



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



Sustainable  
Development  
Goals

**Bangkok Office**  
Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau  
for Education

大學之道，在明明德，在親民，在止於至善。

*'The way of great learning consists in manifesting one's bright virtue, consists in loving the people, consists in stopping in perfect goodness.'*

*Daxue (The Great Learning), approx. 500 B.C.*

## **SHENZHEN STATEMENT**

### **Building Local and Regional Capacity for a Living Quality Culture in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific**

*15-16 June 2017, Shenzhen, People's Republic of China*

Ensuring access to equitable quality higher education is essential to realizing the transformative potential of the Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG4 and the Education 2030 Framework for Action. However, the comparability, recognition and quality assurance of qualifications remains a key concern, particularly in Asia-Pacific where qualifications are often not outcome-driven approaches to student learning. Strengthening investments in the quality assurance of lifelong learning systems to build a culture of quality is vital to enhancing the relevance and comparability of higher education qualifications throughout the region.

Asia-Pacific is the fastest-growing region in terms of the numbers of inbound and outbound international students, which underscores the importance of facilitating student's cross-border mobility and the need to align quality paradigms. Fair and transparent procedures and criteria for the recognition of higher education qualifications are therefore crucial for building the capacity of UNESCO Member States to facilitate mobility in Asia-Pacific and beyond.

The **Regional Conference on Quality Assurance of Higher Education in Asia-Pacific**, held from 15-16 June 2017 in Shenzhen, People's Republic of China, addressed these concerns as well as the quality challenges brought about by the massification of higher education throughout Asia-Pacific, the diversification of higher education providers and the increasing use of technologies in the delivery of different types of higher education programmes.

Representing multiple stakeholders in higher learning, we, the meeting participants agree upon the following:

- With the rapid expansion of higher education systems, quality assurance mechanisms at both internal and external levels need to move from a traditional focus on inputs to an outcomes-based approach to student learning. Where relevant, such processes should be clearly aligned with regional and national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) as the main reference tools to define learning outcomes across key domains.
- Learning outcomes, as defined in NQFs, should be holistic, covering cognitive and non-cognitive domains of learning, including both transversal skills as well as professional/subject-specific knowledge, skills and competencies. At the same time, institution-wide policies should be developed to serve as an overarching framework for academic programme development, and support internal and external quality assurance of higher education institutions.
- Based on the holistic pursuit of learning outcomes, quality assurance is the source of mutual trust among countries for the recognition of higher education qualifications. It is therefore important for countries to build on existing transparency and comparability measures, including through the ratification and implementation of the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (2011 Tokyo Convention). Quality assurance-based recognition contributes significantly to facilitating student mobility, the recognition of learning across diverse delivery modes, and to the wider purpose of knowledge sharing, cultural intelligence and global citizenship.
- To meet the demands of the contemporary learner, higher education institutions should increasingly seek to offer lifelong learning opportunities via new types of courses and programmes (i.e. incorporating MOOCs, blended and flexible learning approaches based on life experience and the world of work), and through cross-border movement of institutions and programmes. Such new modalities for higher education should be compatible with national qualifications frameworks, include credit arrangements, be subject to the same rigorous quality assurance and be clearly articulated in terms of learning outcomes.
- Given this growing diversity, institutional development based on strong and relevant internal quality assurance policies and practices is essential. Such practices can complement external quality standards and guidelines. While external regulations and standards need to be internalized at institutional level to ensure system-wide coherence, institutions need the flexibility to adapt these to their profiles and the communities of stakeholders and learners they serve. External quality assurance agencies in turn need to recognise these efforts and differentiate their quality assurance approaches accordingly.
- Building a living culture focused on quality – one that continuously improves and evolves at institutional and faculty levels – is key to the successful functioning of any quality

assurance mechanism. Whenever possible, research and capacity building efforts from external and internal sources should contribute to the development of self-reflective and self-disciplined academic communities and the enhancement of professionalism.

- Inclusive stakeholder ownership and engagement are crucial in identifying and continuously reviewing learning outcomes based on NQFs at the discipline and programme levels. Quality assurance specialists, students, researchers, teachers, non-academic staff, employers and industry must work together to ensure that learning programmes are coherent and that learning outcomes are constructively aligned with teaching methods and assessment systems. In this way, stakeholder engagement can promote the holistic development of lifelong learning and knowledge societies that contribute to the humanistic, socio-economic, and development aspirations of countries in Asia and the Pacific.

UNESCO, as the lead agency of the Education 2030 agenda, and its partners will support efforts in the Asia-Pacific to develop and implement regional and sub-regional capacity building efforts to build a foundation for future regional harmonization of quality assurance in higher education and lifelong learning in the region.

Statement developed and discussed in  
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**Please share your thoughts and any additional comments or questions with UNESCO Bangkok:**  
[eisd.bgk@unesco.org](mailto:eisd.bgk@unesco.org)