Pakistan

Overview of Higher Education System
In total there are approximately 152 public and private higher education institutions (HEIs) and other degree warding institutions in Pakistan. As of 2013, 7.8% of the age group 17-23 has access to higher education in Pakistan, a number the government aims to increase to 10% by 2015¹.

National Qualifications Framework
The Pakistan Qualification Framework (PQF) lists all quality assured qualifications in Pakistan on the basis of learning outcomes, i.e. skills, competences, and knowledge. The PQF contains comprehensive information on accredited higher qualifications and institutions recognised by the HEC.

The Pakistan Qualification Register (PQR) is the key component of the PQF. It contains details of education providers and qualifications, such as title of qualification, registration level, credit hours, learning outcomes, etc. Qualifications that are not listed on the PQR are not recognised by the HEC.

The PQF forms the basis from which comparison with national and international qualifications can be made and aids the recognition process of foreign qualifications, facilitating transnational mobility of graduates and learners.

Quality Assurance
Improvement in quality of academic standards and research is one of the top priorities of the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) and considerable efforts have been made in the last few years to improve the quality of higher education. In 2005 a Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) was set up within the HEC with the aim of enforcing good practices in higher education. The QAA develops criteria and standards and is involved in internal as well as external quality assurance through capacity building and monitoring and evaluation.

In order to strengthen internal quality assurance processes, Quality Enhancement Cells have been established in 84 public and private universities. The Cells are responsible for conducting internal reviews against the guidelines and proforma stipulated by the QAA. The information gained from the internal review and self-assessment in turn serves as the baseline for assessment by external evaluators.

Professional degree programmes, such as architecture, engineering and medicine, are accredited by their respective Council. All degrees accredited by the Councils are in turn recognised by the HEC. The HEC provides a list of all HEC recognised universities and degree awarding institutions on their webpage and offers a degree attestation service, which verifies and attests Pakistani qualifications.

¹National Education Policy 2009
Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications

The Equivalence and Accreditation Committee of the HEC is the sole body responsible for assessing, evaluating and determining the equivalence and validity of foreign and local qualifications. The HEC is the official National Information Centre of Pakistan.

Equivalence is granted when qualifications obtained from a foreign educational institutions is deemed equal to corresponding qualifications obtained from local Pakistani educational institutions. The term equivalence implies that there is reasonable measure of similarity and commonality between the two courses of studies and recognition entitles its holder to rights enjoyed by those who have completed their degrees successfully at local institutions.

Issues and Challenges Concerning Foreign Qualifications Recognition

Lack of updated information on universities and their programmes is one obstacle Pakistan faces in assessing foreign qualifications. In particular information on qualifications from newly-introduced degree programmes and degrees obtained through non-traditional modes of study, or awarded by HEIs that are not part of the ‘traditional’ education system of a particular country, is difficult to obtain. Updated and trustworthy information on newly established HEIs, as well as data on off-shore university campuses is not always available on the UNESCO Portal to Recognised Higher Education Institutions, which impedes the assessment and verification process.

Progress towards Ratification of the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention

To date, the Government of Pakistan has not launched any specific process aimed at ratifying the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention.

Commitment to Information Sharing Mechanisms

Pakistan is a member of the UNESCO Portal to Recognised Higher Education Institutions. The HEC has been designated the National Information Centre of Pakistan.

Criteria and Procedures for Assessment

When evaluating and assessing the status of foreign institutions and degrees, the HEC may consult any of the following as necessary:

- Internationally recognised lists of accredited HEIs, such as the World list of universities published by UNESCO and the International Hand Book of Universities
- Websites and services of National Information Centres, such as the UK NARIC, and the New Zealand NZQA
- Ministry of Higher Education of relevant country
- Embassy of relevant country.

Assessment officers may also take into account:

- Entry and admission requirements
- Length of study
- Mode of study (full time/part time)
- European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) requirements for the degree programme
- Level of qualification under the Bologna process
- The education system at large.

If results of the review are positive, the HEC issues an equivalence letter. The service charge for this depends on the type of degree assessed.