

Report to the SPBEA on the Regional Qualifications Registry cluster meeting held in Suva, Fiji 11 April - 13 April 2007

In accordance with the project proposal agreed upon by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), SPBEA is working with a consultant to conduct a series of 3 cluster meetings to determine the level of support for the concept of a Pacific Regional Qualifications Register.

This is the report of the first such meeting which consisted of delegates from the countries of Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, and Tuvalu. Representatives from PIFS, SPC and SPBEA were also in attendance.

The purpose of the 3 day meeting was to determine the extent to which this particular group of countries supported the concept of a Regional Qualifications Register (RQR), to discuss details of the scope of the development and make recommendations for the way forward. The meeting was reminded that the 2003 meeting of the Forum Ministers of Education Meeting (Fed MM) considered the objective of an RQR would better meet the needs of the region than would the development of a Regional Qualifications Framework.

More specifically, the objectives of the meeting were to:

- a) introduce the theory and practicalities of a Qualifications Register
- b) discuss the initial proposal for the development and implementation of the RQR.
- c) discuss the basic template for the Register
- d) discuss the level descriptors/benchmarks
- e) discuss the necessary quality assurance and control procedures including accreditation and moderation processes
- f) discuss strategies for countries to develop their NQR based on their current status.
- g) discuss the way forward.

This report will consider each of the above objectives in turn, and summarise the issues raised, and recommendations made by the group for each objective.

A) To introduce the theory and practicalities of a Qualifications Register

This was achieved in the first instance, by defining a National Register as being a list of quality assured qualifications for a country. The purpose of a register was then determined as being to:

- identify qualifications
- equate these qualifications
- provide pathways to learners
- ensure all qualifications have a clear purpose
- enhance international recognition of qualifications.

As part of the introduction to the concept of a register there was considerable discussion about the need for, and possible mechanisms to equate qualifications on a register, and subsequent monitoring of quality assurance processes between countries to ensure this

equating process has integrity. The meeting recognised the quality assurance issues would be critical to the success of the Regional Register, particularly in relation to its international recognition and sustained credibility. There was strong support for the concept of the Register by all members of the cluster meeting.

The meeting also considered the possible relationships between a qualifications register and the National Qualifications Frameworks that exist in New Zealand and Samoa, and is being considered by Fiji and Tonga. The benefits of a Framework and Register for learners and providers were outlined in detail, and endorsed by the meeting. Chiefly these benefits were seen as being:

- assessment is more transparent
- there are positive effects on learning and motivation
- student achievement is recognised with greater flexibility
- assessment is valid, fair, accurate and consistent with national standards
- credits can be used in more than one qualification
- ability to track national trends is enhanced.

The delegates appreciated that the implementation of a Pacific Regional Qualifications Register (PRQR) has the endorsement of International bodies such as UNESCO and the ILO, and would therefore more easily achieve international recognition.

B) To discuss the initial proposal for the development and implementation of the PRQR.

This objective was met during debate held at various times over the 3 days of the meeting. However, it was most specifically addressed during discussions about the principles upon which the register would be founded, the purposes of a register, and some assumptions about the register.

The meeting endorsed the following principles for a PRQR:

- the interests of the learner will be paramount within the register
- the register will reflect the cultural norms of Pacific Peoples, which in the first instance will be reflected in the title “Pacific Regional Qualifications Register” (PRQR)
- the interests of employers will be considered
- the PRQR must not simply replicate aspects of the NQFs developed by individual member countries.

The register would be developed in such a way as to meet the following specific objectives, which were endorsed by the meeting:

- the register will identify and equate all qualifications (including TVET)
- the register will provide clear pathways
- the register will enhance the mobility of learners and labour force
- qualifications will be portable
- the register will enhance international recognition of the regions qualifications
- the PRQR will recognise qualifications through either members NQF or NQR .

In developing the register, the following assumptions were made explicit, and endorsed by the meeting:

- all **quality assured** qualifications will automatically be placed on the register
- all countries will be required to have establish their own NQF/NQR in order to be part of the PRQR
- the Register will be a public document.

The question of the extent to which individual countries had the right decide which of their quality assured qualifications would be placed on the PRQR was discussed. The delegates felt that as long as the PRQR had in place sufficiently rigorous quality assurance processes, then all qualifications appearing on individual countries national registers should automatically be placed on the regional register.

C) To discuss the basic template for the register.

Of all the objectives, this one generated most discussion, and drew the broadest range of perspectives. It was discussed and agreed that qualifications appearing on the RQPR would be characterised by the following parameters:

- the name of the qualification developer
- the title of the qualification
- the date of initial registration of the qualification in its country of origin
- the level of the qualification
- the purpose of the qualification
- any entry requirements for the qualification
- the outcomes achieved
- the length of the qualification
- the names of all countries offering the qualification
- the components of the course leading to the qualification.

This list of parameters is longer than initially discussed, because the delegates considered that for the register to be valued by users, it should be information rich.

Details of the title and level of the qualification provided a good deal of debate from delegates of the meeting. It was agreed that the title needed to be based upon clearly understood definitions that would be applied consistently by all members. The definitions had to be sufficiently general to allow flexibility for individual register members.

The following definitions for the terms Certificate and Diploma were agreed on by the meeting:

- **Certificate:** “These qualifications are used to prepare candidates for both employment and further education and training.”
- Certificates are further described by the criteria defining the qualifications found at levels 1-4 of the register
- **Diploma:** “These qualifications build on prior qualifications or prior experience and recognise capacity for initiative and judgement:
 - across a broad range of educational and vocational areas
 - in technical, professional, and/or management roles “
- Diplomas are further described by the criteria defining the qualifications found at levels 5-7 of the register.

The descriptions for qualifications such as Bachelors Degrees, Post Graduate Diplomas Masters Degrees and Doctoral Degrees appearing on the register would be consistent with common international practice.

The number of levels contained in the register was the topic of much discussion. The meeting heard from the delegates of countries with a National Qualifications Framework, or in the process of implementing one, who felt the number of levels needed to be consistent with the number in their framework. This would avoid confusion of those wishing to use the register to determine the equivalence of a particular qualification. The meeting also considered the need to balance the benefits of a 10 step ladder against the practicalities of achieving the required level of consistency in its application across the entire region, recognising that to do so is easier within a single country.

There was strong support for the need to have the ladder for the PRQR consistent with that of the ladders belonging to the qualification frameworks of member countries, so a 10 ladder has been endorsed as the preferred option.

D) To discuss the level descriptors/benchmarks.

In order to place a particular qualification on a specific level of the RPQR, a set of clearly worded descriptors needs to be developed. Reference was made to the descriptors used in the Frameworks or registers of several countries. The criteria considered to be most appropriate to base the PRQR on were those used in the New Zealand Qualifications Register, the Samoan National Qualifications Framework, and the draft Caribbean Qualifications Framework. The meeting noted that in order to enhance the consistency with which the descriptors would be applied, they would need to be clear and simple, and include aspects such as the nature of the processes, knowledge and skills required and the level of learner autonomy when undertaking the learning. An example of the sort of descriptors that could be used to define the steps on the ladder of qualifications is appended to this report.

E) To discuss the necessary quality assurance and control procedures including accreditation and moderation processes.

Above all other aspects of the register, that of quality assurance was regarded as the one most critical to its success. All delegates felt that unless a sufficiently robust system of quality assurance were implemented to support the register, legitimate comparability of the qualifications within the register would not be possible.

There was discussion and agreement that a robust system of quality assurance would assist those accessing the register in:

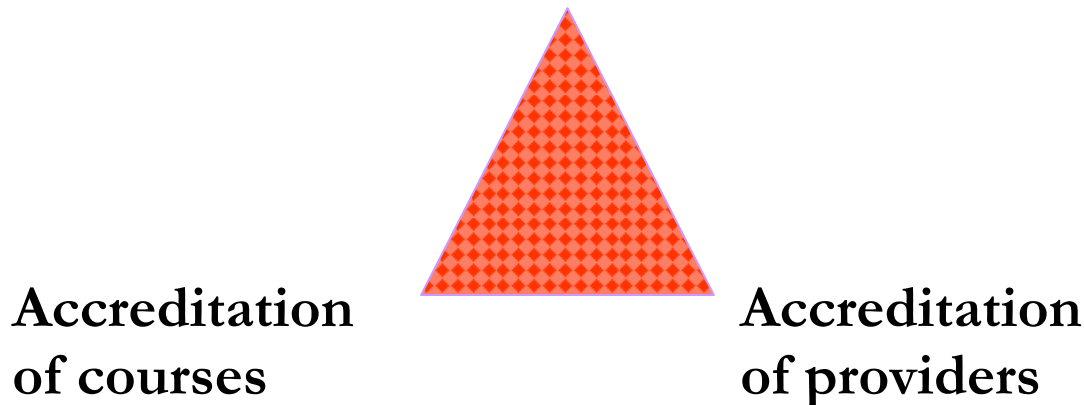
- achieving comparability between the qualifications on it
- identifying the pathways that exist for learners
- have confidence in the courses and providers offering the qualifications
- give all qualifications on the register credibility and acceptance
- having confidence in the register.

To meet these objectives, it was agreed that all countries will need to adopt a similarly robust quality assurance standard, supported by appropriate legislation in each member

country. The delegates had a strong expectation that some form of auditing of the quality assurance processes of member countries once developed would be an integral part of the register.

The following diagram was used to summarise the quality assurance processes supporting the register.

Register of Qualifications



The accreditation processes used by one of the Qualifications Authorities were outlined as an example of what could be done to assure the quality of courses and providers. A moderation system that could be used to achieve legitimate comparability between assessment decisions made by individual providers was also outlined to the delegates who acknowledged the benefits of such a process.

The question of who would be responsible for oversight and co-ordination of the register arose, and it was confirmed that SPBEA had authority from the 2005 Forum Ministers of Education Meeting (Fed MM) in Apia, to do so. The delegates accepted that the independence of the SPBEA gave it the legitimacy to carry out a monitoring role of the extent to which the regional quality assurance processes were being adhered to by member countries. The meeting accepted that the nature of this responsibility is a matter for stage 4 of the registry project, and would not be confirmed until then.

F) To discuss strategies for countries to develop their NQR based on their current status.

The group spent time considering the relationship between a National register and National Framework, and since potentially they capture identical information, it was agreed that a country did not need to have both a National Qualifications Register and National Qualifications Framework to be part of the Regional Register.

The delegates from each member country had previously been invited to present to the meeting a summary of their current qualification and the way in which these are administered. The presentations are included in the appendix to this report, and a summary of their current status is provided in the table below.

Table 1: Summary of current status of member countries

Country	Current status of Qualifications system
Cook Islands	Is linked to the New Zealand NQF and quality audit processes developed by the NZQA, and would continue to foster this relationship to be part of the PRQR.
Fiji	In the process of implementing a National Qualifications Framework which is likely to be based on that developed by the NZQA, so will have the processes in place to be part of the RPQR.
Niue	Is linked to the New Zealand NQF and quality audit processes developed by the NZQA, and would continue to foster this relationship to be part of the PRQR.
Kiribati	Has some school and post-school qualifications of its own, and will work with other countries if further qualifications need to be developed and to have in place quality assurance processes required for the PRQR.
Samoa	Has recently established its own Qualifications Authority and National Qualifications Framework which have been based on that developed by the NZQA.
Tonga	In the process of implementing a National Qualifications Framework which is likely to be based on that developed by the NZQA.
Tuvalu	Has some school and post-school qualifications of its own, some from other countries, and will work with other countries if further qualifications need to be developed and to have in place quality assurance processes required for the register.

Based on these positions, the delegates recognised the need for collaborative arrangements to be made between the smaller and larger member countries. The delegates considered the nature and scope of the collaboration that would be required.

The group confirmed the following be used as principles to guide the collaboration that would need to exist between member countries of the PRQR.

Collaboration between countries will work to:

- Protect the interests of learners
- Enhance the quality of learning
- Recognise member states autonomy
- Enhance the quality and credibility of qualifications
- Reflect the cultural context of parties and learners

The following parameters of responsibility were considered to be important aspects of any collaborative agreements

- Resources
- Learner entry and support
- Quality assurance and enhancement
- Programme delivery, assessment and reporting
- Process for the review of agreements

It is expected if these arrangements are functioning effectively then:

- The parties concerned will have formal written agreements
- Accountabilities and responsibilities of all parties will be clear
- The risk of failure of collaborative arrangements will be low

G) To discuss the way forward

Much of the discussion of this objective occurred as an integral part of the previous section on the development of National Qualifications Frameworks and Registers, and during the course of these discussions it became clear that only the smaller countries represented have no immediate plans for developing registers or frameworks independently of other countries.

Delegates from the other countries were sympathetic to the situation of the smaller countries, and supported the concept of collaboration to provide the level of support needed to allow these countries to play a meaningful part of the PRQR.

There was a strong sense of purpose and commitment from the delegates to move forward with the implementation of the PRQR through the development of national registers or frameworks. They accepted the need to work with decision makers in their own country to ensure the requirements of the PRQR were sufficiently well understood by these groups.

The further stages of the PRQR project outline the steps that member countries need to undertake in order to have their qualifications on the regional register. These are:

- Stage 2: Resourcing of SPBEA for the development of the Register
- Stage 3: Development of the Regional Qualification Register Template
- Stage 4: Development of Country Qualifications Registers
- Stage 5: Development of the Regional Qualifications Register
- Stage 6: On-going operation/maintenance of the Regional Qualifications Register.

LEVEL	PROCESS	LEARNING DEMAND	RESPONSIBILITY
1	<p>Carry out processes that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> are limited in range are repetitive and familiar are employed within closely defined contexts 	<p>Employing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> recall a narrow range of knowledge and cognitive skills no generation of new ideas 	<p>Applied:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in directed activity under close supervision with no responsibility for the work or learning of others
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> are moderate in range are established and familiar offer a clear choice of routine responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> basic operational knowledge readily available information known solutions to familiar problems little generation of new ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> in directed activity under general supervision and quality control with some responsibility for quantity and quality with possible responsibility for guiding others
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> require a range of well developed skills offer a significant choice of procedures are employed within a range of familiar contexts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> some relevant theoretical knowledge interpretation of available information discretion and judgement a range of known responses to familiar problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> in directed activity with some autonomy under general supervision and quality checking with significant responsibility for the quantity and quality of output with possible responsibility for the output of others
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> require a wide range of technical or scholastic skills offer a considerable choice of procedures are employed in a variety of familiar and unfamiliar contexts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a broad knowledge base incorporating some theoretical concepts analytical interpretation of information informed judgement a range of sometimes innovative responses to concrete but often unfamiliar problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> in self-directed activity under broad guidance and evaluation with complete responsibility for quantity and quality of output with possible responsibility for the quantity and quality of the output of others
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> require a wide range of specialised technical or scholastic skills involve a wide choice of standard and non-standard procedures are employed in a variety of routine and non-routine contexts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a broad knowledge base with substantial depth in some areas analytical interpretation of a wide range of data the determination of appropriate methods and procedures in response to a range of concrete problems with some theoretical elements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> in self-directed and sometimes directive activity within broad general guidelines or functions with full responsibility for the nature, quantity and quality of outcomes with possible responsibility for the achievement of group outcome
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> require a command of wide-ranging highly specialised technical or scholastic skills involve a wide choice of standard and non-standard procedures, often in non-standard combinations are employed in highly variable routine and non-routine contexts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> specialised knowledge with depth in more than one area the analysis, reformatting and evaluation of a wide range of information the formulation of appropriate responses to resolve both concrete and abstract problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> in managing processes within broad parameters for defined activities with complete accountability for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> require a command of highly specialised technical or scholastic and basic research skills across a major discipline involve the full range of procedures in a major discipline are applied in complex, variable and specialised contexts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> knowledge of a major discipline with areas of specialisation in depth the analysis, transformation and evaluation of abstract data and concepts the creation of appropriate responses to resolve given or contextual abstract problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> in planning, resourcing and managing processes within broad parameters and functions with complete accountability for determining, achieving and evaluating personal and/or group outcomes
8	<p>Involves skills and knowledge that enable a learner to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> provide a systematic and coherent account of the key principles of a subject area; and undertake self-directed study, research and scholarship in a subject area, demonstrating intellectual independence, analytic rigour and sound communication 		

9	<p>Involves knowledge and skills that enable a learner to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate mastery of a subject area; and • plan and carry out - to internationally recognised standards - an original scholarship or research project. <p>Demonstrated by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The completion of a substantial research paper, dissertation or in some cases a series of papers.
10	<p>Involves knowledge and skill that enable a learner to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an original contribution to knowledge through research or scholarship, as judged by independent experts, applying international standards.