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Department for
Business & Trade

Establishing TNE in Malaysia: A guide for UK institutions



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About this guide

This guide aims to support UK higher education institutions exploring opportunities for transnational education in Malaysia. Whether still considering routes to entry, beginning discussions with Malaysian partners, or actively preparing an application for formal recognition in Malaysia, the guide aims to:

- Outline the process UK institutions need to follow in order to gain the requisite approvals and accreditation
- Highlight key considerations: explain practical requirements such as curriculum alignment, quality assurance expectations, and professional recognition
- Offer practical tools and guidance: include checklists, flowcharts, and examples to help institutions prepare and avoid common pitfalls
- Highlight examples of successful TNE partnership journeys, with insight on good practices and perceived challenges where appropriate.

Acronyms

COPPA – Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation

MCATS – Malaysian Credit Accumulation and Transfer System

MoHA – Ministry of Home Affairs

MoHE – Ministry of Higher Education

MQA – Malaysian Qualifications Agency

MQF – Malaysian Qualifications Framework

MQR – Malaysian Qualifications Register

OBE – Outcome-Based Education

PHEI / PHEIs – Private Higher Education Institution(s) [Malaysia]

PLO(s) – Programme Learning Outcome(s)

QAA – Quality Assurance Agency [UK]

SPM – Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia [Malaysia Certificate of Education]

SPTM – Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia [Malaysia Certificate of Higher Secondary Education]

TNE – Transnational Education

VBE – Values Based Education.

Introduction

With its strong international outlook and reputation as an education hub, Malaysia already hosts a wide range of international collaborations, including UK branch campuses, dual and joint awards, validated programmes, and franchise degree arrangements. These initiatives contribute both to Malaysia's national education goals and to the UK's internationalisation strategy. The recent launch of the *Malaysia Higher Education Plan 2026-2035*, on Jan 20th 2026¹, expanded Malaysia's goal from a regional to global education hub, whilst the UK's International Education Strategy makes clear the national ambition to grow the UK's TNE portfolio.

Over the course of 2025, Ecctis engaged in a scoping exercise which examined and identified the recognition processes, barriers, and opportunities for UK Transnational Education (TNE) programmes in Malaysia. The activities included surveys, focus groups and in-country visits, engaging stakeholders on experiences and lessons learned in navigating the establishment and delivery of TNE and the pinch points in ongoing provision. It informed further engagement and collaboration with UK and Malaysian stakeholders, including UK branch campuses in Malaysia, UK and Malaysian TNE partner institutions, and regulatory bodies, including the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) to facilitate recognition of UK TNE qualifications.

¹ Ministry of Higher Education (2026). *Rancangan Pendidikan Tinggi Malaysia 2026-2035* (Malaysia Higher Education Blueprint). Available at: <https://www.mohe.gov.my/en/rptm-muat-turun>.



Market context



Higher Education overview

This section provides an overview of Malaysia's higher education landscape and the broader socio-economic and political contexts shaping it. Understanding this wider policy context helps institutions design programmes that are locally relevant and responsive to future skill demands.

It is important to note that the *Malaysian Higher Education Plan 2026-2035* was released in January 2026, highlighting 11 key challenges and focus areas for Malaysian higher education:

- Ethical leadership and values
- Competitiveness and global readiness
- Future-ready skills development
- Diversity and inclusion
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Innovation and entrepreneurship
- Sustainability
- Financial sustainability
- Governance
- Infrastructure
- Research.

It is anticipated that this will result in a range of additional documents emerging in the near future and as such it is important that higher education institutions considering TNE arrangements in Malaysia continue to keep abreast of market developments in the context of this new plan.

A diverse and mature higher education system

AT A GLANCE

Malaysia's Higher Education sector comprises:

22 public universities

400+ private higher education institutions (universities and colleges)

11 foreign branch campuses²

+ Community colleges, polytechnics and training providers.

In line with the national goals, there has been a clear focus on growing Malaysia's footing in global rankings and at the time of writing, five Malaysian institutions appeared in the QS World University Rankings, top 200 global universities 2026³.

Private institutions play a particularly important role in TNE delivery. Many actively seek international partnerships to widen their programme portfolio, differentiate themselves in competitive student markets, and respond to industry and regional needs. Public universities are increasingly exploring dual awards and research-driven collaboration with UK institutions to support internationalisation ambitions.













This institutional diversity creates a flexible ecosystem capable of hosting a wide range of TNE models. The current UK TNE footprint in Malaysia is wide-ranging, including:

- **Branch campuses:** Long-term investment models offering full UK degrees and strong research and industry links
- **Franchised provision:** The most common form of UK collaboration in Malaysia, allowing rapid scaling of UK degrees through Malaysian delivery partners
- **Validated and externally assured programmes:** Programmes designed and delivered by Malaysian partners but awarded or quality-assured by UK institutions
- **Dual or joint awards:** Programmes jointly delivered and jointly awarded by UK and Malaysian HEIs, increasingly attractive to Malaysian public universities
- **Articulation and mobility pathways:** Malaysia is a major market for "2+1" and "3+1" arrangements, offering partial study in Malaysia and completion in the UK.

² Education Malaysia Global Services (n.d.). *Malaysia's Higher Education Overview*. Available at: <https://educationmalaysia.gov.my/plan-your-studies/choose-what-to-study/malaysia-higher-education-overview> [Accessed Jan 2026].

³ QS (2025). *QS World University Rankings 2026: Top global universities*. Available at: <https://www.topuniversities.com/world-university-rankings?countries=my>.

Examples of TNE arrangements in place already (non-exhaustive) include:

TNE model ⁴	Examples
International branch campus <i>Joint ventures and partner campuses (as per British Council definitions) are not separately listed in Malaysian sources</i>	 University of Nottingham Malaysia Heriot-Watt University Malaysia University of Reading Malaysia University of Southampton Malaysia  Monash University Malaysia, Selangor  Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland & University College Dublin  Xiamen University Malaysia Campus  Curtin University with a specially formed company in Sarawak ⁵  University of Tsukuba, Malaysia.
Distance learning	 Many universities offer distance/online courses accessible to online learners.
Partnership programme	 University of the West of England (UWE) dual degree with Taylor’s University Malaysia  Queensland University of Technology (QUT) with Taylor University.
Franchised programme	 University of Hertfordshire x INTI University of Greenwich x SEGi University & Colleges Aberystwyth University x Brickfields Asia College  University of Wollongong x INTI / Swinburne University of Technology x INTI.
Validated programme	 Lancaster University, via Sunway University Anglia Ruskin, via MAHSA University Portsmouth University, via MAHSA University.

Several of those above were originally franchise programmes, when the respective Malaysian universities were colleges. Once they received university status and degree awarding powers, the partnerships evolved and matured into Joint / Dual Programmes.

⁴ As referenced and cited in the British Council *Transnational Education Strategy 2025-27 – Accompanying technical document*. See page 4-5 for definitions. Available at: https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/british_council_tne_strategy_technical.pdf.

⁵ Curtin University (2019). *Curtin Malaysia marks 20th anniversary with new 20-year agreement*. Available at: <https://www.curtin.edu.au/news/media-release/curtin-malaysia-marks-20th-anniversary-with-new-20-year-agreement>.

An established, regulated qualifications system

Malaysia's higher education system sits under the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE)⁶ through two departments – one focussed on public universities and private higher education institutions (PHEIs), and another overseeing polytechnics and community colleges.

Entry to public higher education is via the MoHE's portal and is open to holders of the SPTM (Malaysia Certificate of Higher Secondary Education, awarded on completion of sixth-form education, comparable to GCE A Level in the UK) or relevant international qualifications such as A-levels, US High School Diploma.

Holders of the SPM (Malaysia Certificate of Education, comparable to GCSE standard) can also apply to enter TVET or 'feeder programs' which are typically one-year pathways into a Bachelor degree⁷.

Private higher education institutions set their own entry requirements and students apply directly.

All post-secondary education is captured within the Malaysian Qualifications Framework⁸: **qualifications from outside Malaysia will be assessed against this framework.**

⁶ Ministry of Higher Education (n.d.). *Introduction*. Available at: <https://www.mohe.gov.my/en/corporate/about-us/introduction>.

⁷ Ministry of Higher Education (n.d.). *Program Pengajian* (Programme Search). Available at: <https://online.mohe.gov.my/epanduan/ProgramPengajian/kategoriCalon/A?jenprog=spm>.

⁸ Malaysian Qualifications Agency (2024). *Malaysian Qualification Framework (MQF) Second Edition*. Available at: [https://www.mqa.gov.my/new/document/2024/new/MQF%20\(2024\).pdf](https://www.mqa.gov.my/new/document/2024/new/MQF%20(2024).pdf).

Shifting demographics, changing expectations

Malaysia's Higher Education participation rate continues to rise, having gone from 48% in 2014 to 59% by 2024⁹, whilst graduate employment has also made strong progress. Malaysia has committed in its 2026 plan to continue expanding access for disadvantaged students, as current enrolment rates remain below targets previously set for 2025.

However, the market is also changing: institutions Ecctis engaged with point to the local market being well served, with a decline in domestic student numbers due to an aging population and increased affordability of overseas education for Malaysian families. To counteract this, there has been a shift within some institutions towards recruiting students from regional markets like China, Indonesia, and the Philippines, although visa restrictions still remain a significant barrier. Others have chosen to offer a limited range of programmes in order to limit the financial burden of their TNE arrangements in an increasingly competitive environment.

Overall, demand is increasingly shaped by:

- **Working adults seeking part-time and flexible study**
- **Learners interested in online and blended modes**
- **Students seeking global credentials while remaining close to home**
- **Demand for shorter, stackable learning units such as micro-credentials**
- **Regional students seeking lower-cost alternatives to full UK mobility.**

⁹ *Malaysian Higher Education Plan 2026-2030.*

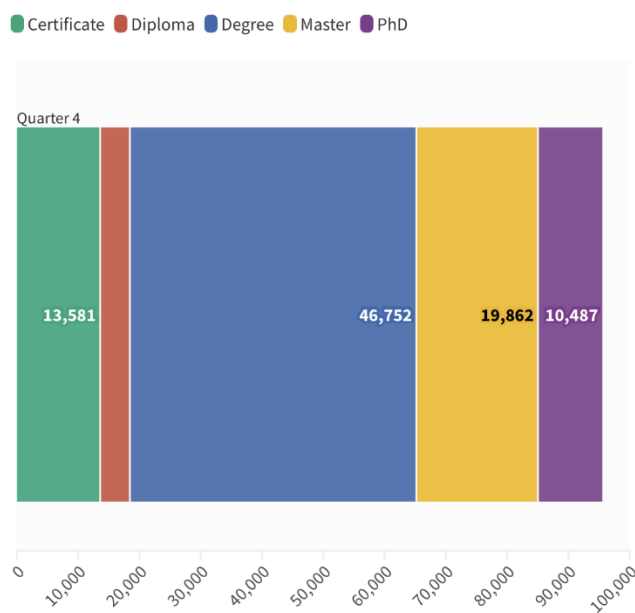
A regional hub and gateway

Malaysia has earned a strong reputation as a major destination and education hub within ASEAN and beyond, with institutions particularly able to attract students from Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam. Information for international students coming to Malaysia is hosted by Education Malaysia Global Services.

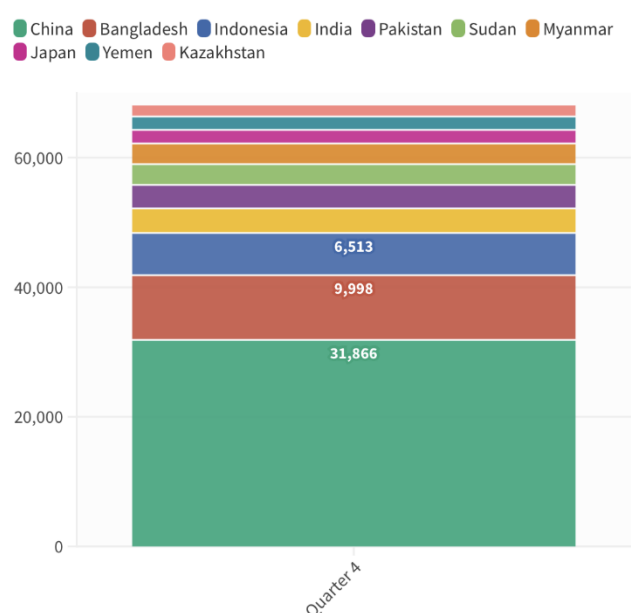
As of 2023, Malaysia hosted approximately 104,315 international students, representing around 10% of total enrolment¹⁰, and the government has set a medium-term growth target to reach 250,000 international students.

Of more than 95,500 applications received as of Quarter 4 2025, 46% were applying to private universities, 25% to public universities and 10% to branch campuses. International students predominantly apply for undergraduate degrees as shown in the Education Malaysia Q4 2025 statistics¹¹, whilst China was by far the highest sending country across all programmes:

New applications as of Q4 2025



Data as of Quarter 4: January to December
Prepared by Corporate Strategy Division



Data as of Quarter 4: January to December
Prepared by Corporate Strategy Division

Source: Education Malaysia accessed January 2026.

¹⁰ Education Malaysia Global Services (n.d). *Statistics on International Student Applications for Malaysia's Tertiary Education 2025*. Available at: <https://educationmalaysia.gov.my/more/student-data/international-student-data>.

¹¹ Ibid.

Malaysia's market position is built on a well-regulated higher education system and decades of policy direction geared towards internationalisation, coupled with its relative affordability, English-language instruction, and the presence of multiple international branch campuses. Educity Iskander alone is home to four international higher education institutions and three international schools¹².

Supportive economic and policy environment

Malaysia's Higher Education system sits within an economy that is undergoing transformation. National development strategies connect higher education to broader goals around innovation, sustainability, diversification, and cross-border collaboration. The Twelfth Malaysia Plan (2021-2025)¹³ highlighted the importance of innovation, advanced technology, talent development, and international partnerships. Plans launched for 2026-2035 signal continuity with those aims: strengthening STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts¹⁴, Maths), digital skills, English-language proficiency, and regional competitiveness.

Recent large-scale developments reinforce the demand for skills and higher-level qualifications.

Sarawak's clean-energy and sustainability agenda

Sarawak is positioning itself as a regional clean-energy hub, investing heavily in renewable energy generation, green industry development, hydrogen technology, and environmental innovation¹⁵.

This opens opportunities for:

- Programme collaboration in environmental sciences
- Engineering and green-technology curriculum development
- Research partnerships
- Dual-award models in sustainability-related fields.

These developments underline Malaysia's shift toward high-growth, high-skill sectors, areas where UK institutions have internationally recognised expertise.

¹² Educity Iskandar (n.d). *About us*. Available at: <https://educity.com.my/about-us/>.

¹³ Ministry of Education Malaysia (2015) *Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025: Higher Education*. Putrajaya: Ministry of Education. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232814>.

¹⁴ Arts including Arts, Humanities, Culture.

¹⁵ Sarawak Tribune. (2024) 'Sarawak one of M'sia's top economic powerhouses', *Sarawak Tribune*, 11 months ago. Available at: <https://www.sarawaktribune.com/sarawak-one-of-msias-top-economic-powerhouses/> (Accessed: November 2025).

Johor–Singapore Special Economic Zone (JS-SEZ)

The JS-SEZ¹⁶, established in 2024, aims to integrate parts of Johor with Singapore’s economic ecosystem, focusing on high-value manufacturing, digital technology, logistics, and services.

The growth of this zone will require graduates with internationally benchmarked skills in Business and Entrepreneurship; Computing, data science and AI; Engineering; Logistics and supply chain management.

UK institutions with strengths in these areas are well positioned to support Malaysian partners in Johor and beyond. The British Council in January 2026¹⁷, hosted and organised a higher education mission of up to 20 Vice-Chancellors and Pro-Vice-Chancellors, to visit Malaysia and explore the opportunities for TNE, institutional partnership, research collaboration and alumni engagement in Malaysia. The visit had a specific focus on the JS-SEZ.

Sustained and strong demand for UK qualifications

Malaysia’s long-standing collaboration with the UK is one of the defining features of its TNE landscape. As of the 2024/25 data, Malaysia had 46,485 transnational students studying wholly overseas for a UK Higher education qualification¹⁸ - 6.93% of all UK TNE students are in Malaysia.

The UK is likewise Malaysia’s largest international TNE provider in the country, with a deep footprint that extends across branch campuses, franchised provision, validated programmes, dual and joint awards and articulation pathways.

From interviews with UK TNE providers undertaken by Ecctis, Malaysian stakeholders consistently emphasised that UK qualifications are well understood, highly regarded – including for graduate employment, and trusted making the UK a “partner of choice” for both public and private institutions. The familiarity Malaysian regulators have with UK quality frameworks further contributes to a stable operating environment for UK HEIs.

¹⁶ British Council (2024) *Agreement signed for Johor–Singapore Special Economic Zone*, Opportunities & Insight. Available at: <https://opportunities-insight.britishcouncil.org/short-articles/news/agreement-signed-johor-singapore-special-economic-zone> (Accessed: November 2025).

¹⁷ British Council (2025). *Call for Participation: UK Higher Education Mission to Malaysia 2026*. Available at: <https://www.britishcouncil.my/call-participation-uk-higher-education-mission-malaysia-2026>.

¹⁸ Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (2026). *Student open data – transnational education*. Available at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/transnational>.

Illustrative opportunities for UK–Malaysia collaboration

Drawing on Ecctis’ engagement with institutions and regulators across previous studies, several clear areas of opportunity emerge for UK HEIs considering or expanding TNE in Malaysia.

➤ **Expanding partnership models**

The Malaysian market has particular interest in models such as:

- Dual and joint awards
- Validated programmes
- Shared delivery
- Micro-credential pathways
- Hybrid and blended programmes
- Industry-linked models.

Public and private institutions have expressed strong interest in expanding these models with UK partners.

➤ **Offering new programmes aligned with regional economic and skills needs**

As Malaysia develops economic corridors and invests in regional development, UK providers with industry partnerships and applied curricula have strong opportunities if they can support emerging skills needs:

- Johor: business, logistics, advanced manufacturing, technology
- Sarawak: energy transition, climate solutions, engineering
- Penang/Kedah: semiconductors and electronics clusters
- East Coast: maritime and industrial technologies.

➤ **Developing flexible, stackable, and digital learning pathways**

MQA’s micro-credentials guidelines, referenced later in this guide, provide a national mechanism for recognising:

- Short, skills-focused modules
- Stackable routes into full qualifications
- Employer-focused bespoke training.

How to set up a TNE arrangement in Malaysia



This section provides guidance on setting up transnational arrangements in Malaysia including key authorities and their role in supporting and/or regulating TNE in Malaysia along with the processes, timelines and key considerations.

It has been developed in collaboration with the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) and is intended to be used alongside official MQA documentation and Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) requirements, providing practical advice and insights to ensure your plans are well prepared and aligned with national expectations.

There are a range of TNE models in operation in Malaysia. Choosing the right TNE model for your strategy and context has implications for:

- Recognition and accreditation routes
- Programme approval timelines
- Institutional governance and QA
- Cost and operational demands
- Market positioning
- Long-term sustainability.

Each model involves distinct recognition pathways through MoHE and MQA. Models that align closely with MQF and Outcomes-Based Education requirements, such as dual awards, validated programmes, and high-quality franchise partnerships, can often achieve recognition more efficiently and respond to Malaysian expectations for local relevance and international rigour.

Models that include programmes that are UK-centric or not yet contextualised to Malaysian needs may require some degree of adaptation and alignment.

What this means for UK institutions

Institutions should carefully consider what TNE model best suits their objectives, taking into consideration:

- The target learner segment
- Discipline area
- Recognition needs and MQA expectations
- Malaysian partner capacity
- Long-term university growth plans.



Key authorities and their role

Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE)

MoHE approval is the first key step in gaining full recognition for TNE programmes.

The MoHE is the central authority responsible for the overall governance, policy direction, and licensing of higher education providers in Malaysia. For UK institutions engaging in TNE, MoHE plays a critical role at the initial entry and programme approval stages, ensuring that new provision aligns with national priorities and complies with legal and regulatory requirements.

MoHE's role in TNE recognition

- **Institutional Licensing:** Any international HEI (including branch campuses) wishing to operate physically in Malaysia must obtain approval and licensing from the MoHE. This includes assessment of governance, financial stability, and long-term sustainability. Additionally, the institution will need to be registered as a business with [Suruhanjaya Syarikat Malaysia \(SSM\)](#), to demonstrate compliance with Malaysia's business laws.
- **Programme Approval:** Before a programme can be submitted for accreditation by MQA, the MoHE must grant Programme Approval, confirming that the proposed provision is appropriate for delivery in Malaysia and aligned with national education priorities.
- **Policy Alignment:** the MoHE ensures that new TNE activity supports Malaysia's broader strategies, including skills development, internationalisation, industry alignment, and regional growth agendas. Proposals are assessed for their contribution to capacity building and student outcomes.
- **Oversight and Monitoring:** the MoHE monitors institutional compliance with national legislation, including the Private Higher Educational Institutions Act (PHEA). This includes oversight of partnerships and delivery arrangements involving local institutions.

What this means for UK institutions

A successful application to MoHE requires:

- Clear articulation of the partnership model
- Evidence of institutional capacity and governance
- Alignment with Malaysia's higher education and economic priorities.



Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA)

MQA accreditation and subsequent listing in the Malaysian Qualifications Register (MQR) is the primary mechanism through which TNE programmes gain formal recognition in Malaysia.

The MQA is the national quality assurance body responsible for the standards-setting and accreditation of higher education programmes delivered in Malaysia, including all TNE provision, whether delivered through a branch campus, franchise partnership, dual award, or validated programme.

MQA's role in TNE recognition

- **Accreditation of programmes:** MQA undertakes Provisional Accreditation (PA) prior to new programme delivery and Full Accreditation (FA) once the programme has produced sufficient evidence of quality in practice. Both stages apply to TNE provision.
- **Standards alignment:** MQA requires that all programmes map their learning outcomes to the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) and demonstrate compliance with Outcome-Based Education (OBE) principles. This affects curriculum design, assessment, and academic governance in TNE partnerships.
- **Inclusion in the MQR:** Once a programme achieves Full Accreditation, it is listed on the MQR, confirming national recognition. MQR listing is essential for graduates seeking employment, professional recognition, or further study in Malaysia.
- **Quality assurance audits:** MQA conducts periodic audits of institutions, including foreign branch campuses and partner institutions delivering UK programmes where they hold self-accreditation status. These audits examine governance, staffing, facilities, student support, and compliance with Malaysian standards.

- **Recognition and mutual understanding:** MQA has shown a commitment to increasing transparency around TNE and supporting institutions to align with Malaysian QA requirements.

What this means for UK institutions

To be recognised, UK HEIs must ensure:

- Programmes are designed using Outcomes-Based Education principles, and that learning outcomes are mapped to the MQF
- Curriculum, assessment, staffing, and support meet MQA standards
- Governance arrangements for franchised or validated programmes are documented.



Professional and statutory bodies

Professional recognition is essential for graduate employability and must be integrated into planning from the outset for institutions looking to offer disciplines that are regulated in Malaysia.

Several professional, regulatory, and statutory bodies have authority over programmes in regulated disciplines meaning their approval is essential where degrees lead to licensure, professional practice, or membership: a list can be found in the [professional bodies section](#).

Their role in TNE recognition

- **Programme-specific accreditation:** Many professional bodies require their own review and approval in addition to MQA accreditation. This may apply to engineering, health sciences, architecture, accounting, and certain technology-related areas.
- **Graduate licensure and employability:** For students to enter regulated professions, programme recognition by the relevant professional body is often mandatory. This includes both Malaysian and international pathways.
- **Alignment with professional standards:** Professional bodies often review curriculum content, practical training components, staff credentials, and facilities to ensure alignment with Malaysian professional standards.
- **Impact on partnership models:** Certain TNE models, especially dual awards or franchised programmes, may require additional demonstration of equivalence or joint oversight to satisfy professional regulators.

What this means for UK institutions

- Identify early whether the programme involves a regulated discipline
- Engage with relevant professional bodies as part of the design phase, not after MQA submission
- Ensure that curricula and practicum components meet Malaysian requirements, which may differ from UK standards
- Communicate clearly with Malaysian partners regarding responsibility for professional body engagement.



Key steps and timelines

	Stage	Outputs
● Month 0-12	▶ 1. Market research and opportunity scanning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A business case for internal approval • A proposal for potential partners and MoHE Malaysia approval.
● Month 0-18	▶ 2. Identify and engage a local partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Memorandum of Understanding with local partner(s) if applicable • For branch campuses, a clear proposal for institution approval by the MoHE.
● Month 18-24	▶ 3. MoHE institutional/partnership approval	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For branch campuses, a letter of support for the MoHE to accept international students • Preparation and submission of documentation for programme approval to MQA, showing alignment of the programme to MQF and relevant Programme Standards. • If a physical presence in Malaysia is required, then registration as a business with SSM.
● Month 24-27 (36 for professionally regulated programmes)	▶ 4. Provisional accreditation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MQF-aligned programme(s) • Provisional accreditation received, with potential recommendations for enhancement actioned (prior to delivery) • Apply to MoHE for approval to deliver the provisionally accredited programme.
● Years 2-6	▶ 5. Programme delivery under provisional status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective reporting and monitoring system against MQA requirements in place • Full programme accreditation.
● Year 6 onwards	▶ 6. Full accreditation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listing on the Malaysian Qualifications Register • Professional recognition (if applicable) • Third country recognition.
	▶ 7. Ongoing audits and quality reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual self-assessments • Accreditation compliance evaluations every five years • Institutional audit reports every four-five years • Professional body programme reaccreditation (where applicable) • QAA review on occasion.

This section provides a description of each stage of the establishment and recognition process, from initial market research through to local accreditation and review cycles. It is supplemented with more specific and detailed considerations for UK institutions, including local content requirements, professional recognition, mapping UK qualifications to Malaysian standards, credit systems, micro-credentials, and student visa and recruitment rules.

Stage 1: Market research

It is essential to understand the current TNE market and regulatory structure in order to identify potential opportunities in the context of current provision and student demand, along with routes to market access for developing a sustainable TNE offer in Malaysia. It is also important to ensure alignment with Malaysia's strategic and economic priorities in Malaysia, in order to identify current shortages in skills and knowledge as well as growth areas. This information can identify opportunities for new programme areas that are not currently offered.

Consideration should also be given to the potential for and approaches to student recruitment. An institutional recruitment and marketing strategy that takes account of domestic Malaysian and regional (ASEAN) markets, target demographics, pricing and the use of agents or direct recruitment, is essential. Where the recruitment strategy anticipates recruitment of international students into Malaysia, it is important to consider the following:

- Whether students from your target countries are likely to encounter visa challenges – visa requirements are set by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA)
- Institutions need a licence from the MoHE to accept and host international students – this is separate from the approval process to deliver programmes in Malaysia. If you open a branch campus, you will need to secure this. If you decide to enter a partnership, you should check prospective partners are able to enrol international students.

Academic staff requirements are also a key consideration. Institutions should understand local staff qualifications, suitability, capability and availability and the conditions for the engagement of UK staff, including visa and teaching licence requirements as these all add to time and costs.

Taken together, the above factors can inform the development of a business case and enable identification of where the institution can add value and access the market successfully.

As outlined earlier, it is relevant to consider early on the type of model(s) the institution may pursue since these will have key implications for governance and finance, as well as the regulations that need to be met. A brief summary of the MQA requirements by partner type are below:

TNE model	Key MQA processes and distinctions
<p>Branch Campuses <i>UK university campuses delivering programmes identical to those offered in the UK.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approval to establish from MOHE and MQA • Business registration with SSM required • Programmes must be accredited by MQA after alignment with the MQF • Regular audits and site visits to ensure compliance with both Malaysian and foreign standards • Focus on maintaining equivalence with the UK parent campus, with some local contextualisation.
<p>Franchise Arrangements <i>UK institutions partner with local providers to deliver their programmes, with the awarding body maintaining oversight.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MoHE evaluation of proposed partnership and local institution’s capacity to deliver proposed UK programmes • If an in-country office is required, business registration with SSM is necessary • Emphasis on local partner’s resources, teaching staff, and infrastructure • Curriculum and assessments controlled by the UK institution, submitted for monitoring by the MQA • Shared quality assurance between the UK institution and the local partner • Regular audits by MQA.
<p>Validated Programmes <i>Local institutions collaborate with UK universities to jointly develop programmes that meet both UK and Malaysian standards.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MoHE approval of the partnership and proposed programmes • Validation approval process: MQA ensures the local institution’s curriculum aligns with both MQF and overseas standards • MQA reviews the local provider’s teaching capacity, assessments, and resources • Local mandatory subject requirements provided in addition to the UK curriculum by the partner institution • Ongoing revalidation process to ensure continuous compliance with MQF and UK standards.
<p>Dual and Joint Awards <i>Programmes designed to confer qualifications from both UK and Malaysian institutions, meeting the regulatory requirements of both countries.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MoHE approval of Partnership and programmes • Dual accreditation required for both local (MQA) and foreign qualifications • MQA evaluates formal agreements between local and UK institutions • MQA accreditation ensures that dual/joint qualifications are recognised in Malaysia • Local mandatory subject requirements provided in addition to the UK curriculum by the partner institution • Collaborative quality assurance with the UK institution, ensuring compliance with both local and UK regulations.

Stage 1: Checklist for UK institutions

Action	Useful resources
<p>✓ Gather insight of the current HE and TNE landscape in Malaysia.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Malaysia Higher Education Overview • Invested: Australia’s Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040 (provides insight to Australia’s TNE strategy in the region) • UK-Malaysia Transnational Education (TNE) British Council.
<p>✓ Identify potential student market for TNE.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Student Data for Malaysia Education • Higher Education Statistics, Malaysia • Data and analysis HESA (provides data on current UK TNE provision, type, level and number of students).
<p>✓ Identify Malaysia’s strategic priorities to inform course offer and potential collaboration for research and development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Malaysian Higher Education Plan 2026-2035 • 13th Malaysia Plan (RMK13) • New Industrial Master Plan 2030 (NIMP 2030) • Critical Jobs for Malaysians High Demand Occupations Malaysia • 10-10 MySTIE Framework.
<p>✓ Determine feasibility of proposed TNE offer in Malaysia.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing risk and developing responsible transnational education (TNE) partnerships • Transnational education: protecting the interests of students taught abroad • Assessing Opportunities and Mitigating Risks in Transnational Education: Introducing the TNE Success Scorecard.

Stage 2: Finding a partner

Finding a local Malaysian partner can provide valuable local insights. Identifying a partner can happen prior to, or at the same time or following stage 1. Depending on the model of TNE being explored, the type of partner can vary:

Model	Local Partner Type
Branch Campus	Private Investor / Government-linked companies if applicable
Franchise	Private colleges, private and public higher education institutions registered with the MoHE
Validation	Private colleges, private and public higher education institutions registered with the MoHE
Joint / Dual Programmes	Private and public universities.

The British Council’s UK-Malaysia University Consortium Grant for Innovative Partnerships awards funding to potential partnerships addressing key priority development areas. The Department for Business and Trade and the British Council both offer opportunities to participate in trade-focussed visits to UK businesses and organisations to explore potential investments and partnerships in different countries. Universities UK International (UUKi) and the British Council can provide guidance, signposting, support and can facilitate connections and networking with potential partners in Malaysia, either on request or through events and dissemination of published reports. The British Malaysia Chamber of Commerce is also well-placed to provide insight, facilitate connections and information on investment opportunities.

Once a partner is identified and engaged, it is important to clarify and agree the roles and responsibilities and expected investment of time, money and resources for the respective partners. This should encompass the development stage as well as the ongoing commitment for delivery, including but not limited to:

- The application for approval from MoHE Malaysia
- Programme design
- Application for MQA accreditation
- Licence application for recruiting and hosting international students
- Marketing of the offer
- Student recruitment
- Teacher recruitment
- Staff training
- Printing and purchasing of course materials
- Facilities and equipment.

Stage 2 Checklist for UK Institutions

Action	Useful resources
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Identify potential partners aligned to vision and mission and able to support market access priorities and programme specialisations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MQA’s lists of public and private institutions • MoHE - Publications, Statistics and Guidelines .
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Monitor Department for Business and Trade, British High Commission Kuala Lumpur, British Council, Universities UK International, British Malaysia Chamber of Commerce websites for opportunities to explore and make connections, develop partnerships, or participate trade missions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universities UK international • Department for Business and Trade Malaysia - GOV.UK • British Malaysia Chamber of Commerce.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Apply to join the UK-Malaysia University Consortium.	UK-Malaysia University Consortium British Council .

Stage 3: Institutional approval by Ministry of Higher Education

Under the Private Higher Educational Institutions Act 1996 (Act 555), once the partnership and/or model of delivery is agreed upon, the partnership must apply for and obtain approval to offer education and a licence to operate.

The Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) retains responsibility for the approval of international branches and partnerships. The partnership should submit a proposal to the Department of Higher Education (JPT) in the MoHE, this should detail the institution, or partnership's concept and business plan. A presentation of the proposal may also be required. The MoHE evaluates the applying institution's reputation (performance in international rankings), resources, and alignment with Malaysian higher education objectives.

Once an institution has received approval to establish an institution/partnership, and provisional programme accreditation from the MQA, it must then submit the documentation to the MoHE for approval to deliver that programme of study. This information is then forwarded to the Malaysia Qualifications Authority (MQA). In the case of franchised or joint degree arrangements, it is the local institution that will need to apply for provisional accreditation: this should be done before applying for MoHE approval to run the programme.

Institutional approval is maintained by ongoing monitoring and oversight through regular internal quality reviews and a periodic external institutional audit, usually every 5 years. Full details on the composition of the external panel of reviewers, the internal review requirements and the nine performance areas to be covered by the internal and external reviews are included in the Institutional Quality Audit Framework (IQAF), which has now replaced the Code of Practice for Institutional Audit (COPIA).

The Institutional audit to achieve self-accreditation status can take up to five months to complete. The pre-audit visit preparation takes about 17 weeks, with a week for the audit visit: the higher education institution is presented a draft of the audit report four weeks after the audit to respond or provide additional information. On receipt of the higher education institution's response to the draft, it can take up to a further eight weeks for the final report to be agreed by the panel and submitted by MQA to the MoHE.

For the Branch Campus model, the MoHE will provide letters of approval for the establishment of the institution and the permission to apply for accreditation of the respective programmes of study. Once the letters are obtained, the institution and or partnership must then register as a Private Higher Education Institution, to receive a Certificate of Registration, which needs to be exhibited on the premises.

These approvals then allow the institution and or partnership to apply to MoHE for a Letter of support to be sent to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) for a license to accept and host international students. Based on Regulation 13 (5) of the Immigration Regulations 1963:

- a. Any educational institution that intends to recruit international students must obtain approval from the Minister of Home Affairs.
- b. Whereas for educational institutions in Sabah and Sarawak, approval must be obtained from their respective State Governments.

Stage 3 Checklist for UK Institution:

Action	Useful resources
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Apply to the MoHE for Institutional / Partnership approval, including clear rationale, alignment to Malaysia’s priorities, financial case and student engagement and demand.	Ministry of Higher Education.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Once MoHE approval is received register the institution / partnership with the Department of Higher Education (JPT), MoHE.	Private HEI Registration Documents.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If a physical presence is required (i.e. Branch Campus, or office) registration as a licensed business is required with SSM.	SSM e-Info - About us.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Apply to MoHE for permission to offer the identified programmes – the institution needs to demonstrate it has the facilities, qualified staff and the programme and curriculum design process, structure and approach in place (full details are included in the link).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Higher Education • Institutional Quality Audit Framework.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Obtain letters from MoHE to recruit and host international students	Malaysian Higher Education Licensing.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Apply to the Ministry of Home Affairs for a licence to recruit and accept international students. For Sabah and Sarawak approval must be obtained from their respective state governments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Home Affairs • Sabah State Government • Sarawak State Government.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Established administrative support to student’s visa applications for Student Pass	Student Pass – Malaysian Immigration Department.

Stage 4: Provisional accreditation (MQA)

Once institutional approval is granted and permission to deliver the programmes is provided, the individual TNE programmes must obtain MQA accreditation in Malaysia to ensure the qualifications awarded by the institution are recognised. This requires a submission of the proposed programmes of study, to the MQA. An integral part of the programme accreditation process is for the institution to:

- Demonstrate a market need for the programme (relevance and industry demand)
- Present the employment and societal role and responsibilities the graduates of the programme would be expected to engage in (programme quality) – this should be evidenced through a clear statement of competencies that students would be expected to achieve and be able to apply at the end of the programme. These should be clearly aligned and relevant to those found on the corresponding level of the MQF (e.g. Level 6 for Bachelor degrees).

The MQF provides clear guidelines (Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation (COPPA) and the Institutional Quality Audit Framework (IQAF)) to ensure quality, comparability, and recognition of both local and accredited overseas qualifications in Malaysia.

Prior to full accreditation, provisional programme accreditation is granted. This allows the institutions to market the programme and recruit students. It should be noted that this approval is conditional, programmes must undergo additional evaluation to achieve Full Accreditation.

The MQA decisions for provisional accreditation are generally made within three to four months, although it should be noted that for qualifications requiring “Professional accreditation” decisions can take up to 12 months.

Stage 4 Checklist for UK Institutions

Action	Useful resources
<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Application for accreditation to be completed including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • detailed programme design, curriculum and structure • learning outcomes, demonstrating alignment to the MQF • assessment methods and grading (pass marks) • faculty qualifications, teaching standards and professional development opportunities • entry requirements / admission criteria • student support services and facilities • educational resources available to students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Official Portal Of MQA • COPPA-2nd-Edition (edited).
<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ensure processes are in place to facilitate internal and external review, data, record keeping and reporting.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COPPA-2nd-Edition (edited) • QUALITY ASSURANCE DOCUMENTS.
<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> For micro-credentials ensure alignment to the guidelines and that a Malaysian micro-credential statement is provided to all students who complete the courses.</p>	<p>MQA Micro-credentials Guidelines.</p>
<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> For professionally regulated programmes (e.g. Engineering, Medicine, Law, Pharmacy) identify any existing arrangements (Washington / Sydney Dublin accords – Engineering) that are in place that can facilitate the alignment of professional standards.</p>	<p>Malaysian Professional Bodies.</p>

Stage 5: Programme delivery under provisional status

If any concerns are identified during the provisional accreditation exercise, these will be flagged along with a clear timeline for the required actions (e.g. by pre-enrolment, by end of Year 1, 2, or 3).

The programme can then be delivered under provisional status. It is recommended that the institution and or partnership continue to engage with MQA throughout the programme’s provisional delivery stage, particularly where recommendations and required actions have been provided.

Stage 5 Checklist for UK Institutions

Action	Useful resources
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ensure annual internal review processes are effective and track activities and reporting alongside any specific questions or enhancements of the conditional accreditation. This will inform the external institutional audit and demonstrate alignment to full accreditation requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COPPA-2nd-Edition (edited) • IQAF - QUALITY ASSURANCE DOCUMENTS.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continuous engagement with MQA throughout the provisional stage, to flag concerns, issues, or demonstrate progress.	The Official Portal Of MQA .

Stage 6: Full accreditation and MQR listing

As the provisionally-accredited programme approaches the final semester, the institution and or partnership must apply for the full accreditation visit. The visit involves a comprehensive review process, including:

- Site visits and audits: MQA’s panel of external reviewers (comprising MQA review staff academic peers and subject matter experts) conducts site visits to the TNE provider (or its local partner)
- Assessment of quality assurance systems: The internal quality assurance systems of both partner institutions are evaluated to ensure that they align with the MQF standards
- Stakeholder consultations: As part of the accreditation process, the MQA consults a wide range of stakeholders, to ensure that the programme meets the expectations of the local job market and broader society.

If ‘Full Accreditation’ is awarded, the programme is listed in the MQR, which is the official repository of accredited programmes. Listing on the MQR provides formal recognition of the qualification within Malaysia, supporting academic progression and private and public sector employment. Additionally, full accreditation facilitates international or third country recognition of UK TNE qualifications delivered in Malaysia.

Stage 6 checklist

Action	Useful resources
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Apply to the MQA for the full accreditation visit. Ensure all data, records and reporting are available.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COPPA-2nd-Edition (edited) • IQAF • MQA Regulatory Documents Office of Knowledge for Change and Advancement (KCA).
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Once full accreditation is granted, ensure the programme is entered on the MQR.	Malaysian Qualifications Register .

Stage 7: Ongoing audits and quality reviews

Ongoing monitoring and review are required to maintain full accreditation. All accredited programmes are subject to periodic audits and reviews to ensure they continue to perform to consistently high standards. The MQA manages this by requiring the following actions:

- Bi-annual self-assessments submitted by self-accrediting institutions to the MQA, reporting on key metrics such as student performance, retention rates, and academic staff development
- Periodic evaluation: Programmes must undergo accreditation compliance evaluations at regular intervals (typically every five years) to ensure ongoing compliance with the MQF. This includes an institutional audit by the MQA
- Reaccreditation by professional bodies for programmes in regulated disciplines.
- Feedback from external examiners: In many cases, external examiners, often from the foreign awarding institution, provide additional oversight on assessment practices, ensuring they meet both UK and Malaysian standards.

Stage 7 Checklist for UK Institutions

Action	Useful resources
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Annual internal review, with required data, records and reporting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COPPA-2nd-Edition (edited) • IQAF.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Application for re-accreditation every 5 years (it is recommended to apply 12 months before the end of the 5-year period).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COPPA-2nd-Edition (edited) • IQAF • MQA Regulatory Documents Office of Knowledge for Change and Advancement (KCA).

Important considerations

Local content requirements

The Malaysian government has developed the *Meta Pelajaran Umum (MPU)* (General Studies courses) which cover philosophy, values and history; soft skills; knowledge of Malaysia and community service and management skills. Both local and international higher education students must successfully complete these courses in order to graduate¹⁹ and there are firm rules around credit transfer for these courses, requiring a sufficient content match. This includes an additional Malay language course (Bahasa Kebangsaan A) for those students who have not achieved a credit in SPM Bahasa Melayu in their upper secondary studies. International students take a simplified “Communication Malay” module. The specific courses that must be taken will differ according to local or international students – it is recommended to refer to and monitor the MoHE site to ensure up-to-date information on local content requirements.

In addition to the MPU, mathematics and science are included in the standard academic curriculum for a degree: all students take these as part of their major.

The MQA has also published standards²⁰ for individual fields of study that must be complied with in the design and delivery of the respective programmes. There are currently 28 different programme standards, each one providing the minimum acceptable practices and requirements.

¹⁹ Except in the case of wholly Open and Distance learning programmes, where all studies are with the overseas institution. Ministry of Higher Education, 2021. Available at: [SOALAN LAZIM MATAPELAJARAN PENGAJIAN UMUM \(MPU\) DIKEMASKINI PADA 30 OGOS 2021.pdf - Google Drive](#).

²⁰ Malaysian Qualifications Agency (n.d.) *MQA Documents*. Available at: <https://office.iium.edu.my/kca/index.php/mqa-regulatory-documents/>.

What this means for UK institutions

For branch campus arrangements, the UK programme must be aligned with the compulsory requirements of the corresponding Malaysian degree in order to secure accreditation and due recognition of the qualification. Compulsory subjects should be incorporated into all programmes, with the appropriate Malaysian credit attached. Branch campuses are also expected to incorporate the relevant programme standards directly into programme design and delivery.

For other TNE arrangements, the Malaysian compulsory subjects would typically be managed, taught, and assessed by the local partner, and would not carry UK credit. In these collaborative models, it is recommended that the UK institution work closely with the local partner to determine how the relevant programme standards should be aligned with and incorporated into the proposed programme.



Professional recognition

In addition to academic recognition, it may also be necessary for UK institutions to seek professional recognition of one or more of its programmes. Malaysia has a number of professional bodies²¹ that accredit undergraduate degree programmes. The MQA forwards any programmes for accreditation to the appropriate professional body for accreditation. This process can take up to 12 months and some professional bodies have compulsory requirements that differ from UK standards. It is important to check with the relevant Malaysia professional body to determine the necessary standards and any required content.

The professional bodies involved in the accreditation and recognition of undergraduate degrees include:

- For the built environment and town planning disciplines
 - Malaysian Board of Architects
 - Malaysian Board of Quantity Surveyors
 - Malaysian Board of Engineers
 - Land Surveyors Board / Land Surveyor Board Sarawak / Sabah Surveyor Board
 - Malaysian Board of Valuers, Appraisers and Estate Agents
 - Town Planning Board of Malaysia
- For medical and allied health disciplines
 - Members of the Malaysian Allied Health Professions Council

²¹ Malaysian Qualifications Agency (n.d.). *Kelayakan Badan Profesional*. Available at: <https://www2.mqa.gov.my/esisraf/profesional.cfm>.

- Malaysian Dental Council
- Malaysian Medical Council
- Malaysian Nursing Board
- Malaysian Optical Council
- Medical Assistant Board
- Pharmacy Board of Malaysia
- Traditional and Complementary Medicine Council
- For accounting and law disciplines
 - Legal Profession Qualifications Board
 - Malaysian Institute of Accountants
- Others
 - Malaysian Board of Technologists
 - Malaysian Counsellors Board
 - Malaysian Institute of Chemistry
 - Malaysian Veterinary Council.

It should be noted that for professional recognition, some international professional bodies have historic direct accreditation agreements with Malaysia (e.g. ACCA), while others require institutions to submit each programme individually for approval.

Mapping to the Malaysian Qualifications Framework

In order to secure understanding and recognition of UK TNE qualifications and facilitate graduate progression and employment, alignment to the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF), is recommended. UK TNE providers should demonstrate alignment with and ensure programmes conform to the MQF Outcome-Based Education (OBE) principles.

What this means for UK institutions

UK institutions need to work with the local team or provider to ensure each proposed programme incorporates and demonstrates alignment to the learning outcomes clusters accordingly. This can be achieved through the teaching, learning and assessment strategies of the programme, or the development of specialised courses.



The MQF has eight levels, ranging from certificate through to PhD level²². The framework levels, credit, and indicative UK levelling on the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) / Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS) levels 4/7-8/12 can be found in the table below:

FHEQ	FQHEIS	MQF Level	MQF Credit	Academic qualification
8	12	8	-	PhD (Research)
			80	Doctoral degree (Coursework, Mixed Mode)
7	11	7	-	Master's degree (Research)
			40	Master's degree (Coursework, Mixed Mode)
			30	Postgraduate Diploma
			20	Postgraduate Certificate
6	10	6	120	Bachelor's degree
	9		64	Graduate Diploma
			34	Graduate Certificate
5	8	5	40	Advanced Diploma
4	7	4	90	Diploma

To inform this alignment process the MQF provides clear guidance on the expected generic learning outcomes descriptors for each level. Each level descriptor comprises a summary of the learner profile as well as knowledge and skills across five 'clusters':

- Cluster 1: Knowledge and Understanding
- Cluster 2: Cognitive Skills
- Cluster 3: Functional Work Skills
 - Practical Skills
 - Interpersonal and Communication Skills
 - Digital and Numeracy Skills
 - Leadership, Autonomy and Responsibility
- Cluster 4: Personal and Entrepreneurial Skills
- Cluster 5: Ethics and Professionalism.

²² More information can be found on the MQA website, at <https://www.mqa.gov.my>.

Additionally, there are standards set by programme level. For instance, at undergraduate level, the 2025 standards²³ stipulates that Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs) should together reflect the five aforementioned clusters from the MQF, along with Values-Based Education (VBE), support for Flexible Learning Pathways and Educational for Sustainable Development competencies.

In parallel, 2026 has already seen the launch of *Guidelines on Value Based Education* – designed to provide higher education institutions with ‘practical references for infusing and integrating VBE in their curriculum designs... producing holistic graduates’²⁴. These guidelines currently set out a list of proposed core values for educational programmes: institutions can maintain their own but should ensure these align with those set out for the MQF: dignity, justice, integrity, gratitude, courage, altruism.

A full list of these is in Table 3.2 of the *Guidelines* (p.27-29) whilst Table 4.2 provides a helpful example of how these might be evidenced within the curriculum of a four-year programme²⁵. At the time of writing, this has not yet been embedded within the accreditation guidelines for overseas higher education institutions looking to offer their programmes in Malaysia.

A provider will be expected to map how the PLOs relate to the clusters, for example:

Learning Outcome	Knowledge and understanding	Cognitive skills	...	Communication...
‘Analyse in-depth knowledge with the related and broad areas of study in national and international contexts’	✓			
‘Express ideas verbally and non-verbally to diverse audiences in various contexts’				✓
Etc...				

²³ Malaysian Qualifications Agency (2025). *Standards for Undergraduate Programme First Edition*. Available at: [https://www2.mqa.gov.my/qad/v2/pekeliling/2025/Standards%20for%20Undergraduate%20Programme%20V15_removed%20\(1\).pdf](https://www2.mqa.gov.my/qad/v2/pekeliling/2025/Standards%20for%20Undergraduate%20Programme%20V15_removed%20(1).pdf)

²⁴ Malaysian Qualifications Agency (2026). *Guidelines on Values-Based Education (VBE)*. Available at: <https://office.iium.edu.my/kca/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Guidelines-on-Values-Based-Education-GVBE-Final.pdf>

²⁵ *Ibid.*

For a Bachelor degree [at Level 6 of the MQF](#), there are 11 illustrative PLOs listed. The final number of PLOs for a TNE programme submitted for accreditation can be higher or lower, but Higher Education Institutions must clearly map and measure the PLOs to ensure comprehensive coverage and integration of the specified skills sets.

Credit systems and transfer

It is essential for institutions offering dual award programmes to align the respective UK and Malaysian credit systems during the dual validation process, as programmes must be recognised in both countries. This process can present challenges and requires detailed mapping of credits to meet both the UK's and Malaysia's standards.

For context, Malaysia applies the Malaysian Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (MCATS)²⁶, which is built on the MQF credit definition (1 MQF credit = 40 notional hours). The system has both qualitative and quantitative values. The MQF is regarded as a credit and qualification framework, as a minimum credit value is allocated to each qualification and level. The credit reflects the number of learning activities (Lectures, tutorials, seminars, practicals, self-study, research and work-based learning) required to achieve a defined set of learning outcomes including preparation for and final assessment.

MCATS provides national guidelines on how MQF credits can be transferred or recognised between programmes and institutions, including TNE arrangements. Its purpose is to support mobility, RPL/RPEL, and articulation pathways. MCATS does not create a separate credit value but governs how MQF credits are accumulated and transferred.

²⁶ Malaysian Qualifications Agency (2024) *Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) 2nd Edition*. Cyberjaya: MQA. Available at: <https://www.mqa.gov.my/new/document/2024/new/MQF%20%282024%29.pdf>.

The table below presents the minimum credit requirements for a Malaysian Bachelor degree programme

“Generic” Bachelor degree components²⁷.	Minimum credit allocation
Compulsory modules (General and HEP modules)	18
Core	65
Final year project	0
Industrial training	0
Elective	0
Credit sub total	73
To complete the minimum requirement of 120 credits, the remaining credits can be placed in any of the categories above/	
Minimum Graduating Credit	120

In this:

- ‘Compulsory’ refers to the Mata Pelajaran Pengajian Umum (MPU) courses which are mandatory, in addition to the Higher Education Provider’s compulsory courses
- Core courses, the final year project and the industrial training component must include sufficient knowledge in the field of the awarded programme
- Industrial training may or may not be mandatory – it will depend on the programme. Where it is not mandatory, it is nonetheless strongly encouraged, considered a key component in preparing students for professional employment
- Electives can be non-discipline related courses. Full discretion and flexibility are given to HEPs to determine the appropriate credit.

Institutions must refer to the relevant Programme Standards documents for their subjects to ensure alignment with any mandatory course or credit requirements.

This next table below presents a Bachelor of Technology (Honours), Environment, as an example of how these credits are allocated in practical terms at the time of writing:

²⁷ Malaysian Qualifications Agency (2025). *Standards for Undergraduate Programme First Edition*. Available at: [https://www2.mqa.gov.my/qad/v2/pekeliling/2025/Standards%20for%20Undergraduate%20Programme%20V15_removed%20\(1\).pdf](https://www2.mqa.gov.my/qad/v2/pekeliling/2025/Standards%20for%20Undergraduate%20Programme%20V15_removed%20(1).pdf).

USM Bachelor of Technology (honours) Environment degree components.	Normal credit allocation
Compulsory modules (General and HEP modules)	18
Core	59
Final year project	7
Industrial training	6
Elective	30
Credit sub total	120

All students must study at least 2 credits of Bahasa Malaysia (courses differ for local vs international students) and 4 credits of English language. Additional compulsory and elective credit or units are developed by each institution, dependent on their expected graduate attributes.

As the table below shows, there are some differences between the UK and Malaysian credit systems:

Aspect	Malaysia (MQF)	UK HE Credit Framework
Typical module size	3 credits (120 hours)	15/20 UK credits (150–200 hours)
Total Bachelor degree programme credits	120–140 credits	360 credits
Compulsory local components	Yes (e.g. local language, cultural subjects)	No
Credit philosophy	OBE-aligned: structured around the MQF	Based on UK subject benchmark statements and FHEQ

The systems are not directly comparable since the definition of notional hours and when credits are applied differs between the two systems. As such, mapping and conversion of credit requires careful comparison of learning outcomes, total study hours and assessment.

A separate guide and tool for UK-Malaysian credit conversion is freely available from Ecctis.

Micro-credentials

Acknowledging the benefits of increased access and flexibility that micro-credentials offer, the MQA has developed guidelines to inform the development, accreditation and recognition of micro-credentials in Malaysia.

In Malaysia there are three acceptable forms of micro-credentials:

1. Those stemming from existing accredited programmes within a single institution
2. Those from a range of accredited programmes across an institution consortium where only one of the institutions awards the credential
3. Those designed and developed in response to demand from industry and employers.

There are clear guidelines on entry requirements and minimum age of graduation to consider in the recruitment of students. Micro-credentials can be delivered face-to-face or online. In the case of TNE, the micro-credential from an existing accredited programme must be designed and delivered in the country of origin before extending to partners or franchisees.

To inform credit transfer and recognition, the higher education providers should provide a clear explanation and description of the micro-credentials as indicated in the [Malaysian Micro-Credential Statement \(MMS\) \(Appendix 2\)](#).

For micro-credentials in professional fields such as engineering, medical sciences, allied health, accountancy, law, architecture, nursing, dentistry, pharmacy etc. engagement with the relevant professional body to determine any associated professional licenses, recognition, or exemptions from professional examinations is essential. Additionally, the provider must ensure that prospective students are clear about the professional status and recognition of the modules of learning they are undertaking and the potential opportunities for transfer and progression within that profession.

Student visa and recruitment rules

As mentioned previously, institutions need a licence from the MoHA to recruit, admit and host international students. To obtain the license the local partner institution or branch campus must collate and submit a range of information to the MoHE, who then forward the information, with their support letter to the MoHA. Once approval is granted, the local partner institution or branch campus is responsible for submitting at registration, the individual student’s application for a student pass²⁸ and monitoring, recording and reporting the international student’s movements, during their time at the institution.

Licence Type	Governing body	Purpose
Private HEI registration	MoHE	To operate legally as university/college in Malaysia.
Recruitment approval	MoHA	To legally bring in foreign nationals on a Student Pass.
Visa processing	EMGS	To facilitate individual student entry and immigration pass stickers.

Approval for the admission of international students by Educational Institutions can be revoked at any time by MoHA if the Educational Institution is found to have violated the Immigration Act 1959/63 & Immigration Regulations 1963 and other stipulated conditions.

What this means for UK institutions

In initial partnership discussions, or as a potential branch campus, consider whether the TNE offer should or needs to be made available to international students and if the local partner or team is in a position to enable that.

²⁸ Ministry of Home Affairs – Immigration Department of Malaysia Official Portal. *Student Pass*. Available at: <https://www.imi.gov.my/index.php/en/main-services/pass/student-pass/> [Accessed January 2026].

Appendix: Case Studies

The following case studies have been compiled in collaboration with current selected UK TNE providers operating in Malaysia.

These are based on initial focus group meetings and interviews conducted in 2024-25, supported by review and validation from the institutions for inclusion in this Guide.



Branch campus example - Heriot-Watt University Malaysia

Heriot-Watt University Malaysia (HWUM), established in Putrajaya, is part of Heriot-Watt's global multi-campus model spanning Edinburgh, Dubai and Malaysia. The branch campus delivers UK degrees under a unified academic framework, with shared curricula and assessments, designed to enable student mobility through the university's "Go Global" initiative. HWUM's establishment followed a successful bid to bring an international university to Putrajaya, with the campus built in partnership with Putrajaya Holdings.

Today, HWUM is regarded as a well-established and trusted provider within Malaysia's Higher Education System, offering UK degrees while contributing as a recognised private provider in Malaysia.

Recognition journey

Navigating Malaysia's regulatory framework

From the outset, HWUM has worked to ensure its UK-designed programmes meet Malaysia's regulatory expectations, whilst operating as an integrated global institution with a single quality system across all campuses. Mapping to Malaysian requirements, particularly the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) framework, necessitated careful adjustment and review of learning outcomes, assessments and module descriptors.

HWUM's approach has included:

- **Systematic remapping of learning outcomes** from UK programme specifications to the MQF structure
- **Reworking of course documents** to align with Malaysian expectations for detailed learning outcomes
- **Internal audits** to identify areas where UK-integrated modules overlap (e.g. fluid mechanics and thermodynamics), ensuring clarity for accreditation purposes
- **Ongoing dialogue with MQA reviewers**, supported by clear evidence of global academic consistency.

The university emphasises that these steps have helped them maintain the UK academic integrity of programmes while demonstrating responsiveness to Malaysian requirements.

Managing accreditation cycles

As a private university, HWUM undergoes the same review processes and costs as any local private institution. Programme accreditation cycles, typically every five years, involve detailed scrutiny and require extensive documentation. HWUM has developed internal processes to manage this workload effectively, including:

- Advance preparation of programme review documentation
- Clear internal timelines to align UK programme updates with MQA review cycles
- Dedicated teams responsible for maintaining compliance across campuses.

Programmes cannot operate without the Malaysian Qualifications Register (MQR) code, and ensuring continuous accreditation is therefore a core operational priority. HWUM's structured approach ensures that programmes remain compliant and allows the campus to continue operations confidently within the Malaysian legal framework.

Reflecting home and host country requirements

Integrated quality assurance

A defining feature of HWUM's model is the effort taken to ensure consistency and comparability with its UK campus. Students across campuses take the same assessments including examinations, scheduled across time zones and are assessed using the same academic standards, moderation processes and programme governance. This integrated system is combined with local alignment processes, such as:

- Additional mapping work to meet Malaysian OBE and Programme Standards
- Ensuring Malaysian components (e.g., MPU subjects) are integrated where required
- Continuous engagement with MoHE and MQA to ensure clarity and compliance.

This dual alignment enables HWUM to continue to align with UK standards while satisfying local regulatory requirements.

Employer and sector engagement

HWUM plays an active role in Malaysia’s higher education community. The university’s leadership is represented within sector-level bodies such as the Vice-Chancellors’ Council for Private Universities, where it contributes to discussions on quality, standards and sector development.

HWUM’s institutional ethos is to participate respectfully and collaboratively in the Malaysian system, positioning itself not as an external institution teaching a “UK model,” but as a Malaysian-based university contributing to Malaysian national goals. This mindset and governance approach underpins the university’s approach to partnership-building with businesses, the city of Putrajaya, industry collaborators and education partners.

Employers in Malaysia continue to value HWUM graduates, as degrees carry both the global recognition of Heriot-Watt and local accreditation required for employment filters. HWUM also monitors employer expectations, noting the increasing shift toward skills relevance and the potential disruptive effects of AI and new modes of learning.

Supporting student mobility and recognition abroad

While HWUM’s degrees are accredited and recognised within Malaysia, some challenges arise in certain third countries where qualifications completed outside the awarding country are not fully recognised. HWUM responds to this by:

- Providing students with clear guidance on recognition expectations in priority regions
- Maintaining detailed documentation demonstrating academic equivalence across campuses
- Contributing to sector-level dialogue on recognition, while working within government-led processes.

The university continues to support efforts to address these challenges and improve recognition transparency for TNE qualifications globally.

Looking ahead

HWUM is focusing on internal enhancements that support both compliance and innovation. These include:

- Investing in academic staff development to deepen expertise in Malaysian OBE standards and programme requirements
- Improving documentation and evidence systems to streamline future accreditation reviews
- Developing innovative programmes while ensuring alignment with existing Programme Standards, even in fast-growing areas such as data science
- Strengthening student development and employability services, a core institutional priority.
- Continuing partnerships with industry, Putrajaya authorities and global Heriot-Watt campuses.

These priorities reflect HWUM's long-term commitment to delivering high-quality UK education in Malaysia while supporting national objectives for talent development and internationalisation.

Key learning points

Heriot-Watt's experience demonstrates that:

- A global quality system can operate effectively in Malaysia when paired with strong local compliance mechanisms
- Early and detailed alignment to Malaysian OBE requirements is essential, even for highly established UK programmes
- Maintaining constructive relationships with MoHE, MQA and sector bodies supports smoother long-term recognition
- Branch campuses benefit from clear internal processes that coordinate UK programme updates with Malaysian accreditation timelines
- Integrated campuses can add value to Malaysia's HE system through collaboration, industry links and mobility opportunities.

Dual / validated programme example - Universiti Malaya-Wales (UM-Wales)

The Universiti Malaya-Wales is a partnership of Universiti Malaya and the University of Wales (University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD)), established in 2013. It delivers a suite of dual-award programmes in Business Administration, Psychology and Professional Communication. Students graduate with two degrees, one from UM-Wales and one from UWTSD, reflecting a model built on shared academic oversight, joint quality assurance, and transparent governance.

Dual-award provision has been a long-standing and stable TNE model in Malaysia, widely recognised for its strong alignment with local requirements and the international exposure it provides students.

Recognition journey

Dual awards require close alignment between Malaysian and UK frameworks. UM-Wales and UWTSD undertake detailed mapping to reconcile differences in credit structures, learning outcomes and assessment approaches. The UK system commonly uses 20 credits per module, whereas Malaysian credit hours are calculated through contact time. Clear mapping ensures the programme meets MQF requirements while preserving the structure of the UK curriculum.

This mapping is understood to be typical of validated and dual-award models in Malaysia, where programmes are usually designed as Malaysian qualifications from the outset and then submitted for UK approval. It is felt that this approach ensures smoother MQF alignment compared to other TNE models.

The dual-award arrangement incorporates:

- External moderation by UWTSD, ensuring UK standards are consistently upheld
- Validation reviews every five years, providing opportunities for enhancement
- Monthly governance meetings covering records management, accreditation timelines, and exam board preparation.

These mechanisms have built confidence among regulators and supported continuity across accreditation cycles.

Supporting student mobility and recognition abroad

Dual certificates and graduate recognition

UM-Wales graduates receive certificates and transcripts from both institutions, which supports recognition in Malaysia and internationally. Employers value the dual award for its international exposure and strong quality assurance, giving graduates a competitive edge.

Sector-wide discussions in Malaysia highlight a broader distinction between *validated degrees* and *dual awards*, and how these are documented:

- Some validated degrees in Malaysia do not issue separate UK transcripts because the UK institution validates but does not teach the Malaysian-delivered degree
- In certain countries (e.g. China), this can create recognition challenges where authorities expect a standalone transcript for the UK qualification
- Differences between Malaysian and UK compulsory modules (e.g. Bahasa Malaysia, cultural studies) may not appear in UK award documentation, which can cause confusion for credential evaluators abroad.

These issues did not arise specifically in the UM-Wales model but represent important considerations for institutions using validated or dual-award structures in Malaysia.

Importance of legal recognition

Participants across the validated/dual-award focus groups noted that beyond academic alignment, legal recognition including embassy verification and mechanisms such as The Hague Convention, can play an important role for graduates returning to their home countries.

Looking ahead

A notable feature of this partnership is the mobility pathway, with around 25% of students completing a semester at UWTSD. Students who remain in Malaysia benefit from online classes delivered by UK academics, giving them exposure to UK teaching approaches. Students report that:

- Mobility experiences can be “eye-opening” for students and enhance their confidence
- Interaction with UK faculty broadens their academic perspective
- Dual graduation ceremonies significantly enhance the student experience.

Looking ahead, UM-Wales and UWTSD aim to sustain and expand dual award provision, and further strengthen their partnership through:

- Re-evaluating the potential reintroduction of previously offered programmes (e.g., Computer Science)
- Ensuring validation processes remain current through regular five-year reviews
- Deepening their understanding of Malaysian cultural and economic contexts to maintain relevance
- Exploring ways to enhance mobility and cross-campus engagement.

These priorities help maintain the programme’s strong reputation and ensure continued alignment with evolving regulatory expectations.

Key learning points

- Validated and dual-award programmes tend to align well with MQF, especially when designed as Malaysian qualifications from the outset
- Clear credit and learning-outcome mapping is essential to demonstrate compliance to both systems
- Regular governance meetings, shared exam board processes, and external moderation support smooth accreditation and continuous improvement
- Institutions should consider documentation and transcript expectations, as these can affect recognition in some countries, even when programmes meet academic requirements
- Understanding local cultural, regulatory and employer contexts ensures validated and dual-award programmes remain relevant and responsive.

Franchise programme example – INTI International University and Colleges

INTI International University and Colleges is an experienced franchise TNE provider. It maintains long-standing partnerships with six foreign universities, including UK providers such as Coventry University, the University of Hertfordshire and Sheffield Hallam University, as well as institutions in Australia, the United States and France. INTI offers a wide portfolio of full franchise (3+0 and 4+0) programmes, dual awards, degree-transfer routes (1+2 and 2+2) and international A Levels through Cambridge Assessment, enabling students to access international qualifications at a lower cost while maintaining pathways for overseas mobility.

On average, INTI's student body is approximately 70% domestic and 30% international, with learners from more than 65 countries, reflecting the central role franchise TNE plays in widening access to global education.

Recognition journey

Accreditation processes, challenges and timelines

Accreditation has taken up to 1.5 years for some programmes. During this time, UK curricula may evolve, creating challenges in maintaining alignment. This is especially evident in design-based disciplines or programmes with rapid industry change.

INTI has sought to manage this by:

- Maintaining continuous communication with partner universities
- Revising documents promptly when standards change
- Seeking clarification where Malaysian Programme Standards differ from UK expectations.

This approach has helped minimise misalignment and delays during the approval cycle.

Navigating dual requirements

INTI's recognition journey began with the need to simultaneously satisfy the academic requirements of its international partners, professional bodies (where applicable) and the MQA. As INTI has highlighted, franchise programmes must meet both host institution standards and MQA requirements, often revealing differences in curriculum structure, learning outcomes and assessment design.

To manage this duality effectively, INTI adopted several strategies early in the accreditation process:

- **Detailed mapping of learning outcomes** between UK and Malaysian frameworks - a significant task where UK modules contain up to 20 learning outcomes that must be aligned to 11 MQF learning outcomes
- **Restructuring of programmes**, where UK programmes were offers over two semesters in contrast to INTI's three-semester programmes
- **Restructuring of modules** where UK programmes use larger, integrated modules that differ from Malaysia's preference for smaller, distinct modules
- **Packaging Malaysian components** (e.g. MPU subjects and any relevant discipline modules) into transfer programmes to ensure domestic recognition of the Malaysian-delivered portion.

These steps enabled INTI to meet local requirements while preserving the core academic design of the UK programme.

Differences between Malaysian and UK quality assurance frameworks frequently influence the accreditation process:

- **Qualification framework** – the frameworks used in the UK and the MQA in Malaysia differ in both taxonomy and learning outcomes
- **Module mapping and credit exemption methodology** – for those students with prior learning
- **Assessment structure:** Malaysia requires multiple assessments per module, whereas UK partners may use a single substantive assessment
- **Passing grade:** Malaysian requirements set a 50% pass mark, compared to 40% in the UK, but the grading systems themselves can also differ with use in Malaysia of a CGPA
- **Professional body input:** MQA decisions rely heavily on professional bodies for programmes such as architecture, where Malaysian standards differ from UK curricular structures, leading to more complex reviews.

INTI has learned that early engagement with both UK partners and Malaysian professional bodies improves clarity and supports smoother review processes.

Supporting student mobility and recognition abroad

Local accreditation is essential for INTI's students, both domestic and international. Without MQA accreditation, graduates may face barriers in:

- Applying for national higher education loans
- Transferring to other Malaysian institutions
- Securing government or government-linked employment
- Obtaining recognition in their home countries.

INTI's commitment to meeting Malaysian requirements is therefore linked directly to ensuring positive graduate outcomes.

INTI's UK partners play an active role in strengthening programme quality and contributing to recognition processes:

- Providing teaching resources, online journals and module materials
- Appointing Partner Leaders to connect Malaysian lecturers with UK academic teams
- Offering guest lectures and participating in teaching development
- Contributing to the programme's branding and visibility in Malaysia.

These structured partnerships ensure that INTI maintains strong academic oversight and alignment with UK standards while meeting Malaysian regulatory needs.

Connection to Industry and External Stakeholders

INTI maintains strong employer engagement that reinforces the relevance and quality of franchise provision:

- Signing of MOU with industry partners on various initiatives related to nurturing and developing future talents and pipeline
- Annual Industry Advisory Boards for each discipline
- External industry assessors who audit student work
- Over 100 employer projects integrated across the portfolio
- A dedicated careers service team supporting student employability.

These evidence-based inputs strengthen INTI's accreditation submissions and provide assurance of programme quality and relevance.

Looking ahead

INTI continues to refine its internal systems to support smoother accreditation and alignment with both UK partners and Malaysian regulators. Current priorities include:

- Enhancing student's learning experience via global classroom and online webinars with partner universities
- Improving internal turnaround times for curriculum and documentation updates, enabling quicker responses when Programme Standards or partner requirements change
- Formalising escalation routes for complex accreditation issues, ensuring early clarification and reducing delays at submission or review stages
- Enhancing internal training for academic staff on MQF-aligned learning outcomes, assessment expectations and professional body requirements
- Expanding data and evidence collection, particularly around industry engagement and student outcomes, to strengthen accreditation submissions.

These actions build on INTI's established processes but focus specifically on the areas that have the greatest impact on accreditation efficiency. They reflect the institution's continued commitment to maintaining high-quality TNE provision and ensuring programmes remain fully aligned with both Malaysian and international expectations.

Key learning points

INTI's experience offers practical insights for UK universities considering franchise delivery in Malaysia:

- Early alignment with MQF requirements is essential for smooth recognition.
- Close, structured collaboration with the Malaysian partner significantly improves the accreditation journey.
- Awareness of Malaysian Programme Standards, professional requirements and assessment expectations helps prevent delays.
- Strong industry engagement and evidence of employer relevance enhance confidence among regulators.
- Recognition processes benefit when institutions approach quality assurance as a joint responsibility rather than a procedural obligation.

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