3. The survey and findings

3.1 Questionnaire

Two questionnaires were prepared for this study. One questionnaire was for economies that had an NQF or had one under development. The other questionnaire was for economies that do not have an NQF. They were trialled with several economies and subject to extensive review in Australia. The questionnaire and the accompanying explanatory statement are included in Appendix 2.

For economies which have an NQF the questions related to:

▪ The factors that led to the introduction of the NQF

▪ The main benefits to be achieved through the establishment of the NQF

▪ The structure of the NQF

▪ The development of Recognition Tools

▪ Quality assurance

▪ Achievements and limitations of the framework

▪ International frameworks

▪ Possibility of an Asia-Pacific Qualifications Framework

▪ Other comments or suggestions about qualifications issues your economy or this project

For economies without an NQF the questions related to:

▪ The qualifications system in the economy

▪ The development of Recognition Tools

▪ Quality assurance

▪ Consideration of a NQF

▪ Possibility of an Asia-Pacific Qualifications Framework and

▪ Other comments or suggestions about qualifications issues in your economy or this project

3.2 Responses to the questionnaire

Of the 21 economies 11 responded to the questionnaire including, six with frameworks in place and one in the process of implementation. Another four were considering or developing frameworks. The economies with frameworks responding were Australia, Hong Kong SAR China, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines and Thailand. The Republic of Korea is starting to implement its framework. Three economies without frameworks which responded, Brunei Darussalam, Japan and Indonesia were giving consideration to a framework. The US also responded. With a federal system of government where education and training is very largely a state responsibility it is not contemplating a national framework though it has in place ways of achieving several of the outcomes for which a framework is designed, as will be discussed.

The survey information has been drawn on for the reports on the economies with frameworks provided in section 2 and that information is not be repeated here. Rather, this section considers, for the economies with or implementing frameworks:

- The factors that led to the introduction of the NQF;

- The main benefits to be achieved through the establishment of the NQF;

- Achievements and limitations of the framework; and

- International frameworks and the possibility of an Asia-Pacific Qualifications Framework.

For economies without a NQF consideration is given to:

- The qualifications system in the economy;

- Consideration of a NQF; and

- Possibility of an Asia-Pacific Qualifications Framework.

The introduction of the NQFs

Qualification frameworks are a recent phenomenon with the New Zealand and the Australian frameworks introduced in the 1990s. Hong Kong SAR, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand have introduced theirs in the 2000s and, notably in Malaysia and Thailand, the implementation is still in progress.

In New Zealand the need for reforms to skills training led to the establishment of the New Zealand Qualifications Authority. As part of its work it embarked wide consultations concerning an NQF that led to its introduction

In Australia the development of an NQF, only a little later than NZ, followed extensive reform in the vocational education and training sector including the development of competency based training and concern for national recognition of training. With a federal structure of government, the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) was established by the council of national and state ministers for education. The development was undertaken by a taskforce which carried out consultations across government and industry stakeholders. The AQF encompassed senior schooling, vocational education and higher education qualifications but the three sectors remain fairly separate to date.

In Hong Kong SAR the initiative came from the government department, the Bureau of Education, which was concerned with the proliferation of qualifications, quality assurance and cross sectoral articulation to support lifelong learning.

In Malaysia what is now called the Malaysian Qualifications Agency undertook wide consultation in 2003 and drew on the practices of New Zealand, Australia, England and Wales in developing an integrated system. The response to the survey by Malaysia indicates that implementation did not occur until 2007 and several parts of the structure of the framework are still under discussion.

In The Philippines the idea for a NQF was proposed by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) in 2004 and has been developed as a three sector system with

higher education under the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), the technical and vocational education system under TESDA and basic education under the department of education. All sectors are subject to overarching coordination by the Presidential Taskforce in Education (PTFE), which it has been agreed, will consider further developments in the framework.

Thailand is still in the process of implementing its framework and expects it to be fully implemented in 2010. It was set up in 2003 by the Commission on Higher Education and applies only to higher education.

In the Republic of Korea, the National Qualifications Framework has been initiated by the Korea Research Institute for Vocational Training (KRIVET). It is intended to build on the National Technical Qualification Framework. The proposal has not yet been fully accepted by all sectors.

The benefits

The economies which have introduced NQFs expect considerable benefits especially if backed by a good system of quality assurance, and a good information system on qualifications and providers. The NQFs are expected to contribute to improvement in matching workers to industry needs and of individuals to education and training over their working lives.

The returned surveys indicated that nearly all the benefits specified were seen to be very important or important for all groups and institutions concerned. Benefits are expected for students and workers, for employers including trust in qualifications, for education and training providers and for government authorities including the more consistent design of qualifications. The NQFs are seen to promote international recognition of the economy's qualifications.

Achievements and limitations

The achievements of the qualifications frameworks so far are largely in terms of the extent to which they have been implemented. The limitations refer to the extent to which an integrated system has been achieved across higher education, vocational education and senior secondary, resistance by particular sectors, the difficulties of implementation in a federal system, such as Australia, and the development of clear descriptors, based on outcomes.

International frameworks and an Asia-Pacific Qualifications Framework

None of the economies returning the survey is linked to an international qualifications framework. Some have taken advice from economies such as Australia and New Zealand that have longer established frameworks. There is general endorsement of the idea of an Asia-Pacific Education Framework as supporting recognition of qualifications and mobility of labour and students. A regional framework seems to be supported as a model to relate to, not one to which the member economies should commit to or have a legal obligation. The costs of aligning with a new structure especially while at an early stage of implementation of their own NQF is reported as an issue in implementation.

Economies without a NQF

Only five surveys were returned by economies that did not have an NQF: The Republic of Korea which is proceeding with implementation, the small economy of Brunei Darussalam and the huge

economies of Japan, Indonesia and the United States. What needs to be noted is that these economies do have systems of qualifications and a range of systems for quality assurance.

The need for a framework in an economy as small as Brunei Darussalam might not seem so obvious given that national oversight can be exercised fairly directly by the government, however, Brunei Darussalam does support the introduction of an NQF.

Japan responded only in relation to higher education. It did indicate support for the development of an NQF and support for an Asia-Pacific model.

Indonesia does not have a clear hierarchy of national qualifications. The government and a range of stakeholders are reported to support the introduction of an NQF. There is also support for the concept of an Asia-Pacific Qualifications Framework.

The major issue with the United States is that responsibility for education and training remains firmly with the states—in contrast with the Australian federal system where the Australian Government has a substantial role in education and training. Despite the lack of a framework the information supplied by the United States indicates a considerable degree of commonality in qualifications across the country and an extensive range of provision for registration of providers and accreditation of qualifications. Some of this is via regulated occupations and professional associations. Some is via the state accreditation for education institutions.

The US is taking active part in the development of recognition tools and is participating in activities with UNESCO's Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) to combat 'diploma mills'. There is also a requirement for all accredited tertiary institutions to maintain websites with detailed information—the provision of information to the potential students and to other institutions enables market pressures to provide quality assurance in deterring students from attending poor performing institutions.

The United States is unlikely to implement an NQF. It has reservations about an Asia-Pacific Qualifications Framework other than a non-binding model framework. Despite this the US demonstrates that it is possible to achieve many of the desired benefits of a NQF with good systems of quality assurance and good and transparent information on education and training providers.