by these working groups.

3.2 UNESCO Regional Conventions on the Recognition of Qualifications and UNESCO/ Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education

The current and forecasted growth in crossborder education in all forms (people, programs, providers and projects/services) bring new urgency to the revitalisation of the regional conventions on the Recognition of Qualifications. These instruments exist in all regions but at different levels of implementation and relevance to the present realities and challenges of international academic mobility. The international legal framework is therefore in place and efforts to update and reinforce the use of these conventions are underway and sorely needed

The European Convention on Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education was updated in 1997 and is best known as the Lisbon Convention. In 2001, The UNESCO/Council of Europe established a Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education to complement the Lisbon Convention. This Code was groundbreaking in its development and

intention. It has served as a catalyst and model for similar types national and agency based codes of practice. A review of the code reveals that the objectives and principles are sound and relevant. Yet, there are new developments and issues in the area of crossborder education that have surfaced since the creation of the code. Perhaps in an addendum to the code or in a future version of the code, attention can be given to the recognition issues arising from the diversity of actors delivering across borders (not just traditional higher education institutions); the innovations and complexities involved with new partners and forms of collaboration, the increase in the number of degree and accreditation mills and rogue providers, the different impacts on licensing, quality assurance and recognition arising from provider mobility as distinct from program mobility, and the changes being made to national regulations and policy about crossborder education. The coverage of education services in bilateral and multilateral trade agreements raises additional questions about removal of barriers to education trade which in fact, may be key aspects of national education policy for crossborder education. Last but not least, the definition or key criteria used to describe transnational education may needed to be reviewed in light of these issues and implications.

The growth in the volume, scope and dimensions of crossborder education has the potential to provide increased access, and to promote innovation and responsiveness of higher education, but it also brings new challenges and unexpected consequences. There are the realities that: unrecognised and rogue crossborder providers are active; that much of the latest crossborder education provision is being driven by commercial interests and gain; and that mechanisms to recognize qualifications and ensure quality of the academic course/program are still not in place in many countries. These present major challenges to the education sector. It is important to acknowledge the huge potential of crossborder education but not at the expense of academic quality or the recognition of qualifications for both academic and professional work at home and abroad.

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Typology of Providers

This typology is a work in progress. The term provider is used as a generic term to include all types of higher education institutions as well as companies and networks involved in crossborder education. It is an attempt to conceptually map the diversity of actors and to separate the type of provider from the form of crossborder delivery. The key factors used to describe each category of provider and to distinguish one category from another are 1) Public, private or religious; 2) Non-profit or for-profit; 3) recognized by a bona fide national licensing/accrediting body and 4) part of the national 'home' higher education system

The proposed typology is purposely rather generic and does not provide specific details on the characteristics of each category of provider. The typology is oriented to international academic provision but may have some relevance for domestic delivery as well. There seems to be a continual flow of announcements about new providers and new forms of partnerships between providers. It is an evolving field that needs to be monitored and this is why the typology is a work in progress.

Chart One: Typology of Crossborder/International Providers

Category	Status	Orientation	Notes
Recognized HEIs	Can be public, private or religious institutions. Usually part of home national education system and recognized by national bona fide licensing/ accrediting body	Can be non-profit or profit oriented	Known as traditional type of HEI focusing on teaching, research and service
Non-recognized HEIs	Usually private and not formally part of national education system Includes HEIs that provide a course of study but are not recognized by national bona fide licensing/ accreditation body. If the non-recognized HEIs are of low quality they are often referred to as 'rogue' providers	Usually profit oriented	'Diploma mills' sell degrees but do not provide programs of study and are related to crossborder education but are not a true provider. 'Rogue providers' are often accredited by agencies that are selling accreditations (accreditation mills) or by self-accrediting groups or companies.

Commercial Company HEIs	Can be publicly traded company (see Global Education Index of OBHE) or privately owned. Includes: 1. Companies that establish HEIs that may or may not be 'recognized' by bona fide licensing/ accrediting bodies and 2. Companies that focus more on the provision of services. Usually not part of 'home' national education system	Profit oriented	Known as type of "new provider" Can include variety of companies (ie media, IT, publishing) who provide education programs and support services. Can complement , cooperate, compete or co-exist with more traditional HEIs
Corporate HEIs May be difficult to identify home country	Not Part of home national education system Usually part of major international corporation and outside of national education system. Not usually recognized by national bona fide licensing/ accreditation body	Not relevant	Known as type of 'new provider' Often collaborate with traditional HEIs especially for degree awarding power
Affiliations/ Networks	Can be combination of public/public or public/private or private/private organizations and HEIs The affiliations/networks may or may not be part of home national education system; and they may or may not be recognized by national bona fide licensing/accreditation body. However some of the individual partners may be.	Usually profit oriented in purpose	Known as type of "new provider"
Vitual HEIs	Includes HEIs that are 100% virtual May or may not be part of home national education system and may or may not be recognized by national bona fide licensing/ accreditation body.	Usually profit oriented if delivering crossborder	Difficult for receiving national education system to monitor or regulate international virtual HEIs due to distance delivery methods
Footnotes	*Home country means country of origin or sending/ source country. Host country means receiving country.*	.	

One of the more central issues is who recognizes and gives the provider the power to award the qualifications in the 'home or sending country' and/or in the 'host or receiving country'. However, as previously pointed out some of the 'new providers' are not part of, or are not recognized by, a 'home' national education system. Another challenge in developing a typology is that the terms 'public, private and religious' are

interpreted and used in different ways among countries (and sometimes within countries as well). The emergence of new trade regulations applying to education services usually means that all commercial crossborder providers are considered to be private by host/receiving country regardless of their status at home. This adds yet another complicating dimension to the task. Furthermore, the definition of the terms profit and non-profit also varies among countries. It is interesting to follow the changes in national regulatory systems for crossborder in terms of these issues, and especially how profit and non-profit education entities and services are defined.

Typology of Program Mobility

Crossborder mobility of programs can be described as 'the movement of individual education/training courses and programs across national borders through face to face, distance or a combination of these modes. Credits towards a qualification can be awarded by the sending foreign country provider or by an affiliated domestic partner or jointly.' Program mobility can involve the delivery of individual courses and programs of a comprehensive HEI; thus, the crossborder profile of an institution/provider may be different from the home profile. On the other hand, program mobility can also involve the only program or course offered by a provider.

Chart Two: Typology of Crossborder <u>Program</u> Mobility Modes

Category	Description	Comments
Franchise	An arrangement whereby a provider in the source country A authorizes a provider in another country B to deliver their course/program/service in country B or other countries. The qualification is awarded by provider in Country A	Arrangements for teaching, management, assessment, profit-sharing, awarding of credit/qualification etc are customized for each franchise arrangement
Twinning	A situation whereby a provider in source country A collaborates with a provider located in country B to develop an articulation system allowing students to take course credits in country B and/or source country A. Only one qualification is awarded by provider in source country A.	Arrangements for twinning programs and awarding of degree usually comply with national regulations of the provider in the source country A.
Double/Joint Degree	An arrangement whereby providers in different countries collaborate to offer a program for which a student receives a qualification from each provider or a joint award from the collaborating providers.	Arrangements for program provision and criteria for awarding the qualifications are customized for each collaborative initiative in accordance with national regulations.
Articulation	Various types of articulation arrangements between providers in different countries permit students to gain credit for courses/programs offered/delivered by collaborating providers.	Allows students to gain credit for work done with a provider other than the provider awarding the qualification
Validation	Validation arrangements between providers in different countries which allow Provider B in	In some cases the source country provider may not offer these

	receiving country to award the qualification of Provider A in source country.	courses or awards themselves.
Virtual/Distance	Arrangements where providers deliver courses/program to students in different countries through distance and on line modes. May include some face to face support for students through domestic study or support centres	

Typology of Provider Mobility

Crossborder mobility of provider can be described as 'the physical or virtual movement of an education provider across a national border to establish a presence to provide education/training programs and/or services to students and other clients.' The difference between program and provider mobility is one of scope and volume in terms of programs/services offered and the local presence (and investment) by the foreign provider. Credits and qualifications are awarded by the foreign provider (through foreign, local or self-accreditation methods) or by an affiliated domestic partner or jointly. Forms of crossborder provider mobility include branch campuses, mergers with or acquisitions of domestic providers, independent institutions, study and support centres plus other types of innovative affiliations. A distinguishing feature between program and provider mobility is that with provider mobility the learner is not necessarily located in a different country than the awarding institution.

Chart Three: Typology of Crossborder <u>Provider </u>Mobility Modes

Category	Description	Examples
Branch Campus	Provider in country A establishes a satellite campus in Country B to deliver courses and programs to students in Country B. (may also include Country A students taking a semester/courses abroad). The qualification awarded is from provider in Country A	Monash University from Australia has established Branch campuses in Malaysia and South Africa. University of Indianapolis has a branch campus.in Athens
Independent Institution	Foreign Provider A (a traditional university, a commercial company or alliance/network) establishes in Country B a stand alone HEI to offer courses /programs and awards.	The German University in Cairo, Phoenix Universities in Canada and Puerto Rico (Apollo Group).
Acquisition/Merger	Foreign Provider A purchases a part of or 100% of local HEI in Country B.	Laureate (formerly Sylvan Learning Systems) has merged with and/or purchased local HEIs in Chile, Mexico and other LA countries.
Study Centre/ Teaching Site	Foreign Provider A establishes study centres in Country B to support students taking their courses/programs. Study centres can be independent or in collaboration with local providers in Country B.	Texas A&M has 'university centre' in Mexico City. Troy University (US) has MBA teaching site in Bangkok

Affiliation/Networks	Different types of 'public and private', 'traditional and new' providers from various countries collaborate through innovative types of partnerships to establish networks/institutions to deliver courses and programs in local and foreign countries through distance or face to face modes	Partnership between the Captor Group and Carnegie Melon University to establish campus in India. Netherlands Business School branch campus in Nigeria in partnership with African Leadership Forum (GO)
Virtual University	Provider that delivers credit courses and degree programs to students in different countries through distance education modes and that generally does not have face to face support services for students	International Virtual University, Hibernia College, Arab Open University