

Progress towards the Brisbane Communiqué Goals – Senior Officials’ Working Group Interim Report to Asia-Pacific Education Ministers – August 2007

The Hon Julie Bishop MP, Australian Minister for Education, Science and Training, hosted the inaugural Asia-Pacific Education Ministers’ Meeting in Brisbane on 3-4 April 2006. Ministers and senior education officials representing twenty-seven countries from Turkey to the Marshall Islands met to discuss how they might work together to raise quality, create common points of reference in education frameworks and enhance qualifications recognition in the region to enable much greater ease of movement across borders for the purposes of study, research and employment. A list of the countries that attended the meeting can be found at <http://www.brisbanecommunique.dest.gov.au>.

Ministers at the meeting issued a communiqué - *the Brisbane Communiqué* - in which they agreed to collaborate on the development of:

1. Quality assurance frameworks for the region linked to international standards, including courses delivered online;
2. Recognition of educational and professional qualifications;
3. Common competency based standards for teachers, particularly in science and mathematics; and
4. Common recognition of technical skills across the region in order to better meet the overall skills needs of the economic base of the region.

The Ministers also agreed to establish a multilateral Senior Officials’ Working Group, convened by Australia, to advance the Brisbane Communiqué goals.

This is the Senior Officials’ Working Group’s first report to Education Ministers on the progress of the Brisbane Communiqué initiative. It provides information on the structures developed to support the initiative and outlines activities that are currently underway and a broad plan for future work. It is submitted to the Education Ministers of the following countries:

Afghanistan	Australia	Bangladesh
Bhutan	Brunei Darussalam	Cambodia
People’s Republic of China	Cook Islands	Fiji
Iran	India	Indonesia
Jordan	Iraq	Japan
Kuwait	Kingdom of Bahrain	Kiribati
Malaysia	Laos	Lebanon
Micronesia	Maldives	Marshall Islands
Nepal	Mongolia	Nauru
Niue	New Caledonia	New Zealand
Papua New Guinea	Pakistan	Palau
Republic of Korea	Philippines	Qatar
Singapore	Samoa	Saudi Arabia
Sultanate of Oman	Solomon Islands	Sri Lanka
Timor Leste	Syria	Thailand
Tuvalu	Tonga	Turkey
United Arab Emirates	Vietnam	Vanuatu
Yemen		

The next report will be submitted to Ministers in 2008.

Support structures

The multilateral Senior Officials' Working Group (SOWG) and the Brisbane Communiqué Taskforce have been established to take the work of the Brisbane Communiqué initiative forward.

Senior Officials' Working Group

The SOWG has been charged with progressing the aims of the Communiqué in a practical and timely way. The group is responsible for developing and implementing a realistic and achievable work programme, promoting the aims of the initiative and encouraging participation.

The following countries have representatives on the SOWG: Australia, Bhutan, Brunei, Cambodia, the People's Republic of China, Japan, New Zealand, Thailand, Solomon Islands, Oman, Tonga, and the United Arab Emirates. The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) also has a representative on the SOWG which is chaired by Dr Wendy Jarvie, Deputy Secretary of the Australian Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). Participation on the SOWG is open to all countries in the greater Asia-Pacific region.

Brisbane Communiqué Taskforce

Australia has set up the Brisbane Communiqué Taskforce in DEST to provide secretariat support to the SOWG. Key activities for the Taskforce include organising SOWG meetings and the next Asia-Pacific Education Ministers' meeting, coordinating the work programme agreed by the SOWG, raising awareness and promoting participation.

The Brisbane Communiqué website was launched on 2 March 2007 and can be found at <http://www.brisbanecommunique.dest.gov.au>. The website provides useful background information and updates on the Brisbane Communiqué initiative.

Establishing the initiative

Inaugural meeting of the Senior Officials' Working Group

The SOWG met for the first time in Bangkok on 13-14 November 2006 to discuss ways to advance the goals of the Brisbane Communiqué. The meeting was attended by senior officials from SEAMEO, Bhutan, Brunei, China, Japan, Republic of Korea, Oman, New Zealand, Thailand and Australia. Representatives from SEAMEO, ILO and UNESCO gave presentations on work currently underway in multilateral forums to facilitate qualification and skills recognition and raise education quality. An expert on the European higher education reforms of the Bologna Process also presented to the SOWG on the advantages of multilateral action on education and practical ways to facilitate multilateral cooperation.

The SOWG agreed on the importance of information sharing and communication across the region on this initiative, especially through mechanisms such as formal networks.

The SOWG is keen to ensure that the Brisbane Communiqué work does not duplicate work already underway in the region, and to work in partnership, wherever possible, with countries and organisations in the region where the Brisbane Communiqué objectives and activities overlap or complement each other.

At the meeting two areas of common interest dominated: quality assurance and recognition of educational and professional qualifications. There was also considerable interest in working collaboratively on teaching competencies, especially from countries seeking particular focus on primary education.

SOWG members agreed that reform in the area of recognition of technical and vocational skills will be challenging, particularly given that in many countries technical skill matters are primarily the responsibility of labour, rather than education, ministries.

Senior Officials' Working Group programme of work

At the Bangkok meeting the senior officials agreed on a method for advancing the Brisbane Communiqué work:

1. The first step is to undertake scoping studies under each of the four Brisbane Communiqué themes to ascertain the current situation in the region and to determine where effort needs to be placed for future action. Each study will be developed in consultation with experts in the relevant fields, and will be overseen by a Consultative Committee consisting of interested countries and multilateral organisations.
2. Seminars held in the region on aspects of the Brisbane Communiqué themes will build on the scoping studies and will provide a mechanism for clarifying issues and developing recommendations for future action/research. The seminars will raise awareness of the Brisbane Communiqué aims and provide opportunities for stakeholders to actively participate in and shape education policy development for the region.
3. Expert working groups will be established to design, with reference to the scoping studies and outcomes of seminars outlined above, practical and workable options under the four Brisbane Communiqué themes for consideration by participating countries.

Australia has undertaken to fund and manage the scoping studies and a number of seminars. The Asia Pacific Quality Network has been commissioned to prepare the scoping study on higher education quality assurance arrangements. The scoping studies on higher education qualifications recognition and teaching competencies (school level) are also now underway. It is expected that the studies will be completed by December 2007.

Working with other multilateral organisations in the region

An important component of the work of the SOWG and the Taskforce is to raise awareness of the initiative and the opportunities it presents to the region. It is crucial to the success of the initiative that countries actively participate in shaping the Brisbane Communiqué work to be relevant to their own national requirements and to the region.

The Taskforce Director had a series of meetings on 20-24 August 2006 with regional organisations to discuss the Brisbane Communiqué work. She met with SEAMEO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, the International Labour Organisation, the World Bank, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Universities Network, and the Southeast Asian Association of Institutes of Higher Learning. The response was positive with organisations enthusiastic about the Brisbane Communiqué aims.

In February 2007 the Chair of the SOWG attended the Asia Pacific Quality Network Annual Conference in order to raise awareness of the opportunities provided by the Brisbane Communiqué initiative and seek collaboration with interested countries.

The Australian SOWG representative spoke on the Brisbane Communiqué initiative at the SEAMEO Council Conference on 13-16 March 2007 in Bali. SEAMEO and its Regional Centres have proposed a number of areas for collaborative activity.

Following the inaugural SOWG meeting, the Hon Julie Bishop MP, the Australian Minister for Education, Science and Training, wrote to Education Ministers in Brisbane

Communiqué countries to inform them of the outcomes of the meeting. A number of countries have subsequently affirmed their active support for the initiative.

Conclusion

Significant steps have been taken to progress the Brisbane Communiqué initiative since the inaugural Asia-Pacific Education Ministers' Meeting. The multilateral SOWG has been established and has identified key activities to advance the initiative. There is growing awareness in the region of the Brisbane Communiqué aims and multilateral organisations are becoming engaged.

The SOWG expects that the scoping studies and seminars in 2007-08 will provide the basis for a number of recommendations for future activities to be presented to Ministers for consideration in the 2008 Report to Education Ministers on progress towards the Brisbane Communiqué goals.

The Brisbane Communiqué Senior Officials' Working Group

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