Informal Note

Overview of the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education
- The 2011 Tokyo Convention

Summary

The 2011 Tokyo Convention, not yet in force, provides a mechanism for countries in the Asia-Pacific region to facilitate recognition of higher education qualifications through basic principles, increased information provision and transparency. Ratification of the Convention demonstrates a country’s commitment to improved mobility of students and academics within Asia and the Pacific, while also strengthening collaboration and solidarity across the region. As of April 2017, three Member States – Australia, China, and New Zealand – have ratified the 2011 Tokyo Convention. Five Member States are needed for the Convention to enter into force.

Background

- Worldwide, six regional conventions on the recognition of higher education studies and qualifications were adopted through UNESCO from the late 1970’s and early 1980’s.
- The first Asia-Pacific Convention was adopted in 1983 in Bangkok, Thailand (i.e. Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific). There are now 21 State Parties to the 1983 Bangkok Convention.
- Since the 1983 Bangkok Convention, significant changes have taken place in higher education: exponential growth of private and public providers in higher education, increased cross-border mobility, growth of ICT and qualifications earned through open and distance learning (ODL), a greater focus on quality assurance, learning outcomes, etc.
- In 2005, Parties of the 1983 Convention acknowledged the need for an updated Convention that reflects best practice. The resulting revised convention was adopted in Tokyo in 2011.

Main articles (excerpt)

- The 2011 Tokyo Convention respects, “each Party’s right to create and grant a system for qualifications, and of the autonomy of its institutions”. Decisions in recognition matters remain at the national, or state and territory level governments.
- The main articles of the 2011 Tokyo Convention include:
  o Article II: Ensure competent recognition authorities implement the Convention;
  o Article III: Make appropriate arrangements to assess an application for recognition of qualifications in a manner that is transparent, coherent, reliable, fair, timely and non-discriminatory (i.e. basic principles related to the assessment of qualifications);
Article IV, Article V and Article VI: Requires each Party to at least assess, or recognise qualifications issued by other Parties that give access to or were obtained in higher education unless a “substantial difference” can be shown - this includes the assessment of partial studies and recognition, where deemed appropriate;

Article VII: Within the framework of the local education system and in conformity with the Party’s regulatory requirements, each Party shall make all reasonable efforts to develop procedures, including recognition of prior learning, to assess fairly and expeditiously whether refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfil the requirements for access to higher education programmes, or for recognition of qualifications for employment activities;

Article VIII: Requires each Party to provide relevant information on their national higher education system and qualifications, as well as take adequate measures to develop and maintain a National Information Centre (NIC);

Article IX.3: Each Party is also obliged to appoint a member of its NIC to the network of NICs in Asia-Pacific established under the 2011 Tokyo Convention.

Any State may declare that it reserves the right not to apply, in whole or in part, one or more of the following articles: Article IV.7 and VI.3, Articles V.1, V.2 and V.3, Article VIII.4.

Conclusion

- The 2011 Tokyo Convention reflects changes in higher education and supports information sharing, quality recognition and assurance measures.
- The benefits of the Convention include providing a mechanism for countries in the Asia-Pacific region to facilitate recognition of higher education qualifications while improving mobility in the region.
- UNESCO Bangkok, as the Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education will continue to support its Member States on these matters through technical support and policy advocacy.
- Instruments of ratification, acceptance, approval, or accession to the 2011 Tokyo Convention may be deposited with the Director-General of UNESCO in Paris, France.

The 2011 Tokyo Convention: Supporting the next generation
Increased access, transparent quality assurance, and fair recognition practices in higher education throughout Asia and the Pacific

Young people today are the most connected and the most open-minded generation the world has ever seen...

- Ms Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, International Youth Day, 12 August 2016