

Report to the SPBEA on the Regional Qualifications Registry cluster meeting held in Honiara, Solomon Islands 2-4 May 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 third such meeting which consisted of delegates from the countries of Papua New Guinea, The Republic of the Solomon Islands, Nauru and Vanuatu.

The purpose of the 4 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 delegates being given a detailed background to the development of the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NQF) and Register. A National Register was defined 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 delegates appreciated that the implementation of a Pacific Regional Qualifications Register (RPQR) 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 4 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 be subject to ongoing review

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/recognise and equate all qualifications
- the register will provide clear pathways to learners and providers
- the register will enhance the mobility of learners and labour force (including nationally for various sectors of the labour market)
- to advocate for the improvement of national courses and qualifications
- the register will enhance international recognition of the regions qualifications
- the PRQR will recognise qualifications through either members NQF or NQR

It was noted that labour market mobility was often in the context of national trends such as a national shortage or surplus of a particular skill or trade. Therefore the register was seen as a means of addressing such imbalances at the national level between various countries, as the equating of qualifications would enhance the possibility of labour market and learner mobility.

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

- all quality assured (by nationally prescribed courses/modules) qualifications will automatically be placed on the register
- all countries will be required to have establish their own NQF/NQR

- the Register will be a public document available to make comparisons between qualifications
- the register will be advocated to ensure its success

The question of the extent to which individual countries had the right to 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:

- Title of qualification (including professional associations)
- Level of the qualification
- Purpose of qualification (to include target group)
- Entry requirement for qualification
- Outcomes achieved
- Length of qualification
- The owner/country of the qualification
- Countries where available

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.”
- **Diploma:** “These qualifications mostly 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”

The title should also allow recognition of professional associations since these are particularly important in the pacific region, a common example being membership of the Society of Accountants, which provides a significant status for its holders.

It was assumed that 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, so these were not discussed in any detail.

The number of levels contained in the register was the topic of much discussion. The meeting initially supported a 10 step ladder given this had already been endorsed by the other 2 cluster meetings. However, the delegates felt strongly that given how important early education and the effect of push-outs are for Melanesian member countries, the achievements of primary school learners needed to be recognised by the regional register. There was discussion about, and support for the need for the register to contain 12 steps, with 2 steps being at a level below the first of a 10 step ladder.

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:

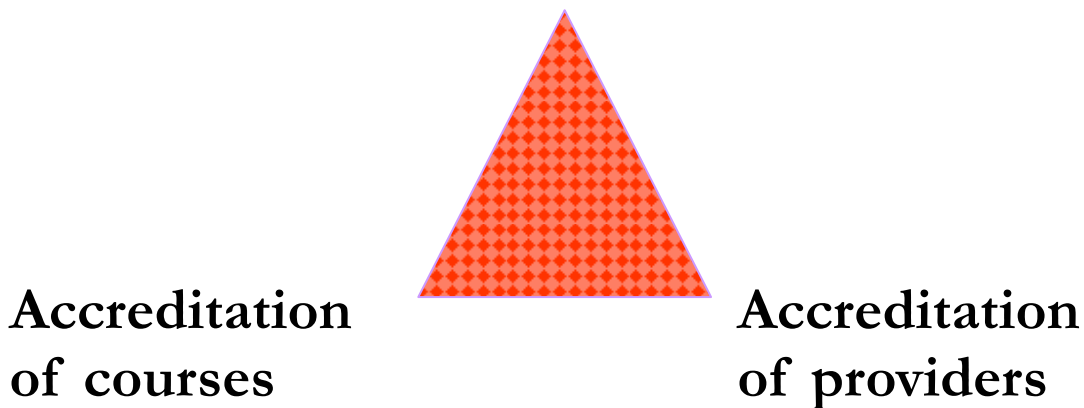
- achieving comparability between the qualifications on it
- identifying the pathways that exist for learners
- have confidence in the courses and providers offering the qualifications
- give all qualifications on the register credibility and acceptance
- having confidence in the register.

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 the New Zealand Qualifications Authority was outlined as an example of what could be done to assure the quality of courses and providers. A moderation system that could be used achieve legitimate comparability between assessment decisions made by individual providers was also outlined to the delegates who acknowledged the benefits of such a process. Most of the delegates were confident they already had in place quite robust quality assurance processes such as those used for TVET qualifications.

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 as separate documents on the SPBEA website.

G) To discuss the way forward

The way forward for some of the delegates was reasonably clear, as quality assurance processes and frameworks are already in place. Each country is prepared to begin the task of thinking about the issues in more detail. To aid progression of this, the delegates suggested that it would be important for each cluster to have the opportunity to meet again to share their experiences as they make progress with their own qualifications registers or frameworks in order to maintain the momentum of the initiative.

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 requirement of the PRQR were sufficiently well understood by these groups. Delegates were asked to advocate for the PRQR within their own countries and brief ministers or policy makers they had access to about the outcomes of the meeting prior to the November Ministers meeting in Auckland.

It was pointed out to delegates that to assist them in keeping updated on the developments of PRQR, they should from time to time access the SPBEA website where information relating to stage one of the project would be available.

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 and negotiation of linkages with International Qualifications Authorities.
- 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.