



UNDERSTANDING THE

WES Credential Evaluation Report for Individuals Who Cannot Obtain Verifiable Academic Documentation

This WES Credential Evaluation Report is issued through the WES Gateway Program, a program designed to provide access to credential evaluation for individuals who are not able to obtain academic documents due to circumstances in their country of education.

A WES credential evaluation provides individuals with a valuable tool to validate their international education so they may pursue higher education or employment in the U.S. The report describes each credential and provides an equivalency statement comparing the credential earned to a similar credential in the U.S. and sometimes includes a course and grade analysis as well. WES evaluations are offered as non-binding advisory opinions and based upon the best information and resources available to professional evaluators. The information in this document provides guidance for employers, academic institutions, and regulatory bodies on how to use the WES Credential Evaluation Report to recognize an individual's educational qualifications, especially when complete and verified documentation may not be available.

THE WES GATEWAY PROGRAM: PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

The WES Gateway Program assesses credentials of individuals who are not able to obtain academic documents from their institutions due to circumstances in their country of education, including but not limited to people displaced by political unrest, conflict, and natural disasters. In many cases, individuals have fled such situations with originals or copies of their academic documents, or other proof of attendance, completion, or interruption of studies.

The WES Gateway Program requires applicants to submit at least one officially issued document in their possession to be eligible for an assessment – for example, a transcript, grade report, professional license, diploma, or professional membership/student identification card. Corroborating evidence submitted, such as testimonial letter or applicant statements, will be noted, but these are not accepted as primary evidence of qualifications. Note that WES assesses only academic credentials, not professional experience or competencies.

WES employed its quality assurance standards and procedures to the assessment process, including identification of fraudulent claims and documents. WES does not assess a file if fraud is suspected, or if there is insufficient information to proceed. Documents used by WES in the evaluation are specified in the evaluation report and attached for the purpose of further examination of the applicant's academic achievements.

WES has rigorously tested its methods for using limited documentation to verify and evaluate credentials submitted for assessment through the Gateway Program. WES compares credible documents in an individual's possession with samples in its extensive archives. If a transcript is not available and a course analysis is required, WES reconstructs the program of study from samples in its archives if possible.

The WES database contains information on more than 200 countries and jurisdictions, 45,000 educational institutions, 20,000 credentials and equivalencies, and 1,600 grading scales. Based on this in-depth knowledge of the country's education system, WES is able to provide an advisory opinion on how this credential compares to a similar credential earned in the U.S.

FREQUENTLY USED TERMS IN THE CREDENTIAL EVALUATION REPORT

Allocation of Transfer Credits: When a transcript lists more than 12 courses for a given academic year, WES may allocate fewer than three semester credits for each subject in order to not exceed the standard annual load of 30 to 36 semester credits. The U.S. institution receiving the evaluation, may, however, round up the credits per subject from two or 2.5 to three in order to facilitate the transfer of credits. Or, a decision may be made to combine credits within the same discipline. For example, two courses in Economics that have been allocated 1.5 credits each may be combined to yield a three-credit course.

Course-by-Course Analysis: Indicates all subjects taken for a specific program or credential when applicant provides complete but unverified academic transcripts. Or, the analysis is a reconstruction of coursework likely undertaken when applicant provides partial unverified academic transcripts or other documentation.

Coursework in English as a Foreign Language: English language courses completed in non-English speaking countries are generally regarded as comparable to foreign language courses taught in the U.S. Accordingly, those courses may not be eligible for transfer credits as equivalent to undergraduate English courses.

Credential Analysis: Identifies each credential in terms of its principal elements. That analysis includes country, name of credential, year awarded, school name, entrance requirements, program length, major/specialization, U.S. equivalency, and special remarks.

Credible Documents: Documents that are in the applicant's possession that were issued by the institution attended or the institution or agency that awarded the degree, diploma, or certificate. The WES Gateway Program requires an applicant to have at least one credible document to begin an application.

Credential Recognition: A decision made by an institution to recognize the validity of a credential earned in a country other than the U.S. to meet requirements for admission, licensing, or employment.

Recognized Institution: The status of a nationally-recognized institution or program in another country that is comparable to that of a recognized institution in the U.S.

ABOUT WES

World Education Services was founded over 40 years ago as a non-profit organization dedicated to helping skilled immigrants and international students on their path to academic and professional success. Through extensive knowledge, trusted research, and expert advice, WES has set the standard of excellence in evaluating international credentials and supporting the recognition of academic qualifications.

ABOUT THE WES GATEWAY PROGRAM

The WES Gateway Program seeks to further the academic and career goals of qualified individuals who, because of adverse circumstances in their country of education, lack standard proof of academic achievement.

Through the Gateway Program, WES can reliably validate and assess the education of individuals displaced by political unrest, conflict, and natural disasters even when verifiable documents are not available. The WES Gateway Program provides eligible participants with a high-quality credential evaluation report that can be accepted and recognized by employers, higher education institutions, and regulatory bodies throughout the U.S.

For an internationally-educated professional, recognition of their academic credentials is the springboard for pursuing suitable employment, further education, and licensing in the U.S.

To facilitate recognition, WES has appended the applicant's documents to the report in case an applicant's claims and related documents are subject to additional scrutiny before a recognition decision is made. Institutions can employ a range of methods of verification and further assessment to reduce risk and make an informed decision. The same approach can be used by employers to make hiring decisions if there are academic requirements for a job.

METHODS OF FURTHER ASSESSMENT

- Ask for a **written statement** that describes the applicant's background and circumstances in as much detail as needed. Provide clear instructions to the applicant, indicating what must be included in the statement. If it is desired that the statement have legal weight, ask the applicant to have the statement notarized.
- **Interview** the applicant in person (if possible) or via phone or online technology to corroborate claimed history.
- Collect **witness statements, testimonials, or references**. An applicant may be able to reach out to school officials, professors, teachers, or employers who can personally testify to some or all of his or her claims. Ask the applicant for a list of such individuals, excluding relatives. Give clear instructions to the witness as to what to include in a written statement, including the relationship with the applicant. If a higher burden of proof is required, the following can be done:
 - Ask for witnesses who are living and working professionally in the U.S.
 - Ask the witness for proof of identity (for example, a copy of a passport photo page or identification card, copy of professional license).
 - Ask the witness to have the statement notarized.
- **Assess competencies** (knowledge and skills) or prior learning.
- **Require examinations**, which may range from comprehensive examinations to individual course challenge examinations. For subjects that are sequential in nature (for example, mathematics), missing coursework might be filled in, depending on certain examination results.
- **Conduct interviews with experts in the field** (professors or other recognized professionals) who can assess the applicant's educational and professional background and knowledge base. The interviewer(s) can then make a recommendation about qualifications recognition.
- Review **sample work**, particularly published work, collected from the applicant. Ask a professor, expert, or recognized professional in the specific field to review the work.
- Ask a professor or recognized professional to assign **special projects** related to the field of study.
- **Request skills assessments** or audits in which skills specific to the field and level of study claimed by the applicant are tested through a series of tasks or a simulation activity.

TYPES OF CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION

In working with displaced individuals whose claims and documents are credible, some degree of flexibility on the part of institutions and employers may be necessary to assist them in moving forward. When it is not possible to recognize all of an applicant's claimed background, rather than complete rejection of the application, there are other options for recognition.

For example:

Partial recognition: Recognize the part of the applicant's claimed background where corroboration is possible, or in which there is confidence for recognition. The applicant could then complete an in-house training program or additional coursework.

Alternative recognition: The applicant can be recognized for a lesser degree or a different qualification than they achieved in their country of education. If desired, the applicant can then work toward regaining his or her original occupation.

Conditional recognition: The applicant's full claimed background can be recognized on the condition that he or she meets certain future requirements.

For example:

- For those who seek to continue their **education:** Recognize the claimed background on the condition that the applicant completes the first full semester or year with certain minimum grades or higher in all courses.
- For those who seek to obtain **employment:** Recognize the full claimed background on the condition that the employee undergoes monthly performance reviews for the first three or six months, or that he/she attends certain professional development or training opportunities. Alternatively, employ provisionally, or as a paid intern, and provide mentoring.
- For those who seek to obtain **professional licensing/certification:** Consider recognizing the full claimed background in order to allow the individual to proceed towards full licensure/certification on the condition that he or she completes additional training.



For more information, see the WES research report, "Assessing and Recognizing Refugee Credentials" and other resources at wenr.wes.org/refugees.