

CHAPTER 1:

The Recognition of Foreign Qualifications

1 What is meant by the recognition of foreign qualifications?

The free movement of students and scholars between universities was a normal characteristic of academic life in the Middle Ages. This changed dramatically with the establishment of nation states and the emergence of national languages, identities and symbols. The International Association of Universities (1970: 11) describes how, by the middle of the nineteenth century, it had become common for universities to identify with the nation, which resulted in huge diversity and weakened links across borders. On the other hand, the knowledge explosion emphasised the need for mutual access to academic work, while the younger generation was increasingly eager to gain knowledge and experience beyond the borders of their home countries. These trends made it essential to recognise foreign qualifications. By the end of the nineteenth century evaluation practices were well established.

In the current milieu of economic globalisation and the internationalisation of education, learner and worker mobility requires the recognition of qualifications across borders more than ever. Qualifications obtained in the education and training system of one country are still not necessarily known or understood in another country. Because of this qualification holders wishing to enter education and training or the job market in another country need to ensure the recognition of their qualifications in advance. Institutions seeking to admit holders of foreign qualifications also need to understand these qualifications as accurately as possible.

The position of a foreigner in a host country and the need for qualifications to be interpreted and recognised by authorities are clearly illustrated by the following e-mail received in the SAQA offices:

"I am currently living in France, but am South African. I studied at the University of Pretoria and obtained a B-Admin (International Relations) degree. The problem is that here in France they have a completely different system of education. In my search for employment this has become an obstacle. My question is, in my letters of application, would I be correct in saying that university education in South Africa is based on the UK system? I hope you can help me with this, because here the university plays a major role in the success of an application and because South Africa's education is not known it really has become an obstacle"

This case shows how the lack of a formal recognition process can frustrate an individual's progress in another country. The lack also has negative socio-economic consequences: it limits mobility of skills and blocks the assimilation of qualified people, both of which are especially important for emerging economies.

A closer look at the concept

Recognition includes:

- The *holistic process* which facilitates an understanding of foreign qualifications and the subsequent placement of foreign qualification holders for work or study purposes.
- The formal *decision* taken by an employer or education and training provider, or any other relevant party, to accept the qualification for a particular purpose.
- The *formal acknowledgement* by a competent authority of the appropriateness of a foreign qualification, which enables the qualification holder to access education or employment in the receiving country.

For further clarification, related concepts are illuminated below.

2.1 Recognition versus equivalence

The essential approach in the establishment of the standing of a foreign qualification, by the end of the nineteenth century and halfway through the twentieth, was that of determining *equivalence*. In the second half of the twentieth century, however, the concept of *equivalence* came to be seen as problematic. The difficulties included inevitable ambiguities, cultural bias and the valuing of difference. Guiton (1977: 10) alludes to the confusion created by the various uses of the term *equivalence*:

- A mere relation between the end results of two study programmes, which may be comparable more easily in principle than in practice and therefore not necessarily identical.
- An approximation of identity between features such as duration, content and intrinsic quality.

Rauhvargers (2003: 6) considers the wide diversity in programmes and qualifications and concludes that no two qualifications, even if awarded by different institutions in the same country, can be equivalent in principle or in practice - let alone two qualifications awarded in different countries. For this reason, a major international legal instrument for academic recognition, the Lisbon Convention of 1997, is not about equivalence, but about recognition. Indeed, the current trend is to recommend that competent recognition authorities should not merely indicate equivalence, but actively support and facilitate the recognition of foreign qualifications. This trend is already reflected in a number of international legal instruments and tools for best practice.

In spite of this trend, the term *equivalency* still prevails in the documentation of many evaluation agencies, while others refer to *comparability*. Whatever term prevails, however, the fact remains that the practice is concerned with comparing foreign qualifications with local ones with a view to recognising the former.

The Recognition of Foreign Qualifications

2.2 Recognition versus evaluation

The evaluation of foreign qualifications does not constitute the whole recognition process. But it is an important and central part of the process.

Evaluation is the process of analysing foreign qualifications in terms of their home contexts and points of difference and/or similarity in relation to local qualifications and contexts. This process constitutes the function of the Centre for the Evaluation of Education Qualifications (CEEQ) of SAQA – and of similar central or national advisory bodies worldwide. Evaluation leads to recommendations which inform the process of acceptance and recognition.

In order to distinguish between *recognition* and *evaluation*, international legal instruments generally refer to two types of bodies:

- Competent (recognition) authorities (bodies officially charged with making formal and binding decisions regarding the recognition of foreign qualifications), as opposed to
- National information centres, which evaluate qualifications and give advice and information on recognition matters.

An important difference between these two types of bodies is that national information centres offer advice, but do not have the jurisdiction to make binding decisions. Competent recognition authorities, on the other hand, make binding decisions in their specific contexts and may also have in place internal systems for evaluation.

The evaluation of foreign qualifications is dealt with in greater depth in chapters 2 and 3.

2.3 Academic versus professional recognition

Qualifications serve multiple purposes in opening up learning and career paths. The view of Rauhvargers (2003:4) is summarised below:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ▶ Access (general or restricted) to higher levels of education and training | ▶ Access to the labour market (either general, or to a specialised area , or to a regulated profession) |
| ▶ Access (general or restricted) to further studies at a given level | ▶ Access to professional training |

Broadly speaking, recognition is sought by qualification holders either for the purpose of further study or for employment. Consequently the need for recognition manifests mainly in two areas:

- Academic recognition, where the purpose is to determine whether the candidate can be admitted into a programme of further study. According to the European Union (EU) Commission (in Rauhvargers: 2003: 5), two subcategories can be distinguished:

- ✓ *cumulative* academic recognition (the qualification holder completed studies at one level and applies for admission to a subsequent level of studies); and
 - ✓ academic recognition by *substitution* (the prospective qualification holder wishes to undertake studies abroad which are to substitute for a part of the programme offered in the host country).
- Professional recognition, where the purpose is to determine whether the qualification holder possesses the required skills and competencies to pursue the profession or career in the receiving country. This may involve either
 - ✓ *de jure* professional recognition (either the education leading to the profession, or the pursuit of the profession is regulated by law); or
 - ✓ *de facto* professional recognition (neither the professional activity, nor the appropriate education is regulated by law).

There is a possibility that the same qualification may be recognised differently for each of these purposes. Various (national and international) legal instruments guide the recognition process and different bodies may be involved in each case, as indicated by the table below:

Academic recognition (for further studies)	Professional recognition (for employment purposes)
Regulated by:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Conventions • Bi-lateral / multi-lateral recognition agreements among states • Co-operation programmes at institutional level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National legislation • Regional directives • Agreements which are adopted internationally by professional bodies
Assessment carried out by:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National recognition information centres • Education and training providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers (often as advised by national recognition information centres) • Governmental Bodies • Professional Bodies
Decisions taken by:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National recognition bodies (some countries) • Education and training providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers (non-regulated professions) • Professional or governmental bodies (regulated professions)

(Rauhvargers, 2003)

The various types of bodies involved in the assessment and/or recognition of foreign qualifications are described in Chapter 2, with emphasis on role players in South Africa and their relevant responsibilities and relationships.

CHAPTER 2:

The Recognition of Foreign Qualifications in SA

1 Roles in the recognition process

As indicated in Chapter 1, the recognition of foreign qualifications entails both a process (coming to understand what a particular qualification signals) and the result of that process (a decision to accept the qualification for a specific purpose, i.e. an acknowledgement of its appropriateness for that purpose).

This points to two activities:

- Analysis and evaluation that informs a decision to recognise a foreign qualification. The competence to undertake such action demands the availability of the required knowledge base (including access to information), formal criteria for assessment (either generic or context specific) and the resources to carry out the evaluation.
- Formal acknowledgement of the foreign qualification and a binding decision allowing the qualification holder to access employment or further studies. This can only be done if the empowering regulations are in place.

The above roles could be mutually exclusive, but are not necessarily so. A particular role player may have both the competence to assess and the jurisdiction to recognise specific qualifications. Another may have only the competence to assess, or the jurisdiction to recognise. A decision-making body will need adequate knowledge, criteria and resources to allow for an in-house assessment if it does not engage the services of an external evaluation partner.

The Lisbon Convention¹ provides a useful model for defining the above roles, through its differentiation between **competent recognition authorities** vis-à-vis **national information centres**. In essence:

- National centres evaluate and offer advice intended to be as universally applicable as possible, but do not make binding decisions.
- Competent recognition authorities make binding decisions on recognition. Sometimes they even have systems in place to evaluate internally. However, their recognition decisions are valid in their own contexts only and cannot necessarily be transferred to other contexts.

¹ Reference to the Lisbon Convention should be understood to include the Explanatory Report to the Convention.

More detail on the differences between national centres and competent recognition authorities is reflected in the table below:

National centre	Competent recognition authorities
<p>General criteria based on structural features of education systems and for purposes of informed decision-making by a broad spectrum of users, at all levels and in all disciplines.</p>	<p>Specific in-house criteria based on selection requirements and for a particular purpose such as admission, registration or remuneration at given and in given disciplines.</p>
<p>Credential evaluation as an informative process is the primary function, although it is underpinned by research and results in the dissemination of information.</p>	<p>Credential evaluation is a secondary activity supporting another function (educational, professional and the like).</p>
<p>Equipped to assess all qualifications in terms of level indicators and to determine comparability.</p>	<p>Usually equipped to assess certain (specialised) qualifications in terms of content and outcomes.</p>
<p>General, advisory, more theoretical and intended to supply guidance, which needs to be refined or applied.</p>	<p>Specific, confined to one context, more applied – could lack insight into broad picture.</p>
<p>Serves to collect, coordinate and make available information at a national level.</p>	<p>Draws from information available at national information centre; should feed information back for co-ordination.</p>

1.1 A national centre for recognition advice

The Lisbon Convention recommends that there should be only one such centre in a particular country. The centre should have national functions and responsibilities. However, national policies and structures may make it desirable for a state to appoint more than one centre. A federal structure of government, different language communities within the same country, or a two-tier governmental structure might require more than one centre.

The national information centre should have the necessary resources to fulfil its functions, including an adequate number of competent staff, technical facilities and a sufficient budget. The budget must allow for adequate contacts with education and training institutions in the country in which the centre is located, as well as with national information centres in other countries.

The functions of this body are outlined as follows:

- Facilitating access to authoritative and accurate information on the higher education system and qualifications of the country in which it is located
- Facilitating access to information on the higher education systems and qualifications of other countries
- Giving advice or information on recognition matters and assessment of qualifications, in accordance with national laws and regulations

In South Africa, this describes the role typically played by the CEEQ at SAQA.

The Recognition of Foreign Qualifications in SA



Centre for the Evaluation of Educational Qualifications

The Centre for the Evaluation of Educational Qualifications (CEEQ) has, since its origins in the fifties, fulfilled the role of a national information centre. In addition, it has provided impetus in general recognition matters in South Africa and has helped to shape perceptions about recognition and placement.

The evaluation service:

- informs a variety of decision makers, who are not knowledgeable about foreign systems and qualifications, of appropriate levels of recognition of qualifications obtained in education and training systems other than the South African system;
- provides guidelines for placement for a range of purposes; and
- facilitates access to information on education and training systems around the world, including the South African system.

The early years

Cilliers and Muller (1987) describe how the CEEQ was first established to address the need for recognition advice that emerged after World War II as a result of an unprecedented influx of immigrants at the time. After research, started in 1957 by the former Department of Education, Arts and Science, the evaluation function was assigned to the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in the HSRC Act, 23 of 1968.

During the first thirty years of its existence the evaluation function catered largely for a need for the classification of both local and foreign qualifications, for purposes of admission to study and for employment and salary categorisation. The latter need existed especially in the public service sector, where use was made of a time-based scale². This required recognition advice to be expressed in terms of years of study. The South African Senior Certificate, commonly known as “Matric”, was the point of reference - hence the practice of expressing years of study as “M+”.

Evolution over time

International developments in the field of credential evaluation and educational change, locally and abroad, resulted in a gradual but steady evolution in approach. Quantitative criteria such as the duration of programmes decreased in prominence and gave way to benchmarks and other criteria of a more qualitative nature. With increasing internationalisation of education new and challenging concepts, such as transnational programmes, became a part of the scope of credential evaluation.

The most far-reaching development, following a rationalisation exercise by the HSRC and general agreement that SAQA was the environment best suited to house such a function, was brought about by the transfer of the CEEQ and its evaluation function to SAQA in July 1999. SAQA is currently mandated to evaluate qualifications in terms of Section 7 (5) of the SAQA Act, 58 of 1995.

² The so-called “M+” and related systems, such as the Relative Value Coefficient (RVQ) system on which the Public Service Staff Code used to be based.

Evaluation in the context of the National Qualifications Framework

The principles of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), which promote access, mobility, portability, a focus on outcomes and a culture of lifelong learning, have led to major changes in the work of the CEEQ since 1999.

A dramatic development was the radical change in the South African education and training system, which provides the framework of reference against which foreign qualifications are assessed. Of particular importance is the vast range of new qualifications, the changed status of qualifications - which often differs from that of the previous dispensation – and new qualification levels as denoted by the NQF.

Working in the context of the NQF required a shift from the previous time-based paradigm (expressed in the evaluation format) to a focus on outcomes. This shift has posed special challenges to the CEEQ, which does not have the capacity to carry out in-depth comparisons of content or to assess outcomes or competencies (acquired skills, knowledge and values) in relation to the multiple levels, types and fields of education and training with which the centre engages. In providing its services, therefore, the CEEQ follows the example of AEI-NOOSR by using as a general guide:

- the broad learning outcomes of the NQF (inasmuch as these have been finalised); and
- the legal rights to which a qualifications entitles the holder in the country of origin.

Status of the CEEQ's evaluations

In line with services offered by a range of other national information centres around the world, the CEEQ's service has a general and advisory status. The CEEQ offers considered opinions based on informed professional judgment, for a spectrum of purposes. It is most frequently consulted about qualifications for study and general employment purposes.

The CEEQ's evaluation decisions are not binding and take the form of advice to:

- employers for general employment purposes;
- educational institutions for the purpose of admission into their programmes; or
- any other competent recognition authority.

Recommendations are based on a structural comparison according to the criteria in Chapter 3 and indicate the relative local "currency" of foreign qualifications. The recommendations do not imply that contents or learning outcomes are identical.

The issuing of SAQA Certificates of Evaluation does not necessarily confirm the authenticity of qualification documents. Although steps are taken to verify authenticity when documents are obviously suspect, recipients of this certificate are advised to insist on original qualification documents and/or to have the authenticity of these verified by awarding bodies. In most cases, contact details can be provided by the CEEQ for this purpose.

The Recognition of Foreign Qualifications in SA

2

1.2 Competent recognition authorities

A competent recognition authority is defined in the Lisbon Convention as a body officially charged with *making binding decisions on the recognition of foreign qualifications*.³

The definition should be seen in the light of the following considerations:

- "Competence" is the *legal power* to make a certain kind of decision or to take a certain kind of action; rather than the knowledge to do so.
- There are different categories of competence or "varying competence": This relates to the fact that the competence of an authority may either extend to decisions on all kinds of recognition cases, or be limited (for example to recognition within a particular higher education institution, recognition within one type of higher education, recognition for academic or for employment purposes only).

Authorities, which are competent to make *different categories of decisions* in recognition cases, may be

- ministries or other government offices or agencies
- a semi-official agency
- higher education institutions
- professional bodies
- any other bodies officially charged with making formal and binding decisions on the recognition of foreign qualifications

In this regard, another useful distinction is the one between academic and professional recognition. The distinction, made by Rauhvargers (2003: 5), is referred to in Chapter 1.

Competent authorities for academic recognition

It is important for an academic institution to be able to determine whether a foreign qualification is adequate as a basis for entry to a next level of study. In addition, there are various options which demand an informed evaluation of a qualification: the possibility of granting advanced standing, subject exemption or credit for a part of the programme already covered by a part of the foreign qualification.

Competent recognition authorities in this area include mainly higher education institutions⁴ and their representative bodies, such as Higher Education South Africa (HESA) which is the higher education sector body responsible for, *inter alia*, handling the statutory admission functions of the Committee of University Principals (also known as the South African Universities Vice Chancellors Association) and the Committee for Technikon Principals.

³ This implies that other authorities may be competent for other parts or aspects of education and training (or employment.)

⁴ Cases where advice is sought for academic recognition at general and further educational and training level are limited. Internationally the focus in the field of credential evaluation is on higher education.

Academic recognition focuses on two levels of higher education:

- At the undergraduate level the emphasis is on access qualifications at school leaving level and their suitability for admission into initial higher education programmes (bachelor's degrees or other).

Admission is generally regulated by the minimum legal requirements for university and non-university study. In terms of the provisions of the Higher Education Act, 1997, the minimum general admission requirement for first university bachelor's degree studies is a (South African) Senior Certificate passed with matriculation endorsement (as affected by Umalusi, the General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance body) or a certificate of exemption from the matriculation endorsement requirements issued by the Matriculation Board.

Applications for admission to university-based certificate and diploma studies are dealt with institutionally.

SAQA evaluations are not based on the above requirements and are not suitable for purposes of matriculation endorsement or exemption from the endorsement requirements. In other words, they may guide a decision about foreign candidates' readiness for admission to higher education programmes, but the evaluations do not have the status of Matriculation Endorsement.

Institutions follow the guidance of the relevant authorities about general minimum legal requirements and have a legal right to determine their own admission requirements in addition to these. Additional specific conditions may have to be met in order to gain admission to a particular higher education programme.

- At the postgraduate level the suitability of access qualifications is determined by faculties, schools or departments of individual institutions. Approaches include
 - ✓ independent internal (subject specific) assessment;
 - ✓ recognition of prior learning (RPL); or
 - ✓ recognition advice furnished by an in-house evaluation unit, or by the CEEQ.

Recognition of qualifications for admission to consecutive levels of education as illustrated above typically refers to cumulative academic recognition as defined by Rauhvargers (2003:5) on page 6 of this document. Academic recognition by substitution assumes a prior exchange arrangement between a local and a foreign institution, including the evaluation of the programmes and substitute programme components in question.

Academic recognition based on in-house evaluation is contextually bound. It is therefore considered to be limited and does not have national standing. This creates a need for co-ordination at national level (described in page 13 (Relationships and ensuring responsibilities)).

Competent authorities for professional recognition

The purpose of professional recognition is to determine whether the foreign qualification holder possesses sufficient skills and competencies to pursue a particular profession or career in a receiving country.

The Recognition of Foreign Qualifications in SA

- *De jure* professional recognition, as defined by Rauvargers (see Chapter 1) entails the recognition of qualifications in professions in respect of which law regulates either
 - ✓ the education leading to the pursuit of the profession;
 - ✓ the pursuit of the profession itself; or
 - ✓ both.

Regulations pertaining to such professions in South Africa are implemented by a number of statutory professional bodies (listed in Annexure B) serving particular fields, in which each could be seen as the competent recognition authority. Evaluation of foreign qualifications mostly takes place internally by means of education committees and professional examinations, although some professional councils consider the recommendations of the CEEQ among other factors in their processes. Recognition decisions are confined to each of the professions in question and are therefore of a limited scope.

A related competent recognition authority would be the national Department of Education (DoE). The DoE through its sub-directorate for Educator Qualifications and Programmes evaluates the qualifications of foreign teachers according to criteria informed by the relevant legal requirements. This is a condition for the appointment of foreign teachers in public schools. SAQA evaluations are not fit for this purpose.

- *De facto* professional recognition (see page 6) entails the recognition of foreign qualifications for employment purposes, where neither the professional activity, nor the relevant education, is regulated by law.

In this regard, employers in general could be seen as *implied* competent recognition authorities, although they are normally not *officially* charged to make binding decisions of such a nature. A central issue here is whether the skills in question are classified as scarce skills by the Department of Labour (DoL) and warrant the issue of a work permit by the Department of Home Affairs. The evaluation of such foreign qualifications by the CEEQ forms an integral part of the DoL process.

1.3 Other role players

Other role players in the recognition of foreign qualifications, such as immigration or personnel agencies, form an important part of the CEEQ's clientele. These are seen as instrumental in the recognition process (due to their mediation role and the facilitation of placements), but not as competent recognition authorities.

2 Relationships and ensuing responsibilities

The relationship between the CEEQ and other central role players in the recognition arena involves reciprocity. This requires sensitivity to the needs, strengths and weaknesses of the various participants, as well as mutual awareness.

The table on page 14 offers a perspective on the unique strengths and specific needs of competent recognition authorities in South Africa in relation to the CEEQ as the national centre. The table is based on feedback from the recognition authorities, and is designed to increase awareness. It should also stimulate the will to build new or enhanced links. This will be mutually beneficial and will strengthen the validity of the recognition of foreign qualifications in South Africa.

National centre	Competent recognition authorities
Strengths	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive expertise and experience in the field of credential evaluation, as well as the security of an internationally aligned credential evaluation methodology. • Adequate infrastructure, systems, resources and procedures to deliver the necessary output, as well as a sound commitment and the necessary procedures to review these regularly. • A central position, which is conducive to impartial action and the ability to co-ordinate. • A strong international network and an understanding of issues in the field of credential evaluation. • Information on international education and training systems, including that of South Africa, as well as the ability to access and interpret relevant information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-depth subject specific, specialist practical and/or academic expertise in a particular field or fields; the ability and mechanisms to compare content and learning outcomes. • Bilateral and/or multi-lateral links by means of agreements and accords, offering pre-determined comparability which minimises the need for evaluation of qualifications. • Involvement, from time to time, in the development or accreditation of international programmes, which minimises the need for evaluation. • Experiences on the success or failure of placement, specific shortages, accuracy of evaluation recommendations. • Information on their own programmes, admission policies and requirements, spread of qualifications, professional prospects.
Needs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships with subject specialists to conduct more comprehensive evaluations and increase accuracy and applicability. • A better understanding of relevant market needs, as well as of the various uses of different qualifications in the study and work place. • Feedback on the successes and failures of placement recommendations and/or institutional views on appropriateness of recommendations, as well as on actual student performance as related to qualification types and origins • Information on the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Foreign institutions, (quality of) programmes and qualifications based on overseas visits, contacts, agreements and the like - Local programmes, requirements and academic and professional pathways • Soundboarding. • Clients' compliance with their own requirements and procedures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A database and other means of information on education and training systems, and institutions, contact details of educational authorities in other countries, comparability of foreign qualifications, confirmation of authenticity • Soundboarding and communication. • Guidelines and capacity building for in-house evaluation. • Comprehensive or partnership evaluations, including comparison of content and assessment of outcomes • Assistance in informed decision-making. • Better and more information on the CEEQ service (also through a regular newsletter), more user-friendly evaluations, faster output. • Interactive database, benchmarking and co-ordination of recognition decisions at various levels. • Needs not known.

It is clear from the table that the CEEQ and competent recognition authorities jointly possess the capacity to meet most of one another's needs and that, in fact, the needs of one party often are the strengths of the other. The level, content and extent of relationships will be determined by the level of awareness on both sides, both of needs and of available capacity to meet these.

The Recognition of Foreign Qualifications in SA

Stakeholder feedback indicates that the demand for the CEEQ's services may be high, low or variable. Demand is dependent on need, and on the level of awareness of the CEEQ services. There is a clear need for greater awareness and enhanced exchange of information.

Although the processes for admission to further study and professional registration may draw upon recognition advice as one consideration amongst others in reaching recognition decisions, users must take their own specific requirements into account. They are always encouraged to supplement SAQA evaluations with further assessments based on specific content and learning outcomes. The case study attached as Annexure A reflects how partnership evaluation can go a long way to strengthen recognition procedures.

The various responsibilities, as per the CEEQ perspective, are summarised below:

Responsibilities	National centre
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge the scope and boundaries of its role and establish appropriate contact with other role players in the recognition arena, as well as with the relevant professional bodies regulating certification, licensure or professional registration. • Deal with applications for evaluation strictly in accordance with the published principles, guidelines and criteria and within the published procedural framework and timelines of the CEEQ. • Obtain, consider and review all the necessary and relevant documentation and sources in evaluating an individual's qualification(s), with due regard to the purpose for which the application was made, and refuse to process applications for evaluation without the required documentation. • Build the infrastructure of systems and resources necessary to fulfil the evaluation function, including the professional knowledge and skills base, current and representative reference material, a comprehensive database of evaluation decisions, networking partners and support services. • Develop and maintain procedures for identifying and counteracting qualifications issued by dubious education and training institutions, as well as qualification documents which are not authentic. Providing contact details of awarding bodies⁵ helps to combat forgery. • Make available, when requested, information on the composition of professional and administrative staff employed in the CEEQ, evaluation policies, the scope of services offered and the terms and conditions, as well as the fees charged in respect of these. • Liaise to create awareness of market needs and ongoing refinement of evaluation formats to meet those needs. • Co-ordinate of feedback on the experiences of competent recognition authorities and other relevant parties regarding the appropriateness of placements and accuracy of assessments. • Serve as an information agency where the particular skills and knowledge of the unit are required, for example in the setting up of inter-institutional or inter-governmental agreements on mutual recognition.

⁵ See page 10

Competent recognition authorities

- Obtain information and build institutional understanding of the service offered by the CEEQ. Liaise to clarify problem areas.
- When using the CEEQ service, regularly check recentness of application guidelines, disseminate these to departments and individual clients. Comply with application requirements and conditions and urge qualification holders to do so as well.
- Share responsibility as far as the verification of authenticity is concerned, by insisting on the submission of original qualification documents and/or by directly contacting awarding bodies.
- If involved in evaluation at institutional level, ascertain what internationally accepted practice is and comply with this. Adopt (and adapt to internal needs, if necessary) the general principles and guidelines in this document. Contribute to the refinement of methodology.
- Develop and implement internal procedures for regular liaison with and feedback to CEEQ about the accuracy of recommendations. Make information sharing a priority.
- Explore ways of setting up partnerships, and/or assist the CEEQ in refining models for comprehensive evaluation.
- Make available specialist subject expertise to reinforce the recognition process when required.
- Make available information on internal matters as far as this can assist recognition of qualifications world-wide.

CHAPTER 3:

Criteria and Guidelines for the Evaluation of the Foreign Qualifications

For purposes of consistency, it is desirable that various levels of evaluation leading to the recognition of foreign qualifications should comply with a single set of basic guidelines. This should offer shared principles and mutual support. If two or more sets of guidelines are in use, they should at least be non-contradictory. In order to promote agreement, this chapter provides information on the guiding principles, procedures and criteria applied by the CEEQ. The chapter also provides assistance in the interpretation of its evaluation processes and recommendations.

1 Guiding principles

In accordance with international best practice, the CEEQ abides by the following broad principles:

1.1 A comparative approach

Assessment is based on the structural comparison of indicators in education and training systems and the features of qualifications within those systems. Recommendations are expressed in terms of the closest (minimum) comparable South African qualification that can be identified, referring also, as far as this is possible, to a particular level of the NQF. In taking this approach, the CEEQ acknowledges the international tendency to move away from merely determining *equivalence* in favour of an intention that actively promotes acceptance (or recognition).

1.2 Access to the evaluation service

The evaluation service is conducted in a way that makes it as accessible as possible to all holders of foreign qualifications applying for assessment, as well as to institutions applying on their behalf. No individual or other party is barred from access on any grounds not related to the criteria applied to evaluate the qualification(s) as contained in this document.

The accessibility of the evaluation service is reviewed from time to time with a view to improvement.

1.3 Evaluation without prejudice

Applications are considered and processed without prejudice. No discrimination is made on the grounds of gender, race, colour, disability, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status. The only consideration is the merit of the qualification(s) for which recognition is sought.

The CEEQ has a fundamental commitment to serving clients fairly, honestly and consistently. Clients' applications are treated confidentially within the confines of the law.

1.4 Fair, transparent, coherent and reliable criteria

Provision is made for the fair assessment of all applications according to criteria that are transparent, coherent and reliable. These criteria are applied consistently to all cases, including cases of study periods (uncompleted programmes). Fairness and consistency of approach and methodology are pursued - even if this leads to an outcome that does not meet the expectations of the applicant.

Criteria and procedures are reviewed periodically to ensure continued best practice.

1.5 Professional integrity

In addition to treating clients and conducting evaluations fairly and consistently, the staff of the CEEQ are required to resist and refuse all improper attempts, including offers of reward, compensation or personal benefit, to influence the outcomes of evaluations.

1.6 Consistency of evaluation outcomes

Unless exceptional circumstances warrant otherwise, similar qualifications should have similar evaluation outcomes. To this end, an inventory of previous evaluation outcomes is maintained.

2 Procedural guidelines

The guidelines below refer to procedural issues as related to clients and do not include the standard operating procedures according to which the CEEQ functions. These are available as an internal document.

2.1 Information

The responsibility for provision of information is shared by the CEEQ, the qualification holder and the education and training institution by which a qualification was issued.

CEEQ

Standardised information on procedures and criteria is contained in the CEEQ's application guidelines (Annexure C). This information is made available to applicants making preliminary enquiries. The information includes documentary requirements, tariffs and payment methods, approximate timelines, the procedure for appeal and the status of the assessment.

The CEEQ is also responsible for the maintenance of up to date and reliable information on education and training systems and qualifications, including the South African system and its qualifications.

Criteria and Guidelines for the Evaluation of Foreign Qualifications

3

A qualification holder has the right to be informed of the rationale underlying the evaluation of his/her qualification(s).

Qualification holders

It is the responsibility of the qualification holders to furnish the required documentation, as well as information meeting the requirements and enabling the CEEQ to consider an evaluation. In doing this they may be supported by the education and training institutions where they completed studies.

Applicants are expected to, in good faith, provide correct and truthful information, not wilfully omitting any relevant detail.

Education and training institutions

Education and training institutions have a responsibility to make available complete sets of qualification documents, as well as to furnish all the required information pertaining to a particular programme or qualification to the CEEQ upon request.

2.2 Processing time and delay

The CEEQ's evaluation results are made within reasonable time limits. Various options for processing time are specified upfront together with terms and conditions. Prioritisation of applications is linked to additional fees. Applications are processed according to certain priority options paid for upfront and, within these categories, on a first-come-first-serve basis. An application is considered active and processing time calculated only from such time that the applicant has provided all the necessary information, documentation and payment.

In cases where a substantial delay is expected - for example when more information is requested from the country of origin - clients are informed to this effect. The CEEQ has no control over the response time for information from abroad, but makes every effort to ensure that contact is established in the most effective way.

2.3 Fees

The CEEQ's service is self-funded on a non-profit, cost-recovery basis. The fees charged for evaluation are thus kept as low as possible in order not to constitute a barrier.

A comprehensive fee structure is made available on request as part of an application guide. (these documents are also available on the SAQA website: www.saqa.org.za) Fees are revised from time to time in accordance with increased operational costs and with due regard for the principle of accessibility. In the event of a price increase, new tariffs are communicated in advance to regular and prospective clients.

2.4 Documentary requirements

Documentary requirements are clearly indicated (Application Guide: Annexure C, page 4). Copies of documents are accepted, but must be certified (preferably by a diplomatic office of the country in question). In exceptional cases sworn statements may be accepted in lieu of official qualification documents.

Documents are scrutinised for evidence of misrepresentation. If misrepresentation is suspected, a further investigation incorporating verification measures is lodged. If proof of such misrepresentation has been established, an evaluation report is not issued, moneys are retained and the relevant authorities are notified.

Verbatim translations by sworn (certified) translators are required in respect of key or primary documents. These do not substitute for documents in the original language, but are intended as supporting documentation and should be attached to the documents in the original language. Qualification titles in the original language must be provided at all times.

2.5 Right of appeal

Qualification holders have the right to be informed of the rationale underlying, and may appeal against, evaluation results that are not in accordance with their expectations. An appeals procedure is in place to facilitate this process.

Wherever possible, guidance is offered to assist applicants in taking the remedial measures needed to meet the requirements of the levels to which they seek admission. This is exemplified by an information leaflet advising on the upgrading of Ordinary Level and related subjects (Annexure D).

3 The process for evaluating foreign qualifications

The following procedures are followed by the CEEQ when evaluating foreign qualifications. A schematic outline of this is attached as Annexure F. As required by other contexts the sequence of these steps may vary, or steps may overlap:

Step 1: Receipt of enquiry / request for information / application for evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Registration and acknowledgement of receipt.
Step 2: Scan documents to determine nature of the correspondence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If general enquiry / request, compile response.• If application, continue to analyse documents.
Step 3: Determine:	
(a) Completeness of application	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If payment lacks, or documents do not meet requirement in terms of completeness, request the necessary from applicant.• If complete, continue.
(b) Status of awarding body	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If not recognised, inform applicant to this effect and refund, if applicable.

Criteria and Guidelines for the Evaluation of Foreign Qualifications

3

(c) Authenticity of documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If recognised, continue.• If suspect, request original documents and request verification of authenticity from competent authority in country of origin.• If not suspect, continue. If required, assist by providing contact details of awarding bodies so that recipients can have authenticity verified.
Step 4: Analyse each qualification submitted, taking into account:	
(a) Purpose for which evaluation is required	
(b) Formal regulations such as national legislation, international conventions and formal recognition agreements	
(c) Past practice in similar cases	
(d) Information and/or decisions available from other national information centres or competent recognition authorities, or other relevant and reliable sources	
(e) Each of the criteria described under par. 4 below	
Step 5: Compile an evaluation report and make available to the applicant and/or other relevant parties, as requested	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluation is accepted as is and supports decision to recognise, partially recognise or not recognise the qualification in question.• Evaluation is supplemented with a purpose specific assessment leading to recognition, partial recognition or non-recognition of the qualification.• Applicant is satisfied.• Applicant is not satisfied, in which case an appeal may be lodged. In case of this, the evaluation is reconsidered on the basis of additional information furnished by the applicant in support of his/her case.

4 Criteria for evaluation

A qualification is situated within the framework of the education and training system it belongs to. The evaluation process aims to determine the qualification's relative place and function, compared to other qualification in the same framework, and then to identify the most comparable South African qualification.

Qualifications of seemingly comparable level may in fact show considerable differences in duration, content, profile or learning outcomes. These differences

are to be considered in a flexible way, but ultimately differences that are substantial may be pointed out and may have an influence on the outcome of the evaluation. The overarching aim is that foreign qualifications should be recognised, unless substantial differences can be indicated with regard to the following:

- Academic and professional legal rights conferred by a qualification in the country of origin⁶.
- Access to further activities offered by the qualification in the country of origin (next level of study, research or employment).
- Key elements of the programme leading to the qualification as stipulated in par. 4.3 below.
- Quality of the programme, in as far as this can be determined.

4.1 The origin of education and training systems

As a result of colonialism, many education and training systems are tailored on, and can therefore be interpreted meaningfully in terms of, "mother" systems such as the British, French, Spanish or Portuguese.

The achievement of independence by colonised countries often resulted in adaptation of the original systems. As a result current systems can be complex hybrids of the original systems. In some countries, the remains of previous eras are more easily detectable than in others, but in each case they serve to provide a means for classification and therefore an overarching basis for comparison. Finding such links is therefore a useful point of departure.

4.2 Status of the awarding institution

It is vitally important to determine the status of the awarding institution as a first step in the evaluation. The wide diversity of provider institutions in higher education and training, plus recent developments in transnational education and training make this necessary – not to mention the opportunism of dubious institutions and their exploitation of learners. The evaluation process therefore needs to establish beyond doubt whether an awarding institution belongs to the national education and training system in the country of origin of the qualification. Transnational arrangements between institutions need to be scrutinised.

4.3 Key elements of the programme leading to the qualification

The following key elements inform the analysis of qualifications:

- Purpose for which the qualification was designed.
- Date of completion. Qualifications issued several years ago may be outdated, but may need to be considered in conjunction with experience.

⁶ The outcomes of the learning - or the capabilities resulting from the qualification - are usually established at the level of the competent recognition authority by means of professional examinations, interviews and the like.

Criteria and Guidelines for the Evaluation of Foreign Qualifications

3

- Minimum stipulated entry requirement, as an indicator of the level at which the qualification is pitched. A benchmark approach is followed in this regard, allowing, for example, for school leaving qualifications to be accepted, regardless of differences in the duration of schooling.
- Minimum stipulated duration, whether part-time or full-time.
- Structure and type of the programme, including aspects such as experiential learning, research combined with coursework, vocational training.
- Programme requirements, such as credit totals and distribution, grading, dissertations, internships.
- Further access gained by virtue of the qualification - whether full or restricted access, whether access to general employment, or to a regulated profession or further education at a particular level.
- Formal rights ultimately bestowed on the qualification holder, such as the right to use a professional title.

4.4 Qualifications frameworks

Qualifications frameworks, where these form a part of education and training systems, are useful indicators of the relative places and status of qualifications in their home countries, as well as of quality assurance processes that are in place.

4.5 General considerations

The evaluation focuses on the qualification submitted for evaluation and takes into account all the relevant, official and available information.

Quantitative criteria are useful in determining the level of achievement reached at the end of a programme, but their significance depends on learning outcomes and the quality of delivery. Where such information includes reference to learning outcomes which cannot be evaluated by the CEEQ this should take precedence over the programme elements. Recommendations highlight such matters for the attention of competent recognition authorities. The evaluation process acknowledges the influence, for example, of recognition of prior learning, credit transfer, different forms of access to programmes, double degrees and excelled programmes on various features of a programme.

The purpose for which the evaluation is required has a bearing on the way a qualification is evaluated. The existence of national and/or international legal provisions, such as contained in the regulations for professional practice or in bilateral and multilateral agreements between governments, may require a specific decision to be reached or procedure to be followed. This must be taken into account.

Past evaluation decisions, whether made in-house or by other evaluating agencies or competent recognition authorities, serve as a guide. The analysis of similar qualifications should normally lead to the same outcomes, unless an adapted recommendation can be justified.

5 The SAQA Certificate of Evaluation

Composition

Each Certificate of Evaluation contains the following information in respect of each qualification or group of qualifications evaluated:

- ❑ Personal details of the qualification holder
 - Current name (with reference to the names on qualification documents, if these differ from the current name used).
 - Date of birth⁷.
- ❑ Recording of the qualification or period of study (in respect of which a recommendation regarding possible advanced standing will be made).
 - Name and country of origin of the awarding institution, with an explanatory note on its status, if deemed necessary.
 - The indigenous (and/or translated, if necessary) name of the qualification awarded, or the programme studied, where the qualification has not been completed.
 - Date of the award (or years of enrolment, if not completed).
 - Supporting documentation (or lack thereof).
- ❑ Description of qualification (or period of study) as analysed according to the criteria in paragraph 4 on pages 21 to 23:
 - Duration and type of study.
 - Admission requirement (and deviations from this on the strength of other considerations).
 - Field and specialisation, with an indication of concentration or weighting, where possible.
 - Programme requirements and features.
 - Legal rights bestowed on the holder in the country of origin, if any.
 - National status in country of origin in terms of a qualifications framework, if any.
- ❑ Indication of an evident substantial difference or differences as compared to a local comparable qualification, if applicable. This may refer to duration, education and training sectors, sub-structure (preceding qualifications as formally required), content as far as this can be determined on the basis of a structural analysis, legal rights, or any other relevant aspects.
- ❑ A summary of the education and training completed and the qualifications obtained (optional).

⁷ Only on certificates referenced 2005-00000 and onwards, i.e. in respect of which the *applicants were received* as from 1 April 2005

Criteria and Guidelines for the Evaluation of Foreign Qualifications

- A recommendation as to what the appropriate level of recognition of a particular qualification, or combination of qualifications, would be in South Africa. This is expressed in terms of:
 - the closest comparable (specific) South African qualification, or if one does not exist, the closest comparable type of South African qualification; as well as
 - the relevant NQF level.

- Additional information or provisos, if applicable. These may relate to one or more of the following:
 - A recommendation for further refinement of the evaluation by a competent recognition authority.
 - The status of the recommendation in relation to legal requirements for admission or professional status in the particular field or at the particular level.
 - The status of the evaluation in terms of authenticity of qualification documents (see page 10).
 - The conditions for finalising a provisional recommendation.

Security features

Evaluation reports are printed against a **background with SAQA** printed in **blue** and in evenly spaced **horizontal lines**. All SAQA certificates must bear the following:

- **A unique reference number** and a **date of issue**.
- **Two signatures**, the authenticity of which can be verified by the CEEQ.

In addition, all certificates referenced 2005-00000 and onwards, i.e. in respect of which the *applications* were received as from 1 April 2005, must bear:

- a **SAQA security hologram with a unique identity number**, attached to the upper right hand corner of the Certificate of Evaluation.

Samples of the various certificate formats issued by SAQA are available for reference purposes as Annexure G.

Written requests for the verification of authenticity of SAQA certificates should be addressed to The Head: CEEQ and will be replied to in writing.

LIST OF SOURCES

Association of International Educators (NAFSA). (Date unknown). *A NAFSA Guide to Selecting a Foreign Credentials Evaluation Service*. Retrieved 2 July 2004 from <http://www.nafsa.org/>.

Australian Government. (2004). *South Africa. Country Education Profiles, Second Edition*. AEI-International Education Network: Canberra.

Cilliers H. and Muller J.F. (1987). *Compendium of evaluations of South African and foreign educational qualifications*. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council.

Guiton, J. (1977). *From equivalence of degrees to evaluation of competence. Present procedures and practices. New avenues*. Ghent: UNESCO.

International Association of Universities. (1970). *Methods of establishing equivalences between degrees and diplomas*. Ghent: UNESCO.

National Association of Credential Evaluation Services. (Undated). *The Standards of Excellence*. Retrieved 20 September 2004 from <http://www.naces.org>,

Provincial Assessment Committee, Canada. (1998). *General Guiding Principles for Good Practice in the Assessment of Foreign Credentials*. Retrieved 2 July 2004 from <http://www.cicic.ca/pubs/prncpen.stm>.

Rauvargers, A. (date unknown). *Recognition of Foreign Qualifications*. Retrieved 30 June 2004, from http://www.aic.lv/ace/tools/leg_acleq_in_ac.htm.

UNESCO in collaboration with Council of Europe. (1997). *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region. European Treaty Series - No. 165*. Retrieved 25 June 2004 from http://www.aic.lv/ace/tools/leg_acleq_in_ac.htm.

UNESCO in collaboration with Council of Europe. (1997). *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region. European Treaty Series - No.165. Explanatory Report*. Retrieved 2 July 2004 from http://www.aic.lv/ace/tools/leg_acleq_in_ac.htm.

UNESCO in collaboration with Council of Europe. (2001). *Explanatory Memorandum. Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications*. Retrieved 2 July 2004 from http://www.aic.lv/ace/tools/leg_acleq_in_ac.htm.

UNESCO in collaboration with Council of Europe. (2001). *Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications*. Retrieved 2 July 2004 from http://www.aic.lv/ace/tools/leg_acleq_in_ac.htm.

UNESCO. (Revised 2002). *Arusha Convention on the recognition of qualifications in Higher Education in Africa*. Regional Convention on the recognition of studies, certificates, diplomas, degrees and other academic qualifications in Higher Education in African States. Retrieved 2 July 2004 from http://www.col.org/speeches/ArushaConv_02.htm.