

INQAAHE 2013 Proposal

Title: Aligning the Papua New Guinea National Qualifications Framework, quality assurance, policy directions and regional frameworks

Conference Sub-Theme 4: National Qualifications Frameworks and their links to Quality Assurance

Topic: National Qualifications Frameworks and Quality Assurance

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Audio-visual requirements

Data projector, computer and screen for PPT presentation

Abstract

The paper provides a study of the challenges in aligning a National Qualifications Framework with quality assurance and desired policy directions for higher education, using the example of the new Papua New Guinea National Qualifications Framework (PNGNQF). We raise a series of considerations for the implementation of the PNGNQF, including questions about the links between technical and vocational qualifications and higher education qualifications. We discuss as well emerging issues in coordinating the PNGNQF with the regional Pacific Qualifications Framework. Areas for further work, and suggestions for improved coordination, are identified.

Outline

Introduction

The Government of Papua New Guinea recently approved a National Qualifications Framework [PNGNQF] (Government of Papua New Guinea, 2012). The approval of the framework is timely, as the national higher education sector faces the challenges of greatly increasing its output of skilled workers while at the same time improving the quality and standards of student learning. There are, however, significant challenges and issues in implementation.

Following a brief explanation of the PNGNQF, the first section of this paper discusses specific issues relating to the incorporation of the Framework into quality assurance mechanisms for higher education. Subsequent sections consider desired directions for post-secondary education in PNG and whether the PNGNQF is likely to help to address these. We discuss emerging challenges in aligning the PNGNQF and the Pacific Qualifications Framework. Finally, we outline some improvements for the future.

Incorporating the NQF into quality assurance requirements

The PNG NQF is a ‘linking’ framework (Tuck, (2007) rather than an integrated framework for all levels of education. Responsibilities for implementation of the NQF are not yet clear, so plans for overall coordination and monitoring of the NQF implementation across different agencies still need to be developed.

The Office of Higher Education has embarked on a series of changes to improve quality assurance mechanisms that are in place, to better protect the public and students in respect of higher education programs. The timing of approval of the new PNGNQF is therefore fortunate, as its requirements can be included readily in new standards and regulations (ENQA, 2012).

There are some challenges, however, in implementing a quality assurance regime for higher education that includes the PNGNQF requirements, including cultural challenges. As yet, PNG has only a tiny proportion of citizens who are university graduates and a comparatively small higher education sector. In addition to the six universities, there are various state and church colleges and a number of private providers.

An absence of proper effective regulatory processes has led to cases of bogus qualifications and bogus institutions. However, many citizens and employers are not aware of the difference between bona fide and bogus providers. The PNG NQF has certificates and diplomas as higher education qualifications, but cannot protect the use of these titles. In this situation, there is a fear of the public not being well informed of why an NQF matters and an even greater concern that the public will continue to demand higher education ‘diplomas’ of ever shorter duration.

Moreover, TVET qualifications in PNG also use the titles ‘diploma’ and ‘certificate’. In these circumstances, there are potential confusions and misunderstandings between higher education and TVET qualifications.

Desired directions for post-secondary education

Desired directions for post-secondary education in PNG include an expansion of pathways between TVET and higher education, and much stronger arrangements for credit transfer, advanced standing, articulation among programs, and recognition of prior learning.

We argue that the PNG NQF, although valuable as an initial framework, does not yet fully support these desired directions. Firstly, as noted above, the PNG NQF is a ‘linking’ rather than an integrated framework, so there are barriers between TVET and higher education qualifications, rather than well-defined pathways.

Secondly, the PNG NQF is not a credit based framework. Its volume of learning is expressed in durations of years. There is currently no uniform credit system in place for higher education institutions in PNG and many institutions do not yet use a system of credit points. The universities are now working to put together a coherent credit system that will facilitate access of students across institutions in the country. While the PNG NQF does not preclude the development of credit-based approaches, arguably it fails to support them (Coles, 2006).

Building bridges to regional compatibility

The paper considers the extent to which the PNG NQF is consistent with other national qualifications frameworks in the region and the Pacific Qualifications Framework. (SPBEA, 2011).

One issue that has already provoked discussion, not surprisingly given its Pacific context, is the extent to which there is compatibility between expectations of the volume of learning in bachelor degrees across the region. Papua New Guinean institutions are required under the NQF to offer a bachelor's degree of 4 to 5 years, while many other countries in the region have qualifications frameworks that set a volume of learning of 3 years.

A further issue for PNG concerns cross-border provision under its dual system of TVET and higher education qualifications.

Mobility of students and employment in Papua New Guinea has increased in the past decades. The use of NQF is crucial to monitor the qualifications of foreigners seeking employment within the country (Burke, 2009) and those PNG nationals undertaking studies across borders. However, as yet no consideration has been given to which PNG agency, if any, might monitor these qualifications against the PNG NQF.

Future actions and improvements

The discussion in the previous sections has highlighted some areas for further work and improvement. These, and some suggestions for improved coordination, are summarised in this final section of the paper.

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