



GUIDE TO THE UNITED KINGDOM EDUCATION SYSTEM AND ASPECTS TO BE CONSIDERED FOR THE RECOGNITION OF HIGHER EDUCATION TITLES IN COLOMBIA

INTRODUCTION

The Colombian Ministry of National Education (*Ministerio de Educación Nacional - MEN*) has been working on the creation of guides of educational systems from different countries. These instruments may make the where and what to study decision-making process easier, as well as illustrate the procedure and requirements for the recognition of higher education degrees in Colombia.

The Office of Higher Education Quality at MEN (*Dirección de Calidad de la Educación Superior del MEN*) examined the guides of foreign educational systems which are already published on this website. In the exercise, the need of bringing the technical language of education closer to the citizen was highlighted, as well as generating an interactive instrument. In this order of ideas, MEN, in agreement with the Colombian Association of Universities (*Asociación Colombiana de Universidades – ASCUN*), updated and redesigned these guides.

For the creation of this guide, information from various official sources was consolidated, originating a practical and relevant instrument for the citizen. Pertinent information on four central aspects is therefore included: (1) a description of the higher education system; (2) the quality assurance of institutions and higher education programs; (3) the legality of higher education programs and institutions; and, 4) steps for the recognition of higher education degrees from abroad.



All information here presented considers different accessibility requirements of tools and web products, facilitating the access for people in a condition of disability. This work was made possible by an invaluable teamwork with the National Institute for the Blind (*Instituto Nacional para Ciegos – INCI*).

1. UNITED KINGDOM HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

The United Kingdom is a sovereign island and country located north-west of continental Europe, composed of four different nations: Wales, England, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Each territory is decentralized and has its own regional government. However, their education systems share a similar structure across the UK.

Since 1999, the United Kingdom has been part of the Bologna Process which aims to facilitate the exchange of graduates and adapt the content of university studies to the needs of today's world, improving their quality and competitiveness through greater transparency and competence-based learning. The Bologna Process currently brings together 48 European countries that share reforms and structures in higher education with a common basis of values such as freedom of expression and institutional autonomy, among other. For more details about this community and its member countries, please visit the EHEA (European Higher Education Area and Bologna Process) website - [EHEA](#).

United Kingdom used to be part of the European Union - EU. However, since the confirmation of Brexit, expectations regarding the academic area were generated. It is important to mention that the changes mainly affect students from EU countries, since they previously enjoyed certain privileges that cease with Brexit. For students from non-EU countries, such as Colombia, conditions are still stable. For up-to-date



information on mobility conditions for Colombian citizens, please visit the official website of the British government: GOV - Study in UK.

Preparatory Education System for Higher Education: Education in the United Kingdom is compulsory from the age of 5 to 18, starting in primary basic education, then secondary. At age 16, students must take a general knowledge test known as the GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education or General Certificate of Secondary Education). They then go on to upper secondary education between the ages of 16 and 18. There, students choose three subjects in which they wish to specialize so they only study those subjects and then take the A Level (or Level A) exams which allow them access to higher education. Access to specialized education allows the student to develop solid skills and concepts in an area of interest which can be linked to a university program, also related to subjects of the "A Level".

In Scotland, instead of the GCSE, there are the Scottish Nationals. The A level are called the Scottish Highers.

Some institutions request applying for the Scottish Advanced Highers instead of the Scottish Highers, as they are considered to be of a greater difficulty.

- Higher education institutions

HEIs - higher education institutions - are independent and autonomous bodies regarding the academic offer they develop. HEIs can be Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and FE (Further Education or Advanced Education) universities, such as Colleges.

It is important to clarify that, in the UK, a college is a higher education institution that educates students in a certain area of study. Some colleges are listed as Listed Bodies, which means they can award degrees through a university listed as a Recognized body.

A university is also a graduate institution of higher education which can award students degrees upon completion of their studies and the achievement of all due requirements.

In the United Kingdom, there are academic offers focused on developing work-oriented skills. This offer is legal and relevant in the workplace, but it does not constitute a higher education training. Therefore, they are not part of the academic titles that can be recognized in Colombia.

- Access to higher education

To confirm undergraduate and graduate requirements and the procedure for applying in the UK, including Scotland, the University and College Admissions Service (UCAS - University and Colleges Admission Service) can process and accept all applications for university admission. However, some universities receive applications directly, including from international students.

More information in the official UCAS website: [University and Colleges Admission Service \(UCAS\)](https://www.ucas.com).

Some academic programs feature certain particularities that are worth considering: Some of them are mentioned below:

- **Law and legal studies:** one of the requirements for university law programs is having taken the LNAT (The Law National Aptitude Test or National Examination of Aptitude for Law) exam. This test focuses on demonstrating behavioral and deductive reasoning skills, as well as indicating an ability to understand and interpret information and argue conclusions.

The LNAT test is helpful in confirming whether the student has chosen the right path and, similarly, it helps universities to verify whether a candidate

has the required skills. For more details on this test, you can access the LNAT link: <https://lnat.ac.uk/>

- **Medicine and Dentistry:** Some institutions require the BMAT (BioMedical Admissions Test or Biomedical Admission Test), which is an aptitude test used as part of the medical admission process, biomedical sciences and dentistry at some universities in the UK.

Another possible test is the UKCAT (UK Clinical Aptitude Test or Clinical Aptitude Test), also used as a requirement for students wishing to undertake a university program in medicine or dentistry, becoming part of the admission process in several universities.

- **Medical residences:** the GMC (General Medical Council or General Medical Council) is the body responsible for setting standards for providers of medical education and training, in addition to the regular verification of established guidelines. To confirm if an offer of medical residency is endorsed by the GMC, the following link can be visited: <https://www.gmc-uk.org/>.

For the area of health there are countless academic options at all levels of higher education, from HND (level 5) to doctorates (level 8). Some examples of them are HND in health care, Bachelor in clinical sciences, Master in sports cardiology, and PhD in cardiovascular science, just to mention a few.

- **Arts:** for higher studies in arts, each school or university has its own requirements. However, it is important to note that for access to higher education in arts, high performance in previous studies and a portfolio containing details of previous developed works are necessary. In this area of knowledge there is an academic offer



of higher education at all levels, from HND (level 5) to doctorates (level 8), with some examples such as HND in art and photography design, bachelor in acting, master in sound arts, and PhD in art history.

Each university, and academic program, has its singularities. Hence, the importance of reviewing the specific requirements of each programme to which it is intended to apply.

It is worth mentioning that Scotland has its own scheme of qualifications and credits. for detailed information on the education system of Scotland and the different education options, please visit the SQA- Scottish Qualifications Authority link below: [SQA.](#)

It is also important to note that UK NARIC (The National Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom or National Recognition Information Centre of the United Kingdom) is the agency for the recognition of qualifications and skills of international students and professionals who wish to study or join the British labour market.

This agency offers certification of foreign degrees and their comparable level in the United Kingdom. For more information regarding all services offered by NARIC, requirements and costs, the following link can be visited: [NARIC Qualifications.](#)

Language Requirements for Language:

The official language of the United Kingdom is English. Accordingly, all foreign students whose mother tongue is different from that language must present an advanced language certificate. There are two tests valid for higher education institutions worldwide, valid for two years in both cases:

IELTS: *International English Language Testing System* is the most popular English test for higher education and global migration, especially if the final destination is the UK. This exam is jointly applied by the University of Cambridge, The British Council, and IDP IELTS Australia. For more details on this test, please visit the following link: [IELTS](#).

TOEFL: The Test of English as a Foreign Language is a standardized English language proficiency test, specifically aimed at non-native English speakers. As a standard, this test is accepted by many English-speaking academic and professional institutions around the world. For more details on this test, please visit the following link: [TOEFL](#).

In addition, on the website of UCAS (University and Colleges Admission Service), there are other valid test options that may be of interest. For more details, please visit the following link: <https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/applying-university/international-and-eu-students/what-level-english-do-i-need-get-uk-university#which-english-language-test-should-i-take>.

- Degrees and titles

HND - Higher National Diploma: the learner acquires real-life skills through modular learning and practical assessments. This course focuses on developing skills according to the market demands. Therefore, it provides solid knowledge for job-seeking candidates and opens doors for those seeking to continue with a full university qualification. Usually, it takes two years to complete them. The minimum academic credits required for this level are 120 ECTS.

DipHe – Diploma of Higher Education: is equivalent to the HND, and is awarded after two years of full-time study at a higher education institution. Some areas of

study are: textile design, nursing, animal science, among others. The minimum academic credits required for this level are 120 ECTS.

Foundation Degree: it focuses on a particular job or profession, ideal for those who want to explore a professional field before committing to a full university program. These programs offer professional and technical skills to advance the career in a shorter period of time than a full degree requires. It usually takes two years to complete. The minimum academic credits required for this level are 120 ECTS.

Note: in the UK, an academic year generally runs from September to the end of July of the following year, a period that is divided into three subperiods.

Bachelor's Degree: it is a course of academic study leading to a higher education qualification, with a duration of between three and four full-time academic years, requiring a significant amount of independent study by the student for the mastery of a given area of training. The academic credits required for this level usually range between 180 and 240 ECTS. The Bachelor's Degree can be achieved with honors, which implies that the university degree contains a higher volume of material or a higher standard of study. However, this additional feature is not relevant in the process of recognition of the university degree in Colombia.

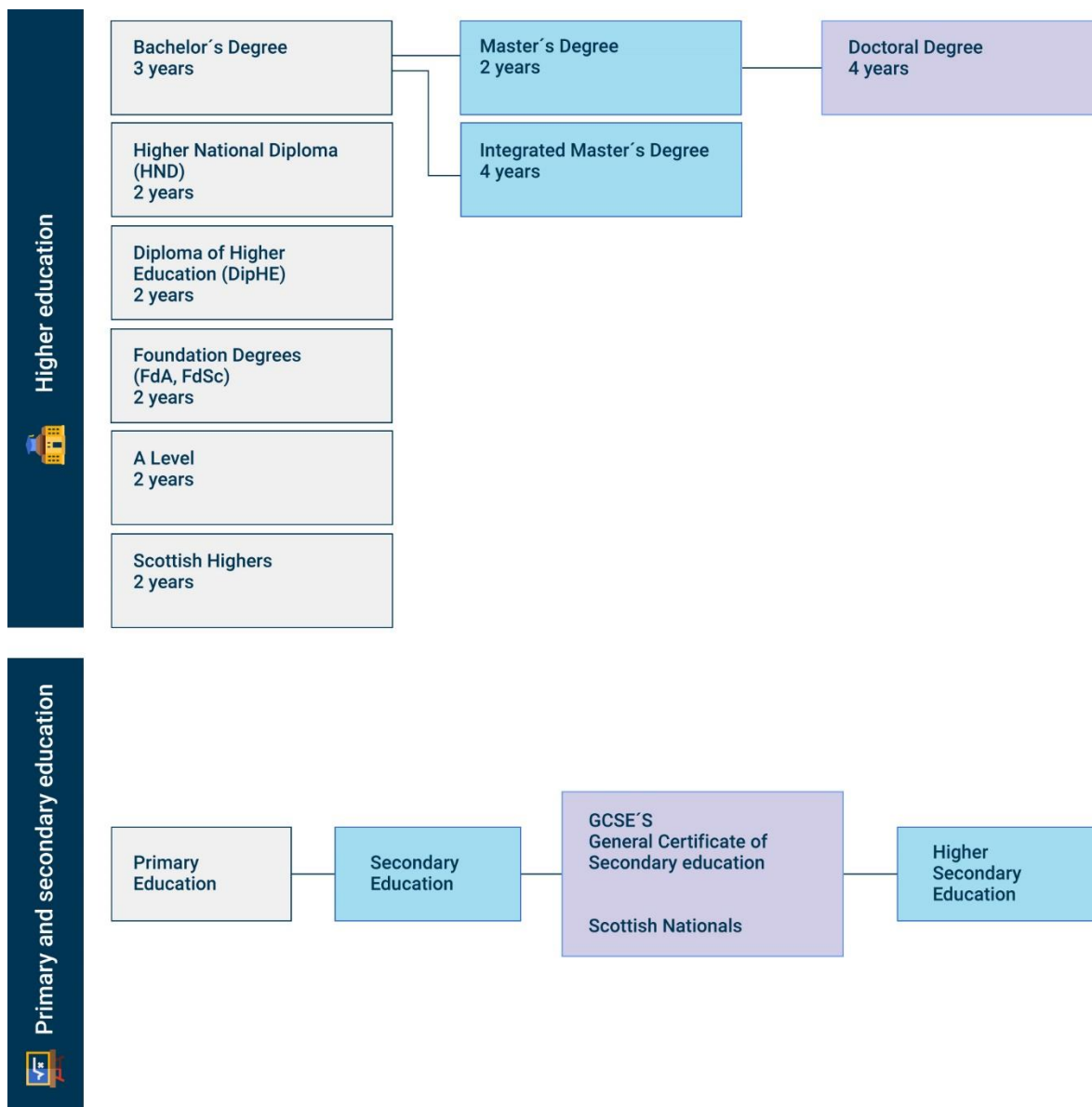
Master's Degree: it is a higher education level, usually requiring at least one year, characterized by a greater depth and specialization than a university undergraduate program such as the Bachelor's Degree. The academic credits required for this level usually range between 60 and 120 ECTS. For certain areas of knowledge such as biology, finance and engineering, integrated Masters are offered, combining undergraduate and graduate studies where the student commits to a field of study in undergraduate and graduate studies at the same time. These types of programs offer the opportunity of exploring a topic in greater detail and depth, finishing studies with an academic level of Master.



Doctoral Degree or Doctorate: it is a level of higher education which confers a degree based, to a large extent, on in-depth and specialized study accompanied by research work. These studies usually last at least three years and usually do not have academic credits.

In addition, it should be noted that there is an academic offer developing knowledge and skills in a certain field in order to facilitate the insertion of the student into the labor market. However, this training does not give access to postgraduate education. Therefore, it is not susceptible of recognition in Colombia. Some examples of these are: graduate certificate, graduate diploma, professional graduate certificate in education (PGCE), among other.

Structure of the UK Education System



Source: based on the document Qualifications Can Cross Boundaries by QAA, [Comparing Qualifications in the UK](#) and in the OECD's UK education system scheme [Education system UK - OECD](#).

A comparative table of educational levels in the United Kingdom and Colombia

It is important to know the particularities of each level of education, both in the United Kingdom and in Colombia. Therefore, the following chart presents a comparative analysis of both systems. In this comparison, reference is made to the following higher education levels:

- Level 8: doctoral level or equivalent.
- Level 7: Master's level, specialization or equivalent.
- Level 6: tertiary education degree or equivalent.
- Level 5: short-cycle tertiary education.

Comparative table: educational levels in the United Kingdom and in Colombia

ISCED – UNESCO LEVELS	LEVELS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM	YEARS	LEVELS IN COLOMBIA	YEARS
8	Doctoral Degree	4	Doctorate	4-5
7	N/A	N/A	Specialization in medical surgery	1-5
7	N/A	N/A	Medical specialization	2
7	Master's Degree	2	Master's degree	2
	Integrated Master's Degree	4	N/A/	N/A
6	N/A	N/A	University specialization	1
6	Bachelor's Degree	3	University professional degree	4-5
6	Bachelor in Medicine/ Veterinary/ Law	> 4		
5	Higher National Diploma (HND)	2	N/A	N/A

	Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE) Foundation Degrees (FdA, FdSc)			
5	N/A	N/A	Technological specialization	<1
5			Technical specialization	1
5			Technologist	3
5			Professional technician	2

Source: based on the document *Qualifications Can Cross Boundaries* byl QAA [Qualifications Guide](#) and in the scheme of the OECD's UK education system [UK education system - OECD](#).

It is important to highlight the chronological measure corresponding to educational levels and its comparison with international standards:

a) Academic credits: in Colombia, as well as in the United Kingdom, the estimated time of academic activity of the student according to academic skills which the program is expected to develop, is expressed in units called academic credits.

- **Academic credit in the UK:** an academic credit represents 10 theoretical hours of learning. Academic credits are awarded to a student in recognition of the verification of achievement of learning outcomes at a specific level. The academic credit requirement is usually mentioned with the acronym ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System).

According to the QAA (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education or Higher Education Quality Assurance Agency), the distribution of credits required at each level of education in Scotland differs from the rest of the United Kingdom as this territory has its own structure.

Scotland is governed by the SCQF (The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework). For detailed information please visit the official link [SCQF](#).

The rest of the UK, Wales, Northern Ireland and England are governed by the FHEQ (Framework for Higher Education Qualifications or Higher Education Qualifications Scheme). For more details, please visit the official document at [FHEQ](#).

- **Academic credit in Colombia:** it is a unit of measurement of the student's academic work, which indicates the effort to be made to achieve the learning results. It is equivalent to forty-eight (48) hours during an academic period. Institutions should determine the ratio between the direct relationship with the teacher and the independent practice of the student, justified in accordance with the learning process and the learning outcomes expected for the programme. Institutions must express in academic credits all training activities that are part of the curriculum (Decree 1330 of 2019, article 2.5.3.2.4.1).

1. ISCED – UNESCO LEVES: the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), proposed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), is a reference framework for collecting, compiling and analyzing international comparable statistics in the field of education.

2. LEGALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES AND INSTITUTIONS

HERA (Higher Education and Research Act) sets out the characteristics that institutions must meet in order to offer education in the United Kingdom. These conditions are determined by the OFS (Office for Students or Student Office),



based on the context of each institution, with the aim of ensuring that English higher education is inclusive, relevant and of high quality.

HERA is the framework under which institutions that may keep the category of "Recognized Bodies".

Recognized Bodies are institutions of higher education which may award higher education diplomas. To know the official list of these institutions, please visit the following link: [Recognised bodies](#).

There are also listed bodies, which cannot award higher education degrees themselves, even though they are legal institutions for academic offer. In case of studying a higher education program in a Listed Body, the degree must be awarded by a Recognized Body in order to have the same legal effects as a higher education degree. Please visit the following link to know the official list of these institutions: [Listed Bodies](#).

It is also important to mention that there are Recognized Awards. Certain institutes and organizations may award their own unique degrees: for example, the Master's Degree in Horticulture, awarded by the Royal Horticultural Society. To review the official list issued by the British government for this type of unique titles, please visit the following link: [Recognized Awards](#).

3. QUALITY ASSURANCE

In the United Kingdom, institutions and programmes of higher education must meet high quality standards. The guidelines of the academic offer are governed by HERA (Higher Education and Research Act or Higher Education and Research Act), where each of the nations that make up the UK is responsible for ensuring the quality of higher education based on the guidelines of this law.

Accordingly, there is the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) which is an independent body responsible for monitoring and advising on standards

and quality in higher education in the United Kingdom. It has an impact on the four nations of the United Kingdom and maintains international networks to improve and promote the reputation of UK higher education worldwide.

In addition, the QAA offers the option of reviewing the quality reports of each of the institutions it regulates. If requiring the report of a university or institute, it can be found in the following link: [Quality Assurance Reports](#).

Although Scotland has its own credit and qualification structure, in terms of high-quality standards, it is governed by the QAA, sharing the same parameters for the regulation of the academic offer in its territory.

4. ASPECTS TO BE CONSIDERED FOR THE PROCESS OF RECOGNITION OF HIGHER EDUCATION TITLES OBTAINED IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

2019 Resolution 10687 of the Ministry of National Education regulates the recognition of higher education diplomas awarded abroad, identifying the quality assurance systems of the countries where the diplomas were obtained.

The process of recognition of higher education diplomas in Colombia is part of the Quality Assurance System for Higher Education, which allows society to guarantee that, as well as the national offer, that from other countries is officially recognized by the states where the certificates were issued.

IMPORTANT: if an undergraduate degree is in law, accounting, education, or part of the health sciences, additional requirements must be verified, stipulated in chapters one and two of 2019 Resolution 10687 of the Ministry of National Education, available at the following link:
https://www.mineducacion.gov.co/1759/articles-401316_archivo_pdf.pdf.

It is worth recalling that it is not compulsory to advance the process of validation of higher education diplomas obtained in other countries. Recognition is required in the following cases:

1. For regulated professions where recognition is required by professional bodies.
2. For persons wishing to work in the public sector as contractors or civil officers.
3. For participating in public tenders where specifications indicate it as necessary.
4. For teachers in public education institutions to be properly graded.

To study in the United Kingdom and subsequently get recognition of the degree in Colombia, the following must be considered:

1. Studies must be advanced in a higher education institution recognized by the United Kingdom.
2. Have the respective apostille or legalization chain in the documents.

For the specific case of the United Kingdom, this procedure is carried out directly with the British government in the law offices - The Legislation Office. The title can only be apostilled if it was issued by a recognized institution (Recognized Body).

In order to complete the apostille process, an apostille order with the required service specifications must be completed. Official documents and the corresponding payment receipt are then delivered. Documents that you wish to apostille can be taken directly to the legalization offices or sent by post, indicating the address you wish to receive once they are apostilled.

For more details on this process, please visit the official website of the Apostille in the United Kingdom: [Apostille UK](#) and follow the steps indicated.

The different validation criteria must be considered, according to the programme and the higher education institution that grants it.

If having a degree issued by a UK higher education institution, and requiring recognition in Colombia, the following questions and answers can help understand the process:

- When is it necessary to recognize a foreign higher education degree? The answer to this question can be found at the following link:
<https://www.mineducacion.gov.co/portal/convalidations/Convalidations-Educacion-Superior/350670:Know-the-process>
- What is the difference between homologation and recognition? The answer to this question can be found at the following link:
<https://www.mineducacion.gov.co/portal/convalidaciones/Convalidaciones-Educacion-Superior/355353:Preguntas-Frecuentes>
- In case of doubt, who can help? The answer to this question can be found at the following link:
<https://www.mineducacion.gov.co/portal/convalidaciones/Convalidaciones-Educacion-Superior/355353:Preguntas-Frecuentes>
- What are the steps for the recognition of higher education diplomas? The answer to this question can be found at the following link:
<https://www.gov.co/ficha-tramites-y-servicios/T366>
- What are the costs of the process of validation of higher education diplomas? The answer to this question can be found at the following link:

<https://www.mineducacion.gov.co/portal/convalidations/Convalidations-Education-Superior/350995:Cost-and-duration>

In case of more questions regarding the process, the following link might help:

<https://www.mineducacion.gov.co/portal/convalidaciones/Convalidaciones-Educacion-Superior/355353:Preguntas-Frecuentes>

Consulted sources

- *Qualifications can Cross Boundaries - A guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland*
https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaas/news-and-events/qualifications-can-cross-boundaries-guide-to-comparing-qualifications-in-the-uk-and-ireland.pdf?sfvrsn=3715c981_4
- UK Quality Code for Higher Education. QAA.
<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>
- *Education GPS, OECD, 13/3/2021 21:47:14 Overview of the education system. United Kingdom.*
<https://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?primaryCountry=GBR&treshold=10&topic=EO>
- Manual del estudiante colombiano. Educación superior en el reino unido. British Council
https://americas.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/study_uk_colombia_han_dbook.pdf
- *Recognised UK Qualifications*, webinar ofrecido por UK NARIC, 25 noviembre 2020.

