13th Session of the Regional Committee on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific

in conjunction with the

Regional Workshop on Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Concept Note

Co-organised by

UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Bangkok, Thailand
Ministry of Higher Education, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
University Grants Commission, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
Australian Government Department of Education

Supported by


4-5 August, 2014

Hotel Galadari, Colombo, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
Background

One of the major functions of UNESCO is to develop normative instruments on issues that are of critical importance to its Member States. These instruments can be in the form of conventions, recommendations or declarations with different legal status, to reflect a common understanding of, and joint commitment to, the principles and international norms that are developed and agreed upon by the Member States. In the area of higher education, UNESCO has initiated six regional conventions on the recognition of higher education qualifications since the 1970s, with a view to promoting the free movement of students and professionals across borders. The UNESCO Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific (the “1983 Convention”) was adopted in 1983 in Bangkok, Thailand, and entered into force on 23 October, 1985. As of July 2014, the 1983 Convention has twenty-one State Parties.

Pursuant to Article 10 of the 1983 Convention, a Regional Committee composed of government representatives from the State Parties was established to promote the application of the Regional Convention. The Committee has met twelve times in various locations since its inception. The purposes of the Regional Committee sessions are to receive and examine periodic reports submitted by State Parties on the progress made and obstacles encountered in the application of the Convention, as well as to review studies carried out by the Secretariat on the current status and pending issues of the Convention. In addition, the Regional Committee sessions provide a platform for information sharing and partnership building among Member States in the region and beyond.

To better reflect the significant changes that have taken place in the region since the 1980s (such as massification and internationalisation of higher education), UNESCO Member States updated and amended the Convention at the International Conference of States, held in Tokyo, Japan, in November 2011. The new revised Convention, entitled the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (the “2011 Revised Convention”) seeks to ensure that studies, diplomas, and degrees in higher education are recognised as widely as possible, considering the great diversity of educational systems in Asia and the Pacific and the richness of its cultural, social, political, religious, and economic backgrounds. As of July 2014, eight Member States of UNESCO and the Holy See have signed the 2011 Revised Convention, subject to ratification, acceptance, approval or accession. The 2011 Revised Convention is now open for signature and ratification, acceptance, approval or accession by all UNESCO Member States and the Holy See, who can become a party to it by expressing their consent to be bound by the 2011 Revised Convention in one of the following ways, as stipulated in its Article X.1.2:
(a) a signature without reservation as to ratification, acceptance, approval or accession;
(b) a signature subject to ratification, acceptance, approval or accession followed by ratification, acceptance, approval or accession; or
(c) the deposit of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession.

To facilitate the implementation of the 1983 Convention, thematic workshops and seminars have been organised in conjunction with the Regional Committee sessions to deliberate on important recognition-related issues and mechanisms, such as assessment of overseas academic qualifications (Perth, Australia, 2003); establishment of cross-border assessment mechanisms (Kunming, China, 2005); regional harmonisation - establishing a common higher education area (Seoul, Republic of Korea, 2007); and recognition of higher education qualifications in the Asia-Pacific Region (Manila, Philippines, 2009).

After the 2011 Revised Convention was adopted in Tokyo, Japan, on 26 November, 2011, a series of seminars and workshops have been organised to raise the awareness of the Member States on the importance of the 2011 Revised Convention with a view to accelerating the ratification of the Convention. At the same time, a Toolkit for the Recognition of Foreign Qualifications: A Reference for Asia-Pacific Practitioners, which aims to provide a common reference guide for the Asia-Pacific region in assessing foreign higher education qualifications, was commissioned by the Regional Committee at its 11th Session in Seoul, Republic of Korea in 2012, and the final version was approved by the Regional Committee at its 12th Session in Bangkok in 2013. It was also decided at the 12th Session that a Working Group be established to develop the Guidelines for National Information Centres: A Reference for Asia-Pacific Practitioners. The draft Guidelines are now ready for comments and the revised version will be submitted to the 13th Session of the Regional Committee for final approval.

Building on the fruitful outcomes of the previous sessions, the 13th Session of the Regional Committee will continue to monitor the application of the 1983 Convention by receiving and analysing the latest reports submitted by the State Parties. Non-State Parties will also be invited to present similar reports as they are still obliged to present the Convention to their relevant domestic authorities for reference. At the same time, each invited Member State will be requested to brief the Regional Committee on the status of their readiness to ratify the 2011 Revised Convention.

Considering that the recognition of higher education qualifications might be more sustainable if it is based on a common academic infrastructure, the follow-up regional workshop to the 13th Regional Committee Session intends to discuss quality assurance arrangements at subject, programme and system levels, especially those that can lead to the development of regional mechanisms, such as a qualifications
framework, subject-specific quality standards, and regional credit transfer and accumulation systems, and so on. UNESCO aims to facilitate a process that starts with information sharing as well as mutual understanding, and concludes with consensus building that can be translated into regional harmonisation tools and mechanisms. It is therefore hoped that the implementation of the regional convention can be supported by more regional quality assurance mechanisms in the years to come.

**Objectives of the Meeting**

The objectives of the meeting are to:

- Receive and examine the latest reports presented by the Member States (State Parties and non-State Parties) concerning the progress and obstacles in the implementation of the 1983 Convention and the status of their readiness to ratify the 2011 Revised Convention;
- Examine and approve the *Guidelines for National Information Centres: A Reference for Asia-Pacific Practitioners*, commissioned by the Regional Committee and developed by the Working Group;
- Collect, discuss and approve new initiatives and recommendations from the State Parties and the Secretariat concerning the application of the 1983 Convention;
- Raise awareness of the Member States in Asia and the Pacific region about the importance of establishing a common academic infrastructure in support of the implementation of the 1983 Convention and 2011 Revised Convention;
- Share best policies and practices with regard to national qualifications frameworks, subject-specific quality standards and credit transfer and accumulation systems among the Member States in this region and beyond.

**Expected Outputs**

The meeting will be important for the Regional Committee to assess the latest developments of the Member States, especially State Parties in the application of the 1983 Convention and to facilitate the ratification of the 2011 Revised Convention among countries in this region and beyond. At the same time, a new consensus needs to be reached concerning the development of harmonisation tools to facilitate regional higher education integration in Asia and the Pacific. More specifically, the expected outputs are:

- A collection of reports submitted by the Member States with regard to the application of the 1983 Convention and supplemented by a regional synthesis report;
- *Guidelines for National Information Centres: A Reference for Asia-Pacific Practitioners* endorsed by the Regional Committee;
• A Working Group established to further develop the Guidelines on a National Qualifications Framework;
• A consensus document developed on the construction of a regional academic infrastructure in support of the application of the Regional Convention.

Organisers

• UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Bangkok, Thailand
• Ministry of Higher Education, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
• University Grants Commission, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
• Australian Government Department of Education

Supporting Partner


Participants

The Meeting will be attended by representatives of the twenty-one State Parties to the 1983 Convention. Representatives of non-State Parties will also be invited to attend the 13th Session as observers. An estimated total of 20 invited speakers, experts, resource persons and UNESCO staff are expected to join the meeting. More information will be provided upon confirmation of participation.

Venue

Hotel Galadari, 64 Lotus Road, Colombo World Trade Centre, Colombo, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

Dates

4-5 August, 2014

Language

English will be the working language
Tentative Programme

13th Session of the Regional Committee (Day 1, 4 August, 2014)

- Opening ceremony
- Election of the Bureau and adoption of the meeting agenda
- Report of the 12th Session of the Regional Committee and its follow-up actions
- Introduction to the Guidelines for NICs
- Approval of the Guidelines for NICs
- Progress reports by the State Parties
- Reports by non-State Parties
- Discussion on follow-up actions
- Welcoming dinner

Regional Workshop on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Day 2, 5 August, 2014)

- Developing a regional academic infrastructure to facilitate the implementation of the Regional Convention, UNESCO Bangkok
- Presentations on National Qualifications Frameworks
- Presentations on Subject-Specific Quality Standards
- Presentations on Credit Transfer arrangements
- Wrap-up and closing of the meeting

For further information, contact:

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