

Changing Climate for Quality Assured Regional Qualifications in the Pacific: An innovative collaboration (EU-PacTVET & EQAP)

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ABSTRACT

The Pacific region embraces 22 countries and territories. With more than 7,500 islands over 30 million square kilometres, their combined land mass accounts for only two per cent of this area. Climate change and disasters threaten Pacific economies, livelihoods and cultures, and impact a range of sectors, including natural resources, agriculture, food security, education, public health and infrastructure. The Pacific leaders have continued to reaffirm the ongoing urgency of addressing the challenges posed by, and the impacts of, climate change as a regional priority.¹ At the Forty-Sixth Pacific Islands Forum held in September 2015 the leaders of the Pacific small island states reiterated their concerns that climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihood, security and well-being of the people of the Pacific. Pacific Island Countries (PICs) recognise a commitment to sustainable development is a national responsibility but also realize that this cannot be achieved without a regional approach. The European Union Pacific Technical, Vocational Education and Training in Sustainable Energy (SE) and Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) Project (EU PacTVET) aims to develop a quality assured regional qualification and accreditation process. This paper reflects discussions, views and validations from members of government agencies, private industry, training providers, non-government organisations, community groups, donors, and industry associations surrounding a regional accreditation strategy.

INTRODUCTION

It is contended that one of the key barriers to improving PICs' energy security status and resilience to climate change impacts is the lack of local and regional capacity and expertise (Jordon, Huitema, Van Asselt, Rayner, & Berkhout, 2010). This results in the absence of relevant outcomes-based curriculum, trained personnel and well-resourced

1. PIF Forum Communiqués, 2008 - 2015

and equipped training institutions to deliver the required training programmes.² Additionally, current education and training systems in the Pacific region do not facilitate recognition and validation of the vast amount of informal and non-formal learning that has occurred in the past. This is particularly relevant in the areas of climate change and sustainable energy that have received a vast amount of ad-hoc training through ongoing support from donor agencies.

Quality assurance of education and training is imperative and critical for successful development. This is important in promoting the desired regionalism since the current regional education and training systems in the Pacific region are in their infancy. For PICs, capacity limitations and resource constraints become the basis for the development of regional qualifications. The recent growth of national accrediting agencies, national qualifications frameworks and quality assurance strategies pave the way for developing mutual understanding of the processes and requirements as well as facilitating recognition of the implications of these developments.

The definitions of formal, informal and non-formal learning adopted by this paper on quality assurance in the Pacific region are derived from the meanings conveyed by UNESCO and The Council of the European Union (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2015, p. 19).

Recognition and validation of learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning assist in making visible the knowledge, skills and competences acquired within the informal sector to promote decent employment and labour mobility (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2015). On this, it is further contended that the lack of formal qualifications and certification makes workers vulnerable and fosters social inequality (Asian Development Bank & International Labour Organisation, 2015). Mobility of the labour force in the Pacific region has long been a focus for the Pacific Leaders. Thus, an education and training system which incorporates recognition and validation of competences will contribute to this regional objective. However, this assessment only pathway often raises the question of quality assurance and subsequently highlights the

2. European Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy Miguel Arias Cañete; Pacific Islands Leaders Forum Conference PNG, September 2015

importance of quality assurance in the developments being initiated through the EU-PacTVET project.

The European Union Pacific Technical Vocational Education and Training Project (EU-PacTVET) is a partnership between the University of the South Pacific (USP) and The Pacific Community (SPC) aims to address issues relating to the need for formal demand-driven TVET training and Pacific regional accredited qualifications in the areas of climate change, sustainable energy and disaster risk management. However, although this progress is justified and welcomed, new qualifications are not likely to be trusted or used unless they can be quality assured by known and reputable systems.

The Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP) is responsible for addressing Pacific regional educational matters³ as a program of the Pacific Community (SPC). The following discussion is descriptive and analytical of the existing quality assurance system maintained and implemented by EQAP, and the reforms being advocated by the EU-PacTVET project to develop regionally accredited qualifications which are readily accessible and quality assured.

The work in progress aims to develop a quality assured regional qualification and accreditation process which can be applied to the EU-PacTVET initiatives in climate change and sustainable energy. It is envisaged that this regional quality education and training system will provide a model for future developments in other disciplines. A description of the work being undertaken by EU-PacTVET informs an analysis and proposals for developing a regional quality assurance system which is innovative and leading in global development. The content of this paper reflects discussions, views and validations from members of government agencies, private industry, training providers, non-government organisations, community groups, donors, and industry associations. These stakeholders represent the fifteen Pacific - African Caribbean Pacific (P-ACP) countries and provide a regional perspective. The methodology also incorporated a review of seminal reports from global agencies such as UNESCO, the Asian

3. <http://www.eqap.org.fj/>

Development Bank, European Commission and regional reports such as Pacific Leader Forum communiqués and regional policy frameworks.⁴

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Given the diversity of country contexts, it is remarkable how much consensus exists around the world that regional qualification frameworks are appropriate tools for the reform and expansion of educational and training provision to address diverse issues such as raising skill levels and improving labour market productivity and mobility (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2015). Thus, quality education and training is considered a cross-cutting theme that underscores all other developmental activities in the Pacific region.⁵ Furthermore quality assurance at the institutional, national and regional levels is regarded as critical to the credibility and integrity of developing effective education and training systems in the Pacific region.

National Qualifications

Commitment at the national level to improve the quality of post-school education and training has led some of the Pacific countries (Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu) to develop national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) and establish national accrediting agencies (NAAs). This work is ongoing in the Pacific region and currently supported by different donor and government initiatives, including EQAP.

PICs are encouraged to develop national qualifications and quality assurance systems and to link these national frameworks to the Pacific regional frameworks. This linking/mapping or referencing, enhances the quality standing of the national system of education and training through what is referred to generally as 'regional accreditation'. However an analysis of the current system for 'regional accreditation' reveals that it does not provide regional qualifications for delivery, but rather access to a database of national qualifications. In addition to providing a reference point and a forum for the engagement of relevant stakeholders, NQFs which are referenced to regional quality assurance frameworks are considered further enhanced for quality assurance.

4. Framework for Pacific Regionalism, 2014: <http://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/linked-documents/pacific-robp-2015-2017-sd.pdf>

5. 46th Pacific Islands Forum Communique, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea 8-10 September 2015

Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP)

EQAP, reflects regional priorities in the field of assessment and education quality. EQAP undertakes this work primarily in the area of accreditation and standards, by the ongoing development, maintenance and regular updating of the Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards (PRQS). At the regional level the PRQS combined with the Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF) and Pacific Quality Assurance Framework (PQAF), provide a basis to encourage national agencies and providers to achieve a minimum standard of quality assurance.

Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards (PRQS)

The PRQS is a regional database of quality assured providers, national qualifications and occupational standards registered by PICs.⁶ The main role of the PRQS is to enable national qualifications and systems to be more comprehensible across the different Pacific Island Countries through the provision of a reference point. In this way, the PRQS supports individual mobility and lifelong learning, helping those moving from one country to another to work, or to continue their education or training. Thus the PRQS provides a broad base to better understand the standard and the quality of national training institutions and their qualifications.

Nonetheless, qualifications currently listed on the PRQS are owned by the submitting Pacific Island Country. The current system demands delivery of a qualification on the PRQS is approved by the country owning the qualification. Furthermore, qualifications on the PRQS can only be delivered by a country or training provider that has undergone quality accreditation with EQAP which includes the submitting agency's QF has been referenced against the PQF. Thus the existing system is one where the quality assurance process may be seen as regional but the qualifications are either provider or nationally owned. The objective of the EU-PacTVET project is to establish regional qualifications that are not owned by any one country or provider and available for delivery by a range of different agencies. Thus reforms to the existing system are necessary to support the aim of the EU-PacTVET project. An analysis of this existing system and the objectives of the EU-PacTVET project inform a proposed new regional system which is presented in the second half of this paper.

6. SPC. (2015). *Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards*, Education Quality and Assessment Programme, EQAP: <http://www.spbea.org.fj/Our-Work/Projects/Pacific-Register-for-Qualifications-Standards.aspx>

Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF)

The Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF) is used as a translation instrument for referencing country frameworks and qualifications for registration on the PRQS.⁷ The PQF has ten levels defined by generic descriptors; outcomes based and credit based. The existing system provides that National Qualifications Frameworks are referenced against the PQF for the registration of qualifications onto the PRQS. All qualifications registered on the PRQS must be initially registered in a relevant national qualifications framework. Thus the PQF establishes transparent relations and comparability of qualifications from the various countries in the Pacific region.

Evidence gathered by a study of the potential role of qualifications frameworks in supporting the mobility of workers and learners (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), 2008; European Union, 2012) shows that there are great expectations that qualifications frameworks will support mobility through better recognition of qualifications. Thus, NQFs are considered to provide an important link to detailed information on qualifications; notably on learning outcomes but also on job roles and the level of qualification. Thus, the direction of the Pacific region and EQAP in supporting the development of NQF's is aligned with global trends in education and training and at the same time global socio-economic objectives for labour mobility.

Pacific Quality Assurance Framework (PQAF)

Both the PQF and the PQAF function as meta frameworks and aim to provide confidence in the qualifications achieved across the Pacific region. The Pacific Quality Assurance Framework (PQAF) is the Pacific's regional quality assurance framework covering post-secondary education and training, benchmarked against international standards and guidelines.

The PQAF is not intended to standardise the quality assurance practices in the different Pacific Island Countries. Rather, it provides a broad base for accrediting agencies and institutions to compare and inform their own quality assurance policies and processes.

The approach adopted by EU-PacTVET to develop regional TVET qualifications in climate change, sustainable energy and disaster risk management are now outlined. At

7. SPBEA (renamed EQAP) (2011) Pacific Qualifications Framework

the same time changes to the existing system are proposed to reflect the aims of the Pacific Island Forum leaders, donors and agencies which promote the benefits of regionalism in the Pacific. The aim of the EU-PacTVET initiative is to provide ready access to regional TVET qualifications which are accredited and quality assured. Ensuring that the rigour of the existing quality assurance system is maintained and supported by the different Pacific Island Countries is essential to the success of a new regional qualifications system.

THE EU-PacTVET APPROACH

The European Union Pacific Technical and Vocational Education and Training on Sustainable Energy and Climate Change Adaptation (EU-PacTVET) project is component three within the broader Adapting to Climate Change and Sustainable Energy (ACSE) programme. The general objective of the project is to enhance sustainable livelihoods in P-ACPs. The purpose of the project is to enhance and/or create P-ACP's regional and national capacity and technical expertise to respond to climate change adaptation (CCA) and sustainable energy (SE) challenges through the development of quality formal TVET training. Disaster Risk Management (DRM) is also included in this development work. Quality education and training is well recognized as the firm foundation for socio-economic development (UNESCO, 2015; Nevin, 2008; SPC, 2015).

The proposed regional accreditation process aims to facilitate industry associations, private industry, NGOs, community groups, national training authorities and national training providers to develop and deliver regional qualifications. This working model for regional qualifications will be a first in the Pacific and at the same time lead global reform in this area (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2015). The following section of this paper provides a brief overview of the relevance of TVET for the development of quality training in CCA, SE and DRM. This is followed by a description of key terminology, stakeholders and processes. Finally the paper presents the challenges and conclusion for a way forward in fostering change to progressing regional education and training in the Pacific.

Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

TVET is an umbrella term that traditionally refers to a range of learning experiences relevant to the world of work. These involve the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge, comprising formal, non-formal, and informal learning.

The concept of TVET has shifted since the late 20th century from a narrow view of training or re-training for particular jobs to integration within all sectors of education, adult training and lifelong learning. TVET is recognized as a vehicle for social development in addition to individual development.⁸ The EU-PacTVET project is based on this contemporary, multifaceted and multipurpose view of TVET. This view underpins the project activities associated with building capacity and enhancing technical expertise to meet climate change adaptation and sustainable energy challenges. The EU-PacTVET activities address regional and national, individual, industry and community needs.

The EU-PacTVET project activities have included a Training Needs and Gap Analysis of the fifteen P-ACPs.⁹ This assessed national training needs in SE, CCA and DRM and reviewed existing non-formal and formal TVET training courses. Through this process common needs across the region were identified in addition to specific country needs. These common training needs were the focus of development for the initial formal regional qualifications. In the area of CCA they include food security, water management, biodiversity and disaster risk management. In the field of SE they include solar PV, energy efficiency and sea transportation (traditional). This regional development and the associated quality assurance process and issues are the focus of this paper. This work is being undertaken by the EU-PacTVET project collaboratively with the Fiji Higher Education Commission (FHEC) and EQAP.

Competencies, Skillsets and Qualifications

EU-PacTVET has been working jointly with the FHEC to develop competency standards, skillsets and qualifications at certificate levels I to IV in SE and Resilience (CCA and DRR). These certificate level qualifications are for technician levels rather than professional levels.

9. <http://www.unevoc.unesco.org/go.php>.

10. Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu, PNG, Solomon Islands, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Niue, Nauru, Timor Leste,

Qualifications are groups of units of competency that are aligned to the relevant Qualifications Framework (NQFs/PQF) from Certificate I through to Diploma levels. A qualification is a formal certification, issued by a relevant approved body, which recognises that a person has achieved learning outcomes relevant to identified individual, professional, industry or community needs.

Skill sets are groupings of units of competency which combine to provide a clearly defined statement of the skills and knowledge required by an individual to meet industry needs or a licensing or regulatory requirement. Skill sets should include information about logical clustering of units for the skill set in meeting industry needs and information about skills set's relationship with a qualification.

The FHEC ensures all tertiary qualifications offered in Fiji are registered on the Fiji Qualifications Framework. This Qualifications Framework is also one of five which has been referenced to the regional framework (PQF).¹⁰

At the same time through collaborative work with EQAP these qualifications will be recognized regionally through processes established to facilitate regional delivery and accreditation. In particular the two key processes in developing regional qualifications is the referencing of the competencies to the regional framework (PQF) and the inclusion of regional representation on the Industry Standards Advisory Committees (ISACs).

Industry Standards Advisory Committee (ISAC)

An ISAC sets the unit standards and learning outcomes within each TVET qualification. Basically, the ISACs define the required competencies. The EU-PacTVET process has used the Fiji national standards agency (FHEC) as the secretariat for the ISAC groups that has facilitated both national (Fiji) and regional qualifications being developed simultaneously. This work is leading-edge for all agencies and stakeholders.

The key to the development of relevant needs based TVET qualifications is industry representation. However, the EU-PacTVET project recognises that in the field of CCA in particular, that the desired competencies are not only focused on the traditional TVET employment outcomes but also productive and effective activity in communities. Thus in

11. Fiji, Samoa, PNG, Tonga, Vanuatu

the case of the two ISAC groups (one for SE and one for CCA), ISACs have two sets of members: (i) professional persons in these areas drawn from both industry and providers, and (ii) persons drawn from the community. This is also considered to be a leading-edge development.

Furthermore, since the aim is to develop regional qualifications it is imperative that the ISACs working with the EU-PacTVET project have regional representation. Since all ISAC meetings have been conducted in Fiji regional participation has been enabled and enhanced by the use of a web-based project management tool.

REGIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

EU-PacTVET's position is that a regional qualification is one that is not owned by any country or agency but rather it is available freely (access via the PQRS) for delivery within the Pacific region. It must be developed with input from regional stakeholders and meet regional needs. The qualification issued will state in the title that it is a Pacific Regional Qualification. This section outlines the proposed system to facilitate achieving quality assured regional training and education in the Pacific region. Regional accreditation for any new competency, course, skillset or qualification developed as part of the EU-PacTVET project requires approval from EQAP that the proposed standards, and courses meet the standards of the PQAF.

Development

A regional qualification must meet EQAP's criteria. Currently, EQAP's process is one where national agencies and providers submit qualifications to be listed on the PRQS. This requires what could be considered copious amounts of paperwork. In order to present a system that encourages the development and submission of qualifications from different stakeholders such as NGO's, industry associations and private industry it is suggested that the existing system should be streamlined.

The newly proposed system for the development of regional qualifications does not require a national quality assurance agency as quality assurance is provided by EQAP. Furthermore these qualifications once approved by EQAP are freely available to all stakeholders on the PRQS. This system does require some change to existing policy and practice by EQAP. The PRQS would have both national and regional qualifications

listed. The existing system for developing national qualifications would remain unchanged.

Delivery

The key component of the regional system proposed here is that it will allow any agency which meets specified criteria to deliver accredited regional qualifications. This will facilitate NGO's, industry associations and private industry in delivering accredited training.

It is suggested that any planned regional training received approval/accreditation prior to delivery. For providers who are accredited in their home country by a national quality agency referenced to the PQF the national quality assurance processes could be applied. For other providers it is proposed that EQAP would develop a system to facilitate this. It is suggested that a process whereby a person known as an 'accreditor' is employed to provide the quality assurance of the delivery. The accreditor would be a certified trainer (in accordance with EQAP criteria) and in addition trained by EQAP in the regional processes.

CONCLUSION

The key challenge in the proposed new system for regional accreditation of education and training programmes presented here relates to establishing and maintaining a quality assurance system that may not be driven by a national system. Currently national legislation in Pacific Island Countries requires adherence to national policies. Thus, endorsement by all regional countries participating in this proposed quality assured regional education and training system would need to be reflected in national legislation.

This paper has described the existing system of regional accreditation for qualifications in the Pacific region. It is claimed that although this provides a regional quality assurance process that can be referenced by the individual countries it is complex and prohibitive. In addition the qualifications listed on the existing regional database (PRQS) cannot be readily accessed for delivery. It is argued that in the Pacific region there continues to be a vast amount of ad-hoc training provided by NGO's, industry associations, private industry and donors which does not provide recognition. At the

same time this training is often at community or grassroots level. The lack of formal qualifications and certification makes workers vulnerable and fosters social inequality (Asian Development Bank & International Labour Organisation, 2015). Furthermore, formal training is required in order to develop the skills and knowledge and expertise required to address the impact of climate change.

This development of human resources in the field of climate change is particularly timely since the United Nations Framework of Convention on climate change (The Paris Agreement at COP21) agreed \$100bn a year in climate finance for developing countries by 2020, with a commitment to further finance in the future. Thus, this initiative by EU-PacTVET in partnership and collaboration with regional stakeholders is timely and innovative in fostering change that will contribute to building sustainable livelihoods in the pacific region. Quality assurance is integral to its success.

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