



**Australian Government**

**Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations**

## **Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications across the Brisbane Communiqué Region**

Scoping study and report commissioned  
by the Department of Education, Employment and  
Workplace Relations

April 2008

© Commonwealth of Australia 2008

This work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced by any process without prior written permission from the Commonwealth. Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction and rights should be addressed to the Commonwealth Copyright Administration, Attorney-General's Department, Robert Garran Offices, National Circuit, Barton ACT 2600 or posted at <http://www.ag.gov.au/cca>.

The views expressed in the copyright work do not necessarily represent the views of the Commonwealth of Australia.

## contents

---

Executive summary .....	4
Introduction .....	7
Project rationale .....	7
What is recognition? .....	7
Obstacles to recognition .....	7
Project objectives .....	8
Methodology .....	8
Survey results .....	9
Identification of key issues in higher education qualifications recognition in the region .....	11
Diversity of the Asia-Pacific region .....	11
Information and communication .....	11
The European Example: Lessons from the Lisbon Convention and the Bologna Process .....	12
National Qualifications Frameworks .....	16
Systems, structures and developments that support recognition .....	19
Quality assurance .....	31
Conclusion & recommendations .....	34
Glossary .....	38
References & bibliography .....	41

### Appendices

1. Survey 1 - Initial survey to identify project contacts
2. Survey 2 - Major survey to countries in the Brisbane Communiqué region
3. Detailed survey responses by individual country

## executive summary

---

The *Brisbane Communiqué* emerged from the 2006 meeting of Asia-Pacific Education Ministers and senior officials in Brisbane. Ministers agreed to collaborate on a number of broad goals to encourage and facilitate regional student and academic mobility and exchange, and to address barriers to these activities.

The multilateral Senior Officials' Working Group (SOWG) charged with responsibility for progressing the aims of the Brisbane Communiqué met in November 2006 to develop a broad program of work. That work program included a recommendation to undertake a scoping study on higher education qualifications recognition in the broader Asia-Pacific region to identify issues, gaps and solutions already in existence across the region.

This study has found that while there is a growing interest in, and demand for, recognition of higher education qualifications in the Asia-Pacific region, together with an understanding that regional cooperation is vital to facilitate the international mobility of students and workers, there is relatively slow progress - particularly in the area of recognition of qualifications between countries. There are several challenges to recognition of qualifications between countries, as well as a number of opportunities which the SOWG can build on.

Transparency is a major barrier with information about educational structures and systems, and the content, duration and nature of qualifications difficult to obtain for the purposes of comparison.

Many countries within the region have not developed a National Qualifications Framework as the basis for qualifications recognition. There also seems to be some difference in the level of understanding about the purpose and nature of such frameworks and the difference between a broad 'qualifications system', and national framework. For a number of countries, a framework for technical and vocational qualifications is a higher priority than a higher education framework.

A number of countries do not have systematic processes in place for recognising foreign higher education qualifications between countries, and ratification of the most relevant United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Regional Recognition Convention—the *Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific* has been limited. However, the Recognition Convention is currently under review thus ratification may increase systemic processes for recognising foreign higher education qualifications. There is also considerable variance in quality assurance of recognition processes with some countries relying on higher education institutions for accreditation, and others using independent, national quality assurance agencies.

There are, however, many examples of positive initiatives and developments related to recognition in the region. Countries such as Hong Kong, India and Sri Lanka are at the point of final adoption and/or early implementation of National Qualifications Frameworks. There is also increasing evidence of cooperation and participation in Regional Recognition Conventions, and use of bilateral/multilateral agreements for recognition of higher education qualifications and to facilitate student mobility. The majority of survey respondents through this project acknowledged a growing demand for effective systems for mutual recognition of higher education qualifications across the region.

There are lessons which can be learnt from the European experience (Bologna Process) which is working towards a European Higher Education Area which embraces quality assurance as well as qualifications recognition by 2010. However, the Asia-Pacific region has greater divergence of countries in terms of culture, population size, per capita income, language, traditions and educational structures than Europe, which has, in addition, a well-developed system of integration of economic activities. However, in many ways it is the very diversity of

education systems in the Asia-Pacific region that makes educational recognition such a key factor for mobility within the region.

The emphasis in the Asia-Pacific region should be on promoting awareness of the benefits of mobility and increasing the transparency of education systems, qualifications, and recognition processes rather than seeking to emulate the process of reform of national education systems and regulatory processes currently underway in Europe.

Based on the information collected through the surveyed countries, and research of issues and progress made with recognition between countries in the region, some areas that the Brisbane Communiqué initiative can build on, or work towards have been identified. Three major recommendations for SOWG collaboration include:

1. Promote regional awareness and cooperation
2. Establish National Information Centres
3. Support the development of National Qualifications Frameworks

Each of these areas for collaboration is explained below together with their objectives and some suggested activities for the SOWG. Note that the activities listed under each recommendation are suggestions and therefore not exhaustive.

<b>Recommendation 1: Promote regional awareness and cooperation</b>
<p><b>Objective:</b> To identify and promote the benefits, and gain the commitment of all countries within the Asia Pacific region to regional cooperation on the recognition of higher education qualifications.</p>
<b>Suggested SOWG activities:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Encourage discussion and agreement among Asia Pacific countries on the principles, values and codes of practices that would further the objectives of transparency of higher education systems, qualifications, and recognition processes</li> <li>▪ Monitor developments regarding the review of the Asia-Pacific and Arab States Regional Recognition Conventions, and support the review process by conducting seminars and hosting meetings to ensure that the new conventions address the challenges of the globalised education environment</li> <li>▪ Following the review process, encourage ratification, and take concrete steps towards adopting Convention resolutions in Asia Pacific countries</li> <li>▪ Facilitate regional networks and linkages to specifically share and collect information on existing educational structures, recognition and quality assurance processes of individual countries. These networks and linkages could also be used to promote good practice in recognition of higher education qualifications, particularly recognition of qualifications between countries</li> <li>▪ Organise regional recognition seminars to:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– promote awareness of the issues and benefits surrounding recognition of higher education qualifications between countries</li> <li>– promote the purpose and benefits of NQFs as a mechanism for benchmarking higher education qualifications and quality of educational outcomes across borders - this should include clarifying the distinction between an NQF and a broader qualification system</li> <li>– promote discussion of the Bologna Process and its implications for the Asia-Pacific region</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## Recommendation 2: Establish National Information Centres

**Objective:** To increase the transparency of higher education systems, qualifications, and recognition processes of countries within the Asia Pacific region by facilitating the development and maintenance of, and access to, authoritative and accurate information on qualifications and recognition processes. The implementation of these centres has the potential to greatly increase the transparency of the region's education systems and qualification structures and remove one of the most important barriers to the recognition of qualifications in the broader Asia Pacific region.

### Suggested SOWG activities:

- Establish an expert working group to undertake relevant research, identify key issues, and develop a regional strategy for the recognition of qualifications across the Asia Pacific region. The group would study the legal and policy framework embedded in the Lisbon Recognition Convention and analyse suitable aspects for application in the Asia Pacific region
- Establish National Information Centres, using the ENIC-NARIC network as a model, although noting that agencies within the European network may have different functions, depending on the country concerned. All countries in the Asia-Pacific region have one or more official agencies with responsibility for higher education who can provide information about their own system. Many, if not most, countries in the region have some processes in place for evaluating foreign qualifications for educational and/or public sector employment. The aim would be to consolidate the work of these various agencies, so that there is a focal point for obtaining and disseminating information about recognition, and to develop capacity on this basis
- Reinvigorate APARNET, making it into an efficient information exchange mechanism, with a permanent home, as the international online arm of the National Information Centres.
- Use the National Information Centres to promote use of a Diploma Supplement or a similar document such as an enhanced transcript document to be issued with the diploma. Since it is likely that significant differences between qualification structures in the broader Asia-Pacific will remain, a Diploma Supplement would facilitate recognition by providing comprehensive information on the level and function of the qualification, its place in any national framework, and information on the national system of education

## Recommendation 3 Support the development of National Qualifications Frameworks

**Objective:** To support the development and implementation of National Qualifications Frameworks for all countries within the Asia Pacific region as a common platform for benchmarking higher education qualifications and outcomes.

### Suggested SOWG activities:

- Encourage consultation on the development of a broad, overarching regional qualifications framework which identifies the principal differences in systems as well as the similarities
- Conduct a mapping of the higher education systems and structures of countries within the region to understand similarities and strengths, and ways to build on those strengths
- Promote the development of credit systems in the countries of the region, based on learning outcomes
- Facilitate discussion of National Qualifications Frameworks, case studies and the experience of countries in the region with highly developed frameworks (eg Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia etc)
- Develop mechanisms to assist countries to develop and implement National Qualifications Frameworks to help them to avoid the problems experienced by other countries, and to ensure a level of regional consistency in their structure and implementation
- Encourage the development of national education frameworks incorporating descriptions of qualifications and levels in terms of pathways and learning outcomes

## introduction

---

### Project rationale

The *Brisbane Communiqué* emerged from the 2006 meeting of Asia-Pacific Education Ministers and senior officials in Brisbane. Ministers agreed to collaborate on a number of broad goals to encourage and facilitate regional student and academic mobility and exchange, and to address barriers to these activities including:

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. The development of 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 multilateral Senior Officials' Working Group (SOWG) charged with responsibility to advance the aims of the Brisbane Communiqué met in November 2006 to develop a broad program of work. That work program included a recommendation to undertake a scoping study on higher education qualifications recognition in the broader Asia-Pacific region to identify issues, gaps and solutions already in existence across the region.

### What is recognition?

The Lisbon Recognition Convention defines recognition as a formal acknowledgment by a competent authority of the value of a foreign higher education qualification. Recognition of a foreign qualification enhances its potential to underpin employment or further study in another national jurisdiction. This definition assumes that the foreign qualification in question is recognised in the home country. A competent recognition authority is defined as a body officially charged with making binding decisions on the recognition of foreign qualifications. In practice, many designated 'competent authorities' make recommendations rather than binding decisions, particularly in the context of academic mobility, where decisions are typically made by autonomous institutions.

Therefore, the recognition of an overseas qualification means in principle acceptance by relevant authorities of a recognised qualification awarded in another country, and granting the foreign award holder the same rights as a person possessing a national qualification.

### Obstacles to recognition

In a diverse region, such as the broader Asia Pacific, recognition of higher education qualifications is complicated by:

- differences in the structure of education
- differences in regulation and quality assurance processes
- differences and perceived differences in educational outcomes.

Differences in structure, regulation and outcomes do not preclude 'recognition'. Even with professional qualifications (outside the scope of this paper), it is possible to factor identified differences into the recognition process, and to target and remedy identified deficiencies.

The initial preconditions for educational recognition in the Asia-Pacific region are that the parties concerned are convinced of the value of recognition as a tool for regional mobility, and are committed to promoting agreed strategies.

Once this threshold has been achieved, key barriers to recognition are perceptions and misconceptions and these are issues of information that can be addressed through official channels such as working groups and Conventions which can suggest action lines for increasing international transparency. Two crucial groundwork requirements for effective recognition are:

- that reliable (official) information about education systems and qualifications is readily available, and
- that there are timely and transparent pathways by which foreign qualifications can be recognised for educational and employment purposes.

## **Project objectives**

This report provides a summary of the outcomes of a project commissioned by the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to assist the SOWG to progress the Brisbane Communiqué goal of facilitating the recognition of educational qualifications across the region. The project aimed to:

- provide an overview of the issues, gaps and solutions that are already in existence for the recognition of higher education qualifications in the Asia-Pacific countries
- identify opportunities for collaboration in enhancing recognition processes across the region
- facilitate information exchange and dialogue across the region to increase understanding and awareness of key recognition issues in the region.

The project deals specifically with recognition of higher education qualifications rather than those relating to professional recognition. For the purpose of definition, recognition of educational qualifications within a country relates to those qualifications issued by an officially accredited institution and is recognised by relevant authorities for the purpose of further study and/or general employment.

## **Methodology**

The project was divided into the following two major stages which focused on the collection of information on higher education qualifications recognition within and between countries in the Brisbane Communiqué region:

1. Design, development and distribution of a questionnaire survey to collect data from the Brisbane Communiqué countries
2. Development of a report summarising survey outcomes, and providing an overview of the recognition processes in individual countries together with a summary of the key issues and recommendations on the next steps to facilitate the goals of the Brisbane Communiqué.



The project methodology centred on the design, development and implementation of two surveys to collect information from identified countries within the region. Project consultants worked in close consultation with the DEEWR project management team on the design, development and distribution of the surveys and accompanying correspondence.

## Survey results

Survey 1 aimed simply to identify key people and organisations within the region who could respond to a second, more comprehensive survey about their country's recognition systems. At the outset, obtaining contacts within Brisbane Communiqué countries for distribution of this initial survey proved challenging. Dissemination was based on a database provided by DEEWR, with problems due to issues such as:

- many of the contact details were no longer in use and it was difficult to find information about people and organisations responsible for cross-border recognition - often responsibilities were divided between organisations depending on individual recognition arrangements and qualifications systems
- the websites of various organisations across the countries varied in terms of the quality and amount of information which could be extracted on recognition systems, eg some did not offer an 'English' option
- language differences made it more difficult to communicate the intent of the surveys and what was required of the respondent
- there was a lack of motivation for some contacts to participate in the project as the immediate impact (or benefits) for them was not always well understood.

The table below lists the Brisbane Communiqué countries which received Survey 1.

Table 1 - Listing of countries which received Survey 1

Countries in the Asia-Pacific region contacted through this project		
Afghanistan	Republic of Korea	Philippines
Australia	Kuwait	Qatar
Bahrain	Lebanon	Samoa
Bangladesh	Laos	Saudi Arabia
Bhutan	Malaysia	Singapore
Brunei Darussalam	Maldives	Solomon Islands
Cambodia	Marshall Islands	Sri Lanka
China	Micronesia	Syria
Cook Islands	Mongolia	Thailand
Fiji	Nauru	Timor Leste
Hong Kong	Nepal	Tonga
India	New Caledonia	Turkey
Indonesia	New Zealand	Tuvalu
Iran	Niue	United Arab Emirates
Iraq	Oman	Vanuatu
Japan	Pakistan	Vietnam
Jordan	Palau	Yemen
Kiribati	Papua New Guinea	

As a result, dissemination of Survey 2 was limited to 18 countries whose representatives had indicated a willingness to participate. Survey 2 was designed to collect detailed information on recognition arrangements between countries in the region, and requested information under the following categories:

- systems for recognition of higher education qualifications (for the purpose of further study and/or general employment) and obstacles to those systems
- quality assurance systems exist, apart from the normal approval processes for higher education institutions
- organisation responsible for monitoring and maintaining the quality of educational institutions and qualifications
- availability of a listing of recognised/accredited education institutions
- national qualifications framework and details of the agency responsible for managing it
- demand for recognition of foreign higher education qualifications
- national agency responsible for the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications
- bilateral and/or multilateral relationships with other countries and the nature of those relationships
- processes for recognition where there is no formal arrangement.

Surveys were distributed via mail, email and facsimile. A total of 18 survey responses were received from the countries listed in the table below.

**Table 2 - Respondent countries for Survey 2**

Countries in the Asia-Pacific region that responded to Survey 2		
Australia	Lebanon	Qatar
Brunei Darussalam	Laos	Samoa
Cook Islands	Malaysia	Thailand
India	New Zealand	Tonga
Japan	Oman	Turkey
Republic of Korea	Pakistan	Vanuatu

Again, information collection using the survey approach proved challenging. Despite indicating a willingness to participate, many countries were contacted several times before their response was received. Information received in some cases was minimal and varied in its capacity to contribute to project objectives.

Nevertheless, analysis of responses was conducted and together with available research, allowed the identification of a number of initiatives and developments relating to recognition of higher education qualifications, as well as a number of recommendations for consideration by the SOWG.

Copies of Surveys 1 and 2 are provided at Appendices 1 and 2 to this report. Appendix 3 provides details of the individual country responses.

## identification of key issues in higher education qualifications recognition in the region

---

Factors such as the diversity of the region, issues impeding the ratification and implementation of the UNESCO Recognition Conventions, and lack of transparency and reliable information, pose major challenges for recognition of qualifications between countries. There are also many opportunities for the work of the Brisbane Communiqué in the area of recognition. These include studying the lessons learnt from the Lisbon Recognition Convention and Bologna Process, supporting the review of the Asia-Pacific and Arab States Regional Conventions, and developing existing networks and communication channels to ensure clear and reliable information on qualifications and improved transparency.

This section discusses these challenges and opportunities, as well as other issues relating to qualifications recognition in the region. Discussion is based on recent research and the responses to Survey 2 for this project.

### **Diversity of the Asia-Pacific region**

One of the key challenges to any attempt to reach agreement on measures to facilitate the recognition of qualifications in the Asia-Pacific region is the sheer diversity in the region. This includes the diversity of structures of education throughout the region, differences in lengths and structures of programs, differences in modes of delivery, for example by distance education or on campus study, variations in the practice of professions, and differing assessment methodologies in different countries.

### **Information and communication**

The lack of reliable official information on the recognition of qualifications within the region is a key challenge. This is a mobility issue both for expatriates and for returning foreign-trained nationals. Professionals who want to enter professional practice in another country need accurate and timely information on how to have their foreign qualifications assessed so that they can practice their profession or occupation. Requirements for general employment and academic purposes are usually less regulated, but the need for information is equally acute. Employers face an increasingly international reality in terms of validity and assessment of qualifications and need clear information on the value of foreign credentials from a competent authority.

Collecting, disseminating and sharing information and making it accessible to a wide range of stakeholders constitutes an important part - not only of the implementation of standard setting instruments, but also of capacity-building exercises and sharing of research findings. There is therefore a need for information systems that include detailed information on the procedures and criteria for recognition of qualifications used by various professional bodies and the additional requirements set for holders of particular qualifications.

While there are a number of educational networks that exist within the region, there has not been any systematic coordination or communication between the various organisations and networks. National recognition information systems are not wide-spread throughout the region, leading to less dissemination of information on these issues. Through cooperation with other networks, there is the potential to develop a more coherent information dissemination system with mechanisms for identifying quality information and for streamlining communication avenues.

There are a number of agencies and organisations that deal with recognition issues and which play an important role in determining professional and educational qualifications recognition in the region. These include higher education institutions, professional bodies and quality assurance agencies. However, such national systems and bodies may have limited knowledge and experience in dealing with foreign higher education systems and qualifications. This is increasingly an issue for graduates who have studied in another country and find that their qualifications may not be accepted on return to their home country.

Because of the range of organisations involved in recognition, it is important to clearly identify their roles in recognition, and seek cooperation with them.

### **The European Example: Lessons from the Lisbon Convention and the Bologna Process**

Recognising the benefits of establishing a shared approach to recognition of higher education qualifications, the Council of Europe and UNESCO jointly sponsored the Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997). As of March 2008, 47 countries have ratified the Convention, and another five countries have signed the convention but not ratified it. These numbers include a number of non-member States of the Council of Europe, such as Australia and New Zealand. A fundamental principle of the Convention is the right of applicants to a fair and timely assessment of their qualifications according to transparent, reliable and non-discriminatory procedures.

The Bologna Declaration of 1999 initiated the Bologna Process, a primary objective of which is to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010, promoting academic mobility and access to quality higher education. Key aspects of mobility are the mutual recognition of higher education qualifications, a system of readable and comparable academic degrees organised in a three-cycle structure, and cooperation in quality assurance. Key tools include the Diploma Supplement, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) the EHEA Qualifications Framework and the establishment of standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the EHEA. The Bologna Process is voluntary: so far 47 countries have joined the process, all but a handful of which have ratified the Lisbon Convention.

An important part of the Lisbon Recognition Convention is its emphasis on recognising qualifications at face value unless 'significant difference' can be demonstrated. The Bologna Process embodies a radical approach to reducing education and employment barriers by reforming national higher education systems and regulatory processes (accreditation and quality assurance) so that they are broadly compatible and significant differences are minimised.

The Bologna Process and experience of the European region provides some insights and implications for recognition within the Asia-Pacific region, and any strategies to establish an Asia-Pacific regional qualifications framework.

### **General recognition issues in the Bologna Process**

A Council of Europe report (2003) summarised a number of general recognition issues in the Bologna Process. Aspects of these have been extracted where useful and relevant to discussion of conditions in the Asia-Pacific region. They are presented in Table 3 below. These issues need to be considered in a context of general endorsement of the principles of the Lisbon Convention (even for countries yet to ratify the Convention) and a commitment to the establishment of the EHEA.

Table 3 - General recognition issues in the Bologna Process

Recognition Issue	Summary
<b>Information</b>	In Europe, problems related to the accessibility of existing information about specific education systems and qualifications, and the need for a proactive approach to the provision of information.
<b>Recognition and quality assurance</b>	The 2003 report emphasised the need for closer links between recognition and quality assurance at all levels, including for higher education Institutions (HEIs). At the national level, recognition and quality assurance procedures and practices in each country need to be linked more clearly and effectively. At the European level, the cooperation between the ENIC/NARIC networks and the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) need to be strengthened and extended.
<b>Learning outcomes</b>	Learning is important for recognition as the basis for recognition procedures moves from quantitative criteria (such as the length and type of courses studied) to the outcomes reached and competencies obtained during the studies. There is agreement on the need for a framework in which learning outcomes are described and assessed.
<b>Standard-setting mechanisms</b>	This relates particularly to transnational education as the number of foreign providers operating in individual countries, or supplying education services across the region increases. The Lisbon Convention could be a key mechanism to ensure fair recognition while maintaining the same quality assurance procedures as for domestic providers. There is also the need to develop a common understanding of the issues through less formal mechanisms, and the current (2003) GATS negotiations are assisting this cooperation.
<b>External dimensions</b>	The key issues of the Bologna Process are of direct relevance to the rest of the world. In addition, the context of regional discussions and negotiations (eg GATS), progress achieved towards the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention serves as good practice for other regions in terms of promoting mobility and exchange while maintaining the transparency and quality of higher education.

### Implications for Asia-Pacific region

The Council of Europe report (2003) also argues that discussion of the Bologna Process is yet another step forward in the direction of establishing and promoting regional cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region. It outlines issues which can be adopted by the region from the Bologna experience. The Bologna experience is useful to broaden the discussion and assist analysis and evaluation of strategies to facilitate recognition. The report acknowledges that the experiences of one region may not offer a perfect solution to the problems in another because of the need to take account of the regional context. They do, however, inform policy deliberations around development of a recognition mechanism that addresses the particular issues of the Asia-Pacific region.

The implications of the Bologna Process for the Asia-Pacific region are summarised in Table 4 below.

Table 4 - Implications of Bologna Process for the Asia-Pacific

Recognition Issue	Summary
<b>Core objectives of regional cooperation</b>	<p>A primary objective of the Bologna process is to create a European Higher Education Area, based on academic mobility and access to quality higher education.</p> <p>Key aspects of mobility are the mutual recognition of higher education qualifications, a system of readable and comparable academic degrees organised in a three-cycle structure, and cooperation in quality assurance. The core objectives of the Bologna Process most relevant to recognition issues in the Asia-Pacific region. .</p> <p>There is general agreement that improved recognition of qualifications between countries of the region will enhance mobility for academic and employment purposes and make the region more attractive in educational terms.</p> <p>For most European countries, the introduction of a three-cycle academic degree structure is one of the most radical aspects of the Bologna Process. However, most countries in the Asia-Pacific region already have a three-cycle structure, and the objective is to improve regional recognition of different national higher education qualifications.</p>
<b>Tools of the convergence process</b>	<p>Many of the tools adopted in the Bologna Process to achieve convergence amidst diversity are also relevant to the Asia-Pacific region. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ establishing National Information Centres (as per the Lisbon Convention)</li> <li>▪ providing easily readable and comparable degrees and other awards facilitated by the implementation of the Diploma Supplement (as per the Lisbon Convention)</li> <li>▪ using the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) based on learning outcomes to facilitate credit accrual and transfer of course credits</li> <li>▪ establishing national quality assurance mechanisms and networks at the regional level</li> <li>▪ developing and implementing National Qualifications Frameworks</li> </ul> <p>These tools will not be unfamiliar to the Asia-Pacific region; however a focus will need to make awards 'easily readable and comparable'. The major challenge for the region will be to implement the tools universally throughout the region and apply them in all educational institutions in each of the countries.</p>

Table 4 - Implications of Bologna Process for the Asia-Pacific (continued)

Recognition Issue	Summary
<b>Other general aspects that underpin the success of the Bologna Process</b>	<p><i>Mapping the higher education system and its trends</i></p> <p>European countries put in a concerted effort to map the areas of convergence and trends in higher education in their region before initiating the Bologna Process. The aim is to understand similarities and strengths in the higher education area, and ways to build on those strengths.</p>
	<p><i>Balancing ministerial participation and academic consultations</i></p> <p>Ministerial commitment is required from the outset because the process rests on intergovernmental cooperation. Ministerial level participation provides the power and resources to launch such a multinational cooperation as well as acceptance of a common system of education. The importance of the role of institutions and academia in implementing the process will also need to be acknowledged. National quality assurance systems have a pivotal role in this context.</p>
	<p><i>Ensuring wider participation</i></p> <p>An avoidable mistake made in the Bologna Process relates to the possible impression that a few countries of the region would dominate and ignore the interests of the relatively smaller ones. This would lead to resistance on the part of some countries. The need to make a highly participative beginning in the Asia-Pacific region is emphasised because the region is even more heterogeneous than Europe.</p>
	<p><i>Bridging the gaps</i></p> <p>A factor which will need to be addressed relates to the perception of member countries of the role they may have to play (ie some will be interested in exporting higher education services, while others will be interested in importing education while safeguarding the interest of their citizens). Other higher education systems (eg Cambodia and Laos) are still being stabilised. The divide between countries has to be bridged and every country encouraged to move towards convergence.</p>
	<p><i>Appropriate forum and resources</i></p> <p>In addition to the commitment of leaders of countries, a strong forum is required to formulate initiatives and mobilise resources.</p>

The Council of Europe report (2003) concludes that:

“... many of the problems in harmonising the higher education systems of the participating communities can be resolved through transparent and flexible approaches and consultations on sensitive issues. Convergence through an acceptable qualifications framework, accommodating the divergence within the overall framework and evolving effective external quality assurance mechanisms are some of the key elements worthy of emulation.

Experience also highlights the importance of ministerial level involvement and commitment to the process right from the beginning to bring in the regional cooperation. Contextualising the lessons of experience of Europe and suitably adapting them to the Asia-Pacific region requires careful reflection and in-depth discussions”.

The Asia-Pacific region can benefit from the pioneering work of the Bologna Process, without necessarily undertaking the same path to reform. Recognising the greater diversity in the Asia-Pacific, some elements of the Bologna ‘package’ adapted to the Asia-Pacific region could serve to remove some of the barriers to recognition and mobility which exist in the region. Furthermore, the Bologna Process highlights the importance of consultation and monitoring in developing qualifications recognition in the region, through activities such as stakeholder consultations, ministerial meetings and expert working groups.

## National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF)

### NQF development in the Asia-Pacific region

Following the development of a European Union Qualifications Framework, a number of other regions are looking at ways to develop national frameworks for benchmarking qualifications, including in the Asia-Pacific region. While progress is relatively slow in the region, the level of interest in establishing NQFs is increasing. The format and maturity of existing qualifications frameworks, however, varies considerably in terms of the level of implementation.

One of the main features that distinguishes an NQF from other qualifications systems is the ranking of qualifications on a single hierarchy expressed as a single set of levels, each with its distinct level descriptors. The distinction is important. A national qualifications framework is normally one component of the overall qualifications system. A qualifications 'system' is broader, including all activities that result in the recognition of learning, such as the means of developing and implementing policy on qualifications, along with institutional arrangements, quality assurance processes, assessment and awarding processes, etc (Tuck 2007).

The Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN) recently conducted a project to look at the development and implementation of NQFs specifically across the Asia-Pacific region. The project surveyed countries in the region and examined websites to obtain information on the existence and nature of NQFs.

The report from that project (Corpus et al 2007) noted that across the Asia-Pacific region there are differences in how NQFs have been introduced and developed, which has resulted in different characteristics of NQFs. The report stated that while countries in the Asia-Pacific region defined qualifications frameworks in many different ways, some common elements could be extracted including:

- a single and comprehensive system of qualifications
- this system sets out agreed titles and descriptors
- these titles and descriptors are used to support qualifications
- the framework covers all qualifications gained through study, training and experience.

While the definitions varied, different countries stated similar purposes or uses of the frameworks, including:

- to provide consistent recognition of outcomes
- to help develop flexible pathways between education and training sectors, and between these sectors and the labour market
- to ensure consistency in the use of qualification titles
- to provide reference for quality assurance reviews.

Despite strong cross national similarities within the region, there is no one model for an NQF which any country wanting to introduce a national framework must adopt. The report describes the types of NQFs which can be found within the Asia-Pacific region which have been summarised in Table 5 on the next page.



Table 5 - Types of NQFs in countries in the Asia-Pacific region

Type of NQF	Description
<b>Complete qualifications framework</b>	<p>There are two types of Complete qualifications frameworks found in the Asia-Pacific area: <i>Enabling</i> and <i>Strong</i> frameworks.</p> <p><b>Enabling:</b> give some indication of progression of pathways and stair casing between levels and in principle across sectors. This type of framework means that it has the potential to assist both learner and those involved in career guidance in making choices. These types of frameworks rely on agreement and have a low level of prescription and regulation. Some may see the Australian Qualifications Framework as a framework of this type, but in its actual implementation for the vocational education and training qualifications it is closer to a 'strong' framework.</p> <p><b>Strong:</b> This describes the type of framework that is able to achieve the goals set out by government. It is often characterised by degree of prescription, with strict requirements that are specified for including a qualification on the framework. An example of this type of framework is the New Zealand Qualifications Framework.</p>
<b>Complete but not yet Unified qualifications framework</b>	<p>This describes where there are complete frameworks in one or more areas (eg vocational education and training <b>or</b> higher education), but there is not a total qualifications framework for the education system. An example of this type of framework is the Philippines which has developed a vocational and training framework, which is not yet unified with the academic/higher education qualifications framework.</p>
<b>Partial framework</b>	<p>These describe qualifications frameworks that cover qualifications specific to type, level or sector. An example of this type of framework is India which does not have an NQF, except for a degree framework or diploma and certificate offered by formal university or government recognised institutions.</p>

The APQN summarises the status of NQFs in the region in the table below.

Table 6 - Status of NQFs in the Asia-Pacific region

Complete	Complete but not yet unified	Partial	In development	Not developed or no information
Australia New Zealand Malaysia	Hong Kong Philippines	Fiji India Maldives Singapore Sri Lanka Thailand	Bhutan Brunei China Pakistan Samoa	Bangladesh Cambodia Japan Laos Macau Mongolia South Korea Vietnam

Source: *Qualification Frameworks in the Asia-Pacific Region, APQN Project No. 2, Corpus et al 2007*

A recent International Labour Organization (ILO) report *An Introductory Guide to National Qualifications Frameworks: Conceptual and Practical Issues for Policy Makers* (Tuck 2007) also provides a valuable insight into the international experience of the development and implementation of qualifications frameworks. It provides the following definition for an NQF:

"A Qualifications Framework is an instrument for the development, classification and recognition of skills, knowledge and competencies along a continuum of agreed levels. It is a way of structuring existing and new qualifications, which are defined by learning outcomes, ie clear statements of what the learner must know or be able to do whether learned in a classroom, on-the-job, or less formally. The Qualifications Framework indicates the comparability of different qualifications and how one can progress from one level to another, within and across occupations or industrial sectors (and even across vocational and academic fields if the NQF is designed to include both vocational and academic qualifications in a single framework)."

The ILO categorises countries which are considered first, second and third generation in the development and implementation of an NQF based on the following definitions:

**First generation:** *implementation started between the late 1980s and mid 1990s*

**Second generation:** *implementation and development started in the late 1990s or early 2000s*

**Third generation:** *currently under consideration*

The ILO report summarises the status of implementation of NQFs internationally in Table 7 below. Countries within the Asia-Pacific region have been highlighted in bolded text.

Table 7 - Implementation of NQFs (worldwide)

1 <sup>st</sup> Generation	2 <sup>nd</sup> Generation	3 <sup>rd</sup> Generation	
Australia New Zealand Scotland South Africa UK (excluding Scotland)	Ireland Malaysia Maldives Mauritius Mexico Namibia The Philippines Singapore Trinidad and Tobago Wales	Albania Angola Barbados Bosnia and Herzegovina Botswana Brazil Chile China Colombia Democratic Republic of Congo Jamaica	Lesotho Macedonia Malawi Mozambique Romania Serbia Slovenia Uzbekistan Tanzania Turkey Uganda Zambia Zimbabwe

Source: *An Introductory Guide to National Qualifications Frameworks: Conceptual and Practical Issues for Policy Makers*, Tuck 2007, ILO

### Issues relating to National Qualifications Frameworks in the Asia-Pacific region

Tuck states that while the development of NQFs is of growing international interest, they have not been adopted by a number of countries in the Asia-Pacific region or in fact, in continental Europe, and North America. Many countries are still in the process of developing, or considering the development, of NQFs. Exceptions relate to the qualifications systems in Australia and New Zealand which have reached a high level of maturity. This is confirmed by the APQN (Corpus et al 2007) which noted increasing interest in the region in the development of NQFs, but a slow rate of growth.

A key issue arising from responses to Survey 2 which is highlighted under the area of NQFs, relates to the varying definitions and interpretations about qualifications frameworks. Countries within the region seem to define qualifications frameworks in many different ways. Thirteen of the 18 countries which responded to Survey 2 identified themselves as having an NQF, including:

Australia	New Zealand	Samoa
Japan	Oman	Thailand
Laos	Pakistan	Turkey
Lebanon	Qatar	Vanuatu.
Malaysia		

These results are somewhat misleading based on other recent information about the existence, format and status of NQFs in the region. It would appear to indicate that the definition of an NQF on the part of some of these countries varies, or perhaps differences in the interpretation of what constitutes an NQF versus a broader 'qualifications system'.

An example relates to Oman which responded that the country has an NQF. Supporting comments noted "it includes the higher education qualifications". The qualifications framework for that country is currently under review, and appears to fall more within the category of a qualifications *system*, rather than an NQF.

Significant progress in the development of NQFs can be noted as follows:

- Malaysia now has the MQF which has eight levels of qualifications in three national higher education sectors and is supported by lifelong education pathways. The sectors are (a) Skills; (b) Vocational and Technical; and (c) Higher Education. Levels 1 to 3 are Skills Certificates awarded by the Skills Sectors. Higher Education and Vocational and Technical Certificates are at Level 3. Meanwhile, Diploma and Advanced Diploma are at Levels 4 and 5. Bachelors Degree is at Level 6, Masters Degree at Level 7 and Doctoral Degree at Level 8.
- Hong Kong, India and Sri Lanka have developed NQFs, and are at the point of final adoption and/or early stages of implementation.
- Thailand, Philippines and Indonesia have made strong progress in the development of their frameworks. The framework for Thailand only covers higher education qualifications, though can be linked to basic and vocational education sectors. The introduction of an NQF for the Philippines is a major step forward for in providing a comprehensive list of all quality assured qualifications and enhancing that country's capacity to benchmark qualifications internationally.
- Turkey is in the process of finalising an NQF for higher education. A National Committee of Turkish Higher Education Qualifications Framework was established in May 2006 to prepare draft level descriptors and implement a consultation process. It is expected to be finalised early in 2008.

## **Systems, structures and developments that support recognition**

In general, recognition systems are broad and include the processes, arrangements or mechanisms by which a country recognises qualifications which have been achieved. There are a number of existing systems, structures and developments in the broader Asia-Pacific region that support recognition, including the legal frameworks represented by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Regional Recognition Conventions, relevant educational and professional recognition networks. The Bologna Process which is transforming higher education in the European region also serves as an example of commitment to regional professional, academic and labour market mobility.

In general, recognition systems are broad and include the processes, arrangements or mechanisms by which a country recognises qualifications which have been achieved. One of the major obstacles for people wanting to work or learn in another country, is that their qualifications and competencies may not be accepted (or recognised). This is further complicated by the large number of qualifications world-wide, and the diverse and constantly changing nature of national qualification systems and education and training structures, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region.

There are a number of ways that a country can facilitate recognition of qualifications between countries for the purpose of further study and employment. An NQF is seen as a key mechanism for facilitating the transfer and recognition of qualifications held by individuals, by linking qualifications systems at the national and sectoral levels and enabling them to relate to

each other. The NQF therefore acts as a translation device to facilitate student mobility for work and study. It provides a way of relating foreign qualifications to the nearest comparable qualification in the context of the local education system.

Other mechanisms which can be part of a broader recognition system include:

- **Credit transfer system** – this is a systematic way of describing an educational program by attaching credits to its components. The definition of credits may be based on different parameters, such as student workload, learning outcomes and contact hours.
- **Diploma Supplement** - this is a UNESCO tool associated with the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Attached to a higher education diploma, it provides a standardised description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies that were successfully completed by the individual. It provides transparency and facilitates academic and professional recognition of qualifications. The Diploma Supplement is now starting to be implemented widely across Europe.
- **Bilateral agreement** - this is a formal agreement between two countries. A bilateral agreement is a major mode of internationalisation in higher education. Agreements related to higher education may be general, or they may be limited to certain subjects and/or certain programs. They facilitate student exchange and recognition of qualifications between countries.
- **Multilateral agreement** - this is a formal agreement between a number of countries which is binding on all signing participants. Generally, agreements or arrangements relating to education qualifications are in terms of recommending rather than mandating recognition, which typically remains the ultimate responsibility of the educational institutions concerned.
- **Accreditation process** - this is usually based on a set of accreditation criteria, standards and/or regulations against the qualification and institution to achieve accreditation status.
- **Assessment process** – in the educational recognition context, this is usually based on a set of criteria for the evaluation of a foreign qualification by a competent authority. foreign

## Recognition conventions

The establishment of procedures and agencies for recognising foreign qualifications has been stimulated and facilitated by the work of UNESCO. The UNESCO Regional Conventions on Recognition are the most significant instruments for the international higher education community and governments to cope with the issues of recognition resulting from international mobility of students and skilled labour.

There are currently Regional Conventions on the recognition of qualifications in six regions - Africa (1981), the Arab States (1978), Asia and the Pacific (1983), Latin America and the Caribbean (1974), and Europe (which has two UNESCO Conventions, the Lisbon Recognition Convention of 1997 and its 1979 predecessor, as well as a European Convention on the General Equivalence of Periods of University Study). There is also one Interregional Convention, the Mediterranean Convention (1976).

A number of these Conventions have been (or are being) reviewed in order to take into account new developments, such as the globalisation of education and increases in student and labour mobility. A review of the Asia-Pacific Recognition Convention has been implemented with the aim to submit a draft revised Convention by 2007.

The Lisbon Convention has had the most impact of the seven Conventions, and is particularly relevant to the work of the Brisbane Communiqué both because it underpins the Bologna Process and provides greater guidance on recognition processes and concrete suggestions on

recognition tools than the older Conventions whose Articles tend to be at a fairly general level. Although the broader Asia-Pacific region is more diverse and larger than Europe, the Lisbon Convention can serve as a guide of best practice from which the region can draw inspiration for the review and effective implementation of its own convention.

The Asia-Pacific Regional Convention serves as a legal instrument for negotiation on recognition of qualifications with concerned State parties, and as an official channel for the exchange of information on qualifications and to promote student and labour mobility.

### **Challenges for regional recognition conventions**

The UNESCO Regional Recognition Conventions are being ratified by an increasing number of countries, but a significant number have neither signed nor ratified the relevant Conventions. So far 20 countries in the Asia-Pacific region have signed or ratified the Convention. Ratification indicates commitment and commitment by the majority of countries in a region is a critical ingredient in the successful implementation of recognition objectives.

Implementation is an additional challenge. Although the UNESCO Regional Conventions are the legal documents underpinning recognition issues, not many countries have implemented them. The Convention will only be useful if countries are committed to implementing its resolutions. There are a number of barriers to more active participation in the ratification and implementation of the Regional Conventions. For example:

- the information dissemination strategy on recognition issues is weak in many countries, and there is often a lack of awareness among the various groups about recognition-related developments, and the importance of recognition
- legislative barriers may exist within a country, inhibiting Convention ratification - although this may not prevent the country from becoming a signatory to the Convention, and adopting its Articles
- in many countries, recognition arrangements that are in place are reactive - developed by individual agencies to deal with foreign academic qualifications, returning students, foreign trained professionals, rather than part of a coherent framework
- recognition issues require the cooperation and coordination of a variety of national authorities, including governments, educational institutions, accrediting bodies, professional organisations and other agencies.

Country reports to the eighth session of the 2005 Convention (UNESCO 2007) noted progress in the region relating to facilitation of recognition of higher education qualifications between countries. A summary is provided in Table 8 below.

Table 8 - Progress relating to recognition of qualifications between Asia-Pacific countries

**Australia**

The Australian Government has undertaken initiatives to further strengthen the quality assurance for education services provided overseas by Australian institutions. The first initiative provides increased funding to the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA), to reimburse the direct costs of offshore audits and allow increased sampling of offshore operations of institutions. The quality of Australia's provision of offshore higher education will be detailed in an annual aggregate report, prepared by AUQA.

The Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000 which protects and enhances Australia's reputation for quality education and training services for overseas students who come to Australia on a student visa, was amended in 2007 to enhance protection of international students, improve the clarity of the regulatory framework, and provide greater autonomy for providers on education matters.

Information and advice on overseas education systems and qualifications (as well as on a range of recognition issues) is provided by AEI-NOOSR. AEI-NOOSR resides in the Federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and is the Australian National Academic Recognition and Information Centre (NARIC). AEI-NOOSR is the national expert and coordinating body on the recognition of overseas professional and educational qualifications. AEI-NOOSR publishes the Country Education Profiles which describe overseas education systems and provides guidelines for assessing the comparability of their qualifications to Australian qualifications.

At the April 2007 29th APEC Human Resources Development Working Group meeting, DEEWR secured endorsement for two new Australian projects: *Mapping of qualifications frameworks across APEC economies*, and *Measures Affecting Cross-Border Exchange and Investment in Higher Education in the APEC Region* to further Australia's agenda to promote mobility and trade liberalisation. The qualifications frameworks mapping project will provide a complete account of the formal and informal qualifications frameworks, associated descriptors and quality assurance frameworks, and recognition agencies in the APEC region by September 2008.

Australia has been an active participant in the collaborative UNESCO/OECD project to develop Guidelines on Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education. As part of the UNESCO/OECD work on the Guidelines, experts identified the need for an International Information tool for higher education. UNESCO has agreed to develop an international web-based Portal on Recognized Higher Education Institutions.

Australia is also actively involved in the first steps of a Pilot Portal Project that will support the eventual development of the final UNESCO Portal on Recognized Higher Education Institutions. The purpose of the Portal is to improve access to up-to-date, accurate, and comprehensive information on recognised higher education institutions/providers at the international level.

Australia maintains a number of bilateral education, science and training relationships within the Asia-Pacific region with a number of these agreements specifically including cooperation on issues relevant to qualifications recognition.

Australia has ratified the Asia-Pacific Regional Recognition Convention, and Lisbon Recognition Convention. The latter obligates Australia to maintain a National Information Centre (NIC), and promote the use of the UNESCO/Council of Europe Diploma Supplement (or any other comparable document). In response, the Australian Government funded a pilot project to identify the costs and implications of issuing the Diploma Supplement for a small sample of Australian higher education institutions. A further trial of the Diploma Supplement in 2005 considered, in detail, system requirements and costings. A consultancy study was also undertaken in 2005 to identify good practice in developing and implementing the Diploma Supplement in Australia, which raised the importance of increasing the awareness of the purpose of the Diploma Supplement in Australian higher education institutions. The Australian Government has committed \$400,000 for a consortium of universities to develop a single agreed template for an Australian Diploma Supplement - the project was to be completed by January 2008.

In 2006 Australia hosted the inaugural Asia-Pacific Education Ministers meeting which resulted in the Brisbane Communiqué.

**Table 8 - Progress relating to recognition of qualifications between Asia-Pacific countries  
(continued)**

### China

China has an all-round international exchange and cooperation in education that truly embodies the independent foreign policy of peace adopted by the country. China's educational exchange and cooperation with other countries is guaranteed by law. International exchange and cooperation in education involves the government, educational institutions and private organisations in multilateral and bilateral forms. The Chinese Government has been actively taking part in the work of UNESCO and has undertaken a number of cooperative programs with UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA and the World Bank. The Government has signed documents on educational exchange and cooperation with over 170 countries and regions.

Chinese educational institutions ranging from primary schools to universities have established cooperative relations with their counterparts in many foreign countries. Chinese universities, in particular, have started multilateral cooperation with foreign universities and enterprises. At present private educational exchange organisations in China have been actively carrying out bilateral and multilateral exchange activities. China Education Association for International Exchange has so far established friendly and mutually-beneficial exchange and cooperative relations with over 170 organisations or groups in 53 countries and regions around the world.

As a signatory to the Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and Pacific Region, China actively develops bilateral cooperation with other countries in its endeavour to fulfil the responsibilities and obligations stipulated by the Convention. In 2006 China signed cooperative agreements and memoranda on mutual recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees with Ireland and Kazakhstan as well as Prince Edward Island, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and New Brunswick of Canada. By the end of 2006 China had signed agreements on mutual recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees with 27 countries and regions. China is now holding relevant talks with Sweden, Denmark, South Korea, Spain, Mexico, Thailand, Singapore and India, and has done a great deal of groundwork for the signing of agreements on mutual recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees. The Chinese Government also encourages and supports domestic universities to carry out exchanges and cooperation with foreign universities.

With more and more Chinese students studying and working in foreign countries over recent years, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China approved in 2004 the establishment of the China Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development Center (CADGEDC) with a special department in charge of the accreditation of Chinese diplomas and degrees. To facilitate application and enquiry processes and to improve efficiency so as to ensure the quality of accreditation, CADGEDC has jointly developed an online accreditation application and management system with an Internet company.

**Table 8 - Progress relating to recognition of qualifications between Asia-Pacific countries  
(continued)**

### India

The Association of Indian Universities (AIU) is responsible for the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications. Indian universities are actively expanding the international dimension of their teaching, research and service functions. Cross border higher education promotes growth of foreign students in India as shown by a steady increase of foreign students. The number of Indian students going out to study is also high. A committee has been constituted on the Promotion of Indian Higher Education Abroad (PIHEAD) under the chairmanship of Secretary, Department of Secondary and Higher Education. The committee monitors all activities aimed at promoting Indian education abroad. This drive has encouraged many Indian institutions to open their branch campuses abroad.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) is India's premier regulatory body for higher education. Ensuring recognition of qualifications within the country is well in place, as the usage of the term "University" is regulated by UGC and the degree awarding power is vested only with university level institutions. Further, the consistency of the nomenclature of the awards is ensured through a registry, which is periodically updated and published by UGC, for the benefit of the institutions and other stakeholders. These features have enabled all the full member universities of AIU to formally agree to recognise the awards of each other on a reciprocal basis. Universities from Mauritius, Nepal and Bhutan have become Associate Members of AIU fulfilling the criteria laid down by AIU and they enjoy the recognition benefits.

India has ratified the UNESCO Regional Convention for recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees in higher education in Asia and the Pacific. Although the Regional Convention has promoted a congenial atmosphere to remove the procedural bottlenecks to make cross border mobility possible, this does not guarantee automatic recognition of qualifications, and the national institutions continue to follow their own screening mechanisms and criteria. In the process of screening, the reservations expressed by the institutions are on three major issues:

1. Inconsistency in the levels and structure of the different national systems of higher education
2. Lack of appropriate mechanisms that assure the quality of educational provisions in some countries
3. Absence of a reliable mechanism or agencies that can be referred to on mutual recognition issues.

In India, Educational Exchange Programmes (EEPs) are taken up with various countries with a view to giving a more focused attention to bilateral collaborations. Recently, EEPs/Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) have been signed with a host of countries eg, Afghanistan, Croatia, Ecuador, Saudi Arabia, Rwanda, China and South Africa. Proposals for EEPs with about 30 countries including USA, Malaysia, Yemen, Libya, Portugal, Vietnam and Kazakhstan are at various stages of negotiation. In addition, MOUs are under consideration with several countries including Armenia, Ukraine, Russia and China.

The UGC on behalf of the Government of India has been implementing the Bilateral Exchange Programmes in the field of higher education between India and other countries. In 2005-06, such programs have been in operation with 23 countries, and Educational Exchange Programmes with 11 countries. UGC hosted the visit of 42 foreign scholars from various countries and arranged programs at different institutions in India. 55 Indian scholars were deputed abroad under these programs.

### Korea

The Study Korea Project was launched in December 2004 as a comprehensive plan to attract foreign students to Korean colleges and universities. The project attempts to invite 50,000 foreign students to Korea by 2010. It also aims to set up an overseas network for attracting foreign students and to activate it. The project hopes to increase the number of Korean Education Centers in regions such as China, Vietnam or Philippines where students have great interest in studying in Korea.

A special law was enacted in 2005 to facilitate educational investment of foreign universities on Korea. Since then, one European university contracted the establishment of a branch school in Korea and four universities are under deliberation. As of 2006, three universities in Korea offer Joint Degrees with foreign universities in the UK and Australia. As of 2005, 11 universities in Korea offer Dual Degrees with foreign universities and 212 students participated in Dual Degree programs. As of 2003, three universities in Korea have branch schools in China and Mongolia.

Even though the Korean government is very interested in the mutual recognition of qualifications, actual agreements for recognition of qualifications have not been accomplished yet. However, the government has discussed the recognition of qualifications with a few countries such as China and Australia. As one of the efforts for cross-border movement of higher education, Korea has built legal foundations. Universities in Korea can operate curriculum with foreign universities since 1997 and dual-degrees and joint-degrees can be offered to students.



**Table 8 - Progress relating to recognition of qualifications between Asia-Pacific countries  
(continued)**

#### **Lao PDR**

Laos has not fully implemented the Diploma Supplement, and there is no current mechanism to manage the recognition of higher education degrees. There are also no quality assurance boards and accreditation council in Laos.

The issue of recognition of qualifications has been proposed to be included in revised education law. The criteria, guidelines and other requirements pertaining to training, and joint training programs delivered within and outside the country, should be developed and respected by all public and private training providers. In the framework of education reform, these matters will be discussed and resolved by the task force on education and organisational structure reform.

Laos has ratified the Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific. There is no specific statement, however, concerning the recognition of qualifications and diplomas in the bilateral agreement at the Government or institutional level.

Laos participates in meetings or conferences to learn from the experiences or best practices of others on the recognition of qualifications and on the establishment of a quality assurance board to enhance international and regional cooperation. The Ministry of Education has sent the staff to take part in regional meetings, such as those organised by the APQN, UNESCO, AUN etc.

The Ministry of Education has also signed bilateral cooperation agreements with Vietnam and China on exchange of staff and students. A number of scholarships have been provided, but the qualifications of staff and students are usually automatically accepted by the receiver countries.

#### **Mongolia**

A Diploma Supplement (DS) is already in place. All diplomas are supplemented with annexes that indicate names of courses taken by the holder, related credits and grades, a title and a final examination grade of a dissertation or thesis defended. There is no law that regulates the recognition of qualifications awarded by higher education institutions outside the country. The government of Mongolia sees mutual recognition of qualifications and agreements with other countries as a vital tool to enhance quality of education and at the same time, secure rights.

Mongolia continues to exercise bilateral relationships with its traditional partners in educational exchange; the partners are former Soviet block countries that provide scholarships to both undergraduate and graduate students.

Although Mongolia has a large body of students studying at institutions outside the country, there is not yet any debate at national level on potential implications of cross-border provision of higher education. Higher education institutional accreditation was established in Mongolia in 1998 and is currently maturing. As of February 2007, there were 90 public and private higher education institutions accredited. Currently there is no law that regulates the recognition of qualifications awarded by higher education institutions outside the country. However, the Government of Mongolia has been working actively and making special efforts to establish agreements with other countries concerning mutual recognition of qualifications in higher education. The government is also devoting much time and energy to establishing a policy for the recognition of qualifications awarded by higher education institutions within and outside the country.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences (MECS) has been making special efforts in recent years to establish an agreement for the recognition of foreign higher-education documents. For example, bilateral intergovernmental agreements on recognition of academic degrees and certificates have been signed with the People's Republic of China (1998), Russian Federation (2003), Turkey (2004), Ukraine (2004), and Austria (2006). Preliminary measures have been taken to establish a similar agreement with France and the Netherlands.

The Government of Mongolia sees mutual recognition of and agreements with other governments on educational certification and qualifications as tools to enhance quality of education delivered and, at the same time, secure rights of degree holders to be employed consistent with professional status. As a preparatory stage to join international conventions on the recognition of qualifications and certificates, MECS gives importance to conducting comparative curriculum analysis and benchmarking exercises.

Various meetings are taking place vis-à-vis reaching a common understanding and approaches to a regional framework, especially in the field of creating favourable conditions for mutual recognition of academic degrees and certificates at sub-regional and regional levels. Some of these meetings are organised by the UNESCO PROAP and others with international partners.

**Table 8 - Progress relating to recognition of qualifications between Asia-Pacific countries  
(continued)**

Nepal
<p>The University Grants Commission is active in initiating dialogue with national and international institutions. Some issues relating to mutual recognition of degrees, studies and diplomas in higher education include applying common standards for measurement and evaluation among member states and signatory countries; and the adoption of common curricular standards to contribute significantly to support each other's academic programs.</p> <p>Efforts have been made to enhance the academic quality of higher education in Nepal. Some funds were also provided by the Government through the Asian Development Bank funded Secondary Education Development Project. The assistance was utilised for Office Building of the Higher Secondary Education Board, and providing training for some teachers. Some Higher Secondary teachers working in higher secondary schools were trained under this provision. The Government also signed an agreement with the World Bank and the fund was utilised for the development of civil works for +2 schools, colleges, university campus infrastructure, technical assistance, and curriculum development.</p>
Philippines
<p>Ratified the Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees In Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific in 2003. Also gained acceptance in the APEC Mutual Recognition Project in Engineering Disciplines. It has also developed policies on Transnational Education to address the increase in the number of cross-border providers and its entry into the country.</p> <p>Philippine higher education providers are increasingly participating in bilateral and multilateral programs brought about by enhanced trade cooperation and economic partnership agreements. Ongoing international cooperation programs relevant to mutual recognition of degrees include UMAP and the APEC Human Resource Development Working Group Mutual Recognition Program.</p> <p>The Philippines has been pursuing bilateral agreements with regional as well as neighbouring countries to promote mutual recognition of higher education degrees and diplomas. It has signed agreements of academic cooperation with China, India, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and Croatia.</p>
Sri Lanka
<p>Sri Lanka has recognised the need for quality assurance and took steps to introduce quality assurance mechanisms to the university sector based on four elements of quality assurance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a national framework</li> <li>▪ provision of guidance and support for academic practice in teaching and learning</li> <li>▪ setting standards by developing benchmarks for individual subjects</li> <li>▪ design and implementation of a Sri Lanka Credit and Qualifications Framework.</li> </ul> <p>The University Grants Commission in Sri Lanka has established the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Unit which carries out a number of activities to facilitate quality assurance and mutual recognition of qualifications.</p> <p>No action has been taken in the area of international cooperation, bilateral and multilateral agreement.</p>

## Recognition networks

There are many regional organisations in the broader Asia-Pacific region, most of which focus on cooperation with other institutions within the region rather than systematic recognition issues. Of particular relevance to the work of the Brisbane Communiqué is the Asia-Pacific Academic Recognition Network (APARNET) and to a lesser extent, University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP).

APARNET was established in 2002 to facilitate discussion and exchange of information among National Information Centres of the UNESCO Regional Convention in Asia and the Pacific. APARNET assists in the promotion, collection, dissemination and exchange of information on issues relating to higher education systems, assessing authorities and the recognition of educational qualifications within the region.

Australia undertook the task of establishing and maintaining the APARNET website and electronic discussion forum in 2002. This responsibility was passed to Korea in late 2005. At this stage, there is comparatively little activity in the network. Most countries in the region have identified a contact point for questions about academic recognition, but it is difficult for these officers to participate effectively without the support of a national information centre, with resources to provide and disseminate information about national systems and recognition issues.

UMAP is a voluntary association of government and non-government representatives of the higher education (university) sector in the Asia-Pacific region, which promotes enhanced international understanding through increased mobility of university students and staff. Membership is open to countries, territories and administrative regions, and all accredited public and private universities in member countries, territories and regions can participate in the UMAP exchange program. Of the 30 eligible countries 15 are currently active participants, with a (potential) total of 360 participating institutions. Exchange students undertake one or two semesters of formal study. Because students need credit for the formal study undertaken, UMAP has developed the UMAP University Credit Transfer Scheme or UCTS - based on the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). UCTS has the potential to be developed as an accepted credit transfer system within the region.

### **Current bilateral or multilateral agreements within the region**

An important consideration relating to recognition is the extent to which countries and educational institutions recognise foreign qualifications and competencies. Some countries have bilateral or multilateral agreements with others to facilitate cooperation in the area of higher education. Such agreements are formal and directly influence the ease and the possibility, or otherwise, of recognition of foreign higher education qualifications.

In such agreements, instruments such as a Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) are often developed as a way of formalising the relationship between the education ministries of the participating countries. MOUs usually include a broad statement about an intention to promote cooperation in education for the mutual benefit of all parties to the agreement.

In bilateral and multilateral agreements relating to higher education, areas of cooperation can include:

- recognition of qualifications and credit transfer
- staff and student exchanges
- development of institutional links between education and training systems
- cooperation in research and development
- facilitation of information exchange on systems of respective countries
- exchange of information on education policy, curriculum development, governance, education materials etc
- development of twinning programs.

The countries which responded to Survey 2 for this project listed current bilateral and multilateral relationships relating to higher education within the Asia-Pacific region which are summarised in Table 9 on the next page. This listing is not exhaustive, rather it reflects responses to survey questions about the existence and nature of such relationships. Supporting comments are also shown where provided as in some cases they clarify the nature of the relationships.

Table 9 - Current bilateral and multilateral relationships indicated by respondent countries

<b>Australia</b>		
Bilateral	Multilateral	Comments
People's Republic of China France Germany Malaysia New Zealand	Australia has ratified the Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific ('the Asia-Pacific Recognition Convention') and the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region ('the Lisbon Convention').	In addition to MOUs and Arrangements specifically relating to recognition, joint working groups operate under MOUs on general cooperation in the field of education and training, which provides an opportunity to address recognition issues.
<b>Brunei Darussalam</b>		
Bilateral	Multilateral	Comments
Malaysia New Zealand Canada.	ASEAN countries via ASEAN Free Trade Agreement Asia Pacific Quality Network (APEC/APQN) Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Commonwealth World Trade Organization (WTO) General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS)	No response
<b>Cook Islands</b>		
Bilateral	Multilateral	Comments
New Zealand.	None indicated	No response
<b>India</b>		
Bilateral	Multilateral	Comments
Russia Singapore	None indicated	For technical and medical education there are agreements with countries such as Russia and Singapore. NAAC is a member of APQN and INQAAHE.
<b>Japan</b>		
Bilateral	Multilateral	Comments
None indicated	Universities have independent understandings with foreign universities.	No response
<b>Korea</b>		
Bilateral	Multilateral	Comments
Bilateral relationship with some countries for recognition of Higher Education qualifications	None indicated	In general, foreign higher education qualifications are recognised as long as they are recognised by home country.

Table 9 - Current bilateral and multilateral relationships indicated by respondent countries  
(continued)

<b>Laos</b>		
Bilateral	Multilateral	Comments
None indicated	None indicated	No response
<b>Lebanon</b>		
Bilateral	Multilateral	Comments
France	None indicated	Many relationships with the European Union (France, Italy, United Kingdom, Belgium etc) for joint education programs, quality assurance in higher education, and accreditation of engineering programs.
<b>Malaysia</b>		
Bilateral	Multilateral	Comments
Canada New Zealand Brunei and others through government-to-government arrangements and agreements with foreign quality assurance agencies	Member of International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and APQN. Planning to set up a regional network of quality assurance agencies possibly with the cooperation of the APQN or any other relevant bodies.	Malaysian Qualifications Authority will be renewing its MOU with New Zealand, and also looking at other quality assurance bodies such as the AUQA to formalise some activities on mutual cooperation.
<b>New Zealand</b>		
Bilateral	Multilateral	Comments
Australia Brunei China Malaysia Thailand	Currently in the process of acceding to the Lisbon Convention. Benefits to New Zealand include increased mobility of students and skilled workers between Europe and other Convention parties, improved understanding and recognition of New Zealand's qualifications internationally, and an alignment of New Zealand with its main non-European competitors in the export education market (Australia, United States and Canada).  Involved in the work on the redraft of the UNESCO Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Asia and the Pacific.	Australia through the Trans Tasman Mutual Recognition Arrangement (TTMRA) arrangement allows a person registered to practice an occupation in Australia to practice an equivalent occupation in New Zealand and vice versa.  China arrangements set the scene for further work with China on qualifications recognition.
<b>Oman</b>		
Bilateral	Multilateral	Comments
None indicated	None indicated	No response
<b>Pakistan</b>		
Bilateral	Multilateral	Comments
None indicated	None indicated	No response

Table 9 - Current bilateral and multilateral relationships indicated by respondent countries (continued)

Qatar		
Bilateral	Multilateral	Comments
Based on the educational agreement between the State of Qatar and other countries	In spite of not having multilateral relationships with other countries, the equivalency committee will look into the recognition of higher education qualifications from other countries.	Exchanging students between the State of Qatar and different universities. Changing the education system in some countries such as with the Bologna Process.
Samoa		
Bilateral	Multilateral	Comments
No - Samoa aims to develop relationships so that they can develop mutual recognition and equivalence on the Samoa qualifications framework	No - Samoa aims to develop relations with other countries (eg Australia and New Zealand and others in the APQN/INQAAHE/SPBEA) for recognition of qualifications and training opportunities.	No response
Thailand		
Bilateral	Multilateral	Comments
Australia New Zealand	None indicated	Guidelines for recognition of degrees in both countries, for academic cooperation, exchange of students, faculties, programs and research cooperation.
Tonga		
Bilateral	Multilateral	Comments
New Zealand	None indicated	Bilateral relationships are beneficial for both countries, eg the New Zealand Qualifications Authority accredits courses.
Turkey		
Bilateral	Multilateral	Comments
None indicated	Party to three Council of Europe and UNESCO Regional Recognition Conventions.	No response
Vanuatu		
Bilateral	Multilateral	Comments
University of the South Pacific (Fiji)	None indicated	No response

### Issues relating to recognition in the Asia-Pacific region

With the exception of Japan and the Cook Islands, all countries that responded to Survey 2 for this project indicated that there is a level of demand for recognition of foreign higher education qualifications in their country. This is mainly due to the accelerating pace of globalisation and internationalisation of higher education. The demand is driven by need, and assisted by bi-lateral agreements between governments which embrace qualifications recognition.

Many Asia-Pacific economies are growing and expanding their international profile, for example India, Turkey, South Korea and China. This rapid economic change has resulted in, and will continue to accelerate the need for higher education which can develop a global workforce to respond to changing trends. To be effective, useful and responsive, the workforce must be able to access education and qualifications which are recognised internationally.

Despite the demand, a key issue within the region remains that while there is growing interest and desire to increase the mobility of students and their qualifications, concrete practices to translate that desire into actions is moving at a relatively slow pace.

The review of progress on the *Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific* (UNESCO 2005) found that the impact of cross-border education has seen many countries in the Asia-Pacific facing challenges from international trade in higher education. Discussions have become polarised according to countries' interest and culture. Proponents of transnational and cross border provision argue that transnational education increases the variety and amount of education services and has the potential to build capacity in the host country. Others fear that it will undermine the public education system and destroy intangible values with which higher education has been contributing to the establishment and development of the local society.

As the internationalisation of higher education develops, strategies for bi-lateral or multi-lateral cooperation relating to quality assurance, accreditation and recognition of qualifications is becoming an important issue. The UNESCO report states that the Convention should be revised to more adequately cover qualifications recognition and quality assurance related to new providers, new delivery means and new qualifications in cross-border education. In Europe, a Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education was adopted in 2001 (revised 2007) as a subsidiary text to the Lisbon Convention, to provide guidance on the provision of quality transnational education and facilitate the recognition of qualifications gained through transnational arrangements.

Another recent report looked at how members of the Global University Network for Innovation - Asia and the Pacific (GUNI-AP) approached quality assurance and mutual recognition of qualifications (Anthony 2005). The report found that there is awareness that in this time of uncertainty and competition, Higher Education Institutions (HEI) need to develop strategies for the mutual recognition of qualifications in order to thrive. While HEIs have developed action plans and strategic frameworks for future development, issues related to mutual recognition of qualifications do not find a place there.

The report stated that international accreditation was seen as a way of ensuring the acceptability of students and their qualifications across borders, however future strategies for promoting mutual recognition of qualifications was a weak area for GUNI-AP members. Institutions were yet to find appropriate ways of ensuring wider recognition of the qualifications they offer and were not aware of the potential of the Regional Convention for recognition of degrees, diplomas and awards in the Asia-Pacific.

## **Quality assurance**

### **Lessons from the Bologna Process**

A key lesson which can be adopted from the Bologna experience for the Asia-Pacific region relates to the promotion of national quality assurance systems to support regional cooperation. The report *"Recognition Issues in the Bologna Process"* (Council of Europe 2003) identifies the use of an effective and credible external quality assurance mechanism as an important instrument in facilitating recognition across borders. The external quality assurance system should safeguard the minimal acceptable quality and standards without neglecting the interest of the local context.

The European model is based on using national equivalence/recognition/acceptance units, and well-established infrastructure and network for considering mutual recognition (eg National Academic Recognition Information Centres, and the European Network of National Information Centres on Academic Recognition and Mobility).

For the Asia-Pacific region, mutual recognition of quality assurance agencies (with appropriate regulatory mechanisms) is the best option for recognition of qualifications. It adds that the best way to achieve this is by bringing the national quality assurance agencies together as these can be relied on for dependable information upon which to base decisions about recognition.

### **Role of quality assurance in facilitating mutual recognition**

Recognition of higher education qualifications across the Asia-Pacific region raises the question of quality assurance. The question of quality assurance/standards and their relationship to mutual recognition are also being discussed as part of the Bologna process. Particularly in the higher education sector, the lack of comprehensive frameworks for quality assurance, accreditation and the recognition of qualifications is a major barrier to recognition and student mobility.

Over the last decade, significant progress has been made within the Asia-Pacific region towards promoting cooperation in assuring quality and mutual recognition in education and training. Quality assurance in most countries within the region, however, is of relatively recent origin with practices differing throughout agencies and institutions. Changes in technology, methods of education and training delivery and mobility across borders (eg distance and e-learning) means the portability of qualifications is an issue of increasing concern in the region.

There are different kinds of structural barriers relating to quality and recognition. Lack of standardised measures at the national level is a barrier. For example, some countries have a multiplicity of accrediting agencies, including regional accrediting bodies, as well as specialised accrediting bodies. Some countries have no quality assurance accrediting bodies. In some countries it is a voluntary process whereby lack of accreditation does not necessarily mean lack of quality. Where transparency and equivalence of systems are the desired outcomes then these variations becomes a barrier.

The variety of education systems and lack of transparent information about them worldwide, leaves room for low quality providers, misinformation about quality assurance and inappropriate accreditation agencies and mechanisms to operate. While national quality assurance and accreditation systems partly resolve quality issues relating to recognition, this is usually only within the scope of the home country. While still limited in scale, fraud and the provision of false qualifications is increasingly becoming an issue in the region. It can affect the overall perception of the quality of higher education where there are doubts about accreditation and its rigour.

### **Issues relating to quality assurance in the Asia-Pacific region**

The recognition of international qualifications relies on agreed standards and accreditation to ensure confidence in the international education sector, as well as transparency across borders to increase their international validity and portability.

In general terms, while most countries within the region have established education and training systems and infrastructures, quality assurance mechanisms are at different levels of maturity and capacity. From the countries surveyed in this project, the majority (81%) indicated that they have a quality assurance system apart from the normal approval process for higher education institutions. There appears to be considerable variation, however, in the way quality assurance of higher education qualifications is defined, with some systems relying only on internal quality assurance processes.



Although many countries have established accreditation and quality assurance systems, many of these are focused on the national education system and not geared towards monitoring of cross-border education and recognition. “The quality assurance frameworks of the Asia-Pacific region, with respect to traditional operations of the traditional providers, are reasonably well developed. But the issue of quality assuring cross-border education warrants serious attention in most countries” (Anthony 2005).

Again, a key issue highlighted by the surveyed countries in the region relates to communication and the level of understanding regarding national quality assurance systems. A majority of respondent countries indicated that there is a *national quality assurance agency* as part of their quality assurance system for higher education qualifications. Supporting comments indicate that these systems vary significantly from classification processes used by institutions, to coordination by autonomous government agencies responsible for quality assurance of qualifications at the national level.

Based on survey responses, the following countries indicated they have established independent government agencies/systems for the purposes of quality assurance of higher education qualifications:

- Australia
- Brunei Darussalam
- Cook Islands
- India
- Malaysia
- New Zealand
- Oman
- Pakistan
- Qatar
- Samoa
- Thailand, and
- Turkey.

The following countries do not appear to have a formal quality assurance system for the recognition of higher education qualifications:

- Laos
- Korea
- Lebanon, and
- Vanuatu

Tonga has recently established the Tonga National Qualifications Accreditation Board (TNQAB) which was expected to be fully operational in January 2008.

## conclusion & recommendations

---

There is a growing interest in, and demand for, recognition of higher education qualifications in the Asia-Pacific region. Countries in the region understand that regional cooperation is vital to facilitate the international mobility of students and workers. This is evidenced by survey responses throughout this project, and the participation of some countries in initiatives which aim to facilitate regional cooperation and mutual recognition (eg the UNESCO Regional Recognition Conventions). Despite this growing awareness and interest in facilitating recognition, there is relatively slow progress in the region.

There are many lessons which can be learnt from the European experience (Bologna Process) which is working towards a European Higher Education Area which embraces quality assurance as well as qualifications recognition by 2010. However, the Asia-Pacific region is more diverse than the European region with greater divergence of countries in terms of culture, population size, per capita income, language, traditions and educational structures. Also, integration of economic activities is still emerging in the region which has been partly responsible for a comparatively slower move towards recognition of higher education qualifications between countries.

The Bologna process has been launched off the back of a long process of European political and economic integration. The absence of these overarching institutional and political drivers in the broader Asia-Pacific region presents an additional challenge. Still, careful reflection and in-depth discussion of the implications of the Bologna Process could provide the basis for high-level collaboration on strategies to assist the Asia-Pacific region move towards regional cooperation and mutual recognition.

The initial emphasis should focus on increasing the transparency of education systems, qualifications, and recognition processes within the Asia-Pacific region, rather than seeking to emulate the ambitious process of reform of national education systems and regulatory processes currently underway in Europe.

This section summarises opportunities for SOWG collaboration across the Asia-Pacific region to facilitate recognition of higher education qualifications between countries. Based on the information collected through the surveyed countries, research of issues and progress made with recognition between countries in the region, some areas that the Brisbane Communiqué initiative can build on or work towards have been identified. Three major recommendations for SOWG collaboration include:

1. Promote regional awareness and cooperation
2. Establish National Information Centres
3. Support the development of national qualifications frameworks.

Each of these areas for collaboration is explained below together with their objectives and some suggested activities for the SOWG. Note that the activities listed under each recommendation are suggestions and therefore not exhaustive.

### Recommendation 1: Promote regional awareness and cooperation

**Objective:** To identify and promote the benefits, and gain the commitment of all countries within the Asia Pacific region to regional cooperation on the recognition of higher education qualifications.

#### Suggested SOWG activities:

- Encourage discussion and agreement among Asia Pacific countries on the principles, values and codes of practices that would further the objectives of transparency of higher education systems, qualifications, and recognition processes.
- Monitor developments regarding the review of the Asia-Pacific and Arab States Regional Recognition Conventions, and support the review process by conducting seminars and hosting meetings to ensure that the new conventions address the challenges of the globalised education environment.
- Following the review process, encourage ratification, and take concrete steps towards adopting Convention resolutions in Asia Pacific countries.
- Facilitate regional networks and linkages to specifically share and collect information on existing educational structures, recognition and quality assurance processes of individual countries. These networks and linkages could also be used to promote good practice in recognition of higher education qualifications, particularly recognition of qualifications between countries.
- Organise regional recognition seminars to:
  - promote awareness of the issues and benefits surrounding recognition of higher education qualifications between countries
  - promote the purpose and benefits of NQFs as a mechanism for benchmarking higher education qualifications and quality of educational outcomes across borders - this should include clarifying the distinction between an NQF and a broader qualification system
  - promote discussion of the Bologna Process and its implications for the Asia-Pacific region

## Recommendation 2: Establish National Information Centres

**Objective:** To increase the transparency of higher education systems, qualifications, and recognition processes of countries within the Asia Pacific region by facilitating the development and maintenance of, and access to, authoritative and accurate information on qualifications and recognition processes. The implementation of these centres has the potential to greatly increase the transparency of the region's education systems and qualification structures and remove one of the most important barriers to the recognition of qualifications in the broader Asia Pacific region.

### Suggested SOWG activities:

- Establish an expert working group to undertake relevant research, identify key issues, and develop a regional strategy for the recognition of qualifications across the Asia Pacific region. The group would study the legal and policy framework embedded in the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the Bologna Process and analyse suitable aspects for application in the Asia Pacific region.
- Establish national information centres, using the ENIC-NARIC network as a model, although noting that agencies within the European network may have different functions, depending on the country concerned. All countries in the Asia-Pacific region have one or more official agencies with responsibility for higher education who can provide information about their own system. Many if not most countries in the region have some processes in place for evaluating foreign qualifications for educational and/or public sector employment. The aim would be to consolidate the work of these various agencies so that there is a focal point for obtaining and disseminating information about recognition, and to develop capacity on this basis.
- Reinvigorate APARNET, making it into an efficient information exchange mechanism, with a permanent home, as the international online arm of the National Information Centres.
- Use the national information centres to promote use of a Diploma Supplement or a similar document such as an enhanced transcript document to be issued with the diploma. Since it is likely that significant differences between qualification structures in the broader Asia-Pacific will remain, a Diploma Supplement would facilitate recognition by providing comprehensive information on the level and function of the qualification, its place in any national framework, and information on the national system of education.

**Recommendation 3: Support the development of national qualifications frameworks**

**Objective:** To support the development and implementation of National Qualifications Frameworks for all countries within the Asia Pacific region as a common platform for benchmarking higher education qualifications and outcomes.

**Suggested SOWG activities:**

- Encourage consultation on the development of a broad, overarching regional qualifications framework which identifies the principal differences in systems as well as the similarities
- Conduct a mapping of the higher education systems and structures of countries within the region to understand similarities and strengths, and ways to build on those strengths
- Promote the development of credit systems in the countries of the region, based on learning outcomes
- Facilitate discussion of National Qualifications Frameworks, case studies and the experience of countries in the region with highly developed frameworks (eg Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia etc)
- Develop mechanisms to assist countries to develop and implement National Qualifications Frameworks to help them to avoid the problems experienced by other countries, and to ensure a level of regional consistency in their structure and implementation
- Encourage the development of national education frameworks incorporating descriptions of qualifications and levels in terms of pathways and learning outcomes

## glossary

---

AGEDC	Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development Centre (China)
AIU	Association of Indian Universities
APARNET	Asia Pacific Academic Recognition Network
APEC	Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation
APQN	Asia Pacific Quality Network
AQFAB	Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AUN	ASEAN University Network
AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
CADGEDC	China Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development Centre
CBE	Cross Border Education
BDNAC	Brunei Darussalam National Accreditation Council
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (Australia)
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EEP	Educational Exchange Programme
EHEI	Ecclesiastical Higher Education Institutions
EU	European Union
ENQA	European Network of Quality Assurance
GATS	General Agreement on Trade and Services
GUNI	Global University Network for Innovation
GUNI-AP	Global University Network for Innovation - Asia and the Pacific
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HKCAA	Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
MEXT	Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (Japan)
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MQA	Malaysian Qualifications Authority
MR	Mutual Recognition
NAAC	National Assessment and Accreditation Council
NARIC	National Academic Recognition Information Centres
NIIED	National Institute of International Education Development (Korea)
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OIC	Organization of the Islamic Conference
PIHEAD	Promotion of Indian Higher Education Abroad
QA	Quality Assurance
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
RM	Ringgit Malaysia
SEAMO	South East Asia Ministers of Education Organisation
SOWG	Senior Officials' Working Group of the Brisbane Communiqué
TNQAB	Tonga National Qualifications Accreditation Board
TTMRA	Trans Tasman Mutual Recognition Arrangement
UCTS	University Credit Transfer Scheme
UGC	University Grants Commission
UI	National University of Indonesia
UKM	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
UMAP	University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNESCO PROAP	UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund (formerly United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund)
UPC	Technical University of Catalonia
VNTC	Vanuatu National Training Council
WCHE	World Conference on Higher Education
WTO	World Trade Organization
YOK	Council of Higher Education, Turkey
ZU	Zhejiang University (People's Republic of China)

## references & bibliography

---

AEI NOOSR, *Country Education Profiles: Australia*, (Canberra: 2006)

AEI, 'The Bologna Process and Australia: Next Steps',  
<http://aei.dest.gov.au/AEI/GovernmentActivities/BolognaProcess/default.htm>

AEI-NOOSR website: <http://aei.dest.gov.au/AEI/QualificationsRecognition/>

APARNET website: [www.aparent.org](http://www.aparent.org)

APQN website: [www.apqn.org](http://www.apqn.org)

Asia-Pacific Education Ministers' Meeting, 4 April 2006, 'The Brisbane Communiqué.

Association of Indian Universities: [www.aiuweb.org/](http://www.aiuweb.org/)

Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks (2005) *Qualifications – A Framework for Qualifications of The European Higher Education Area*

Corpus, M. et al (2007) *Qualification Frameworks in the Asia-Pacific Region, APQN Project No. 2*

Council of Europe (2003) *Recognition issues in the Bologna Process*, Sjur Bergan (ed.)

Council of Europe (2005) *Standards for Recognition: the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its subsidiary texts – Higher Education Series No. 3*

Council of Europe (2006) *Higher education governance between democratic culture, academic aspirations and market forces – Higher Education Series No. 5*, Jürgen Kohler and Josef Huber (eds.), Sjur Bergan, Series editor

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2008) *Quality Assurance Arrangements in Higher Education in the Broader Asia-Pacific Region*

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2006) *Recognition of Higher Education and Professional Qualifications - A discussion paper commissioned by the Australian Department of Education, Science and Training for the inaugural meeting of the Brisbane Communiqué Senior Officials' Working Group*

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations website: [www.dest.gov.au](http://www.dest.gov.au)

Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) (2006) *Recognition of Higher Education and Professional Qualifications - A discussion paper commissioned by the Australian*

*Department of Education, Science and Training for the inaugural meeting of the Brisbane Communiqué Senior Officials' Working Group*, October 2006

ENIC/NARIC: [www.enic-naric.net/](http://www.enic-naric.net/)

Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCETYA), *Australian Qualifications Framework – Making the most of achievements*



OECD (2005) *Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education*

OECD: [www.oecd.org/](http://www.oecd.org/)

Stella, A (2007) *Approaches to Quality Assurance and Mutual Recognition of Qualifications (based on selected case studies of GUNI-AP membership)*, National Assessment and Accreditation Council, India

Tuck, R. (2007) *An Introductory Guide to National Qualifications Frameworks: Conceptual and Practical Issues for Policy Makers*, Skills and Employability Department, International Labour Organization (ILO)

UNESCO (2005) *Progress in the Ratification and Implementation of the Regional Convention and the Need for Revision: Report from the Secretariat of the Asia Pacific Regional Convention*

UNESCO (2007) *Ninth Session of the Regional Committee Meeting for the Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific in conjunction with the Regional Seminar on Regional Harmonization: Establishing a Common Higher Education Area, Seoul, Republic of Korea, 22-23 May 2007*

UNESCO (2007) *Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific - Eighth Session of the Regional Convention, In conjunction with the Seminar on the Establishment of Cross-Border Higher Education Assessment Mechanism, Kunming, People's Republic of China May 24-25, 2005*

UNESCO Bangkok website: [www.unescobkk.org](http://www.unescobkk.org)

UNESCO Education website: <http://portal.unesco.org/education/>

United Kingdom HE Europe Unit, 'Guide to The Bologna Process',  
[http://www.europeunit.ac.uk/about\\_us/index.cfm](http://www.europeunit.ac.uk/about_us/index.cfm)

United Kingdom Qualifications and Curriculum website: [www.qca.org.uk](http://www.qca.org.uk)