Environment for Transnational Education Partnerships and UK Qualifications: Challenges and Opportunities

Egypt and the UK

Findings and recommendations from primary research

Part of Going Global Partnerships

Contents

Background

This report considers the opportunities for higher education institutions in Egypt and the UK to develop and extend international partnerships in tertiary education. These include collaborative teaching programmes from undergraduate to doctoral level.

The report aims to provide a summary of the environment for such partnerships. In order to do this, a review of the legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks for international tertiary education was undertaken. Interviews were then conducted with higher education stakeholders in both countries. These included government representatives, sector agencies, higher education leaders, partnership managers and academic course leads. The report contains their views relating to the opportunities and the main challenges, together with how these might be addressed. Their contributions in the interview discussions inform the recommendations.

Data in this report is drawn from three sources:

1. Research conducted for this project in March and April 2022, which included 16 semi-structured interviews with Egyptian and UK stakeholders. A fifth of the interviewees were female.
2. An online survey of stakeholders in the UK and overseas engaged in the delivery of transnational education.
3. Data from the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Aggregate Offshore Record (AOR) for 2022, which inform the analysis of the current position of transnational education provision for the academic year 2020-21.

1. The current position

Transnational education (TNE) has a growing importance for the strategic internationalisation of higher education institutions (HEIs). TNE provides a means of engagement with students who choose to study in their home country. For UK universities, it deepens international partnerships and raises global brand awareness. For students, it provides a cost-effective means to progress into study in the UK. For the universities hosting TNE programmes, it has strengthened their capacity and quality assurance practices, diversified the models of higher education provision and supported the broad internationalisation of the host university.

With 23,805 TNE students, Egypt is the fifth largest host country for UK TNE programmes globally. It hosts 42 per cent of Africa's TNE population. TNE in country continues to expand; the latest recorded growth was 22 per cent in 2020-21 compared with the previous year.[1]

Figure 1 shows that 80 per cent of the TNE students in 2020-21 were studying under the collaborative provision arrangements. Collaborative TNE, mainly dual degrees, is the fastest-growing type of provision in the country. Over two-thirds of the students are at the undergraduate level of study (69 per cent).

1. https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2022-11/UUKi%20Scale%20of%20UK%20HE%20TNE%202020-21.pdf.

Figure 1: Number of TNE students from 2018-19 to 2020-21

Legend:
- 2018-2019
- 2019-2020
- 2020-2021

Source: HESA AOR 2022.

Methodological note: The data excludes TNE students at Oxford Brookes University, which was impacted significantly by the changes in the AOR methodology in 2019-20.
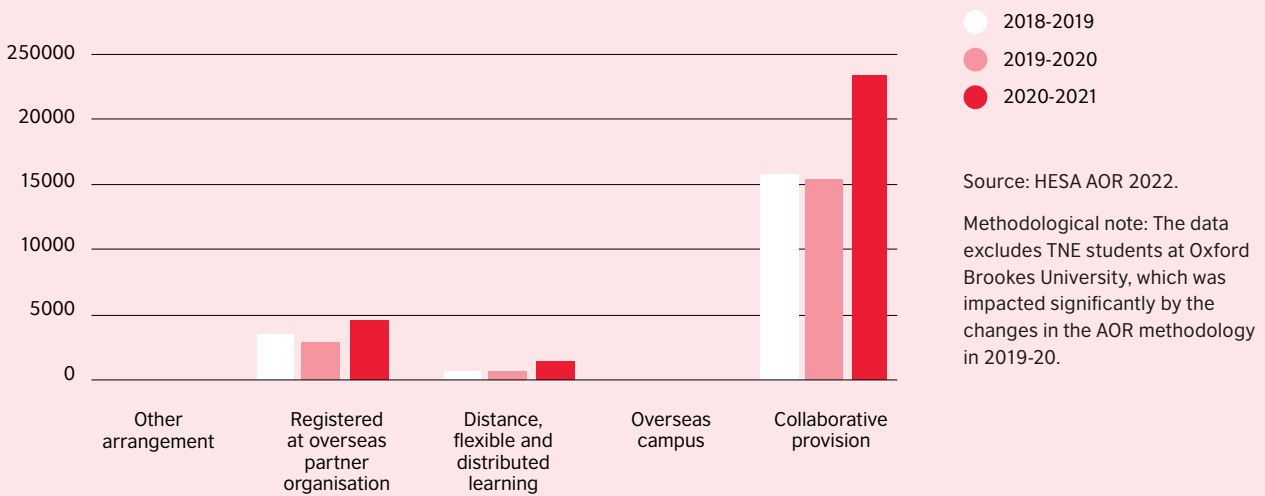
Figure 2: shows that most TNE students in Egypt were studying for an undergraduate degree in 2020-21, followed by masters' level qualifications. Over 70 per cent of students in Egypt are concentrated in just the UK institutions.

Figure 2: The level of study of TNE students in 2020-21
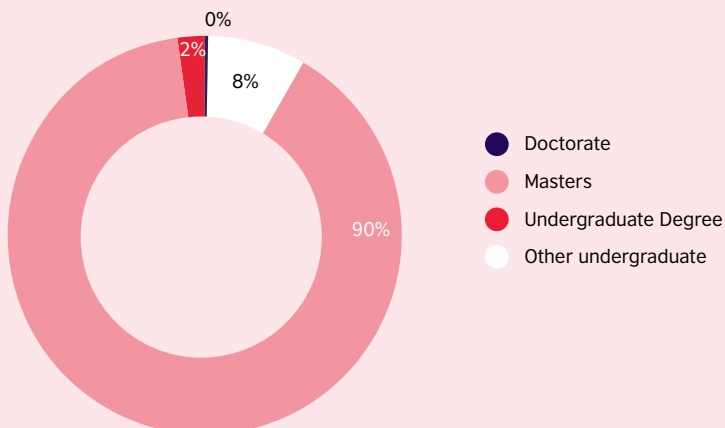
Legend:
- Doctorate
- Masters
- Undergraduate Degree
- Other undergraduate

Source: HESA AOR 2022.

Methodological note: The data excludes TNE students at Oxford Brookes University, which was impacted significantly by the changes in the AOR methodology in 2019-20.

2. Value of teaching partnerships and TNE

TNE offers a huge opportunity for HEIs to engage locally. The size of the population is a significant factor increasing the attractiveness of local engagement.[2] The country's population is growing at approximately, 2 per cent annually.[3] Egypt has a comparatively young population, 45 per cent of which is under 19. It is the 14th most populous country in the world and has a population forecast to reach 160 million by 2050, which would rank it 11th globally.

Table 1: Population growth

Year	Population	Percentage annual increase
2019	100,388,073	2%
2020	102,334,404	1.94%
2021	104,258,327	1.88%
2022	106,156,692	1.82%

The Egyptian Ministry of Education [4] aims to increase the number of its higher education students to 5.6 million by 2030. This means at least 2 million additional students to the system, which equates to half of the population between 18 and 22. Currently, this proportion stands at 35 per cent. There is a balanced male to female ratio, which is close to 50:50.

The ministry has adopted a strategy in the recent years that aims to expand the capacity of higher education provision, and equally improve its quality. The strategy includes the following:

• Increasing the size and number of existing state universities (with several now having over 200,000 students) and encouraging the growth of private universities.

• Developing a new model of fee-paying but not-for-profit state universities.

• Egyptian universities to establish partnerships with foreign universities.

• Introducing legislation to encourage foreign universities to set up branch campuses and partnerships with local institutions and organisations in Egypt.

• encouraging all universities to attract international students, so that Egypt can achieve the ministry's goal of becoming a major hub for international education in the Middle East – North African region and wider Africa.

2. Healey, N (2021) Transnational Education: Good Practice - Connecting the Dots. UL Global Seminar 13th April 2021. Available from https://www.academia.edu/46887530/Transnational_education_good_practice_connecting_the_dots. Accessed 21 February 2022.

3. https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/EGY/egypt/population#:~:text=Egypt%20-%20Historical%20Population%20Data%20%20%20,%20%202.05%25%20%2068%20more%20rows%20od Practice and https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/egypt-population.

4. https://moe.gov.eg/en.

Therefore, the strategy is underpinned by the following four pillars:

• increased access to higher education

• reform of the higher education curricula

• linking of the programme curriculum to industry

• increased provision of foreign languages.

As part of that ambition, there is strong support for international branch campuses (IBCs), which is extended to encourage cooperation with universities worldwide for the purpose of developing dual awards, student exchanges, research cooperation, and joint projects.

There are significant benefits from sharing knowledge of how UK universities operate efficiently, internal systems and procedures, pastoral care support, engagement with industry, governance and committee structures, and accountability. TNE supports the development of global graduates, through their learning outcomes, exposure to an internationalised curriculum, access to their UK peers and international faculty.

The interviews with local stakeholders recognised the value of added brand recognition, building the capacity of staff and accelerated career progression, and improved access to international networks.

HEIs based in Egypt suggest TNE adds value through introducing new models of collaboration, broadening the models of higher education provision, opening the door to new areas of subject specialism, introducing new pedagogic models, enabling global perspectives and access to international networks, promoting internalisation at the institutional and sector levels, and raising performance benchmarks to higher levels.

3. Overview of international collaboration policy landscape

While there is limited evidence of a specific detailed international higher education strategy, to render the Egyptian economy more competitive, balanced and diversified, the government developed the national sustainable development strategy Egypt Vision 2030, which seeks to make high-quality education and training systems available to all.[5] The high level of proposed investment in the 2030 vision document, and the forthcoming 2032 revision of that document, demonstrate commitment to higher education and internationalisation, and that higher education is both an economic and social priority.

3.1 International higher education as a strategic national priority

In a recent interview, President Abdel Fattah El Sisi of Egypt emphasised his commitment to overhauling the education system at both pre-university and university levels.[6] This is supported by the Ministry of Education (2014) Strategic Plan for Pre-University Education 2014 – 2030, which allows for the development of secondary education in a manner compatible with international standards and for ensuring that the provision for school leavers fully prepares them transition into higher education.[7] Evidence for this commitment is also found in the Higher Education Strategy.[8]

While there is no dedicated body solely tasked with the promotion the internationalisation of higher education, the policy of internationalisation, its shape and pace are set by the minister and his advisers. At present, the responsibility is delegated to the deputy minister. The supreme councils, which are, at least partly, member organisations, work to the minister's brief. The vision of the ministry is '…for the advancement of the education system by the university to achieve greater access and absorption…'.[9] The Supreme Council of Universities, a sub-council of the Ministry of Education, seeks the advancement of high-quality classifications, in partnership with foreign universities.[10] The council further determines greater connection between graduates and employment institutions at home and abroad, as well as expansion of the educational institutions.[11]

Shifting regional dynamics have prompted Egypt to adopt a more proactive foreign policy.[12] The Cultural Affairs and Missions Sector of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research is one of the state's service sectors with special importance, given its association with ministries, state sectors, research entities and universities, as well as Arab and global agencies such as embassies and international organisations' cultural bureaus and centres.[13] It oversees Egyptian mission students abroad, supports cultural exchange, international agreements and programmes, and disseminates Egypt's culture.[14] Cultural offices can be found in Asia, North America, Africa, and Europe including France, Germany, Italy and the UK.[15]

More recently, the focus of the Education Attaché role in London has shifted from supporting Egyptian sponsored students in the UK to much more proactively assisting a growing number of Egyptian universities seeking UK partners.

5. http://sdsegypt2030.com/social-dimension/education-training-pillar/?lang=en&lang=en/.
6. Cornock, O (Ed) (2019) The Report. Egypt 2019. Oxford Business Group; p12. .
7. http://www.unesco.org/education/edurights/media/docs/c33b72f4c03c58424c5ff258cc6aeaee0eb58de4.pdf
8. http://portal.mohesr.gov.eg/en-us/Pages/default.aspx.
9. http://portal.moe.gov.eg/eng/Pages/default.aspx.
10. https://scu.eg/.
11. https://scu.eg/pages/vision_mission.
12. https://ecfr.eu/publication/burning-ambition-egypts-return-to-regional-leadership-and-how-europe-should-respond/.
13. http://portal.mohesr.gov.eg/en-us/Pages/Cultural-Affairs-Missions.aspx.
14. Ibid.
15. https://www.iro.bu.edu.eg/egyptian_culturaloffices.php.

3.2 Strong bilateral higher education relationship between the UK and Egypt

The UK and Egypt share a strong bilateral relationship supporting the development of mutually beneficial partnerships in education, research and innovation, with initiatives aiming at continued collaboration.[16]

As early as the 1930s, the UK was a key contributor to the training of lecturers for the Egyptian state universities of Cairo, Alexandria, and Ain Shams, which continued until the 1990s and marked the start of a higher education expansion.

The British Council's involvement became more prominent after the Arab Spring in working at the system and institutional levels. It convened two-way delegations and familiarisation visits, which led to a bilateral agreement in 2015 for collaboration in research and innovation in the fields of higher education reform, technical and vocational education and training, medical education, cultural heritage and leadership.[17] Building on this relationship, the jointly funded £50 million Newton Mosharafa Fund was created in 2016, with the aim of strengthening collaboration between the British and Egyptian scientific research and innovation sectors.[18] In January 2018, the UK and Egypt signed a memorandum of agreement on IBCs and in July 2018, Egypt ratified the International Branch Campus Act.[19]

3.3 Egypt's potential to become an education hub

Secondary school education in Egypt includes compulsory foreign language provision, whereby pupils have a choice between English and French. An estimated 140 schools offer the Cambridge International GCSE curriculum.[20] The university system is flexible: although in principle classical Arabic remains the language of instruction, there are variations and the language can be discipline-dependent. For example, medicine, engineering, and science are generally taught in English. There are also many English language universities in Egypt, for example the British University in Cairo, the Future University in Egypt, Nile University and the American University in Cairo. Two more recent additions include the Global Academic Foundation, a partnership with the University of Hertfordshire, and the Knowledge Hub in Cairo.[21]

The government has taken significant steps to establish Egypt as a transnational education hub by attracting more foreign branch campuses. The Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport plays a significant role in this development. It has supported many of the UK TNE providers in Egypt and is responsible for the enrolment of over 3,000 of the overall TNE students in the country. The government's efforts are paying off following changes in legislation that took place in 2018 for the establishment of IBCs.

16. https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2021-07/2018%2520iNote_Egypt%2520IBC_final.pdf.

17. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/the-uk-and-egypt-sign-memoranda-of-understanding and also https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-egyptian-partnership-in-education-has-enormous-potential.

18. https://www.britishcouncil.org.eg/en/programmes/education/newton-mosharafa-fund.

19. https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/topics/international/egypt-inote-international-branch-campus.

20. https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/Images/662459-2024-2026-syllabus.pdf. The estimate of 140 schools was prompted by the British Council.

21. https://www.herts.ac.uk/international/overseas-study/study-for-a-hertfordshire-degree-outside-the-uk/global-academic-foundation-and-the-university-of-hertfordshire and also https://tkh.edu.eg.

The country's appeal to international universities has history. The first international university, the distinguished American University of Cairo, is over 100 years old. Over the years, before the creation of the new administrative capital, German, Japanese and French universities, operating with English as a medium of instruction, were established in Egypt. The University of Arizona established its regional hub in 2022.

The first foreign university to operate in Egypt's new administrative capital was the Universities of Canada in Egypt, in April 2018, under an umbrella organisation formed to host degree programmes from select Canadian universities in partnership with Canwell Education Consultancy.[22] This was followed by the launch by Coventry University in September 2019 of the Knowledge Hub, in partnership with Elsewedy Education.[23] The University of Hertfordshire, in partnership with Global Academic Foundation, inaugurated its branch campus in December 2019[24] 2021 saw the establishment of the European Universities in Egypt, one of the latest IBCs set up.[25] European Universities in Egypt hosts the University of London.[26]

3.4 The role of national bodies and the regulatory landscape

The Ministry of Higher Education oversees public and private higher education institutions. It exercises this function through the Supreme Council of Public Universities, the Supreme Council of Private Universities, the Supreme Council of Higher Institutes, and the Supreme Council of Al-Azhar – bodies that coordinate policies between institutions, provide quality control, and approve new HEIs and programmes.[27]

Under the new law, an IBC can be established by presidential decree following the recommendation of the Minister of Higher Education Affairs, which in turn will be informed by a specially appointed expert commission, the relevant state authorities and the cabinet.[28] The published regulations have four main sections, and several associated articles, which are not necessarily easy to navigate. If applying directly to the ministry, the foreign university will need to present a proof of legal ownership of appropriate land where the IBC will be established, a financial feasibility study, a proposed governance structure and a detailed description of the academic policies, syllabuses, grading and examination schemes and contingency exit plans. If applying through an educational institution, the same documents will be required in addition to the institution's name, objectives and proposed structure. If the IBC is to be hosted by the institution, then draft operational agreements between the parties and a list of the institution's shareholders are to be supplied. The IBC or the partner institution will need to pay the Egyptian government a licensing fee and yearly service fee.

22. https://enterprise.press/blackboards/light-touch-regulation-attracted-international-branch-campuses-egypt/ and https://www.upei.ca/cairocampus..

23. https://tkh.edu.eg/.

24. https://www.herts.ac.uk/international/overseas-study/study-for-a-hertfordshire-degree-outside-the-uk.

25. https://eue.edu.eg/about/.

26. https://eue.edu.eg/university/university-of-london/.

27. https://scu.eg/pages/vision_mission.

28. https://riad-riad.com/regulation-foreign-universities-egypt/.

Egypt's National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE) was established in 2006 and legislated by Law No. 82 in 2006.[29]

According to the law 82-2006, NAQAAE was given the responsibility for quality assurance in education as well as for building confidence in – and ensuring the recognition of – the output of the Egyptian education system, i.e. its graduates and their qualifications.[30] The vision of NAQAAE is 'to develop the quality of education and its continuous improvement and to accredit educational institutions according to national standards that are independent, impartial and transparent and comply with international standards'.

NAQAAE works to the Prime Minister's office. Internationalisation is being driven by the ministry. Foreign universities are encouraged to engage with NASQAAE for accreditation purposes in Egypt. While some do – for example, the Arab Academy and the British University of Egypt – there is no regulatory obligation to do so. The ministry is aware of the lack of a regulatory framework for TNE, and is discussing drawing up the first set of TNE regulations.

An emerging area for the national quality assurance agencies is advising, monitoring and accrediting the cross-border activities of domestic institutions. The latest development in this space is the University of Alexandria's efforts to set up IBCs in Africa.[31]

Details on the process of local accreditation are available in the Annexe.

Degree recognition in the regulated professions depends on engagement with Egypt's professional bodies, or syndicates. The Professional Syndicates Union represents 24 syndicates from around Egypt, including applied art designers, dentists, doctors, engineers, farmers, lawyers, physiotherapists, pharmacists, teachers, veterinarians, and other syndicates. An important recent development has been the adoption of World Federation of Medical Education accreditation for medical degrees from Egyptian universities.

One of the most prolific syndicates is the Egyptian Engineering Syndicate,[32] which dates back to the 1920s. For membership, it requires a Bachelor's degree in Engineering from an Egyptian university, or a degree certified by the Supreme Council of Universities to be its equivalent.[33]

29. https://www.naqaae.eg/en/about_us.

30. https://naqaae.eg/en/about_us/Vision_Mission.

31. https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20130320171746447.

32. http://eea.org.eg.

33. Elsafty, A., Elsayad, H & Shaaban, I. G. (2020) Educating Engineering Students in Egypt: Recommendations for Improvement. International Journal of Higher Education. Vol. 9, No. 3; 2020. https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/287724786.pdf.

4. TNE challenges and how to overcome them

Many of those interviewed spoke positively about their experience of setting up TNE or an IBC in Egypt. They considered the high level of support from the ministry as one of the main reasons for establishing a partnership in Egypt. Many said there were no challenges to entry. They viewed the framework as allowing the appropriate level of flexibility, particularly for the new model of IBC operation in the country.

Although interviewees welcomed the opportunities Egypt presented, some continued to view the main challenges as relating to the approval process and equivalency or recognition of qualifications. Some found the process of IBC approval, adding additional programmes or making changes to programmes, to be overly bureaucratic and time-consuming. It is appreciated that the UK degrees have a different duration from their Egyptian counterparts: for example, a UK undergraduate engineering degree would typically be three years, compared with four in Egypt. Nevertheless, there was an expectation that the new law for IBCs would enable the programmes from the UK to be broadly equivalent to those in Egypt. The IBCs report challenges around equivalence and recognition and their ability to fully reassure students that they would be able to easily transfer to other local higher education institutions. Steps are being taken to reconcile these disparities.

Other perspectives related to student fees and criteria to enter the market, but these were not viewed as significant obstacles to establishing a TNE presence in Egypt.

4.1 Regulatory challenges

Most interviewees identified regulatory and perception-based challenges. The regulatory challenges included the approval process and recognition and accreditation. Challenges relating to perceptions of the operating environment included the following:

• financial factors

• criteria for entering the market

• disparities in credit and pass marks

• reputational and security risks

• quality assurance mechanisms

• university buy-in

• infrastructure and wi-fi capability

• cultural differences.

These challenges are explored below.

4.2 Regulatory challenges

4.2.1 UK institutions

It was appreciated that the ministry has a rigorous process for the approval of programmes. However, those seeking to expand their portfolio were presented with some unforeseen restrictions. Those were more of a frustration than a challenge. Approvals for new programmes may take up to two years, which may not sit well with the financial backer of an IBC. Both issues demonstrated interviewees' lack of awareness of the process and the high level of involvement by the government and Ministry of Education in programme approval.

Recommendation 1: Develop a greater understanding of the programme approval process in Egypt.

There was some confusion over the legislation the UK university operates under. In this context, it is essential to clarify that the IBC law governs TNE through IBCs only. However, Egypt lacks a TNE regulatory framework. Much of the confusion is related to franchised degrees which are not covered by the IBC legislation.

Another difficulty was related to the regulated professions' qualifications. There was an expectation that UK IBCs would set up in Egypt, in compliance with UK standards and quality assurance processes, and that their degree with a foundation year would be accepted as equivalent to those awarded by Egyptian universities. However, it has emerged that the IBCs' degrees are not recognised by the country's syndicates. For example, an engineering degree in Egypt requires a special case to be made to the Egyptian Engineering Syndicate. Interviewees shared their concerns that this is a lengthy process, and their priority is to ensure their graduates can get a job in Egypt. It should be noted that the Ministry of Higher Education is aware of this challenge, and expected to resolve it in time to benefit the IBCs' graduating cohorts.

Recommendation 2: Produce a documented guide for local programmes leading to regulated professions' qualifications and the respective approval processes.

It was also mentioned that some UK HEIs have unrealistic expectations of fees and the income they would generate.

Recommendation 3: Conduct thorough market research into the market entry requirements and associated costs, and perform an assessment of the feasibility of fee levels in the location of TNE delivery.

Other challenges to TNE focus on the fees for programmes and the guidelines by the Ministry of Education, most of which are only available in Arabic.

Recommendation 4: Publish official translations of all government guidelines and regulations pertinent to overseas HEIs wiling to engage in TNE partnerships in Egypt.

4.2.2 Local institutions

The criteria Egyptian partners look for in potential UK partners generally include their league tables positions. Most of their go-to agencies are local ones, rather than locally based UK advisors. It was implied that the knowledge of in-country advisors may limit the number of partnerships with appropriate UK HEIs.

Recommendation 5: Encourage Egyptian universities to work closely with the British Council when looking to set up partnerships with UK HEIs.

While some Egyptian interviewees commented positively about specific requirements of the Ministry and Supreme Council for the approval of an IBC or new TNE programme, others indicated that they would like more flexibility. To open an IBC requires seeking permission from various ministries including the Ministry of Higher Education. The cycle of approval for a new programme is said to be identical.

The initial documents for the IBC appeared to only require the title of the programme. However, for the introduction of a new programme, the ministry requires information about why the HEIs want to run the programme, and on the marketplace, resources and required investment of funds. There is an additional need to operate a parallel track with the overseas institution where possible, to avoid delays. The timelines are a challenge, and the process is viewed as bureaucratic and requiring significant groundwork. In the meantime, it is not possible to advertise the new programme to potential students until it is formally approved.

The process for a new programme is estimated to take six to nine months for a decision, leading to the programme approval, or its rejection on the basis of insufficient market demand. There is a danger of second-guessing the Supreme Council, as it may request additional content be added to the curriculum, which may then require a summer school to deliver the additional content. Similarly, the content of a programme is driven by the overseas institution, using its course materials. Those interviewed suggested it would be helpful if programme approval could be prescriptive and streamline the process for new programmes. Interviewees conveyed that they would welcome the ability to agree on programme changes with a partner, without the need to seek ministerial approval.

Recommendation 6: Review the process for approval or changes to academic programmes.

Most professional qualifications require syndicate recognition. This is particularly relevant to engineers given the legal liability they hold as part of their professional practice. If their programme is not currently recognised based on its duration (e.g., three years for UK first-degree programmes), then UK undergraduate programmes will require additional modules, to allow their graduates to become members of the engineering syndicate. This is similar for other regulated professions like law and medicine. This generally relates to undergraduate programmes rather than postgraduate; however, some noted potential challenges relating to the one-year duration of UK masters' programmes compared with two years in Egypt.

There is a perception by local interviewees that if the Supreme Council were to accept UK degrees as equivalent to Egyptian degrees, this would be immediately acceptable to the syndicates. Previously, an institution needed to have graduated a cohort before the Supreme Council could confirm degree equivalency. At present, as part of the IBC law, an IBC can gain approval after the first year of operation. Therefore, in theory, the equivalency process will be complete before the first cohort of students graduate. However, this is not fully understood. Students' parents have also raised concerns, asking IBCs whether they will be getting Egyptian accreditation or equivalence from the Supreme Council of Universities.

A few local interviewees felt degree recognition was not an issue, and they found the ministry to be supportive. Others suggested that it would be helpful to have an alignment between professional qualification agencies in the two countries. For example, the syndicate of engineers in Egypt could work with the equivalent body in the UK to allow graduates to be recognised by the Supreme Council and registered automatically with the syndicate. (**See Recommendation 2.**)

Some students have sought to transfer from an IBC to another university, and questions are asked about equivalency in credit hours and pass marks (which are 40 per cent at IBCs and 60 per cent at an Egyptian university).

Recommendation 7: Work with the regulatory bodies to better articulate the differences in programme comparability.

It was suggested that an alignment of quality assurance systems, processes and procedures across the TNE partnership would be helpful. The interviewees go on to request the UK government's help to adjudicate more in-depth discussions with the National Quality Assurance Agency in Egypt to identify examples of good practice. It would be helpful if they could use the outcomes of Egyptian quality assurance mechanisms, rather than following both the UK and NAQAEE processes and procedures.

Recommendation 8: National agencies identify and communicate case studies of best practice.

4.2.3 National-level stakeholders (government; regulatory bodies; professional associations)

The main challenges to establishing TNE dual and joint awards are around how to navigate the process of partnering with a local university. From the UK side, this mostly concerns clarity and understanding compliance with the legal frameworks in place.

(See **Recommendation 1**).

The UK and Egyptian sides of the partnership bring different challenges. From the Egyptian side, many enquiries relating to establishing partnerships with UK HEIs, come from faculty-level staff. While this signals demand for collaboration with the UK, the challenge is to understand the seniority of these staff and their ability to mobilise institutional support for the partnership if it is to go ahead.

The issue is often linked to staff with limited knowledge about the country, the system, the market and the institutions, who often lack executive authority. On both sides, this has often resulted in a perception of the respective HEIs not knowing how to engage.

Recommendation 9: HEIs in both countries adopt a more centralised approach to partnership requests.

As with previous responses, national-level stakeholder interviewers agreed that one of the main concerns from the UK side is quality assurance, and noted that while it does not have to be comparable, it does have to be appropriate. They also mentioned a lack of understanding of the recognition of qualifications. They further commented on the slow response of the UK universities and how it can take two to three years to complete due diligence approval processes.

Interviewees mentioned student visas challenge for those TNE models that include a semester abroad.

4.3 Soft challenges: perceptions by stakeholder groups

4.3.1 UK HEIs' perceptions

One of the UK institutional interviewees expressed some reservations about infrastructure to support TNE. It was suggested that some HEIs were not familiar with preparing for massive growth in student numbers and the facilities they might need to have a place.

Recommendation 10: Ensure resources are part of the due diligence process.

UK HEIs were aware of the various cultural and attitudinal differences that could potentially hinder collaborations.

Recommendation 11: Develop courses on multicultural awareness for TNE staff.

Interviewees conveyed a perception that UK HEIs can be overly optimistic about student demand and revenue. Often these expectations are not realised. The initial investment of time, building a working relationship with the partner, performing due diligence and having more modest expectations each play an important role in making an informed decision. If a partnership does not materialise as expected and the UK university chooses to withdraw, that will impact future UK universities wishing to enter the market. UK HEIs are autonomous; however, decisions to withdraw at a late stage have a far-reaching effect across the Egyptian higher education sector. The impact they can have on their counterparts cannot be underestimated.

Recommendation 12: UK Government and national agencies to present a coherent view of UK TNE. This may include a clear articulation of value that TNE partnerships bring to the local higher education system, its institutions and students.

4.3.2 Local institutions

The local HEIs spoke positively about the soft barriers to TNE and their partnerships. They explained that TNE improves the understanding of the world on both sides of the partnership and there are gains for everyone involved. There are significant benefits related to institutional internationalisation, and to the alignment of the Egyptian higher education system with those of the UK and the rest of the world.

4.3.3 National-level stakeholders (government, regulatory bodies, professional associations)

Communication between partners can be difficult to initiate, with some HEIs having limited capacity to respond partnership requests and enquiries.

The ministry's current policy focus is IBCs; therefore, interviewees experienced challenges in gaining support for other forms of TNE partnerships. (See **Recommendation 12**.)

Egyptian HEIs have preferences for top-ranked UK HEIs in TNE partnerships. This perception that top-ranked HEIs are better TNE partners necessitates the navigation of the wide-ranging Egyptian higher education sector to identify partners that do not hold that view. (See **Recommendation 5**.)

Although there is communication between the various UK agencies, the British Council, Universities UK International, the Department for International Trade and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, their remit and support for the development of TNE partnerships are less clear. (**Recommendation 12**.)

5. Summary of recommendations

The report details the wide range of challenges UK and Egyptian HEIs experience when they develop TNE partnerships. While the challenges identified in this report do not present a complete list, we have attempted to identify recommendations and considerations that need to be accounted for to better support TNE engagement between the two nations.

In summary, the following recommendations are made to UK and Egyptian HEIs and policymakers in the two countries.

Recommendations for UK HEIs:

- Develop a greater understanding of the programme approval process in Egypt.

- Produce a guide for programmes leading to regulated professions' qualifications and the respective approval processes.

- Conduct thorough research into the market entry requirements and associated costs, and perform an assessment of the feasibility of fee levels in the location of TNE delivery.

- Publish official translations of all government guidelines and regulations pertinent to overseas HEIs willing to engage in TNE partnerships in Egypt.

- Ensure resources are part of the due diligence process.

- Develop courses on multicultural awareness for TNE staff.

Recommendations for Egyptian HEIs:

- Work closely with the British Council when looking to set up partnerships with UK HEIs.

- Review the process for approval or changes to academic programmes.

- Work with the regulatory bodies to better articulate degree equivalencies.

Policy considerations:

- Review the process for approval and changes to new programme offered in Egypt. Streamlining these will allow for greater flexibility in the TNE providers' subject portfolio and greater responsiveness to employers' needs.

- National agencies and regulators to identify and communicate best practices in TNE.

- Regulatory bodies in the two countries to work towards recognition of degrees and qualifications. The regulated professions can be part of such agreement.

- National agencies to identify and communicate case studies of best practice.

- UK government and national agencies to present a coherent view of the UK TNE. This may include a clear articulation of value that TNE partnerships bring to the local higher education system, its institutions and students.

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Annexe

The role of NAQAAE and the process of local accreditation

The Ministry of Higher Education operates through the Supreme Council of Public Universities, the Supreme Council of Private Universities, the Supreme Council of Higher Institutes, and the Supreme Council of Al-Azhar —bodies that coordinate policies between institutions, provide quality control, and approve new HEIs and programs, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3
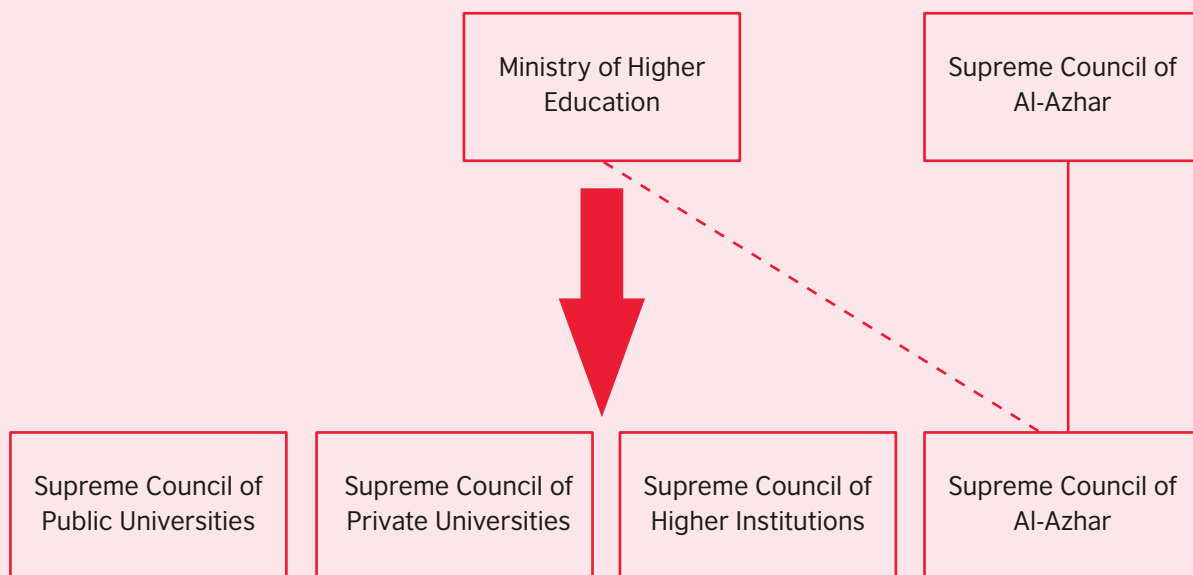
Source: 32. Samy and Elshayeb, Y. (2017) Overview of the Higher Education System in Egypt.

If an institution wishes to be accredited, which is optional, it must be licensed by the Ministry of Higher Education which requires the following: (i) the HEI must have awarded an academic degree in one of the educational programmes at least once; (ii) demonstrate that a mission, strategic plans and systems in place for performance improvement, and (iii) provided appropriate university or academic affiliations.[34] The NAQAAE website provides details of the documents required, application fees and the procedures that need to be followed.[35] The NAQAAE institutional Guide provides a detailed description of the process, criteria and outcomes. The outcome of the accreditation process undertaken by NAQAAE is based on the recommendation of the auditors' team in the external audit report.

NAQAAE will then inform the educational institution of the decision to either grant accreditation, if the institution meets the accreditation standards, or postpone the decision. Certificates are awarded to institutions that meet the requirements of the National Authority for Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation and are valid for five years. During the five years, the institution is subject to periodical monitoring and revisions through the annual self-reporting submission and visits made by the NAQAAE or authorised personnel. If the monitoring inspection fails to meet the conditions set for accreditation, then the board of directors of the National Authority for Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation can suspend the accreditation certificate for a period of time or revoke the certificate.

NAQAAE has a range of international collaborations. The current President of NAQAAE is a board member of the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE). Also, NAQAAE holds full membership of the International Network for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education (INQAAHE)[36] and there is also a Memorandum of Understanding between NAQAAE and the Accreditation Board of Engineering (ABET).[37] In December 2020, NAQAEE signed a Memorandum of Understanding with ECCTIS (former UK NARIC) to facilitate collaboration between the two parties in the areas of Quality Assurance and Recognition of Qualifications.[38] The President of the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education in Egypt has more recently been appointed as an international quality assurance expert to the QAA International Quality Review (IQR) Accreditation Panel.[39]

Egypt is one of the first countries to participate in the UK QAA's Quality Enhancement and Evaluation of UK Transnational Education (QE-TNE) Scheme, which was jointly commissioned by the Universities UK International (UUKi) and GuildHE to enhance the quality of TNE provision.[40] The scheme applies to all UK degree-awarding bodies on a voluntary basis over the academic years 2021-22 to 2025-26. The President of the NAQAAE, Youhansen Eid, has also expressed her support saying

> *'NAQAAE strongly supports the QE-TNE scheme, acknowledging that it will add to the quality of UK-TNE provided in Egypt. This will help to develop a quality enhanced environment that will be in the best interests of the most important stakeholder, the student, as well as the entire Egyptian Higher Education system.'* [41] (48).

34 https://naqaae.eg/en/higher_education/publications_templates

35 https://admin.naqaae.eg/api/v1/archive/download/8462

36 https://www.inqaahe.org/full-members-list

37 https://www.abet.org/global-presence/memoranda-of-understanding/

38 https://www.ecctis.com/Documents/MoU/MOU%20_%20NAQAAE-Egypt-104120130-0001.pdf

39 https://www.qaa.ac.uk/news-events/news/international-quality-experts-appointed-to-qaa-international-accreditation-panel

40 https://www.qaa.ac.uk/international/transnational-education/quality-evaluation-and-enhancement-of-uk-tne

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The NAQAAE website contains a handbook and templates associated with the Assessment and Accreditation of Educational Programmes in Higher Education Institutions, however, this particular handbook is currently in Arabic (49). The NAQAAE website further contains a set of discipline-based National Academic Standards (NARS), to serve as an external reference for designing and upgrading the undergraduate educational program (49). These standards represent the minimum academic quality requirements, which NAQAAE & the relevant stakeholders regard as necessary and appropriate to protect the interests of the students, and the community at large (49). The majority of the thirty-two NARS are in Arabic, with seven subjects associated with medicine, Nursing, Dentistry, Pharmacy, computer science, and Engineering found to be in English.

If the respective TNE degrees are delivered in partnership with an Egyptian university or through an International Branch Campus, then NAQAAE criteria for degree accreditation would apply. The QE-TNE Scheme introduced in 2020, applies to all UK degree-awarding bodies on a voluntary basis, with Egypt set to be in the first round of scrutiny for the academic years 2021-22 (50). Fundamental to this new approach is a collaboration between QAA and local higher education bodies, which in this case will be NAQAEE, to build and deepen mutual understanding, cooperation, and trust (50). NAQAAE has also recently signed an agreement with UK-NARIC, with the expectation that the collaboration with a focus on the review of HEIs offering Transnational education in Egypt and possibly beyond.

Acknowledgements