



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. The WES Gateway Program is designed to provide credential evaluation access to individuals not able to obtain academic documents because of adverse circumstances in their country of education.

A WES credential evaluation provides individuals with a valuable tool to validate their international education so they can pursue higher education or employment in the United States. 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 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 is not 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 because of adverse circumstances in their country of education, including but not limited to displacement due to 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 or student identification card. Corroborating evidence submitted, such as a testimonial letter or applicant statements, will be noted but not accepted as primary evidence of qualifications. Note that WES assesses only academic credentials, not professional experience or competencies.

WES applied 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, nor if there is insufficient information to proceed. Documents reviewed by WES as part of the evaluation are specified in the report and attached for the purpose of further examination of applicant's academic achievements.

WES has rigorously tested its methods for using limited documentation to 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 240 countries, former countries, and territories; 64,204 institutions; 41,390 credentials and equivalencies, and 9,935 grading scales. With access to this in-depth knowledge of country education systems around the globe, WES is able to provide an advisory opinion on how a credential compares to a similar credential earned in the U.S.

FREQUENTLY USED TERMS IN 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 3 semester credits for each subject in order not to 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 2 or 2.5 to 3 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 3-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 applicants provide partial or 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 or specialization, U.S. equivalency, and special remarks.

Credible Documents: Documents 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 (WES) is a non-profit social enterprise that supports the educational, economic, and social inclusion of immigrants, refugees, and international students. For 50 years, WES has set the standard for international academic credential evaluation, supporting millions of people as they seek to achieve their academic and professional goals. Through decades of experience as a leader in global education, WES has developed a wide range of tools to pursue social impact at scale. From evaluating academic credentials to shaping policy, designing programs, and providing philanthropic funding, we partner with a diverse set of organizations, leaders, and networks to uplift individuals and drive systems change. Together with its partners, WES enables people to learn, work, and thrive in new places.

About the WES Gateway Program

The WES Gateway Program assesses the educational credentials of individuals who have been forcibly displaced and who cannot obtain official academic documents from their country of education. Credential evaluation reports issued through the WES Gateway Program enable academic institutions, employers, and licensing bodies to make informed decisions about admissions, employment, and licensure.



USING THE WES Credential Evaluation Report for Credential Recognition

Recognition of academic credentials is often the springboard for internationally educated professionals pursuing suitable employment, further education, and professional licensure 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 videoconference to corroborate claimed history.
- Collect **witness statements, testimonials, or references**. An applicant may be able to contact school officials, professors, teachers, or employers who can personally testify to some or all of the applicant's claims. Ask the applicant for a list of such individuals, not including 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 (a copy of a passport photo page, identification card, or 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 professional) who can assess the applicant's educational and professional background and knowledge. 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. When it is not possible to recognize all of an applicant's claimed background, rather than rejecting the application completely, there are other options for recognition.

Partial Recognition: Recognize 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 from what they received in their country of education. The applicant can then work toward resuming the original occupation, if desired.

Conditional Recognition: The applicant's full claimed background can be recognized on the condition that the applicant meet certain requirements within a specified period of time.

For example:

- For those who seek to continue their **education**: Recognize the claimed background on the condition that the applicant complete 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 undergo monthly performance reviews for the first three or six months or attend certain professional development or training opportunities. Alternatively, offer provisional employment or a paid internship, and provide mentoring.
- For those who seek to obtain **professional licensing or certification**: Consider recognizing the full claimed background in order to allow the individual to proceed towards full licensure or certification on the condition that the individual complete additional training.



For more information, see the WES research report, "Recognizing Refugee Qualifications: Practical Tips for Credential Assessment," and other resources at wenr.wes.org/refugees