Concept Note
As of 4 April 2017

2nd Regional Capacity Building Workshop on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications in Asia-Pacific

1-3 June 2017
Beijing, China

Background

In 2015, the new ambitious and inspiring global education agenda, referred to as Education 2030 or Sustainable Development Goal Four (SDG4), called for all countries to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”\(^1\) Given its role in promoting lifelong learning, higher education was given a prominent role to ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality education, including university.

This emphasis on quality higher education is important given emerging challenges from the rapid expansion of higher education systems, as well as the substantial increase in cross-border mobility of students in the past two decades, which are key issues in Asia and the Pacific. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), there was a 164% increase in tertiary students from 1999 to 2014 seeking to study in Asia and the Pacific. This trend led to the Asia-Pacific region becoming one of the top destinations for international students.

As a global leader in mobility, international students in Asia-Pacific pursue valuable opportunities to build new skills and competencies and promote global citizenship as well as contribute significantly to local economic development. However, the comparability,

\(^{1}\) Incheon Declaration: Education 2030 - Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all (Incheon, Republic of Korea, May 2015).
recognition and quality assurance of educational qualifications is a growing area of concern, particularly in countries where administrative systems remain underdeveloped.

To support cross-border mobility of students and ensure access to quality education, UNESCO initiated six regional conventions on the recognition of higher education qualifications, including the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention, which was first adopted in Bangkok, Thailand in 1983. To date, there are now 21 State Parties to the 1983 Bangkok Convention. In view of new developments shaping higher education such as the massification of higher education, the increasing use of ICT, and the diversification of higher education providers, the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention went through a revision process that led to the adoption of a new convention in Tokyo, Japan in 2011. As of March 2017, three Member States – Australia, China, and New Zealand – have ratified the 2011 Tokyo Convention. However, at least five Member States must ratify the 2011 Tokyo Convention in order for it to come into force, a challenge that remains a key priority for UNESCO.

During the 14th Session of the Regional Committee on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications in Asia and the Pacific, held in August 2016 in Sydney, Australia, Member States shared their current work plans on ratification and implementation of the 2011 Tokyo Convention. As a result of the 14th Session, delegates and participants called on the Secretariat at UNESCO to provide new capacity building opportunities to help raise awareness about the importance of international recognition and the value of the convention. In particular, the UNESCO Strategy on standard-setting instruments in the field of education (2015-2021) outlined five interconnected elements to support national and regional capacity building:

1. **Visibility:** Improve communications with key stakeholders, both internally and externally, about the value of UNESCO’s normative instruments in education;
2. **Implementation:** Strengthen technical support, capacity building and resource mobilization to support implementation;
3. **Monitoring:** Reinforce a broad understanding of monitoring obligations, processes and mechanisms, including through partnerships and key networks;
4. **Cooperation:** Promote knowledge-sharing, peer-learning and collaboration; and
5. **Ratification:** Identify difficulties and challenges faced by Member States and offer tailored assistance.

Building on the request from the 14th Session and UNESCO’s strategy on standard-setting instruments, the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, in collaboration with

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2 Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific (Bangkok, Thailand, December 1983)
3 14th Session of the Regional Committee on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications in Asia and the Pacific (Sydney, Australia, August 2016)
4 Strategy on standard-setting instruments in the field of education (2015-2021)
the Chinese National Commission for UNESCO, and the China Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development Centre (CDGDC) will co-organize a two-day capacity building workshop from 1-2 June 2017, in Beijing, China. In addition, CDGDC offers all the workshop participants to join the International Forum on internationalization of postgraduate education on June 3 in order to share observation and insights.

With the aim to bring the 2011 Tokyo Convention into force as soon as possible, Member States will be invited to review current strategies and **benchmark progress towards ratification of the 2011 Tokyo Convention** and accelerate the development of National Information Centres (NICs) in Asia and the Pacific. Specific objectives for the workshop are outlined in the following section.

**Objectives of the workshop**

- Conduct a pre-workshop survey on the implementation of the 1983 Bangkok Convention and the readiness of Member States to ratify the 2011 Tokyo Convention
- Build national-level awareness and capacity with regards to the benefits, challenges, and ratification procedures
- Share information on how to establish and promote key national outreach mechanisms such as National Information Centres (NICs) to provide authoritative information on higher education systems on the recognition of qualifications
- Develop a regional status report and implementation plan for Asia-Pacific in preparation for the 15th Session of the Regional Committee in 2018

**Organizers**

The meeting will be organized by the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education in Bangkok, Thailand, in collaboration with the Chinese National Commission for UNESCO and China Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development Centre (CDGDC).

**Participants and resource persons**

An estimated 50 participants, including officials nominated by Member States, resource persons and UNESCO staff are expected to join the capacity building workshop.

**Dates**

1-3 June 2017 (with arrival on 31 May)

**Location** (venue TBD)

Beijing, China
Tentative programme

Day 1: Building readiness

- Welcome and overview (morning start time)
- Regional progress report since the 14th Session: Towards ratification and implementation of the 2011 Tokyo Convention
- Visibility: Strategies to effectively communicate about the national benefits and growing importance of international recognition
- Working group session one: Identifying obstacles and opportunities towards ratification and implementation of the 2011 Tokyo Convention. Participants and resource specialists will join one of three working groups based on shared interests and common challenges in implementing the convention
- Welcome dinner and reception

Day 2: Moving forward - Adapting a regional convention to local needs

- Welcome and overview
- Working group session two: Developing and launching National Information Centres (NICs) and the Asia-Pacific Network of NICs
- Working group presentations of national and regional action plans
- Report from the Bureau of the Regional Committee: Preparing for the 15th Session
- Synthesis report: Reviewing action items, timelines and technical assistance to bring the 2011 Tokyo Convention into force
- Closing and commitment for next steps

Day 3: International Forum (organized by CDGDC)

- One-day International Forum on internationalization of postgraduate education, hosted by the China Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development Centre (CDGDC), Beijing, China

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