

UK ENIC Special Report

# Guide to Recognition Issues in International Distance Learning: Southeast Asia

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# Foreword

Distance and blended learning have grown significantly over the past ten years, as learners and providers have seen the benefits of more flexible education provision. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these modes of study have been vital in enabling education to continue while campuses, classrooms and lecture theatres have been closed. The shift to online learning has also further highlighted the potential of distance learning to expand access to high quality education for learners worldwide.

Quality assured distance learning will play an increasingly key role in education internationally for the foreseeable future. However, the focus on online learning has amplified pressing questions around the quality and recognition of distance learning for providers, students, and national authorities.

This report series – highlighting recognition issues in international distance learning – is designed to provide an essential resource for the international education sector, from those involved in international admissions, recruitment and partnerships through to those working in the areas of policy, accreditation and quality assurance.

This edition focuses on Southeast Asia, a dynamic region experiencing rapid growth in demand for higher education. Transnational education, including distance and blended learning provision, is already well-established in some countries in the region, such as Malaysia and Singapore, and has significant potential to grow and build capacity in others, such as Indonesia and Vietnam.

This publication forms part of a wider strand of UK ENIC's resources to promote the international understanding and fair recognition of credible, quality assured distance learning, supporting global mobility and opportunities for graduates and providers.

**Paul Norris**  
Head of UK ENIC

# Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>FOCUS ON SOUTHEAST ASIA</b>	<b>6</b>
Overview	6
Higher education and student mobility	6
Distance learning	7
Transnational education	7
<b>GUIDANCE ON RECOGNITION BY COUNTRY</b>	<b>9</b>
Indonesia	10
Malaysia	12
Philippines	14
Singapore	16
Thailand	19
Vietnam	21

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# Introduction

Online and distance learning<sup>1</sup> has significant potential. It can play a key role in widening access to quality education to sectors of the population who might otherwise not be able to pursue their studies of choice. At a time when finding ways to reduce our emissions is a global priority, it offers opportunities for institutions to provide and students to gain an international education with a lower carbon footprint. In addition, as we have witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic, distance learning can be a way to guarantee continuity of education to students during challenging times.

Blended or hybrid learning, in which a programme is studied partly online and partly face-to-face, has also been an approach widely adopted during the pandemic. This mode of study also offers flexibility and accessibility and has potential to be expanded in the future. Many countries are looking at the role blended learning can play in international partnerships.

The growth of distance and blended learning also presents some challenges: from the development of IT infrastructures and resources allowing reliable and equitable access to students; to concerns on the capacity of distance learning to provide education of the required quality and standards. The latter can lead to recognition issues for qualifications which have been obtained through these modes of study.

Recognition is often essential for admission to further study (especially in public universities), for employment (particularly in public sector organisations) and, in certain countries, to obtain a visa<sup>2</sup>. The recognition of qualifications awarded through distance learning has long been a complex issue. Approaches and policies vary considerably between countries.

The [second edition](#) of this guide (published in December 2020) highlights a range of approaches; from no recognition of distance learning qualifications to recognition on the same basis as qualifications obtained through traditional modes of study. Our research also found a range of policies in between that allow for recognition of distance learning qualifications in certain cases or when additional criteria are met.

In November 2019, UNESCO's General Conference adopted the [Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education](#) stating that qualifications which are "subject to **comparable quality assurance mechanisms** and which are considered part of the higher education system... will be assessed...using the same criteria as those applied to similar qualifications acquired through traditional learning modes"<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter referred to collectively as 'distance learning'

<sup>2</sup> Professional recognition – for degrees in professional fields such as medicine, allied health, engineering and accounting – often lies with the relevant professional body in each country: such bodies may have further requirements in terms of modes of learning and assessment.

<sup>3</sup> The Convention, published by designed to promote transparency, consistency and trust in international recognition and quality assurance, will build upon and consolidate regional recognition conventions for Africa, Arab States, Asia-Pacific, Europe and North America; and Latin America and the Caribbean.

As quality assurance is a key factor in enabling recognition, it is important to understand who is responsible for the oversight of distance learning provision. Approaches to regulation and quality assurance of distance learning provision offered by local institutions also vary between countries. In some countries, distance learning forms an integral part of the national quality assurance system, where higher education institutions must demonstrate how they maintain standards across all modes of learning. In others, distance learning may fall outside of the national quality assurance system, whether being self-regulated or falling under the remit of a specialised distance learning accreditation agency. In all cases, recognition is typically only possible where the awarding institution is subject to external oversight by an appropriate competent authority.

To support and guide stakeholders in their understanding and recognition of international qualifications, UK ENIC holds information on the accreditation and quality assurance systems of over 200 countries and territories on its [International Comparisons](#)<sup>4</sup> database, along with specific information on the recognition and regulation of transnational education in over 60 countries and territories.

This series of reports is designed to complement the information on quality assurance and qualifications made available to UK ENIC members on the database. The reports aim to highlight, where relevant, potential barriers to academic recognition for applicants holding qualifications obtained through distance and blended learning. As such, they may be of particular relevance to higher education staff involved in admissions, recruitment or international partnerships development.

The [first edition](#) was published in May 2020 and looked at the recognition of distance learning in nine countries. The [second edition](#), published in December 2020, focussed on distance and blended learning in 15 key countries. This edition explores the recognition of these modes of study within a particular region, Southeast Asia, in more depth.

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<sup>4</sup> Login required.

# Focus on Southeast Asia

## Overview

Southeast Asia is a dynamic and fast-developing region, with high levels of demand for high quality higher education provision. It is estimated that the student-age population of the region will grow significantly over the next thirty years. Southeast Asia also has a number of the world's fastest growing economies.

Indonesia is one of the most populous countries in the world with 270 million inhabitants and has the third highest population under 25 (behind only China and India). It is estimated that by 2050 the overall population will be nearly 321 million. The populations of Vietnam and the Philippines are also expected to grow from 98 million to over 109 million, and from 111 million to over 145 million, respectively, over the same period of time.

By 2050, Indonesia is projected to rise to fourth place in terms of its economy. Vietnam is projected to record an average annual GDP growth rate of 5.1% and move from 32<sup>nd</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> place; the projected annual growth rate for the Philippines is 4.3%, moving the country from 28<sup>th</sup> position to 19<sup>th</sup><sup>5</sup>. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is predicted to become the world's fourth largest single market by 2030<sup>6</sup>.

## Higher education and student mobility

There are twenty million students enrolled at tertiary level across ASEAN<sup>7</sup>. The number of students in higher education in the region has increased significantly in recent years. However, the average tertiary enrolment rate across the region is still only around 40%. It varies significantly between countries, but many countries have significant potential for further growth.

The education systems of the region are diverse, but initiatives such as the development of the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) aim to support the comparison and recognition of qualifications between member states.

Outbound student mobility also varies considerably across the region. Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei Darussalam have higher rates of outbound mobility. At the other end of the scale, the number of students from Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand studying overseas remains low. Vietnam is one of the fast-growing international student markets globally, growing faster than both China and India<sup>8</sup>. Indonesia and Vietnam have been identified as priority countries within the [UK's International Education Strategy](#).

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<sup>5</sup> PwC, *The World in 2050*

<sup>6</sup> UK-ASEAN Business Council

<sup>7</sup> ASEAN, *ASEAN Development Outlook*

<sup>8</sup> UNESCO

## Distance learning

In Southeast Asia, as across the rest of the world, distance learning has been pushed to the foreground of the educational landscape by the pandemic. Prior to this, distance learning was much more prevalent in some countries in the region than others.

Many countries in the region have public open universities: Universitas Terbuka (Indonesia), University of the Philippines Open University, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (Thailand), Hanoi Open University and Ho Chi Minh City Open University (Vietnam). Malaysia has a number of private open universities, the largest of which, the Open University of Malaysia, is owned by a consortium of public universities.

Distance and / or blended learning programmes are also offered by other universities. Many institutions in Malaysia and the Philippines offer these programmes, and smaller numbers of institutions in Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam. The Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) in the Philippines have published specific standards and guidelines for open and distance learning programmes. The use and promotion of open and distance learning to expand access to higher education was formalised in the Philippines in the [Open Distance Learning Act \(2014\)](#).

The role that distance learning plays in the national higher education system, and how it is regulated and quality assured, can influence approaches to the recognition of international distance learning qualifications. Countries where these modes of study are not as well established and integrated into national higher education provision may be less likely to recognise distance learning provided by overseas institutions. Approaches to the quality assurance of distance learning globally also vary, so international cooperation and engagement is needed to ensure that processes and standards are widely understood.

## Transnational education

Transnational education has long formed part of the higher education sector in Malaysia and Singapore, but international partnerships are less well-established elsewhere in the region. A number of countries have introduced legislation in the past ten years to regulate transnational education (TNE) and international partnerships within the higher sector.

In Indonesia, TNE has been permitted and promoted since the introduction of Law No. 12 (2012) on Higher Education and is regulated according to the Ministry of Education and Culture (*Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan (Kemdikbud)*) Regulation No. 14 (2014) on Foreign Cooperation in Higher Education. New rules allowing branch campuses to be established were introduced in 2018.

In the Philippines, the Transnational Higher Education Act was passed in 2019; it sets out the regulatory framework for a range of different types of TNE provision, including branch campuses, franchised programmes, articulation agreements, joint and double degrees, and

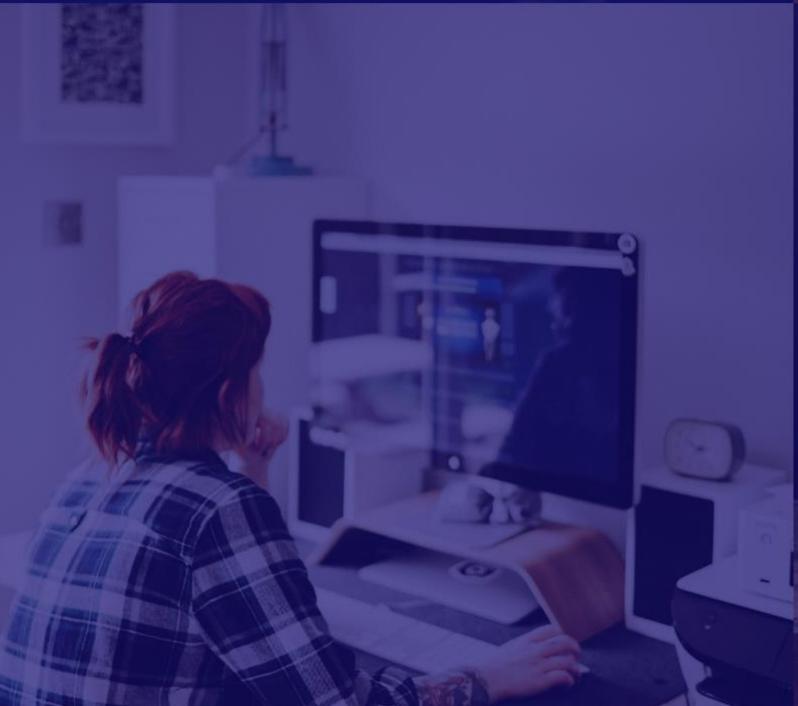
online, blended and distance learning. Policies, standards and guidelines for TNE were published by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) in 2016.

The regulatory framework for TNE in Vietnam is set out in the Law on Higher Education (*Luật Giáo dục đại học*) (2012) and Government Decree: Regulations on Foreign Cooperation and Investment in Education (Decree 73) (*Nghị định số 73/2013/NĐ-CP ngày 26/9/2012*) (2012).

In Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, TNE is regulated within the same framework as provision by local private higher education institutions.

Some regulatory frameworks explicitly refer to international distance learning programmes, whereas others do not. In many cases, because neither a physical presence within the country, nor collaboration with a local partner are necessarily required to offer a distance learning programme, such provision can exist outside of the regulations. Whether or not the qualification awarded on completion of the programme of study is recognised and will be accepted for the purposes of further study or employment, is therefore an important factor in determining whether international distance learning programmes form a significant part of the TNE landscape in these countries.

# Guidance on recognition by country



# Indonesia

## Overseas degrees studied through distance learning may be recognised.

Joint and dual / double degrees and twinning programmes with blended delivery through local partner institutions are permitted.



### Relevant authorities

**Regulation of higher education**  
Ministry of Education and Culture

**Regulation of distance learning**  
As above

**Recognition of overseas qualifications**  
Ministry of Education and Culture

## Policies and guidelines on qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Specific policies / guidelines for distance learning?



Specific policies / guidelines for blended learning?



## Recognition of overseas qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Overseas degrees delivered through distance learning may be recognised in Indonesia. The main consideration is the status of the awarding institution in the home country.

Collaborative programmes delivered through blended learning in Indonesia which lead to a joint or dual / double degree are permitted by Regulation No. 14 (2014) on Foreign Cooperation in Higher Education. These programmes lead to a recognised Indonesian degree. Twinning programmes, in which students study courses or credits towards an overseas degree at an Indonesian partner institution can also be offered through blended learning.

### National distance learning provision

The largest provider of online and distance learning is *Universitas Terbuka* (Open University), which is a public institution. Several other higher education institutions also offer online programmes.

### Recognised distance learning providers

#### Approved list of national distance learning providers?



Under [Law No. 12 on Higher Education \(2012\)](#), accreditation of higher education institutions and programmes is mandatory and is overseen by the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (*Badan Akreditasi Nasional Perguruan Tinggi*) (BAN-PT). Lists of accredited institutions and programmes are available on the BAN-PT website. Distance learning programmes are indicated by 'PJJ' within the programme title.

#### Approved list of overseas distance learning providers?



There is no list of approved overseas providers.

### Applying for recognition: the process for individuals

The Ministry of Education and Culture evaluates overseas qualifications and issues equivalency certificates.

# Malaysia

**Overseas degrees studied through distance learning are recognised if they are recognised in the home country.**

Distance learning programmes offered by local providers must be accredited by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), but this is not required for overseas distance learning providers.



## Relevant authorities

### Regulation of higher education

- Ministry of Higher Education
- Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA)

### Regulation of distance learning

As above

### Recognition of overseas qualifications

MQA

**Policies and guidelines on qualifications studied by distance and blended learning**

Specific policies / guidelines for distance learning?



Specific policies / guidelines for blended learning?



## Recognition of overseas qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Degrees delivered through distance and blended learning are recognised in Malaysia if they are recognised by the relevant authorities in the home country of awarding institution.

### National distance learning provision

The MQA has a [Code of Practice](#) for the accreditation of open and distance learning programmes. The first edition of these guidelines was published in 2013, and they were updated in 2019. A programme of study can be regarded as open and distance learning if more than 60% of the courses offered in the programme are conducted in open and distance mode and delivery meets other requirements outlined in the Code of Practice such as having regional centres, provision of support through self-instructional materials, a learning management system platform that supports synchronous and asynchronous learning and other learning support services.

## Lists of distance learning providers or programmes

### Approved list of national distance learning providers?



Higher education qualifications in Malaysia must be accredited by the MQA. Accredited programmes, including those delivered through distance learning, are listed in the [Malaysian Qualifications Register \(MQR\)](#). There is no separate list of approved distance learning providers.

There are several open universities in Malaysia, including Open University Malaysia, Wawasan Open University, Al-Madinah International University and Asia e-University. Many other institutions also offer distance learning programmes.

### Approved list of overseas distance learning providers?



There is no list of approved overseas providers; degrees delivered through distance learning are recognised if they are recognised by the relevant authorities in the home country of the awarding institution.

## Applying for recognition: the process for individuals

The MQA carries out the verification of recognition of overseas qualifications for the general purposes of entry to higher education and employment.

# Philippines

**Overseas degrees studied through distance learning are recognised if they are recognised in the home country.**

TNE programmes delivered through open and distance learning or blended learning are permitted.



## Relevant authorities

### Regulation of higher education

Commission on Higher Education (CHED)

### Regulation of distance learning

As above

### Recognition of overseas qualifications

Centre for Academic Information and Mobility, International Affairs Staff

## Policies and guidelines on qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Specific policies / guidelines for distance learning?



Specific policies / guidelines for blended learning?



## Recognition of overseas qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Overseas universities are permitted to offer online, distance and blended learning programmes in the Philippines through a range of different delivery models.

The [Policies, Standards and Guidelines for Transnational Education Programs](#) issued by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) cover open and distance learning, and blended learning.

### National distance learning provision

The Open and Distance Learning Act (2014) ([Republic Act No.10650](#)) established the policy of promoting distance education as a means of expanding access to tertiary education and ‘...the use of distance education as an appropriate, efficient and effective system of delivering quality higher and technical educational services in the country.’ Regulations, policies, standards and guidelines are in place to support and regulate the delivery of higher education programmes via distance learning.

The largest distance learning provider in the higher education sector is the University of the Philippines Open University, established in 1995. A number of state universities have an open university among their constituent colleges and many private institutions also offer distance learning programmes.

### Recognised distance learning providers

#### Approved list of national distance learning providers?



A list of recognised higher education providers is available on the [CHED website](#). Distance learning providers are included but not listed separately.

#### Approved list of overseas distance learning providers?



There is no list of approved overseas providers.

### Applying for recognition: the process for individuals

The Centre for Academic Information and Mobility, [International Affairs Staff](#) provides information on the recognition of higher education qualifications.

# Singapore

**There is no central authority in Singapore that assesses or grants recognition to degrees awarded by overseas universities, whether studied via distance learning or face-to-face. Decisions about qualifications are made at the discretion of the employer or admitting institution.**

Recognition of degrees in professional subjects, such as accountancy, engineering, law and medicine, is the responsibility of the relevant professional body.



## Relevant authorities

### Regulation of higher education

Ministry of Education (publicly funded higher education only)

### Regulation of distance learning

As above

### Recognition of overseas qualifications

N/A

## Policies and guidelines on qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Specific policies / guidelines for distance learning?



Specific policies / guidelines for blended learning?



### Recognition of overseas qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

As the Ministry of Education does not grant recognition to private or overseas institutions or their qualifications, there are no national policies or guidelines relating to the recognition of distance and blended learning.

#### ***Recognition of distance learning for professional registration***

Qualifications accepted for professional registration are determined by professional bodies, such as the Singapore Medical Association and the Board of Professional Engineers. These bodies maintain lists of approved degrees from overseas universities. Policies and guidelines on qualifications studied by distance learning vary. For example, the [Board of Professional Engineers](#) stipulates that at least 50% of approved engineering degrees must have been studied on-campus. Degrees in accountancy studied by distance learning from [recognised overseas institutions](#) are acceptable for membership of the [Institute of Singapore Chartered Accountants](#) and eligible for enrolment on [Singapore Accountancy Commission](#) Chartered Accountant qualification. The [Singapore Medical Association list of recognised degree programmes](#) does not include any distance learning qualifications.

### Recognised distance learning providers

Approved list of national distance learning providers?



Under the Private Education Act, private providers must register with the [Committee for Private Education \(CPE\)](#). The [list of approved programmes](#) includes programmes offered by distance learning.

Approved list of overseas distance learning providers?



The [CPE list of approved programmes](#) also includes distance learning programmes offered by overseas providers in Singapore, often through a local partner.

## Applying for recognition: the process for individuals

There is no central authority which recognises overseas qualifications; decisions are made by employers and admitting institutions.

# Thailand

**Overseas degrees studied through distance learning are not recognised in the public sector, but may be accepted for employment in the private sector.**



## Relevant authorities

### Regulation of higher education

Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation

### Regulation of distance learning

As above

### Recognition of overseas qualifications

Office of Higher Education Standards and Quality, Office of the Higher Education Commission

## Policies and guidelines on qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Specific policies / guidelines for distance learning?



Specific policies / guidelines for blended learning?



## Recognition of overseas qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Overseas degrees delivered through distance learning are not currently recognised by the Office of Higher Education Standards and Quality, or by the Office of the Civil Service Commission for employment in the public sector. They may be accepted by employers in the private sector.

## National distance learning provision

Thailand has one open university, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, which is a public institution offering distance learning programmes. Degrees are recognised by the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC) and by the Office of the Civil Service Commission for employment in the public sector.

Some other Thai universities offer blended learning courses as part of degree programmes.

## Recognised distance learning providers

### Approved list of national distance learning providers?



The Office of the Higher Education Commission maintains a [database of all programmes](#) (in Thai) that have been acknowledged. Thai universities do not require approval for programmes, but OHEC acknowledgement ensures that qualifications will be nationally recognised. The database includes distance learning programmes, but these are not listed separately. It also includes joint programmes with overseas institutions.

### Approved list of overseas distance learning providers?



There is no list of approved overseas providers.

## Applying for recognition: the process for individuals

Individuals can apply to the Office of Higher Education Standards and Quality for recognition and evaluation of overseas higher education qualifications. Details of visas and time spent in the country of the awarding institution are required as part of the application.

# Vietnam

**Overseas degrees studied through distance learning are only recognised if the institution is approved to offer programmes in Vietnam.**

Joint programmes with local partner institutions delivered in blended mode are permitted.



## Relevant authorities

### Regulation of higher education

Ministry of Education and Training (MOET)

### Regulation of distance learning

As above

### Recognition of overseas qualifications

Vietnam National Academic Recognition Information Centre (VN-NARIC)

## Policies and guidelines on qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

Specific policies / guidelines for distance learning?



Specific policies / guidelines for blended learning?



## Recognition of overseas qualifications studied by distance and blended learning

According to the regulations, overseas degrees delivered through distance learning are only recognised if the awarding institution has been licensed by the Ministry of Education and

Training (MOET) to deliver programmes in Vietnam. UK ENIC is not currently aware of any distance learning degrees that have been approved for delivery in the country.

According to regulations set out in [Circular No. 38/2020/TT-BGDĐT](#), joint programmes offered by Vietnamese institutions in partnership with overseas universities are permitted to be delivered in blended mode, with a maximum of 30% of the total teaching time taking place online. This applies to programmes that lead to a degree awarded solely by the overseas university, as well as those that lead to a joint degree awarded by both partners.

### National distance learning provision

Distance learning programmes are offered by Ho Chi Minh City Open University and Hanoi Open University. A small number of other universities also offer some programmes. Prior to COVID-19, online and distance learning was not very prevalent in the Vietnamese higher education sector.

## Recognised distance learning providers

### Approved list of national distance learning providers?



Higher education institutions must be accredited by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). Accredited institutions are permitted to offer distance learning, but there is no separate list of distance learning providers.

### Approved list of overseas distance learning providers?

There is no list of approved overseas distance learning providers.

[The list of approved joint programmes](#) offered by overseas providers in partnership with local institutions may include programmes with a blended mode of study.

## Applying for recognition: the process for individuals

The [Vietnam National Academic Recognition Information Centre \(VN-NARIC\)](#) is responsible for recognition of overseas degrees.

Individuals can apply for recognition of Bachelor degrees, Master's degrees and PhDs awarded by overseas institutions studied overseas or studied in Vietnam. Procedures for the recognition of overseas qualifications are outlined in [Law no. 77/2007/QĐ-BGDĐT](#).



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