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# Guidelines on Developing and Strengthening Qualifications Frameworks in Asia and the Pacific

## Building a Culture of Shared Responsibility

**Education**  
**2030** 

# Guidelines on Developing and Strengthening Qualifications Frameworks in Asia and the Pacific

**Building a Culture of Shared Responsibility**

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**“...And multilateralism is not the sum of particular interests, the addition of bilateral relationships. It is instead a dialogue with several voices, a collective intelligence in action, in which each voice should be heard and respected. And where compromises have to be made.”**

*Ms. Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO on the occasion of the Peace and Prosperity Forum, Jeju, Republic of Korea, 28 June 2018*

# Table of Contents

## Part 1. Developing and Strengthening Qualifications Frameworks in Asia-Pacific

1. Introduction.....	1
1.1. The Rise of qualifications frameworks in Asia and the Pacific	
1.2. Background and aims of the guidelines	
1.3. Ensuring value for stakeholders	
1.4. The Role of UNESCO in strengthening lifelong learning systems in Asia and the Pacific	
2. Key principles.....	24
2.1. Shared values and concerns for qualifications frameworks in Asia and the Pacific	
2.2. Guiding principles for qualifications frameworks to support mobility and employability	
2.3. Transparency and the role of National Information Centres	
3. Scope and structure.....	30
3.1. Domains of learning: knowledge, skills, competencies and ethics	
3.2. Sector coverage	
3.3. Referencing and comparing qualifications across countries in Asia and the Pacific	
3.4. Credit transfer systems	
4. Strategies for developing and strengthening qualifications frameworks.....	36
4.1. Process and timeline for developing qualifications frameworks in Asia and the Pacific	
4.2. Strategies for stakeholder engagement and ownership	
4.3. Governance structures within national systems for lifelong learning	
4.4. Integrating quality assurance, international recognition and qualifications frameworks	
4.5. Managing stakeholder expectations	
4.6. Realising mobility: The Tokyo Convention	

## Part 2. Case Studies on Developing and Strengthening NQF's in Asia and the Pacific

Australia .....	54
China .....	56
India .....	58
Japan .....	60
Nepal .....	62
Philippines .....	64
Republic of Korea .....	66
Sri Lanka .....	68
Thailand .....	70
Regional Perspective .....	72

## ANNEX

Key contributors to developing the guidelines (2015-2018) .....	74
Sydney Statement (UNESCO Bangkok, August 2016) .....	76
<i>Connecting qualifications frameworks, quality assurance and recognition for mobility and employability.</i>	
Principles for Quality Assurance of TVET Qualifications in Asia-Pacific (UNESCO, 2017) .....	80
Shenzhen Statement (UNESCO Bangkok, June 2017) .....	82
<i>Building Local and Regional Capacity for a Living Quality Culture in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific (Shenzhen, China)</i>	
Tokyo Convention (UNESCO, 2011) .....	86
<i>Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education</i>	
Fact Sheet (UNESCO, 2017) .....	104
<i>Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications Project</i>	

## Foreword

## ***Strengthening regional, educational and economic ties in Asia and the Pacific***

Collaboration with stakeholders throughout Asia and the Pacific is increasingly important to develop quality and relevant lifelong learning systems. Technical planning tools like qualifications frameworks aim to promote transparency around expected learning outcomes, yet education and training providers in many countries struggle to deliver on these mechanisms.

A key to changing that lies in taking a serious look at qualifications frameworks around the region to see how we can better engage stakeholders throughout the development and implementation of qualifications frameworks. This is crucial because such frameworks cannot be effective with governments acting alone. To ensure equal access to quality tertiary education, including university, we must promote a culture of shared responsibility. This collaborative effort includes the meaningful and continuous engagement of learners and stakeholders, including entrepreneurs and private sector partners. These “end users” are the ultimate decision-makers about the value of their education and training.

To explore these approaches, this new guide builds on three years of stocktaking

throughout Asia and the Pacific. For the first time it combines experiences from three distinct areas of UNESCO’s work on quality assurance, qualifications frameworks, and fair recognition of qualifications. This holistic approach to internationally recognized qualifications is timely and necessary. On 1 February 2018, a new convention entered into force to support cross-border mobility throughout the region. The ***Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education*** (Tokyo Convention) promotes fair and transparent recognition of qualifications in higher education. This is increasingly important in Asia and the Pacific given the rise of private sector providers, diverse modes of learning, and rapid growth of student and scholar mobility.

Whether studying at home or abroad, online or offline, lifelong learning is essential to ensure peace and stability. This consideration is also at the core of Sustainable Development Goal 4, known as the SDG4-Education 2030 agenda. This shared vision lays out a universal and transformative aspiration whereby innovative solutions must be part of an integrated agenda; which is to say all 17 SDGs are essential to create lasting change. An integral part of this transformative agenda for the region – through education, science and culture – is central to UNESCO’s mandate, and to

the mission of our many partners.

We hope this new guide will serve as a call to action – a call to examine the evidence of past practice as we chart a path towards increasing the value and relevance of qualifications and learning pathways in the region. This can be done only in collaboration with key partners, including policymakers and quality assurance professionals, academia, employers and industry players, students and lifelong learners, and members of civil society.

Together we can ensure a sustainable and peaceful future in Asia and the Pacific and beyond. Thank you to our donors at the Republic of Korea Funds-in-Trust for supporting our collective efforts and UNESCO’s unique mandate to promote quality education in this fascinating region. Thank you for joining UNESCO on this journey to sustainable development.



Shigeru Aoyagi  
Director  
UNESCO Bangkok

**Foreword**

It is my great pleasure to congratulate all those involved on this outstanding publication of the NQF guideline for the Asia-Pacific region, which consolidates diverse policies and practices of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) throughout the Asia-Pacific region and provides practical suggestions to the Member States. I would especially like to express my sincerest gratitude to colleagues at UNESCO Bangkok who have greatly helped publish this guideline and continue to support Member States in increasing their capacity for formulating and implementing evidence-based policies in higher education.

In 2015, the United Nations declared “Sustainable Development Goals” (SDGs), global agenda to be accomplished by all members of the international community by 2030. Among its 17 goals, the fourth goal (SDG4), also known as Education 2030, aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” To be more specific, Target 4.3 seeks to “ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education, including university” by 2030. In order to achieve this global target, one of the key strategies involves

strengthening international cooperation for developing cross-border tertiary education to support increased access, better quality assurance and capacity development.

The Republic of Korea has been a strong supporter of global and regional collaborations to facilitate cross-border mobility in the past decades. The Republic of Korea is among the 21 State Parties to the “1983 Bangkok Convention” and five States Parties to the “2011 Tokyo Convention” and has been very active in various Regional Convention-related activities, including hosting the first session of the committee of the Tokyo Convention in Seoul this year. Most of all, the Republic of Korea has been a supporter of the higher education project initiated by UNESCO Bangkok in 2015, which aims to harmonize different QA systems and make qualifications from different countries more compatible and comparable with one another in order to promote mobility in Asia and the Pacific.

It has been a great pleasure for us to observe that the Higher Education Project supported by Korea Funds-in-Trust (KFIT) has been playing an important linking role across UNESCO’s mandates in higher education and

provides valuable technical support to target countries in Asia and the Pacific. I hope that this NQF guideline will be actively used by Member States to build their capacity to implement NQF-based learning outcomes and boost mutual trust among countries.

The Republic of Korea will always support regional harmonization in higher education and promote communication and integration in the Asia-Pacific region.



Kim Sang-kon  
*Deputy Prime Minister  
and Minister of Education  
Republic of Korea*

## Preface

### **Towards new visions for quality tertiary education in Asia and the Pacific**

Libing Wang

*Chief, Section for Educational Innovation  
and Skills Development (EISD), UNESCO  
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When the UN system entered into its second 15-year planning cycle with the adoption of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, education was referenced in SDG4 as a stand-alone goal. Tertiary education, including technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and university-level instruction, are more visible and connected with the three SDG4 targets, namely Target 4.3 – technical, vocational, tertiary and adult education, Target 4.4 – skills for work, and Target 4.b – scholarships for mobility. As more and more countries graduated from the UN's previous Education for All movement, tertiary education has been increasingly recognized as key to the human, social and economic development of all nations.

### ***Past legacies and traditions***

Considerations of educational quality are nothing new and have been evolving for many years. At least three separate and identifiable practices have sought to provide quality assurance in higher education through various means. The first is the British tradition that emphasized the importance of institutional autonomy and academic

freedom. The second is a Continental European model that relies more on external government regulation. The third is the American model wherein quality assurance has been mostly entrusted to professional accreditation bodies leaving the government little role to play.

Each of these traditions has left their impacts on many countries in the Asia-Pacific region. As prime education providers, academic institutions were once fairly autonomous in deciding what and how to teach without external interventions. A culture of self-reflection and self-discipline was an essential part of such self-governance for elite institutions of higher learning. Increasingly now, owing to growing public investments in higher education in many countries, governments joined the quality assurance process by introducing external quality frameworks and standards in the name of social accountability. As a result, institutional autonomy and social accountability have clashed with quality assurance arrangements requiring a better balance between the two, and reflecting the specific social and economic backgrounds and needs at the national level.

### ***A renewed impetus for a quality tertiary education***

Many new developments have contributed to renewed calls for quality tertiary education in the Asia-Pacific region. One such development has been the increasing massification of higher education and expansion of the TVET sector in most countries within the region. Quantitative expansion has resulted in widened access to tertiary education, but this expansion has routinely been accompanied by concerns over the quality of provision.

Another factor has been the diversification of higher education providers, especially as regards the increasing involvement of the private sector in the provision of higher education. Whereas public institutions remain dominant, the increasing presence of private institutions in many countries demands that such institutions need to be properly regulated in order to ensure quality standards. As of 2014, more than half of all tertiary-level students worldwide are in Asia and the Pacific, a significant portion of which are enrolled in the private sector.

Asia and the Pacific is an exceedingly vibrant region in terms of the inbound and outbound mobility of students and professionals across borders. The region is home not only to traditionally popular destinations for international students such as Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea and Singapore but also to emerging destinations such as China, Malaysia, Thailand and India. Accordingly, the harmonization of quality standards and mechanisms in tertiary education across the region is of fundamental importance and UNESCO is promoting this process through the implementation of regional recognition conventions.

Equally, the innovative and widespread use of technologies in the delivery of tertiary education programmes requires more careful monitoring and evaluation of the quality of provision in order to ensure that all technology-enhanced or -empowered learning programmes are quality assured. The rapid development of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and MOOC platforms, together with the proliferation of online learning to supplement traditional face-to-face classroom teaching and learning, necessitates that new procedures and criteria are developed so as to monitor the quality of online learning.

### *From inputs-driven to process- and outputs-driven*

The measurement of quality once promoted such inputs-related matters as infrastructure readiness, student-instructor ratio and the number of staff with advanced degrees, etc. Such an approach is useful when a higher education system is still at a stage of rapid development and inputs-related indicators can serve as leverage for more investment from governments and other stakeholders. However, inputs alone cannot guarantee the achievement of required outputs. Even if the required outputs are achieved, the process leading to their achievement may not necessarily be student-centred and thus conducive to the holistic development of learners.

That is why a clear shift of focus from inputs to outputs is needed with learning outcomes (LOs) becoming more pertinent to the quality assurance of higher education in many countries. The identification and assessment of LOs at subject or programme levels in higher education institutions (HEIs) can ensure that students are learning as anticipated with concrete LOs to be achieved. The typology of LOs

depends on how learning is perceived in terms of learning domains, strategies, processes and assessments, which have been bolstered by a myriad of learning theories such as cognitivism, connectivism and constructivism, among others. LOs normally cover knowledge, competencies, skills, values and attitudes that can be concretised within academic disciplines and professional fields.

Yet what has long been ignored is the consideration of processes that lead to the achievement of LOs. In many cases results-based approaches may come at the expense of the holistic development of learners. This can leave tertiary education teaching staff with fewer or no opportunities to develop their pedagogical capacity in delivering their learning programmes. In other words, we need to make sure that teaching personnel engaged in tertiary education are not only well prepared in subject areas but are also well trained in pedagogy. The overall aim of this is to ensure the learning process is pedagogically learner-centred, thereby leading to the achievement of comprehensive LOs, including cognitive and non-cognitive competencies as well as transversal skills.

***National qualifications frameworks: the best tools to identify LOs and the ways to achieve them***

LOs are expected outcomes that learners should achieve after finishing a learning programme or course. This can come in the form of narratives such as after finishing the programme/course, learners are expected to know/understand/apprehend X or Y; should be able to conduct/carry out/do X or Y; or should be aware of X and apply Y. Such narratives are not new and have long been articulated as learning objectives in programme and course profile documents and curricular and assessment criteria within HEIs.

The capacity to develop such programme/course profile documents is different, however, depending on the maturity levels of institutions. In many countries it is required for faculty to develop programme/course profile documents that specify key variables such as entry requirements, prior learning requirements, learning objectives/outcomes, modes of delivery, learning modules/contents, evaluation strategies and required supporting resources. In some countries, however,

there may be less capacity to prepare these kinds of profile documents based on the articulation of learning outcomes at the programme and course level.

**Hence, the development of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) can provide an overarching framework for the identification of learning outcomes that apply to all programmes, subject areas, and disciplines within a country.**

As such, NQFs should be generic and learning matrix-based in order to define different domains of learning that should be included for different levels of learning programmes in the form of level descriptors.

Normally, a national qualifications framework covers tertiary level learning programmes that can range from secondary school leaving certificates to university degrees, including different levels of TVET qualifications. It is also important for NQFs to make recommendations on the means to achieve LOs in general terms, to promote student-centred pedagogies, foster the use of modern technologies, and facilitate the timely monitoring and evaluation of learning outcomes, as well as engagements with stakeholders.

***Engagement and partnerships – the key to the development and implementation of NQF***

As a tool to promote external quality assurance, NQFs are not only a set of level descriptors for LOs and the suggested means to achieve LOs. They are also a mechanism to engage all the stakeholders in the development and implementation of NQFs. The skills mismatch, which has been prevalent in many countries in the region, has its root cause in the lack of engagement and partnership mechanisms with stakeholders, especially with employers and professional bodies.

In this context, quality assurance processes must include engagement and partnerships. Assuring the quality of study programmes cannot be undertaken in isolation by subject experts alone, especially when relevance and employability have emerged as the key factors for the sustainability of the whole sector on top of the need to foster the holistic development of learners. Even when level descriptors are generic with an NQF, they should be based on a consensus reached through wide-ranging consultation processes engaging

all the stakeholders; it is not sufficient for them to be developed by QA experts or approved by people working at certain institutions. At academic, occupational or professional level, joint committees with members coming from within and outside institutions – including representatives from employers, local communities, parents and students – should be established and tasked with identifying LOs and the means to achieve them for specific learning programmes or courses.

It is also important that QA experts work closely with subject experts in the development and implementation of subject-specific quality standards, including the identification of LOs in specific subject areas. For NQFs to be beneficial at subject and programme levels, we need a shift of ownership of the NQF away from policymakers to QA experts and eventually to subject experts and employers. Ownership begins with engagement and partnership and so any exclusion from the entire process can lead to the rejection of quality standards.

### *The integration of academic recognition with QA and NQFs for greater cross-border mobility*

One of the flagship higher education activities for UNESCO in this region is the implementation of the **Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education** (Tokyo Convention, 2011), which came into force on 1 February 2018 following the ratification by five Member States – Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, and Republic of Korea. The issue of academic recognition is clearly important for promoting the cross-border mobility of students and professionals. However, in addition to efforts to urge member states to abide by the principles of transparency, fairness and non-discrimination, QA-based recognition arrangements should make sure that the recognition of qualifications is supported by a common understanding of QA practices rather than simply good-will from relevant countries.

This ties academic recognition more

closely with the harmonization of QA and NQFs since LOs at subject and programme levels can constitute solid bases for facilitating recognition. Such a holistic approach has been endorsed by Member States of the region in the **Sydney Statement** adopted at the *14th Session of the Asia-Pacific Regional Committee on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications* in August 2016 in Sydney, Australia. A QA-based academic recognition begins with information sharing and capacity building, followed by more bilateral equivalency agreements and eventually by enhanced degrees of harmonization in quality standards among Member States in the region.

This is especially relevant to SDG Target 4.b, which seeks “by 2030 [to] substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing states and African countries, for enrolment in higher education...” With the increased mobility of students in tandem with

more scholarships, the harmonization of QA and NQFs will aid in enhancing the recognition of qualifications among Member States in the region. It should be added that being State Parties to the Tokyo Convention will also enable countries to develop their capacities to align their QA systems and NQFs with international norms and best practices as well as collectively contributing to the regional harmonization processes in quality assurance in higher education.

### **Conclusion**

SDG4 provides a new momentum for Member States to push for stronger and better quality tertiary education outcomes in the next 15 years. It is evident that an inputs-driven approach to quality assurance in tertiary education has coincided well with a system that is in constant expansion as inputs-oriented indicators command more financial investments from governmental and nongovernmental sources alike. However, the peak in continuous expansion of the sector has passed in most countries in the

region. The challenges ahead are now related instead to the quality concerns. Outputs and processes are emerging as the main elements for quality assurance in tertiary education.

National qualifications frameworks and their implementation at subject, occupational and professional levels are powerful tools to meet requirements for more outputs and processes-driven quality assurance systems. NQFs have the potential to ensure a greater common understanding of LOs among all the stakeholders in tertiary education. Efforts for the regional harmonization of LOs under common qualifications frameworks will also facilitate the international recognition of qualifications among Member States in the Asia-Pacific region.

**National qualification frameworks underpinned by quality assurance should be developed and considered as crucial for enhancing transparency, comparability and recognition of qualifications within and across countries**

*Kuala Lumpur Declaration, 2015  
Asia-Pacific Conference on Education and Training*

# Part 1. Developing and Strengthening Qualifications Frameworks in Asia-Pacific

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Purpose and desired outcomes of the guidelines:

- Promote a culture of quality and shared responsibility in tertiary education and training systems throughout Asia and the Pacific
- Explain why a National Qualification Framework (NQF) is not a shortcut to international recognition of qualifications, or a quick solution to quality assurance
- Strengthen connections between NQF, quality assurance and the recognition of qualifications to promote mobility and employability in Asia-Pacific, including through UNESCO's policy instruments such as the Tokyo Convention on recognition

While governments have primary responsibility for the quality and relevance of education, all actors, including students, educators and training providers, policymakers, members of civil society and employers, have a role to play in improving education systems.<sup>1</sup> This need for effective stakeholder collaboration is increasingly important for tertiary education, particularly in Asia and the Pacific. With its 46 countries, the Asia-Pacific region now represents over 50% of total global tertiary enrolment, which increased from 39 million in 2000 to 112 million in 2015.<sup>2</sup> The rapid expansion, diversification

of public and private sector providers, and significant increases in cross-border student mobility have introduced both new opportunities and new challenges for students, higher educational institutions, national governments, and members of civil society. As a result of the dramatic expansion of tertiary education and related concerns about quality, **National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs)** have emerged as a tool to promote quality, transparency and the use of relevant and effective learning outcomes.<sup>3</sup>

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1 UNESCO (2017). Accountability in education: Meeting our commitments. Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report. Paris, France.

2 UNESCO Bangkok, 2018. Regional Report: Advancements needed for the Asia-Pacific region to achieve the target set under SDG4.

3 Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to demonstrate upon completion of a learning process (UNESCO Executive Board 202 EX/8, 2017).

### What is a qualifications framework?

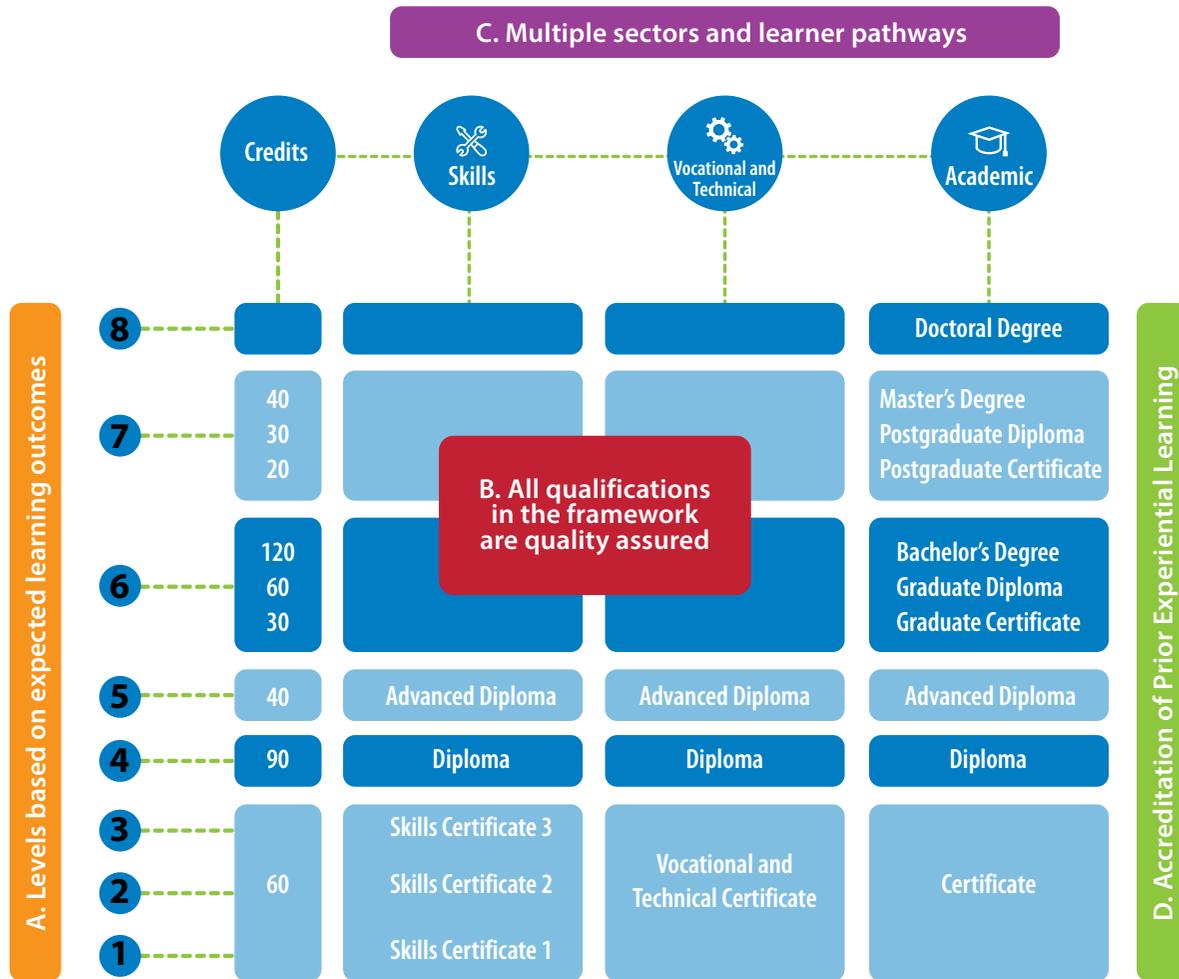
A system for classification, publication and articulation of quality assured qualifications according to a set of criteria (UNESCO 202 EX/8, 2017).

Qualifications frameworks establish levels of learning based on learner outcomes. The different levels of qualifications in a given education and training system should be quality assured and embrace different pathways of learning, including experiential learning (see example in Figure 1). Fundamentally, an outcomes-based approach to education and training is essential.

In this regard, how to develop and implement such an approach has become key to education stakeholders. There is

growing consensus throughout Asia and the Pacific that qualifications frameworks have the potential to promote relevance, consistency, transparency, and portability of qualifications given their emphasis on learning outcomes. However, quality assurance is fundamental. For example, **robust quality assurance enhances credibility and builds trust in learning outcomes achieved at different levels of the qualifications framework.** Strong links between these separate policy areas are necessary.

Figure 1. Exploring the main features of a sample qualifications framework



Source: Adapted from the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (2011)

### Main features of NQF:

- **A. Levels based on expected learning outcomes** – Most commonly, NQFs describe tertiary qualifications based on levels of knowledge, skills, competencies, values and attitudes, etc. NQFs describe types of qualifications and how levels connect with one another and how equivalences are established (e.g. how academic and vocational qualifications compare).
- **B. Part of a system of quality assurance policies** – An effective system of quality assurance is fundamental to support a well-functioning NQF.
- **C. Multiple sectors and learner pathways** – While diverse, NQFs tend to be inclusive of all tertiary education and training sectors and learning pathways (e.g. Technical Vocational Education and Training and higher education institutions, and cover public and private institutions).
- **D. Embrace different ways of learning** – NQFs often include different modes of learning, including formal, non-formal and informal learning so that outcomes are comparable, recognizable and transferable, and thus contribute to lifelong learning. Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) is one example of how authorities can consider flexible learning pathways.

As these Guidelines illustrate, efforts to develop and strengthen qualifications frameworks in the Asia-Pacific region should not be isolated from **quality assurance**<sup>4</sup> and **international recognition**.<sup>5</sup>

Figure 2 (below) provides an example of a conceptual framework for promoting policy coherence and strong links with NQFs.

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4 Quality assurance is a process by which the quality of a higher education system, institution or programme is assessed to assure stakeholders that acceptable standards are being maintained and enhanced (UNESCO Executive Board 202 EX/8, 2017).

5 Recognition of Qualifications means a formal acknowledgment as defined and given by the competent recognition authorities of a Party of the value of a foreign education qualification (Tokyo Convention, 2011).

Figure 2. Qualifications frameworks do not work in isolation from quality assurance and qualifications recognition



Source: Education 2030: The links between qualifications frameworks, quality assurance and recognition. 14th Session of the Regional Committee (Sydney, Australia, 2016). UNESCO Bangkok.

### **What is quality assurance? <sup>6</sup>**

A process by which the quality of a higher education system, institution or programme is assessed to assure stakeholders that acceptable standards are being maintained and enhanced

### **What is qualifications recognition? <sup>7</sup>**

Recognition of qualifications means a formal acknowledgment as defined and given by the competent recognition authorities of the value of a foreign education qualification

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6 UNESCO Executive Board 202 EX/8 (2017). Progress Report on the Preparation of the Draft Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0025/002530/253046e.pdf>

7 UNESCO (2011). Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (Tokyo Convention). [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=48975&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=48975&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

Given the interconnection of these distinct policy areas, there are a number of challenges with regard to the development of NQFs, including the need for transparency on recognition practices and the status of quality assurance in a country.

Despite the widespread growth of NQFs, concrete evidence of their value for students, institutions, national governments and civil society remains largely undeveloped,

especially in the world's largest region, Asia and the Pacific. Policy-relevant research efforts in the region have not yet shown the extent to which NQFs necessarily lead to better recognition outcomes or greater mobility for students and labour.<sup>8</sup> For example, in a recent case study one official in the Asia-Pacific region elaborated on this **concern about a lack of evidence to support some of the promises NQF advocates suggest:**

**“The use of NQFs in qualifications recognition, NQF referencing projects and regional qualifications frameworks is a new policy area and it is [our country’s] view that there is little evidence to suggest that the development of NQFs, NQF referencing projects and the development of regional qualifications frameworks actually leads to better recognition outcomes and greater mobility for students and workers.”**

*Source: Asia-Pacific Education Research Institutes Network (ERI-Net)  
Annual Meeting 22-24 February 2016, Tokyo, Japan*

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<sup>8</sup> See also Coles, Keevy, Bateman & Keating (2014). Flying Blind: policy rationales for national qualifications frameworks and how they tend to evolve, International Journal of Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning, Volume 7, Issue 1.

This highlights the **importance of developing a monitoring and evaluation framework** to support qualifications frameworks. Further complicating this issue is that the implementation of NQFs has been uneven across the region as some countries in the Asia-Pacific region struggle to make sense of new frameworks in relation to quality assurance and other mechanisms and policy areas. The dual pressure to expand access to education yet also to improve the quality of qualifications and their relevance to the labour market has emerged as a key dilemma in education, particularly among least developed countries (LDCs) and developing economies in Asia and the Pacific.

With the overarching goal to foster high quality and inclusive lifelong learning opportunities for all, the *Guidelines on Developing and Strengthening Qualifications Frameworks in Asia and the Pacific* explores important insights from NQF development efforts in Asia and the Pacific. In this context, an integrated approach means that NQFs, quality assurance and international recognition policies and practices support national-level development goals.

To help illustrate national-level strategies, Section 1.1 (below) will explore the rise of

qualifications frameworks in Asia and the Pacific, including an overview of a number of Member States participating in the development of the regional guidelines on NQFs (see Part Two).

The country case studies are as follows:

- South Asia: India, Sri Lanka, Nepal
- Southeast Asia: Cambodia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand
- East Asia: China, Japan, Republic of Korea
- Pacific: Australia, Fiji

With generous support from the **Republic of Korea Funds-In-Trust**, regional experts were convened from these and other countries in Bangkok, Thailand (July 2015), Tokyo, Japan (February 2016), Sydney, Australia (August 2016), and Apia, Samoa (March 2017) with the aim, among others, of informing the development of regional guidelines on NQFs in Asia and the Pacific. This effort was part of a discussion within the region about the role of qualifications frameworks in connection to existing quality assurance mechanisms and recognition conventions such as the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (Tokyo Convention).<sup>9</sup>

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9 For a list of experts and researchers involved, please see Annex and the Acknowledgements.

The UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education is responsible for overseeing these areas in the 46 Member States throughout the region. Building on this mandate, the Republic of Korea Funds-in-Trust project called *Developing Regional Quality Tools to Facilitate the Cross-Border Mobility of Students in Asia and the Pacific (KFIT Higher Education Project 2015-2019)* was a key source of support to convene stakeholders, take stock of regional needs and draft the present guidelines. Along these lines, the KFIT Higher Education Project aims to:

**1. Develop regional quality tools** to facilitate the recognition of foreign higher education study credits, study programmes and qualifications, and thus contribute to the cross-border mobility of students among countries in Asia and the Pacific region;

**2. Raise awareness** of Member States in Asia and the Pacific, especially those with emerging higher education systems, about the significance of quality issues in higher education and their impact on the cross-border mobility of students;

**3. Build national capacities** to establish or reform quality assurance systems;

**4. Strengthen capacity to monitor and evaluate** the application of regional quality tools of countries in this region.

The following guidelines are a result of more than two years of successive consultations to explore the rise of qualifications frameworks in the region, the diverse scopes and structures of NQFs, as well as different strategies and insights for developing and strengthening NQFs in selected countries. Most importantly, the guidelines emphasise **the importance of local contexts and needs to continuously build a sense of ownership among end-users**. This includes developing local strategies for monitoring and enhancing the value of NQFs so that they promote quality educational experiences and lifelong learning opportunities for all. To this end, it is critical to assess the development and potential value of qualifications frameworks in Asia and the Pacific.

### **1.1. The Rise of qualifications frameworks in Asia and the Pacific**

Worldwide, over 150 countries are now developing and implementing qualifications frameworks.<sup>10</sup> According to the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), the rapid expansion of these frameworks took place between 2008 and 2012. As of 2017,

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<sup>10</sup> See also CEDEFOP, ETF, UNESCO, UIL. 2017. Global Inventory of Regional and National Qualifications Frameworks Volume I: Thematic Chapters and Volume II: National and Regional Cases.

most UNESCO Member States in the Asia-Pacific region are planning or have already developed an NQF.

As shown below, there are multiple stages of planning, implementing and reviewing NQF structures.<sup>11</sup> Historically, the introduction of NQFs in Asia and the Pacific can be grouped into three phases of development. As part of the first generation of NQFs, the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) was among the first.

The AQF was established in the 1990s in response to several converging concerns. For example, in the technical and vocational education and training sector:

- Qualifications in the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector no longer provided a widely acceptable framework to recognise achievement;
- Changes in the way TVET was delivered, funded and recognised, especially the introduction of nationally-recognised training based on competencies identified by industry and enterprises;
- Integration of trade qualifications oriented around workplace competency with TVET qualifications and other higher education qualifications.

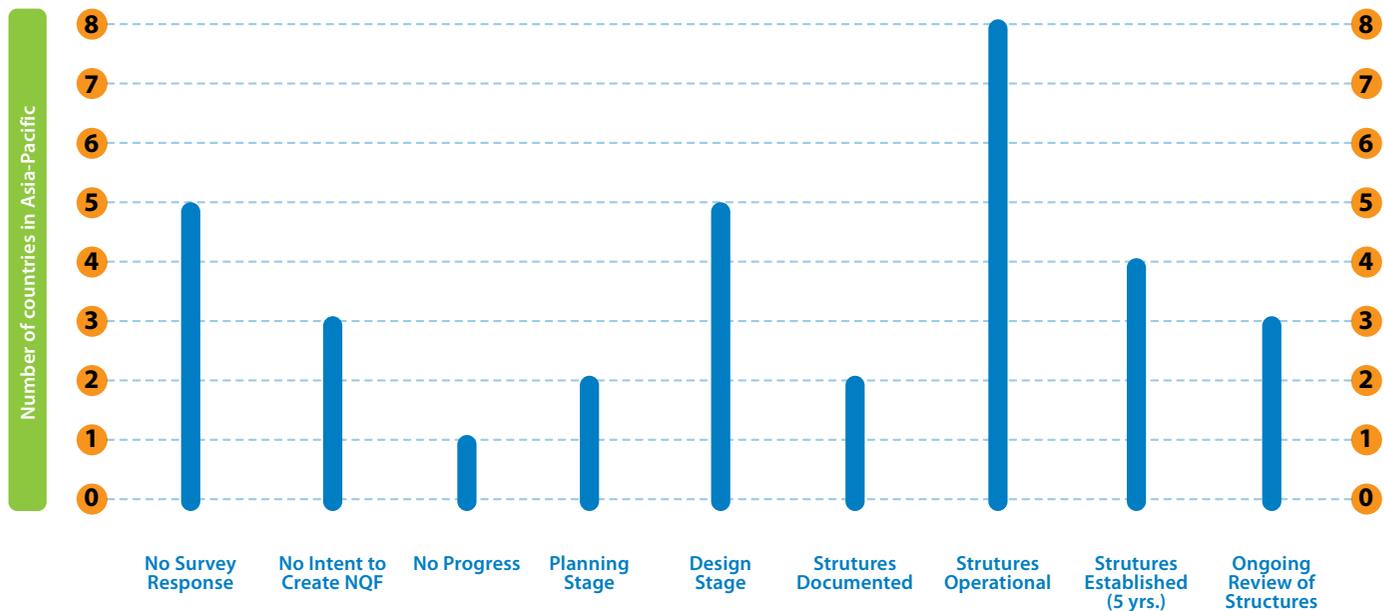
Building on these issues, it was determined that a national and cross-sectoral qualifications framework could provide the necessary consistency and internationally consistent recognition of learning outcomes across all TVET or higher education sectors. In doing so, the national system in Australia could also facilitate the development of flexible learning pathways. Being among the first countries in the world to develop such an overarching framework, **Australia has had to innovate and continuously adapt the model as it was implemented.** This early insight has been important region-wide.

A second generation of frameworks emerged in the early 2000's, which collectively were able to draw upon different national experiences (e.g. Malaysia, which was an early adopter of a NQF in the Asia-Pacific region). In the last decade, many more countries in Asia and the Pacific have developed NQFs and are moving towards operational structures (e.g. the Philippines, Fiji and Thailand). These frameworks were developed after years of consultations with industry stakeholders and related ministries (see Part Two).

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11 For background on the stages and categories of NQF implementation in Figure 3, see also DAAD, 2016 <http://share-asean.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/AQRF-NQF-State-of-Play-Report.pdf>

Figure 3. Self-reports on the Status of NQF Implementation in Asia and the Pacific



Source: Country Reports, 14th Session of the Regional Committee (Sydney, Australia, 2016). UNESCO Bangkok.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Data for Figure 3 is from a self-report collected from government officials attending the 14th Session of the Regional Committee on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (17-18 August 2016 in Sydney, Australia)

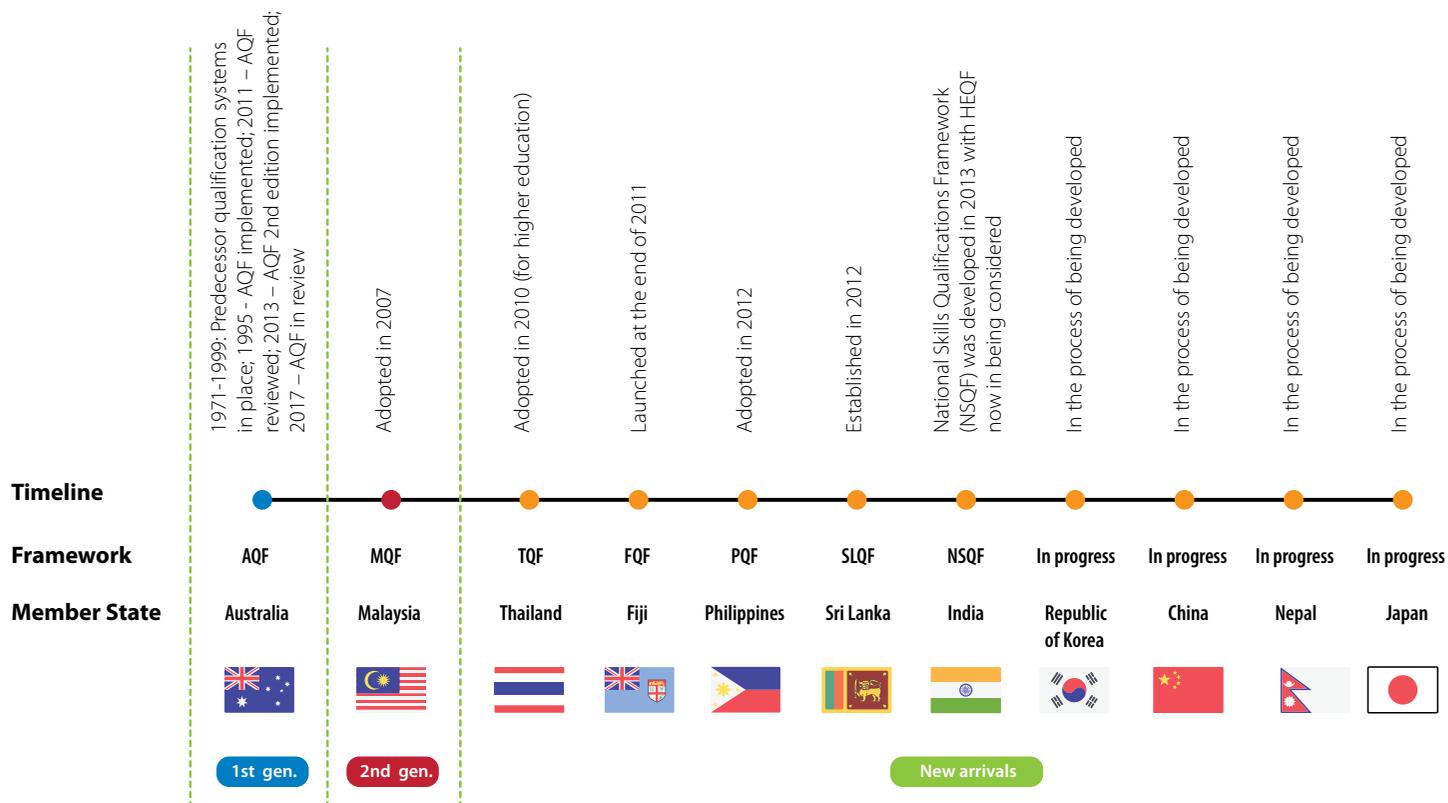
### **Insights from the field:**

The decision to develop and introduce an NQF can no longer be considered just a domestic initiative; there are now multi-dimensional considerations for policymakers to consider, including around the sectoral, national, regional and global coverage of a framework.

In addition, some countries self-reported that they have not yet established an NQF, but are in the early stages of development (Table 1. below). For example, in the Republic of Korea, the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Employment and Labour have a joint NQF development master plan. This plan includes establishing additional “Industry Skills Committees” to oversee sectoral relationships between education providers and specific industries. And in 2016, the 13th Five-Year Plan for Economic

and Social Development of the People’s Republic of China proposed to build an NQF. To explore these development issues further, the following section outlines the background and process of NQF developments in the Asia-Pacific region and the aims of the guidelines.

Table 1. Excerpt on NQF Development in Asia-Pacific



Source: Asia-Pacific Education Research Institutes Network (ERI-Net) Annual Meeting, 22-24 February 2016, Tokyo, Japan. UNESCO Bangkok.

## 1.2. Background and aims of the guidelines

The NQF guidelines are an **entry point** depending on the needs and context of a given lifelong learning system. For example, the key insights and themes on NQFs, as well as the case studies are intended to help spark a reflection and dialogue, not only about the cross-cutting nature of qualification systems, but about the value and timeliness of stakeholder engagement and data collection processes to inform ongoing developments of NQFs. The Guidelines also underline the importance of **meaningful collaboration** with diverse stakeholders (e.g. students, education and training institutions, policymakers, civil

society members, employers and industry players) to develop and strengthen NQFs. This includes promoting collaboration between different departments and agencies within government. There are many levels of interest as well, including between global, regional, and localized functions of NQFs. These brief Guidelines are not a comprehensive review of all levels or technical areas, but instead shares experiences and key insights from Asia and the Pacific on developing and strengthening qualifications frameworks at national level. With this in mind, the following section explores the need to promote meaningful and timely collaboration, with a focus on ensuring value for end-users of qualifications, including industry and students.

**The new generation of frameworks differs from first generation frameworks by emphasising communication and transparency rather than regulation and harmonisation. These frameworks are 'loose' in the sense that they have been designed to embrace the multiplicity of education and training subsystems, institutions and provisions, reflecting a broad range of concepts, traditions, values and interests.**

*Source: CEDEFOP, ETF, UNESCO, UIL. 2017. Global Inventory of Regional and National Qualifications Frameworks, Volume I: Thematic Chapters.*

### 1.3. Ensuring value for stakeholders

At their core, effective NQFs serve the dual purpose of promoting quality education and enhancing the responsiveness of lifelong learning systems. Given the complexity and local nature of this task, there are no shortcuts to this development effort. The Guidelines thus draw on the rich experiences and diversity within the region to highlight different approaches and localized solutions for the development, implementation, and sustainability of an NQF (see Part 2). For example, effective NQFs rely on engaging diverse stakeholders in a continuous development process. These stakeholders may include students, educational institutions and training

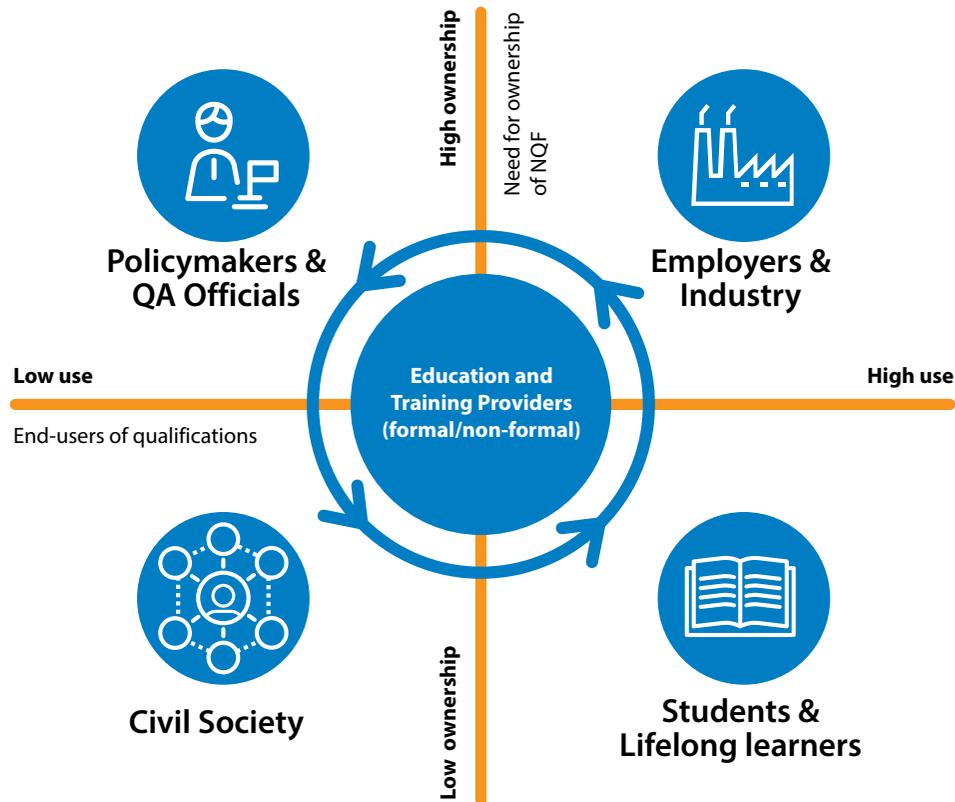
providers, employers and industry. In addition, there is a clear need to build the understanding and practical commitments required from senior government managers to implement the quality-assured NQFs for the recognition of tertiary qualifications. Yet too often, the main stakeholders spearheading an NQF (e.g. policymakers) are not the primary end-users (e.g. employers, credential evaluators for recognition, and lifelong learners).

How can different industry groups be engaged in a meaningful way? Figure 4 highlights the need to promote ownership of qualifications frameworks, in particular among end-users of qualifications such as industry players and lifelong learners.

**“In a fast-changing, global economy and labour market, skills and qualifications are key to ensure inclusive economic growth and fair and inclusive societies.”**

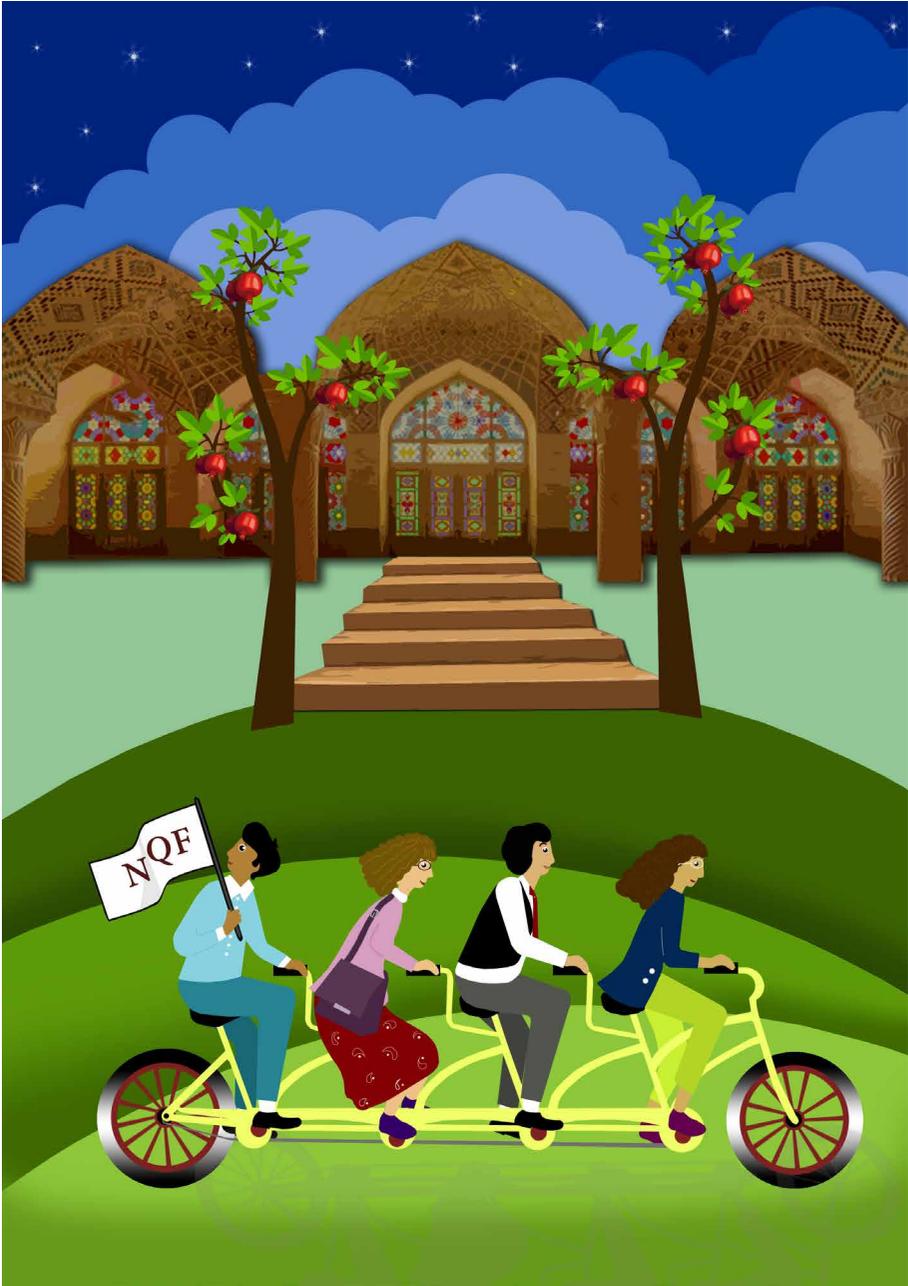
*Mr. Borhene Chakroun, Chief, Section for Youth, Literacy and Skills Development, UNESCO*

Figure 4: Promote ownership of qualifications frameworks, including end-users like industry and lifelong learners



Source: UNESCO Bangkok, 2018. *Guidelines on Developing and Strengthening Qualifications Frameworks in Asia and the Pacific - Building a Culture of Shared Responsibility.*

# Building a culture of shared responsibility



For example, by promoting ownership among employers and industry, NQFs are more likely to be accepted within a country's education and training system and labour market. Given this need, primary end-users such as employers and students should be involved in the development and review of NQFs. In this way, the main purpose of an NQF should be clearly defined so that all stakeholders understand its intended vision and scope. To support these needs, UNESCO plays a unique role in promoting the potential value of NQFs to help strengthen lifelong learning systems.

#### ***1.4 Role of UNESCO in strengthening lifelong learning systems in Asia-Pacific***

As an intergovernmental organisation and the only UN agency with a mandate in higher education, UNESCO is well-positioned to provide its Member States with a platform for collaboration to foster dialogue on policy, research and practice in pursuing high quality and inclusive lifelong learning opportunities for all. The emergence of this emphasis on lifelong learning is itself a response to rapid

changes in society and UNESCO's mandate to help individuals adapt to the evolving requirements of the labour market and better master the changing timeframes and rhythms of society.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, the Education 2030 Agenda does not explicitly require the development of NQFs. Instead, the decision to develop and introduce an NQF is based most often on multi-dimensional considerations for policymakers, including sectoral, national, regional and global coverage of their national qualifications system.<sup>14</sup>

UNESCO's primary role in this context is to support Member States in developing education systems to foster high-quality and inclusive lifelong learning for all.<sup>15</sup> For example, in the context of higher education, UNESCO's mandate is to strengthen national capacities to develop evidence-based higher education policies to address the challenges of equity, quality, inclusion, expansion, mobility and accountability. International conventions, such as the Tokyo Convention reflect a common understanding of, and joint commitment

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13 Delors, J. et al. 1996. Learning: The Treasure Within. Paris, UNESCO.

14 For example, see NQF references in the Kuala Lumpur Declaration (2015). Asia-Pacific Conference on Education and Training. [www.unescobkk.org/education/tvet/asia-pacific-conference-on-education-and-training/kuala-lumpur-declaration/](http://www.unescobkk.org/education/tvet/asia-pacific-conference-on-education-and-training/kuala-lumpur-declaration/)

to, the principles and international norms that are developed and agreed upon by UNESCO Member States in the Asia-Pacific region (see also Section 2.3 and 4.4)<sup>16</sup> In reference to NQFs, the Kuala Lumpur Declaration in 2015 underlined the importance of transparent qualifications and recognition practices. Ministers responsible for education and training, high-level government officials, representatives of multilateral, bilateral, employers, youth and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), of the research community and of the

private sector gathered at the Asia-Pacific Conference on Education and Training in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and gave a strong endorsement for the role of NQFs and their potential for facilitating learning and career pathways (see excerpt below).

**Member States recognize that qualification systems and frameworks are important for recognizing formal, non-formal and informal learning; building lifelong learning systems; and facilitating the recognition of qualifications.**

*Source: Kuala Lumpur Declaration, August 2015*

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15 UNESCO, 2016. 38 C/5 Approved – Programme and Budget 2016-2017

16 The convention was adopted in Tokyo in 2011, having been revised from an earlier convention adopted in 1983 in Bangkok, Thailand, to reflect significant changes in higher education, such as the increasing diversity of public and private education providers and the growth of ICT and qualifications earned through open and distance learning.

Later in 2015, delegates from around the world furthered these aims by agreeing to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including **Sustainable Development Goal Four (SDG4) known as Education 2030**. The agreement underscored that the comparability, recognition and quality assurance of qualifications has become an important area of concern, particularly where administrative systems are weak (i.e. Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States).

To address these issues, the **Education 2030 Framework for Action** is designed to ensure that quality assurance, comparability and recognition of educational qualifications across institutions and education providers are recognized as widely as possible. In this regard, equitable access, not least for the most vulnerable members of society, is an essential motivator for developing transparent learning outcomes based on qualifications frameworks.

#### Insights from the field:

The shift to outcomes-based education may not be as difficult as it seems if higher education actors open their minds to articulating the learner outcomes disciplines are expected to achieve, the means for optimally achieving such outcomes and the assessments that lead to quality assured qualifications.

In this regard, the goals and roadmap of SDG4 – ***to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*** – serve as a platform and catalyst for the shift to

learner outcomes qualifications in higher education. For example, SDG Targets 4.3 and 4.4 are directly applicable for tertiary education.<sup>18</sup> In terms of benefits, qualifications frameworks can help deliver

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18 SDG 4.3: By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university; and SDG 4.4: By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent work and entrepreneurship.

relevant learning outcomes and skills, while quality assurance increases the chance of access through recognition and acceptance of relevant skills for employment and further study. In line with SDG4, equal access to lifelong learning opportunities requires strong, transparent, non-discriminatory and outcomes-based processes for recognition.

To elaborate, the following section explores how these aspirations serve as underlying principles for effectively developing and implementing qualifications frameworks.

#### To summarize:

- **The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** underline the importance of relevant and effective learning outcomes as a means to promote quality education.
- **National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF)** are a means to build a culture of shared responsibility throughout education and training systems, including for the development of expected learning outcomes (e.g. knowledge, skills and values).
- Despite the rapid growth of qualifications frameworks in Asia-Pacific, **questions remain about how NQFs are being implemented to improve student mobility and employability**. It is therefore critical to address the misconception that NQF is a shortcut to international recognition of qualifications, or a quick solution to quality assurance.
- **New tools and strategies are being developed by UNESCO Member States** to strengthen an integrated approach to NQF, quality assurance and recognition, including around key policy instruments such as the Tokyo Convention and forthcoming Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications.



Source: Adapted from the 14th Session of the Regional Committee in Sydney, Australia, August 2016

## 2. KEY PRINCIPLES

The importance of enhancing the quality and relevance of education and training is at the heart of SDG4-Education 2030. Building on this commitment, the successful development and implementation of NQFs should be aligned with the goals of a country's education and training system and labour market. Based on case studies in Asia and the Pacific (see Part Two), three approaches can be highlighted as key ingredients of effective efforts to develop and implement an NQF:

**1. Creating a culture of ownership through stakeholder engagement:** Effective stakeholder engagement provides space for diverse groups to voice their needs and views throughout the development phase of an NQF. These stakeholders include students, institutions, national governments, and members of civil society. Building a culture of shared ownership of

a NQF requires meaningful and sustained participation as the underlying vision and framework take shape. Are there shared values and concerns for NQF among different stakeholders? (Section 2.1 below).

**2. Building trust to support mobility and employability:** In order to build trust among all stakeholders, the relationship of NQFs to the national quality assurance system must be clear. When implemented effectively, NQF can give credibility to qualifications. In this regard, what does an NQF do to promote mobility and employability? (Section 2.2).

**3. Promoting transparency and sustainability:** Ultimately, it is vital to develop strong institutional structures to ensure transparency and sustainability. Does a National Information Centre provide authoritative information about quality

assurance? These efforts include building and sustaining institutional capacities for information sharing (Section 2.3).

As noted in a recent report<sup>19</sup>, NQFs have various means to achieve their stated goals,

including the ordering and specification of qualifications, the promotion of multiple pathways for lifelong learning, and facilitating international recognition.

### **Insights from the field:**

A strong connection to the education system's quality assurance processes goes a long way towards ensuring confidence among stakeholders, both domestically and internationally.

### ***Questions to consider:***

- 1) How does an NQF contribute to lifelong learning?
- 2) Is the NQF part of the recognition system and quality assurance systems?
- 3) How will it work as part of the international recognition systems?
- 4) How does an NQF contribute to achieving and monitoring the SDG4/ Education 2030 agenda?
- 5) How is the NQF monitored and strengthened over time?

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19 DAAD, 2016. ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework and NQFs - State of Play Report. Report for EU SHARE. <http://share-asean.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/AQRF-NQF-State-of-Play-Report.pdf>

### **2.1. Shared values and concerns for qualifications frameworks in Asia-Pacific**

Across the Asia-Pacific region, there are shared values and concerns about NQFs, including issues concerning the **compatibility of qualifications** (i.e. determining “substantial differences” between qualification levels or degrees), **transparency, accountability, and mutual trust**. Despite such concerns, however, many countries have argued for the value of NQFs in supporting industry involvement and improving the relevance of education and training to address national development priorities.

In addition, personal and ethical-level competencies are sometimes included in NQFs (e.g. see Section 3.1). These ethical competencies can also be tied to the values and roles of NQFs by promoting holistic and student-centred development.

### **2.2. Guiding principles on qualifications frameworks to support mobility and employability**

A possible shortcoming in NQF development is whether such systems support or do not support academic mobility and to what extent they do so. Well-conceived NQFs can foster greater labour mobility and assist in the creation and support of a globally mobile workforce. Recognition principles can be broad and adaptable to national contexts. They can also enhance understanding of qualifications and build trust in their consistency. **In other words, when implemented effectively, NQFs can boost the credibility of qualifications in terms of labour mobility and employability.** To achieve this, an NQF should be up to date as well as nationally consistent and it should also meet the skills needs of an economy, including the standards expected by employers and industry.<sup>20</sup> Building and implementing such a robust and relevant NQF takes time.

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<sup>20</sup> The prominence of the term ‘skill’ in international education and training discourse reflects trends in linking education and training systems with the labour market, and the policy focus on employability. Source: Level-setting and recognition of learning outcomes: The use of level descriptors in the twenty-first century. UNESCO, 2015

Across the region one key challenge is to increase common understanding of the interactions between qualification frameworks, quality assurance mechanisms and international recognition of locally

obtained qualifications. The aim is to foster a common understanding of comparability and respect for diversity without mandating harmonization and standardisation.

**To summarize:**

- **Quality assurance** alone does not drive mobility or employability
- **Qualifications frameworks** alone do not drive mobility or employability.
- **International recognition** relies on quality assurance and qualifications frameworks to underpin academic mobility and cross-border employability – whether that is securing recognition of your country's qualifications across the Asia-Pacific, or recognizing Asia-Pacific qualifications in the home country.

Furthermore, quality assurance systems provide stakeholder confidence that outcomes have been met to a certain standard. In this sense, a qualification is the **“currency of the labour market”** in that it indicates proven ability. Quality assurance is a form of consumer protection that

guarantees the value of a qualification to students, higher education institutions and employers alike. In this way, a well-functioning system can help support national development.

### Insights from the field:

The Philippines Qualifications Framework (PQF) underscores the importance of having **shared objectives to support national development:**

- 1) **Establish** national standards and levels for outcomes of education and training, skills and competencies;
- 2) **Support** the development and maintenance of pathways and equivalencies which provide access to qualifications and assist people in moving easily and readily between the different educational and training sectors and between these sectors and the labour market;
- 3) **Align** the PQF with international qualifications frameworks to support the national and international mobility of workers through increased recognition of the value and comparability of Philippine qualifications.

For governments, there are many potential benefits that can be gained from integrating strategies across agencies responsible for qualifications frameworks, quality assurance and recognition. These benefits include promoting collaboration, reducing duplication, maximizing impact, and driving strategies for sustainable development. Exemplifying strategy integration, efforts to achieve SDG4.3 can advance other targets such as reducing inequality as well as promoting decent work opportunities,

economic growth, and gender equality (see Section 1.4 above for more on the SDGs). At student and institutional levels, a coherent approach to NQFs has the potential benefit of promoting an outcomes-based approach to education and creating more flexible pathways and options for education and training. To do so, all stakeholders need access to authoritative information on the levels of qualifications and whether or not they are quality assured.

### 2.3. Transparency and the role of National Information Centres

In a vast and diverse region with increasing numbers of inbound and outbound international students, the Tokyo Convention helps facilitate the recognition of higher education qualifications based on common principles, increased information sharing and transparency. In this regard, National Information Centres (NICs) play a highly visible role. For example, the Tokyo Convention requires each State Party to **provide relevant information on their national higher education system and qualifications, as well as to take adequate measures to develop and maintain an NIC.**<sup>21</sup> While the form and function of an NIC varies by country, they provide open access to relevant, accurate and up-to-date information, including:

- (a) Facilitating access to authoritative and accurate information on its higher education system and qualifications;
- (b) Facilitating access to information on the higher education systems and qualifications of the other State Parties; and
- (c) Giving advice or information on recognition matters and assessment of qualifications, in accordance with national laws and regulations.

Further, Article IX.3 of the Tokyo Convention requires each Party to appoint a member to the network of NIC's in Asia-Pacific (see also Section 4.6). The network of NIC's serves a crosscutting role to share authoritative information, including explaining the role and relevance of quality assurance and NQFs in a given national context.

**“Since Qualifications Frameworks describe qualifications in terms of learning outcomes independent of learning pathways, they are today a vital information and transparency tool for facilitating the recognition of higher education qualifications and qualifications giving equal access to quality higher education, both at intra- and inter-regional levels.”**

*Mr. Peter J. Wells, Chief, Section for Higher Education, UNESCO*

21 For more detailed explanations of NIC's see, "Guidelines for National Information Centres: A reference for Asia-Pacific Practitioners".

## 3. SCOPE AND STRUCTURE

Universal definitions regarding the scope or structure of NQFs have not been developed in Asia and the Pacific. However, there are lessons that can be learned from the examples of Australia, Malaysia and other nations in the region: these can serve as useful examples for developing and strengthening an NQF.

In essence qualifications frameworks are often ambitious mobility reforms that, when fully realised, could overhaul the mobility of various types of stakeholders: student, labourer, academic, researcher, and provider. However, as has been noted, qualifications frameworks do not, by themselves, deliver mobility or quality or recognition. Instead, it is important to explore the relevant scope and structures to fully realise this objective.

### **3.1. Domains of learning: knowledge, skills, competencies and ethics**

Learning outcomes emphasize the results

of learning rather than focus on inputs such as years of study or contact hours. In the context of NQFs the domains of learning are based on generic learning outcomes that often include:

- **Knowledge:** What a graduate knows and understands. This can be general or specialised, in a single area or a range of areas and can be discrete or cumulative;
- **Skills:** What a graduate can do. This can be cognitive, creative, technical, communicative and/or interpersonal;
- **Application of knowledge and skills:** The context in which a graduate applies acquired knowledge and skills.

*Source: Country Education Profiles Australia, accessed 2 December 2016*

In addition, to help learners develop the necessary knowledge and skills across

their lifespan, many education systems throughout the region have emphasized the importance of **transversal competencies**, which refer to knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that are integral to life in the 21st century.<sup>21</sup> Developed in cooperation with

experts throughout Asia and the Pacific and UNESCO Bangkok, Table 2 illustrates a nonbinding and descriptive framework for transversal competencies in Asia-Pacific (below).

*Table 2: Framework on transversal competencies to inform NQF*

Domains	Examples of key skills, competencies, values and attitudes
Critical and innovative thinking	Creativity, entrepreneurship, resourcefulness, application skills, reflective thinking, reasoned decision-making
Interpersonal skills	Communication skills, organizational skills, teamwork, collaboration, sociability, collegiality, empathy, compassion
Intrapersonal skills	Self-discipline, ability to learn independently, flexibility and adaptability, self-awareness, perseverance, self-motivation, compassion, integrity, self-respect
Global citizenship	Awareness, tolerance, openness, responsibility, respect for diversity, ethical understanding, intercultural understanding, ability to resolve conflicts, democratic participation, conflict resolution, respect for the environment, national identity, sense of belonging
Media and information literacy	Ability to obtain and analyse information through ICT, ability to critically evaluate information and media content, ethical use of ICT
Other (physical health, religious values)	Appreciation of healthy lifestyle, respect for religious values

*Source: UNESCO (2016). Assessment of Transversal Competencies: Policy and Practice in the Asia-Pacific Region.*

21 UNESCO (2016). Assessment of Transversal Competencies: Policy and Practice in the Asia-Pacific Region

The domains and examples above recognize the importance of developing knowledge and skills for sustainable development, including global citizenship and cultural diversity. Further, the domains are both social (e.g. interpersonal) and technical (e.g. media and information literacy). Together, NQFs can build on such examples to cover all domains of learning, including education and training across sectors.

### **3.2. Sector coverage**

The sector coverage of NQFs in Asia and the Pacific is diverse, ranging as it does from inclusive of all tertiary education to TVET only. Australia has a long history of qualifications systems and standards and was one of the first countries in the world to introduce a cross-sectoral NQF. The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) was the country's first national cross-sectoral policy to cover qualifications from all education sectors: higher education, TVET and school education. The need for an NQF was stressed because qualifications in the TVET sector no longer provided a widely acceptable framework to recognise achievement. NQFs are meant to address needs across all sectors, including public and private higher education, TVET, as well as formal and non-formal institutions – and in some cases such as in the Philippines parts of the basic education system are also

included. Part Two gives other examples of sector coverage.

To explore differences among qualifications frameworks, referencing levels and descriptors has emerged as a complex policy area. The next section provides a brief overview of the potential benefits and limitations of referencing.

### **3.3. Referencing and comparing qualifications across countries in Asia and the Pacific**

Qualification levels vary country by country, yet may refer to the complexity, breadth and depth of learning outcomes (known as level criteria). Typically, each NQF level has qualification types and descriptors based on learning outcomes.<sup>23</sup> Referencing or comparing these different levels of qualifications, either nationally or regionally, has emerged as a primary method of connecting stakeholders across domains.

The potential benefits of alignment range from economic benefits at a national or regional level to benefits for individuals, including the provision of a systematic basis for improving mutual trust and the recognition of qualifications between nations or regions. Referencing also aims to explore the comparability of two national qualifications frameworks or a national and

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23 For a more detailed discussion of level-setting, see: Keevy, J. and Chakroun, B. (2015). Level-setting and recognition of learning outcomes. The use of level descriptors in the twenty-first century. UNESCO.

regional qualifications framework. The aim is to support mobility and improve understanding through critical analyses of the technical and conceptual characteristics

of the respective frameworks and systematic identification of similarities and differences, including in learning outcomes and quality assurance.<sup>24</sup>

### Insights from the field:

Referencing is not about automatic recognition. Qualifications recognition assessment methodology assesses a foreign qualification holistically.

However, the level of a given qualification in a national or regional framework is only one of many factors in the assessment process. These factors vary significantly, even among qualifications that are at the same level of the same framework. For example, a Bachelor's degree in Nursing may be at the same level and have the same generic learning outcomes as a Bachelor's degree in Construction, but this does not necessarily mean that the graduates can do the same job or study in the exact same Master's Degree programmes. They are not comparable in important ways and could not be recognised as the same for those purposes. Hence, **it is critical to address the misconception that qualifications frameworks are a shortcut to recognition or a quick solution to quality assurance.**

In addition, NQFs should be explicit about

what referencing can and cannot achieve and whether it is the most flexible and sustainable solution to recognition or mobility. A key question in this regard may be: *Will referencing deliver improved mobility?* In some cases, referencing alone cannot deliver better mobility unless recognition and quality assurance stakeholders are fully involved and ready to embed referencing outcomes in their activities as well.

### 3.4. Credit transfer systems

Credit transfer, whilst beyond the scope of these Guidelines, is nonetheless an important consideration. In this regard several components or measures of learning are important. These include:

- Volume of learning indicators;
- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL);
- Credit transfers;

24 For example, see Annex for Key principles for Quality Assurance of TVET Qualifications in Asia-Pacific

- International Recognition of higher education degrees and TVET certifications.

Credit systems seek to provide tangible measures of the educational value of certain qualifications. These systems can serve as a common currency which allows learners to understand the effort and time expected of an average learner to complete the learning process and attain the learning outcomes of relevant qualifications. The systems also improve credit transfers and assessments based on prior learning.

For example, in Malaysia the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) provides a

process for individuals to seek recognition of previous training, work experience, professional development, professional licensing and examinations and other work-based education and training. Such practices are an assessment process undertaken by recognized providers where individuals apply for an assessment of their current skills and knowledge. Recognition of prior learning is a key component of developing a comprehensive and flexible national qualifications framework (see Table 3). Additional strategies for developing a useful qualifications framework are elaborated below.

*Table 3. Reducing barriers to assessment of non-formal and informal learning*

**According to the Tokyo Convention, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) means a process to formally acknowledge the knowledge and skills a person has as a result of formal and/or non-formal learning.**

Promising practices to reduce barriers to assessment of non-formal and informal learning include:

- International research into strategies to promote recognition of prior learning and credit opportunities;
- Policies in relation to recognition of prior learning and credit opportunities;
- NQF documentation, including information in relation to recognition of prior learning and credit opportunities;
- Schemes that reduce barriers to assessment of non-formal and informal learning, and evaluations of such schemes;
- Easily accessible information for potential applicants for assessment of non-formal and informal learning;
- Promotions targeting employers that explain the benefits of assessment of non-formal and informal learning;
- Analysis of datasets to determine success or otherwise of schemes or promotions;
- Guidelines to support assessors in undertaking recognition of prior learning.

*Source: Guidelines for the Quality Assurance of TVET Qualifications in the Asia-Pacific Region. UNESCO Bangkok, 2017.*

### Insights from the field:

Last year a staff member at UNESCO relayed information about a master's candidate studying at a major research university in Thailand. What made this student special was that despite being a master's candidate in human rights this person did not have a bachelor's degree or prior formal qualification. Yet coming from a former conflict zone in the global south, the student had vast experience as an NGO manager but no regular access to formal schooling. **Given the candidate's professional experience and an assessment of prior learning, the university was still able to enroll the international student as a degree-seeking master's candidate on full scholarship.**

This type of flexible learning pathway is an innovative example where a university in the Asia-Pacific region was able to admit and fully fund an international student from a least developed country. This was possible based on effective strategies for assessing and recognizing prior experience, even if the knowledge, skills and competences were gained outside a formal education system. **Education 2030 and the recognition conventions are powerful tools that embody these same principles** as part of a vision to build a stronger global community.

## 4. STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

With the core principle of building a culture of ownership and connectivity across NQFs, quality assurance and international recognition, the following section focuses on strategies for effectively developing qualifications frameworks in Asia and the Pacific. Given the great diversity across the region, there are a range of experiences with regards to the process and time needed to effectively develop a NQF. These different processes and milestones are explored below.

### ***4.1. Process and timeline of developing qualifications frameworks in Asia-Pacific***

In developing and introducing a new or revised qualifications framework or system it is vital that all stakeholders are consulted and have the opportunity to provide feedback and input into the design of the framework. In many cases, intensive stakeholder engagement with institutions can be undertaken at both the design and development phase and again at the

implementation phase. This commitment extends the timeline for development but is a necessary consideration in the development or evaluation process of NQFs. Below, the self-assessment explores different levels of reviewing processes (on a scale from no intent to create an NQF to strengthening an existing NQF), all of which require stakeholder validation.

As has been discussed, the interconnection among qualifications frameworks, quality assurance and recognition is important to achieve operationally; there is a need for synergy among the bodies that develop these tools at the level of policy and in operational terms.

### ***4.2. Strategies for stakeholder engagement and ownership***

Effective stakeholder engagement provides stakeholders with a voice in the development and updating of NQFs.

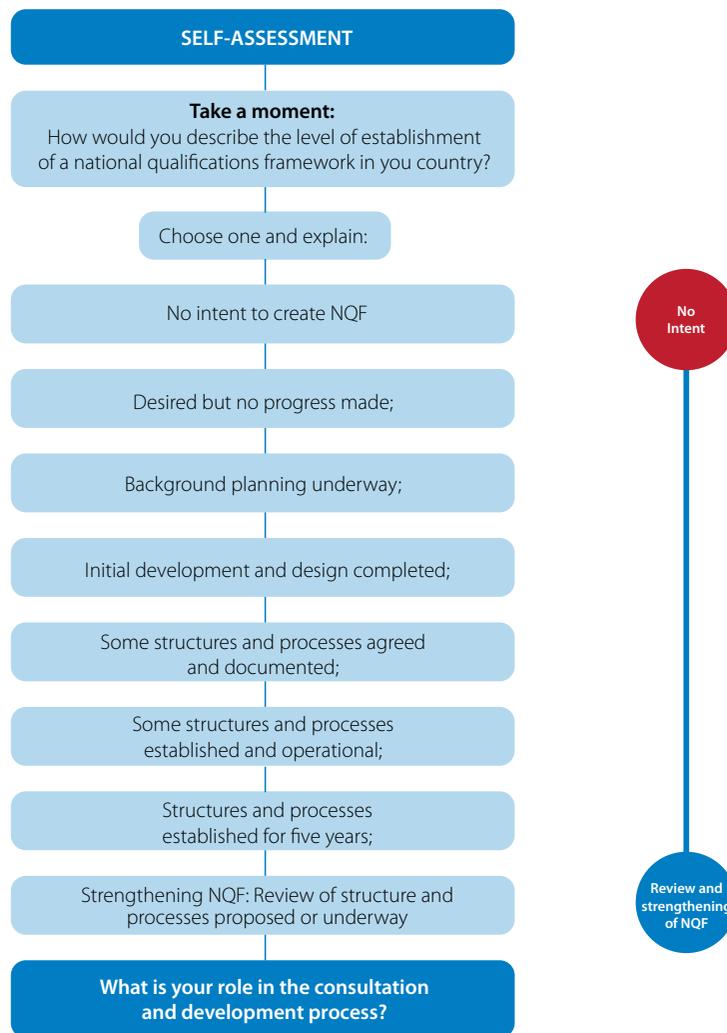
### Insights from the field:

It is vital to have strong institutional structures in place and a sense of shared responsibility. To do so, institutions must be able to apply an NQF transparently and effectively in line with their own **internal curriculum development and assessment practices**. As such, prior to the implementation of an NQF it is important to ensure that institutions and relevant partners are aware of their obligations and have effective strategies in place to ensure the successful operating of an NQF.

This will contribute to its acceptance and provide stakeholders with a sense of ownership over the framework. To that end, UNESCO supports participatory governance and coordinated partnerships at all levels and across sectors with the aim of upholding the right to participation of all stakeholders. For example, in TVET, under indicative implementation strategies, the Education 2030 Framework for Action suggests to:

**“Promote collaboration on enhancing transparency and cross-border recognition** of TVET qualifications to raise the quality of TVET programmes and enable workers’ and learners’ mobility, and to ensure that TVET programmes keep pace with the changing labour market demands.”

In this regard, the inclusion of education experts and practitioners, together with representative bodies in the initial governance arrangements of an NQF, is important. Meaningful participation helps to ensure that policy is relevant for all stakeholders. At the implementation phase, frequent consultations can also ensure that stakeholders are aware of implementation timeframes and their obligations. Furthermore, such engagement can enable users to have strategies in place to ensure compliance with the newly established framework. It is also important that institutions have internal strategies for the sake of successful implementation and acceptance. Depending on national priorities and resources, this can be achieved through:



Source: Adapted from DAAD (2016) & Coles, Keevy, Bateman & Keating (2014)<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Adapted from DAAD (2016). ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework and National Qualifications Frameworks State of Play Report. SHARE, the European Union Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region & Coles, Keevy, Bateman & Keating (2014). Flying Blind: policy rationales for national qualifications frameworks and how they tend to evolve, International Journal of Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning, Volume 7, Issue 1.

- Working groups (e.g. Industry Skills Committees)
- Program mapping and course review
- Transition strategies
- Faculty action plans
- Professional development for academics and teachers to ensure their teaching and assessment methods would allow for learning outcomes to be met
- Revision of internal policies and development of guidelines
- Compliance checking
- Information evenings for students and parents/guardians
- Ongoing industry-wide consultations to ensure major stakeholder engagement.

These strategies are not one size fits all, however. Instead, they must be adapted and localized as part of a meaningful process of collaboration and trust building. For example, Australia has found that an NQF is more likely to be accepted when the qualifications types (e.g. names of specific qualifications in a country) are retained without too many changes. The following section describes these efforts in the context of governance structures within national systems for lifelong learning.

### ***4.3. Governance structures within national systems for lifelong learning***

Given the diversity of governance structures across Asia and the Pacific, how an NQF is anchored within national systems will vary. However, the vantage point should focus on developing a learner-centred lifelong learning coordination mechanism for NQF. This may mean that a working group is needed to oversee inter-ministerial collaboration. As a general rule, the governance structure of NQFs in Asia and the Pacific often relies on key leaders with access to significant oversight and financial resources. For example, the governance structures within national systems may rely on:

- Initiator and champion (e.g. ready to build and sustain buy-in)
- Institutionalized qualifications frameworks (e.g. or sector-specific frameworks)
- Legislative underpinnings
- Qualifications authorities
- Funding mechanisms.

Each of these elements can help with inter-ministerial collaboration, provide investment returns to sustain the

development of qualifications frameworks, and facilitate continuous innovation and engagement. These approaches should also be integrated across purposes, including quality assurance agencies, stakeholders and recognition policies.

For example, in Australia it was determined that neither sector-level nor a discipline specific framework could provide consistent recognition of outcomes achieved in all Australian post-compulsory education and could thus be flexible and responsive for lifelong learning needs.

#### ***4.4. Integrating quality assurance, international recognition and qualifications frameworks***

As highlighted earlier, qualifications frameworks, quality assurance and recognition are separate areas of public policy. In the Asia-Pacific region such areas are often developed and implemented in isolation. Table 4 provides a brief overview of these three policy areas (below).

#### **Insights from the field:**

Acceptance can be further enhanced by providing a place for various stakeholder users groups within an NQF's governance structure. Governance arrangements that include stakeholders can be particularly useful during the early stages of implementation.

*Table 4. Defining the Roles of QA, QF and Recognition*

<b>Quality assurance (QA)</b>	QA promotes the systematic review of educational programmes to ensure that acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being maintained <sup>26</sup>
<b>Qualifications frameworks (QF)</b>	Underpinned by quality assurance, QF can help lifelong learning systems to enhance transparency, comparability and recognition of qualifications within and across-countries <sup>27</sup>
<b>Qualifications recognition</b>	Recognition of qualifications means a formal acknowledgement as defined and given by the competent recognition authorities of the value of a foreign education qualification <sup>28</sup>

26 UNESCO (2016). Evaluation of UNESCO's Regional Conventions on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002452/245223E.pdf>

27 Kuala Lumpur Declaration (2015). Asia-Pacific Conference on Education and Training. [www.unescobkk.org/education/tvet/asia-pacific-conference-on-education-and-training/kuala-lumpur-declaration/](http://www.unescobkk.org/education/tvet/asia-pacific-conference-on-education-and-training/kuala-lumpur-declaration/)

28 UNESCO (2011). Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (2011 Tokyo Convention). [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=48975&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=48975&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

Integrating strategies in these three policy areas of cross-border higher education means that supporting one strategy will simultaneously advance other strategies. For example, in the context of the SDGs, tertiary education is integrated into sustainable development strategies as it can impart mind-sets, skills, and knowledge necessary to effect sustainable changes.

In Australia, quality assurance, qualifications frameworks and qualifications recognition and effectiveness are known as a “*mobility trifecta*.” This is because when all three criteria are in place and information about each criteria is clear and accessible, it makes mobility a much easier process and so a high level of trust can be achieved quickly. In part because NQFs have received

increasing attention in recent years, countries throughout the Asia-Pacific region have developed, or are at the early stages of developing and implementing, an integrated model for an NQF based on learning outcomes. The region needs to cooperate in order to work out how these policy areas can and should interact to achieve their full potential.

One area of concern is that there are countries focused on reforms relating to quality assurance without also including a focus on recognition. Other countries are developing qualifications frameworks with the objective of improving international mobility yet without considering how recognition authorities and recognition policies function. Recognition authorities

could deny recognition for quality-assured qualifications achieved through flexible lifelong learning pathways that are a product of new qualifications frameworks. Instead, barriers are being created to mobility and employability, in addition to the full realization of the Education 2030 agenda, by failures to work together, trust colleagues and keep pace with educational innovation; ultimately, individual graduates will end up suffering the consequences. To combat these harmful tendencies, effective coordination and policy coherence are key. These efforts include the following:

- **Quality assurance** is an integral part of the feedback loop between policies and implemented reality. How are programs and assessments designed to ensure

learning outcomes are achieved? The UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education (published in 2005 and now in revision) provide tools and best practices to assess the quality and relevance of higher education provided across borders with the aim of protecting students and other stakeholders from low-quality provision. Quality assurance also encourages the development of quality cross-border higher education that meets human, social, economic and cultural needs. In the Asia-Pacific region, it is not just a lack of information about qualifications that limits recognition but so does a lack of trust in quality assurance. How do we develop more trust of different models of quality assurance?<sup>29</sup>

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29 See Annex for the Shenzhen Statement (June 2017). Building Local and Regional Capacity for a Living Quality Culture in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific (Shenzhen, People's Republic of China).

### Insights from the field:

Quality assurance is a crucial dimension to ensure value and recognition in the labour market. Building on this foundation, qualifications frameworks provide important tools to recognize learning, including:

- Qualifications based on learning outcomes;
- Level descriptors, based on learning outcomes, that are used to determine the level at which a qualification is pegged;
- A hierarchical classification of levels, described by the level descriptors, in most instances ranging between six and ten levels;
- A series of domains, described with learning outcomes, usually in the categories of knowledge, skills and competences, described by level descriptors;
- **A quality assurance regime that provides credibility for the delivery of the qualifications.**

*Source: Level-setting and recognition of learning outcomes: The use of level descriptors in the twenty-first century. UNESCO, 2015.*

- **Qualifications frameworks** and quality assurance are intimately linked. It is the relationship with recognition that needs to be explored to strengthen foundations for both inbound and outbound mobility and to ensure the best conditions for the continued expansion of mobility. One strategy is to maintain and enhance minimum standards for quality assurance, usually through registration and/or accreditation of institutions and qualifications. This includes self-evaluation and external review by designated authorities. Recognition is challenged by increasing diversity and the ability to effectively quality assure in this context. Qualifications frameworks can manage diversity, but only deliver trusted outcomes if quality is assured.

- **Recognition:** The Tokyo Convention provides a mechanism for countries in the Asia-Pacific region to facilitate recognition of education qualifications through basic principles, increased information provision and transparency. UNESCO's role as Secretariat of the Regional Committee for the earlier 1983 Bangkok Convention and revised convention provide a platform for

UNESCO to support capacity building in recognition policy and explore implications of these conventions for NQFs and quality assurance systems. Member States must be encouraged to play an active role.

These three pillars, when aligned, can improve transparency, promote mobility, and enhance cooperation among Member States. Therefore, UNESCO's role is to provide technical support and guidance as Member States strive to enhance the quality of their higher education systems based on essential principles of fairness related to the assessment of qualifications.

In 2011, recognizing that the regional conventions do not adequately address global dynamics in higher education, Member States called on UNESCO to conduct a feasibility study for a global convention on the recognition of higher education qualifications. In 2019 this new Global Convention will be put for adoption by all Member States of UNESCO who recognize the potential benefits of a global normative instrument to improve the quality and recognition of their higher education systems. The Global Convention

seeks to be the first international instrument for cross-policy cooperation in these fields.

**With the growing demand for international cooperation in this space, there needs to be more effort put into success indicators.** What are the benefits

and how do we measure them? What role do the UNESCO Recognition Conventions play? How do we increase collaboration between organisations responsible for qualifications frameworks, quality assurance and recognition?

### Why do we need a Global Convention?

In light of the Education 2030 Agenda and current global trends in higher education, the preparation of a Global Convention aims to facilitate academic mobility, improve quality and enhance international cooperation in higher education.

#### This includes the need to address:

- The growth of inter-regional student mobility
- The need of transparent and fair recognition of qualifications
- The need of enhancing quality on higher education
- The need of international coherence in recognition processes

#### Points to highlight:

- The future Global Convention will not imply automatic recognition
- The draft text of the Convention will not be submitted for adoption before 2019
- The Tokyo Convention (and other Regional Conventions) will continue being binding

#### 4.5. Managing stakeholder expectations

A key component of success is ongoing reflection and managing of stakeholder expectations. In this regard, qualifications frameworks are a tool for dialogue and consensus building, not a fixed and unchangeable commitment. Instead,

frameworks are a guide to help put learners – and learning outcomes – at the centre of quality assurance and international recognition. When this is done in a coherent and contextualized fashion, the benefits to stakeholders at all levels are a well-functioning lifelong learning system that has the potential to support mobility and employability.

#### Insights from the field:

To build trust in an NQF, it is important that it be a fundamental part of regulation and quality assurance in a country's education and training system. A strong connection to the education system's quality assurance processes goes a long way towards **ensuring confidence among stakeholders**, both domestically and internationally.

#### 4.6. Realising mobility: The Tokyo Convention

On 1 February 2018, the UNESCO Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education in the Asia-Pacific region, also known as the Tokyo Convention, came into effect. Japan and the Republic of Korea ratified the Tokyo Convention in December 2017, following earlier endorsement by Australia, China, and New Zealand. Together, these Member

States provided the minimum number of five ratifications needed to bring the Convention into force.

In a vast and diverse region with immense numbers of inbound and outbound international students, the Tokyo Convention helps facilitate the recognition of higher education qualifications based on common principles, increased information sharing and transparency. As a legal instrument, the Convention provides the foundation

for promoting fair and transparent practices in cross-border mobility and recognition across formal and non-formal learning in Asia and the Pacific.

The entry into force of the Tokyo Convention means that its tremendous

potential to promote cross-border mobility in higher education, while strengthening collaboration among countries in the region, can now be realized. This development was recognized as a landmark achievement for the Asia-Pacific region (below).

**Commencement of the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Convention of the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education – a landmark achievement for Asia and the Pacific:**

“Commencement of the Tokyo Convention represents a significant achievement for our region, bringing the recognition of higher education qualifications into the 21st century based on best practice. In Australia, best practice qualifications recognition is critical to facilitating student, academic, education provider and labour mobility, and is fundamental to underpinning regional prosperity.”

**Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham**

Minister for Education and Training  
Manager of Government Business in the Senate  
Senator for South Australia

The complete and authoritative text of the Tokyo Convention is available online.<sup>30</sup> The Convention serves two primary functions:

#### I. National coordination mechanism:

- **To ensure that a “competent recognition authority” implements the Convention** – Competent recognition authorities vary country by country and may be governmental or non-governmental bodies officially authorised to make decisions on the recognition of foreign qualifications (e.g. centralized or decentralized systems);
- **Development and maintenance of an NIC** to share accurate information from their higher education system. The form of the NIC can vary and may not necessarily require a new structure or organisation to be formed (see Article VIII of the Tokyo Convention).

#### II. Regional coordination and monitoring mechanism:

- **The Committee of the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the**

**Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education** includes one representative from each State Party, while UNESCO’s Director-General serves as Secretariat. The main function of the Committee is to oversee, promote and facilitate the implementation of the Tokyo Convention. Non-State Parties and other stakeholders may be invited to observe Committee meetings.

- **Regional network of NICs:** The Tokyo Convention also requires that State Parties create a regional network of NICs. “A network of national information centres on academic mobility and recognition shall be established and shall uphold and assist the practical implementation of this Convention by the competent recognition authorities” (Article IX.3).

These coordination mechanisms at national and regional levels help to facilitate the recognition of higher education qualifications in order to improve mobility throughout the region. Along these lines, a key function of the Tokyo Convention is a **commitment to recognising foreign qualifications as widely and fully as**

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30 UNESCO (2011). Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (2011 Tokyo Convention). [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=48975&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=48975&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

**possible.** For example, the Convention promotes: “Recognition as widely as possible of qualifications in higher education in order to promote lifelong education and the democratisation of education in a manner suited to the cultural context of each Party.”<sup>31</sup>

In this way, the primary aim of the Tokyo Convention is to ensure fair and transparent recognition, including across three core functions:

**a) Access to further higher education studies,** including relevant examinations or as preparations for a postgraduate course;

**b) The use of an academic title,** subject to the laws and regulations of the Party or the jurisdiction thereof, in which recognition is sought;

**c) Access to employment opportunities,** subject to the laws and regulations of the Party or the jurisdiction thereof, in which recognition is sought.

How these policies function requires persistent efforts to understand core principles and engage key stakeholders. In this area, there is significant work ahead to promote the transparency – and potential harmonization – of quality standards in higher education and training throughout Asia and the Pacific.

To conclude, challenges remain in assessing the local value of quality tools such as quality assurance, NQFs and the Tokyo Convention. These challenges include how these tools are localized to improve student mobility, employability and access to quality education. Going forward, collaboration is necessary at national and regional levels, not least so that national-level capacities can be built in order to facilitate self-assessment and effective monitoring of the local value of a growing number of quality tools in the Asia-Pacific region. To foster this dialogue, UNESCO, as the specialised UN agency for education, will continue in its mandated role to lead and coordinate the SDG4-Education 2030 agenda throughout the region.

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31 UNESCO (2011). Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (Tokyo Convention). [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=48975&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=48975&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

The Tokyo Convention commenced on **1 February 2018**  
after being ratified by  
Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, and the Republic of Korea.

### The Tokyo Convention: How it works



The 2011 Tokyo Convention sets transparent, fair, and shared norms for qualifications assessments in Asia-Pacific



The Convention's standards encourage student mobility through trust, mutual understanding, and information sharing

### What are some potential benefits for Member States?



Ratification shows commitment to improved mobility, employability, and collaboration in Asia-Pacific



Ratification aligns Member States with a strategy for improved information sharing, qualifications recognition, and quality assurance measures.



Ratification encourages fair and transparent recognition so that all Member States can benefit from qualified students and labour and improved economic productivity

### Are there benefits for students?



The Convention's shared standards help students navigate our region's diverse education systems



The Convention's information sharing strategy helps assessments remain fair and transparent for all students



The Convention supports a student's right to appeal a denied assessment, which assures fairness and fights discrimination



## Part 2. Case Studies on Developing and Strengthening NQF in Asia and the Pacific

1. Australia – Innovation for World-class Qualifications
2. China – Promoting Economic and Social Development
3. India – Embracing Diversity, Enhancing Quality
4. Japan – Conducting Pilot Projects to Explore NQF Development
5. Nepal – Overcoming Gaps to Operationalize the Qualifications Framework
6. Philippines – Enhancing the Mobility of Filipinos in ASEAN and the World
7. Republic of Korea – Towards a Competency-based Society
8. Sri Lanka – Promoting 21st-Century Graduates
9. Thailand – Embedding a Culture of Quality
10. Regional Perspective – Achieving Outcomes in the Pacific Community

**Innovation**

**for World-class**

**Qualifications**

## Australia

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) is the national policy for regulated qualifications in Australia's education and training systems. It was established in the 1990s with the aim of building on policy innovations in qualification systems that had been evolving from the 1960s. The AQF is a cross-sectoral framework and covers a variety of qualifications, including higher education, vocational education and training, and school education. It supports the diverse needs of students and the workforce by ensuring that Australian qualifications meet the skills needs of the economy and the standards expected by employers. As an integrated national policy, the AQF guarantees rigorous national standards in education and training to support transparency and recognition of Australian qualifications both domestically and overseas.

### *Critical factors for success:*

- Progressive policies to ensure that it is fit for its purpose now and into the future
- Genuine stakeholder consultation and ownership across government, the education and training sector, and industry
- Comprehensive, practical and flexible policies to promote quality and innovation in education and training
- Effective quality assurance and regulation promoting trust in the value of Australian qualifications
- Strong and integrated policy linkages to employment and industry, contributing to the national economy
- Embedded flexible pathways whereby students can readily access qualifications in any education and training sector, move easily from one sector to another, and transition to the workforce and back
- International robustness to support Australian graduate participation in international education and demand in the global workforce.

### *The results:*

The AQF is routinely represented in a 'wheel' reflecting Australian education and training policy innovation, incorporating genuine support for education and training through lifelong learning. The AQF is a national living policy to support students of Australian education and training, employers, education providers and policymakers that Australian qualifications are contemporary, relevant, nationally consistent and internationally recognised.

**Promoting Economic**

**and**

**Social Development**

## China

From a perspective of policy, the idea of establishing a national qualifications framework originated from the Outline of China's National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020), which was launched by the State Council of China in 2010. With a view to building a lifelong learning system, this master plan asserted that 'a framework shall be constructed to make way for the accumulation and transfer of academic credits in further education, and for mutual recognition and connection between different types of learning results'. As a follow-up, two crucial initiatives laid the foundation for NQF in China:

- "The Bank of Academic Credits" was set up to promote the recognition of lifelong learning outcomes as well as to establish connections among different learning levels and achieve the integration of various types of learning;
- Six open universities were created to pilot the transfer, accumulation and recognition of learning outcomes in further education.

### *The results:*

In March 2016 the 13th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China (2016-2020) formally proposed to build NQF for the country. As the National Development and Reform Commission of China (NDRC) explained, the priorities for the preparation of establishing NQF during 2016-2020 included the following steps to be undertaken:

- Establish the regulatory authority of NQF, release NQF, and develop unified learning outcomes and recognition criteria;
- Launch a recognition platform for NQF, construct infrastructures including National Regulatory Portal for Learning Outcomes Transfer and Service System for the Recognition of Learning Outcomes, create Lifelong Learning Outcomes Profiles for learners;
- Promote the recognition of learning outcomes among educational institutions at the same or different levels, as well as among educational

institutions, members of industry, employers and training institutions.

Work remains in progress so as to launch NQF in one of the world's largest and most dynamic tertiary education systems.

**Embracing Diversity,  
Enhancing Quality**

## India

India has the second largest higher education system in the world with more than 700 universities, 36,000 colleges, 1.4 million faculty, and more than 31 million students enrolled.<sup>1,2</sup>

However, an estimated 90 per cent of the workforce remains in unorganised sectors and more than 80 per cent of new entrants into the workforce lack sufficient opportunities for skills training. Because of this large scale and diversity in skills and education levels it can be a challenge to compare higher education qualifications across institutions and contexts. Complicating matters is the fact that some of the locally available qualifications are not recognised abroad.

India is in the process of developing sectoral qualifications frameworks but as yet does not have a unified NQF. The country is in the initial stages of developing a national higher education qualification framework (NHEQF), which builds

on a prior vocational qualification framework (NSQF) and new national skills qualification framework (NSQF) launched in 2015.

The policy framework for skills development envisages that skilling will be integrated with formal education by introducing vocational education classes from grade 9 of secondary education onwards. In higher education, skilling will be integrated with polytechnics offering NSQF-aligned vocational courses and bachelor degrees in vocational studies.

### *The results:*

India is committed to an inclusive policy on educational development. A National Quality Assurance Framework (NQAF) was finalised in 2016. NQAF provides benchmarks which different providers and organizations involved in education and training must meet in order to

be accredited. The framework applies to all organizations offering NSQF-compliant qualifications.

Furthermore, all formal and vocational education, including skills training, will have to be aligned with NSQF by December 2018. To supplement this work, the University Grants Commission is planning to develop a comprehensive NHEQF for the entire higher education sector, which remains a work in progress.

1 MHRD: Ministry of Human Resources Development. 2014a: Selected Educational Statistics, New Delhi, MHRD.

2 Mehrotra, Santosh. 2015: 'Employment of Tertiary-level graduates in India' in N.V.Varghese and Garima Malik eds. India Higher Education Report 2015, Routledge.

**Conducting Pilot  
Projects to Explore  
NQF Development**

## Japan

Japan is rapidly becoming a more multicultural society with international mobility and the number of intercultural families having grown substantially in recent decades. The population of Japan is an ageing society and is expected to decrease significantly to approximately 90 million by 2060 – almost a third less than the country's population in 2010. In response, there are calls in Japan for those with unused skills to participate in the labour market and help boost economic growth, including women. To ensure a more inclusive approach, Japan has been experimenting with qualification frameworks in limited capacities and in limited fields. These pilot projects include gathering experiences from the vocational skills evaluation standard, the Career Grading System (CGS), and other measurements. This indicates that Japanese society has recognised the importance of NQF in order to create a common platform for compatibility, transparency and accountability as well as for building mutual trust across society. Nevertheless, these

pilot systems and scales have not yet created far-reaching inter-sectorial standards.

### *The results:*

As of 2016, Japan has developed Vocational Skills Evaluation standards across more than 54 industries and in nine cross-industry occupations (e.g. general administration and accounting). Moreover, Japan also implemented its own "Job Card System" in 2007 and Career Grading Systems in 2012, both of which aim to promote lifelong career planning and to facilitate the evaluation of professional qualifications.

To reform and further elaborate on these initial efforts, additional investments will be crucial. The costs of establishing and maintaining Japan's NQF will be substantial. In addition, a number of government ministries are responsible for the NQF system, which means that more time will be needed to create a truly collaborative project. To drive this process, the

ongoing "Dual-Track Development of Tertiary Education and Relevance of National Qualifications Framework", organized by the Research Centre for Tertiary Education and Qualifications (RTEQ) at Kyushu University, will compare how NQF systems work in different countries. The RTEQ team is researching standards and scales of professional skills or competencies in Japan. The aim is to create a system in which graduates can use the knowledge and skills they have acquired in society in order to achieve social and vocational independence.

**Overcoming Gaps  
to Operationalize  
HEQF**

## Nepal

Nepal has witnessed a rapid expansion of its higher education system, especially after the establishment of multi-party democracy in the 1990s. However, while educational access has increased, quality assurance and recognition between universities in the country as well as internationally remain challenging. For example, no students can transfer from one faculty to another faculty or from one university campus to another. In addition, distance learning and credits for self-directed learning are also not widely recognised. To overcome these difficulties and promote more uniformity in the standards and acceptance of learning outcomes, Nepal aims to launch a national higher education qualification framework (HEQF).

The goals of Nepal's HEQF are as follows:

1. Make higher education qualifications more transparent
2. Formalise flexibility and transferability among different education/professional fields

3. Foster the development of learning objectives
4. Assist national/professional agencies to steer skills development
5. Ensure educational mobility and credit transfer systems within Nepal and beyond
6. Enhance quality based on international standards
7. Establish a system of horizontal and vertical mobility

If approved, the HEQF will apply to all universities in Nepal, including degree-awarding institutions, their constituent campuses/schools, affiliated campuses/schools and institutions. Ultimately, this framework must be formalised and endorsed by Nepal's University Grants Commission.

### *The results:*

The internal audit systems of most higher education institutions in Nepal remain underdeveloped. As a result, assessing and meeting the expected learning outcomes listed in the HEQF

will be challenging. To build readiness for HEQF, three key needs include: 1) staff capacity to promote a culture of internal quality assurance; 2) means to recognise credits and qualifications in Nepal; and 3) improvements in structures and general ability to assess distance learning and non-formal learning based on the knowledge, skills and competencies expected by the qualification framework. Capacity-building work in Nepal will have to focus on the establishment of the HEQF across the country.

**Enhancing Mobility**

**in ASEAN**

**and the World**

## The Philippines

Establishing the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF) was necessary owing to a number of converging factors. These include a persistent mismatch between educational qualifications and the needs of locally based industries; the fragmented system of qualifications in the country; and issues of comparability for a significant number of skilled workers and local professionals working in different parts of the world.

The PQF started with the technical vocational education and training (TVET) sector when the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), the government agency which manages the TVET sector, began implementing reforms leading to a quality-assured competency-based TVET system in 1998. The PQF was institutionalized on 1 October 2012, through Executive Order No. 83 as a national policy that describes the levels of educational qualifications and sets the standards for qualifications outcomes. It will be referenced with the ASEAN Qualifications Reference

Framework (AQR) in 2018 to enable the fair comparison and levelling of educational qualifications in order to enhance student, professional and skilled worker mobility with other ASEAN nations.

PQF's factors for success include strong support from policymakers and stakeholders in the government sector. However, the low levels of public awareness of PQF and the insufficient engagement of other stakeholders in its popularization and implementation remains a challenge. Another persistent challenge with the exception of TVET is the paradigm shift to learning outcomes/competency-based education. This is despite the fact that a related policy has been in place for some time now in basic and higher education. The country's educators continue to struggle with the requisite mind-set and behavioural changes associated with outcomes-based teaching and assessment. It is a situation with which other countries have likewise struggled, especially in higher education.

### *The results:*

The substantiation and implementation of the PQF is imperative since the Philippines remains committed to referencing with the AQR in 2018, which entails focusing on the following actions:

- Continuing simultaneous raising of public and stakeholder awareness and valuation of PQF as a powerful change agent to influence current education and training practices and challenge professional and sectoral interests
- Articulation of qualifications in terms of learner outcomes/competencies particularly in higher education
- Rationalizing the Philippine Credit Transfer System in the interface of TVET and higher education with technical support of the Asian Development Bank (ADB)
- Quality assurance of PQF through effective systems of registration, accreditation, assessment, or certification.

**Towards a  
Competency-based  
Society**

## The Republic of Korea

In December 2013, the Korean government announced a “Master plan of National Qualification Framework (NQF ) Establishment”, which serves as a roadmap towards the development of NQF. While not yet in force, the aim of the NQF in the Republic of Korea is to promote a competency-based society. Building on this vision, NQF is expected to connect education, training and qualifications with the labour market, establish competency-based employment, and support professional advancement and a job transfer system.

To maximize the potential impact of the NQF, trust between large stakeholders is essential. To ensure support from diverse stakeholders, it is also important to nurture highly qualified expert groups who can direct and promote the implementation of the NQF. The cooperative networking with other advanced economies who have accumulated policy experience in this topic will also be critical for the successful planning and launch of the NQF in the Republic of Korea.

### *The results:*

Industry Skills Councils are at the centre of efforts to introduce and implement the NQF in the Republic of Korea by developing the Sectoral Qualification Framework (SQF) with cooperation from the Ministry of Employment and Labour. Building on a core industrial committee of corporation and labour unions, skills councils also promote industry-driven human resource development.

Currently, there are 17 industry skills councils in fields as diverse as IT and management, business, accounting and administration, banking and insurance, tourism and leisure, construction, machinery, electronics, and others in 2017. The amount of funding for each council is approximately US\$0.5 million, and the amount of support is set by an annual performance evaluation. However, the NQF in the Republic of Korea is expected to take more time before it reaches its full potential.

“Major stakeholders such as the Ministry of Employment and Labour, the Ministry of Education, labour unions and employer associations recognize the necessity and usefulness of the NQF in terms of linking education and training systems, including the system of vocational qualifications. However, there are many different opinions as to how to create, operate and manage the links between academic and vocational qualifications based on the levels of qualifications.”

*Dr. Joeng-Yoon Cho,  
Director of Global Skills and  
Qualifications Agency (GLOSQUA)  
Seoul, Republic of Korea*

**Promoting  
21st-Century  
Graduates**

## Sri Lanka

In November 2007, Sri Lanka's Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council (QAAC) published a report that addressed the significant variation in degrees awarded throughout the state university system. In response, the Council envisioned a nationally consistent framework for all higher education qualifications. With support from the World Bank, the Sri Lanka Qualifications Framework (SLQF) was introduced in 2012 applying to all institutions in the public and private sectors.

The SLQF is based on four core areas of expected capabilities:

- 1) Knowledge – what qualification holders know;
- 2) Skills – what qualification holders can do;
- 3) Attitudes, Values, Professionalism and Vision for life – how qualification holders think and behave;
- 4) and, uniquely Mind-set and Paradigm – how qualification holders perceive the world.

This model, known as K-SAM, aims to produce graduates equipped for

the challenges of the 21st century and to help Sri Lanka become an international hub of excellence in higher education by 2020.

### *The results:*

Sri Lanka now has a nationally consistent qualifications framework, approved by the University Grants Commission for all higher education qualifications offered in the country. New study programmes developed by state universities are not approved unless the qualifications are in compliance with the SLQF. While this key requirement promotes compatibility of qualifications, there are implementation challenges:

Academic: Implementation of the SLQF for existing study programmes will be a challenge as a number of important changes need to be made in order to bring all qualifications into compliance with the SLQF.

Administrative: QAAC provides a sound basis for an external quality assurance process for the state

universities in Sri Lanka, but there is no quality assurance process for the non-state sector. This lack of coherence in quality assurance also limits the coverage of the SLQF.

Going forward, conducting regular staff professional development on key aspects of SLQF will help academics and administrators to develop their professional skills and expertise in support of the successful implementation of SLQF.

*“The establishment of SLQF has already created an awareness in the higher education sector of the country about the necessity of enhancing teaching and learning methods in order to raise the quality of education to a level that is on par with international standards.”*

*- Dr. Upali Mampitiya, Senior Lecturer  
Department of Mathematics, University  
of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka*

# Embedding a Culture of Quality

## Thailand

Thailand has successfully developed multiple qualifications frameworks for various levels of education, but it was not until 2013 that the overarching standard of the National Qualifications Framework was fully established. There are now four major qualifications frameworks including the umbrella qualifications framework or the National Qualifications Framework, the Basic Core Education Curriculum for Basic Education, the Thailand Qualifications Framework for Vocational Education (TQF:VEd), and, finally, the Thailand Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (TQF:HEd). The NQF is a key instrument aimed at linking expected learning outcomes to work performance at every level. It is also aimed at upgrading the knowledge and skills of those already in the labour market.

Interestingly, the development of Thailand's qualifications frameworks in different sectors – namely, basic, vocational and higher education – were developed independently of

one another. A major contribution of the development of TQF:VEd was to create a clearer pathway of academic progression and linkage between different educational sectors. The aim to facilitate free movement between students and the workforce was important in guiding this effort. Through credit transfer and the recognition of prior learning, the overarching structure of lifelong learning pathways was key for Thailand's progress.

### *The results:*

The main obstacles and challenges lie in the actual implementation at the educational level. For now qualifications frameworks are generally perceived as rules set up to monitor the teaching and learning process of educational institutions. For example, in 2015 there was a move from higher education institutions requesting the Office of the Higher Education Commission to eradicate the TQF:HEd. Reducing documentation

related to implementing the TQF:HEd was proposed as a way to limit pressure on institutions. Challenges remain regarding how to encourage educational personnel and officials in higher education to embrace a culture of quality across Thailand's education system.

**Achieving Outcomes  
in the Pacific  
Community**

## Developing the Pacific Qualifications Framework

The Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF) is a unified meta-framework for the Pacific regions' fourteen member countries. The initiative started from the inaugural Education Ministers Forum in Auckland, New Zealand, in 2001 where one of the determinations was to "consider the setting up of a regional qualifications framework covering basic, primary, secondary, TVET and tertiary education benchmarked against appropriate international standards and qualifications".

The Pacific Community highlights the importance of inter-relationships between various levels of national and regional educational development and provisions in achieving sustainable development. To implement this ideal, the PQF has been referenced against all the Pacific NQFs. A second referencing by Pacific countries was completed in 2016. Qualifications from Fiji, Samoa and Tonga have been submitted for registration on the Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards (PRQS).

### *The results:*

There is growing recognition that qualifications frameworks contribute to Pacific nation-building and socioeconomic growth through the development of skilled workers to meet industry and public demands. Nevertheless, the actual benefits of qualifications frameworks have yet to be fully realised as implementation remains slow. For example, the higher education sector faces challenges as they convert programmes and courses to an outcomes-based approach. This has caused some delays in aligning qualifications with the PQF.

In contrast, the TVET sector is more compliant with their qualifications that are competency-based. A balance needs to be established between compliance with "input aspects" versus "quality of outputs" for quality to be assured. Examples of "input" criteria include the qualification level and experience of tutors/lecturers versus "output" factors such as learner

performance and achievement of learning outcomes. The PRQS allows for diverse practices, yet there is a need to improve the scope of developing regional standards (i.e. standards to register by professional/occupational and industry in the Pacific Community).

## **Annex I. Acknowledgements**

Key Contributors to the Guidelines on  
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work possible.**

*Remembering former UNESCO Bangkok Director Dr Gwang-Jo Kim  
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## **Annex II. Sydney Statement (2016)**

14th Session of the Regional Committee on the Recognition of Qualifications  
in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific  
in conjunction with the  
Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop on Education 2030:

Connecting qualifications frameworks, quality assurance and recognition for  
mobility and employability



## SYDNEY STATEMENT

18 August 2016

### Connecting qualifications frameworks, quality assurance and recognition for mobility and employability

#### *Preamble*

Young people today are the most connected and the most open-minded generation that the world has ever seen.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly evident in Asia and the Pacific, which is a global leader in internationally mobile students. Students pursue valuable international opportunities to enhance their knowledge, skills and competencies and promote global citizenship. The comparability, recognition and quality assurance of higher education qualifications has become a growing area of concern, particularly in countries where administrative systems are underdeveloped.<sup>2</sup>

These trends highlight the complex pursuit of quality education in the context of sustainable development. Recognizing the need for action at all levels, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015. Sustainable Development Goal four (SDG4), known as Education 2030, aims to *ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*.

To advance the Education 2030 Framework for Action, delegates and guests from over 30 UNESCO Member States in Asia-Pacific gathered in Sydney, Australia on 17-18 August 2016 for the *14th Session of the Regional Committee on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific* held in conjunction with

the *Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop on Education 2030* to promote the importance of international recognition of qualifications in facilitating mobility and employability.

### Context

The *Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education* (2011 Tokyo Convention) and the *Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific* (1983 Bangkok Convention) provide a unique means for countries in the region to cooperate in facilitating mobility through the international recognition of higher education qualifications based on principles of fairness and transparency. They also build national-level capacity throughout Asia and the Pacific with respect for the great diversity of education systems of Member States, including the richness of cultural, social, political, philosophical, religious and economic backgrounds.

Before it can come into force, the 2011 Tokyo Convention requires five Member States from Asia and the Pacific to be a Party to the Convention. At the time of issuing this statement, three Member States – Australia, China, and New Zealand – have ratified the 2011 Tokyo Convention.

The forthcoming *Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications* will be a tool to ensure that higher education qualifications are recognized as widely as possible. It will support inter-regional collaboration and facilitate access for students of the Asia-Pacific to mobility opportunities around the world, building on the strong foundation of the 2011 Tokyo Convention and 1983 Bangkok Convention.

The Education 2030 Framework for Action also promotes mobility and employability by emphasizing lifelong learning, equal access and validation of knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through non-formal and informal education. It highlights

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1 Message from Ms Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, International Youth Day, 12 August 2016

2 Education 2030 - Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (2015). Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002432/243278e.pdf>

that mobility is also achieved through scholarships, which support international opportunities for young people who may not otherwise have access to quality higher education.

Many quality tools have been developed within the Asia-Pacific region to enhance mobility and employability. Improving links and coherence between international recognition, quality assurance and qualifications frameworks will support the achievement of SDG4.

### **Actions**

International cooperation is at the heart of the recognition of qualifications and facilitating mobility. Effective quality assurance is important for building mutual trust and underpins confidence in qualifications.

Acknowledging the interconnected nature of these challenges, participants of the 14th Session and Regional Workshop on Education 2030 will strive to advance the goals and targets in the Education 2030 Framework for Action and serve as champions of the 2011 Tokyo Convention by encouraging Member States to:

- ratify and implement the 2011 Tokyo Convention to demonstrate commitment to improved mobility and employability within Asia and the Pacific and to strengthen collaboration for the benefit of people in the region;
- support the forthcoming Global Convention to strengthen inter-regional cooperation for the continuous improvement of mobility, access, equity and quality;
- support less developed countries and small island developing states in Asia and the Pacific through expanding scholarship programmes, to contribute to the internationalization of higher education and research.

UNESCO, as the specialised United Nations agency for education, will continue in its mandated role to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 agenda and promote coherence between international recognition, quality assurance and qualifications frameworks for quality higher education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

## **Annex III. Principles for Quality Assurance of TVET Qualifications in Asia-Pacific**

<b>Principle 1</b>	There is a clear vision for how quality assurance of TVET qualifications operates across the TVET qualifications system
<b>Principle 2</b>	Organizations involved in quality assurance of TVET qualifications operate with clear and transparent governance arrangements
<b>Principle 3</b>	Quality assurance of TVET qualifications practice is appropriately financed
<b>Principle 4</b>	Quality assurance of TVET qualifications practice is based on clear and transparent quality standards
<b>Principle 5</b>	Quality assurance of TVET qualifications practice addresses the conception and formation of qualifications, assessment, validation and certification processes
<b>Principle 6</b>	Key stakeholder groups are involved in key aspects of quality assurance practice (e.g. conception and formation of TVET qualifications, assessment, validation and certification)
<b>Principle 7</b>	Economic, social and environmental dimensions are explicit in quality assurance of TVET qualifications practice to: maximize access, social inclusion, pathways, articulation, participation of vulnerable groups, and participant retention and completion rates; and prioritize key industry sectors
<b>Principle 8</b>	Barriers to assessment, including for non-formal and informal learning, are minimized
<b>Principle 9</b>	Professionalization of staff underpins quality assurance of TVET qualifications
<b>Principle 10</b>	Continuous improvement underpins quality assurance of TVET qualifications practice; decisions are informed by data and research
<b>Principle 11</b>	Organizations involved in quality assurance of TVET qualifications commit to internal evaluation and cyclical external evaluation, as well as to making public the findings of external evaluations
<b>Principle 12</b>	Quality assurance of TVET qualifications practice remains fit for purpose and is sustainable
<b>Principle 13</b>	Quality assurance of TVET qualifications practice is enhanced through national and international linkage and cooperation

*Source: Guidelines for the Quality Assurance of TVET Qualifications in the Asia-Pacific Region UNESCO Bangkok, 2017*

## Annex IV. Shenzhen Statement (2017)

Building Local and Regional Capacity for a Living Quality Culture in  
Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific

大學之道，在明明德，在親民，在止於至善。

**'The way of great learning consists in manifesting one's  
bright virtue, consists in loving the people, consists in  
stopping in perfect goodness.'**

*Daxue (The Great Learning), approx. 500 B.C.*



## Shenzhen Statement Building Local and Regional Capacity for a Living Quality Culture in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific

*15-16 June 2017, Shenzhen, People's Republic of China*

Ensuring access to equitable quality higher education is essential to realizing the transformative potential of the Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG4 and the Education 2030 Framework for Action. However, the comparability, recognition and quality assurance of qualifications remains a key concern, particularly in Asia-Pacific where qualifications are often not outcome-driven approaches to student learning. Strengthening investments in the quality assurance of lifelong learning systems to build a culture of quality is vital to enhancing the relevance and comparability of higher education qualifications throughout the region.

Asia-Pacific is the fastest-growing region in terms of the numbers of inbound and outbound international students, which underscores the importance of facilitating student's cross-border mobility and the need to align quality paradigms. Fair and transparent procedures and criteria for the recognition of higher education qualifications are therefore crucial for building the capacity of UNESCO Member States to facilitate mobility in Asia-Pacific and beyond.

The **Regional Conference on Quality Assurance of Higher Education in Asia-Pacific**, held from 15-16 June 2017 in Shenzhen, People's Republic of China, addressed these concerns as well as the quality challenges brought about by the massification of higher education throughout Asia-Pacific, the diversification of higher education

providers and the increasing use of technologies in the delivery of different types of higher education programmes.

Representing multiple stakeholders in higher learning, we, the meeting participants agree upon the following:

- With the rapid expansion of higher education systems, quality assurance mechanisms at both internal and external levels need to move from a traditional focus on inputs to an outcomes-based approach to student learning. Where relevant, such processes should be clearly aligned with regional and national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) as the main reference tools to define learning outcomes across key domains.
- Learning outcomes, as defined in NQFs, should be holistic, covering cognitive and non-cognitive domains of learning, including both transversal skills as well as professional/subject-specific knowledge, skills and competencies. At the same time, institution-wide policies should be developed to serve as an overarching framework for academic programme development, and support internal and external quality assurance of higher education institutions.
- Based on the holistic pursuit of learning outcomes, quality assurance is the source of mutual trust among countries for the recognition of higher education qualifications. It is therefore important for countries to build on existing transparency and comparability measures, including through the ratification and implementation of the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (2011 Tokyo Convention). Quality assurance-based recognition contributes significantly to facilitating student mobility, the recognition of learning across diverse delivery modes, and to the wider purpose of knowledge sharing, cultural intelligence and global citizenship.
- To meet the demands of the contemporary learner, higher education institutions should increasingly seek to offer lifelong learning opportunities via new types of courses and programmes (i.e. incorporating MOOCs, blended and flexible learning approaches based on life experience and the world of work), and through cross-border movement of institutions and programmes. Such new modalities for higher education should be compatible with national qualifications frameworks,

include credit arrangements, be subject to the same rigorous quality assurance and be clearly articulated in terms of learning outcomes.

- Given this growing diversity, institutional development based on strong and relevant internal quality assurance policies and practices is essential. Such practices can complement external quality standards and guidelines. While external regulations and standards need to be internalized at institutional level to ensure system-wide coherence, institutions need the flexibility to adapt these to their profiles and the communities of stakeholders and learners they serve. External quality assurance agencies in turn need to recognise these efforts and differentiate their quality assurance approaches accordingly.
- Building a living culture focused on quality – one that continuously improves and evolves at institutional and faculty levels – is key to the successful functioning of any quality assurance mechanism. Whenever possible, research and capacity building efforts from external and internal sources should contribute to the development of self-reflective and self-disciplined academic communities and the enhancement of professionalism.
- Inclusive stakeholder ownership and engagement are crucial in identifying and continuously reviewing learning outcomes based on NQFs at the discipline and programme levels. Quality assurance specialists, students, researchers, teachers, non-academic staff, employers and industry must work together to ensure that learning programmes are coherent and that learning outcomes are constructively aligned with teaching methods and assessment systems. In this way, stakeholder engagement can promote the holistic development of lifelong learning and knowledge societies that contribute to the humanistic, socio-economic, and development aspirations of countries in Asia and the Pacific.

UNESCO, as the lead agency of the Education 2030 agenda, and its partners will support efforts in the Asia-Pacific to develop and implement regional and sub-regional capacity building efforts to build a foundation for future regional harmonization of quality assurance in higher education and lifelong learning in the region.

*Statement developed and discussed in Shenzhen, China from 15-16 June 2017*

*Please share your thoughts and any additional comments or questions with UNESCO*

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## **Annex V. Tokyo Convention (2011)**

Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications  
in Higher Education



## Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education

*26 November 2011, Tokyo, Japan*

### **PREAMBLE**

The Parties to this Convention:

**Guided** by a common will to strengthen their geographical, cultural, educational and economic ties;

**Recalling** that, as stated in the Constitution of UNESCO, “the purpose of the Organization is to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science, and culture”;

**Recognising** the substantial diversity that exists within the education traditions, systems and values in Asia-Pacific;

**Convinced** that the diversity of the cultures and higher education systems existing in Asia-Pacific constitutes an exceptional resource;

**Committed** to strengthening and extending collaboration among the Parties with a view to making optimal use of their human potential so as to encourage the advancement of knowledge and to continually improve the quality of higher education within Asia-Pacific;

**Desirous** of enabling the peoples of Asia-Pacific to take full advantage of the cultural resource by facilitating access for the nationals of each Party, in particular its students and academics, to the educational resources of each Party, with due regard to domestic regulation;

**Convinced** that, within the framework of such collaboration, the recognition of qualifications in higher education will facilitate international mobility of students and academics;

**Mindful** of the need to intensify cultural exchanges with a view to facilitating the economic, social, cultural and technological development, and the promotion of peace in Asia-Pacific;

**Recalling** that many Parties have concluded bilateral or sub-regional agreements regarding the recognition of qualifications in higher education among themselves, but desirous of strengthening such efforts by extending collaboration throughout Asia-Pacific by means of this Convention;

**Mindful** that this Convention should also be considered in the context of the UNESCO Recognition Conventions covering other Regions of the world, as well as the 1993 UNESCO Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education;

**Conscious** of the wide ranging changes in higher education in Asia-Pacific since these Conventions were adopted, resulting in considerably increased diversification within and among national education systems, and of the need to adapt legal instruments and practice to reflect these developments;

**Willing** to engage in active international collaboration at the global level with Parties to the other UNESCO Regional Conventions;

**Conscious** of the need to find common solutions to practical challenges in regard to the recognition of qualifications in higher education, which will facilitate mobility of students and academics in Asia-Pacific;

**Conscious** of the need to improve current recognition practice and to make it more transparent and better adapted to the current situation of higher education in Asia-Pacific;

**Considering** that the recognition by each Party of qualifications in higher education issued by other Parties represents an important measure for promoting academic mobility among the Parties;

**Desirous** of ensuring the recognition as widely as possible of qualifications in

higher education in order to promote lifelong education and the democratisation of education in a manner suited to the cultural context of each Party;

**Respectful** of each Party's right to create and grant a system for qualifications, and of the autonomy of its institutions;

Have agreed as follows:

## **SECTION I. DEFINITION OF TERMS**

### **Article I**

For the purposes of this Convention, the following definitions apply:

**1983 Convention** means the Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific adopted at Bangkok on 16 December 1983;

**Access (to higher education)** means the right of qualified candidates to apply and to be considered for admission to higher education;

**Accreditation** means a process of assessment and review that enables a higher education programme or institution to be recognised or certified as meeting appropriate standards;

**Admission (to higher education institutions and programmes)** means the act of, or system for, allowing holders of qualifications to pursue studies in higher education at a given institution and/or a given programme;

**Assessment (of institutions or programmes)** means the process for establishing the educational quality of a higher education institution or programmes;

**Assessment (of individual qualifications)** means the written appraisal or evaluation of an individual's foreign qualifications by a competent recognition authority;

**Displaced person** means a person forced to move from their locality or environment and occupational activities;

**Competent Recognition Authority** means a governmental or non-governmental body officially authorised by government with making decisions on the recognition of foreign qualifications;

**Components of a Party** means public entities at the national, provincial, federal or regional level;

**General Requirements for Access (to Higher Education)** mean conditions that must in all cases be fulfilled for access to higher education;

**Higher Education** means post-secondary education, training or research that is recognised by the relevant authorities of a Party as belonging to its higher education system;

**Higher Education Institution** means an establishment providing higher education recognised by the relevant authorities of a Party;

**Higher Education Programme** means a programme of study recognised by the relevant authorities of a Party as belonging to its higher education system, and the completion of which provides the student with a qualification in higher education;

**Mutatis Mutandis** is a Latin phrase meaning “with respective differences taken into consideration”;

**Non-traditional modes** refer to qualifications obtained through alternative delivery mechanisms;

**Partial Studies** mean any homogeneous part of a higher education programme, while not a complete programme in itself, can be equated with a significant acquisition of knowledge and skills;

**Qualification Giving Access to Higher Education** means any qualification issued by relevant authorities attesting the successful completion of an education programme and giving the holder of the qualification the right to be considered for admission to higher education;

**Qualification in Higher Education** means any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by a higher education institution attesting the successful completion of a higher education programme;

**Quality Assurance** means an on-going process of evaluating and enhancing the quality of a higher education system, institution or programme to assure stakeholders that acceptable standards are being maintained and enhanced;

**Recognition of Prior Learning** means a process to formally acknowledge the

knowledge and skills a person has as a result of formal and/or non-formal learning;

***Recognition of Qualifications*** means a formal acknowledgment as defined and given by the competent recognition authorities of a Party of the value of a foreign education qualification;

***Secondary Education*** means that stage of studies of any kind which follows primary, elementary, preparatory or intermediate or basic education and the aims of which may include preparing students for higher education, leading to a secondary school leaving certificate or enabling students to enrol in higher education;

***Specific Requirements (for admission to higher education)*** means conditions that must be fulfilled, in addition to the general requirements, in order to gain admission to a particular higher education programme, or for the award of a specific qualification in a particular field of study in higher education; and

***UNESCO Diploma Supplement***, a reference document of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, commonly known as the Lisbon Recognition Convention, means a document providing a description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed by the individual named on the original qualification to which this supplement is appended.

## **SECTION II. COMPETENT RECOGNITION AUTHORITIES**

### **Article II.1**

1. Where central authorities of a Party are competent to make decisions in recognition matters, that Party shall immediately be bound by the provisions of this Convention and shall take the measures necessary to ensure the implementation of this Convention's provisions within the Party's territory.
2. Where the competence to make decisions in recognition matters lies with components of a Party, the Party shall furnish the depositary with a brief statement of its constitutional situation or structure at the time of signature or when depositing its instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval, or accession, or any time thereafter. In such cases, the competent recognition authorities of the components of the Party so designated shall take measures necessary to ensure

- implementation of the provisions of this Convention within the Party's territory.
3. Where the competence to make decisions in recognition matters lies with individual higher education institutions or other entities, each Party according to its constitutional situation or structure, shall transmit the text of this Convention to these institutions or entities and shall take all possible steps to encourage the favourable consideration and application of its provisions.
  4. The provisions of paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of this article shall apply, mutatis mutandis, to the obligations of the Parties under subsequent articles of this Convention.

#### **Article II.2**

At the time of signature or when depositing its instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession at any time thereafter, each Party shall inform the depository of this Convention of the authorities that are competent to make different categories of decisions in recognition matters.

#### **Article II.3**

Nothing in this Convention shall derogate from any more favourable provisions concerning the recognition of qualifications in higher education issued in one of the Parties that are contained in or stem from an existing or a future treaty by which that Party is bound.

### ***SECTION III. BASIC PRINCIPLES RELATED TO THE ASSESSMENT OF QUALIFICATIONS***

#### **Article III.1**

1. Holders of qualifications issued in one of the Parties shall have adequate access, upon request to the competent recognition authority to an assessment of these qualifications in a timely manner.
2. In order to assure this right for holders of qualifications, each Party undertakes to make appropriate arrangements for the assessment of an application for recognition of qualifications with the main focus on knowledge and skills achieved.

#### **Article III.2**

Each Party shall ensure that the procedures and criteria used in the assessment and recognition of qualifications are transparent, coherent, reliable, fair and non-discriminatory.

### **Article III.3**

1. Decisions on recognition shall be made on the basis of appropriate information on the qualifications for which recognition is sought.
2. In the first instance, the responsibility for providing adequate information rests with the holder of the qualifications, who shall provide such information in good faith.
3. The Parties shall instruct or encourage, as appropriate, all education institutions belonging to their education systems to comply with any reasonable request for information for the purpose of assessing qualifications earned at the said institutions. In particular, the Parties shall encourage institutions belonging to their education systems to provide, upon request and within a reasonable timeframe, relevant information to the holder of qualifications or to the institution or the competent recognition authorities of the Party in which recognition is sought.
4. As long as the information relevant to the assessment of the qualifications is appropriately provided, the responsibility to demonstrate that an application does not fulfil the relevant requirements lies with the competent recognition authority.

### **Article III.4**

Each Party shall ensure, in order to facilitate the recognition of qualifications, that adequate and clear information on its education system is provided.

### **Article III.5**

Decisions on recognition of qualifications shall be made within a reasonable time limit specified beforehand by the competent recognition authority and calculated from the time all necessary information in the case has been provided. If recognition is withheld, the reasons for the refusal to grant recognition shall be stated, and information shall be given concerning possible measures the holder of the qualification may take in order to obtain recognition at a later stage. If recognition is withheld, or if no decision is taken, the holder of the qualification shall be entitled to make an appeal through appropriate procedures in each Party within a reasonable time limit.

## ***SECTION IV. RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS GIVING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION***

### **Article IV.1**

Each Party shall recognise, for the purpose of access to each of its higher education programmes, the qualifications issued by the other Parties that meet the general requirements for access to these respective higher education programmes, unless a substantial difference can be shown between the general requirements for access in the Party in which the qualifications were obtained and those in the Party in which recognition of the qualifications is sought.

### **Article IV.2**

Alternatively, it shall be sufficient for a Party to enable the holder of a qualification issued in one of the other Parties to obtain an assessment of that qualification, upon request by the holder, and the provisions of Article IV.1 shall apply mutatis mutandis to such a case.

### **Article IV.3**

Where admission to a particular higher education programme is dependent on the fulfilment of specific requirements in addition to the general requirements for access, the competent recognition authorities of the Party concerned may impose the additional requirements on holders of higher education qualifications obtained in the other Parties or assess whether the holder of qualifications in higher education obtained in other Parties has fulfilled comparable requirements.

### **Article IV.4**

Where, in a Party in which they have been obtained, school leaving certificates give access to higher education only in combination with additional qualifying examinations as a prerequisite for access, the other Parties may make access conditional on these requirements or offer an alternative for satisfying such additional requirements within their own education systems.

### **Article IV.5**

Without prejudice to the provisions of Articles IV.1 – IV.4, admission to a given

higher education institution, or to a higher education programme within such an institution, may be restricted or selective. In such cases in which admission to a higher education institution and/or higher education programme is selective, admission procedures should be designed with a view to ensuring that the accreditation of foreign qualifications in higher education is carried out according to the basic principles of fairness and non-discrimination described in Section III.

#### **Article IV.6**

Without prejudice to the provisions of Articles IV.1 - IV.5, admission to a given higher education institution may be made conditional on demonstration by the holder of the qualification of sufficient competence in the language or languages of instruction of the institution concerned, or in other specified languages in order for the holder of the qualification to profitably undertake the studies in question.

#### **Article IV.7**

Qualifications obtained through non-traditional modes which allow access to higher education in one Party shall be assessed in a fair manner in other Parties.

#### **Article IV.8**

For the purpose of admission to higher education programmes, each Party may make the recognition of qualifications issued by foreign educational institutions operating in its territory contingent upon specific requirements of national legislation or specific agreements concluded with the Party of origin of such institutions.

### ***SECTION V. RECOGNITION OF PARTIAL STUDIES***

#### **Article V.1**

Each Party shall recognise, where appropriate, or at least assess partial studies completed within the framework of a higher education programme in another Party. This recognition shall consist of taking such partial studies into account for the purposes of the completion of a higher education programme in the Party in which recognition is sought, unless substantial differences can be shown between the partial studies completed and the part and/or all of the higher education programme in the Party in which recognition is sought.

### **Article V.2**

Article V.1 shall apply mutatis mutandis to partial studies carried out through non-traditional modes.

### **Article V.3**

In particular, each Party shall facilitate recognition of partial studies when:

- (a) there has been a previous agreement between:
  - i. the higher education institution or the competent recognition authority responsible for the relevant partial studies; and
  - ii. the higher education institution or the competent recognition authority responsible for the recognition that is sought; and
- (b) the higher education institution in which the partial studies have been completed has issued a certificate or transcript of academic records attesting that the student has successfully completed the stipulated requirements for the said partial studies.

## ***SECTION VI. RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION***

### **Article VI.1**

To the extent that a recognition decision is mainly based on the knowledge and skills certified by a qualification in higher education, each Party shall recognise the qualifications in higher education conferred in another Party, unless a substantial difference can be shown.

### **Article VI.2**

Alternatively, it shall be sufficient for a Party to enable the holder of a qualification in higher education issued in another Party to obtain an assessment of that qualification, upon request by the holder of the qualification, and the provisions of Article VI.1 shall apply mutatis mutandis to such a case.

### **Article VI.3**

Articles VI.1 and VI.2 shall apply mutatis mutandis to qualifications in higher education obtained through non-traditional modes within the framework of a Party's education

system and in conformity with domestic regulatory requirements.

#### **Article VI.4**

Recognition in a Party of a qualification in higher education issued in another Party may have one or more of the following consequences:

- (a) access to further higher education studies, including relevant examinations or to preparations for a postgraduate course on the same conditions as those applicable to holders of qualifications of the Party in which recognition is sought;
- (b) the use of an academic title, subject to the laws and regulations of the Party or a jurisdiction thereof, in which recognition is sought;
  
- (c) access to employment opportunities, subject to the laws and regulations of the Party or the jurisdiction thereof, in which recognition is sought.

#### **Article VI.5**

An assessment by a competent recognition authority in a Party of a higher education qualification issued in another Party can be used in the form of advice to one or more of the following:

- (a) an educational institution for the purpose of admission to its programmes;
- (b) any other competent recognition authority;
- (c) potential employers.

#### **Article VI.6**

Each Party may make the recognition of qualifications in higher education issued by foreign higher education institutions operating in its territory contingent upon specific requirements of national legislation or specific agreements concluded with the Party of origin of such institutions.

### ***SECTION VII. RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS HELD BY REFUGEES, DISPLACED PERSONS AND PERSONS IN A REFUGEE-LIKE SITUATION***

#### **Article VII**

Each Party shall make all reasonable efforts within the framework of its education system and in conformity with its constitutional, legal, and regulatory requirements

to develop procedures, including recognition of prior learning, designed to assess fairly and expeditiously whether refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education programmes or for recognition of qualifications for employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications obtained in one of the Parties cannot be proven through documentary evidence.

## ***SECTION VIII. INFORMATION ON ASSESSMENT/ACCREDITATION AND RECOGNITION MATTERS***

### **Article VIII.1**

Each Party shall provide adequate information on any institution belonging to its higher education system, and on its quality assurance system, with a view to enabling the competent recognition

authorities of the other Parties to ascertain whether the quality of the qualifications issued by these institutions justifies recognition in the Party in which recognition is sought. This includes:

- (a) a description of its higher education system;
- (b) an overview of the different types of higher education institutions belonging to its higher education system, and of the typical characteristics of each type of institution;
- (c) a list of recognised and/or accredited higher education institutions (public and private) belonging to its higher education system, indicating their powers to award different types of qualifications and the requirements for gaining access to each type of institution and programme;
- (d) an explanation of quality assurance mechanisms; and
- (e) a list of educational institutions located outside its territory which the Party considers as belonging to its education system.

### **Article VIII.2**

Each Party shall provide relevant, accurate and up-to-date information in order to facilitate the recognition of qualifications in higher education by:

- (a) facilitating access to authoritative and accurate information on its higher education system and qualifications;

- (b) facilitating access to information on the higher education systems and qualifications of the other Parties; and
- (c) giving advice or information on recognition matters and assessment of qualifications, in accordance with national laws and regulations.

### **Article VIII.3**

Each Party shall take adequate measures for the development and maintenance of a national information centre that will provide higher education information. The form of the national information centre could vary.

### **Article VIII.4**

The Parties shall promote, through their national information centres or otherwise, the use of the:

- (a) “UNESCO Diploma Supplement” or any other comparable qualification supplement; and
- (b) the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education and/or any comparable document produced by the Parties’ respective higher education institutions, subject to their respective national laws and regulations.

## **SECTION IX. IMPLEMENTATION**

### **Article IX.1**

The body to oversee, promote and facilitate the implementation of this Convention shall be the Committee of the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education, hereinafter referred to as “the Committee”.

### **Article IX.2**

1. The Committee, which is hereby established, shall be composed of one representative of each Party.
2. States which are not Parties to this Convention may participate in the meetings of the Committee as observers. Representatives of governmental and non-governmental organisations active in the field of recognition in the region may

- also be invited to attend meetings of the Committee as observers.
3. The Committee may adopt, by a majority vote of the Parties, recommendations, declarations, protocols and models of good practice to guide the competent recognition authorities of the Parties in their implementation of this Convention and in their consideration of applications for the recognition of qualifications in higher education. While they shall not be bound by such texts, the Parties shall use their best endeavours to apply them, to bring them to the attention of the competent recognition authorities and to encourage their application.
  4. The Committee shall maintain its links to the UNESCO Regional Committees for the Application of Conventions on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education adopted under the auspices of UNESCO.
  5. A simple majority of the Parties shall constitute a quorum.
  6. The Committee shall adopt its Rules of Procedure. It shall meet in ordinary session at least every three years. The Committee shall meet for the first time within a year of the entry into force of this Convention and annually for the first five years after that in order to manage its implementation.
  7. The role of Secretariat of the Committee shall be entrusted to the Director-General of UNESCO.

### **Article IX.3**

1. A network of national information centres on academic mobility and recognition shall be established and shall uphold and assist the practical implementation of this Convention by the competent recognition authorities.
2. Each Party shall appoint a member of their national information centre to the network of national information centres. In cases in which more than one national information centre is established or maintained, all these shall be members of the network, but the national information centres concerned shall dispose of only one vote.
3. The network of national information centres shall meet annually in plenary session. It shall elect its President and Bureau.
4. The role of the Secretariat of the network of national information centres shall be entrusted to the Director-General of UNESCO.
5. The network of national information centres shall collect relevant information from the Parties relating to academic recognition and mobility.

## **SECTION X. FINAL CLAUSES**

### **Article X.1**

1. This Convention shall be open for signature and ratification, acceptance, approval or accession by all UNESCO Member States and the Holy See.
2. These States may express their consent to be bound to this Convention by:
  - (a) a signature without reservation as to ratification, acceptance, approval or accession;
  - (b) a signature subject to ratification, acceptance, approval or accession, followed by ratification, acceptance, approval or accession; or
  - (c) the deposit of an instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession.
3. Instruments of ratification, acceptance, approval, or accession shall be deposited with the Director-General of UNESCO, hereinafter referred to as “the depository”.

### **Article X.2**

This Convention shall enter into force on the first day of the month following the expiration of the period of one month after five UNESCO Member States of the Asia-Pacific region have expressed their consent to be bound by this Convention. It shall enter into force for each other State on the first day of the month following the expiration of the period of one month after the date of expressing its consent to be bound by the Convention.

### **Article X.3**

1. The Parties to this Convention which are not already Contracting States to the 1983 Convention undertake to abstain from becoming Contracting States to the 1983 Convention
2. Parties to this Convention that are at the same time Contracting States to the 1983 Convention: (a) shall apply the provisions of this Convention in their mutual relations; and (b) shall continue to apply the 1983 Convention in their relations with any other Contracting States to the 1983 Convention that is not a Party to this Convention.

### **Article X.4**

1. Any State may, at the time of signature or when depositing its instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession specifies the territory or territories to which this Convention shall apply.

2. Any Party may, at any later date, by a declaration addressed to the depository, extend the application of this Convention to any other territory specified in the declaration. In respect of such territory the Convention shall enter into force on the first day of the month following the expiration of a period of one month after the date of receipt of such declaration by the depository.

#### **Article X.5**

1. Any Party may, at any time, denounce this Convention by means of a notification addressed to the depository.
2. Such denunciation shall become effective on the first day of the month following the expiration of a period of twelve months after the date of receipt of the notification by the depository. However, such denunciation shall not affect recognition decisions taken previously under the provisions of this Convention.
3. Termination or suspension of the operation of this Convention as a consequence of a violation by a Party of a provision essential to the accomplishment of the object or purpose of this Convention shall be addressed in accordance with international law.

#### **Article X.6**

1. Any State may, at the time of signature or when depositing its instrument of, ratification, acceptance, approval, or accession declare that it reserves the right not to apply, in whole or in part, one or more of the following Articles of this Convention: Article IV.7, Article V.1, Article V.2, Article V.3, Article VI.3, and Article VIII.4. No other reservation can be made.
2. Any Party that has made a reservation under the preceding paragraph may wholly or partly withdraw it by means of a notification addressed to the depository. The withdrawal shall take effect on the date of receipt of such notification by the depository.
3. A Party that has made a reservation in respect of a provision of this Convention may not claim the application of that provision by any other Party; it may, however, if its reservation is partial or conditional, claim the application of that provision in so far as it has itself accepted it.

#### **Article X.7**

1. Amendments to this Convention may be adopted by the Committee by a two-thirds majority of the Parties. Any amendment so adopted shall be incorporated into a Protocol to this Convention. The Protocol shall specify the modalities for its entry into

force which, in any event, shall require the expression of consent by the Parties to be bound by it.

2. No amendment may be made to Section III of this Convention under the procedure of paragraph 1 above.
3. Any proposal for amendments shall be communicated to the depository, who shall transmit it to the Parties at least three months before the meeting of the Committee. The depository shall also inform the Executive Board of UNESCO.

#### **Article X.8**

The depository shall notify the Parties to this Convention, as well as the other Member States of UNESCO when any of the following has been accomplished:

- (a) any signature made in accordance with provisions of Article X.1.2;
- (b) the deposit of any instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession made in accordance with the provisions of Article X.1.2;
- (c) the date of entry into force of this Convention in accordance with the provisions of Articles X.2;
- (d) any reservation and the withdrawal thereof made in accordance with the provisions of Article X.6;
- (e) any denunciation of this Convention in accordance with the provisions of Article X.5;
- (f) any declaration made in accordance with the provisions of Article X.4;
- (g) any proposal made in accordance with the provisions of Article X.7;
- (h) any notification with regard to competent recognition authorities made in accordance with the provisions of Article II.2;
- (i) any other act, notification or communication relating to this Convention.

In witness thereof the undersigned representatives, being duly authorised, have signed this Convention.

Done at Tokyo, this twenty-sixth day of November 2011, in the Chinese, English, and Russian languages, the three texts being equally authoritative, the original version shall be deposited in the archives of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation. A certified copy shall be sent to all States referred to in Article X.1 and to the Secretariat of the United Nations.

# **Fact Sheet**

Global Convention on Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications

*September 2017*

## Why do we need a global convention?

- The growth of inter-regional student mobility
- The need of transparent and fair recognition of qualifications
- The need of enhancing quality on higher education
- The need of international coherence in recognition process

## Points to Highlight:

- The future Global Convention will **NOT** imply automatic recognition
- The draft text of the Convention will not be submitted for adoption before 2019
- The **Regional Convention** will continue being binding

### Brief Background

November 2011: International Conference of States, Tokyo  
 2012: Feasibility study  
 October 2012: International Experts' meeting, Nanjing  
 November 2013: General Conference requests Preliminary Report  
 November 2015: General Conference endorses the Preliminary Report and requests the establishment a Drafting Committee  
 May 2016 - June 2017: Four Drafting Committee meetings  
 May - June 2017: Initial Consultation round with Member States



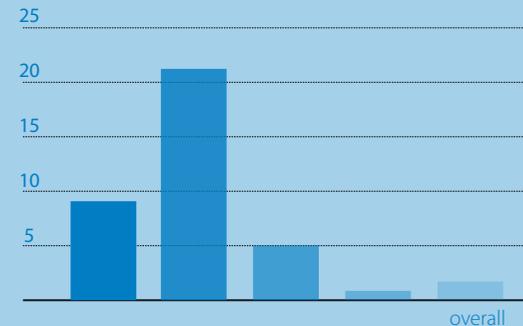
### Upcoming Steps

November 2017:  
 Progress report submitted to the UNESCO General Conference (GC) for **its decision on the next steps**;  
 The 39<sup>th</sup> Session will decide on **wide consultations in 2018** with Member States and relevant stakeholders on the Draft Convention;  
 The 39<sup>th</sup> Session will decide on the submission of the Draft Convention for **adoption in 2019**

### For further information:

Contact: [glocohed@unesco.org](mailto:glocohed@unesco.org)

Global Convention Wegpage: <https://en.unesco.org/themes/higher-education/recognition-qualifications/global-convention>



Result of Consultations with Member States (May - June 2017)

Likelihood to accept draft convention for adoption (n=39)

- Very likely
- Likely
- Somewhat likely
- Unlikely
- Do not know

Source: Fact Sheet (UNESCO, 2017). Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications Project. <https://en.unesco.org/themes/higher-education/recognition-qualifications/global-convention>



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

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