Report on the 12th Regional Committee Session and Follow-Up Actions
The Content

- Introduction
- Summary of country progress reports
- Highlights of follow-up workshop
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I. INTRODUCTION
I.I UNESCO standard setting instruments

- **International Conventions** (Treaties, Agreements, etc.): subject to the ratification, acceptance or accession by states. They define **the rules** with which the States undertake to comply.

- **Recommendations**: international **principles** and **norms** which are not subject to ratification but which member states are invited to apply.

- **Declaration**: another means of defining norms, which are not subject to ratification.
The roadmap to an convention

- **Preliminary study** of the technical and legal aspects of the question to be regulated at international level
- **Submission to the Executive Board** for consideration
- Included in the agenda of the **General Conference** to decide the desirability and the form of the instrument
- **DG** prepares a **preliminary report** with member states invited to present their comments and suggestions
- **DG** prepares a **final report** containing one or more drafts of the convention
- **General conference** or **International Conference of States** to adopt the instrument
I.III The 1983 Regional Convention

Signatories of State Parties to the Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, 16 December 1983. (As of 1 April 2012)¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States</th>
<th>Date of deposit of instrument</th>
<th>Type of instrument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 China</td>
<td>25/09/1984</td>
<td>Approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Australia</td>
<td>23/09/1985</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Sri Lanka</td>
<td>10/01/1986</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Turkey</td>
<td>28/04/1988</td>
<td>Ratification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Democratic People's Republic of Korea</td>
<td>26/04/1989</td>
<td>Approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Republic of Korea</td>
<td>29/08/1989</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Nepal</td>
<td>02/11/1989</td>
<td>Ratification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Maldives</td>
<td>14/05/1990</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Russian Federation</td>
<td>16/11/1990</td>
<td>Ratification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Mongolia</td>
<td>19/10/1991</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Tajikistan</td>
<td>28/08/1993</td>
<td>Notification of succession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Armenia</td>
<td>05/09/1993</td>
<td>Notification of succession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Azerbaijan</td>
<td>24/04/1995</td>
<td>Accession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Holy See</td>
<td>10/07/1995</td>
<td>Accession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>07/11/1995</td>
<td>Notification of succession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Turkmenistan</td>
<td>04/06/1996</td>
<td>Notification of succession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Kazakhstan</td>
<td>14/03/1997</td>
<td>Notification of succession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 India</td>
<td>02/08/2000</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Lao People's Democratic Republic</td>
<td>02/01/2003</td>
<td>Ratification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Philippines</td>
<td>26/11/2003</td>
<td>Ratification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Indonesia</td>
<td>30/01/2008</td>
<td>Ratification</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹This Convention entered into force on 23 October 1985. It subsequently entered into force for each State one month after the date of deposit of that State’s instrument, except in cases of notifications of succession, where the entry into force occurred on the date on which the State assumed responsibility for conducting its international relations.
I.IV The 2011 revised Regional Convention

- **Adopted** at *International Conference of States to Examine and Adopt the Amendments to the 1983 Regional Convention* on 25-26, November 2011 in Tokyo, Japan

- **Signed** by 8 member states: *Armenia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Republic of Korea, Timor Leste, and Turkey.*

- **Also signed** by the Holy See

- **Ratifications** by five member states required for the revised convention to **enter into force.**
I.V Functions of the Regional Convention

• Establishing regional **norms** and **codes of best practices** in the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications (**standard setting**)

• Promoting institutional reforms and capacity building with regard to QA systems in higher education (**capacity building**)

• Collecting best policies and practices for experience sharing and knowledge building (**clearinghouse**)

• Serving as a platform or mechanism for regional cooperation in higher education (**catalyst for international cooperation**)

II. SUMMARY OF COUNTRY PROGRESS REPORTS AT 12TH SESSION
II.I Country reports presented

- **11 State Parties:** Australia, China, Holy See, India, Lao PDR, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka.

- **10 Non-State Parties:** Brunei, Bhutan, Cambodia, Fiji, Japan, New Zealand, Timor Leste, Tonga, Uzbekistan, Viet Nam
Differences of HE systems posed a big challenge to academic recognition.

However, academic recognition had become a focus of attention, as higher education systems were increasingly connected with one another with fast growing cross-border mobility of students and professionals.

Diversity can provide fertile ground for regional consensus building (united in diversity, unity without uniformity, diversity without fragmentation)
II. III Information sharing

- Information sharing through strengthened network of related agencies and authorities across the region and beyond can lead to transparency and mutual understanding in the recognition of HE qualifications.

- Lack of capacity of related national officials.

- Inadequate coordination among related stakeholders.

- Absence of a formal NIC with dedicated staff.
In A-P region, seven Member States, namely Australia, China, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan and Thailand, have signed up the Portal.

Most Member States, which have not joined yet, were ready and willing to upload necessary information on it.

Some countries, such as Cambodia and Tonga, preferred the establishment of internal EMIS, which will be able to be linked to the Portal afterwards.

Some Member States mentioned limitation of Information provided by the UNESCO HE Portal
II.V National information centers

- Australia and New Zealand have maintained well-functioning NICs
- Most Member States reported on-going internal discussions on how to establish NICs.
- Some were to designate or had already identified a department within related ministries and/or QA Agency to function as NICs
- Reports did not describe much on the roles and functions of NICS working
Most Member States had been on the **internal process of ratification**, including consultation meetings with relevant stakeholders.

Some countries, such as **Australia**, were expected to ratify the 2011 Revised Convention by 2014.

**No concrete actions** were reported in some countries with regard to the ratification of the 2011 Revised Convention.
III. HIGHLIGHTS OF FOLLOW-UP WORKSHOP
III.1 National qualifications framework

- The cases of Philippines Qualifications Framework (PQF) and Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) were shared, followed by a presentation on Regional Qualifications Framework in ASEAN.

- These were contributing to the awareness raising and capacity building of Member States which had not yet had or were in the process of developing their own NQF.

- A regional harmonization process might be useful in reducing substantial difference and facilitating recognition of qualifications.
III.II Diploma supplement

- A presentation was made on Diploma Supplements and Diploma Supplement Models
- A common template of graduation statement issued for each qualification, recognition – friendly
- More than an academic transcript
- Enhancing transparency and comparability without undermining local traditions
- Programme Specification – Diploma Supplement (based on NQF and subject-specific quality standards)
III.III NICs and regional NIC network

- The **European experience** was shared, together with a presentation on the Strengthening of **National Information Centres (NICs)** and a regional NIC network in Asia and the Pacific

- UNESCO Higher Education Portal

- APARNET

- UNESCO Bangkok higher education website
Two presentations on the understanding of **substantial difference** and its application in the recognition practice were delivered.

Each party shall recognise the qualifications in higher education in another party, unless **substantial difference** can be shown – the 2011 Revised Regional Convention.

Harmonization of higher education systems, especially quality assurance mechanisms, can greatly reduce substantial difference and make recognition of qualifications much more easier.
IV. POST-12th SESSION ACTIVITIES
IV.I Developing Guidelines on NICs

- A working group was established after the 12th RC session to develop Guidelines on National Information Centres.
- The draft guidelines was developed, reviewed by the WG members and the revised version is now ready for adoption. Mr Tony Davis and Ms. Ethel Valenzuela will elaborate on this later.
- Further comments and suggestions from the delegates are welcome.
Based on the country presentations delivered at the 12th RC Session, 12 reader-friendly, succinct two-page summaries of country presentation have been drafted and uploaded on UNESCO Bangkok HE website.

Country Report Summaries

On this page you can download summaries of the Country Reports presented at the 12th Session of the Regional Committee on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific, held in Bangkok, Thailand on 21-23 May 2013.

The summaries contain up-to-date information on current practices and challenges with regards to the recognition of foreign qualifications in higher education and the country's progress towards ratifying the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education.

The summaries contain information on:

- Current practices and existing bodies responsible for recognition issues;
- The existence or progress towards establishing an official National Information Centre (NIC) on higher education;
- Progress towards ratifying the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention;
- Contact information of the country's National Focal Point for recognition related issues; and
- Higher education bodies and related organisations.

The summaries intend to facilitate information sharing in the region with the overall aim of supporting cross-border student mobility and encouraging a culture of transparency and mutual trust. The full reports can be accessed here.

Country Report Summaries:

- Australia (pdf, 140kb)
- Bhutan (pdf, 140kb)
- Brunei Darussalam (pdf, 400kb)
- China (pdf, 110kb)
- Fiji (pdf, 500kb)
- India (pdf, 110kb)
- Maldives (pdf, 140kb)
- New Zealand (pdf, 160kb)
- Pakistan (pdf, 140kb)
- Philippines (pdf, 160kb)
- R.O. Korea (pdf, 160kb)
- Sri Lanka (pdf, 150kb)
Overview of Higher Education System

The Sri Lankan education system is state funded and offered free of charge at all levels, including at the university level. In addition to government operated education institutions, there is a small number of private institutions operating on a fee-paying basis.

The education sector is governed by several ministries with varying responsibilities. However, three ministries carry the main responsibility: Ministry of Education (MOE), Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), and the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skills Development (MOYA & SD).

Post-secondary education is offered by vocational training centres, technical colleges, and advanced technological institutes under Sri Lanka Institute of Advanced Technological Education and universities. Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) operate under both state and non-state sectors. Under the state sector there are 15 National Universities, two Buddhist Universities, and nine institutes affiliated with national universities, which provide some courses leading to undergraduate education free of charge. There are also seven postgraduate institutes affiliated with national universities, as well as semi-Government and non-State higher education institutes that offer many courses of studies at the level of Diploma, Degree, Masters and PhD on a fee-paying basis.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) is responsible for admission to the undergraduate programmes of national universities. Selection is based on student merits and district quota. Due to stiff competition and limited places, excellent grades are typically required to secure a place at university, in particular in study areas that are in high demand, such as medicine, engineering and management.

Some institutes in Sri Lanka offer both local and foreign qualifications through joint programmes with foreign universities. In 2011, approximately 20,000 students were enrolled in this mode of study. It is estimated that around 10,000 students go abroad annually to pursue higher education. Most of them return after completion of their studies, while a small number find employment outside Sri Lanka.

In 2011, the Sri Lankan Government expanded opportunities for foreign students to study in Sri Lankan national universities, earmarking five per cent of places in a given course of study for international students (up from 0.5 per cent). 4.5 per cent of these places are offered on a fee-paying basis. The goal is to increase the number of foreign students in local universities from 1,435 in 2011 to 10,000 by 2015.

National Qualifications Framework

Sri Lanka is in the process of introducing the Sri Lanka Qualification Framework (SLQF) to all state and non-state HEIs by 2015. The framework is expected to facilitate credit transfers and student exchanges among HEIs domestically and internationally. Sri Lanka is also in the process of establishing the Sri Lanka Qualification Agency under the MOHE by the end of 2014. The Agency would take on the task of implementing the SLQF.

Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications

Students who have gained qualifications abroad are able to request that the UGC accepts their qualification. The UGC only accepts qualifications obtained from HEIs listed in the International Handbook of Universities and the Commonwealth Universities Year Book. If the qualification is accepted the UGC issues a certificate. However, for the practice of medicine in Sri Lanka it is required that the degree holder has obtained higher medical degree from a medical institute or university recognised by the Sri Lanka Medical Council.

Issues and Challenges Concerning Foreign Qualifications Recognition

While Sri Lanka has a system in place through which foreign qualifications can be recognised, there are limitations to this system. The main challenges lie with identifying and gaining an understanding of the concrete education attainments the qualification has instilled. Often, qualification transcripts do not provide clear understanding of the level of achievement. Information about duration of programme, materials covered, the level at which the subject is addressed, and credit hours is inadequate and dubious in many cases. Sri Lanka needs to develop a system through which the quality and the level of achievement indicated on a particular certificate can be understood and measured.

Progress toward ratification of the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention

Sri Lanka will be able to initiate the process of ratifying the Convention when the SLQF is in place, which is expected to be in full operation in 2015.

Commitment to Information Sharing Mechanisms

Sri Lanka plans to develop a separate division under the Sri Lanka Qualifications Agency to perform the functions of a National Information Centre. Sri Lanka is also ready to upload information onto the UNESCO Portal to Recognised Higher Education Institutions.

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Author: P. Ranepura, Additional Secretary (Development) Ministry of Higher Education
IV.III New regional proposals

- Developing Regional Quality Tools to Facilitate the Cross-Border Mobility of Students in Asia and the Pacific
- Regional Guidelines on National Qualifications Framework
- Regional Guidelines on Developing National Subject-Specific Quality Standards
- Regional Guidelines on Study Programme Development
- Regional Guidelines on Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
IV.IV Preparation for the 13th Session

- Development of **Concept Note**
- Identifying host country – Sri Lanka
- Mobilise intellectual and financial resources to support the meeting
- Inviting two delegates from each State Parties and one delegate from each Non-State Parties
- Suggested outline of the country presentations
- Pre-meeting communications with resource persons and speakers
Thank you very much for your attention!