First Session of the Committee of the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education

In conjunction with the

Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop on the Integration of Quality Assurance, Qualifications Frameworks and Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications

CONCEPT NOTE

Background

As the only United Nations agency with a mandate in higher education, UNESCO supports Member States to ensure quality assurance, comparability and recognition of higher education qualifications with the aim of facilitating cross-border mobility and fundamentally achieving the overarching global goal: “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. Indeed, mobility in tertiary education is an asset and an opportunity and should be enhanced to develop students’ competencies and global competitiveness as the Education 2030 Framework for Action clearly states.¹

Since the 1970’s, UNESCO has initiated six regional conventions on the recognition of higher education qualifications with a view to promote cross-border mobility of students and academics. 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), which has twenty-one State Parties to date. Pursuant to Article X of the 1983 Convention, a Regional Committee was established with representatives of State Parties and has met fourteen times throughout the Asia-Pacific region. The regional committee meeting served as a platform for Member States (State Parties and non-State Parties) to discuss benefits and challenges of ratification and implementation of the convention, as well as to share information concerning the recognition of higher education qualifications and strengthen collaboration between Member States.

Revised convention as a new platform for regional collaboration

Since the adoption and implementation of the 1983 Convention, significant changes have taken place in higher education, such as exponential growth of private and public providers, increased cross-border mobility, growth of ICT and qualifications earned through open and distance learning (ODL) and a greater focus on quality assurance. In order to reflect these trends and best practices, the revised convention officially referred to as the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education was adopted in 2011 in Tokyo, Japan. The Tokyo Convention entered into force on 1 February 2018, after the ratification of five Member States – Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, and Republic of Korea.

Therefore, the Committee of the Tokyo Convention will hold its first session with representatives of the State Parties and adopt its Rules of Procedure, in accordance with Article IX of the Tokyo Convention. The 15th session of the Committee of 1983 Convention will be held after the 1st session of the Committee of the Tokyo Convention and will review the status of their readiness related to ratification of the Tokyo Convention. The application of the 1983 Convention will be reduced as the number of Parties to the Tokyo convention increases. It is hoped that the Tokyo Convention will eventually replace the 1983 Convention.

In addition, State Parties to the Tokyo Convention will discuss about the establishment of a network of national information centres (NICs) that will uphold and assist the practical implementation of the Tokyo Convention, and collect relevant information from the Parties related to academic recognition and mobility. Considering the importance of the event, the Korean Ministry of Education, Korean Council of University Education and Korean National Commission of UNESCO kindly agreed to co-host the First Session of the Committee of the Tokyo Convention from 18-19 October 2018, in Seoul, Republic of Korea.

Progress towards a Global Convention

In addition to the revision process, based on an initiative launched at the 2011 Tokyo meeting, Member States called on UNESCO to conduct a feasibility study for a global convention in 2011 and recognized its potential benefits to improve the quality and recognition of higher education systems at the 37th session of the General Conference in 2013. After the consultations with Member States, the preliminary draft of the global convention was presented with a progress report to the 39th session of the General Conference in 2017. The final progress report and draft Global Convention is expected to be presented to the 40th General Conference in 2019, according to the tentative timeline for the adoption in the progress report. The first session of the Committee of the Tokyo Convention will be an opportunity for Member States throughout Asia and the Pacific to learn more about how a global convention would complement regional conventions to improve global mobility, and enhance international collaboration.
Towards policy coherence across quality assurance, comparability, and academic recognition

Effective quality assurance in education systems is essential to instilling trust in qualifications among countries and successful implementation of the Regional Convention. However, substantial differences in quality assurance arrangements become a fundamental obstacle to the further development of cross-border mobility of students. In order to build national capacities to deal with this challenge, UNESCO Bangkok initiated the higher education project titled as “Developing Regional Quality Tools to Facilitate the Cross-Border Mobility of Students in Asia and the Pacific”, with support from the Republic of Korea Funds-in-Trust (KFIT Higher Education Project, 2015-2019).

The KFIT Higher Education Project has raised awareness about the significance of quality issues in higher education, collected and consolidated best policies and practices, and developed regional quality tools at various levels. Most of all, this project has emphasized policy coherence approach across qualification frameworks/systems, quality assurance and academic recognition to foster mobility of students and ensure access to quality higher education.

After the sessions of regional committees finish, participants will be invited to a Regional Workshop on the Integration of Quality assurance, Qualifications Frameworks and Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications, to review progress and outcomes of the KFIT project and discuss how to implement quality tools in national contexts. In addition, the group will plan a feasibility study on an Asia-Pacific credit recognition and transfer system after reviewing trends, needs, existing practices and challenges in Asia-Pacific and related sub-regions. Throughout the event, academic mobility will be reviewed to ensure equitable access to quality higher education for all and to promote mutual understanding and solidarity across Asia and the Pacific.

Meetings objectives

The objectives of the Sessions of the Regional Committees and the Regional Workshop are to:

- Understand the transition to the revised convention and adopt its Rules of Procedure based on previous practices;
- Receive and examine country reports on implementation of the 1983 Convention and assess the readiness of non-State Parties for ratification of the Tokyo Convention;
- Collect, review and approve new initiatives and recommendations from the Committee concerning the implementation of the Tokyo Convention;
- Raise awareness about the Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications and explore how it may complement existing Regional Conventions;
- Establish a network of NICs in order to uphold the implementation of the Tokyo Convention
• Share information and updates on the implementation of the other regional Conventions especially the Lisbon Convention in the European Region;
• Build awareness and capacity for policy coherence across quality assurance, comparability, and recognition by sharing outcomes of the KFIT Higher Education Project

**Expected output**

• Rules of procedure adopted for the Committee of the Tokyo Convention
• A network of NICs established with a draft work plan to be refined later
• Regional synthesis report on the implementation of the 1983 Convention and the readiness of the member states to ratify and implement the Tokyo Convention;
• Regional communique/statement that promotes the ratification and implementation of the Tokyo Convention and cross-border mobility in the Asia-Pacific region with a concrete timeline;
• A steering committee established to guide the feasibility study on Asia-Pacific credit recognition and transfer system

**Participants**

The meeting will be attended by representatives of State Parties to the Tokyo Convention and the 1983 Convention. Representatives of non-State Parties will also be invited to attend as observers. In addition to representatives and observers, invited speakers, resource persons and UNESCO staff are expected to join the meeting.

**Organizers**

• UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Bangkok, Thailand
• Korean Ministry of Education
• Korean Council of University Education
• Korean National Commission for UNESCO

**Venue**

Conrad Hotel, Seoul, Republic of Korea

**Dates**

18-19 October 2018

**Language**

English will be the working language
Tentative programme

<Pre-meeting, 17 October 2018>

I. Pre-meeting of the founding members (Parties to the Tokyo Convention only, 1-5pm)
   - Discuss about the Rules of Procedure and the establishment of the Asia-Pacific Network of NICs

II. Optional registration with a welcome function (All Member States, begins at 5pm)

.DAY 1, 18 October 2018

I. First Session of the Committee of the Tokyo Convention
   - Opening ceremony
   - Election of the Bureau
   - Adoption of the agenda of the session
   - Adoption of Rules of Procedure of the Committee
   - Report from Secretariat: Transition to the revised convention
   - Review modalities of the two Convention Committees
   - Updates on national implementation developments and work plans
   - Raise awareness of Global Convention and its relationship with Regional Conventions
   - Review and approve new initiatives and recommendations from the Committee
   - Date and place of the next session of the Committee
   - Closure of the session

II. Tokyo-Lisbon Dialogue
   - Share the case of the Lisbon Convention and its implications for the Tokyo Convention for strategic planning to facilitate an inclusive network of NICs in Asia-Pacific

.DAY 2, 19 October 2018

I. 15th Session of the Committee of the 1983 Convention
   - Election of the Bureau
   - Adoption of the agenda of the session
   - Ratification strategy: review country reports and the readiness of the ratification of the Tokyo Convention with anticipate timeline
   - Discuss follow-up actions
   - Closure of the session

II. Asia-Pacific regional workshop on Education 2030: KFIT Higher Education Project
   - Review regional quality tools in diverse policy contexts
• Plan the feasibility study on Asia-Pacific credit recognition and transfer system
• Wrap-up and closing of the meeting

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