

UK-Spain Franchise agreements:

Opportunities for British and Spanish Higher Education institutions

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Foreword

This report collates data and discussions from UK universities and Spanish business schools and higher education providers that met at the British Council office in Madrid, Spain, on 19 March 2026. The event was organised to discuss franchise opportunities in Spain and brought together a selected group of institutions with experience or an interest in franchise or validation, with the following objectives:

- A. To highlight the importance of authorisation
- B. To understand the authorisation processes
- C. To identify ways of raising the profile of British-Spanish education provision

Attendees included over 30 participants, including CEOs from various Spanish education institutions and internationalisation leaders from UK universities. This included centres that had successfully achieved authorisation in 2024 and 2025, following the University Law 2021 that regulates the establishment of university qualifications in Spain. The recent increase in authorisations prompted the British Council to organise this meeting.

Spain hosts over 65,000 students attending more than 130 British schools—more than in the rest of the EU combined—and represents an attractive pool of international students from Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and North Africa, with increasing interest from Asia. The country is also home to significant networks of wealthy new residents from countries such as Venezuela and Argentina, many of whom are interested in high-quality higher education qualifications. In addition, Spain is becoming an increasingly attractive destination for students from the LAC region who would traditionally travel to the USA but are now seeking alternative options, particularly prestigious degrees delivered in English or Spanish.

The strong reputation of UK education makes UK franchise programmes a compelling offer for this growing market. However, the current provision remains limited, the authorisation process is complex and not widely understood, and there is no unified, distinctive offer that clearly articulates the unique student experience of combining Spain as a destination with the UK's high-quality education. Nor is there a single, holistic way to access existing programmes under a "UK in Spain" higher education offer. Recognising a current window of opportunity—driven by increasing authorisations and shifting geopolitical dynamics that are boosting market demand—the British Council's Education Team convened this meeting.

It is hoped that this meeting will mark the first step towards the creation of an Alliance of centres offering franchise provision in Spain. Such an Alliance could help drive policy dialogue, share expertise, build a strong "UK in Spain" higher education brand to distinguish itself from competitors, and provide a single point of contact listing all available programmes across Spain, thereby amplifying the impact of individual institutions.

Discussions throughout the day were open and forward-looking, and I was particularly pleased with the agreement to establish a WhatsApp group that could, in due course, evolve into a formal Alliance. I would like to thank all those who contributed to organising the event, particularly Gabriel Arrabal (EADE) and Jorge Ruiz (Association of Business Schools), as well as all the speakers and especially those who have shared their experiences of the authorisation process over the past two years. Finally, I want to thank all participants, whether from Spain or the UK, Inés Teresa Palacio, our report writer, the team at the British Council in Madrid, and the interpreters, whose efforts ensured the smooth running of the event.

Participating institutions:

| Spanish institutions | British institutions |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Asociación Española de Escuelas de Negocios (AEEN) ● EADE Estudios Universitarios ● ISDE ● BSBI ● Barcelona Institute of Arts ● ESIC ● Centro de Enseñanza Superior Cardenal Cisneros ● MSMK ● LABA Valencia ● ESEI ● Instituto Europeo de Diseño (Bilbao, Barcelona & Madrid) ● New Digital Talent University School | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Manchester Metropolitan University ● University of Wales Trinity Saint David ● University of Salford ● Southampton Solent University ● Middlesex University (unable to attend due to fly cancellation) ● University of the Arts London |

Carolina Jiménez,
Head of Education British Council Spain

Executive summary

Five UK universities and twelve Spanish institutions met at the British Council's headquarters in Madrid, Spain, on 19th March 2026 to discuss franchise opportunities and current trends, to understand the authorisation process and to identify ways of raising the profile of British-Spanish education provision. The workshop provided an overview of the latest legislation shaping the Spanish higher education system, the types of institutions operating in Spain, the different types of programmes, quality assurance agencies, and lessons learned by institutions already operating in Spain.

Spain and the UK have historically been very close partners both economically and politically. To formalise and accelerate the collaboration between both governments, a Strategic Bilateral Framework was signed on 3rd September 2025, covering a range of areas, including education. Spain is the fourth largest market in Europe for UK TNE, and there is currently a window of opportunity for British and Spanish institutions to establish new partnerships, thanks to a more favourable political landscape that supports the internationalisation of the Spanish higher education sector, particularly in the regions of Madrid, Catalonia, Valencia and Andalucia. However, the process for authorisation is complex and varies from region to region.

Transnational Education (TNE) refers to “educational programmes in which learners are located in a different country from the country where the awarding institution is based”. There are different types of TNE: validation, franchise, branch campus, distance and online provision, double and multiple degrees, dual programmes, joint PhD supervision and articulation agreements. Our event was held to discuss, understand and promote franchise agreements in particular, as these require a complex authorisation process.

When TNE agreement contracts are signed between degree-awarding universities in Spain and the UK, offering dual, joint or double degrees, there is no need to apply for authorisation. However, franchise agreements are normally signed between a UK university and a Spanish educational institution that does not have the power to award degrees. British institutions wishing to offer validation or franchise TNE in Spain are advised to opt for the franchised model, as validation is not generally authorised. Obtaining authorisation for a franchised programme currently takes between 12–18 months, with a similar process throughout Spain, although there are some regional variations. Authorisation difficulties vary depending on the type of Spanish partner. In principle, when the Spanish partner is already offering Spanish university degrees or postgraduate (PG) programmes from a Spanish university (including in the case of “*centros adscritos*”), the process of authorisation should be quicker as the centre has already fulfilled the regional quality assurance agency requirements. Once authorised, centres and programmes are listed in the Spanish Official Register of Universities, Centres and Qualifications (RUCT), which brings clear advantages for the local partner, such as being able to sponsor international student visas.

A centre can offer unauthorised programmes, but these are not recognised in Spain, meaning that graduates are not able to access higher levels of education in Spain or to apply for official recognition of these qualifications (*homologación* or *equivalencia*). Such recognition would allow them to apply for official government and civil service posts.

During the event, a thorough explanation of the authorisation process was provided, the importance of creating an Alliance and closely collaborating with each other was discussed, and an overview of future opportunities and networking opportunities was presented.

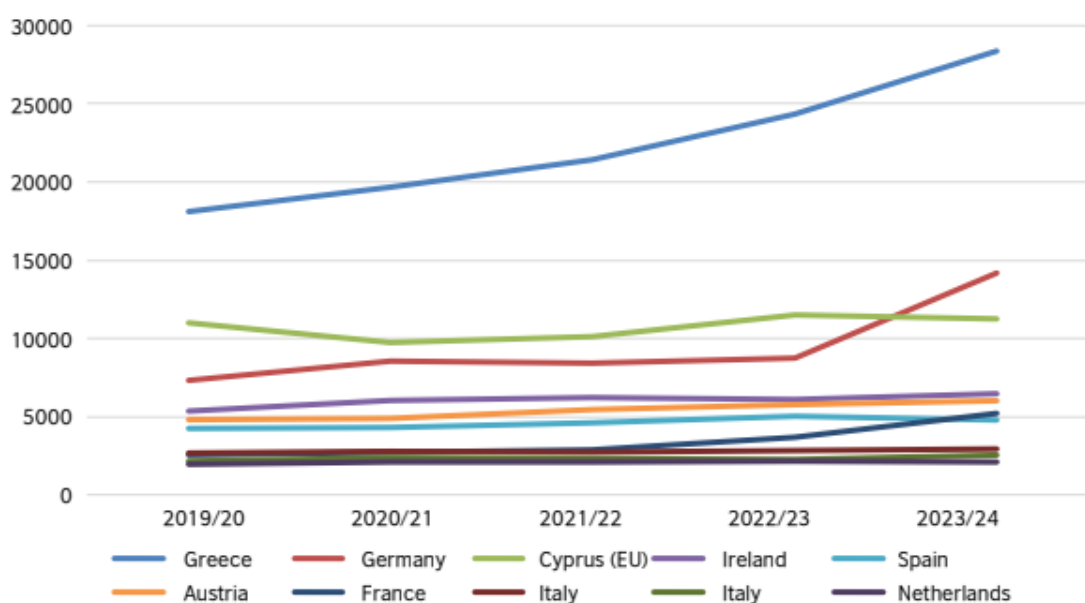
As a first step towards creating an Alliance, participants agreed to set up a UK-Spain TNE working group to share best practices, convene a pool of experts, raise the profile of the “**UK in Spain**” brand, pool marketing efforts and act as a single voice to liaise with and influence authorities.

Workshop content, discussion and next steps

TNE: latest figures and trends

TNE features prominently in the UK's new International Education Strategy for 2026, which sets the goal of increasing education exports to £40 billion per year by 2030. There are over 620,000 students from 188 countries enrolled in UK higher education institutions outside of the UK, mainly in collaborative programmes. Although Spain does not feature among the top 20 host countries of UK TNE students, it is an important TNE market in the EU and has potential for growth, as observed in recent activity in 2024-25. See the tables below for 22-23/23-24:

Chart 7 – All types of provision: top 10 EU markets



Source: UK Transnational Education in the EU: Models, Insights and Strategic Choices. British Council 2026

Table 1: 2023/24 annual growth, top 10 EU markets

| | | 2022/23 | 2023/24 | Annual growth | % growth |
|--|-------------|---------|---------|---------------|----------|
| | Greece | 24,365 | 28,375 | 4,010 | 16% |
| | Germany | 8,765 | 14,255 | 5,490 | 63% |
| | Cyprus (EU) | 11,540 | 11,265 | -275 | -2% |
| | Ireland | 6,105 | 6,535 | 430 | 7% |
| | Spain | 5,095 | 4,835 | -260 | -5% |
| | Austria | 3,830 | 4,050 | 220 | 6% |
| | Denmark | 2,170 | 3,405 | 1,235 | 57% |
| | France | 2,880 | 3,015 | 135 | 5% |
| | Italy | 2,290 | 2,605 | 315 | 14% |
| | Netherlands | 2,200 | 2,165 | -35 | -2% |

Source: UK Transnational Education in the EU: Models, Insights and Strategic Choices. British Council 2026

While there seems to be a decreasing number of TNE programmes in Spain, particularly since the UK left the EU (resulting in fewer University to University partnerships), the trend is expected to change in the next couple of years, thanks to the growth generated by successful franchise partnerships, as well as joint, double and dual degree programmes, once the UK rejoins the Erasmus scheme.

TNE initiatives in Spain tend to be concentrated in the regions of Madrid, Catalonia, Valencia and Andalucia, where there is a large number of Spanish higher education institutions, a higher population density and greater demand for university places. Cities such as Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Málaga and Alicante consistently attract foreign students and professionals seeking a high-quality international education. Current governments in these regions are particularly supportive of international education enterprises, and the Madrid Government for example wants to make Madrid an international education hub. Furthermore, offering English-speaking programmes in Spain also acts as a gateway for Latin American, African and Asian students interested in obtaining UK qualifications.

Successful examples include joint provision, such as the dual programmes, [Master's Degree in Industrial Engineering and Master's Degree in Smart Grids](#), offered by Strathclyde University and Universidad Pontificia Comillas, and the franchised provision at EADE for [Bachelor's and Master's programmes](#) from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David.

In 2024 and 2025, MIUC, LABA Valencia, CESTE and EADE all had their new and existing programmes authorised following a five-year period during which no franchise agreements had been approved. There are also a handful of new applications, some with enormous potential, that have been submitted recently, demonstrating the interest from local and UK institutions. With all this in mind, and given Spain's potential as a country for attracting international students, we believe that **there is currently a window of opportunity for UK and Spanish institutions to establish new TNE collaborations**, responding both to the TNE focus of the UK International Education Strategy 2026 and the recent positive shift by the Spanish administration towards authorising new franchise initiatives.

Favourable political and economic context

Spain and the UK have historically been very close partners, both economically and politically. There are nearly half a million British residents in Spain and almost the same number of Spanish nationals living in the UK. Spain is one of the UK's closest trade partners, with bilateral trade and services worth more than £60 billion per year. Research and innovation collaboration has also been accelerating since the UK rejoined Horizon Europe.

Recent authorisations suggest a growing openness and a more favourable regulatory environment, with authorities interested in registering non-Spanish qualifications on offer in Spain. Combined with strong domestic and international demand and the high regard for UK education in Spain, there is a clear momentum for growth and/or new partnerships. Spain has low birth rates but the immigration rate is extremely high, especially from Latin-America, and many of these immigrants are potential HE students, including those that would traditionally study in the USA, as well as those that have emigrated to Spain from Argentina or Venezuela due to political circumstances. This favourable context is further strengthened by the UK–Spain Strategic Bilateral Collaboration Agreement, signed in September 2025, which sets a clear framework for cooperation across multiple sectors, including education.

“Spain hosts many collaborations with our higher education institutions, including joint degrees, dual awards, research partnerships and franchise programmes. There is an appetite from both sides to deepen those collaborations, to offer a unique value added proposition for students both from Spain and elsewhere (...) TNE gives us a powerful set of tools to respond to shared challenges: how we widen access to high quality education, how we equip students with the skills needed for the international labour market, how we support regional development in innovation, and how we ensure our education systems remain globally connected, resilient and relevant (...) We share values around quality, inclusion and an international outlook”

Debbi Christophers
Culture and Public Diplomacy Attaché at the British Embassy in Madrid

While many Spanish universities struggle to fill their places, there are many others with extremely high entry requirements, which depend largely on the course and university's reputation. Regional authorities have the power to approve the creation of new universities, and several have been set up recently. Below is a map of the main universities in Spain, both private and public.



Source: [SEPIE](https://www.sepie.es/)

Regulatory context in Spain

The Spanish education sector is governed by the Ministry of Education, Vocational Training and Sports (which oversees school education and vocational training) and the Ministry of Innovation, Science and Universities (which oversees higher education). Although laws and royal decrees apply to the entire national territory, each of Spain's 17 autonomous regions is responsible for interpreting and applying the laws and regulations within its respective territory. This explains the differences observed in the authorisation processes and decisions across different regions, some of which, such as Catalonia, have their own Universities Law. The regional governments make the final decision on whether or not to authorise foreign institutions, whilst the central government only participates in the process by providing an informative report on whether the UK and Spain mutually recognise each other's qualifications and by registering authorised centres in the RUCT.

The key legislation applicable in Spain for authorisation of University degrees or PG programmes is:

- [Royal Decree RD 640/2021](#), which defines the rules for the creation and authorisation of international centres operating in Spain
- [Royal Decree RD 1509/2008](#), which defines the registry of authorised universities and foreign qualifications (RUCT)
- [Royal Decree RD 905/2025](#), which revises the process to create, recognise and authorise universities and university centres, introduces more quality-assurance actions, updates the national registry of authorised university institutions and reviews the rules to issue degrees

Non university qualifications are regulated by [Royal Decree RD 806/93](#), which may also be applied to level 6 artistic qualifications, as they are equivalent in level but are not regulated by the Universities Law.

All authorised universities, university centres and accredited programmes should be listed in the official Register of Universities, Centres and Qualifications ([RUCT](#)). This includes artistic qualifications. Only centres listed in this register are officially recognised by the Spanish authorities. If unauthorised, Spanish authorities do not recognise foreign qualifications awarded in Spain, which means students will not be able to get their qualifications recognised upon graduation, nor can the centre advertise that it offers "official" degrees or postgraduate qualifications. Qualifications from unauthorised centres must be advertised as "non-official" ("propios").

Types of HE institutions in Spain

There are different types of education institutions operating in Spain:

1. Universities (public and private)
2. “*Centros adscritos*”, which do not have the authority to award degrees themselves but can offer university degrees through an association with a university
3. Centres offering artistic qualifications that are equivalent to university education
4. Vocational training centres offering qualifications at Levels 3, 4 and 5
5. Business schools and institutions offering non-official qualifications (“*títulos propios*”), often very highly reputed and with high employability prospects, with sector recognition.

Universities, “*centros adscritos*” and centres offering artistic education at level 6 are regulated by the Ministry of Innovation, Science and Universities. When partnering with British universities, Spanish universities often seek to develop joint, dual or double degree programmes. There may also be opportunities for articulation between degree and postgraduate levels. The rest of the education institutions mentioned above would normally seek partnerships through franchise agreements. It should be noted that authorisation to offer university degrees at a vocational training centre is difficult, as it is unlikely that the centre will meet local staffing requirements, among other conditions. Authorisation for centres that are already offering Spanish university degrees should be quicker than for those offering their own degrees, as the former already have local quality assurance in place. Finally, artistic education centres may be authorised through HE processes (RD 640/2021) or through RD 806/93, which regulates non-HE qualifications (this is normally easier, but which one to apply for will depend on local authorities).

Types of programmes

When a centre is not authorised, regardless of whether or not the UK qualification is official, it will not be recognised as official in Spain; instead, its programmes will be considered as “*títulos propios*”. All validation agreements would fall under this category, as they will not be authorised (unless they are artistic qualifications authorised under RD806/93). Centres offering “*títulos propios*”¹ cannot advertise them as official university degrees, nor can they sponsor visas for foreign students in Spain; furthermore, their students cannot obtain formal recognition of their degree level, nor can they practise regulated professions such as those in healthcare, architecture or engineering. Despite this, there are many institutions offering “*títulos propios*” in Spain, mainly because they are quicker to develop and they allow greater flexibility in curriculum design, which aligns them well to employer needs. “*Títulos propios*” are widely accepted (and often highly valued) by employers, but it is important to reiterate that they are not recognised by the Ministry of Education and, therefore, do not grant access to master or PhD programmes, nor to public service positions.

Recognition of foreign programmes in Spain

UK qualifications are recognised in Spain if they have been studied in the UK or when offered by an authorised centre in Spain. The qualifications have exactly the same validity. UK qualifications offered by a non-authorised centre are not recognised and those qualifications will be considered as “*títulos propios*”.

While UK qualifications are generally recognised in Spain and accepted directly by the private sector, students wishing to practise a regulated profession or work for the public sector must get their UK qualification stamped. Graduates need to apply through an administrative process called “*homologación*” (required to practise regulated professions) or “*equivalencia*” (the more general process to recognise a

¹ A “*título propio*” is a qualification that is awarded by an institution that does not hold awarding powers. When the qualification is at master’s level, it is often referred to as a “*máster profesional*”.

degree or master's). This process is not required to access higher level Spanish education (master's or PhD), as universities have the authority to accept foreign qualifications from countries with a recognition agreement (the UK and Spain mutually recognise each other's qualifications) without the student having applied for "*equivalencia*". However, we must reiterate that when the qualification is offered by a non-authorised centre, there will be no possibility of accessing higher-level qualifications or of applying for "*equivalencia*" or "*homologación*".

Quality assurance

Regional authorities are responsible for the authorisation of foreign centres operating in Spain. They normally consult with Spanish quality assurance agencies (regional or national) to ensure that the centre meets quality assurance standards. Their approval is a prerequisite for any centre and/or official programme to be listed in the RUCT.

The [National Quality Assurance Agency \(ANECA\)](#) oversees the evaluation, certification and accreditation of universities and their programmes, and works in collaboration with a number of regional agencies that operate in some of the 17 autonomous regions:

| | |
|---|--|
| ACCUA : Andalusia | AQU : Catalonia |
| ACCUEE : Canary Islands | AQUIB : Balearic Islands |
| ACPUA : Aragón | AVAP : Valencia |
| ACSUCYL : Castilla y León | Madrid+D : Madrid |
| ACSUG : Galicia | UNIBASQ : Basque Country |

Higher education institutions operating in a region with its own quality assurance agency must adhere to its rules, regulations and procedures, which are drawn up in accordance with ANECA guidelines, but may have regional variations. All other regions follow ANECA's processes and procedures. Normally, the local agency would oversee the UK's quality assurance documentation related to the centre/qualification and, if satisfied, issue a favourable report. They may wish to visit the centre and carry out a local audit/review of the premises and facilities. It may be a lengthy process, but permission is granted to those centres meeting UK and EU standards (as ANECA's standards are fully aligned).

Authorisation of joint, double or dual degrees

The Spanish partner, that already has awarding powers as a university, will formalise the delivery of the joint, double or dual qualification. No authorisation is required.

Authorisation of franchise programmes in Spain

We have explained the reasons why authorisation is important. Although it requires careful attention, being authorised brings guarantees to students as well as institutions:

- Strengthens institutional reputation
- Lists both the local partner and qualifications authorised in the RUCT, which provides students with confidence and peace of mind
- Allows centres to increase student recruitment by becoming a visa sponsor for international students
- Provides recognition of awarded degrees through the process of "*homologación*" or "*equivalencia*" (a voluntary administrative process that graduates can undertake to have their title formally endorsed by the Spanish authorities)
- Allows the local institution to apply to and participate in schemes such as the Erasmus+ and similar initiatives

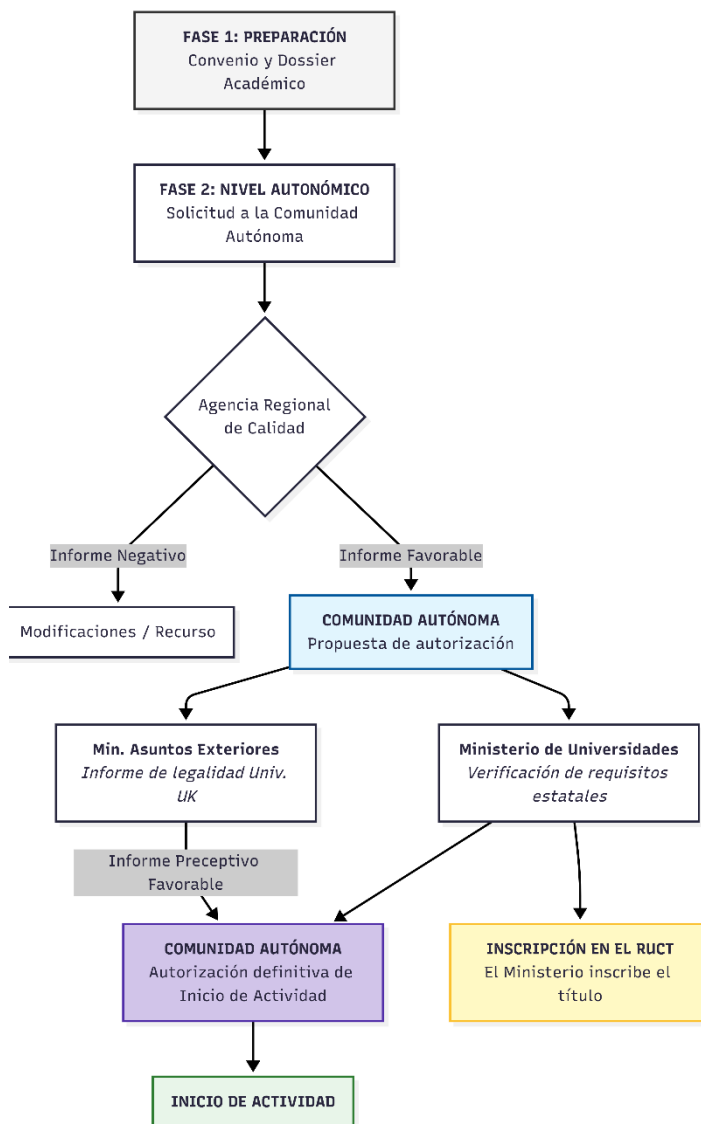
The authorisation application process typically takes 12 to 18 months. The process includes the following steps:

1. Application Online: The application is submitted online to the regional authorities where the Spanish partner institution is operating. It is possible, **and highly recommended, to have an informal pre-application meeting with the relevant authorities to clarify any questions.** Once an application is submitted, including all required documentation, if there are any questions or a request for further information, the relevant Spanish authority may contact the applicant and provide up to 10 working days to respond.

2. Quality Assurance: If local authorities review documentation submitted in order, they forward documentation to their local or national QA agency. The agency reviews the documentation and would normally also visit the centre and write a QA report. Centres are advised to prepare the initial documentation thoroughly and should ideally rely on quality assurance experts who have experience with the requirements and regulations of the relevant quality assurance agency.

3. Central Administration: When the application for authorisation is approved by regional authorities, they request a report from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (which confirms that UK and Spain mutually recognise each other's qualifications) and issue a recommendation for authorisation to the Ministry of Innovation, Science and Universities (which updates the RUCT).

4. Resolution: Once the Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirms mutual recognition, local authorities issue authorisation and inform the centre.



If authorisation is denied, a period of one month is given to appeal the negative outcome.

Key documentation required for the application:

| | |
|---|--|
| Documents to show legal status and | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proof that the Spanish institution is a legal education entity established in Spain • Proof that the UK university is legally established in the UK and has awarding powers |
|---|--|

| | |
|---|--|
| partnership contract | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic collaboration agreement between the Spanish centre and the UK university, stating that the programme belongs to the UK university and is franchised to the Spanish institution |
| Certification from the country of origin (provided by the British Council) | Certificate by the British Council that confirms a) the legal status of the UK university in the UK, b) that the programmes to be franchised are being offered by the UK institution in the UK, c) that the degrees awarded have official academic validity in the UK, and d) that the programmes to be franchised are subject to the relevant quality assurance processes in the UK. |
| Financial sustainability | The Spanish institution must guarantee that students will be able to finish their studies if the centre ceases operations. The documentation required to demonstrate the financial sustainability of the partnership varies by region, ranging from something as simple as a self-statement to a bank guarantee. |
| Academic development plan | This academic development plan must, as a general rule, include both the qualifications offered by the foreign university as well as the rest of qualifications on offer. Qualifications lists must include level, number of student places that will be available, duration, credit structure and starting date. For the foreign qualifications for which authorisation is required, the academic plan must demonstrate the equivalence of study programmes, that is to ensure that the degree awarded in Spain will be exactly the same qualification as the one offered at the UK university. |
| Staff and governance | Documentation to describe the profile of the academic, research and administrative staff which may include some specific requirements such as a minimum staff-to-student ratio of 1:25 (FTE equivalent), a minimum of 50% of teaching staff holding a doctoral degree and academic staff having qualifications related to their teaching subject. |
| Quality Assurance | Internal quality document (which can be adapted from the UK University Quality Handbook) to show how the centre meets UK quality standards as well as Spanish quality requirements. While this is only required in Catalonia at the time of application, the rest of the country will require all centres to have an internal quality document in place within two years of initiation of activity. |
| Research plans | Profile of the research staff and details of the research plans. This is only required in Catalonia. |

There are slight variations in the process of authorisation in different regions. The process above is based on the current processes in Andalucía, Valencia and Catalonia. Variations in other regions will be minimum as the requirements are all stated in RD640/21, a national law.

Centres without authorisation status

Despite the benefits of authorisation, such as visa sponsorship capacity, recognition of qualifications and brand reputation, there are some centres offering unauthorised UK qualifications. **It is not illegal to offer foreign qualifications in Spain without authorisation, but leading students to believe the qualifications are UK University official qualifications is not permitted** as these qualifications are not recognised in Spain. However, the same quality standards apply as in the UK. Many of the centres currently authorised were operating under validation agreements and have had to evolve towards a franchise model, in which the foreign curriculum is replicated like-for-like and delivered in Spain.

Cualificam, introduced recently to offer some recognition to “*títulos propios*”, could be an opportunity for unauthorised centres currently offering master’s programmes through validation (see next section below).

Centres offering level 6 validated qualifications will not be authorised except if the qualifications are “*enseñanzas artísticas*” (not offered by universities in Spain) and authorisation is applied for under RD806/93, which regulates non-university qualifications.

Cualificam: An alternative for PG programmes recognition

[Cualificam](#) is an independent process endorsed by the Madrid Quality Agency (Madrid+D) to provide recognition to existing master’s programmes that are not listed as official (i.e. that are not delivered by a university, whether Spanish or foreign). These programmes are, however, recognised within their specific professional sector. Cualificam could present an opportunity for the recognition of master’s programmes that are offered through a validation agreement with a UK university. It focuses on the academic quality of the programme and the employability of its graduates. Cualificam requires institutions to have ownership of the programmes, so it is not applicable to franchised degrees.

The authorisation process of Cualificam follows the same quality standards as the European Higher Education Area and is open to programmes (online, hybrid and face-to-face) delivered by institutions in any Spanish region. Students enrolled in a programme endorsed by Cualificam can be sponsored with a visa by their institution -a significant advantage in comparison to existing “*títulos propios*”, also called “*masters profesionales*” that do not have the Cualificam recognition. Cualificam is recognised across Spain but graduates of programmes endorsed by Cualificam cannot receive “*homologación*” and/or “*equivalencia*” and therefore are not able to access PhDs, official government or administrative roles, or practise regulated professions with these qualifications.

The recognition process by Cualificam includes documentation review and a site visit. The recognition is valid for six years, including a review after the first three years. There are two calls for applications every year, in spring and autumn, and the turnaround time is approximately four months. All recognised programmes are listed in the official [Cualificam register](#).

Recommendations for British Universities

| | |
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| 1 | Ensure there is a strategic alliance between both partners, which should share vision, values and objectives |
| 2 | Engage early on with the British Council in Spain, which can help with identifying partners and provide support during the authorisation process |
| 3 | Invest time and effort in understanding the quality, legal and regulatory context in Spain |
| 4 | Have well-defined governance and quality assurance structures and ensure your local partner, if not a university, understands the UK quality framework |
| 5 | When your partner in Spain is not a university, opt for an authorised franchise model instead of validation; if your partner is a university, either dual, joint or double degrees, or articulation is possible and does not require authorisation |
| 6 | If you are already partnering under validation, consider evolving to a franchise model. Investigate Cualificam to gain recognition of existing master validated programmes |
| 7 | Define a clear financial sustainability plan, as TNE is a long-term investment |
| 8 | Hold regular partnership reviews based on agreed KPIs, including quality checks |
| 9 | Prioritise the student experience and employability benefits |
| 10 | Work with your partner to emphasise the added value of a British education for the needs of the Spanish labour market and the distinctive (different) student experience it provides |

The need to joining forces: next steps

The participants in the workshop discussed and agreed on the need to establish a working group or interest group for UK-Spain TNE with the aim of:

- Sharing best practices and convening a pool of experts
- Acting as a single voice to liaise with and influence authorities
- Raising the profile of UK higher education in Spain as the “UK in Spain” brand
- Joining marketing efforts at international events
- Collating a register of all British higher education institutions operating in Spain

It was agreed to start by setting up a WhatsApp group to first study the role of a more formal Alliance. The British Council could coordinate the creation of this working group and the Association of Spanish Business Schools, formally established, expressed their will to host this Alliance/Association. It was also agreed that the working group would be coordinated by the British Council, under the initial associative guidance of the Association of Spanish Business Schools. A call for volunteers has been forwarded after the event for the creation of a WhatsApp Group and volunteers to lead the group.

A brief overview of British Council TNE strategy was presented, highlighting two areas that are particularly aligned to the objectives of this working group:

ACTION 2: Promote UK TNE’s reputation for quality

ACTION 3: Inform policy development and support the growth of UK TNE in partner countries

Conclusion

Although TNE has not grown in Spain since 2022 until recently, recent changes in the number of granted authorisations will soon lead to growth and present a window of opportunity at this time for UK institutions interested in TNE partnerships based on the franchising model. Enhanced co-operation will support the British Council TNE Strategy's vision for the UK to be a partner of choice for TNE globally, delivering mutual benefit, contributing to sustainable development and fostering intercultural understanding.

The workshop provided detailed guidance on the authorisation process, regulatory context and recommendations for centres seeking authorisation, providing a variety of possibilities for those currently under validation programmes.

As well as gaining an understanding of Spain's complex regulatory environment, the workshop provided an opportunity for one-to-one engagement. The British Council's clear recommendation was for centres to collaborate and work towards the creation of an Alliance of centres, outlining the advantages that such a network would provide to the ecosystem.

During the event, information was also provided on Cualificam, an opportunity for those centres offering level 7 validated programmes to obtain recognition.

As a result of the workshop, a working group has been created to bring together Spanish and UK institutions interested in collaborating on TNE initiatives, with the aim of acting as a single point of contact for the relevant authorities and other stakeholders, sharing insights and know-how, providing expert advice to members and creating a distinguished high-quality UKinSpain brand, as well as a single point of access for all programmes offered in Spain.

Annex 1: Key definitions

While the term Transnational Education is common in the UK, it is less known in Spain, even by institutions that are delivering different forms of Transnational Education themselves, hence the need for a brief outline of the key terms and definitions.

According to UNESCO (2001), the term Transnational Education (TNE) refers to “*educational programmes in which learners are located in a different country from the country where the awarding institution is based*”.

There are different types of TNE, including:

- **Validation:** An awarding institution approves a partner’s independently developed programme, which meets specific quality criteria, while the partner retains curricular ownership.
- **Franchise:** Delivery of foreign programmes by a local institution, which follows the branding and quality standards of the foreign partner.
- **Branch campus:** Physical campus alongside all relevant operations established by a foreign institution in another country.
- **Distance and online provision:** programmes delivered remotely that do not require face-to-face attendance.
- **Joint programmes:** one single degree reflected in one single certificate on completion, which is delivered and awarded jointly by the two institutions and recognised by the relevant authorities in each country.
- **Double/ multiple degrees:** joint programme as described above but where each of the partner institutions issues a separate certificate on completion to meet the requirements of the relevant authorities in each country.
- **Dual programmes:** the students progress from one country to another through an articulation agreement to end up with two degrees. They normally spend longer hours than for a joint or double degree as the programme structure has not been prepared jointly.
- **Joint PhD supervision:** co-supervision of a doctoral candidate from two institutions.
- **Articulation agreements:** structured pathways that enable students to progress between programmes at different institutions.

Annex 2: Additional resources

- [UK International Education Strategy 2026](#)
- [SEPIE Spanish Service for the Internationalisation of Education](#)
- [British Council TNE Global Strategy](#)

Relevant TNE reports:

- [Understanding the impact of transnational education: insights from UK TNE alumni \(2025\)](#)
- [Transnational Education - What We Know \(2024\)](#)
- [Global Transnational Education Framework \(2024\)](#)
- [Managing risk and developing responsible transnational education partnerships \(2024\)](#)
- [The scale of UK higher education transnational education 2023-24](#)
- [An analysis of UK TNE in Spain. British Council](#)
- [UK Transnational Education in the EU: Models, Insights and Strategic Choices](#)

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