Bhutan

Overview of Higher Education System
The higher education system in Bhutan is evolving with the changing times. Prior to 2003, all higher education institutions (HEIs) were governed by the relevant Ministries and the degrees were awarded by the institutions themselves. In order to regulate and institute a sound tertiary education system, the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) was established in June 2003 and is based on the federated college model.

The RUB is the only university in Bhutan and includes ten constituent colleges and one affiliated private college. With the establishment of the RUB, all tertiary education institutions, which were previously governed by the relevant ministries and agencies, were placed under the University and restructured both in terms of nomenclature and programme.

The RUB is responsible for the planning, research, funding, external relations, internal quality assurance, program validation, and award of degrees of its constituent and affiliated institutions. The management is fairly decentralised to ensure a certain level of autonomy for its constituent institutions.

In addition to the RUB, the Royal Institute of Management (RIM) (established in 1990) provides courses, training, consultancy, research and advisory services related to management and IT. It is an autonomous institution governed by its Board of Directors. The overall objective of RIM is to impart, promote, and improve professional knowledge and skills in management and public administration to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of manpower, particularly at senior and middle levels. In addition to the above mentioned HEIs, the Royal Institute of Tourism and Hospitality (RITH) has recently been established. It is governed by the Tourism Council of Bhutan.

The existing HEIs cater to about one third of the secondary school graduates. The remaining students who wish to pursue higher studies need to seek admission to HEIs outside of Bhutan. However, to increase access to higher education, the Government is encouraging private participation in the education sector and is facilitating the establishment of private colleges.

Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications
The Bhutan Accreditation Council (BAC) and the Bhutan Qualifications Framework (BQF) were established in 2011. The BAC is responsible for recognising qualifications in higher education and facilitating credit transfer and lateral entry. However, to date, the BAC has not been able to facilitate credit transfer and lateral entry as outlined in the BQF due to a lack of capacity within the Secretariat to the BAC. Prior to 2011, the Royal Civil Service Commission of Bhutan, which is the central personnel agency of the Government, was responsible for handling the recognition of qualification in higher education.

The BAC has endorsed guidelines for recognition of qualifications, however, currently process is underway to align the guidelines with the ‘Toolkit for the Recognition of Foreign Qualifications’, which was endorsed in the...
Regional Workshop on Recognition of Foreign Qualifications that followed the 12th Regional Committee Meeting in Bangkok (2013).

**Issues and Challenges Concerning Foreign Qualifications Recognition**

The major challenge to the recognition of foreign qualifications is establishing a transparent, fair, and coherent system for recognition of qualifications. The BAC and its Secretariat, Quality Assurance and Accreditation Division (QAAD) are relatively new and their existence is not well known in the region. There is a lack of networking and bilateral agreement both at the national and institutional level. In absence of networks and linkages it is difficult to verify documents.

**Progress towards Ratification of the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention**

Following the International Conference of States (2011) the QAAD initiated the process to seek Government approval for ratifying the revised Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education. However, the process could not be completed during the tenure of the former Government. Therefore, once the new Government has been formed, gaining Government approval will be a priority and efforts will be initiated urgently.

**Commitment to Information Sharing Mechanisms**

Discussion on designating a relevant division within the Department of Adult and Higher Education (DAHE) under the MoE as the National Information Centre (NIC) is underway. Given the small size of the higher education system in Bhutan it is felt superfluous to establish a separate NIC. When the BAC completes accreditation of the tertiary education institutions, and introduce a functional system of recognition of qualification, it shall upload information related to tertiary education institutions and the detailed procedure for recognition of qualifications onto the UNESCO Portal to Recognised Higher Education Institutions and APARNET.

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**National Focal Point**

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**Criteria and Procedures for Assessment**

1. The QAAD provides all applicants with a checklist of the documents required for assessment. A non-refundable fee is charged at submission of application. The fee is fixed and determined by the BAC and is subject to revision from time to time.

2. Documents must be attested or notarised by the notary office or other competent authority, such as the South Asian Scholarship Program (SASP) Office for Australia.

3. Upon completion of the verification process the QAAD recommends either to recognise or to decline the qualifications. The decision should be conveyed to the applicant within 14 working days. A certificate bearing an ID number shall be issued to each applicant upon approval.

4. In case the application is declined recognition, a letter indicating the reasons for the decline shall be sent to the applicant. The applicant may opt to appeal to the chairperson of the BAC, which will be forwarded to the Appeals Committee. The applicant should produce all documents, including additional evidences as specified in the letter of decline. The decision on the appeal shall be conveyed to the applicant through the QAAD within 14 working days.

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