

PIFS(09) FEDMN.08

FORUM EDUCATION MINISTERS' MEETING

Nuku'alofa, Tonga 24-26 March 2009

SESSION FIVE

AN UPDATE ON THE REGIONAL QUALIFICATIONS REGISTER 1

This paper was prepared by the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA).

FORUM EYES ONLY



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AN UPDATE ON THE REGIONAL QUALIFICATIONS REGISTER¹

Purpose

To update Ministers on the development of the Pacific Regional Qualifications Register.

Background

- 2. At the Forum Education Ministers' Meeting held in Auckland in May 2001, priorities for improving basic education in the region were considered by the leaders of Pacific countries, and it was agreed to "consider the setting up of a regional qualifications framework, covering basic, primary, secondary, TVET and tertiary education benchmarked against appropriate international standards and qualifications". This arose because of the concern among countries of the diversity of courses and qualifications but with no mechanism of comparability between countries.
- 3. This meeting was followed by one in November 2003 in the Cook Islands, where the UNESCO Directors of Education meeting agreed that a Regional Qualifications Register (RQR) be set up to achieve this objective over the more complex proposal to establish a Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF). A paper prepared by Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), which was based on a research study by UNESCO and recommended that development of a RQR be pursued was presented and accepted by the Education Ministers in Apia, in 2004.
- 4. In November 2004 at a PIFS meeting it was agreed to seek approval for SPBEA to take the lead role in the establishment of the RQR, and to prepare a project proposal for possible funding of the development of the RQR. The Education Ministers met in May 2005 in Apia, and reaffirmed their support for the development of the RQR. SPBEA agreed to take the lead role **provided that** all physical and human resources are given. In 2005 at the

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SPBEA AGM the Board approved a review of its constitution to reflect the nature of the work of RQR in its mandate.

- 5. The above actions are all in line with the objectives contained in section 7 of the Pacific Plan.
- 6. It was determined that the development of the RQR would be developed in 6 stages:
 - **Stage 1: Introductory development**
 - Stage 2: Resourcing of SPBEA for the development of the Register
 - Stage 3: Development of the Regional Qualifications Register Template
 - Stage 4: Development of National Qualifications Register and National Qualifications Framework
 - Stage 5: Development of the Regional Qualifications Register
 - Stage 6: On-going operation/maintenance of the Regional Qualifications Register
- 7. **Stage 1** was conducted in 2007. It consisted of cluster meetings held in Honiara, Solomon Islands; Kolonia, Federated States of Micronesia and Suva, Fiji. The objectives of these meetings were to:
 - a) introduce the theory and practicalities of a Qualifications Register;
 - b) discuss the initial proposal for the development and implementation of the PRQR;
 - c) discuss the basic template for the Register;
 - d) discuss the level descriptors/benchmarks;
 - e) discuss the necessary quality assurance and control procedures including accreditation and moderation processes;
 - f) discuss strategies for countries to develop their NQR based on their current status; and
 - g) discuss the way forward.
- 8. During the consultations consensus was reached to use the term Pacific Regional Qualifications Register (PRQR). The consultant reported: "There was a strong sense of purpose and commitment from the delegates to move forward with the implementation of the PRQR through the development of national registers or frameworks. They accepted the need to work with decision makers in their own country to ensure the requirement of the PRQR were sufficiently well understood by these groups. Delegates were asked to advocate for the PRQR within their own countries and brief ministers or policy makers they had access to about the outcomes of the meeting, prior to the November Ministers meeting in Auckland."
- 9. **Stage 2 was concluded in 2008.** SPBEA developed a proposal for the establishment and development of PRQR. A Monitoring and Evaluation Tool was also developed during this time. Initial funds were made available in later 2008. Further funding would be contingent on a satisfactory report being provided to AusAID in November 2009.
- 10. There were also a number of presentations and discussions with PIFS and government officials on the ways that PRQR could facilitate the Temporary Movement of Natural Persons (TMNP) initiative within the scope of the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement (PICTA).

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11. The PRQR work also involved the Pacific being included in the Commonwealth's Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF). SPBEA is a vice-chair of the Commonwealth of Learning's (COL) TQF Management Committee.

Current Status

- 12. The PRQR Unit staffing comprises a Senior Professional Officer, two Professional Officers² and one Administrative Officer. The Unit has been set up within SPBEA and started functioning early in 2009.
- 13. The team has already started visiting National Qualifications Accreditation Authorities (NQAA) and is establishing networks both regionally and internationally.
- 14. Stages 3, 4, 5 and 6 will begin simultaneously in 2009 and the advancement of the developments in any one of the areas will depend on the countries' commitment and capacity to respond to the demands of establishing and strengthening their NQAAs, developing their NQF/NQR and especially forming the network of contacts in the region and internationally. It should be noted that these stages do not directly relate to the objectives in the project proposal. The Monitoring and Evaluation Framework is in place and will be used to monitor this work and report to the AusAID and Ministers on the developments.
- 15. It is expected that by the end of the year significant progress will have been made in realizing many of the objectives listed in the proposal document and various developments along phases 3, 4, 5 and 6.
- 16. An important point worth noting is the fact that since the RQF was first considered in 2001, many developments have occurred at the country and regional levels, in particular:
 - The development of various forms of: national Qualifications Frameworks such as Vanuatu Qualifications Framework, Samoa Qualifications Authority, Tonga National Qualifications Authority, Fiji Qualifications Authority; and
 - Links with Qualifications Frameworks from outside the region such as New Zealand Qualifications Authority, Western Association of Schools and Colleges, and Transnational Qualifications Framework.

Recommendations

17. Ministers are invited to **note** progress on the development of the Regional Qualifications Register.

Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Suva 3 March 2009

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² In the proposed document there was only one SPO, PO and AO. SPBEA has decided that there is a need for a further PO and therefore hired two an SPO, two POs and an AO.