SUMMARY REPORT
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RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1

Seek cooperation with existing UNESCO Regional Conventions and associated working groups to take forward the issues identified in the workshops.

The workshop sessions identified an immense range of issues that need to be addressed and progressed. Given the number of issues and their complexity, a coordinated action plan and strategy for implementation, developed through a centrally coordinated working group, is essential to take forward these issues effectively. UNESCO (Bangkok) has agreed to look at the issues and provide support as appropriate.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Continue to promote regional awareness and capacity building related to qualification recognition, development of qualification frameworks and recognition and mobility tools and information management through workshops and meetings facilitated by UNESCO Regional Conventions and Working Groups. Work with the ASEAN Quality Assurance Network and the Asia Pacific Quality Network to promote regional awareness and capacity building related to quality assurance processes.

There continues to be a need for the promotion of regional awareness and capacity building workshops and meetings, in particular relating to the development and implementation of the interconnected areas: qualification frameworks, quality assurance processes, information management and recognition tools.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Engage with the Asia Pacific Academic Recognition Network to publish information related to qualification recognition, development of qualification frameworks and recognition and mobility tools

The information package will enable common understanding of differences and commonalities related to qualification recognition, development of qualification frameworks and recognition tools, quality assurance processes and information management. The publication should include a “map” of the issues, barriers (eg.
language of academic transcripts) and potential way forward. It should include shared protocols; roles and functions of organisations involved in recognition (UNESCO, APEC, SEAMEO, APQN etc); information on regional recognition bodies, contact persons and agencies; information on good practices in mutual recognition and capacity building within individual countries (who has done what); and, information on the European experience and the Bologna Process, drawing on positive and negative lessons of that process.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Develop national qualification frameworks, with consideration to develop an overarching generic regional qualification framework consistent with existing international frameworks including the Transnational Qualification Framework (TQF) developed by Commonwealth of Learning and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) at some point in the future.

The development of national qualification frameworks should include a guide for setting up national information centres, websites, databanks, development of recognition and mobility tools, quality assurance processes, national qualification frameworks and country education profiles.

The development of national qualification frameworks will facilitate mutual recognition of qualifications and enhance mobility of students and academics, facilitate program mobility and enhance employment mobility across the region. These frameworks should be developed with consideration of linking to a generic regional reference qualification framework to be developed at some point in the future. Ideally, national qualification frameworks will take into consideration how they could be easily linked to a regional framework, as and when developed, through consideration of existing regional frameworks (TQF and EQF). A regional reference qualification framework, when developed, will enable Asia-Pacific countries to link their qualification systems to one another and, in turn, link them to other regions of the world.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Actively promote qualification recognition and related issues with education agencies (government, institutional, private) to progress the recognition agenda; continue publication of the UNESCO Regional Handbook on Recognition of Studies and Diplomas in Higher Education; assist developing economies in development of national qualification frameworks.
The role of UNESCO in taking forward the outcomes from the workshop can be enhanced through increased visibility via projects, specialist international seminars (which were the most effective way for developing the Bologna tools process) and programmes. Through an advocacy role UNESCO can engage with educations agencies and governments to promote bilateral agreements and mutual recognition agreements, partnerships and cooperation; facilitate the exchange of information between universities and governments; encourage universities to participate in academic mobility; promote recognition of degrees; build awareness around the issues of non-recognition and under-recognition. UNESCO should continue the publication of the UNESCO Regional Handbook on Recognition of Studies and Diplomas in Higher Education (last publication was in 2003) and, assist small-states and developing economies to develop their national qualification frameworks, recognition tools, quality assurance processes and development of national information centres.
INTRODUCTION

At a meeting of Asia-Pacific Education Ministers hosted by Australia in 2006, ministers and senior officials representing 27 countries met to discuss actions to strengthen relations in the broader Asia-Pacific region and to increase the international mobility of students and academics, concluding in the release of the Brisbane Communiqué 2006.

The Ministers agreed to collaborate on a number of issues, including quality assurance frameworks for the region linked to international standards; recognition of educational and professional qualifications; common competency-based standards for teachers, particularly in science and mathematics; and development of means to recognise common technical skills across the region. Further information on this meeting can be found at [http://www.brisbanecommunique.dest.gov.au](http://www.brisbanecommunique.dest.gov.au).

To facilitate the progress of quality assurance frameworks in the region, a workshop was held in Chiba, Japan in February 2008 to develop a set of quality assurance principles, available at [http://www.brisbanecommunique.deewr.gov.au/docs.htm](http://www.brisbanecommunique.deewr.gov.au/docs.htm), in conjunction with the establishment of the Asia-Pacific Quality Assurance Network.

To further recognise educational and professional qualifications in the region, a regional meeting and workshop was held (6-7 May, 2009) in conjunction with the 10th 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 (8 May 2009), in Manila, Philippines. The workshop was co-organised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in Bangkok, Thailand; the Commission of Higher Education (CHED) of the Philippines and the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR).

MEETING OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications in the Asia-Pacific Region Workshop were to address the issues of regional qualification recognition, development of national qualification frameworks (including the concept of a regional framework) and quality assurance. To achieve this, simultaneous workshop were held to address the recommendations from the scoping study, Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications across the Brisbane Communiqué Region, developed through the 2006 Asia-Pacific Education Minister’s meeting.

Those recommendations were:
- Establish National Information Centres
- Build regional capacity
- Promote regional awareness and cooperation
- Support the development of national qualification frameworks
OVERVIEW

Approximately 200 participants from 25 countries attended the workshop over two days. The workshop was timed to coincide with the 10th Session of the Regional Committee Meeting for Regional Convention of the Recognition of Studies, Diploma and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific to ensure a high level of participation from countries in the region and relevant delegates from those countries who were already engaged with the Convention meeting.

Day One

The workshop was structured over two days. The first day commenced with formal greetings from a number of invited dignitaries including:

- Dr. Emmanuel Angeles, Chairman, CHED
- Dr. Gwang-jo Kim, Director, UNESCO Bangkok
- Dr. Nona Ricafort, Chairperson of the Tenth Regional Committee Meeting

The key note address was presented by Dr Mona D. Valisno, Presidential Adviser for Education, Office of the President of the Philippines.

The first day was a series of seminars followed by an open forum discussion. The seminars provided information and background on the scoping study (the basis for the workshop), the ‘European experience’, the importance of regional harmonisation and an overview of national qualification frameworks, national information centres, and qualification recognition tools. The following is brief summary of the seminars.

1. Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications across the Brisbane Communiqué Region, presented by Ms Margaret Proctor.

   This seminar provided an overview of the scoping study on qualification recognition, focusing on the key issues:
   
   - an overview of issues, gaps, solutions;
   - identification of opportunities for collaboration;
   - facilitation of information exchange;
   - the key findings:
     - diversity in the region reduces capacity to develop a common framework for recognition of qualifications;
     - need for further official information on the recognition of qualifications within the region;
     - employers and professionals face challenges in determining level of qualification reducing prospects for international mobility;
     - need for information systems that include detailed information on the procedures and criteria for recognition of qualifications;
     - little systematic coordination or communication between the various educational organisations and networks in the region;
• potential to develop a more coherent information dissemination system with mechanisms for identifying quality information and for streamlining communication avenues;
• the three recommendations:
  • promote regional awareness;
  • establish National information centres;
  • develop qualification frameworks;
and the next step:
• develop a workshop to promote regional awareness and cooperation; establish National Information Centres; and, support development of national qualifications frameworks.

2. The Bologna Process, presented by Mr Stephen Adam.
This seminar provided an overview of the Bologna Process, the driving forces behind the initiative, the time lines, what it seeks to achieve, recognition tools, the latest developments, the positive and negatives and its global dimensions and potential links to a model for the Asia-Pacific region.

There was general agreement that the Bologna Process had some useful lessons for the Asia-Pacific region and much could be learned from the European experience (both positive and negative lessons), e.g:
• share many common drivers for educational reform (growth, employability, globalisation, etc);
• diverse in terms of finance, providers, processes, quality, corruption, efficiency, structures academic cultures; and
• several of the key Bologna ‘tools’ are becoming a ‘world standard’ (qualification frameworks, quality assurance, credit transfer, diploma supplement).

Important differences between the two regions were noted including cultural, lack of EU-driver, levels of academic infrastructure (especially quality assurance processes), demographics, commitment, local problems, funding, language and the academic year.

The implementation of a ‘Bologna type’ process in the Asia-Pacific needs to consider:
• difficulty of implementation, i.e., time, real commitment and resources (financial, people, infrastructure). Educational reforms need to adjust to local and regional requirements;
• development of an intergovernmental and voluntary process that is about mutual cooperation between countries facing similar problems;

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1 The European Union is proactive in developing higher education links in the Asia region and held a Round Table from 1-3 July, 2009 in Belgium: Regional Higher Education Cooperation in the Next Decade: The Bologna Process and Europe-Asia dialogue. See EU-Asia Higher Education Platform (EAHEP) website: http://www.eahep.org/web.
• no single country or institution should dominate the process (involve all stakeholders);
• allow the process to evolve naturally - adjust to regional needs - clarify what these are (stocktaking);
• focus on key common problems (via international seminars) and develop appropriate ways to help solve them (measure progress) - build on existing tools;
• create a common regional identity for the ‘space’ – i.e., what does this common space stand for and what is it seeking to achieve (deadlines);
• focus on transparency – to ensure systems, institutions and processes are clear and informed judgments can be made about them (build mutual trust); and
• development of a realistic time frame for reforms - (it is not possible to force dramatic cultural change on academic institutions - the top-down/bottom-up balance needs to be right).

3. Regional Awareness and Cooperation: Moving Toward the Harmonisation of a Common Space in Higher Education in Southeast Asia, presented by Dr Supachai Yavaprabhas.

This seminar emphasised the diversity in size and political, religious and economic systems throughout the region and provided an overview of current initiatives including a summary of the recent Conference series held from June to November 2008. The key findings from Conference series on Raising Awareness were:
• development of an ideal form of the higher education area; a system or an area that becomes a reference or one that can be fitted into, with strong recognition of cultural diversities and national identities;
• priority areas for development of guidelines or frameworks (quality assurance, credit transfer, life long learning, mobility system, education and research link);
• role of key players (government, higher education institutes, employment sector);
• role of international organisations, e.g. ASEAN, SEAMEO (drivers, funding, facilitation, coordination, information dissemination, etc);
• key benefits - increased student mobility, access and choice; enhanced resources; greater institutional cooperation; greater alignment and understanding across the region; and, increased economic gains.

Key elements for harmonisation were identified including drawing on the EU experience, and the development of a regional ‘Asian’
• qualification framework,
• register of quality assurance agencies,
• diploma supplement or student passport ,
• standards and guidelines and
• credit transfer system.

4. Development of National Qualification Frameworks, presented by Professor Gerald Burke.

This seminar provided a summary of:
• what a national qualification framework (NQF) is (an instrument for classifying qualifications according to a set of criteria for levels of learning outcomes); and,
• the benefits, through confidence and transparency in qualifications (establishing national standards and levels, promoting quality, facilitating comparisons, promoting access to education and mobility of students and workers).

• A brief outline of the components to be considered in the development of a qualification framework was provided (levels, descriptors, recognition tools, etc.) along with an overview of the current status of national qualification framework development and differences between countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

The seminar highlighted a number of issues related to the development of qualification frameworks:
• differences in learning outcomes across sectors;
• trust in qualifications affected if underpinning knowledge not well assessed;
• external assessment in measurement of outcomes can promote trust;
• can some of the aims/benefits can be achieved without an NQF;

and highlighted some important points:
• currently, no evaluation of achievements of NQFs;
• do not necessarily have to have the same approach in each sector;
• quality assurance of outcomes is essential and can be enhanced by monitoring of assessment and/or measures of institutional quality, and by good public information (where users have choice of provider);
• credit systems and recognition tools are important but generally only in the development phase; and
• there is a case for a regional framework like the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) to be sued as a reference in developing national frameworks.


This seminar provided an overview of the Malaysian Qualification Framework (MQF):
• the history - 2005 Cabinet decision to establish the MQA; launched in November 2007;
• the governance - Minister of Education approval to conduct programmes through the Malaysian Qualifications Agency Council and Accreditation Committees;
• quality assurance - Code of Practice for Programme Accreditations; Code of Practice for Institutional Audits; MQF compliance by internal quality assurance and external evaluation systems;
• justification - national competitiveness; human capital development; knowledge creation; cross-border higher education and trade and service; need to engage globally; single regulatory structured for all qualifications;
• objectives - single structure for all higher education qualifications; secure standards and reinforce policies on quality assurance; mechanisms for progression (life long learning); supports collaboration between sectors; parity of different qualifications; credit systems-transferability and external linkage; clarity of information; facilitate qualifications comparison;
• benchmarking with other national frameworks - numerous consultations (UK, Australia, New Zealand and European Framework); learning outcomes and credit
6. Diploma Supplements and Quality Assurance Systems, presented by Dr Carita Blomqvist.

The Seminar on Diploma Supplements provided information on:
• what it is (annex to the Diplomas; independent data to improve transparent and fair recognition of qualifications; description of nature, level, context, content and status of studies completed; free from value-judgments, equivalence statements or suggestions);
• why it is needed (non-recognition of qualifications is global; aid in mobility, access and lifelong learning; original credential may provide insufficient information);
• what it offers to students (more readable and easily compared abroad; precise description of studies and competencies acquired; objective and fair judgment of achievements; easier access to further study and work opportunities);
• what it offers to institutions (promotes informed judgements; protects national/institution autonomy; raised visibility of institution internationally; facilitates academic and professional recognition);
• the structure of a Diploma Supplement;
• the history of development through the Bologna Process; and
• recommendations when developing Diploma Supplements (follow a common structure; centrally produced; accompany original qualification; issued automatically; linked to quality assurance systems; translated accurately; contain information of local/national higher education system).

The second part of the seminar (Quality Assurance) noted the importance of developing and linking qualification frameworks to quality assurance systems. An overview of quality assurance in the Bologna Process, i.e., Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area was provided with detailed information on:
• internal quality assurance in higher education institutions;
• external quality assurance in higher education institutions;
• external quality agencies;
• links to the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its documents (e.g. Code of Good Practice, ENIC/NARIC Charter of Activities and Services, Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications, etc); and
• global dimensions and links to UNESCO/OECD guidelines.

7. Credit Transfer Systems, presented by Mr Stephen Adam.

An overview of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) was provided. The ECTS is one of the cornerstones of the Bologna Process developed to
provide a system of credits as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility. Information was provided on:

- what the ECTS is designed to do (teaching and learning more transparent; facilitates recognition of formal, non-formal and informal studies; facilitates student mobility across Europe; develops a learning path toward a degree; informs curriculum design and quality assurance);
- key features (a learner-centred credit system; learning outcomes; levels and level descriptors; credits and workload; transfer tools; course catalogue/information package; learning agreement; transcript of record; grade translation);
- steps in the process (institutional commitment; credit allocation to course units; learning agreement; award of credits to students; transcript of record; academic recognition); and
- issues and lessons learned (the need to promote ‘fair recognition’; importance of the full recognition of credits and grades).

The main challenges developing the ECTS were:

- language;
- academic culture;
- financial and bureaucratic issues;
- unequal mobility flows and patterns;
- academic standards and institutional reputation;
- disjunctions in study patterns and the teaching year;
- credit allocation practices (workload and learning outcomes); and
- reluctance to transfer full credits and the associated grades.

The ECTS pilot scheme was essential to resolve these problems and aid the gradual development of mutual trust and confidence.

8. **National Information Centres: European and Australian Models**, presented by Dr Carita Blomqvist and Ms Margaret Proctor.

This joint seminar provided an overview of:

- the formal basis for national information centres (Lisbon Recognition Convention, 1997);
- main tasks of the centers (officially recognised as the body which speaks on behalf of the Country regarding recognition of qualifications; provides information and advice on the comparability of overseas higher education qualifications; promotes quality, equity, transparency, accessibility and consistency for recognition decisions; identifies and promotes good practice; participate in the recognition global community; facilitates access to authoritative and accurate information on the national higher education system and qualifications; facilitates access to information on foreign higher education systems and qualifications; gives advice or information on recognition matters and assessment of qualifications);
- cooperation between centres;
- remaining concerns (challenge of diversity; recognition of qualifications earned through lifelong learning; mutual trust in quality and in education systems; transnational qualifications, joint degrees; fair recognition);
information on:

- the Australian National Information Centre (Australian Government recognised coordination authority on recognition of overseas qualifications; types of support provided; products and services; structure of the Australian Qualification Framework); and

- the Finnish National Information Centre: provides information on academic recognition and good practice; information on foreign and Finnish (higher) education systems and qualifications; administrative decisions on the competences conferred by foreign qualifications in Finland; eligibility for a public post or right to practice a profession; advisory statements on foreign vocational education and Finnish qualifications; and, representation of Finland in international information networks.

and matters to consider:

- regulation in the recognising country;
- legal/official status of qualification;
- professional regulation;
- agreed definition of the qualification (qualification framework);
- Memorandums of Understanding;
- multilateral or bilateral agreements;
- legal/official status of institutions;
- comparing different education systems requires flexibility;
- learning outcomes are more significant than duration of programme;
- focus on the content of the programme (is the applicant prepared for entry to the programme); and
- what can the candidate do ‘in country’ with the qualification?

Day one concluded with an open forum discussion and questions and answers from the day’s proceedings.

Day Two

The second day was structured around three workshops to address the recommendations of the scoping study. The participants were divided into three groups and rotated through each workshop, enabling all participants the opportunity to contribute to each of the three workshops. Approximately 40 people attended each workshop. Lively discussion took place and evaluations suggested this format worked will to inform and engage delegates. A brief summary of the three workshops follows.

1. **Promoting Regional Awareness and Cooperation.** Facilitator: Dr Supachai Yavaprabhas. Rapporteur: Dr Ethel Valenzuela
This workshop identified issues and barriers associated with regional awareness and cooperation in the development of qualification recognition across the Asia-Pacific region. The issues identified were:

- different higher education systems;
- varied number of course units, hours and years (of study);
- quality standards vary;
• language requirements and barriers; and
• prerequisite requirements of receiving countries.

Information barriers were identified as lack of:
• data on education structures and systems;
• information on quality assurance bodies and systems;
• access to UNESCO information and updates, activities and plans; and
• information on requirements for mutual recognition by Asia-Pacific countries.

Recommendations included\(^2\):
• promote regional awareness on the recognition issues [through establishment of National Information Centres];
• mapping of issues, barriers and challenges on recognition [this would need to be done by each country];
• establish a human network and/or a working group (of experts and authorities) on recognition issues [this is in place via the UNESCO Regional Convention];
• UNESCO to facilitate a common understanding of differences and commonalities [this is provided through the existing UNESCO portal and the ENIC/NARIC network];
• UNESCO to promote transparency to have better understanding of the qualifications framework [this is provided through the existing UNESCO portal and the ENIC/NARIC network];
• develop tools and protocols [this is in place via the UNESCO Regional Convention];
• UNESCO to lead the development of a DATABANK of information to promote recognition [a databank is provided through the existing UNESCO portal and the ENIC/NARIC network];
• UNESCO to offer a mechanism for recognising qualifications (bilateral cooperation) [this is the role of individual countries and is facilitated by the UNESCO Regional Convention];
• define the roles and functions of organisations involved in recognition: UNESCO, APEC, SEAMEO, APQN etc;
• continue the publication of the UNESCO Regional Handbook on Recognition of Studies and Diplomas in Higher Education (last publication was in 2003);
• prepare information materials on recognition bodies and contact persons as well as agencies [this is provided through the existing UNESCO portal and the ENIC/NARIC network];
• UNESCO to continue to have regional meetings that will promote understanding of the diversity of educational systems and practices in the region [UNESCO convention meetings have the capacity of building in seminars/workshops with invited speakers/delegates];
• UNESCO to assist small-states and developing economies to develop their NQF and NICs;
• define the real reason for recognition of studies, degrees and diplomas in higher education [facilitate mutual recognition of qualifications and enhance mobility of

\(^2\) Text in italics addresses recommendations following workshop
students and academics, facilitate program mobility and enhance employment mobility across the region;}

- build awareness on academic credentials to avoid non-recognition and understand the under-recognition phenomenon [development of national recognition frameworks and associated ‘tools’ in conjunction with a quality assurance process and linked to a regional framework would achieve these outcomes];
- support Regional Conventions - they are useful codes of practice;
- promote the framework for recognising learning outcomes rather than number of years of study;
- support the move towards fair recognition and never target on “EQUIVALENCY” which may not be possible;
- capacity building and sharing of good practices on mutual recognition [UNESCO convention meetings have the capacity of building in seminars/workshops with invited speakers/delegates];
- Asia-Pacific region needs to map the problems – language problems (academic transcript are in Chinese) – structure [differences in language barriers are inherent in any regional network; it would not be practical to have one language for all];
- develop website/databank on recognition tools – NIC, NQF, country education profiles [this is provided through the existing UNESCO portal and the ENIC/NARIC network];
- information dissemination – develop government to university info exchange;
- visibility of UNESCO projects/programmes;
- advocate communication, partnership and cooperation between universities and the government [not the role of UNESCO; a role for individual countries];
- encourage universities in the Asia-Pacific region to participate in academic mobility (APL) for better understanding of cultures, systems etc;
- UNESCO to work with educational agencies (e.g. CHED) for better advocacy of recognition agenda [not the role of UNESCO; a role for individual countries];
- UNESCO to take an active role in disseminating info for portal [this is provided through the existing UNESCO portal]; and
- pro-active role of government in promoting recognition of the degrees (bilateral).

2. National Information Centres. Facilitator: Ms Margaret Proctor. Rapporteur: Dr Jean Tayag

The main questions and possible solutions arising from this workshop were:
- what NICs are available and how to access them (UNESCO portal and the global ENIC/NARIC);
- how to establish a NIC (appropriate government body; resources, expertise, technical support; support from existing NICs; with assistance from a UNESCO Technical Working Group);
- what data/info should be provided by NICs (comprehensive information on country; qualification frameworks/programme/ institutions; data similar to UNESCO portal, ENIC/NARIC; beware of bogus institutions and programmes);
- need to establish common terminologies/learning outcomes (continuing dialogues with existing organisations/NICs);
how to link NICs to other NICs/regional ICs/international ICs; how to facilitate HEIs to HEI link; how to update information regional/international ICs (Establish a regional counterpart of the ENIC/NARIC\(^3\) networks in the Asia-Pacific region. Once the *UNESCO Regional Convention of the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Asia and the Pacific* has been signed countries have a vehicle by which to meet).


This workshop addressed the issues associated with developing national qualification frameworks. The outcomes form this workshop were:

- raising awareness of commonalities and differences in developing recognition frameworks and of barriers to the development of an Asia-Pacific qualification recognition framework;
- providing opportunities for collaboration and identifying best practices in qualification recognition within the Asia-Pacific region;
- sharing information on qualification recognition in each country and identifying challenges within different nationals contexts;
- encouraging the contribution of ideas, perspectives, and recommendations on approaches to introducing qualification recognition frameworks for higher education in the region;
- strengthening regional coordination in the education sector; and
- exploring options for establishing an Asia-Pacific regional qualification recognition framework.

Issues and concerns in the development of national qualification frameworks were identified as:

- need for harmonisation and understanding of diversity;
- identification of accrediting bodies;
- possible components of an NQF;
- how to relate NQF to both higher education and technical and vocational education;
- compatibility of criteria across countries;
- defining scope of NQF;
- articulation systems/mechanisms of NQF;
- difficulty in defining learning outcomes (as to acceptability, comparability);
- specification of competency standards;
- levels of accreditation;
- limitations of bilateral agreements;
- need for measurable indicators and appropriate mechanisms;
- possibility of having uniform learning outcomes;
- purpose of mutual recognition: Is it for academic exchange, employment, independent practice?
- cross-border mobility.

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3 ENIC: European Network of Information Centres in the European Region; NARIC: National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union
Criteria for developing a national qualification framework were identified as:

- harmonised/comparable systems; comparable curricula;
- reinforced by quality assurance mechanisms;
- generally acceptable learning outcomes/competencies, while recognizing that differences across sectors may be maintained;
- measurable performance indicators;
- use of “level descriptors”;
- comprehensive in coverage; and
- highly generic/flexible.

The following proposals were put forward as suggested ‘next steps’:

- for UNESCO to assist countries without National Qualification Framework (NQF) to develop the same;
- benchmark existing NQFs of different countries involved in UNESCO to facilitate entry to Mutual Recognition Agreements;
- creation of Technical Working Group (TWG) to develop a generic/model of a regional qualifications framework that is comparable and acceptable to the countries as a step towards mutual recognition of qualification; and
- draw on and possibly link to existing reference frameworks such as the Transnational Qualification Framework (TQF) developed by the Commonwealth of Learning and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

The second day concluded with an overview of each of the three workshops presented by the rapporteurs.

**OUTCOMES FROM THE WORKSHOPS**

The workshops were well regarded by participants and raised the level of knowledge and awareness of regional issues especially the use of qualifications frameworks and national information centres. Stronger working relationships with UNESCO and SEAMEO on qualifications recognition, quality assurance and qualifications frameworks has been achieved. Tangible outcomes of the workshops included:

- Raising awareness of commonalities and differences in developing recognition frameworks and actual or potential barriers to the development of national qualification frameworks and a regional framework.
- Providing opportunities for collaboration and identifying best practices in qualification recognition within the Asia-Pacific region.
- Sharing information on qualification recognition in each country and identifying challenges within different national contexts.
- Contribution of ideas, perspectives, and recommendations on approaches to introducing qualification recognition frameworks for higher education in the region.
- Strengthening regional coordination in the education sector.
- Exploring options for establishing an Asia-Pacific regional qualification recognition framework.
The three workshops identified a number of important issues, difficulties that may be encountered on taking the issues forward and how to progress the issues (‘next steps’). Participants recognised that ownership and resources (in particular funding) were fundamental to development and implementation of the ‘next steps’. Given the wide range of complex issues, the meeting agreed that a regional Working Group needs to be established to take forward this work. There was general agreement that UNESCO (Bangkok) is best placed to undertake this work. UNESCO (Bangkok) agreed to look at the issues and how to take them forward in the region.

PARTICIPANTS

Approximately 200 participants from 25 Countries participated in the two day workshop. The workshop brought together experts in developing qualification frameworks within the Bologna Process from Europe, from Government Education sectors in Malaysia, Thailand, Finland and Australia and from the higher education sectors of Australia and other countries in the Asia-Pacific region. These experts provide an international perspective toward the development of a regional qualification framework and information on recognition tools (credit transfers, diploma supplements) and national information centres.