



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



Sustainable
Development
Goals

Bangkok Office
Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau
for Education



International Centre
for Higher Education Innovation
under the auspices of UNESCO
联合国教科文组织高等教育创新中心

Regional Conference on Quality Assurance of Higher Education in Asia-Pacific

15-16 June 2017

Shenzhen, People's Republic of China

CONCEPT NOTE

Background

The year 2015 saw the adoption of the new global education agenda, officially referred to as Education 2030 or Sustainable Development Goal Four (SDG4). The Education 2030-SDG4 laid the foundation for the development of global education for the next 15 years with concrete targets covering Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), school education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and higher education in a lifelong learning perspective. One of the salient facts of the SDG4 is that higher education has garnered more visibility than it did with the previous Millennium Development Goals.

The Education 2030 Framework for Action Target 4.3 clearly states that “by 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university”. In addition, Target 4.b calls for substantial expansion of the number of scholarships available to benefit developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing states and African countries. The inclusion of higher education in the Education 2030-SDG4 agenda reflects the high-level recognition of Member States worldwide on the importance of higher education in promoting and achieving the sustainable development goals. However, long-term trends and emerging concerns continue to challenge quality assurance policies and practices throughout Asia and the Pacific.

Trends and challenges

Indeed, higher education systems have undergone tremendous expansion in the past decades, leading to the so-called massification of higher education in the Asia-Pacific region. For example, building on substantial investments in higher education, China's Gross Enrollment

Ratio (GER) increased by 33 percentage points between 1999 and 2014¹. Along with the quantitative expansion come the quality challenges that almost no country can escape.

Further, the diversification of higher education providers, especially the increasing involvement of the private sector in the provision of higher education has been another factor for the concerns about quality of higher education provision in the Asia-Pacific region. As of 2014, more than half of all tertiary level students worldwide were from Asia-Pacific, and a significant portion were from the private sector. While public institutions are still the dominating force, the increasing presence of private institutions in many countries underlines the importance of effective coordination and regulatory mechanisms, including transparency and accountability across the higher education sector.

Another related factor that has triggered quality concerns has been the use of technology in the delivery of higher education programmes through open and distance learning, blended learning and MOOCs. In a region that has heavily relied on the traditional face-to-face, classroom-based learning, on-line learning, formal and non-formal learning require due attention to quality assurance (QA) so that qualifications and outcomes documents are built on the trust and confidence from learners, employers and other key higher education stakeholders.

Towards quality higher education and lifelong learning for all

One of the important features of Education 2030-SDG4 is that, compared with inputs and processes, learning outcomes now have a more prominent role in determining the quality of educational provision. National qualifications frameworks (NQFs) have likewise emerged as an important tool to help define expected learning outcomes for different levels of post-school qualifications based on level descriptors. Although NQFs are external quality standards, the alignment of university study programmes with the NQF requirements is actually a process of internalizing the external standards at institutional, programme and professional levels. The convergence of trends in many countries is that the boundary between internal and external quality assurance mechanisms has been blurred, as the two practices are increasingly inter-connected.

Quality assurance is the main source of mutual trust and is therefore essential to the mutual recognition of higher education qualifications among countries in the region. As UNESCO is advocating for the ratification and implementation of the 2011 Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (2011 Tokyo Convention), transparency measures such as the establishment of national information centers (NICs) and equivalency arrangements based on bilateral agreements can play important roles. QA-based recognition arrangements can ultimately help to make recognition much easier and pave the way for greater mobility of students across borders in the future. In this regard, effective

¹ UIS-AIMS, UNESCO Bangkok, UIS Data Center, accessed November 2016

quality assurance is important for building mutual trust and underpins confidence in qualifications in Asia-Pacific and worldwide.

It is against this background that UNESCO, as the only UN agency with a mandate in higher education, will organize the **International Conference on Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Paris, France in early 2018**. To prepare, regional conferences will help take stock of innovative QA policies and practices, identify gaps and challenges, and explore common agendas for future collaboration. The Asia-Pacific Regional Conference on Quality Assurance in Higher Education is one of the regional preparatory conferences and will be expected to contribute to the 2018 International Conference on Quality Assurance with rich and diverse inputs from the region. The specific objectives of the regional stocktaking effort are below.

Meeting objectives

The aim of the Asia-Pacific Regional Conference on Quality Assurance is to inform and shape the 2018 international conference on quality assurance in higher education organized by UNESCO. In particular, the aim is to map the current status, needs, innovative practices and challenges that are related to quality assurance in higher education in the Asia-Pacific region. In doing so, the conference will:

- Take stock of innovative policies and practices at system, institution, subject and programme levels in Asia-Pacific, with an aim to produce a consolidated regional report on quality assurance in higher education;
- Build understanding of the links between QA, NQF and recognition, including providing concrete support and capacity building for the ratification and implementation of the 2011 Tokyo Convention;
- Raise awareness about quality assurance of nontraditional modes of learning (e.g. MOOCs, blended learning, etc.)
- Connect multiple quality assurance initiatives in Asia-Pacific to promote synergies and cross-fertilization.

Sub-themes

The following sub-themes for the conference focus on the dynamics of quality assurance in higher education in Asia-Pacific:

- New impetus for strengthening quality assurance in higher education
- External quality assurance mechanisms
- Internal quality assurance mechanisms and a culture of quality within HEIs
- Bridging the links between internal and the external quality assurance processes
- National qualifications frameworks and exploring connections with quality assurance, credential recognition, and students' mobility

- Quality assurance of private higher education institutions
- Quality assurance of qualifications obtained through non-traditional modes (e.g. MOOCs and blended learning)
- International cooperation and regional harmonization efforts in Asia-Pacific

Expected outputs

- A collection of 10 country case study reports on quality assurance in higher education from Asia-Pacific region
- Regional synthesis report to be submitted to the UNESCO 2018 International Conference on Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Paris
- Shenzhen statement on quality and inclusive higher education in Asia and the Pacific

Participants

The meeting will be attended by government officials, QA practitioners and researchers from member states in the Asia-Pacific region, representatives from international and national professional bodies, international organizations and NGOs and other higher education stakeholders.

Organizers and sponsors

The meeting will be jointly organized by the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education in Bangkok, Thailand and the Section of Higher Education, UNESCO in Paris, in collaboration with the Chinese National Commission for UNESCO and the UNESCO International Centre for Higher Education Innovation (UNESCO-ICHEI) in Shenzhen, P. R. China.

Dates

15-16 June 2017

Location

Shenzhen Hall, Wuzhou Guest House
Address: No.6001 Shennan Rd., Shenzhen, P.R. China.
Tel: +86-755-82938000
Website: www.wuzhouguesthouse.com

For further information, contact:

Mr. Libing Wang, Chief of Section for Educational Innovation and Skills Development, UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, 920 Sukhumvit Road, Prakanong, Bangkok 10110, Thailand; tel: +66 2 391 0577 ext. 212; fax: +66 2 391 0866;
Email: l.wang@unesco.org

Ms. Jihye Hwang, Programme Specialist in Higher Education, Section for Educational Innovation and Skills Development, UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education;
Email: j.hwang@unesco.org

Mr. Wesley Teter, Senior Consultant, Section for Educational Innovation and Skills Development, UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education,
Email: wr.teter@unesco.org