Republic of Korea

Overview of Higher Education System
Higher education institutions (HEIs) in Korea are classified in three groups: national universities, public universities, and private universities. In total, there are 431 universities in Korea: 201 ‘four-year universities’ (including ten educational universities and two industrial universities); 145 junior colleges; 42 graduate schools; 19 cyber universities; and 17 miscellaneous. The Korean government stipulates minimum standards that aim to assure university autonomy.

Typically, Korean university degree programs encompass four to six years of study. Medical schools require six years of study. Junior colleges require two to three years of study for a degree in, for example, humanities, natural sciences, engineering or health. A complete degree qualifies students to enrol in specialised universities. There are academic research-centred Graduate Schools, as well as practice-orientated. A Master’s degree requires two years of full-time study. A Doctoral degree requires three years of study or more.

National Qualifications Framework
The Ministry of Employment and Labour and the Ministry of Education are currently in the process of collaboratively developing a National Qualifications Framework.

Quality Assurance
The Korean Council for University Education (KCUE) administers the Korean University Accreditation Institute (KUAI), which is the only institutional accreditation authority for four-year universities in Korea. KUAI stipulates the accreditation criteria and regulates the quality assurance system with the overall aim of ensuring quality and accountability of HEIs, as well as promoting international recognition and exchange. KUAI also provides critical support to member universities to execute self-review, which must take place every two years.

Educational institutes must practice thorough public disclosure of information as per the Act on Information Disclosure of Educational Institutes. KCUE also shares select information through the Council’s Higher Education Transparency Service.

Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications
Universities and education institutes are responsible for and have the authority to verify and recognise foreign degrees. In 2011, the Government introduced standard guidelines for foreign degree verification. Prior to this, each university followed its own process for verifying foreign degrees. The new guidelines are to ensure greater consistency throughout Korean universities.

Doctoral Degree Registration
In 2009, the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRFK) launched the Foreign Doctoral Degree Registration System, which lists all Korean Doctoral degree holders who have obtained their PhD in a foreign country, together with their dissertation topic. Subject to the authors consent, it contains his/her dissertation in full text. Currently the NRFK’s registration and verification system only covers Doctoral degrees and does not include degrees obtained at

Quick Facts and Links
Korean Council for University Education (KCUE)
Association of almost all ‘four-year universities’ in Korea. Works to increase the autonomy, accountability and quality of universities.

Korean University Accreditation Institute (KUAI)
Authorised by the Ministry of Education to perform institutional accreditation.

National Research Foundation of Korea (NRFK)
The NRFK promotes and supports international cooperation and research and planning in academic disciplines. PhD degree holders are required to register their degrees with the NRFK.

Higher Education in Korea Service (HEKS)
Provides information on all universities and colleges in Korea to foreign and local students, corporations, governments, and other stakeholders

Study in Korea
Operates under the Korean Ministry of Education. Promotes international cooperation and student exchange.
lower levels. In addition to the register, the system also contains information on higher education systems and accreditation systems in other nations. The Register is searchable by the public.

Issues and Challenges Concerning Foreign Qualifications Recognition
Since the standard guidelines for foreign degree verification were first introduced by the Ministry of Education in 2011, it will take some time before the system is fully incorporated into university procedures. In addition to this, the focus of the guidelines is verification, rather than recognition and equivalence of qualifications. To address this, the Korean Government has also commissioned research to be undertaken into mechanisms appropriate for degree recognition.

Progress toward Ratification of the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention
Ministry of Education and Ministry of Foreign Affairs continue to discuss the ratification of the Convention.

Commitment to Information Sharing Mechanisms
The Higher Education in Korea Service (HEKS) provides information on all universities and colleges in Korea. It is made available to students, corporations, governments, and other stakeholders in an accessible format. The system gives detailed information on colleges in Korea and includes major indicators and competitiveness.

‘Study in Korea’ is another public service that provides information on the Korean higher education system and scholarship opportunities for foreign students.

The Korean Government is willing to participate in developing and furthering academic recognition in Asian and Pacific countries through improved information sharing. The Korean Government is in the process of establishing a NIC and the Ministry of Education is expected to make further announcements in the near future.

Criteria and Procedures for Verification of Doctoral Degrees
Candidates are required to submit their official documents, such as transcripts and degree certificates.

The NRFK review board requests the issuing university to verify the authenticity of the documents and the qualifications.

Once the verification is completed, the candidate will be notified and the NRFK will issue an official document.

The NRFK does not process or register Doctoral degrees that are:

- Obtained in law, religion, art, music, or practical skills
- Written in a language that is not classified as official by the United Nations
- Obtained from a foreign branch campus in Korea that lacks government permission
- Obtained in Korean language.