

Report to the SPBEA on the Regional Qualifications Registry cluster meeting held in Pohnpei, FSM 23 April - 25 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 second such meeting which consisted of delegates from the countries of the Federated States of Micronesia (**Chuuk, Kosrae** and Pohnpei) and **the Republic of Palau**. The list of those attending is attached as an appendix to this report. It should be noted that **the Republic of Marshall Islands** chose not to attend the meeting. It should also be noted that representation of the countries attending was of the highest caliber, for which the SPBEA is very grateful.

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 given a background to the initiative as being part of the Pacific Plan, and 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

In order to facilitate delegates understanding of the issues relating to frameworks and registers, a detailed description of the historical development of the New Zealand qualifications framework and register was presented. The purpose of a register was then determined as being to:

- identify qualifications
- equate these qualifications

- provide pathways to learners and providers
- enhance the mobility of learners and the labour force
- ensure all qualifications have a clear purpose
- enhance international recognition of qualifications
- enhance regional unity.

As part of the introduction to the concept of a register there was considerable discussion about the need for, and possible mechanisms to equate teacher 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.

The delegates expressed concern about the need for teacher training issues to be addressed, and were hopeful the regional register would support initiatives to achieve this outcome.

It was suggested that the qualifications to appear on the register should not be confined to those of High school, College and beyond. Specifically the delegates felt quite strongly that qualifications earned as part of early childhood and elementary education should not be overlooked on the register.

There was a detailed discussion about the issues of quality assurance, and how the existing measures that are inherent in **Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)** accreditation could be used to satisfy the quality assurance mechanisms that are likely to be required by the Regional register. Pohnpei is currently in the final stages of applying for WASC accreditation.

Although there was some explanation and discussion about the idea of a Qualifications Framework, the meeting recognised the real differences that exist between the perspectives of the Northern Pacific countries who as Freely Associated States (FAS) are focussed on the United States assessment systems in the same way that many of the south pacific countries are focussed on Australia and New Zealand. For this reason, it is an unrealistic goal at this stage for the FAS to adopt a standards based qualifications framework in order become closely aligned to that of south pacific countries.

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.

There was strong support for the concept of the Pacific Region Qualifications Register by all members of the cluster meeting, and some discussion about the concept of a sub-region comprising of the FAS as a means of recognising the assessment and certification differences that exist between the south and north of the pacific.

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. It must be noted that the meeting considered that creating distinctions between possible objectives, principles and assumptions for the register to be somewhat artificial. However, the meeting endorsed the following principles for a PRQR:

- the interests of the learner will be paramount within the register
- all qualifications will be quality assured

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 from those of early childhood up-to and including qualifications such as 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 National 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 objectives and principles of the regional register will be reviewed periodically
- all qualifications of the PRQR will be recognised by member countries.

C) To discuss the basic template for the register.

It was discussed and agreed that qualifications appearing on the RQPR would be characterised by the following parameters:

- the title of the qualification
- 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

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 “

It was felt that the term “Diploma” needed to be applied in a sufficiently broad way to recognise the qualification of High School Diploma, so the specification that a Diploma “*mostly*” builds on prior qualifications was endorsed by the meeting. There was not the same certainty by the delegates that these definitions could be supplemented by ascribing to them particular levels of a qualifications ladder.

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.

D) To discuss the level descriptors/benchmarks.

The delegates had no strong preference for a particular number of levels for the ladder, but were keen to ensure that such a ladder would recognise any ladder developed for individual FAS or a northern sub-region.

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 including those of New Zealand (Samoa) and the Caribbean, although no strong preference was declared by delegates. However, the meeting accepted that in order to enhance the consistency with which the descriptors would be applied, they would need to be clear and simple.

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

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.

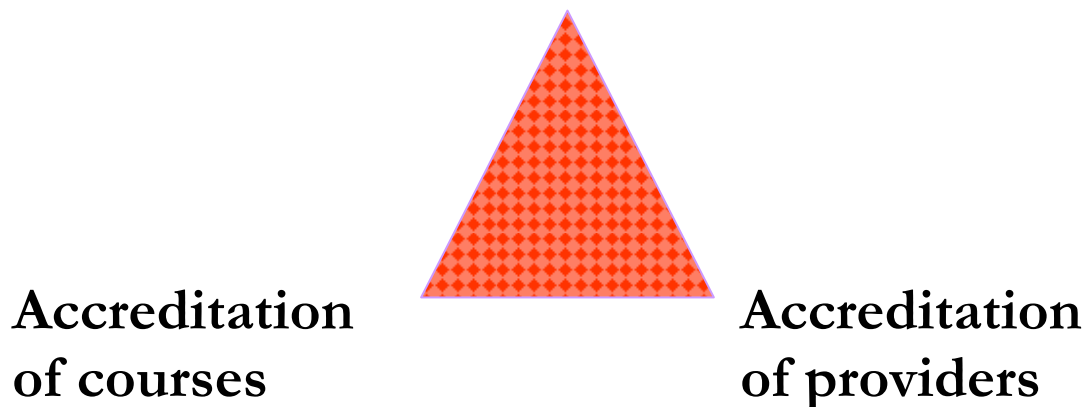
There was discussion and agreement that a robust system of quality assurance would assist those accessing the register in:

- 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



It was suggested that the accreditation and subsequent quality assurance measures of WASC would be acceptable as an equivalent to what many of the south pacific countries are doing or intending to do by way of quality assurance. There was also some discussion on the extent to which a different quality assurance ethos defined what is appropriate to the northern pacific countries. Specifically, the delegates saw mechanisms such as moderation as being micro-management, and unnecessary given the accountability that is inherent in the reporting system in the FAS.

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.

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

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 presentation presented below is for all 3 countries as the qualifications are so similar. [Insert the FAS education system here](#)

G) To discuss the way forward

The way forward is not as clear as is the case for the southern countries, as the legislative issues may be more complex. However, each country is prepared to begin the task of thinking about the issues in more detail.

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
- 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.