



Operationalising the Tokyo and Global Conventions on Higher Education: National Qualifications Framework and Foreign Credentials Evaluation – the case of Japan

3rd Session, Asia-Pacific Capacity-Building Webinar Series on UNESCO's Global and Regional Recognition Conventions

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Part I

Recent developments of recognition of foreign credentials and micro-credential in Japan

Necessity of Authentication and Verification

1. A diploma mill is a fraudulent entity that issues credentials not backed by appropriate academic work.
2. An accreditation mill is an illegitimate entity that provides “accreditation” to fraudulent education institutions – diploma mills.

Necessity of Fair Recognition

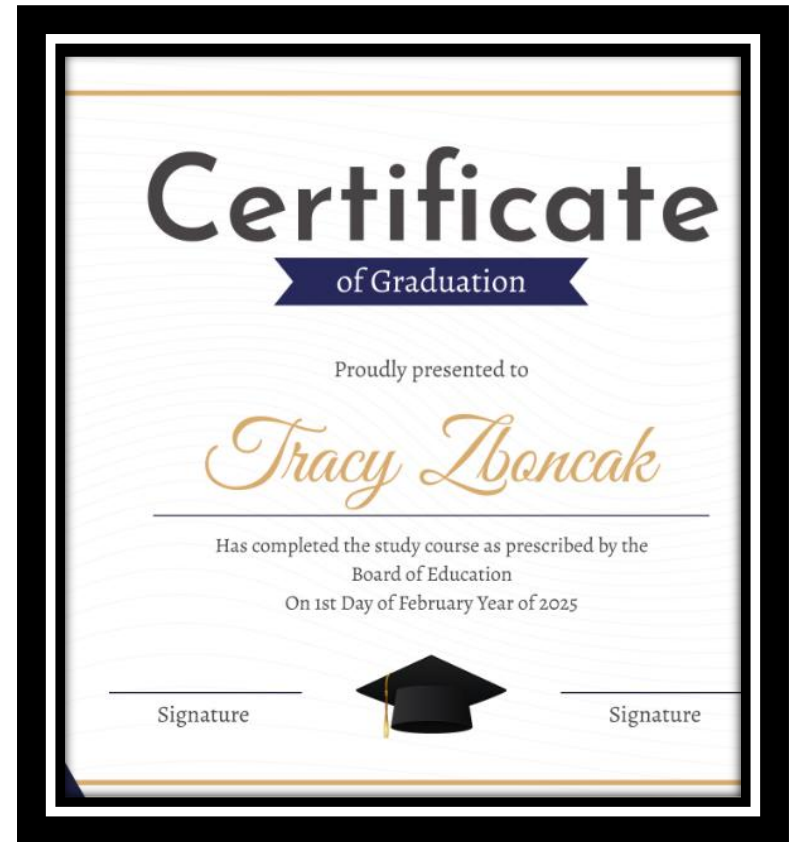
1. Equivalency Consideration: curriculum, program length, qualification.
2. Criteria of Recognition: Accreditation and other requirement for educational entities

How do you recognize foreign credentials?

- Authenticity?
- Level? Equivalency? Workload?
- Substantial Difference?



National Qualifications Framework
Regional Convention and Global
Convention (UNESCO)



Why Japan ratified the conventions?

Tokyo Convention

Japan ratified on **6th December 2017**,
as the 4th country to join

Background (around 2016) :

- Japan had launched “300,000 Int’l Students plan” to be achieved by 2020.
- Expectations were high for ratification to enhance dissemination of information on Japanese higher education system, which would promote incoming of int’l students and outgoing of Japanese students

Global Convention

Japan ratified on **13th September 2022**,
as the 17th country to join

Background (around 2022) :

- Accepting 300,000 Int’l students was achieved in 2019, but COVID struck
- Japan had actively participated in the Tokyo Convention/ drafting of Global c.
- Aspiration to participate in initial discussions by the intergovernmental committee for Global convention



Rationale for ratification

Benefits for STUDENTS:

- ✓ Maximize opportunities for access to HE

Benefits for JAPAN:

- ✓ Increased mobility of international students to Japan
- ✓ Enhanced mobility of Japanese students to go study abroad
- ✓ Global presentation of Japan’s eagerness to internationalize HE

Key Issues and Challenges for Japan

NQF

Recognition of
Partial Study

Prior Learning

Substantial
Difference



National Information Center for Academic Recognition Japan (NIC-Japan) was established in 2018.

Micro-Credential Initiatives in Japan

Regarding the establishment of the Micro-credential Joint Working Group

(Click here for Japanese translation)

Micro-credential Joint Working Group

August 18, 2023

Japan Forum for Internationalization of Universities

Japan Virtual Campus Management Committee

Japan Massive Open Online Education Promotion Council

Published a Micro-credential framework in April 2024.

Regarding the establishment of the Micro-credential Joint Working Group

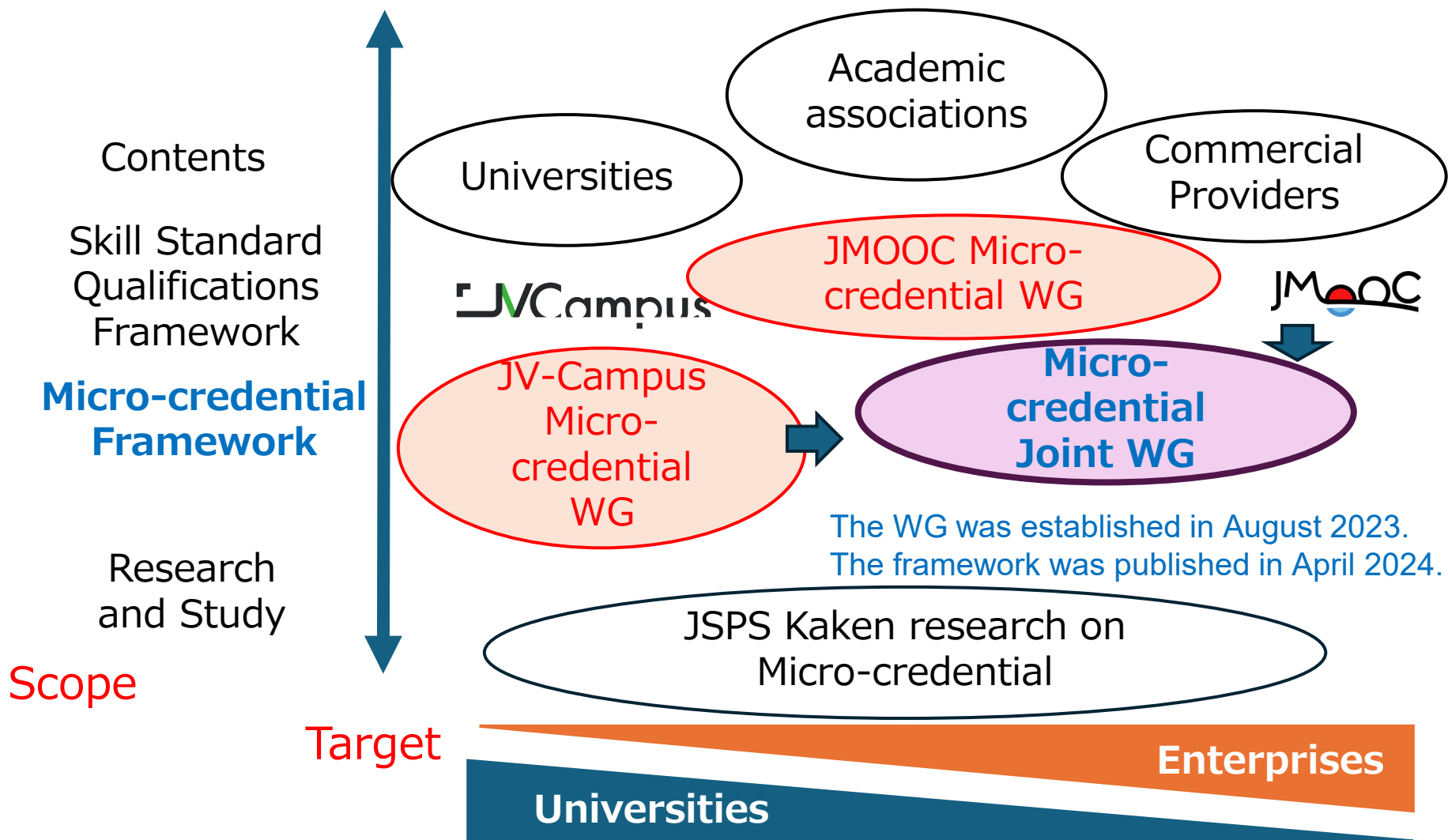
The Japan Forum for Internationalization of Universities, the Japan Virtual Campus Steering Committee (JV-Campus), and the Japan Massive Open Online Education Promotion Council (JMOOC) formed the Micro-credential Joint Working Group on August 18, 2023.

With the global development of the online learning environment, it is becoming possible for learners to freely select content and study without being constrained by time and space. In order to do so, it is necessary to clearly indicate the learning purpose, contents, and completion conditions of learning content, as well as quality assurance.

Micro-credential is a focused record of learning outcomes that proves what a learner knows, understands, or can do. Their learning achievements are assessed based on clearly defined standards, ensuring the quality of their education.

Through the activities of the Micro-credential Joint Working Group, the Japan Forum for Internationalization of Universities, JV-Campus, and JMOOC will promote the production and provision of Micro-credentials, as well as develop and collaborate on operational platforms, and

Micro-Credential Initiatives in Japan



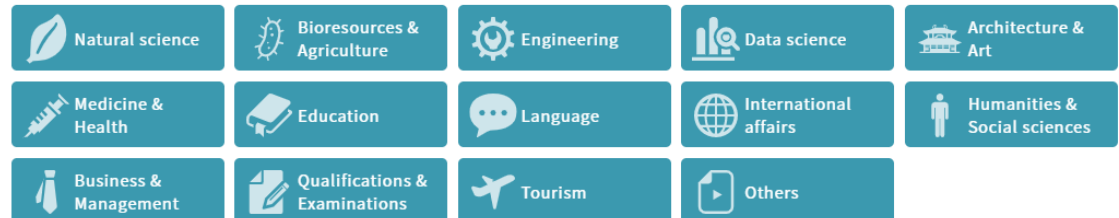
Japan Virtual Campus

Online International Education Platform

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has developed a new platform as part of its Top Global University Project (TGUP), designed to promote Japan's international education and exchange through the use of online education.



Search by category



Search by content type



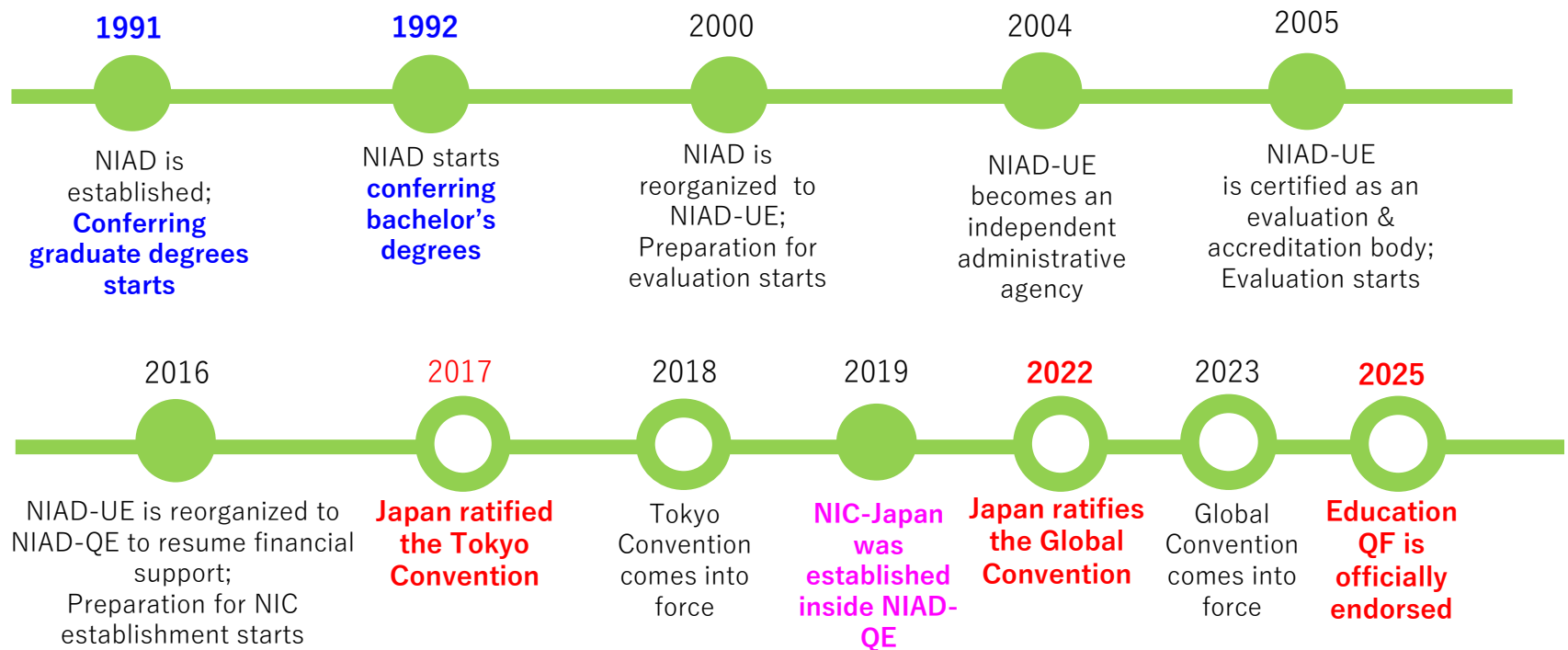
<https://www.jv-campus.org/en/providers/>

Part II

Introduction of NIC-Japan & Current Situations of FCE in Japanese Higher Education

Development of NIC-Japan (National Information Center for Academic Recognition Japan)

Background: Timeline



Background: NIC-Japan

NIC-Japan is not a Competent Recognition Authority of all Japanese higher education institutions (HEIs).

3,817 : 1 as of 2024

**813 universities
297 junior colleges
58 colleges of technology (KOSEN)
2,643 professional training colleges
3 academies
3 ministries**

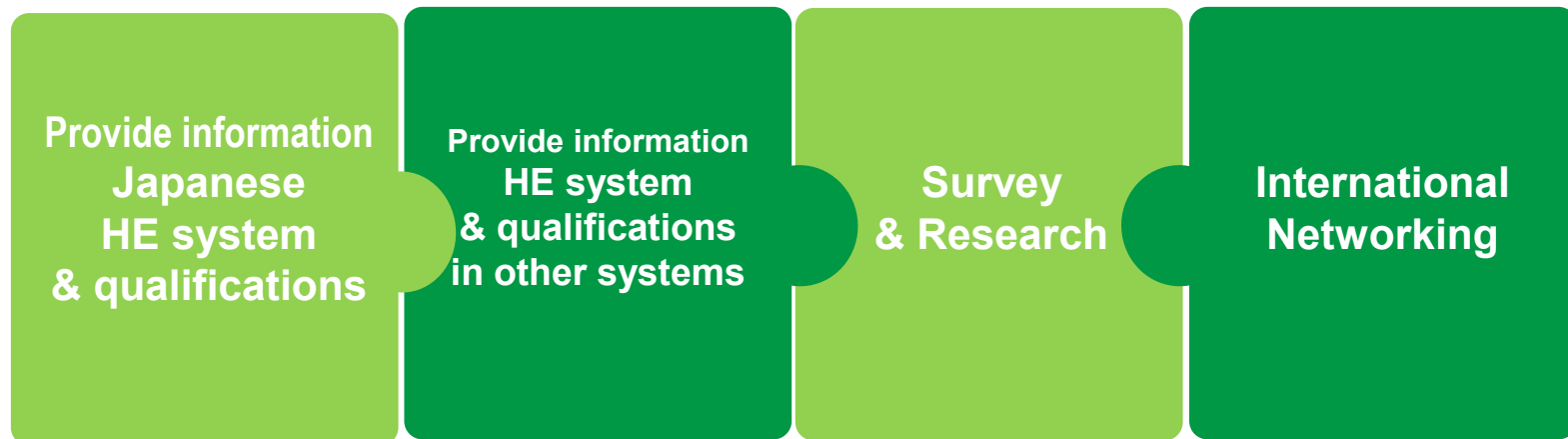
Competent Recognition Authorities

NIC-Japan

**Something not a
competent
recognition
authority**

Implementation: overview

- NIC-Japan does help competent recognition authorities **by providing information on FCE** (foreign credential evaluation) inward and outward.
- NIC-Japan **does not issue any legally binding recommendations/decisions** for FCE.
- NIC-Japan does have 15 staff members. Out of them, **6 are exclusively working on the NIC-Japan** responsibility on a daily basis.



1. Does a higher education system ratify both the Tokyo and the Global Conventions?

NIC-Japan was launched in 2019 under the Tokyo Convention and experienced the commencement of the Global Convention in 2023.

NIC-Japan has not perceived any significant impact from the Global Convention in its daily operations.

Since its launch, NIC-Japan has strived to respond to all inquiries in a helpful manner, regardless of participation in the Convention.

2. Who will be the Competent Recognition Authority?

The implication under Question 1 is possible because NIC-Japan is not a competent recognition authority.

Otherwise, NIC-Japan's operations would have been significantly different.

Under both conventions, NIC-Japan's primary mission is to provide information enabling fair judgments by competent recognition authorities, such as universities.

Survey on the current status of foreign-credential-evaluation (FCE) practice at HEIs in Japan

Researchers:

- ❖ **Rie Mori**, Professor, National Institution for Academic Degrees and Quality Enhancement of Higher Education (NIAD-QE); Executive Director, National Information Center for Academic Recognition Japan (NIC-Japan)
- ❖ **Taiji Hotta**, Visiting Professor, NIAD-QE; Senior Adviser, NIC-Japan

Objective:

- ◆ The study aims to investigate the actual condition of how Japanese universities handle the FCE of their international applicants.

Method:

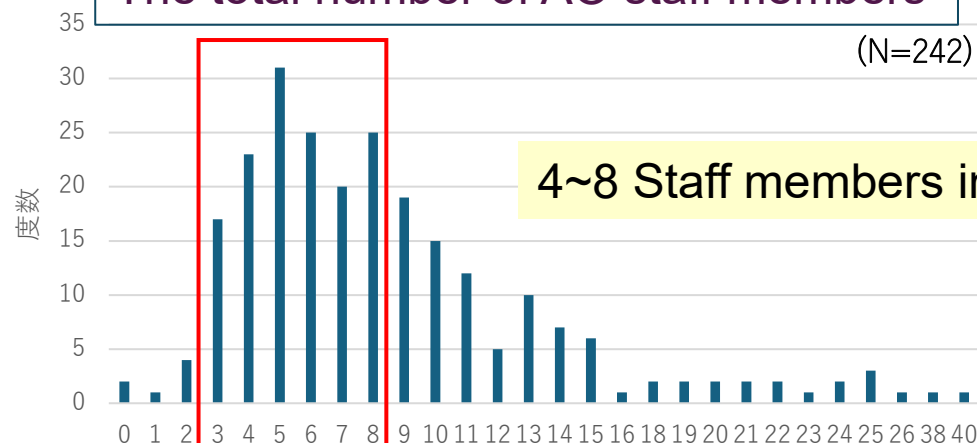
- ◆ Questionnaire survey with at most 44 items with Google Form.
- ◆ Distributed via e-mail directly to each respondent.
- ◆ Survey was conducted between August 26 and September 20, 2024

Sample:

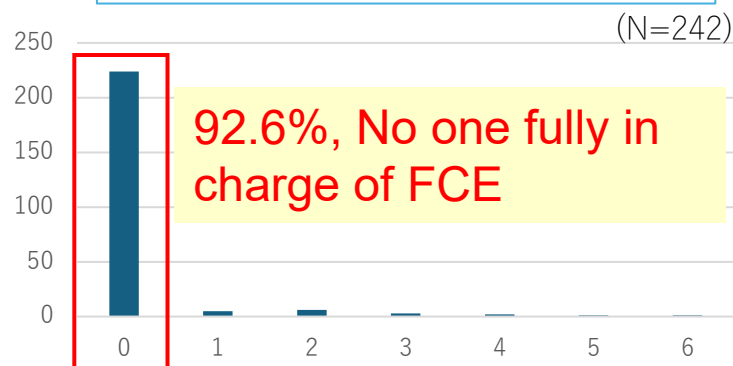
- ◆ Sent to 1303 admission offices (hereafter AOs) of Japanese universities
- ◆ 242 offices responded to the survey. (18.6% response rate)

A Severe Lack of FCE Professionals

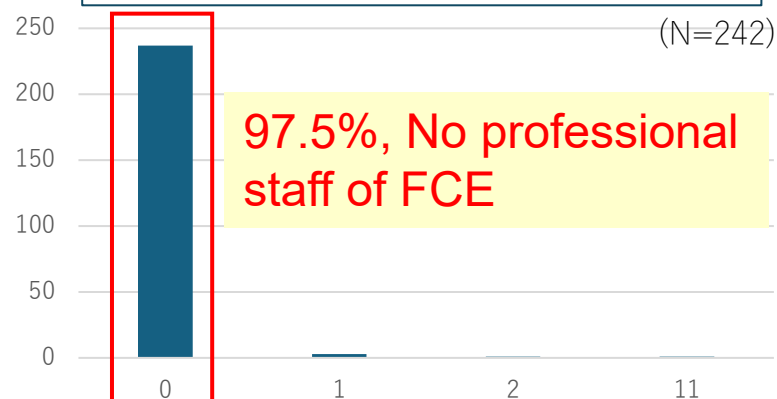
The total number of AO staff members



Staff handling only FCE



Professional staff of FCE



Level of Professionalism (A Comparative Perspective)

A Total Number of AO Staff Fully In Charge of FCE

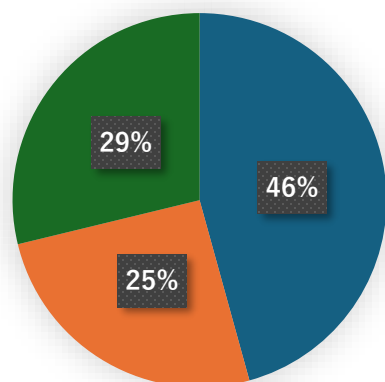
(N=242)

# of Staff	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
National-U	56	1	2	0	0	0	0	59
Public-U	31	0	0	0	1	0	0	32
Private-U	136	4	4	3	1	1	1	150
Open Univ	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	224	5	6	3	2	1	1	242

❑ Those who work solely on FCE tend to **work in private universities. (14/18 offices)**

❑ **Only 5** offices have professional staff of FCE (From other source of data)

Duration of Work Experiences (all staff of AO)



(n=792 responses on Multiple Answers)

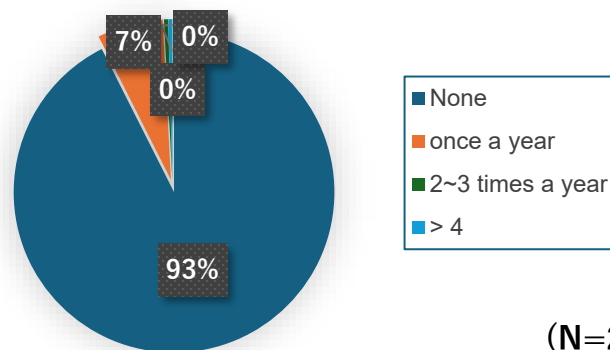
- 1~2 years
- 3-4 years
- 5 or above

(Mostly 1~2 staff at all levels)

- ❑ 1~2 years: 77% (of 242 offices)
- ❑ 3~4 years: 50%
- ❑ 5 or above: 50%

A Severe Lack of Training for Admission Officers

Attending Training Workshops

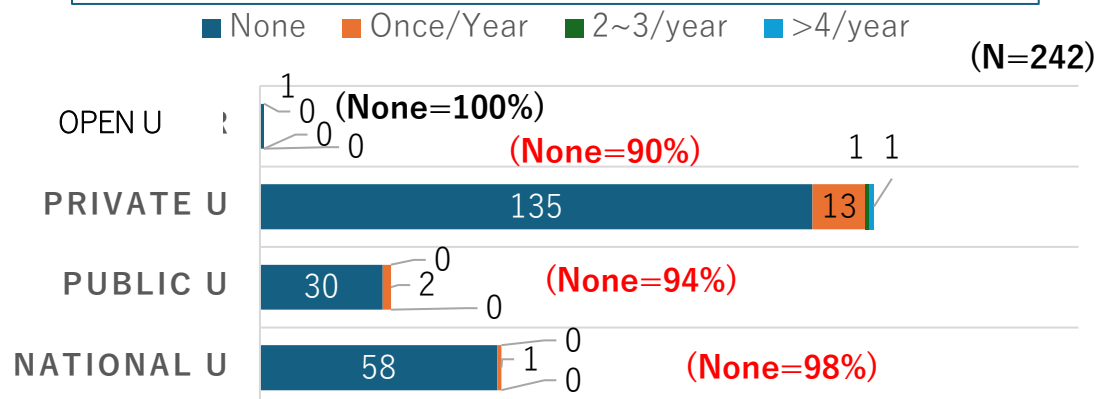


(N=242)

❑ The majority (93%) of AO staff **DO NOT** receive any training.

❑ Private universities give slightly more chance for staff to attend the training workshops than public and national universities.

Comparison of three types of universities



Duration and Busy Time of Handling FCE in Japan

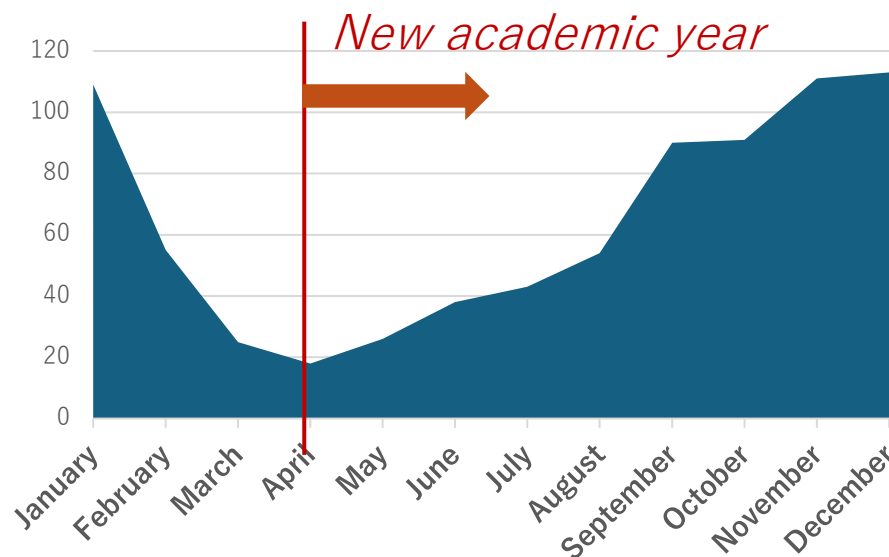
- ❑ While the majority complete each case of FCE within one day, about 50 offices tend to spend one week or more per case of FCE.
- ❑ It appears that most of the FCE process is done towards a general academic year starting in April.

Average processing time of FCE per case

Required time per case	# of Univ
< One day	2
One day	117
Two days	17
3 days	25
4-6days	13
One week	23
> One week(8~90 days)	29
ZERO (No handling)	7

(N=242 universities)

Busy months for FCE per year

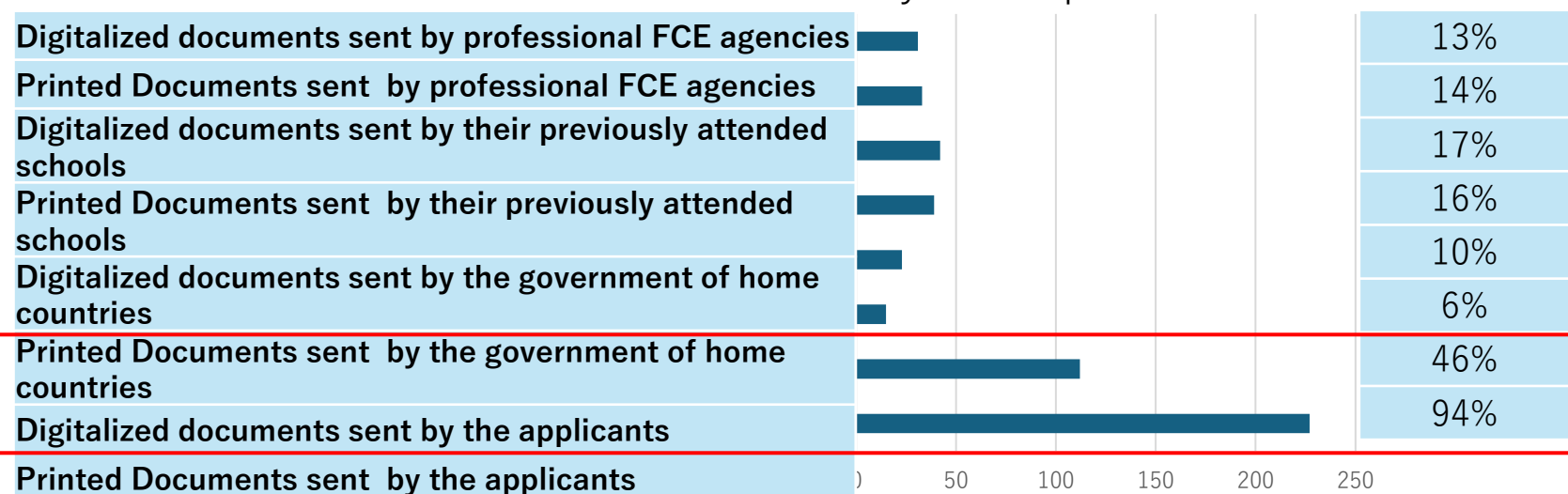


How to Handle FCE of International Applicants

- ❑ Japanese universities still heavily depend on paper-based or (we assume) self-made PDF documents sent by the applicants. (94%)

What kinds of documents do you accept for FCE?

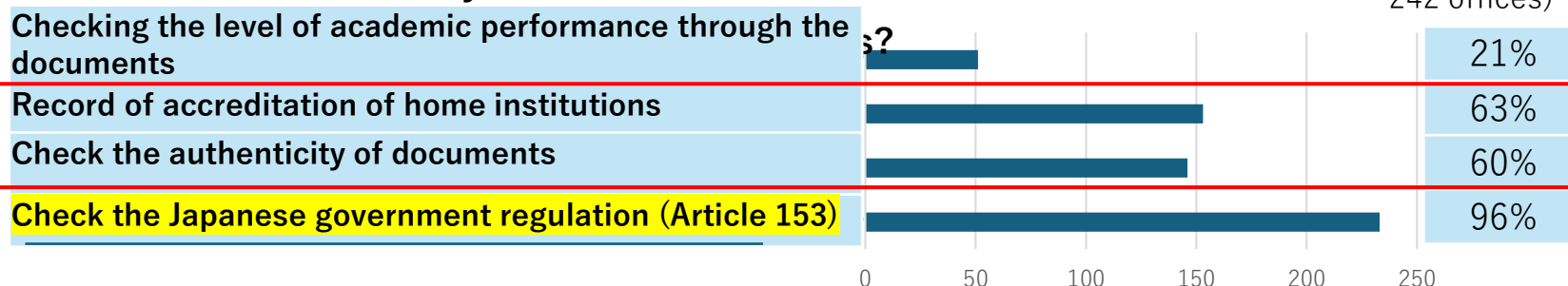
(# of responses from 242 offices)



Confirmation of Authenticity with “Original Printed Document”

What do you check with the documents of international

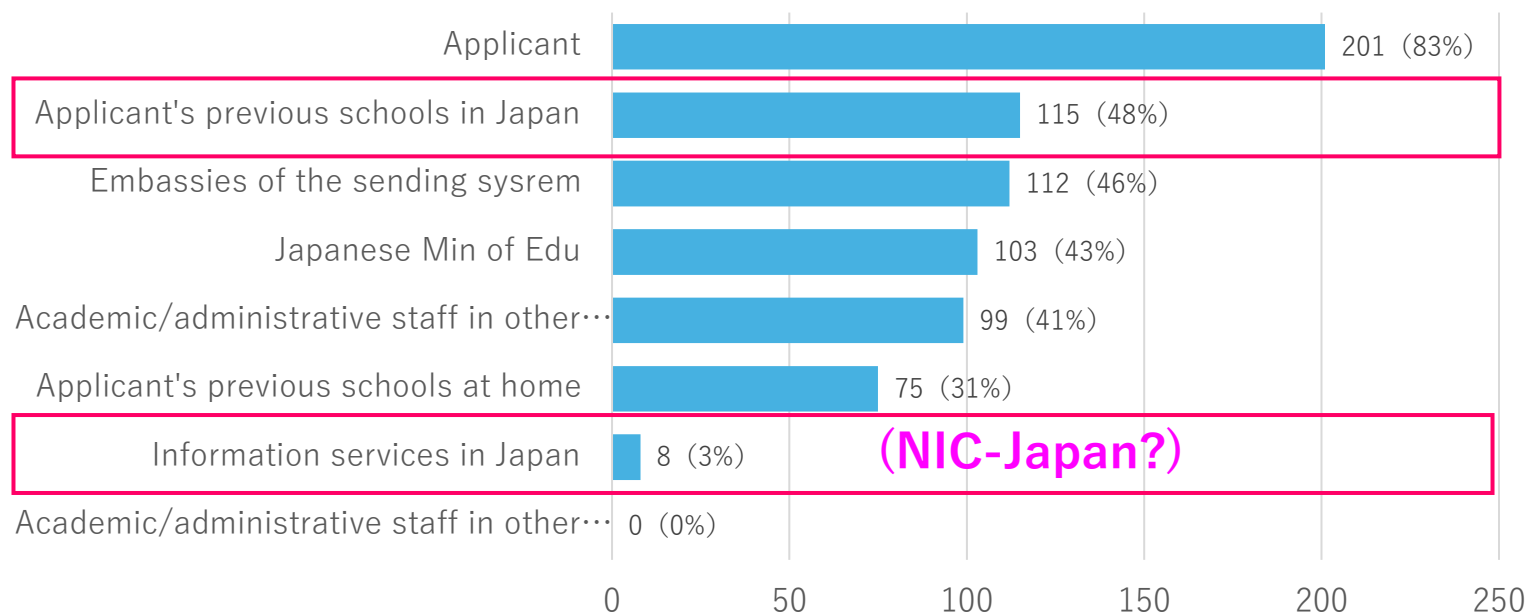
(# of responses from 242 offices)



About 145 offices (60%) check the authenticity of documents submitted to them. Out of that, 88 offices described as follows:

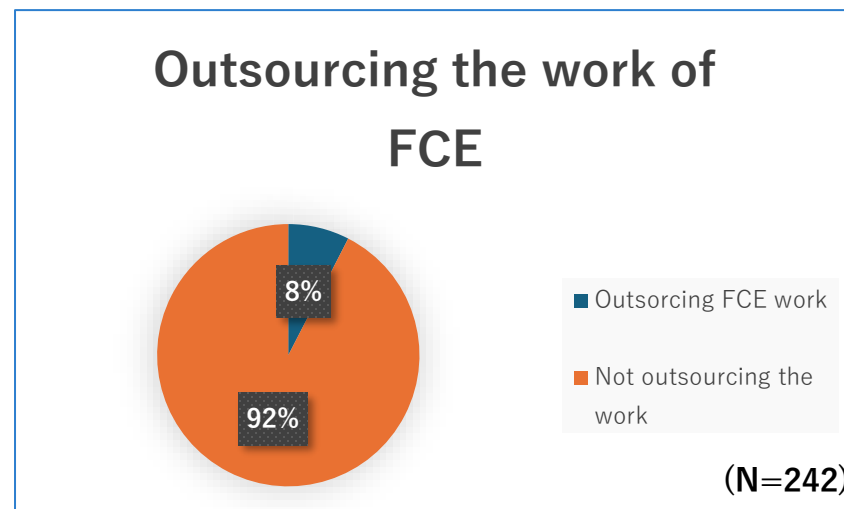
- ☐ Check “Original (printed) document” (sealed, officially signed, type of paper, no discrepancy with passport and other documents)
- ☐ Ask for **officially issued supporting documents** from the Auditor, Embassy, **Home institution**, (and **Japanese language school**)
- ☐ Contact the **home institution directly**
- ☐ Checking **the existence of the home institution** through the **internet (homepage)**

Information Sources (supplemental) (N=242)



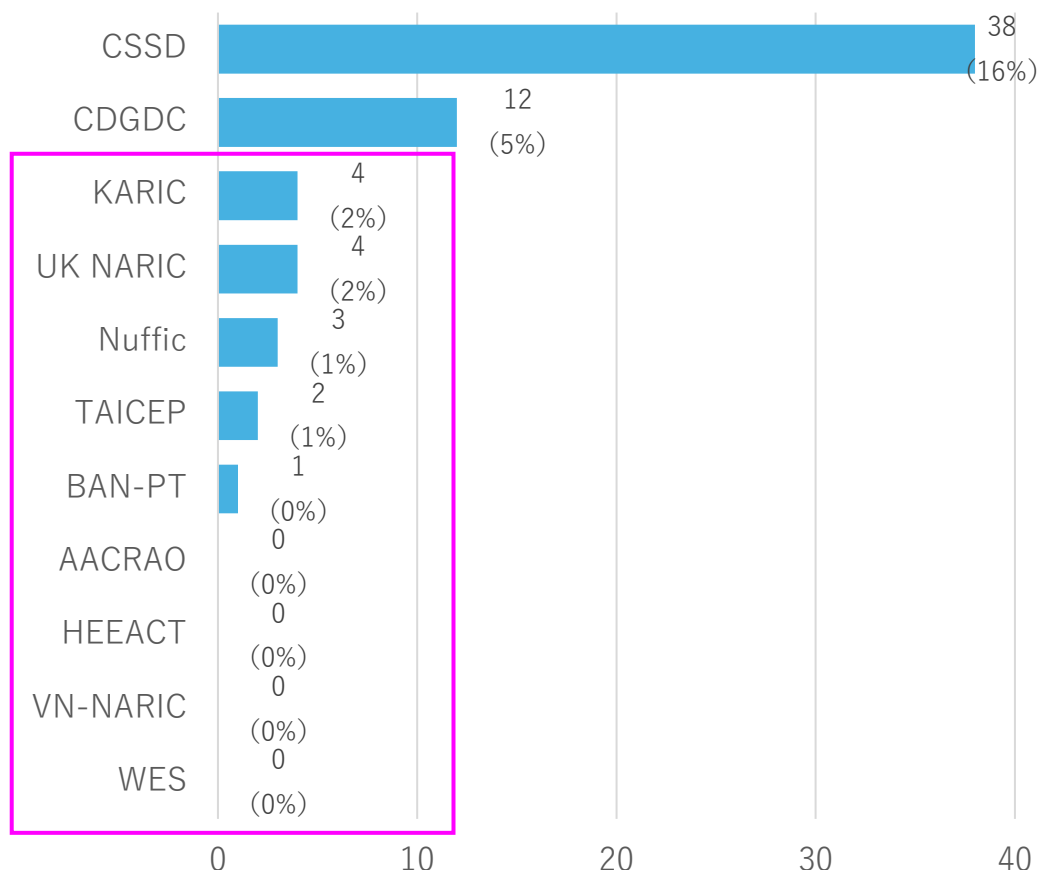
The majority of admission offices request supplemental information from the applicants themselves.

Information services/shared endeavors are playing minor roles.



- ❑ 17 offices (8%) said “yes” to outsourcing some of their work. Most of those institutions tend to outsource the initial stage of their screening process (confirmation of authenticity) with application documents.

Information Sources (international orgs) (N=242)



Chinese information centers are in relatively frequent use. The majority of admission offices do not contact international organizations that support FCEs.

There is a possibility that the FCE in Japan is heavily dependent on the institution's own judgment.

Note: Today, UK-NARIC became UK-ENIC, managed by Ecctis, the UK national agency.

Difficulties Related to Submitted Documents

How often does the admission office face difficulties in evaluating individual documents? (N=242)

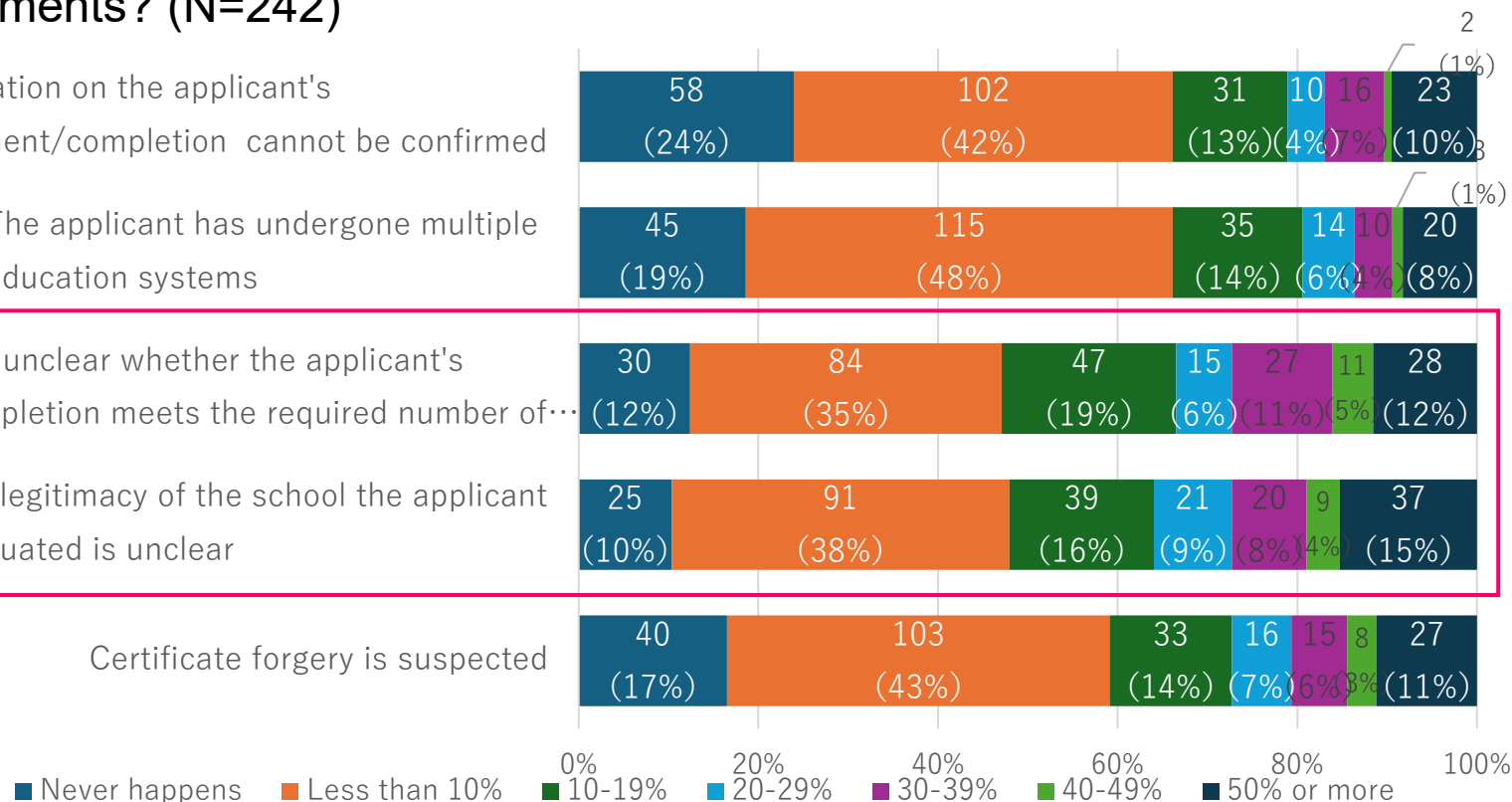
Information on the applicant's enrollment/completion cannot be confirmed

The applicant has undergone multiple education systems

It is unclear whether the applicant's completion meets the required number of...

The legitimacy of the school the applicant graduated is unclear

Certificate forgery is suspected



Contents of submitted documents are highly trusted.

- By and large, regular admission officers in Japanese universities do both domestic and international admissions without any additional professional foreign credential evaluator or any initial training on FCE.
- The majority of AO officers **do not outsource** their FCE work or use the information from agencies or organizations (except Chinese ones).
- The Japanese AOs strongly demand (1) the appropriate **official training, especially for newly assigned AO staff members**, and (2) **Professional foreign credential evaluators**.

**A New Action and Recommendations
from NIC-Japan,
based on the findings from the Survey**

- **NIC-Japan offered the 1st FCE Training Workshop for Japanese HEIs and other organizations for the first time on September 26th in 2025.**
- **There were 35 participants at the workshop room and over 280 participants online.**



- It was worthwhile for NIC-Japan to learn the reality of FCE in Japanese higher education by conducting a national survey in 2024. As a result, we could develop our first time FCE workshop in 2025.

(Recommendation) Other newly established NICs in APNNIC may also try a similar type of survey for their own HEIs.

- The utilization rate of information provided by NICs and other agencies in Japan and abroad was very low, except for Chinese governmental agencies.

(Recommendation) We need to encourage HEIs to use NICs in APNNIC and also other agencies, e.g. UK-ENIC (Ecctis) and TALCEP (The Association of International Credential Evaluation Professionals)

Part III

Development of Qualifications Framework by NIAD-QE

Japanese Educational Qualifications Framework (JEQF)

レベル	教育資格
8	博士
7	修士 修士（専門職） 教職修士（専門職） 法務博士（専門職） 学士（医学、歯学、薬学（臨床目的）、獣医学）
6	学士 一 認定専攻科における単位修得に基づき NIAD-QE が授与するものを含む（*1） ・短期大学 ・高等専門学校 学士（専門職） 高度専門士（*2）
5	短期大学士 短期大学士（専門職） 準学士 専門士
4	専攻科 2 年制以上修了証書 ・高等学校 ・中等教育学校後期課程 ・特別支援学校高等部 専修学校専門課程 1 年制修了証書 専攻科 1 年制修了証書 ・高等学校 ・中等教育学校後期課程 ・特別支援学校高等部
3	卒業証書 ・高等学校 ・中等教育学校 ・特別支援学校高等部 ・専修学校高等課程 高等専門学校 3 年次修了証書 高等学校卒業程度認定試験合格証書
2	卒業証書 ・中学校 ・義務教育学校 ・特別支援学校中部 中学校卒業程度認定試験合格証書
1	卒業証書 ・小学校 ・特別支援学校小学部

（*1） NIAD-QE が行う審査に合格した者のみ学士が得られる
（*2） 文部科学大臣認定を受けた課程の修了者は大学院入学資格が得られる
（*3） 大学、専門職大学、短期大学、専門職短期大学、高等専門学校には認証評価の受審義務がある

LEVEL	QUALIFICATIONS
8	Doctoral degree [Hakushi]
7	Master's degree [Shushi] Master of xxx (Professional) [Shushi (Senmonshoku)] Master of Education (Professional) [Kyoshoku shushi] Juris Doctor [Homu hakushi (Senmonshoku)] Bachelor's degree (Medical, Dentistry, Pharmaceutical Sciences (Clinical), and Veterinary Medical Science) [Gakushi (Igaku, Shigaku, Yakugaku, Juigaku)]
6	Bachelor's degree [Gakushi] -includes those of NIAD-QE based on credit accumulation at recognized advanced courses [senkoka] at (*1) ・Junior College ・College of Technology (KOSEN) Bachelor's degree (Professional) [Gakushi (Senmonshoku)] Advanced diploma [Kodo-senmonshi] (*2)
5	Associate degree [Tanki-daigakushi] Associate [Jun-gakushi] (*3) Associate degree (Professional) [Tanki-daigakushi (Senmonshoku)] Diploma [Senmonshi] Certificate of Completion of two or more year advanced course [senkoka] in: ・Upper secondary school ・Upper division, secondary education school ・Upper secondary department, school for special needs education
4	Certificate of Completion of one year course in professional training college Certificate of Completion of one year advanced course [senkoka] in: ・Upper secondary school ・Upper division, secondary education school ・Upper secondary department, school for special needs education
3	Certificate of Graduation ・Upper secondary school ・Secondary education school ・Upper secondary department, school for special needs education ・Upper secondary course, specialized training college Certificate of Completion of 3rd grade of regular course, College of Technology (KOSEN) Certificate: Upper secondary school equivalency examination
2	Certificate of Graduation ・Lower secondary school ・Compulsory education school ・Lower secondary department, school for special needs education Certificate: Lower secondary school equivalency examination
1	Certificate of Graduation ・Elementary school ・Elementary department, school for special needs education

（*1） Those who have passed the assessment conducted by NIAD-QE can earn Bachelor's degrees.
（*2） Those who have completed the course designated by MEXT are eligible for admission to master's programs.
（*3） Conferred by Colleges of Technology (KOSEN)
（*4） Universities, professional and vocational universities, junior colleges, professional and vocational junior colleges, and Colleges of Technology (KOSEN) must undergo certified evaluation and accreditation (CEA).

<https://niadqe.jp/information/higher-education-degree-2/>

Lessons learned

Essential facts dwell in the details

- The Japanese school system is relatively simple. But important matters follow asterisks: exceptions and historical facts.
- Descriptions explaining articulation from one level to another are also important: currently under development.

The development of QF is also a review of the education system

- It involved reorganizing the qualification structure, which had become complicated by the siloed nature of higher education administration.
- It took a while for the JEQF to be authorized by the government.

Perfection remains elusive

- Authorizing QF means always being prepared to update.
- For information about QF and other Japanese education resources, visit:
<https://www.nicjp.niad.ac.jp/en/>

Thank you very much for your attention!