



Accreditation vs Recognition of HE Programs in Oman



Oman's higher education sector comprises locally developed and imported programs. The quality assurance system has sought to subject all these programs to the Omani accreditation process. This means that programs already accredited in another country would be required to undergo a second accreditation process in Oman.

This system is currently being reviewed. It is suggested that the primary concern should not be whether the foreign accreditation was adequate, but whether it is supported with appropriate transnational quality assurance.

Therefore, a new system of higher education quality assurance is being considered that allows two different forms of program approval: *accreditation* of local degrees and *recognition* of foreign-accredited degrees offered in Oman. These two recurring (on a 5 yearly cycle) forms of approvals are of an equivalent status (for such purposes as permission to operate, recognition by employers etc.).

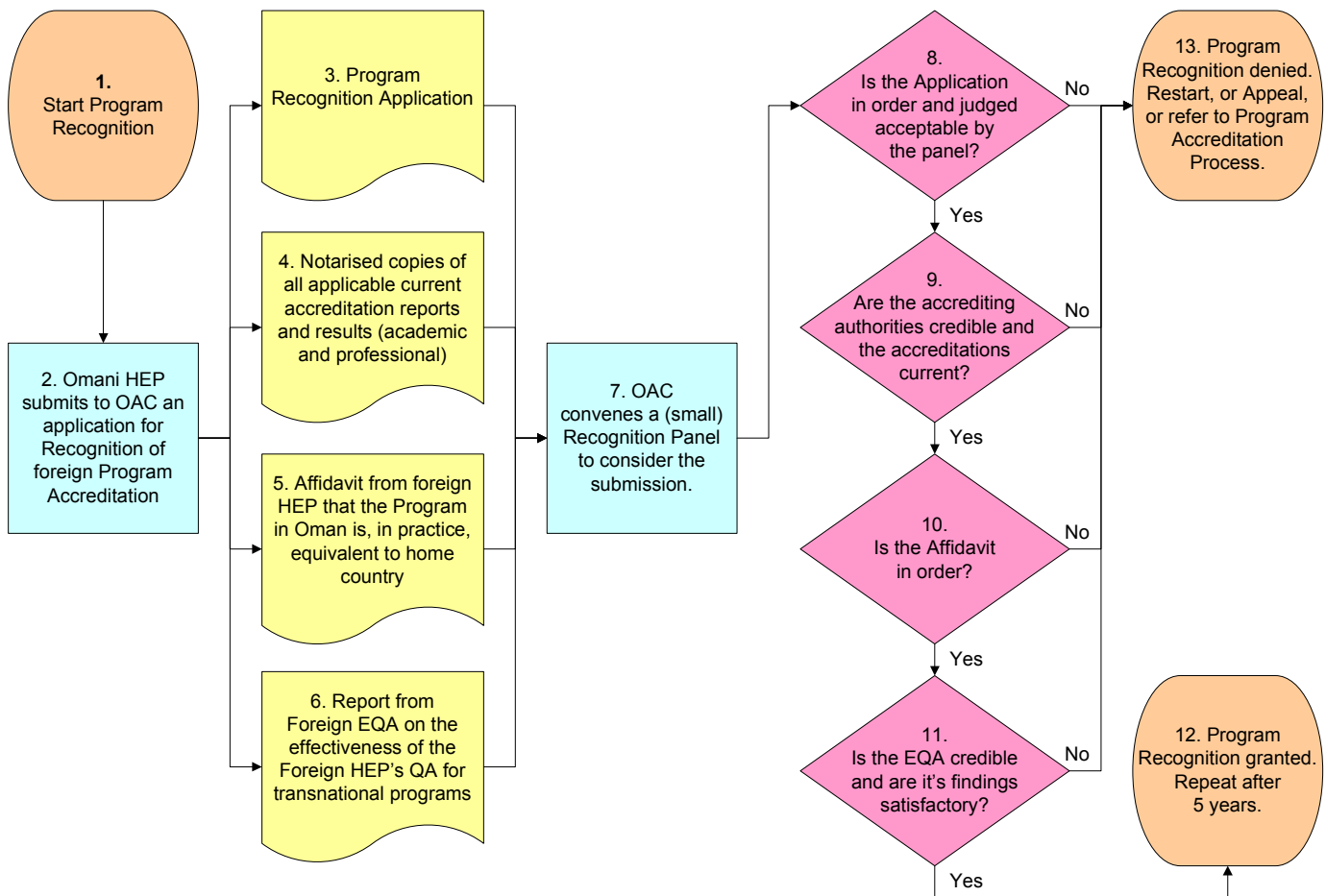
Accreditation will involve assessment of programs against Omani national standards (including four dimensions: generic graduate attributes; broad field learning outcomes; narrow field learning outcomes; and resource standards). Recognition, on the other hand, will involve acceptance of four key items of evidence: evidence from the Omani provider that the program meets national needs; robust foreign accreditation; an affidavit from the Foreign HEP attesting to the equivalence of the Omani and country-of-origin program offerings; and an independent assessment of the effectiveness of the transnational quality assurance.

This system would remove possibility of a program being subject to two different and potentially conflicting sets of standards; remove confusion over the exact status of the degree being awarded; and minimise the administrative burden on providers and accreditors. However, given that the proposed recognition process is based on the standards of another country, it forfeits the ability to embed standards centred around Oman-specific nation-building. As such, recognition can only be an option, and not the only form of program approval. Oman will still benefit from the ability to accredit programs against its own national standards.

		Accreditation Authority		
		Foreign ↓	Oman Accreditation Council (OAC) ↓	
Provider Conferring the Degree	Omani HEP ⇒	Recognition by OAC of Foreign Accreditation plus Accreditation by OAC against Generic Skills Standards only THIS IS AN OMANI DEGREE	OR	Accreditation by OAC against Generic Skills Standards, Broad & Narrow Field Learning Outcomes Standards & Resource Standards THIS IS AN OMANI DEGREE
	Foreign HEP ⇒	Recognition by OAC of Foreign Accreditation THIS IS NOT AN OMANI DEGREE	OR	Accreditation by OAC against Generic Skills Standards, Broad & Narrow Field Learning Outcomes Standards & Resource Standards THIS IS AN OMANI DEGREE

This table identifies how the two approval processes could be applied. It is proposed that this framework apply to all higher education programs, irrespective of their mode of delivery (e.g. face to face; distance education; online; flexible learning combinations).

The Program Recognition Process in Brief



3 & 8.....This must be signed by the chief academic officer of the Omani Higher Ed. Provider (HEP). It includes a summary of the curriculum, and a statement of how the program relates to the needs of Oman (supported by evidence that employers and students are satisfied and that graduates gain employment).

4 & 9.....Must include a higher education accreditation from an accreditor duly authorised by its state government. Applicable professional body accreditations, including information about limits to the scope of such accreditation, may also be considered. The robustness of accreditation processes, and their relevance to Oman, vary considerably. OAC will develop a database of recognised accreditors.

5 & 10....The affidavit must attest that the Foreign HEP:

- (a) has effective systems to ensure that the Oman and home campus program offerings are equivalent;
- (b) guarantees identical internal credit recognition to its home program offering;
- (c) knows of no variances in credit and qualification recognition by external parties between the Omani program offering and the home program offering.

6 & 11....Examples might be Australian University Quality Agency reports or Quality Assurance Agency (UK) reports. If the report indicates significant problems with the foreign HEP's QA processes, then recognition will not be granted. Where no report exists, then the Oman Accreditation Council (OAC) may commission an 'equivalence review', involving an independent panel comprised of OAC external reviewers and external reviewers from the Foreign HEP country, at the expense of the applicant.

7.....The Review Panel may undertake this task as a desktop exercise (unless an 'equivalence review' is required, as in 11 above). It does not involve a visit to the Omani HEP.

13.....Programs which are not Recognised (or Accredited) by the OAC may not be eligible for public financial assistance or recognised by the Civil Service for employment purposes.



For further information contact the Oman Accreditation Council

Phone: +968 24475170

Email: enquiries@oac.gov.om

Fax: +968 24475168

Web: www.oac.gov.om