# VERIFYING AND AUTHENTICATING ACADEMIC DOCUMENTS AND TRANSLATIONS MANUAL
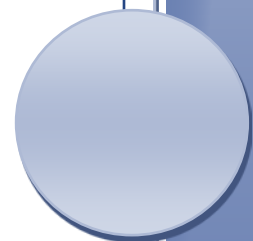
Prepared for Engineers Canada

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Engineers Constituent Associations, staff from professional regulatory bodies and assessment agencies as well as many others contributed their time to discuss the process, issues and challenges inherent with the academic document verification and translation processes of internationally educated professionals. The consultant for this manual expresses her appreciation to all these individuals and organizations.

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## About the Manual

This manual describes how Engineers Canada (EC) supports procedures concerning verifying and authenticating academic credentials and transcripts (herein referred to as academic documents) and translation of those documents.

It is informed by best practices used by Constituent Associations, Canadian regulatory bodies as well as Canadian and international academic credentials assessment services. Further, it is designed to assist academic credential assessors to carry out fair processes according to the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), the Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications, as well as the studies conducted by the Ontario Office of the Fairness Commissioner (OFC) on the practices of Qualifications Assessment Agencies in Ontario.

Several guides were also used in developing this manual:

- Best Practices: Strategies and Processes to Obtain Authentic International Educational Credentials by World Education Service (WES) (2012)
- Combating Education Fraud - Network of National Academic Recognition Information Centres-UK (NARIC-UK) (2015)
- Evaluating Foreign Educational Credentials: An Introductory Guide by Association of International Educators (NAFSA) (2010)
- Misrepresentation in the Marketplace and Beyond: Ethics Under Siege – American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), Washington, DC (1996)
- The European Recognition Manual for Higher Education Institutions by European Association for International Education (EAIE) (2012)

The scope of this manual is on describing the processes about translation of and/or translated academic documents as well as processes EC or academic credential assessment services or a Constituent Association may consider undertaking when verifying / authenticating academic documents received from an applicant seeking academic credential assessment. Other aspects of the assessment process concerned with recognition of institutions, determining the existence of institutions, diploma mills, recognition of programs of study, comparative analysis of education, confirming the identity of the applicant, and review of other documents such as syllabus, membership certificates, good standing status and such are not covered by this manual.

Users of this manual may have different levels of experience in verifying academic documents or handling translations, hence, this manual can be used as a quick guide, as an introduction to the fundamental concepts of verification and translation and/or as a training tool.

Moreover, guidelines included in this manual may not always be viable and different approaches may be necessary for different circumstances. This manual does not cover approaches and steps necessary in cases where an applicant cannot provide documentation (e.g., refugee cases). Alternative measures such as sworn affidavits, interviews, confirmatory examinations, and prior learning assessment may be used in cases when authenticity of a credential cannot be verified. Supportive evidence may include professional license, statements from employers, statements from teachers, lists of admitted, registered or graduated students, student ID cards, registration/enrollment slips, tuition receipts, course catalogue and syllabi. Applicants may be also asked to explain possible interruptions, delays or non-completion of education, the admission requirements for their education, and/or to construct syllabus / course descriptions. Ontario College of Teachers provides comprehensive guidelines for when an applicant is unable to submit documents. Further, section 9 of the World Education Service report on Best Practices: Strategies and Processes to Obtain Authentic International Educational Credentials offers possible solutions to handle these situations.

Two major sections are included in this manual: Authenticity / Authentication Process and Translations / Translated Documents. Each section starts with an introduction followed by explanations and examples.

Appendix 1 includes information about the terminology used in this manual and suggests the use of an online terminology guide for definition of the terms used herein.

Appendix 2 includes a list of warning signs and legitimate reasons for applicants from certain countries being unable to provide documentation of their academic credential or transcripts. Appearance of academic documents is also included in this section and provides useful hints and examples for the user's reference.

A list of useful electronic resources as well as the resources and references used in developing this manual is provided in Appendix 3.

# Foreword

Altered and fraudulent academic documents have long been a problem and fraudulent documents have become a minor industry in some parts of the world. Forgery is an ancient art. For example, Egyptian law of several thousand years ago attempted to restrict its spread by serious measures: "The punishment was directed more particularly against the offending member; and adulterators of money, falsifiers of weights and measures, forgers of seals or signatures and scribes who altered any signed document by erasures or additions, without the authority of the parties, were condemned to lose both their hands."[1] Fraud can be very endemic in certain countries in some cases and some academic credential assessment services are reluctant to accept documents from countries that have been tainted with incidents of counterfeit records. For example, World Education Service (WES) and International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS) no longer accept applications from Somalia and Afghanistan and there are countries out there that we should probably verify every credential from.

There is quantitative and qualitative argument in research but in the credentials assessment world we often times deal with the qualitative aspects which means we may think everyone is criminal because we see one fraudulent credential and we may think all of them must be fraudulent. We must therefore take a look at how big the problem is and determine if there are possible quantitative indicators to be able to realistically look at it from credential assessment point of view.

Once we get to how big the problem is, then we can get to the issues of what is the context of corruption and fraud in the individual country. Authenticity is a big deal and we want to make sure that if there is a fraudulent credential, we do as much as we can to catch it. Better technology makes falsifying documents easier and harder to detect. With a world of scanners and other technologies the documents that can be created are limitless.

Some organizations are also likely targets than others. For example, academic credentials assessment services with high profiles and big in size, most likely would not be the primary target. Smaller institutions, such as provincial regulatory bodies that conduct credentials assessment, with limited number of staff dedicated to detecting fraud would be more likely the target. On the other hand, in the case of the provincial regulatory bodies, even if a small number of fraudulent credentials are not caught, the applicant still has to be admitted to the licensing process, successfully complete the educational credential assessment process and perhaps complete confirmatory exams before obtaining a licence to practice their profession.

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[1] [1] Yaggy, L.W.; Haines, T.L. *Museum of Antiquity* (Nashville : South Western Publishing House, 1880), 237

Fraud exists and we must be mindful of it and understand the complexities of fraud and corruption in the context of the applicant's country but all estimates indicate that the majority of credentials are not fraudulent. Applicants who submit valid documentation may therefore be placed as a disadvantage since they are subjected to extra scrutiny.

As a start, organizations must understand their priorities and their tolerance in making an incorrect decision. Sometimes we can be frozen by our fear of fraudulent credentials and sometimes the system makes it right for academic fraud. Organizations must be fair to all applicants, always keep this in the context and be aware of what is occurring in the environment where the applicant completed his/her education.

Capturing, codifying and disseminating the knowledge as it becomes available is key to detecting fraudulent documents. Higher Education Corruption monitor at the Centre for International Education at Boston College provides free online resources such as quarterly news letter with contemporary issues in international education (Appendix 4).

## Authenticity and the Authentication Process

An academic document is authentic when it is issued by the institution(s) authorized to issue the document, has not subsequently been unlawfully altered by the applicant or others and has in fact been rightfully issued to the applicant.
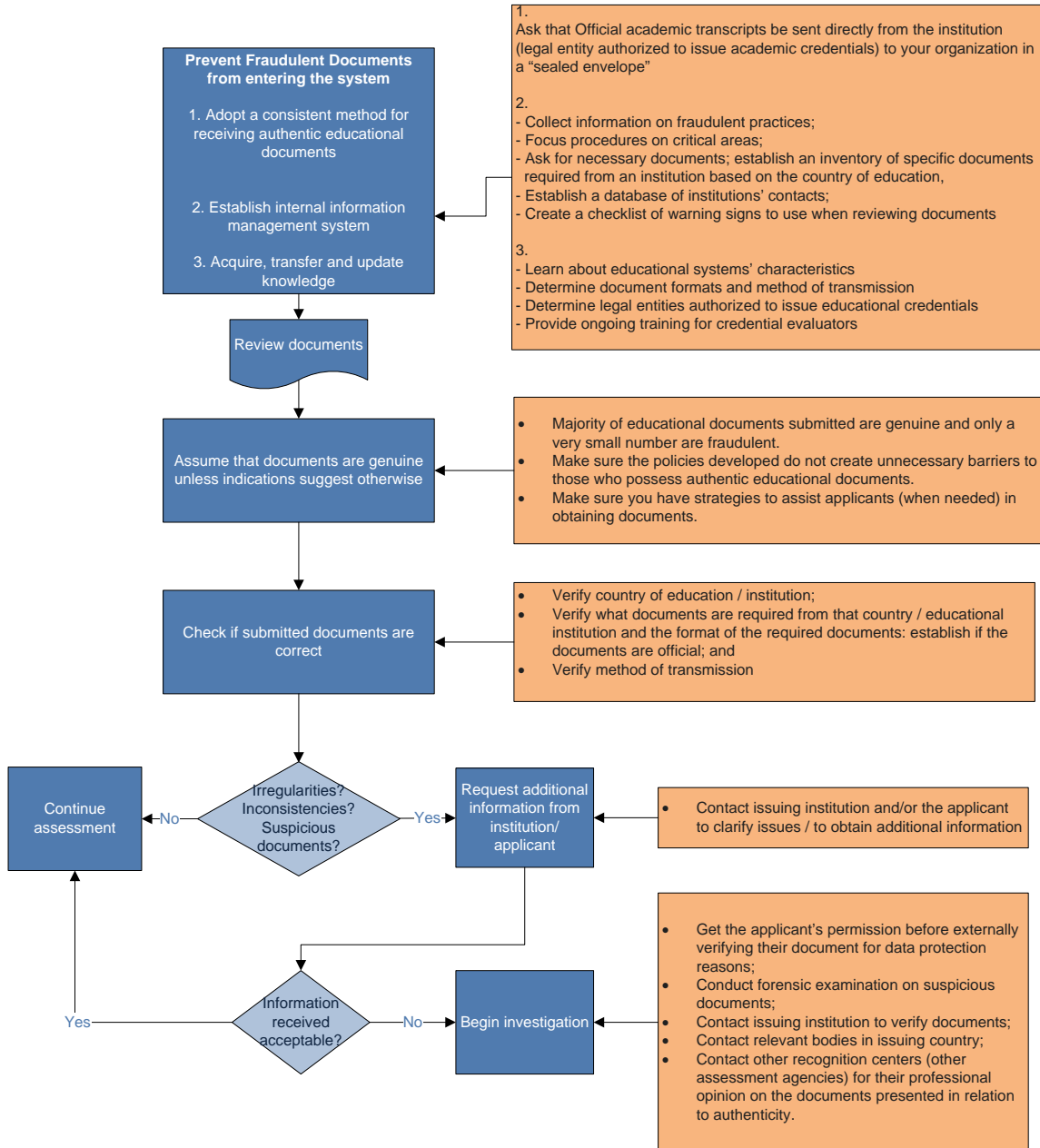
Authentication, in the context of this manual, refers to a process by which credential assessors seek to establish the authenticity of academic documents presented to them, assessing qualifications/documents for fraudulent elements.

Credential assessors are cautioned to keep in mind that "while the need to establish the authenticity of documents as a part of the assessment procedure is very real, this need should nonetheless be balanced against the burdens placed upon applicants. The basic rules of procedure assume that most applicants are honest, but they should give the competent recognition authorities the opportunity to require stronger evidence of authenticity whenever they suspect that documents may be forged" (The Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee (LRC), 2001).

**CAUTION** A note of caution is in order here: the terms 'forged', 'fraudulent', and/or 'fabricated' are used in the LRC and many other documents and guidelines when inscribing about verifying academic documents, however when corresponding with the applicants about the documents in question, some academic credential assessment services as well as AACRAO caution that the terms such as 'forgery', should not be used as it is a legal term and since it implies "intent", it is the verdict of a judge in a court of law.

# Authenticity - Process Flowchart

**Prevent Fraudulent Documents from entering the system**

1. Adopt a consistent method for receiving authentic educational documents

2. Establish internal information management system

3. Acquire, transfer and update knowledge

1.
Ask that Official academic transcripts be sent directly from the institution (legal entity authorized to issue academic credentials) to your organization in a "sealed envelope"

2.
- Collect information on fraudulent practices;
- Focus procedures on critical areas;
- Ask for necessary documents; establish an inventory of specific documents required from an institution based on the country of education,
- Establish a database of institutions' contacts;
- Create a checklist of warning signs to use when reviewing documents

3.
- Learn about educational systems' characteristics
- Determine document formats and method of transmission
- Determine legal entities authorized to issue educational credentials
- Provide ongoing training for credential evaluators

**Review documents**

**Assume that documents are genuine unless indications suggest otherwise**

- Majority of educational documents submitted are genuine and only a very small number are fraudulent.
- Make sure the policies developed do not create unnecessary barriers to those who possess authentic educational documents.
- Make sure you have strategies to assist applicants (when needed) in obtaining documents.

**Check if submitted documents are correct**

- Verify country of education / institution;
- Verify what documents are required from that country / educational institution and the format of the required documents: establish if the documents are official; and
- Verify method of transmission

**Irregularities? Inconsistencies? Suspicious documents?**
— No → **Continue assessment**
— Yes → **Request additional information from institution/ applicant**

- Contact issuing institution and/or the applicant to clarify issues / to obtain additional information

**Information received acceptable?**
— Yes →
— No → **Begin investigation**

- Get the applicant's permission before externally verifying their document for data protection reasons;
- Conduct forensic examination on suspicious documents;
- Contact issuing institution to verify documents;
- Contact relevant bodies in issuing country;
- Contact other recognition centers (other assessment agencies) for their professional opinion on the documents presented in relation to authenticity.

## Prevent Fraudulent Documents from Entering the System

**Adopt a Consistent Method for Receiving Legitimate Academic Documents**

In a recent document, "Best Practices: Strategies and Processes to Obtain Authentic International Educational Credentials" (WES, 2012), WES advises that establishing consistent documentation practices will help prevent fraudulent documents from entering the system and suggests that academic transcripts be submitted directly from one institution to another in a sealed envelope.

Keep in mind that:

- It is difficult to detect fraudulent documents due to advanced printing technology therefore scrutinizing documents for warning signs is time consuming, unreasonable, ineffective and inefficient;
- It takes time to source verify every academic document received. Time for confirmation ranges from weeks to months and in some cases, some institutions would never respond to such requests; and
- It takes a considerable amount of time to compare every received academic document with samples of previously received documents is a database.

Every effort should therefore be made to establish policies to ensure that only genuine academic documents enter the system. Almost all North American institutions, majority of European institutions and institutions in Australia transmit academic transcripts directly to the designated organization in a sealed envelope. Keep in mind that, in majority of cases, the most secure documents are not issued to the student and are mailed directly to the intended recipient in a sealed institutional envelope with an institutional meter mark rather than a postage stamp.

Student data today exist in a digital format and as a response to increasing student mobility, many academic institutions are developing secure and complete digital platforms for student data (The Groningen Declaration, 2012). See Appendix 4 for a copy of the Declaration.

On the other hand, some international institutions will not send academic transcripts directly to the designated organizations. Moreover, in some countries original academic credentials are oversized documents with little information. In such countries (and in most cases), the awarding body issues official academic transcripts for individual graduates on request.

In general, the academic documents that must be submitted by the applicant and/or the issuing authorities depend on the country where the qualification was obtained.

Consider the following:

o Develop a list of countries that transmit academic documents directly to the designated organizations;
o Develop a list of countries that do not transmit academic documents directly to the designated organizations and /or the institutions that issue one set of academic documents to the student;
o Develop a list of countries/institutions you will accept transcripts from via secure electronic transcript exchange process;
o Establish what type of documents are required from each country and ask for relevant documents for each of those countries to allow for efficient verification;
o Establish the method of submission of the required documents:
  - Identify the authority responsible for issuing official documents;
  - Identify how the documents can be submitted (i.e., in a sealed envelope);
  - Identify, if possible, the contact information for the authorized organizations / institutions that can transmit documents;
o Establish if any other country specific information would be useful to include in the application package;
o Create an internal checklist for credential assessors to use when reviewing documents;
o Clearly communicate the information and documents needed for assessment to all parties involved in the process;
o Use terms applicants are familiar with.

Keep in mind that it is inevitable that in certain cases additional research is required, such as discontinued qualifications, closed institutions, institutions that issue academic documents only once and only to the student and the student submits those documents for assessment, institutions that do not have policies to transmit academic documents to another institution / organization. Other situations are when documents arrive in a sealed envelope from the issuing authority but the information on the envelope or in the academic documents inside the envelope is not consistent with information previously received from the same authority. Policies should be developed to manage these situations.

Consider the following:

o Send the documents submitted by the applicant to the issuing authority and ask for verification;
o Contact appropriate authorities in order to obtain further information on the award. Establish appropriate timelines for receiving responses;
o Inform the applicant that the process will take longer than the standard timeline
o Send follow up requests / reminders if the appropriate authorities fail to respond within the set timelines. Establish the number of times requests and reminders will be sent;
  - Consider providing time allowance depending on the country in question.
o Consider the value of the information received;

- If an evaluation cannot be provided based on the information received, consider requesting further information.
o Evaluate in accordance with the new information in the context of previous evaluations for the country in question;
o Present findings to appropriate staff (e.g., manager/supervisor/senior credentials evaluator); and
o Submit a response if /once findings are confirmed.

### Establish Internal Information Management System

Comparing original documents in question against verified documents from the same institutions for other applicants or reviewing, in detail, documents for any warning signals can be costly and time consuming.

Consider the following:

o Collect samples of documents that are verified to be fraudulent as a reference for common fraudulent practices;
o Identify contexts where fraudulent practices may be encountered more frequently and adapt your evaluation processes accordingly;
o Keep a list of common and reliable verification procedures for specific countries;
o Do not rely solely on translations. Develop a glossary of common terms in foreign languages;
o Develop a list of warning signs for credential evaluators to use when reviewing documents (Appendix 2).

### Continuously Acquire, Update and Transfer Knowledge

Develop and maintain expertise in authenticating and verifying documents by leveraging the skills, competencies and services of credential assessors. Keep in mind that credential assessors must acquire and maintain a comprehensive knowledge of the specific system of education whenever there is a question about authenticity of the documents presented.

o Provide a comprehensive training plan for new employees as well as refresher training for existing credential assessors:
- Many assessment agencies, such as WES, provide specific webinars about verification and authentication of credentials;
o Develop credential assessors specialization in assessing documents from specific geographical regions and establish an information sharing system with credential assessors:
- Allow sufficient time to credential assessors to get familiar with the format and content of academic documentation that can be expected from individual countries and institutions, as well as the educational terminology used in the country of education;

- o Continuously document processes and procedures to ensure consistency of work and decisions amongst the credential assessors;
- o Provide regular opportunities to credential evaluators to meet and exchange information, seek input, and present new and/or exceptional cases:
  - - Share information among credential assessors whenever a document is verified as being not authentic;
- o Establish an effective escalation process to ensure prompt handling of special and exceptional cases:
  - - Document and communicate exceptions to all credential assessors;
- o Create and maintain libraries containing pertinent resources regarding international educational systems, institutions and academic credentials;
- o Create a searchable Fraudulent Document Library to assist credential assessors when there is evidence that documents are not genuine;
- o When possible, attempt to hire credential assessors with multiple language skills; and
- o Attempt to retain experienced credential assessors by providing a challenging and respectful work environment that promotes professional and personal development:
  - - Focus on quality of service and not the number of applications processed or number of files completed.

## Assume All Academic Documents Presented are Genuine

**Majority of Academic Documents Submitted Are Authentic**

Unless there is evidence that academic documents presented are not authentic you should assume that they are genuine. Verification is an integral part of the assessment process and mechanisms must be in place to ensure that only authentic and genuine documents enter the system. Organizations evaluating credentials must make sure that they do not create unnecessary barriers to those who possess authentic academic documents when developing policies. It is also imperative not to place undue burden on applicants when developing polices about required documents and formats. Examples of undue burden are:

- o Requiring original degree certificates;
- o Requiring transcripts to be transmitted directly from the issuing authority / authorized awarding body to the designated organization where transcripts are issued only once and only to the student (e.g., France);
  - - The documents submitted by the applicant should be sent to the issuing authority for verification of authenticity.
- o Requiring direct transmission of academic documents from the issuing authority to the designated organization in cases where political environment in the country prohibits the authority to transmit transcripts directly to another organization (i.e., Afghanistan).

**Develop Strategies to Assist Applicants with Obtaining Documents**

In most cases, the applicant is able to provide documents and/or arrange for the required documents to be transmitted directly from the issuing authority to the designated organization. On the other hand, in some cases, applicant may need assistance from the academic credentials assessment services with obtaining documents. Some educational institutions will provide documents only if an official request is submitted by the designated organization. Many academic credentials assessment services have developed templates and forms that can be used to assist the applicants with obtaining the necessary documents. At a minimum, the form should include information about the purpose of the request, a list of required documents and instructions on how to complete the form, a space for the official's signature and date as well as method of submission.

## Documents

### Verify Country of Education

Verify what documents are required from a country / educational institution within the country and the format of the required documents: establish what an official document is from the country in question and review the received documents to establish if they are official;

### Verify Method of Transmission

In general the following types of documents are required for evaluation purposes. These documents will enable you to determine the applicant's full education history:

o  Academic Credential (Degree / Diploma)

   Many academic credential assessment services accept this document from the applicant and identify the type of document such as original, certified or notarized copy, photocopy, etc. This document is issued to the individual that completed the program therefore it is not an official document unless if it is sent directly from the issuing authority to the designated organization. However, it is an important document even if you cannot read the language, as the final academic credential is likely to have security features which will not be evident on a translation. Moreover, it may contain some information that may not appear on the transcript such as credential name and issuing authority.

o  Official Academic Transcripts (Academic Records)

   This is the most complete and reliable written or recorded copy in printable or digital format issued by legitimate authority for certifying an individual's educational background. It includes the individual's academic record at the

educational institution and contains all essential academic data such as dates of attendance, degrees conferred, courses attempted, grades, and credits. It may also include information about current academic or administrative status and previous education, both secondary and postsecondary. It is considered official when it is sent directly from the issuing authority to the designated organization in a sealed envelope. It is important to obtain the official copy of the original language so that you can check that the grades have not been altered in any way. Keep in mind that marks are not always available for taught postgraduates in certain countries. In these cases, you may consider accepting a certified statement of period of study and/training from the provider.

o   Word-for-word English or French translations for academic documents in other languages

Always require academic documents in original language as well as word-for-word English (French) translation.

Some institutions may issue academic transcripts in English even though the primary language of academic institution is not English.  Develop a list of such countries / institutions to be used by credential assessors when reviewing documents.

o   Evidence of name change

In some countries changing one's name is a common occurrence. When the name on academic documents does not match the applicant's current name, always ask for evidence of the name change such as marriage certificate or other legal document supporting name change.

o   Other Documents

Many other documents such as proof of identity, syllabus (course descriptions), registration certificates, employment letters, character letters and such may also be required. Format of such documents and/or their method of submission are not discussed in this manual.

**Diploma Supplement**

Many European institutions now issue a Diploma Supplement (DS) which is a tool introduced by the Bologna Process with the degree certificate, in the language of the country of study and a widely spoken European language such as English. The DS, produced by the higher education institutions and according to standards agreed by European Commission, is a document accompanying a higher education diploma and provides standardized description of the nature, level, context content and status of the studies completed by its holder ("Education and Training: Diploma Supplement", European Commission, 2015). The details of the modules taken, the type of award made and the level of the award in the country of origin are clearly defined in the

DS. This is particularly useful in determining whether the award is at undergraduate or postgraduate level.

The following sections are included in the DS:

o   the holder of the qualification;
o   the qualification;
o   its level and function;
o   the contents and results gained;
o   certification of the supplement;
o   details of the national higher education system concerned; and
o   other relevant information.

This document is issued at no charge and graduates in all the countries taking part in the Bologna Process have the right to automatically receive the document.

Keep in mind that while the DS could be a very good source of information, it is not a substitute for the official academic documents as it is issued to the student. Further, the DS includes information about the level of education completed by the applicant in the context of the country where there education was completed. As the DS is not an automatic system that guarantees recognition, in some cases, it may be confusing to the applicants to accept this document as the only document required for assessment and then inform the applicant that the level of their education is not comparable to the level of education required by the academic credential assessment service when the DS notes the opposite.

**Types of Documents**

In a recent document "Best Practices: Strategies and Processes to Obtain Authentic International Educational Credentials" (WES, 2012), different types of documents and the degrees of reliability attributed to each document type can be found. Five (5) types of documents have been identified in this document:

| Photocopy | Certified (notarized) | Original | Official | Verified |
|---|---|---|---|---|

WES indicates that the reliability of documents increases as one moves from the left to the right and suggests the using of official documents as the most reliable evidence of an individual's educational achievements (WES, 2012).

http://www.wes.org/ca/licensing/BestPacticesStrategiesProcesses.pdf

**Strategies to Identify Questionable Documents**

A key component of assessing credentials and ensuring accuracy of assessments conducted is establishing that the documents presented are authentic. It is therefore important to understand different types of unauthentic documents as well as how to identify this type of documents.

Types of Fraud

Five (5) different types of "fraudulent" / "unauthentic" documents are identified in this manual. These are grouped as follows:

**Fabricated or fake documents** – These documents may represent a legal or a fabricated entity (institution) or a program

**Altered documents** – These documents are legitimate documents that have been modified by adding, deleting, omitting, or changing the information in the documents. Modifications may include changes in the name, date of birth, dates of attendance, initial enrollment and graduation dates, grades, courses, etc.

**Illegitimately issued documents / Documents created in-house** – These are documents produced by institutional employees. Sometimes the grades are inflated or contact hours / credits or professional titles are changed. Sometimes degrees are awarded for programs that are partially completed and sometimes the person who has not undertaken the required study for the presented qualifications has gained the document by means of bribery.

**Diploma Mills** – These are bogus documents such as transcripts and diplomas that although not defined as a fabrication, the study or qualification they claim to represent is illegitimate.

**Misleading or Interpretative Translations** – These are inaccurate translations of documents which are interpretative in nature and systematically misleading. For example, quite often the Latin American high school diploma of "bachiller" is literally, and often unintentionally, translated into Bachelor's or the grades are converted into the Canadian grade scale of A-F. Further, sometimes the course titles are translated into comparable subjects in the receiving country to enhance the possibility of transfer credit.

Other misrepresentations and types of fraud include altered or fraudulent language test scores, and bogus or altered official documentation such as passports, birth certificates that are usually requested to verify the identity of a credential holder when age discrepancy is a defining factor.

**Identifying questionable documents[2]**

<u>Warning Signs and/or Legitimate Reasons</u>

There are many warning signs that may enable credential evaluators to identify distinguishing features of fraudulent or altered documents. While there are some legitimate reasons for students being unable to provide documentation of their degree, majority of reasons given are not valid. Examples of warning signs as well as legitimate reasons are included in Appendix 2.

Keep in mind that applicants should not be penalized for internal polices of the issuing institution. Credential assessors should determine what other documents could be requested when the applicant provides legitimate reasons for being unable to present academic documents and establish policies to manage these issues.

<u>Mode of Delivery</u>

Examining the mode of delivery and method of submission of the academic documents is one of the most important steps in identifying questionable documents:

Check the following:

Received Documents

o   Did the documents come from a third party?
  -   Some countries such as Cuba, China, Russia, Pakistan use a third party (a ministry-authorized office) to authenticate transcripts and other documents on behalf of the educational institution.
  -   Become familiar with documentation practices of the country in question
  -   Pay attention to documents that are received from other (third party) organizations

o   Did the documents come from the awarding body / authority that issued the documents?

o   Were the documents in a sealed envelope and if yes, is the format and information consistent with the criteria set by the academic credentials assessment services and with other documents received from the same institution?

o   Is the Sender's information present on the envelope?
  -   Pay attention to cases where there is no sender information or if/when information comes from a third party
  -   Is the institution's logo, stamp or seal on the sealed envelope?

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[2] Information in this section is taken from Degrees of Deception – Dealing with Education Fraud (UK NARIC, 2015); Best Practices: Strategies and Processes to Obtain Authentic International Educational Credentials (WES, 2012); Ontario College of Teachers (2015)

- Is there a date on the sealed envelope?
- Is the signature of the appropriate signing authority on the envelope?

o Documents from different institutions received with tracking numbers in sequence
  - Be careful when you receive documents from different institutions with tracking numbers in sequence

o Documents are postmarked in a different country
  - Courier companies, other postal services and clearinghouses often route mail through other countries (e.g., Australia, Germany)

<u>Appearance of Documents</u>

Examining the appearance and the look of the document is another important step in detecting questionable documents. See Appendix 2 for a list of examples.

**Academic Document is irregular or inconsistent or there are warning signs**

This manual suggests a three-step verification process. The first step is when the academic documents arrive in a sealed envelope or in a format accepted by the academic credentials assessment services. Documents are checked by credential assessors and a decision is made as to whether the documents are acceptable. If the documents are questionable, credential assessors may seek guidance and advice from more senior credential assessors. The senior evaluators may decide that the documents are acceptable or questionable.

The second step in the verification process is when the senior assessor finds the documents questionable. In this case, further information is requested from the issuing authority or sometimes from the applicant. The additional information / documents are reviewed again by the credential assessors and for acceptability.

The third step in the verification process is when the additional information or documents received are not acceptable. As part of this step, the credential assessors will begin investigation until a decision can be made.

In most cases, the knowledge and expertise of the credential assessors and specifically more senior assessors are sufficient to detect altered and fabricated documents. However, in cases where more irregularities are identified as part of the internal verification process, credential assessors will consider what type of external verification to undertake in order to establish the authenticity of the documents.

Sometimes simple clarification from the applicant and/or the issuing authority will be sufficient and sometimes further investigations will need to be performed and yet sometimes additional requirements may be imposed on the applicant in order to

establish the authenticity of the documents. The best step will always depend on the case and the identified irregularities. Some of the actions are the following:

o Contact the applicant and ask for clarifications or additional documents
  - In some cases, interviewing the applicant without implying that documents are inconsistent or irregular, and asking the applicant about names of instructors or the main areas of content of courses listed on the suspect documents could be helpful. Further information can be requested based upon the interview results.

o Contact the issuing authority to verify the applicant's qualifications;
  - Use the correct address for the institution when sending verification requests. Consult the published sources that include the correct address of the institutions;
  - Always address your request to the **title** of the person who issued the document and not their names;
  - Keep in mind that some institutions may require a payment in order to provide a verification letter or to respond to verification requests. Consider asking the applicant to arrange for the payment, provide you with the evidence and then inform the institution that a payment has been submitted by the applicant. Have a list of institutions that require payment of a fee to verify documents and make sure the list is updated on an ongoing basis; and
  - Some institutions require the applicant's consent before they can submit information to another organization. Have a list of such institutions, inform the applicants of such practices ahead of time and update the list on a regular basis.

o Ask for more details on the applicant;
  - Sometimes, and depending on the location of the issuing authority, a phone call can be made to verify some of the information on the submitted documents;
  - If the telephone call does not support a document's authenticity, send out an official request for verification to the issuing authority. Attach copies of submitted documents in question; and
  - Have a process in place if the institution asks that you return questioned documents so that they can conduct their own investigations for possible legal action.

o Contact other relevant authorities in the applicant's country of education to verify the applicant's qualifications;

o Contact other academic credential assessment services for their professional opinion on the documents presented in relation to authenticity;

The above actions were far more difficult to undertake in the past. However, advanced communication technologies nowadays have allowed for faster resolution of issues and speedy receipt of information and documents.

Credential assessors must ensure that the applicant has provided her/his consent before the academic credentials assessment services can externally verify the applicant's documents. The consent section of the application package can include wording to ask for the applicant's permission to externally verify documents with variety of sources.

Keep in mind that even when applicants provide permission for external verification of their documents, some countries and/or institutions in some countries have policies that prevent them from responding to such requests. Ensure that the applicant is not penalized for the institutions' internal policies.

Make sure to have policies in place for how to proceed with the application until a response is received from the institution.

A variety of country specific online resources and services exist for student verification and university authentication. In general, visiting the web pages of national bodies (such as ministry of education) for information on the system of education and possibilities for verification of credentials for the country in question is a good starting point. These web pages may have a link to a website for verification of documents where you can enter the graduation year, diploma number etc to verify the name of the degree holder.  Some of the specific online resources are listed below.

Keep in mind that this list is not comprehensive and the pages provided via the links may not be found by the time you use this manual. Moreover, student specific information is required in order to view results. The required information may include personal identification number, diploma number, security information on the student's card, title of the examination, title of the degree, degree code and such. Some of this information can be found on the documents submitted and some needs to be obtained from the applicant.

CAUTION  A note of caution is required here and before you use the following links: Many of the online sources confirm award of the degree and do not provide information on subjects completed and/or marks/grades obtained by the applicant. Further, the information available on these online sources may not be entirely secure and should not be considered highly reliable. The information should be used in combination with other verification methods.

## China

Secondary and post-secondary academic credentials from 2007 can be verified using this website. Services are provided in Chinese and English. According to their website they verify:

o   Secondary Education Level: General Education and Vocational Education
o   Higher Education Level : Bachelor Degree Program and above
  -   Transcript (for both undergraduate and graduate students)
  -   Studying Certificate
  -   Degree of All Three Levels (Bachelor, Master and Doctoral Degree)
o   Professional Qualifications Certificate

http://cqv.chinadegrees.cn/en

## Bangladesh

To verify secondary school and higher secondary examination results go to the Official Website of Education Board – Ministry of Education at

www.educationboardresults.gov.bd

## Gambia

Check the secondary / higher secondary examination results of an applicant educated in Gambia at West African Examinations Council (WAEC) website.

www.waecgambia.org/resultchecker

## Ghana

According to the website, "In Ghana, the West African Examination Council conducts the terminal examinations for all pupils and students at the pre-tertiary levels of education."  The examinations of the Council also serve as selection tests for progression from one level to the other in the country's educational structure up to the tertiary level where the results of the Council's examinations are used for direct entry into all tertiary Institutions in Ghana."

http://ghana.waecdirect.org

## India

Central Board of Secondary Education
Check the higher secondary education examination results at the CBSE website. This page includes the current examination results. To view the results of old examinations click on Public Portal, then on http://www.cbse.nic.in/welcome.htm and then select a desired year.

www.cbse.nic.in

India Results

India Results publishes India's different national and State Boards universities' competitive exam results.

www.indiaresults.com

## Kenya

According to the website, the Kenya National Examinations Council confirms the authenticity of certificates or diplomas issued by the council upon request by the government, public institutions, learning institutions, employers and other interested parties.

www.knec.ac.ke/main/index.php

## Nigeria

The West African Examinations Council in Nigeria provides online access to the examinations results.

www.waecdirect.org

## Pakistan

To verify the secondary and intermediate examination results in Pakistan visit the issuing institution's website Examples: Board of Intermediate Education in Karachi (BIEK) or Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Lahore (BISE)

http://www.biek.edu.pk/

http://www.biselahore.com

Higher Education Commission (HEC) in Pakistan provides Degree Attestation services as well as list of recognized Universities and Degree Awarding Institutions. The institutions' main campus and website address is provided on the list. The website also provides a list of institutions not recognized by HEC.

Degree Attestation

http://www.hec.gov.pk/InsideHEC/Divisions/QALI/DegreeAttestationEquivalence/DegreeAttestationServices/Pages/welcome.aspx

HEC Recognized Institutions

http://www.hec.gov.pk/OurInstitutes/Pages/Default.aspx

Institutions Not Recognized by HEC

http://www.hec.gov.pk/OurInstitutes/Pages/NonHecRecognized.aspx

To verify the examination results for applicants educated at the University of the Punjab visit the following link:

http://pu.edu.pk/home/results

Sierra Leone

The West African Examinations Council in Sierra Leone provides online access to the examinations results.

www.waecsierra-leone.org

South Africa:

Tertiary Education

According to the website, the South African Qualifications Authority's (SAQA) verification service is available for the verification of qualifications achieved at South African providers as recorded on SAQA's National Learners' Records Database.

www.saqa.org.za

Once on the website, select "Verify South African Qualification Achievements" from the "Services" drop down menu

Secondary Education – Examination Results

Department of basic education's website provides online access to the Matric Results. According to their website, to meet the minimum admission requirements to a Bachelor's Degree study at a higher education institution, a candidate must obtain, apart from a National Senior Certificate, an achievement rating of 4 (Adequate Achievement, 50% - 59%) or better in four designated subjects. Once on

Home page of the website, click on Matric Results in the Assessment Section of the webpage.

http://www.education.gov.za/MatricResults/ExamResults/tabid/175/Default.aspx

## Tanzania

The National Examinations Council of Tanzania conducts examinations for, and grants diplomas, certificates and other awards of the council. It also provides online access to examinations results. Click on the following link to go to the website then select exam results from the "Results" drop down menu.

http://www.necta.go.tz/

## Ukraine

The following website provides degree verification services for degrees issued in Ukraine. The website is in Ukrainian and subscription is required to obtain access to the tools.

www.osvita.net

## United Kingdom

The Higher Education Degree Datacheck (HEDD) is developed on behalf of UK universities and colleges. According to their website, "this is the UK Higher Education's official service for candidate verification and university authentication". This is a fee-based service designed for employers, universities or other agencies and offers a degree verification system allowing registered users to check authenticity of a credential online.

https://www.hedd.ac.uk/

## USA

According to their website, "the National Student Clearinghouse is the nation's #1 source for education verification offering the largest online collection of enrollment and degree data". They provide and automated service to instantly verify degrees from all types of higher education institutions across the U.S.

http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/vs_portal.php?show=2

**Some Steps to Take When a Document Is Verified to Be Fraudulent**

It is essential to establish a process for closing an application if a satisfactory explanation is not received in cases where documents are found to be suspicious. Moreover, it is important to establish the consequences when unauthentic documents are submitted and clearly communicate those with all stakeholders involved in the process. Finally, it is equally important to allow applicant to appeal the evaluation results if and when it is determined that academic documents are not authentic.

The following actions can be taken when you have confirmation that a document is fraudulent or altered:

o   Stop processing the file;

o   Make thorough notes;

o   Avoid accusatory language in the correspondence to the applicant (refrain from using terms such as forged or fraudulent or fabricated)
   -   For example, never tell the applicant that they have forged / fabricated the document or the document is forged / fraudulent. Let them know that you have been notified by XXX that the documents received are not authentic or that the institution does not attest to the authenticity of the documentation.

o   Clearly indicate the reasons for the findings;
   -   Provide a period of time for the applicant to appeal the decision;
   -   Have a process for closing the application if a satisfactory explanation is not received;
   -   Have policies in place if the applicant requests that you return the suspect documents to the applicant;
      –   In general, academic credentials assessment services do not return suspect documents to the applicant as such documents may be needed in the future should legal action be required.

o   Notify the issuing institution and send a copy of the document found fraudulent
   -   Have a policy in place for notifying other appropriate authorities

o   Preserve the documents for future reference

**Problems with Verifying Documents Issued in Certain Countries**

There are many reliable means of verifying documents issued in most countries. However, due to significant political instability in certain countries, such as Afghanistan and Somalia, traditional methods of authenticating academic documentation are impossible or questionable.  Many assessment agencies in

Canada do not evaluate credentials from these countries. It is recommended that detailed research be performed in order to determine the best possible ways to verify documents from such countries. Some useful guidelines are provided below:

o Consider contacting the embassy of the country in question and negotiating an agreement where the embassy can take on the process of verifying certain academic documents:
  o In general, academic credential assessment services do not accept verifications issued by embassies and consulates because the process these entities use is a certification / notarization process and not an authentication process. However, an agreement may be put in place where the embassy takes on the task of verifying / authenticating the academic documents.
  o The Embassy of Afghanistan in Ottawa is the only entity that verifies afghan credentials for applicants who apply to Ministère de l'Immigration, de la Diversité et de l'Inclusion (MIDI) in Quebec for an assessment of academic documents;
o Develop reliable contacts at select educational institutions in the country in question to help facilitate the verification process.
o Verify documents submitted using a variety of sources. For example, send verification requests to the issuing authority (educational institution) and the ministry of education;
o Contact International Organization for Migration (IOM) to coordinate the verification process. IOM has a specific department for verifying international documents.

> http://www.iom.int/files/live/sites/iom/files/What-We-Do/docs/13 FACT SHEET Verification Services.pdf

## Conclusion – Authenticity and the Authentication Process

This section of the manual has attempted to enhance the user's knowledge and understanding of fraudulent academic documents. It has outlined some procedures that can be followed to ensure that authentic documents enter the system rather than trying to scrutinize documents for signs of fraud or alterations. It also includes verification procedures when documents are inconsistent, irregular or suspicious. It has listed some examples of warning signs and legitimate reasons for credential assessors to use when reviewing documents as well as some tips as to what to look for when reviewing the academic documents. Lastly it has outlined some steps that can be taken when there is confirmation that a submitted document is fraudulent.

Fraudulent documents and institutions are multiplying worldwide and the activities of those involved are becoming more sophisticated as more people become aware of their presence. For example State legislation varies between states in the USA making it easy for a Diploma Mill organization to set up in one state and advertise their qualifications in other States or internationally; you can find advertisements for fake diplomas at bus stops and train stations in Russia; Companies such as Back Alley Press in China are known to generate fake copies of certificates from well-known overseas institutions. In the "About Us" section of the website they note:

> Shun Luen Co. Ltd. has been in the professional printing business for 17 years. The diploma business started in 1996 when we printed a few novelty diplomas for a couple of friends and today it has grown into a huge business. We produced almost 1,500 documents last year alone. Though the bulk of our orders come from China, Europe and the United States, we do produce a number of degrees for Australia, Canada, India, Israel, Korea, Kuwait and Taiwan. There are a few others, so feel free to ask if you don't see your country on this list. If we don't have the template you need, we will do our best to create one.

India and Pakistan both have large numbers of fake academic institutions within their borders. Both countries have active ministries of education which recognize this problem and, in an effort to counteract fraud, publish lists of both genuine and fake institutions. Nigeria and Cameroon suffer from an endemic traffic in fraudulent documents. Usually fake certificates are easy to identify due to their poor quality, but in these two countries the quality of genuine certificates is often so poor that it is difficult to tell the difference between a genuine award and a fake one.

It is the responsibility of the credential assessors to accept academic documents to be included in the assessment process. This imposes a heavy burden on the credential assessors. As such, it is imperative that consistent method for receiving authentic academic documents be established and maintained so that the credential assessors can have assurance that reliable academic documents are received. As long as the academic credential assessment services have clear policies for the type of documents required based on the country of education and the method of

submission of those documents and make the submission of official documents in a sealed envelope and form the issuing authority a requirement, there can be reasonable trust that reliable and authentic documents have entered the system. The credential assessors can then verify if the documents were submitted in the appropriate format and method then question only those that did not follow the set procedures.

Organizations assessing credentials must develop procedures designed for the fair and expeditious access of all applicants including those who, for valid reasons and despite their best efforts, cannot submit academic documents and cannot prove, via official documentation, the qualifications they claim (refugees or refugee-like situation). When developing such procedures, organizations must keep in mind that the verification for this type of applicants is a different procedure from the traditional one used in verifying academic documents from other applicant since the information provided will be either incomplete or completely absent about the individual qualification and/or the educational system in which the credential was obtained.

When determining the authenticity of academic documents, familiarity is the key and general knowledge of the educational system in the country is very helpful. The more academic documents you see from a particular institution or country the more knowledge you gain about that system of education or documents and the easier it will be to spot a fraudulent one. For this, it is essential that credential assessors come together to share information and exchange ideas, issues, policies and procedures. Keeping up to date with the latest information on institutions and qualifications will help credential assessors stay ahead of those providing fraudulent documents. A variety of workshops and webinars are frequently offered by many academic credential assessment services in Canada. For example, year-round webinars are provided by WES including specific webinars on how to authenticate academic documents.

Contacting the issuing authority and asking for proof of the applicant's course of study and graduation is essential when you are suspicious of a qualification's authenticity.

Considering the existing security measures and increasing those measures is also helpful. Security measures can be increased by ensuring that the required documents are entered into the system and all documents are properly reviewed.

As a final note, it is important to re-emphasize that majority of applicants hold authentic credentials and only a small number of academic documents are fraudulent. Organizations in charge of assessing academic documents should therefore develop policies and processes that do not create unnecessary barriers to those who present authentic academic documents.

## TRANSLATIONS / TRANSLATED DOCUMENTS

In general, if applicants' academic documents are not in English or French, credential assessors will rely on translations to assist them in understanding the applicant's academic documents.

The Pan-Canadian Code of Good Practice in the Assessment of the International Academic Credentials included in the Pan-Canadian Quality Assurance Framework for the Assessment of International Academic Credentials presents the following guidelines with respect to translations:

19. Subject to the usual practices, requirements, and directives of the assessing organization, only the translation of essential documents should be required. The translation of essential documents issued in a language other than one of the two official languages of Canada must be entrusted to certified translators.

20. Official documents, including the titles of international academic credentials, must be provided in the language in which they were issued.

This manual includes information gathered from Constituent Associations, national and international academic credentials assessment services demonstrating commendable or exemplary practice about translated documents and translations. All the processes included in this manual are also in keeping with the Pan Canadian Quality Assurance Framework for the Assessment of International Academic Credentials and Framework for Regulation Element "Fairness in Registration Practices".

The Ontario Office of the Fairness Commissioner (OFC) provides the following descriptions for such practices:

*A **commendable practice** is a program, activity or strategy that goes beyond the minimum standards set by the OFC assessment guides, considering the regulatory body's resources and profession-specific context. Commendable practices may or may not have potential for transferability to another regulatory body.*

*An **Exemplary Practice** is an excellent licensing (registration/certification) practice used by Ontario regulators.*

Users of this manual should keep in mind that the cost of translating documents to English or French can be enormous, therefore translation of unnecessary documents should not be requested.

Translation is not an exact science and credential evaluators must be careful when using translated documents.

Academic documents in the original language as well as translations of those documents are needed. The original language documents will allow the credential assessors to check the security features. Translations of the academic documents should never be accepted in lieu of the original language documents.

It is recommended that, when possible, translations be conducted by a certified translator.

In Canada, the title of "certified translator" is granted by the provincial regulatory bodies for this profession. Three certification mechanisms are used in Canada: certification on dossier, certification by mentorship and the certification exam. Currently, only Québec and New Brunswick offer certification by mentorship. The title of certified translator is granted by the provincial association (or professional order) to which the candidate has applied for certification.

The following is a list of provincial bodies in Canada:

o   Association of Translators and Interpreters of Alberta (ATIA)
o   Society of Translators and Interpreters of British Columbia (STIBC)
o   Association of Translators, terminologists and Interpreters of Manitoba (ATIM)
o   Corporation of Translators,Terminologists and Interpreters of New Brunswick (CTINB)
o   Association of Translators and Interpreters of Nova Scotia (ATINS)
o   Association of Translators and Interpreters of Ontario (ATIO)
o   Association of Translators and Interpreters of Saskatchewan (ATIS)

Keep in mind that there is a high cost involved with translations carried out by certified translators.

Embassies are other sources that often provide a translation service or can recommend a good translating firm in the country of education.

An organization may also decide not to require translation of documents in cases where the credential assessors are fluent in the language of the academic documents submitted for assessment. At a minimum, credential assessors should familiarize themselves with the names of the major qualifications from the countries they deal with most frequently. A checklist of titles and awards would be useful when comparing the original documents with the translations.

Moreover, in some countries where English or French is not the primary language of academic institutions, transcripts in English or French maybe issued at the request of the student. In these cases, and generally, the department of linguistics, the

faculty of languages within the educational institution or a faculty member in the foreign language department provides this type of services. In some cases, there is a dedicated translation department that handles students' requests for translation of academic documents.

Making arrangements with a translation agency is considered a best practice by the Ontario Office of the Fairness Commissioner. If possible, organizations should make arrangements with a translation agency through a review and selection process. Academic documents that require translation can be sent to the selected agency and returned by the agency directly to the organization once translations are completed. A flat fee should be set for this service if possible. However, even if the organization establishes agreements with a translation agency, accepting translated documents from the issuing institution when the documents are translated by the educational institution and transmitted with the original language document and in a sealed envelope should be considered if possible.

Most academic credentials assessment services provide flexibility to applicants in sources the applicants can use to translate the required academic documents. Some of these sources are:

- the consulate, high commission or embassy (in Ontario) for the country that issued the documents
- a Canadian consulate, high commission or embassy in the country from which the applicant emigrated
- a certified translator accredited by a professional association of translators in Canada
- a translator accredited by the Canadian government or by a provincial or municipal government in Canada
- A member of the International Federation of Translators

Some academic credentials assessment services allow the applicants to submit translations done by COSTI translation services in Ontario (www.costi.org) if no other certified translator is available.

Diploma Supplement is another source to verify translation of academic documents. The DS is issued in a widely spoken language such as English by many educational institutions in Europe regardless of the language of education of the particular country. In cases where there are no doubts about the authenticity of the academic documents, and where the credential assessor would normally require a translation, organization may consider using the translated information from the Diploma Supplement without requiring the applicant to submit an official translation.

Consider the following:

- o Have a dedicated area on your website explaining the requirements and procedures for translation of documents;
- o Do not accept translations done by the applicant;
- o Do not base evaluations solely on translation of documents. Always ask for academic documents issued in the original language;
- o Require translation of key documents (e.g., academic transcripts, degree certificates):
  - Develop a list of such documents and communicate that to all stakeholders;
- o Establish a translation waiver policy to waive the requirement for submission of a translation in cases where internal expertise is available for languages other than English or French within the organization assessing academic documents:
  - consider publishing a list of the languages for which a waiver can be applied;
  - determine if written translations will be provided to the applicant. In general, organizations that provide this type of service do not provide written translations to applicants.
- o If possible, make arrangements with a translation agency to provide translation services and determine a flat fee for the service;
- o Require word-for word translation with no interpretation and following the same format as the original language;
- o Become familiar with translation practices of the educational institutions if applicable;
- o Make sure to define the specific terminology used in the information / application package with respect to translations. These may include certified translation, certified translator, acceptable translator, approved translator, sworn translator (a term mostly used in Europe), etc.
- o Provide alternatives for those who cannot locate a translator competent to translate their documents into English or French:
  - if possible, give the applicant flexibility in the sources they can use to translate their required documents when no other certified translator is available:
  - if possible, allow flexibility to applicants to complete translations in their country of origin, where costs may be lower than in Canada.
  - determine who can translate documents and clearly communicate that to all stakeholders;
  - outline the acceptable sources in the information package for applicants;
  - include contact information for these services;
- o If translations are to be done by certified translators, include details about acceptable translation services and provide contact information for these services;
- o Describe the features required of a translated document. For example, grades should be listed in the translation exactly as they are listed in the original language transcript.

o Inform the applicants about who is responsible for the cost of translating the documents they must submit for evaluation:
  - inform the applicants if the costs may vary depending on the translation service and the volume of documentation;
  - determine if there are any mechanisms to help minimize the applicant's translation costs;
o Specify the requirements for the translator:
  - request translations to be printed on letterhead;
  - ask that translations include the translator's original signed letter that attests the translation is accurate and that the translator belongs to one of the acceptable organizations
  - ask that the letter includes the translator's identification number or seal (or both) as well as their name, address and telephone number.

  In cases where a certified translator is not used, the translator should, at a minimum, endorse the translation with their full name and contact information along with details of their qualifications and experience in the language being translated. This can help identify the translator so they can be traced if necessary.

**Issues with translations**

  o The translator may translate the title of the qualification into the English/French equivalent that they see fit. However, this may be misleading. For example the French term 'Baccalauréat' could be translated as 'Bachelor's' when, in fact, it is a school level award;

  o The title 'Doctor' can refer to several types of degree. It can be awarded on conclusion of an undergraduate medical course, or a postgraduate degree course (PhD) in any subject. As well as the traditional research-based PhD there are now New Route PhDs (NRPhD) which include more taught modules and have less emphasis on research. These are also seen as doctoral awards in many countries;

  o The translator may translate the documents incorrectly, include additional information that does not exist on the documents in the original language, leave out information that is present in the original language documents or interpret the information on the original language document rather than providing a literal (word-for-word) translation;

Sometimes, despite the accurate translations provided, the translations may not necessarily reflect the true level of education. Translators often take liberties with their translation, especially if they do not have an understanding of the educational system and how the academic documents to be translated is viewed in the country where the evaluation is conducted.

It is helpful to have different language dictionaries on hand to verify translations. Websites that include an encyclopedia of writing systems and information on a variety of languages are helpful tools when reviewing original documents and comparing those with the translated documents. Once such website, Omniglot, provides an index of writing systems and languages that includes more than 180 writing systems with information on over 600 languages.

http://www.omniglot.com/

## Conclusion – Translations and Translated Documents

This section of the manual has attempted to enhance the user's knowledge and understanding about acceptable translations and translation services for academic credentials and academic transcript issued in a language other than English or French. Explanation on the requirements and procedures for translation of such documents is also included in this manual.

When determining the accuracy of translated documents, familiarity is the key and general knowledge of different languages is very helpful. After you see many documents from the same country, you will be able to pick out the important words in the original language documents to help you determine what the document is even if you don't know a word of that language.

Academic credentials assessment services (any organization evaluating credentials) must determine the best way of ensuring that the documents are translated accurately and that the translated documents meet the requirements of the organization. Establishing clear and detailed polices for external translations is necessary since inaccurate translations lead to problems and confusion both for the credential assessors and the applicants or other stakeholders.

## Appendix 1 : Glossary of Term

The terms used in the field of credentials assessment have been defined in several different ways and by numerous organizations. Almost every academic credentials assessment services have developed a glossary of terms for their own purposes and in many cases this has lead to confusion among different evaluators as well as internationally educated applicants and all other stakeholders.

One of the most comprehensive terminology guides available both in English and French has been developed by Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC). CICIC is a unit of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC). Founded in 1967, CMEC is the collective voice of Canada's ministers of education. It provides leadership in education at the pan-Canadian and international levels and contributes to the exercise of the exclusive jurisdiction of provinces and territories over education.  At the request of provincial and territorial governments, Canada became a signatory to the Lisbon Recognition Convention on November 4, 1997, which is an updated version of the 1990 convention. ("About CICIC", 2015).

Moreover, CICIC is the pan-Canadian centre for the network of individuals and organizations involved in the assessment and recognition of international academic credentials.

According to the information on CICIC website, the terminology guide "was developed to outline the semantic field of these terms and their common definitions in order to not only facilitate communication between specialists and partners within this field, but also to help those who need to evaluate academic credentials for a variety of reasons: process applications for immigration, allow admission to specific programs, facilitate access to the employment market or candidacy for a position, and so on" ("Terminology Guide", 2015).

The third edition of the guide has been developed through supervision of a working group composed of stakeholders from various sectors and regions in Canada. The best feature of this edition is that it is a living document and a work in progress that is continually updated **online** to reflect the current practices and issues in the field of academic credential assessment.

The same terms included in the CICIC Terminology Guide have been used in this manual. Therefore, it is the suggestion of the developer of this manual to use the CICIC Terminology Guide rather than compiling yet another list of terminologies for the purpose of this manual.

http://terminologies.cicic.ca/app/

## Appendix 2: Warning Signs | Legitimate Reasons | Appearance

The following lists include the most common examples of some of the warning signs, legitimate reasons and document appearance and are not inclusive.

**Warning Signs**

1. Applicant educated in Spain claims that it takes up to two years to gain the final degree certificate and the university won't issue any documentation in the meantime.

2. Applicant educated in Argentina claims that the universities do not issue degree certificates and that the transcripts can be used as proof of completion.

3. Applicant educated in Georgia claims that the universities no longer issue transcripts and universities issued transcripts in Soviet Union era only.

4. Applicant educated in China claims that the university never issued a degree certificate and that the graduation certificate is the only document available.

5. Applicant claims that required documents cannot be provided while previous cases indicate the contrary.

6. Applicant educated in France presents transcripts with very high grades.

7. An applicant educated in Nigeria presents official academic records and indicates they were given to them by the university.

8. Applicant claims that the school has burned (or a tornado etc) and can't get a transcript.

9. Applicant claims that there was another student with the same name and that the university is always getting the names mixed up so anything the evaluator receives will be inaccurate.

10. Applicant claims that transcripts are so expensive that he/she can't afford one until their first paycheque and asks that the evaluator use the copy issued to the applicant.

11. Applicant claim that she/he is in a big rush to obtain assessment results (due to personal reasons) and ask the credential evaluator to accept the applicant's grade reports as the report includes all the necessary information that is included in an official transcript.

These excuses are not legitimate. For example, it does take a long time to receive the centrally issued certificate from a university in Spain however these universities issue documentation to say that the student has finished the course. Universities in

Argentina issue degree certificates and transcripts are used as proof only at secondary technical level. Universities in Georgia are autonomous and would provide transcripts for each course. As for those who completed a Bachelor's degree in China, they should present both their degree certificate and their graduation certificate. If they do not have a graduation certificate they may not have finished the course, taken too many re-sits or broken the law. They may also have a sub-Bachelor-level diploma. Official academic records are never given to students in Nigeria. Some applicants will create a rushed atmosphere in the hope that the academic credentials assessment services will use the altered / fraudulent document presented by the applicant.

**CAUTION**     Use caution in cases when the applicant blames an institutional fire or other disaster for destroying records or the closing of an institution for lack of records as these excuses *may be* inaccurate. Back-up records are kept by many of the universities around the world as well as different legal entities (e.g., ministry of education, etc) in some countries. Documents in most cases may be obtained from different sources.  Moreover, educational institutions, in many countries, require permission from ministry of education or other ministries should they wish to close down. In such cases, the institution has to find suitable means to preserve student records.

### Legitimate Reasons

While most excuses are not legitimate, some applicants do have real difficulties collecting the correct documentation. Examples of some of the legitimate reasons are the following:

1. Applicant educated in India claims that studies were completed in a different region to where the applicant lives. Applicant must therefore collect the degree certificate in person and it can take a year or two to issue and so all the applicant has is provisional degree certificate.

2. Applicant educated in Iraq is a political refugee and had to leave in a hurry without certificates and cannot obtain proof from the university of education

3. You receive a letter from a university in Nigeria directed to the name of the credential assessor.

**CAUTION**     These excuses may be legitimate. For example, some universities in India now post the certificates but some require them to be picked up in person. The certificates can take a year or two to issue.  Students from countries that have

suffered periods of social or political turmoil (such as Iraq) are likely to have difficulty providing the correct documentation. In Nigeria, the information is almost always directed to a person in the letter and Nigerian officials rarely use "to whom it may concern". Although this may be considered a warning sign, it could also be that the authority who wrote the letter did indeed use the name of the evaluator in the correspondence. Conduct research before you communicate with the applicant.

**Appearance of Documents**

Check if:

o The documents are inconsistent and different from what is normally received from the institution in question

– Make sure that the applicant's gender is consistent across the academic documents and that the context is correct. In many cases, those involved in altering an academic document overlook the references to the gender and sometimes the references to the award are different. For example, the degree certificate indicates that the individual was enrolled in a Bachelor's degree program but refers to the applicant receiving a Master's degree;

– The date on the documents is another item that needs to be checked carefully. For example, examinations completed as a whole mean that the applicant completed the examinations in one sitting and completed in part means they were completed in many sittings (several months). Sometimes the duration of studies is clearly noted on certificates. Dates and durations need to be checked to ensure the dates listed match:

**CAUTION** Keep in mind that sometimes, in certain countries, a degree program may take much longer than the normal amount of time it takes to complete such programs. This may be due to the type of program completed (part-time vs. full time) and sometimes due to social and/or political turmoil in the country. For example universities in Iran were closed for a long period of time after the Islamic revolution in that country. A perfectly authentic document may seem suspicious in these cases. Credential assessors must investigate political / social and all other circumstances before rendering a judgment.

o There are different fonts, logos, colors

– In general, only one or two fonts are used on certificates and the typefaces are usually simple and clear.

- The logo on the institution's website is different than the logo on the academic documents submitted. The logo on one certificate from one institution is different from the logo on another certificate from the same institution when you receive several degree from the same institution

**CAUTION** Keep in mind that there are always exceptions to rules and there are in fact countries whose certificates are much more dense in text and use traditional style fonts (the Philippines).

o There is a lack of official stamps and/or signatures
   - Some countries such as UK may not have stamps on their certificates while in countries in the Middle East and North Africa you can find ministry stamps (ministry of education etc)  on national awards and in some countries (Russia, China) it is more common for the institutions to stamp the certificate

o Certificate is printed on low quality, thin paper
   - In general, educational institutions use a very good quality paper for printing degree certificates and/or transcripts.

**CAUTION** Keep in mind that there are notable exceptions such as certificates from the Philippines that are generally printed on thin and transparent paper

o The text on the certificate is misaligned

o The certificate has scanned signatures.
   - In general certificates are manually signed by appropriate authorities such as the president of the university etc.  With the help of technology, it is becoming more difficult to detect a good quality scanned signature.

o Informal language | Spelling errors | Inconsistent terminology | etc
   - Other issues are when there is informal language, spelling errors, inconsistent terminology, improbable degree titles, inconsistent typeface elements, different letterheads; missing lines or words or numbers and use of white-out
   - In general, formal language is used on degree certificates and highly unusual for an institution to issue certificates with informal language. If you find any informal text on a degree certificate, check and compare other certificates from the same institution
   - Possibility of finding spelling errors on academic documents is very low if text is pre-printed on the documents. In general, an authentic certificate should

not include any spelling errors however there is always exception to this rule. For example, it is very common in the Republic of Cameroon to spot spelling errors on academic documents

- Sometimes fraudulent certificates include unusual and unlikely degree titles such as Diploma of Master Honours Degree / Diploma of Bachelor Degree. Also check for unusual acronyms and abbreviations.

o Size and shape of the document
  - Check if the size and shape of the document is different than what is expected from the institution in question. For example, academic documents in Russia and some eastern European countries are generally issued as small booklets

o Handwritten text in the certificates
  - Check if there is handwritten text in the certificates presented. In general, certificates issued these days are computer generated however there are hand written portions in older certificates.

> **CAUTION** Institutions in some countries continue to handwrite a portion of certificates today (China).

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# *Groningen Declaration*
## on Digital Student Data Depositories Worldwide

We, the signatories of this Groningen Declaration on Digital Student Data Depositories Worldwide, are witnessing a growing awareness in large parts of the worlds of politics and academics, as well as in public opinion, of the need to establish a more complete and far-reaching delivery of digital student data. As we see it, digital student data portability and digital student data depositories are becoming increasingly concrete and relevant realities, and in the years to come, they will contribute decisively to the free movement of students and skilled workers on a global scale.

In order to make this free movement of students and skilled workers a reality, and in order to unleash the full potential of digital student data depositories, we want to look into privacy rights, identification, access, and forwarding/sharing of data, next to compatibility of systems and comparability of data. Respecting the principle of autonomy and diversity of systems and modes of delivery, the overriding principle is to seek convergence rather than to create uniformity.

It is understood that there are more stakeholders involved than just the digital student data depositories themselves. These other stakeholders include, of course, first and foremost the students themselves; then education institutions at the primary, secondary and tertiary level; national ministries of education; employers; and so forth. This group of stakeholders would not be primarily concerned with the technical part, but with acceptance and recognition and is, as such, of vital importance for the acceptance of the goals of this declaration. These stakeholders are therefore naturally included among the signatories.

The Groningen Global Founding Seminar of Digital Student Data Depositories Worldwide that is now coming to a close aimed at gathering the critical mass that may bring about global momentum as the best possible way to bring about change. And the best way we can think of to continue, after the seminar, is through promoting concrete measures to achieve tangible forward steps.

The present declaration will take the above named issues as overarching themes for the road ahead.

We consider the following issues - privacy rights; identification; access; consulting; forwarding/sharing; compatibility; comparability; acceptance; and recognition - to be of primary relevance, in order to establish a global area of convergence on digital student data depositories, and we strive to co-ordinate our policies on the following goals and/or tasks:

- Discussion of purpose, feasibility and cost-efficiency of worldwide exchange of digital student data
- Looking into ways to make our systems more compatible, inter alia by looking into semantic interoperability
- Looking into ways to make data more easily comparable
- Sharing or forwarding of data through designated systems
- Promoting acceptance, for purposes of recognition, of digital student data in lieu of paper documents
- Compliance with national or federal privacy rights, both at the sending and at the receiving ends, when data are transferred
- Phasing out of paper based documents and of paper based authentications (legalisations)
- Establishment of a Global Standing Secretariat on Digital Student Data Depositories Worldwide, to develop a follow-up structure, consisting of a "consultative group" of representatives of all signatories, plus a smaller "follow-up group", in order to organize future events.

We hereby undertake to attain these objectives within the framework of our respective organisational competencies and taking full respect of the diversity of current systems. To that end, we will mutually seek intergovernmental and/or non-governmental co-operation.

Signatures on reverse side

Signed by

**CHINA**
CHESICC China Higher Education Student Information and
Career Center
Mr. Ning Xiaohua, Assistant Director-General

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**INDIA**
NAD National Academic Depository - for NAD
Mr. Ramkumar K., Vice-President Operations and New Projects,
Central Depository Services (India) Ltd.

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**NETHERLANDS**
DUO Education Executive Agency
Mr. Rob Kerstens, Director-General

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**NORWAY**
FS, Felles Studentsystem
Mr. Christen Soleim, Leader, Steering Committee FS

_____

**RUSSIAN FEDERATION**
Ministry of Education and Science
Dr. Yuri Akimov, Head of Division, Department for International
Cooperation

_____

**SOUTH AFRICA**
SAQA South African Qualifications Authority
Mr. Joe Samuels, CEO

_____

**UNITED KINGDOM**
DARE Digital Academic Records Exchange - for DARE
Mr. Jonathan Dempsey, Chief Executive Officer, DIGITARY

_____

**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**
NSC National Student Clearinghouse
Mr. Rick Torres, President

_____

**DIGITARY**
Mr. Jonathan Dempsey, Chief Executive Officer

_____

**EAIE** European Association for International Education
Mr. Hans-Georg van Liempd, Vice-President

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**EUNIS** European University Information Systems Organisation
on behalf of the EUNIS President: Dr. Janina Mincer-Daszkiewicz

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**RS³G** Rome Student Systems and Standards Group
Mr. Simone Ravaioli, President

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**SIGNE S.A.**
Mr. Luis Díez, Director

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