

Recognition and authentication of higher education qualifications in a transnational market: Sorting the cyber wheat from the digital chaff

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This paper seeks to address the burgeoning problem of internet-based degree granting institutions/ educational document providers, and the challenges credential evaluators face when assessing paper based documents for admission purposes. The paper begins by reviewing the various models of higher education provision, ranging from the traditional to the non-traditional, virtual degree granting provider. It is argued that the rise of the for-profit, virtual university has been fuelled, in part, by the sociological pressures of 'credentialism' and 'diplomaism', suggesting that these perhaps are major factors causing degree qualifications to be seen as currency in both the labour market and higher education sectors. The value placed upon these credentials leads individuals to seek qualifications from a myriad of sources ranging from traditional to illegal. In order to explain these phenomena, two continuums are presented, designed to provide interpretations as to the verification of the legitimacy and acceptability of degree qualifications. Current resources used to provide solutions to the problem of degree acceptance and authentication are presented, and are critiqued in light of future developments surrounding the Bologna Declaration and review of the Hague Apostille Convention. The paper is concluded with a review of current global approaches, either being used or under development, in order to address the issue of qualification verification. The review is used to develop a best practice model for authenticating and recognising degree qualifications presented to both employers and higher education providers in Australia and New Zealand, in an effort to minimise credential fraud and facilitate moves towards a global qualification recognition system.