



Strategic Review of the Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards

Report to DFAT

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List of acronyms

APQN	Asia Pacific Quality Network
APTC	Australia-Pacific Technical College
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
AQRF	ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework
ASU	Assessment and Standards Unit
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CRGA	Committee of Representatives of Governments and Administrations
CROP	Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government
EAS TVET QAF	East Asia Summit Technical and Vocational Education and Training Quality Assurance Framework
EQAP	Educational Quality and Assessment Programme
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
GPOF	Greater Pacific Qualifications Framework ('working title')
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NQAF	National Quality Assurance Framework
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
OCTA	Office of the Chief Trade Advisor
PACER	Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations
PICTA	Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement
PIF	Pacific Island Forum
PIFS	Pacific Island Forum Secretariat
PQF	Pacific Qualifications Framework
PQAF	Pacific Quality Assurance Framework
PRQS	Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards
RQF	Regional Qualifications Framework

QA	Quality assurance
SPBEA	Secretariat of the Pacific Board of Educational Assessment
SPC	Secretariat of the Pacific Community
USP	University of the South Pacific
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training

Executive summary

The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) commissioned a strategic review of the Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards (PROQS) to:

- Identify lessons learned from the PROQS's efforts to facilitate the benchmarking of Pacific qualifications against international standards and to facilitate Pacific learner and labour mobility
- Recommend to DFAT a future model of support that will promote greater institutional and program compliance with quality standards, foster international recognition of qualifications, and facilitate Pacific learner and labour mobility.

The PROQS program became operational in February 2009. Australia has funded the PROQS from its inception and to the end of December 2016. Funding allocation over this period has been AUD\$3,058,399, with staffing salaries and benefits (74%), and workshops/meetings and consultancy fees (21%) being the two largest costs. A small team, the Accreditation and Standards Unit (ASU), based within the Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP), leads the PROQS.

The PROQS model is both complex and multi-faceted and links a regional qualifications framework and a regional quality assurance framework to that of a register of recognised agencies, approved qualifications and providers. The PROQS aimed to:

- Support the mobility of Pacific learners and labour, and foster and sustain regional integration
- Facilitate informed decisions and choices about comparable and recognised qualifications, accrediting agencies, education and training institutions, professional status of workers, and regional occupational standards in the Pacific region.¹

To what extent the PROQS program has facilitated the benchmarking of Pacific qualifications against international standards, and Pacific learner and labour mobility into further educational opportunities or entry into the global labour market, is a critical aspect of the review.

The PROQS relies on other competent bodies (i.e. national quality assurance [QA] agencies), regional professional associations or other regional initiatives to be able to populate the register. The current PROQS progress reflects the member countries' progress of establishing National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs), quality assurance and governance arrangements. The progress to date includes the PROQS recognising and listing six national agencies, one regional agency for USA aligned education systems, two sectoral agencies,² 124 quality-assured qualifications, and three regional benchmarks. There have been no items listed in the professional licensing and occupational standards or the traditional knowledge and indigenous skills domains.

It is considered that the current quality assurance arrangements of the PROQS have not engendered trust or high accountability of its members, possibly due to the lack of rigour of quality review of agencies and effective self-assessment activities. In addition, the lack of benchmarking or harmonisation of agency processes has meant that there have been very few gains in recognising agency decisions in terms of accreditation of qualifications and registration of providers across borders. In addition, the inclusion of sectoral agencies poses a level of risk that has not yet been realised. Other strategies to promote harmonisation of processes (e.g. implementing a regional model for a Diploma Supplement, and developing regional occupational standards) are only emerging.

The duplication of qualifications on the register has not prompted benchmarking activities, and the lack of transparency of qualification details on the database does not enable any benchmarking or comparisons

¹ SPC 2015a, p. 6.

² Theological education: South Pacific Association of Theological Schools, and Maritime Training: SPC's Transport Programme (Economic Development Division).

by countries of these qualifications. The register only includes qualifications, and does not enable short course or skills sets that could be recognised, which would further the flexibility of the register.

The lack of ownership and engagement of key stakeholders of the PRQS and its profile across the region is concerning. The governance arrangements of the relevant boards or committees has not promoted engagement across the membership of the PRQS or extended opportunities to the broader Pacific countries and territories. The lack of visibility of the PRQS beyond that of national agencies is concerning. The top down approach to quality assurance is potentially alienating to the member countries and places the locus of control with EQAP rather than with the broader Pacific community. Finally, the review team questioned EQAP's remit to be able to accredit qualifications and register providers across borders, given the national context of legal obligations.

However, within the context of increasing globalisation, the international development of regional qualifications and quality assurance frameworks, means that there is still a need, or even a greater need, for a Pacific model. The PRQS, as a key regional initiative, can provide a forum for any regional consultations in relation to qualifications and quality assurance; foster common understanding and trust; and, develop national capacities in terms of recognition of qualifications.

Within the region a recent driver for enhanced labour mobility, the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus, has increased the focus on skilled occupation mobility and how the PRQS could support the movement of learner and labour mobility. The implications of the PACER Plus agreement on the future role of the PRQS are significant. The PRQS also has the potential to support other regional initiatives, such as Revised Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education 2011, which provides general guidelines intended to facilitate the implementation of regional cooperation regarding recognition of qualifications in the higher education/TVET sector.

If learner and labour mobility is of critical importance to the region, then recognition of qualifications and skills is a key strategy to facilitate this mobility. The Pacific model, being a regional initiative, could be a key catalyst for change and be paramount in supporting recognition and in turn facilitating learner and labour mobility. The PRQS has developed out of an educational context, which is similar to other regional qualifications frameworks. However, as the push for greater connectivity with labour and trade priorities (e.g. trade agreements, labour mobility) increases, it is natural that additional stakeholder groups need to be engaged.

Given the current context, it is timely to review the current PRQS model and propose an enhanced model to provide a clear focus and purpose and to provide stability and sustainability over the longer term. The details of a proposed future Pacific model are included in Appendix 8.

A future Pacific model needs to focus on building trust across the broader Pacific region, on harmonising³ recognition processes, and to take a proactive role in developing regional mechanisms to support recognition, for example, regional occupational standards and qualifications.

To foster a high level of trust and accountability by its members the following should be undertaken:

- A robust referencing, that includes engagement by relevant stakeholders, of NQFs and NQAFs to the PQF and PQAF, which is fit-for-purpose, given the size and scope of the qualifications systems
- Development of clear and unambiguous agreed quality assurance processes, including robust self-assessment by competent bodies for entry onto the register, strengthening internal self-review and evaluation of competent bodies, and requiring external quality evaluations on a periodic basis
- A focus on supporting mutual recognition of competent body decisions through harmonising processes of accreditation of qualifications, registration of providers, through benchmarking qualifications and recognition of foreign qualifications.

³ Harmonisation is about bringing into agreement (or harmony) of related quality assurance processes. It does not necessarily mean all processes are the same.

Any future Pacific model should promote the quality of qualifications, through a focus on the development of regional qualifications (occupational and assessment standards, qualification completion rules, PQF level) or co-opting national qualifications for regional qualifications so to facilitate benchmarking and recognition of occupations and skills across the Pacific and beyond. Shifting the focus makes the Pacific model less reliant on national progress of agencies.

The future Pacific model should also continue to strengthen its relationship with other Regional Qualifications Frameworks, and with national qualifications frameworks of key receiving countries (e.g. Australia and New Zealand).

If the Pacific model is to be maintained and strengthened, it needs to have ownership by the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) countries and territories, have clear and identifiable benefits to them and be incorporated into other regional and international initiatives and agreements. Without these, the Pacific model will surely falter. To strengthen the engagement and ownership of a future Pacific model the model's governance arrangements should include:

- The establishment of a governing committee that includes all PIF countries with equal voting status, with an intent to engage other countries in the greater Pacific region and that distances donors from the management and operations of the initiative
- Acceptance and confirmation of a revised Pacific model by PIF education ministers, trade ministers and economic ministers, and reporting to the three sets of ministers.

Other strategies to strengthen the use of the future Pacific model (especially the PQF) could be through:

- Promoting the inclusion of the Pacific model in bilateral or multilateral agreements related to occupations or occupational standards
- Benchmarking of qualification activities regionally and/or internationally
- Having strategies for badging and promoting the revised Pacific model to raise its profile beyond its members, across the Pacific and internationally
- Increasing transparency of information provided on the register to enable benchmarking of qualifications
- Linking this regional initiative to national bilateral programs, for example, incentivise the uptake and provision of regional occupational standards (and qualifications) at a national level.

However, the progress of the PRQS is linked to each Pacific Nation's progress with quality assuring qualifications. The following pre-conditions are crucial to the success of the future Pacific model. Pacific Nations need to have:

- The legal remit to quality assure TVET and Higher Education sectors
- The associated processes to undertake the key functions (accreditation of qualifications and registration [approval and monitoring] of providers, e.g. documented in regulations, policies and procedures as well as, costing schedules, complaints and appeals processes
- Personnel to manage the key functions and make accreditation and registration decisions⁴
- The capacity to outsource technical services through a third party to undertake the work
- The capacity to undertake rigorous internal quality assurance and review of its own processes.

These pre-conditions are relevant to all Pacific Nations with emerging QA processes, and is especially relevant where work is underway in current bilateral development programs and where the legal remit and the competent QA body capacity are not evident.

⁴ This is often through a competent QA body enshrined in legislation, but may be a small unit of 1–2 people within a government department.

Pacific Nations also need to have in place individual providers that have the capacity to deliver quality education and training (e.g. access to curriculum, equipment, facilities, qualified trainers and assessors, and management systems), and to undertake robust internal quality assurance and review processes.

Support for these pre-conditions could take a range of forms, such as a focus on bilateral support programs to ensure the legal framework, structures and processes are in place for quality assuring education and training; or using regional initiatives, such as APTC and USP to provide support to both TVET and Higher Education sectors in terms of provider capacity. Other Pacific QA bodies could also provide assistance to emerging QA bodies.

Once the future model is agreed then the number of secretariat staff can be determined; however, the likelihood would be no more than two staff members. The secretariat staff will need a strong understanding of qualifications frameworks, regional frameworks, quality assurance and recognition. A model of support for the secretariat should include a technical advisory group. The technical advisory group could provide mentoring support, strategic advice, and specialist services to assist in developing key documents, operationalising benchmarking and referencing activities and assist in workshops and meetings, including information technology support to assist in the enhancement of the register.

Funding to the future Pacific model is required for the next 3–5 years. Any proposal for funding the future Pacific model is predicated on the aim that the model is self-funding after 8 years, through Pacific Nation financial contributions and any fee for service activity. In the immediate future, Australia DFAT could seek additional donor partners for the support of the future Pacific model. For Australia, the most logical choice for a donor partner is New Zealand.

Transitioning to a new model will require a concentrated input over the next 3–5 years. Initially, efforts should focus on confirming a revised model design with the Pacific Nations and on the establishment of governing arrangements. Once established, the focus should be on increasing the portability of qualifications and occupations through the development of agreed regional qualifications, and benchmarking of existing national qualifications to these regional qualifications. In addition, promoting internal and external review of the competent QA bodies by recognised agencies and/or experienced personnel, and promoting harmonisation processes (including referencing NQFs and benchmarking quality assurance processes) should assist in enhancing trust and common understanding.

The review concluded that there is still a need, or even a greater need, for a future Pacific model and that the full potential of the current PRQS has not been realised. It is timely to review and shift the focus of the PRQS and provide some stability and clear direction for the next 3–5 years.

It is recommended that DFAT:

1. Commit to funding a future Pacific model for the next 3–5 years, and to seeking support from New Zealand as a donor partner
2. Confirm with the Pacific Nations a revised model that includes:
 - a. Development of regional qualifications (occupational standards, assessment standards, and qualification completion rules, PQF level) to facilitate benchmarking and recognition of qualifications, occupations and skills across the Pacific and beyond⁵
 - b. Fostering a high level of trust and accountability by its members by referencing NQFs and NQAFs to the PQF and PQAF, and which is fit-for-purpose, given the size and scope of the qualifications systems and appropriate level of engagement by relevant stakeholders

⁵ Countries can either utilise these regional qualifications and supplement for national accreditation purposes or benchmark their existing qualifications to these regional qualifications. A simple way to promote the recognition of these qualifications is to ensure that the PRQS website includes in detail the occupational and assessment standards, and the qualification completion rules. In addition, certificates issued at a national level could include details of the qualification's relationship to the regional qualification.

- c. Fostering a high level of trust and accountability by its members to be facilitated by clear and unambiguous agreed quality assurance processes, including:
 - i. A robust self-assessment process for competent QA body recognition for entry onto the register
 - ii. Strengthening internal self-review and evaluation of competent QA bodies and requiring external quality evaluations on a periodic basis.
 - d. Supporting mutual recognition of competent QA body decisions through:
 - i. Harmonising processes in regards to accreditation of qualifications, registration of providers and approval to deliver processes across countries
 - ii. Harmonising benchmarking and recognition of qualification processes.
 - e. Having strategies for badging and promotion of the revised Pacific model to strengthen its profile across the Pacific and internationally, beyond the key stakeholders. This may include (but is not limited to) using a Diploma Supplement model and/or logo on qualifications based on regional occupational standards.
3. Work with participating Pacific Nations to confirm revised governance arrangements:
- a. Whereby a governing committee is established, with all PIF countries and territories members having equal voting status, to foster ownership and engagement⁶
 - b. With an intent to engage other countries in the greater Pacific region by encouraging observer status
 - c. That distances donors from the management and operations of the initiative
 - d. That are supported by a small secretariat to provide strategic focus and operational assistance.
4. Ensure that the future Pacific model:
- a. Is documented in a briefing paper that outlines the scope, purpose and structure of the model, as well as competent body obligations, governing committee roles and functions, and secretariat roles and functions
 - b. Is designed and agreed by PIF countries and territories' competent QA body representatives as members of the governing committee
 - c. Has a 3-, 5- and 8-year plan with final transition from a donor-funded program to being supported by the broader Pacific region and supplemented by fee for service activities
 - d. Is accepted and confirmed by PIF education ministers, trade ministers and economic ministers, with the governance arrangements requiring reporting to the three sets of ministers.
5. Confirm funding for a technical advisory team to assist in fine tuning the design and providing support and advice to the Secretariat and governing committee over the longer term
6. Strengthen the use of the future Pacific model (especially the PQF and PQAF) through inclusion in bilateral or multilateral agreements related to occupations or occupational standards (e.g. mutual recognition agreements) or in benchmarking of qualification activities (either regionally or internationally).

In addition, DFAT should promote associated pre-conditions required within Pacific Nations, by:

⁶ Australia and New Zealand representatives have not been considered members of the PRQS. They will need to make their position clear in terms of whether they are members of the future model, or non-voting members, or observers.

7. Working with Australia Posts in the Pacific and bilateral programs to establish the pre-conditions, such as ensuring country competent QA bodies have the legal remit to quality assure post-secondary sector, have the capacity to implement processes and manage the key functions and to undertake rigorous internal quality assurance and review of their own processes
8. Working with APTC to support key or strategic providers to improve their capacity to deliver quality training and assessment, and meet external quality standards
9. Considering funding to USP to assist higher education institutions in Pacific Nations to improve internal quality assurance and curriculum accreditation arrangements
10. Working with bilateral programs to coordinate and rationalise the development of national qualifications to avoid duplication, promote sharing and using the protocols for developing regional qualifications so there is an agreement of minimum requirements for an occupation or qualification outcomes across the region
11. Working with bilateral programs to incentivise uptake of regional qualifications.

1. Background

1.1 Purpose of review

The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) commissioned a strategic review of the Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards (PROQS) after supporting the program financially for more than six years. The purpose of the strategic review of the Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards was to:

- Identify lessons learned from the PROQS's efforts to facilitate the benchmarking of Pacific qualifications against international standards and to facilitate Pacific learner and labour mobility
- Recommend to DFAT a future model of support that will promote greater institutional and program compliance with quality standards, foster international recognition of qualifications, and facilitate Pacific learner and labour mobility.

The review was to focus on the following areas:

- What happened? (what worked well or less well, what was achieved?)
- So what else needs to be done? (is it enough, relevant?)
- What now? (recommendations).

The key questions to be posed included:

- Is the PROQS contributing sufficiently to benchmarking of Pacific qualifications, and is this facilitating improved learner and labour mobility?
- To what extent, and how, is PROQS relevant to the Pacific context and needs?

The review team included:

- Andrea Bateman, Bateman & Giles Pty Ltd (Team Leader)
- Ewen Holstein, Lead Evaluator, External Evaluation and Review, Quality Assurance Division, New Zealand Qualifications Authority
- Dr Sereana Kubuabola, Senior Quality Assurance Coordinator, Planning and Quality Office University of the South Pacific.

The complete Terms of Reference are included in Appendix 1. A summary of the methodology is included in Appendix 2, and a list of interviewees is included in Appendix 3.

1.2 Terminology

A difficulty faced by the review team was how to identify the various Pacific Island groupings and associations. Pacific Island Forum (PIF) countries and territories include Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, plus Australia and New Zealand. Associate members include New Caledonia, French Polynesia and Tokelau. Pacific island observers include Wallis and Futuna, Guam, American Samoa and Northern Mariana Islands, and, as a special observer, Timor-Leste.

Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) members include PIF countries and territories (including Australia and New Zealand) as well as French Polynesia, Guam, New Caledonia, Northern Mariana Islands, Pitcairn Islands, Tokelau, Wallis and Futuna, France and United States of America.

The focus of this review has been on the Pacific island countries and territories and their engagement with the PROQS. Given this, as much as possible the term PIFs refers to full member countries and territories (excluding Australia and New Zealand unless otherwise stated). The term, Pacific Nations, is used to

describe an island grouping broader than that of the PIFs countries and territories (excluding Australia and New Zealand).

A glossary of key terms is included in Appendix 9.

1.3 The PRQS model

The model

The PRQS aims to:

- Support the mobility of Pacific learners and labour through a common regional quality standard and recognition arrangement for either qualifications or occupational standards that foster and sustain regional integration.
- Facilitate informed decisions and choices about comparable and recognised qualifications, accrediting agencies, education and training institutions, professional status of workers, and regional occupational standards in the Pacific region.⁷

The PRQS is a database and comprises options to include:

- Quality assured qualifications
- Pacific traditional knowledge and indigenous skills
- Professional licensing and occupational standards
- Regional benchmarks, such as those related to literacy, numeracy and life skills for basic education.

The database also hosts information on accrediting agencies, quality assurance instruments used by each country and an overview of the educational systems of each of the Pacific Nations. Functionality of the database is limited and information on all these areas is not readily available unless full access rights are provided.

The PRQS model is both complex and multi-faceted. To promote its aims the PRQS model is underpinned by two key structures:

- The Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF), a common reference framework to link national qualifications frameworks of participating Pacific Nations
- The Pacific Quality Assurance Framework (PQAF) which includes a set of quality assurance standards for agencies (including the registration of providers and accreditation processes of qualifications) and minimum standards for providers.

The PQF consists of a 10-level framework, and has the capacity to function as a national qualifications framework (NQF). A more detailed overview of the model is included in Appendix 4. The effectiveness of this model is discussed in the findings section of this report.

PRQS stakeholders

The PRQS⁸ notes its education stakeholders as including Pacific accrediting agencies and Ministries of Education from Pacific Island Forum (PIF) countries and territories (i.e., Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia [Federated States of], Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu).⁹ However, the remit of the PRQS is not straightforward. The

⁷ SPC 2015a, p. 6.

⁸ SPC 2015a

⁹ Australia and New Zealand are also PIF members. Associate members include New Caledonia, French Polynesia and Tokelau. Pacific island observers include: Wallis and Futuna, Guam, American Samoa and Northern Mariana Islands, as a special observer Timor-Leste,

Educational Quality and Assessment Programme is within the Pacific Community with a membership of PIF countries and territories as well as French Polynesia, Guam, New Caledonia, Northern Mariana Islands, Pitcairn Islands, Tokelau, and Wallis and Futuna.¹⁰ To complicate further the clarity of a stakeholder group, EQAP contribution paying Pacific island countries (i.e. members) include a smaller group: Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, Tokelau, Vanuatu, Tuvalu, Kiribati, and Solomon Islands.

Progress to date

The PRQS relies on other competent bodies (i.e. national agencies), regional professional associations or other regional initiatives to be able to populate the register. Progress to date has included:

- Recognition of at least six national agencies, one regional agency for USA aligned countries and territories, and two sectoral agencies
- 124 quality assured qualifications listed on the register
- 3 regional benchmarks (i.e. literacy and numeracy, school leaders, school teachers)
- No entries in the professional licensing and occupational standards field
- No entries in the traditional knowledge and indigenous skills field.
- Acceptance of EQAP as the quality assurance agency by Kiribati and Tuvalu
- Development of systems and processes to accredit institutions and qualifications in countries that do not have national quality assurance agencies.

It was not clear whether the processes for populating the register were benchmarked against processes used by other similar regional registers that exist internationally e.g. European Tertiary Education Register. A more detailed summary of progress to date is included in Appendix 4.

Funding and staffing

The PRQS program became operational in February 2009. A small team leads the PRQS, the Accreditation and Standards Unit (ASU), based within Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP). Australia has funded the PRQS from its inception and has recently extended funding to the end of December 2016. From June 2007 to April 2016, AUD\$3,058,399 has been allocated to this program. Over the funding period, the two most significant costs were staffing salaries and benefits (74%), and workshops/meetings and consultancy fees (21%). A summary of the budget and expenditure from June 2007 to April 2016 is included in Appendix 4.

1.4 International and regional context

International frameworks and linkages

Countries that have a regional, economic or social identity, or wish to see one develop, have cooperated in the development of regional qualifications frameworks and regional quality assurance frameworks. Regional frameworks work differently to national frameworks and their purpose and processes should not be confused. Refer to Appendix 5 for a summary of the purposes and examples of regional frameworks.

A regional qualifications framework or a common reference framework is 'a means of enabling one framework of qualifications to relate to others and subsequently for one qualification to relate to others that are normally located in another framework'.¹¹ CEDEFOP (2015) identified seven regional qualifications frameworks, the most relevant being the European Qualifications Framework, the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQR) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) framework.

¹⁰ Plus Australia, France, New Zealand and the United States of America

¹¹ Commission of European Communities 2005, p. 13.

A key aim of a regional quality assurance framework is to develop mutual understanding of quality and quality assurance of qualifications amongst member countries. Linkages between a regional qualifications framework and regional quality assurance frameworks is most obvious in the ASEAN model, as the AQR requires benchmarking to quality assurance standards (including the *East Asia Summit Technical and Vocational Education and Training Quality Assurance Framework (EAS TVET QAF)*) when undertaking the formal referencing process. A formal and robust referencing process that links to the quality assurance framework is yet to be featured on the PRQS website.

Within the international community, the interest in the linkages between the frameworks is increasing. This interest has led to a recent international initiative of developing world reference levels (Keevy and Chakroun 2015). The purpose of the world reference levels lies mainly in their potential to provide an independent reference point against which a level of learning can be compared internationally. These world reference levels could contribute directly to the way in which international qualifications are developed and offered. They would be the benchmark for regional qualifications frameworks and contribute to transparency. This initiative also links with quality assurance arrangements and transnational developments in higher education provision.^{12 13}

The potential for the PRQS role to link with other regional frameworks is significant. Being involved in international initiatives will raise the profile of Pacific qualifications, and in turn support benchmarking activities and comparability of Pacific qualifications internationally.

Regional initiatives, and learner and labour mobility

The PRQS functions in an international context where globalisation of organisation, information and occupations is an undeniable trend. Within the region a recent driver for enhanced labour mobility, Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus, has increased the focus on skilled occupation mobility and how the PRQS could support the movement of learner and labour mobility. The implications of the PACER Plus agreement on the future role of the PRQS are significant. The PRQS is a key regional initiative that could provide a forum for any regional consultations in relation to qualifications; foster common understanding and trust; and develop national capacities in terms of recognition of qualifications. The PRQS also has the potential to support other regional initiatives, such as Revised Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education 2011, which provides general guidelines intended to facilitate the implementation of regional cooperation regarding recognition of qualifications in the higher education/TVET sector. Further details of regional initiatives are included in Appendix 6.

Collated data to track the extent of learner mobility within the Pacific region, not including Australia and New Zealand, is not easy to source. UNESCO Institute for Statistics data is patchy in relation to country responses (excluding Australia and New Zealand). In terms of inbound students, only Fiji and Samoa from Pacific Nations have recorded receiving a significant number of students between years 1999 and 2014, recording only two years of inbound students within these 15 years. By comparison, outbound student data between 1999 and 2014 shows that across the Pacific students were leaving their home countries for further studies.

There is no known collated source of recognition of qualifications undertaken across the Pacific. Evidence sought from national agencies and the Assessment and Standards Unit in EQAP indicates that small numbers of qualifications are being formally assessed.

Data to track the extent of labour mobility within the Pacific regional countries, not including Australia and New Zealand, is also not easy to source. Two recent research reports provided by Office of the Chief Trade Advisor (OCTA) forecast an increase in labour supply demands. Figures indicate both the long-term need to generate employment for Pacific youth, and the clear demographic capacity to meet growing labour

¹² Bateman & Coles 2015

¹³ Representatives from the ASU have participated in the international consultations

demand in Australia and New Zealand (Ball 2015). A more detailed overview of learner and labour mobility within the region is included in Appendix 6.

2. Findings and analyses

This section includes the key findings identified from the review of reports, data and interviews. These findings are explored with commentary with the aim to inform future directions of the regional Pacific model.

2.1 Governance and remit of the PRQS

The governance and advisory board arrangements of the PRQS have undergone a number of changes. The SPBEA was governed by a board with a membership that included the contributing countries. This board became an advisory board in 2011. With the merger of SPBEA into SPC the review in 2010 (Eadie) included, amongst other recommendations, to:

1. Introduce new governance arrangements
2. Establish arrangements to increase collective knowledge and active engagement of member countries. Each member country should have one representative with close involvement to enable regular exchange of knowledge and to utilise broader expertise to guide project developments.

Following the EQAP board meeting in February 2015, the advisory board became a sub-committee of the Committee of Representatives of Governments and Administrations (CRGA). The minutes from this meeting indicate a proposal that:

The roles of awarding authority and accrediting authority could sit within this sub-committee, as the CRGA has the ability and authority to mandate specialist sub-committees to carry out specific activities such as those which require specific skill sets and expertise, as currently being carried out by the SPBEQ.¹⁴

The Assessment Research Centre review (2013) also proposed that *...the heads of national qualifications authorities, development partners, and the Director of SPBEA form the advisory board for the PRQS.*¹⁵ The PRQS advisory board's Terms of Reference included providing strategic advice on the PRQS, and had its first meeting in 2014. Its membership included representatives from recognised agencies¹⁶ and donor partners,¹⁷ with other country representatives given observer status if there is no recognised national agency. This is an important point, as this arrangement excluded some countries from voting status due to the lack of a quality assurance agency, and has the potential to alienate other PIF countries and territories from full engagement and participation in the implementation of the PRQS.

The governance arrangements of the Pacific Board of Education and Quality (PBEQ), which is a sub-committee of the CRGA, has been cited as providing the remit to accredit qualifications and register providers across country borders. PBEQ is the governing body of the PRQS on behalf of SPC.

This approach does not take into account the legislative basis of education and training in Pacific Nations. For countries with national quality agencies, the responsibility for quality assurance activities in the post-secondary education sector is enshrined in legislation. Legislation may be addressed by broad education legislation, but in the Pacific it is more likely to be specific to the agency's or competent body's remit (e.g. Tonga, Samoa, Fiji and Vanuatu). For those without an agency the responsibility for accreditation and registration may lie with relevant ministries and may include legislation that addresses post-secondary education; however, there may be a legislative void in relation to the post-secondary education. For example, there is a legislative void in the relevant Education Acts in relation to post-secondary education in some Pacific Nations, e.g. Kiribati, Tuvalu, Solomon Islands and Nauru. The review concluded that the

¹⁴ EQAP, SPC 2015, Draft Minutes of 2015 board meeting

¹⁵ Assessment Research Centre 2013, p. 56

¹⁶ National and sector agencies

¹⁷ Noted as voting members

EQAP does not have the legal remit across borders into national processes of accreditation of qualifications and registration of providers.

There are two instances (Tuvalu and Kiribati) where the EQAP has proposed that it will accredit qualifications and register providers at a national level.¹⁸

- Tuvalu representatives indicated that Tuvalu intended to use the expertise of EQAP and to establish a quality unit in country for regulatory and quality assurance purposes. This appears the most feasible and logical approach, given national responsibility for education and training.
- For Kiribati, the *Kiribati Skills for Employment Program: Investment design document (2015)* proposed that the program will utilise 'the Secretariat of the Pacific Community's (SPC) Pacific Quality Assurance Framework (PQAF) and Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards (PRQS) for the proposed regional registration and (curriculum) accreditation of Kiribati Institute of Technology'.¹⁹ The design notes that the theory of change is based on, amongst a range of assumptions, that the 'regional registration of Kiribati Institute of Technology and course accreditation under the PRQS is achievable'.²⁰

EQAP envisages (Nadi, May 2016) that for these two countries EQAP will convene an accreditation panel nominated by the accrediting agencies as members of the PRQS. However, given the above concerns about EQAP's remit, EQAP could only provide (at best) a recommendation in relation to a qualification or a provider, with the in country competent body formally accrediting the qualification/s and registering the provider.

At a regional level, the opportunity for EQAP to undertake the accreditation of regional qualifications and approve providers to deliver them was proposed (Nadi May 2016). However, there was no clear definition of a 'regional qualification', the process for development a regional qualification or what criteria for declaring a qualification as a regional qualification. If the EQAP does not apply criteria for recognising a regional qualification then it runs the risk of directly impinging on national processes, possibly even allowing the opportunity to circumvent national processes.

Regional consultation in Nadi (May 2016) indicated that accreditation of qualifications and registration of providers or approval to deliver the regional qualifications would still require in country approval processes. Therefore, EQAP's approach to accredit qualifications and register providers (and approval to deliver) is duplicative and potentially impinges on national sovereignty. Again, EQAP could make a recommendation or an endorsement to member countries, for them to undertake their own legal obligations of accreditation and registration. This approach assumes that member countries have the legal remit to undertake these obligations in the TVET/Higher Education sector.

2.2 PRQS model and quality assurance

From its inception, the PRQS model focussed on the register as opposed to the regional qualifications framework and quality assurance framework that underpin the register. In most qualifications frameworks (regional or national), the register is considered an output of the framework rather than a focus. The approach taken was consistent with that stated by the Pacific Heads of Education meeting in 2004.

However, the attention on the register potentially detracts from the underpinning structures of the regional qualifications framework and the regionally agreed quality assurance standards – structures that are better understood by the international community, especially those focussed on qualifications frameworks and quality assurance frameworks.

¹⁸ In both instances, there is a void in the relevant Education Acts in relation to post-secondary education. Kiribati Government 2013, Tuvalu Government 2008.

¹⁹ Peddle et al 2015, p. 7.

²⁰ Peddle et al 2015, p. 20.

As previously mentioned, there have been two major reviews of the PRQS and another related review pertaining to quality assurance of qualifications in the Pacific. The PRQS has responded to these reviews over time and implemented recommendations to further advance the role, remit and focus of the PRQS.

The SPC review in 2013 (University of Melbourne) recommended that the PRQS:

...should conduct periodic compliance reviews of accreditation agencies and training institutions to ensure that threshold expectations of quality are met and that there is demonstrable improvement over time.

The current approach of the PRQS reflects this recommendation, with a top down approach to quality assuring competent bodies. The Forum Education Ministers' Meeting in 2014 and the SPC's CRGA meeting in March 2016 endorsed this function and approach.²¹

In this approach to quality assurance EQAP 'will coordinate a regional external quality assurance function that moderates potential variations in how quality is administered by accrediting agencies'.²² The EQAP will recognise accrediting agencies for a period of 5 years and then a review is required. How the initial recognition and subsequent re-registration is to be undertaken is unclear as the regional documents provide no transparency to member countries and therefore limits confidence in the process.

For national agencies to be recognised and listed on the PRQS they need to be able to meet the PQAF agency standards, which 'guide EQAP's recognition of an Accrediting Agency as a standard setting body'.²³

At the 2009 regional consultation,²⁴ members agreed that EQAP would carry out an assessment of the national quality assurance agencies against the PQAF standards for agencies as basis for recognition of the agencies, for piloting purposes of the PRQS processes. Assessments were conducted of the Fiji Higher Education Commission, Samoa Qualifications Authority, Tonga National Qualifications and Accreditation Board and the Vanuatu National Training Council. As a result of the assessment, all agencies were deemed to be recognised.

Although the process enabled the agency to be listed on the register and to be recognised for their capacity to do so, for some interviewees the process did not engender a sense of trust in the level of scrutiny or in ensuring that the outcomes were met. The outcome reports of the review of agencies are not in the public domain.

For re-recognition purposes, EQAP notes that it 'will co-opt the services of relevant panels of experts where necessary, for external quality assurance of accrediting agencies' and review of qualifications submitted.²⁵ Fiji Higher Education Commission has been the first to request this service from the EQAP.

Comments from interviewees and surveys indicate that there is no clarity of the process for recognition or re-recognition, and templates for assessment not developed or made public. This has meant that there is no transparency for members – of the process or their obligations as part of the process. Regardless of the process, it needs to be clearly documented and well understood and accepted by all members.

At the regional consultation in Nadi (May 2016) it was proposed that the SPC review (2013) recommendation related to EQAP conducting periodic reviews be taken forward. A key reason cited was that the acceptance of the information on the PRQS is dependent on:

- The accuracy and currency of the data
- Rigour of quality assurance strategies at the national and institutional levels, including periodic audit of national agencies

²¹ Participant notes, Regional Consultation meeting May 2016.

²² SPC 2015a, p. 11

²³ SPC 2015c, p. 9.

²⁴ PRQS Progress report July – December 2009)

²⁵ SPC 2015a, p. 11

- 'Periodic audit of national agencies by EQAP'.²⁶

The quality assurance approach implies that audit by EQAP is the only measure of assessing the quality assurance of national agencies, which in itself implies that the locus of control rests with the EQAP. It is important to consider whether this is the best approach to engage member countries in the regional initiative. There may be other more supportive and evaluative approaches to achieve the same outcome and foster engagement of a country in a less confrontational and more constructive manner. For example, another approach could include discussions and professional conversations with one or more contracted specialists (perhaps a panel of 2–3 specialists, at least one of whom is from the Pacific region). This panel may recommend recognition (or maintenance of recognition), or not, in which case, they may recommend what the country or competent body needs to do in order to gain recognition. Other options should be explored to quality assure agencies other than audit by EQAP. A potential approach is included in the proposed future Pacific model outlined in Appendix 8.

For listing on the register, qualifications need to be accredited by a recognised national agency. The PQAF outlines the regional minimum standards and guidelines for accreditation of programs undertaken by agencies. National agencies provide to EQAP the information of accredited qualifications on a periodic basis to be included on the register. For countries that have undergone an alignment activity of their NQF levels to the PQF levels, and where there is considered to be a close alignment, their qualifications are assigned a PQF level.²⁷ The information provided by agencies is only skeletal and would not enable EQAP to quality assure the national agency accreditation processes or to ensure that the PQF level assigned is accurate.

The alignment of Pacific NQFs to the PQF is called 'referencing' or 'technical referencing' of the levels; however, the process is more about alignment or benchmarking of the levels rather than what is internationally understood (e.g. within the EQF processes) as referencing. The PQF document²⁸ notes that the alignment or benchmarking of levels is undertaken, and includes benchmarking NQF qualification types with PQF qualifications types. There appears to be confusion with the design of the PQF as a meta framework and the PQF as a NQF. The register itself does not include an opportunity to note a PQF qualification type outcome – only a PQF level outcome, so the reason for the inclusion of this level of scrutiny is not clear. There needs to be greater distinction between *what is* the PQF as a meta framework, and *what is* the PQF to be utilised by countries for NQF purposes. These functions and structures should not be confused.

2.3 Implementation of the PRQS

The PRQS model is based on the premise that entries (e.g. agencies and qualifications) on the register are quality assured at a regional level. Underpinning this approach was the assumption that this register would support benchmarking and recognition processes and hence facilitate learner and labour mobility.

Agencies

The PRQS project did not become operational until early 2009 and since that time, six Pacific island countries have moved to develop national qualifications frameworks, with four being endorsed and implemented. This progress in establishing NQFs is similar to international trends and in part could be attributed to regional discussions and the establishment of the PRQS.

The PRQS lists six national agencies, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) of the United States, and two sectoral accrediting agencies (Theological education: South Pacific Association of Theological Schools, and Maritime Training: SPC's Transport Programme (Economic Development Division)). The inclusion of sectoral agencies may pose a level of risk that has not yet been recognised. The

²⁶ Participant notes, Regional Consultation meeting May 2016.

²⁷ Note that Papua New Guinea qualifications are unassigned.

²⁸ SPC 2015b

inclusion of these alternative non-national competent bodies raises the opportunity for providers and their qualifications to potentially circumvent national quality assurance processes and become registered/accredited on the PRQS. This raises the issue of jurisdiction and authority to legally accredit qualifications and register providers across borders.

The EQAP should work closely with each national competent body to develop policy guidelines for the inclusion of sectoral agencies on the PRQS and to facilitate individual arrangements between national competent bodies and the non-national agency.

Qualifications domain

The qualifications register includes 124 qualifications with **duplication of qualifications** at a similar level in similar sectors, including agriculture, automotive, carpentry, cookery, electrical engineering, fabrication and welding, fitting and machining, heating and air conditioning, plumbing, and tourism and hospitality.²⁹ Duplication of qualifications raises the question as to whether benefits could be gained by benchmarking similar national qualifications, or for sharing national qualifications (i.e. those that belong to the country as opposed to those developed by individual providers), or to develop regional (shared) qualifications to minimise effort in emerging qualifications systems.

The details on the register, at the public access level, include name of qualification, code, accrediting agency, PQF level, country and ownership. There are **insufficient details** to provide external viewers an overview of the qualification, components and qualification outcomes, or to enable countries (either internal or external to the region) to benchmark their qualifications against similar entries on the register.

The **domain does not include accredited programs that may be less than a qualification**, those that do not meet the requirements of a complete qualification outcome. In some instances, countries may accredit programs that are less than a qualification (e.g. short courses), or approve 'skill sets' that have a sub-occupational outcome.³⁰ Opportunities for inclusion of these programs does not have any inherent risks as the register only notes the PQF level of the program outcome (not a PQF qualification outcome) and should be encouraged.

Professional licensing and occupational standards domain

A review of the PRQS progress reports indicates that the 'accredited qualifications' domain dominated the activities from 2009 to 2013, and that activities within this domain were deferred due to a focus on qualifications and qualifications frameworks.³¹

The title and focus of this domain has changed over time. Originally, it was titled the 'Professional licensing and occupational standards', and then changed to 'Occupational skills and standards domain' (SPC 2015a). At the most recent regional consultation in Nadi (May 2016), the group was asked to endorse the three domains, with this domain retitled 'Skills and occupational standards'. It was not clear as to the purpose of the name change or how this change alters the focus or the intent of this domain.

The PRQS (2015a) notes that this domain includes:

...information on professional associations, professional and occupational standards, and individual professional workers by occupation or trade

1. For occupational standards:

²⁹ Duplication of qualifications will continue to increase, facilitated as a direct result of bilateral programs that do not achieve economies of scale through sharing or coordinating the development of qualifications into agreed regional qualifications for use by other Pacific Nations.

³⁰ Solomon Islands is proposing to include short courses (module based programs at less than a qualification) and also skills sets (clusters of competency units as defined in the Australian context) in accreditation processes.

³¹ Refer to PRQS July to December 2013 progress report.

- developed by regional professional associations by occupational type. Examples: regional standards for teachers; regional standards for school principals; professional code of ethics for teachers;
 - the name and contact details of the regional professional association;
 - a list of professional associations by country, and their contact details (including websites); and,
 - web links to national professional associations and licensing authorities.
2. For licensed professional workers by trade:
- the register of individual professional workers by occupation; and,
 - name, profession, country, professional status, registration number, field licensed to practise in, date of registration and expiry, and other similar details.
3. Guidelines for issuing a license to practise a trade:
- generic requirements for acquiring a license to practise; and,
 - profession-specific requirements to obtain a specific license to practise by occupation.

Source: SPC 2015a

The domain is heavily reliant on professional associations and their progress in developing regional professional standards for their occupations. In addition, **this domain does not demonstrate consideration of regional occupational standards** (i.e. those not developed by a professional association) and the opportunity for these to be the basis of shared or regional qualifications, which in turn would enhance the potential for benchmarking or recognition of Pacific qualifications. Regionally agreed occupational standards and shared or regional qualifications could facilitate the benchmarking of qualifications and the mutual recognition of qualifications within the region. They could also reduce duplication of similar qualifications across countries. These options would provide a change of focus for this domain, and provide time for professional associations to be established and to take responsibility for the functions noted above in PROS documentation.

As described in the PROS document (SPC 2015a), this domain 'pulls in' the regional benchmarks domain (e.g. teacher standards).³² However, this domain does not demonstrate how these standards link to (or potentially link to) qualification entries on the register. Such a link is important to enable further benchmarking or recognition of Pacific qualifications (internally or externally to the region).

In Nadi (May 2016), a Skills Register was proposed. The Skills Register is to be a 'database of information that contains the personal and professional details of individuals for the purpose of making the information available to potential employers and other interested parties'.³³ In addition to basic information (e.g. personal details, academic qualifications, professional information, and key skills), it is possible that curriculum vitae could be uploaded. The PROS team indicated that employment advertisement and job opportunity information could be included on this register.

Although this Skills Register aims to support labour mobility, it may be a duplication of what a regional or national employment agency would provide and it does not have a clear point of difference from those types of services. The **Skills Register has the potential to become 'busy work'** and take away from the focus of the potential core business of a future Pacific model.

Traditional knowledge and indigenous skills domain

Although review of this domain was outside the terms of reference of this review, the team gave it some consideration in relation to the focus of a future Pacific model. The PROS document (SPC 2015a) indicates this PROS domain will host the general specifications of Pacific traditional knowledge and skills packaged

³² It was decided that by the 1st December 2014, the PROS database would only have three domains.

³³ Regional consultation notes, May 2016, Item 15, p. 1.

as units of competence, rather than the actual knowledge and skills as defined by each Pacific Island country and their communities. This domain has not undergone further development on the PRQS.

The PRQS document (SPC 2015a) notes that this domain is retained to capture information in the future. For example, Samoa has progressed the development of traditional knowledge and indigenous skills.³⁴

This domain is extremely important to countries in the Pacific and is the remit of the countries to progress. An alternative approach for the PRQS could be that this domain be incorporated into the qualifications or the occupational standards domain, depending on how these knowledge and skills are documented. Regardless, this domain poses no risk to the focus of a future Pacific model if it remains, and could provide a central point for sharing practice within and beyond the Pacific.

Monitoring and evaluation

Two most recent extensive reviews which can be regarded as part of the monitoring and evaluation framework are the *Review of the Secretariat of the Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA)*, (Assessment Research Centre, 2013) and the *Review of Quality Assurance Mechanisms for Post-Secondary Education in the Pacific* (Bateman, 2013). Both reviews resulted in a number of recommendations for PRQS and SPBEA/EQAP, some of which were, or are being, implemented.

Prior to these two 2013 reviews, the *Pacific Qualifications Register Independent Preliminary Progress Review* (Eadie 2010) found that the Register was basically on track, but slower than anticipated and lacking engagement with key stakeholders required for full implementation. The reviewer recommended that the development of a Register continue, subject to attainment of project milestones and subject to the implementation of eight recommendations, not all of which have been achieved.

The *Regional Qualifications Register South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment CROP Agency Project Submission to AusAID* in 2008 provided five program objectives, key outputs supporting achievement of key outcomes, progress measurements, sources of verification, anticipated outcomes, and a year-by-year timeframe for five years. A more generic and very recent *Revised Program Logic for PRQS* with ten Key Evaluation Questions, four intermediate outcomes and six outputs updates the CROP submission.

The monitoring and evaluation framework has the appearance of being robust, but its implementation has significantly reduced its effectiveness. Different iterations of the framework, meeting related reporting requirements, different reviews and their output recommendations and shifting criteria, while intended to support delivery of the framework, have not always been successful.

While the ASU have fulfilled their mainly six-monthly reporting requirements, the reports have not captured to what extent actions have been implemented or how effective they have been. There was a lack of evidence of interactions between the funder/donor and ASU team and of funder/donor feedback in response to PRQS reports (other than reviews which arose). These factors have reduced and limited the effectiveness and value of continuous and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the framework.

Not only have external funder/donor reporting requirements not appeared to have achieved their intent, they may in fact have distracted the ASU from delivery of their core business and contributed to insufficient internal quality assurance and self-review as well as insufficient support and advice. They may also have deprived the ASU and Pacific Nation members of robust self-evaluation opportunities and membership and ownership of the PRQS by all Pacific Nations.

To strengthen Pacific Nations' participation and engagement, provide a sense of ownership based on high trust and high accountability, and encourage future success of a Pacific model, it is suggested:

- Distancing the funder(s) or donor(s)

³⁴ This may be in part due to the support of the NZQA and the development of Mātauranga Māori Qualifications and Assessment Standards in New Zealand, which cater specifically to Māori knowledge, pedagogy and skills, and enables the portability of Māori skills and knowledge within the national education system. NZQA 2016, accessed at <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/maori/maori-qualifications/>

- Placing less emphasis on external monitoring and evaluation and more emphasis on feedback and support from external agencies when they do receive reports, also placing more emphasis on self-evaluation (which could include contracting external people as required).

The PRQS is supported by two meta-frameworks – the Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF) and the Pacific Quality Assurance Framework (PQAF). However, there was inconsistent evidence, or a lack of evidence, that the frameworks enabled the EQAP or ASU to assess program effectiveness.

Support to the ASU

The ASU team has been supported by the SPBEA/EQAP’s board and the PRQS advisory board since 2014. The PRQS advisory board has met twice and provided a forum for discussion and endorsement of actions to be undertaken. Interviews with the ASU team indicated that there could have been more opportunities for professional dialogue over the years to provide technical support and advice to enhance the focus and potential of the PRQS. **A technical advisory team to assist the implementation of a Pacific model in the Pacific should support any future Pacific model.**

2.4 Focus of PRQS activity

There are essentially three major country groups across the greater Pacific region that the PRQS has within its broader remit. These include those countries with national competent bodies and NQFs, those countries requiring assistance in terms of accreditation of qualifications and registration of providers, and those countries that look to other quality assurance systems and frameworks (e.g. to New Zealand, USA, France and Australia). The table below outlines these three groups.

Table 1: Groupings of Pacific countries and territories

Group 1: National competent bodies and NQFs	Group 2: In progress or assistance required	Group 3: Other international focus
Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu	Kiribati, Tuvalu (adopted the PQF & PQAF) <i>plus Solomon Islands (proposed NQF)</i> <i>plus Tokelau</i>	Cook Islands,* Marshall Islands,* Micronesia,* Nauru,* Niue,* Palau,* French Polynesia, Guam, New Caledonia, Northern Mariana Islands, Pitcairn Islands, and Wallis and Futuna

Note: Additional * PIF countries and territories

The focus of ASU activities over the past years has been limited to a small number of countries within its scope (i.e. eight countries in Groups 1 and 2). The focus has been on establishing the qualifications component of the PRQS and on supporting country developments in terms of NQFs and quality assurance.

The ASU has taken on multiple roles, including support of competent bodies and national initiatives, provision of workshops, accreditation and registration, and quality assurance of the competent bodies.

For the annual work plan, ASU team contact countries seeking actions to support. Feedback is collated and a work plan developed. This approach has led to the ASU responding to specific and immediate needs of countries as opposed to developing a strategic view of the role of the PRQS in the longer term and of supporting its key identified priorities. This work plan approach has meant that other country stakeholders, including but not limited to those in the broader Pacific Island Forum group, may not have identified with the potential or real benefits of the PRQS or not fully engaged in its progress.

Interview and survey responses indicated that PICTs, especially those with an emerging qualifications system, have found the support of ASU very valuable and indicated that the support was still a future need (e.g. assistance in setting up a national register). One country, however, noted that it could not ‘but feel that [our country] may be under served with the PRQS work’. Overall there was a sense that respondents wanted more clear benefits, transparency of processes, more engagement and a greater ‘say’ in implementation. It is timely for the ASU to consider a more proactive role in supporting the PIF countries

and territories to develop a Pacific strategic plan with medium and long-term goals to meet identified priorities and support of regional initiatives.

2.5 Ownership and engagement of stakeholders

As previously mentioned, the PRQS stakeholders are those of the PIF countries and territories, with an advisory board that gives voting rights to those with a recognised agency. All other countries and territories are observers. If the PRQS is to grow as a regional framework, it needs to engage a broader Pacific community and provide benefits to the broader group.

At this stage, the implementation of the PRQS has not provided an effective forum for collaboration and harmonisation for other countries and territories in the greater Pacific region, in particular the other PIF countries and territories not in Groups 1 and 2 (Table 1). At least one survey respondent indicated that, although they had engaged well in dialogue at the initial development of the PRQS, in recent years engagement was limited. Given the regional context and the interest in labour and learner mobility, it is now timely to consider a shift of focus. At a minimum, a refined Pacific model should engage all PIF countries and territories on an equal status, and work towards engaging the greater Pacific region.

In addition, **the PRQS has developed out of an educational context, which is similar to other regional qualifications frameworks.** However, as the push for greater connectivity with labour and trade priorities (e.g. trade agreements, labour mobility) increases, it is natural that **additional stakeholder groups need to be engaged.** The EQAP reports to the Forum Education Ministers, but given the shift in focus, should also report to the Forum Economic Ministers and to Forum Trade Ministers. This would not only provide for greater connectivity to labour and trade agendas but also increase the visibility of the Pacific model and align better with the proposed benefits. The support of the Forum Economic Ministers and the Forum Trade Ministers is also important for the future Pacific model in meeting its labour mobility goals.

As in any regional framework, communication of the initiative and what it provides is paramount.

The PRQS website and newsletter are obvious strategies for communicating the Pacific initiative. However, greater attention to details and transparency of information on the publically accessible database as well as its useability is important and should be a key administrative activity in a future Pacific model.

The visibility of the PRQS beyond the level of national competent bodies was limited. To gain visibility, it is important that the PRQS provides standardised information to national competent bodies in PIF countries and territories for use of further development into national materials for the promotion of a future Pacific model. National communication strategies and badging strategies should be focussed on engaging providers of educational services (including, but not limited to, providers such as universities and training colleges) as well as employers and relevant professional associations.

2.6 Trust and common understanding

One underlying assumption related to regional qualifications frameworks and the recognition of qualifications is the level of trust that can be placed in the qualifications process and certificate issued. This trust is engendered by two key factors:

- Transparency and a common understanding of a country's qualifications and how they are developed and approved, as well as its education, training and qualifications institutions, for example, as made evident through an agreed NQF³⁵

³⁵ Bateman & Coles 2013

- The quality assurance process that operates in each country. Without an accompanying quality assurance system a national qualifications framework 'is unlikely to be effective in building the quality of and trust in national qualifications'.³⁶

Within the Pacific, **the level of trust amongst competent QA bodies is important, as without trust any attempts at mutual recognition of decisions made by competent bodies or any mutual recognition of qualifications or occupational outcomes will falter.**

The review identified that, although all interviewees agreed with the PRQS and the underpinning principles and structures (i.e. PQF and PQAF), the PRQS has not supported any significant benefits, especially in terms of recognition of agency decisions or of qualifications. The small case study below outlines some basic operational issues faced by cross border providers.

For USP and Australia Pacific Technical College (APTC), the provision of services across borders is predicated on the following:

- Seeking separate registration within each country – according to the application requirements
- Seeking separate accreditation of each qualification within each country – according to the application process and application template.
- Seeking separate approval to deliver each accredited qualification within each country.

Within some countries, competent bodies have legislation related to accreditation of qualifications and registration of institutions and are bound by these requirements. In other instances, a history of practice may dictate how such applications are addressed. Interviewees indicated that national competent bodies in most instances are undertaking a full evaluation and approval process, with little quality gains and little value added. Streamlined processes are not implemented; suggesting that there is a lack of trust in the decisions made by another competent body. However, if trust and mutual recognition of decisions were established, the required processes could be accommodated or streamlined in a range of ways, such as.

- Only review approval to deliver within country rather than full registration, or
- Only check the additional requirements within the curriculum beyond that of the original approving agency.

This small case study indicates that there has been little traction gained in harmonising accreditation and registration processes across the national competent bodies to encourage recognition of competent body decisions. A key focus for the future Pacific model could be to facilitate the harmonisation of processes, and build trust to enable competent QA body decisions to be accepted.

The ASU has undertaken an alignment of NQFs to the PQF and of quality assurance arrangements of national competent QA bodies to the PQAF. However, these processes have not engendered trust in competent body decisions. More recently, the competent QA bodies have undertaken a brief self-assessment and presented the findings to the community (Nadi 2016) in the aim to enhance a common understanding.

Other regional framework models (e.g. EQF and AQRf), include two key mechanisms to promote trust and common understandings, coupled with high accountability. The most critical one is that of a robust referencing process undertaken by each country; involving country stakeholders, an independent international expert, and representatives from member countries. The referencing process is informed by an agreed set of criteria and guidelines,³⁷ is peer reviewed and made public. Such processes promote national responsibility for transparency and quality assurance, and promote regional participation in the process. The second initiative is the use of concept notes or guidelines, confirmed or endorsed by the community (e.g. learning outcomes, validation of non-formal and informal learning).

³⁶ Bateman & Coles 2013

³⁷ The AQRf criteria are included in Appendix 7.

A key focus for a future Pacific model should be that of promoting trust and common understanding, of fostering national obligations in relation to the regional good, and of harmonising various processes to facilitate recognition processes.

2.7 Mechanisms to support recognition of qualifications

Recognition is a process that allows the qualifications or skills gained in one organisation, nation or region to be recognised in another organisation, nation or region, and creates an environment where the mobility of qualified persons can be encouraged.³⁸ Recognition of qualifications and skills is an essential component in working towards the free flow of services.³⁹ Mechanisms that support recognition of qualifications and skills include:

- Regional qualifications frameworks, including transnational or common reference frameworks
- Regional quality assurance frameworks
- Multilateral arrangements related to qualifications such as conventions and instruments (i.e. Diploma Supplement models)
- Bilateral and multilateral arrangements related to occupations or occupational standards (e.g. mutual recognition agreements)
- Stand-alone national procedures (e.g. credential evaluation and skills assessments, referencing to regional or other national frameworks)
- Industry sector specific procedures (e.g. international standards [maritime], vendor programs).⁴⁰

There are no known examples where the PQF or the PQAF have been included in bilateral or multilateral arrangements. **A focus for the future Pacific model could be promoting the PQF and PQAF as the regional benchmarks in any bilateral or multilateral arrangements, either within or external to the region.**

At the May 2016 regional consultation, EQAP proposed the following mechanisms to support recognition and to facilitate learner and labour mobility:

- Skills Register
- Audit of national agencies
- Diploma Supplement
- Accreditation of regional qualifications
- Assessment of foreign qualifications.

The Skills Register and audit of national agencies have been discussed earlier in this report.

A **Diploma Supplement** is a transparency and mobility tool. It provides extra information in addition to that included on a graduate testamur and its accompanying academic statement/record.⁴¹ A Diploma Supplement aims to enhance the information available to other educational destinations and to prospective employers. This document aims to support international recognition of qualifications, assist with interpretation of the aims and content of particular awards, and the achievements of graduates.⁴² A

³⁸ This generally includes a benchmarking activity that involves comparing and analysing a qualification against an identified standard or benchmark. It can include alignment of the qualification to a qualification framework level and/or an assessment to pre-existing relevant qualifications or occupational standards; which in turn determines the type or form of recognition granted.

³⁹ Bateman & Cole 2015

⁴⁰ Bateman & Cole 2015

⁴¹ A Diploma Supplement does have implications for additional records management requirements.

⁴² James et al 2010.

regional model is the agreed format or fields that each participating country agrees to include. Different regions (e.g. Europe and APEC) have developed agreed templates. At a regional level, it could include reference the PQF and the PQA as well as the PRQS – using a standardised clause. Although the proposal to include a Diploma Supplement in the Pacific is reasonable, it was considered that the proposed template (Nadi 2016) did not provide sufficient additional information to support recognition, nor did it foster trust in Pacific Nations' qualifications systems, and would need to be enhanced.

Putting aside whether EQAP has the remit to accredit qualifications across borders, the notion of **developing regional qualifications** is an accepted strategy to support qualification recognition in the Pacific. Interviewee feedback indicated, that the proposed PRQS accreditation template for regional qualifications is highly detailed and very similar to that used for national program accreditation (including specific areas which cross national boundaries and national variations e.g. trainer or assessor qualifications), and included detailed units of competency.

However, there is potential to provide a more streamlined model of regional qualifications (occupational and assessment standards, and qualification completion rules, PQF level). A streamlined model would be more readily accepted by countries and not impinge on national requirements (e.g. training standards).⁴³ The development process should include a strong needs analysis approach to ensure a close match of the standards/qualifications to the education destination or job/labour need. The process should also include benchmarking to other international standards (e.g. Australian competencies or International Labour Organisation regional occupational standards),⁴⁴ to ensure comparability and hence encourage learner and labour mobility. Pacific Nations with existing relevant qualifications, could also benchmark their qualifications against the regional occupational standards or qualifications. Regional qualifications are those that are regionally agreed as the minimum requirements for an occupation or a qualification or both.

The EQAP could take a significant role in facilitating the development of regional qualifications through:

- Assisting the identification of regional occupational priorities⁴⁵
- Documenting an agreed regional process for development
- Coordinating the development of regional occupational standards (and qualifications), and approving and recommending to the governing committee (and therefore member nations)
- Monitoring the use of the regional qualification/standards to ensure currency and relevance
- Approaching recognised competent bodies to access nationally accredited qualifications (based on occupational standards) and undertake regional consultation to enable these qualifications to be recognised regionally
- Facilitating regional benchmarking activities of occupational standards or qualifications
- Providing on the PRQS website, full details of these regional qualifications (including the occupational standards, assessment standards, qualification completion rules and PQF level) for use by participating countries and by employers regionally and internationally.

Finally, the EQAP proposes (Nadi 2016) to undertake the **evaluation of foreign qualifications**, that is, those outside the region. At this stage, the implementation of central assessment service that determines a PQF level and/or PQF qualification type equivalent may be premature – but could be an option for a

⁴³ Although a detailed training standard/advice could be included in the model – advisory only.

⁴⁴ There has been very little research into the use of International Labour Organisation occupational standards, so it is unclear to what extent they are used by countries for development of national occupational standards and/or qualifications.

⁴⁵ The Office of the Chief Trade Advisor (OCTA) has identified key labour opportunities in the areas of tourism, construction and related trades as well as aged care. A PAC-TVET project has identified the need for regional project management and trainer qualifications in addition to those qualifications currently being developed (i.e. related to climate change and sustainability qualifications).

future Pacific model. The point of difference is that the evaluation provides equivalence against the PQF and not against a NQF.

In terms of evaluation of foreign qualifications, two other opportunities are evident:

- Undertaking the research to determine equivalence of qualifications requires significant research, information systems and regular updating. A potential role for the EQAP could be to provide a regional information service for international qualifications and qualification systems outside the greater Pacific region. Offering such an information service could provide for consistent and reliable information and promote consistent decisions across the Pacific.⁴⁶
- Facilitating benchmarking activities of each participating country's assessment and evaluation of qualifications to promote harmonisation⁴⁷ of processes and trust in decisions made.

The intention of the Forum Education Ministers' determination in 2001 was to have a PRQS to facilitate the benchmarking of Pacific qualifications against international standards. The PRQS was to become a single reference for collective understanding and benchmarking of Pacific qualifications systems against other qualifications systems to facilitate learner and labour mobility into further educational opportunities or entry into the global labour market. Any benchmarking activities undertaken were not immediately obvious or reported. Benchmarking of qualifications is an essential component of PRQS' role in supporting recognition and, in turn, facilitating learner and labour mobility. **A focus for a future Pacific model could be facilitation of benchmarking activities**, including:

- Benchmarking of accreditation criteria and processes of PIFs competent bodies to ensure that outputs and learning outcomes are clearly defined
- Benchmarking of registration criteria and processes of PIFs competent bodies to ensure in confidence the certification processes and qualifications issued
- Evaluation and assessment of foreign qualifications for learner or labour mobility
- Country processes for assigning PQF levels for country qualifications entry onto the register.

2.8 Sustainability

The *EQAP Business Plan 2016–2018* (SPC 2016) recommends that the PRQS 'work to transition from a funded or project status to a self-sustainable model that is not reliant on regional development funding' and to being based on the needs and interests of the users in the region. A number of funding proposals are in place. The EQAP has proposed that PIF countries and territories will need to pay for certain services: such as recognition of agencies (quality audit), issuance of certifications and reports, qualification recognition services, and access to the Skills Register.⁴⁸ Interviews with EQAP representatives indicated that as the PRQS model expands and provides benefits and services, countries or territories could potentially pay a membership fee to support the PRQS.

Currently the PRQS is a program within EQAP, based within the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). The EQAP has considered that the long-term potential of the PRQS could be as a stand-alone entity. Other options explored throughout the review, included the PRQS being placed within the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat, putting aside any potential conflicts of interest within SPC or USP.

There is no immediate and logical location for the PRQS. In the long-term, it would be desirable for the future Pacific model to be able to provide clear benefits to participating countries, which could be recognised through national contributions. In addition, it should be independent enough to be considered

⁴⁶ Countries such as Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom have such qualification and skills assessment services.

⁴⁷ Harmonisation is about bringing into agreement (or harmony) of related quality assurance processes. It does not necessarily mean all processes are the same.

⁴⁸ Participant notes, Regional Consultation meeting May 2016.

a Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP)⁴⁹ member.⁵⁰ The future Pacific model being a CROP member is the logical conclusion of its role and importance to other regional strategies (e.g. USP, learner and labour mobility, trade agreements).

⁴⁹ Formerly the South Pacific Organisations Coordinating Committee.

⁵⁰ CROP was established in 1988 'with the mandate to improve cooperation, coordination, and collaboration among the various intergovernmental regional organisations to work toward achieving the common goal of sustainable development in the Pacific region. CROP comprises the heads of the intergovernmental regional organisations in the Pacific.'

<http://www.forumsec.org/pages.cfm/about-us/>

3. Conclusion, recommendations and proposed model

3.1 Need for a Pacific model that is trusted and valued

Globalisation of organisations, information and occupations is an undeniable trend; countries and regions are faced with developing policies and strategies in the context of the global economy that has free trade of goods and services and free movement of capital, technology and skills. There are significant differences in country and regional implementation strategies to recognise qualifications and skills, these differences are important, but at the regional level, communities need to design their own coordinated strategy on how to cope with the challenges of globalisation.⁵¹

Within this context, the international development of regional qualifications and quality assurance frameworks means that there is still a need, or even a greater need, for a Pacific model. As one interviewee stated: 'there is a need for it more than ever', both regionally and internationally.

The *Framework for Pacific Regionalism* (2014) endorsed by Forum Leaders outlines the process for identifying and implementing regional priorities. It notes that regional initiatives should not duplicate national initiatives, but should provide a regional benefit, should promote a shared norm or standard or establish a common position, while maintaining the degree of effective sovereignty held by national governments. Any future refinements or enhancements to the Pacific model should take into account the Framework's critical criteria for regional initiatives. In addition, the role and functions of the future Pacific model should be cognisant of the regional context, including the greater Pacific region, and internationally.

If learner and labour mobility is of critical importance to the region, then recognition of qualifications and skills is a key strategy to facilitate this mobility. Within a region, recognition can be achieved if:

- The principles that facilitate mutual recognition are adhered to by participating countries/agencies/providers.
- There is an agreed mechanism for mutual recognition to occur.
- The mechanism in place can generate trust between countries based on the quality of the qualifications undertaken, relevant occupational or educational standards and the certificates issued.
- Quality standards are transparent and fully implemented across each participating country/provider/qualification.
- There is specific regional governance of the recognition process.⁵²

To develop a zone of trust⁵³ between the PIF countries and territories there needs to be an appreciation by people in key agencies (e.g. education and training providers, qualifications bodies/quality assurance agencies, professional bodies, employers, employee organisations, regional bodies) that the Pacific model is helpful for understanding qualifications systems, qualifications and occupational standards in other PIF countries or territories.

A future Pacific model that builds on and significantly develops the approach and work undertaken to date by the PRQS team and which focusses on building trust and harmonisation across the broader Pacific region is considered paramount to support other regional initiatives. Given the current context of PACER Plus providing a significant impetus it is timely to review the current PRQS model and propose an

⁵¹ Bateman and Coles 2015

⁵² Bateman and Coles 2015

⁵³ Coles, M. and Oates, T., 2005.

enhanced model to provide a clear focus and purpose and also provide stability and sustainability over the longer term.

If the Pacific model is to be maintained and strengthened, it needs to have ownership by the PIF countries and territories, have clear and identifiable benefits to them, and be incorporated into other regional and international initiatives and agreements. Without this, the Pacific model will surely falter.

3.2 Proposed model

The program logic for the future Pacific model is based on the experiences of other regional frameworks (e.g. EQF and CARICOM) and their links to improved recognition and impact on labour and learner mobility. The assumptions made are:

- That a regional multilateral approach to recognition and learner and labour mobility is more efficient and effective than bilateral arrangements which could alienate Pacific Nations with less advanced quality assurance systems
- That a regional approach to recognition, portability of qualifications and labour mobility is best facilitated through a central focal and coordinating point
- Nations have the legal remit to quality assurance TVET and Higher Education sectors within their respective countries
- National competent QA bodies have the capacity to quality assure the qualifications system
- National competent QA bodies have strong internal review processes of their own activities
- Individual providers have the capacity to deliver quality education and training, and to undertake robust internal quality assurance processes.

An outline of the program logic is as follows:

Goal	Pacific model, as a regional initiative, supports recognition of qualifications and occupations across the Pacific and beyond
End of program outcomes	<p>Pacific Nations have ownership of Pacific model</p> <p>Increased trust of QA decisions across QA bodies</p> <p>Increased portability of qualifications and occupations</p> <p>Increased recognition of graduate outcomes and qualifications</p>
Intermediate outcomes	<p>Improved engagement and commitment to the regional model</p> <p>Improved QA processes and harmonisation across Pacific QA bodies</p> <p>Increased use of regional qualifications</p> <p>Increased harmonisation of processes for recognition of qualifications</p>

A future Pacific model should continue to promote qualifications and quality assurance in the Pacific through:

- A focus on the development of regional qualifications (occupational standards, assessment standards, qualification completion rules, and PQF level) to facilitate benchmarking and recognition of qualifications, occupations and skills across the Pacific and beyond⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Countries can either utilise these regional qualifications and supplement for national accreditation purposes or benchmark their existing qualifications to these regional qualifications. A simple way to promote the recognition of these qualifications

- A focus on fostering a high level of trust and accountability by its members by referencing NQFs and NQAFs to the PQF and PQAF, which is fit-for-purpose, given the size and scope of the qualifications systems and appropriate level of engagement by relevant stakeholders
- A focus on fostering a high level of trust and accountability by its members to be facilitated by clear and unambiguous agreed quality assurance processes, including:
 - A robust self-assessment process for competent body recognition for entry onto the register
 - Strengthening internal self-review and evaluation of competent bodies and by requiring external quality evaluations on a periodic basis.
- A focus on supporting mutual recognition of competent body decisions through:
 - Harmonising processes in regards to accreditation of qualifications, registration of providers and approval to deliver processes across countries
 - Harmonising benchmarking and recognition of qualification processes.
- Having strategies for badging and promotion of the revised Pacific model to strengthen its profile across the Pacific and internationally, beyond its members. This may include (but is not limited to) using a Diploma Supplement model and/or logo on qualifications based on regional occupational standards.
- Including governance arrangements:
 - Whereby a governing committee is established, with all PIF countries and territories members having equal voting status, to foster ownership and engagement⁵⁵
 - With an intent to engage other countries in the greater Pacific region by encouraging observer status
 - That distances donors from the management and operations of the initiative.
- Receiving support from a small secretariat to provide strategic focus and operational support
- Continuing to strengthen its relationship with other Regional Qualifications Frameworks, such as the AQR and the EQF, and with national qualifications frameworks of key receiving countries (e.g. Australia and New Zealand).

Refer to Appendix 8 for details of a proposed future Pacific model, including timelines.

3.3 Pre-conditions to the model

As mentioned in the program logic, some identified pre-conditions are crucial to the success of a future Pacific model. Progress of the PRQS is intrinsically linked to participating Pacific Nations' progress in terms of quality assurance in the TVET and Higher Education sectors.

Within this context, Pacific Nations need to have:

- The legal remit to quality assure TVET and Higher Education sectors, e.g. within their respective legislation

is to ensure that the PRQS website includes in detail the occupational and assessment standards, and the qualification completion rules on the website, and that certificates issued at a national level could include details of the qualifications relationship to the regional qualification.

⁵⁵ Australia and New Zealand representatives have not been considered members of the PRQS. They will need to make their position clear in terms of whether they are members of the future model, or non-voting members, or observers.

- The associated processes to undertake the key functions, e.g. documented in regulations, policies and procedures in relation to accreditation of qualifications, approval and monitoring (registration) of providers, costing schedules, complaints and appeals processes
- Personnel to manage the key functions and make accreditation and registration decisions⁵⁶
- The capacity to outsource technical services through a third party to undertake the work, e.g. another competent QA body in the region could undertake accreditation and registration activity and make a recommendation to the Pacific Nation competent QA body
- The capacity to undertake rigorous internal quality assurance and review of its own processes.

These pre-conditions are relevant to all Pacific Nations with emerging QA processes, like Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Tuvalu, who do not have the legislative basis to quality assure or to take responsibility for post-secondary education and training. It is especially relevant where work is underway in current bilateral development programs and where the legal remit and the competent QA body capacity is not evident or weak.

Pacific Nations also need to have in place individual providers that have the capacity to deliver quality education and training, and to undertake robust internal quality assurance processes. Capacity to deliver includes capacity to access curriculum, equipment and facilities, qualified trainers and assessors, documented and implemented quality management systems, and ability to undertake internal quality assurance and review processes.

Support for the pre-conditions

Support for these pre-conditions could take a range of forms and include:

- Bilateral support programs could shift their focus from grass roots capacity development at provider level to a broader perspective that ensures that the legal framework, structures and processes are in place for education and training to be quality assured. The importance of the legal remit of the government, the capacity of a competent QA body, and a comprehensive view of a qualifications system⁵⁷ should be clearly understood as quality assurance has not only an economic outcome within country, but also within the region.
- APTC could provide capacity development support to providers. This could include providing access to curriculum, developing curriculum to meet QA body requirements, training trainers and assessors, developing quality management systems, developing capacity to undertake internal quality review, preparing for registration audits, and benchmarking of existing provider programs either to regional qualifications or to other recognised qualifications (e.g. Australia and New Zealand).
- APTC could also undertake provider quality reviews (e.g. as in SINU in the Solomon Islands) to provide clear advice to providers as to actions required to raise the quality of education and training provision.
- USP could provide similar assistance to that of APTC, especially in the areas of providing advice to higher education providers in relation to developing curriculum, developing quality management systems and internal quality review for higher education.

⁵⁶ This is often through a competent QA body enshrined in legislation, but may be a small unit of 1–2 people within a government department.

⁵⁷ Qualifications system includes all aspects of a country's activity that result in the recognition of learning. These systems include the means of developing and operationalising national or regional policy on qualifications, institutional arrangements, quality assurance processes, assessment and awarding processes, skills recognition and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. Qualifications systems may be more or less integrated and coherent. Coles & Werquin (2006), p. 22.

- Existing Pacific QA bodies could also provide assistance to emerging QA bodies, facilitated through funding from bilateral support programs.

There is a need for DFAT to:

- Take into consideration, when funding bilateral programs and in bilateral program negotiations, the comprehensive nature of education and training provision and qualifications systems, the impact of a quality assurance approach, and the link to regional initiatives, such as the future Pacific model
- Promote the use of the future Pacific model (especially the PQF and PQAF) through inclusion in bilateral or multilateral agreements related to occupations or occupational standards (e.g. mutual recognition agreements) or in benchmarking of qualification activities (either regionally or internationally).

It would be desirable if both Australia and New Zealand provided greater clarity of their role in the future Pacific model. Both countries are included within the PIF grouping of countries, are members of SPC, and will also be signatories to the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus.

3.4 Support to the model

To support a future Pacific model the secretariat staff will need a strong understanding of qualifications frameworks, regional frameworks, quality assurance and recognition. However, the focus of the model shifts from providing advice and assistance, and undertaking quality assurance activities to working closely with the nominated chairperson and coordinating the functions of the Pacific model. PRQS staff members are already in place, but a job review and analysis will be required to ensure that the mix of skills and knowledge are suitable for the future proposed model. Once the future model is agreed then the number of staff can be determined can be ascertained; however, the likelihood would be no more than two staff members.

Regardless, secretariat staff will require further mentoring and support from a selected technical advisory group to implement a proposed Pacific model. This technical advisory group could take a range of forms and be accessed on an ad hoc or semi-permanent basis. The technical advisory group could provide ongoing mentoring, opportunities for professional dialogue, strategic advice, and specialist services for the development of concept notes and guidelines, to assist in operationalising benchmarking and referencing activities, and assist in workshops and meetings. All development of documents and processes would include participation from the secretariat for capacity development purposes, engagement and ownership. The technical advisory group should consist of a small group of specialists (especially with a strong understanding of qualifications frameworks, quality assurance and of harmonisation mechanisms). An information technology specialist would be required in the early stages to assist in the enhancement of the register to be able to provide additional details of qualifications listed.

In the extended model (Appendix 8), additional development of internal databases would also be required for international recognition services (international qualifications systems overviews, and records management of recognition services). However, providing international recognition services in an extended model requires a level of financial support that may not be available in the immediate future.

Currently, the PRQS team resides within EQAP, which at this time is a logical site, given EQAP's role and the level of administrative support it provides. Other future options include being housed with a national quality assurance agency (e.g. FHEC) or housed with the chair of the future Pacific model (this is on a moving basis as is the case with the Asia Pacific Quality Network) or housed with a regional body (e.g. USP or even APTC). There are pros and cons for these options, but regardless of where it resides it should ensure a close liaison with the future model's chairperson.

3.5 Funding and sustainability

Any proposal for a funding the future Pacific model is predicated on the aim that the model is self-funding after 8 years, through Pacific Nation financial contributions and any fee for service activity.

In the immediate future, Australia DFAT could seek additional donor partners for the support of the future Pacific model. For Australia, the most logical choice for a donor partner is New Zealand, as there is: a strong relationship between the NQFs; they have strong trade and services agreements; both countries are destinations for Pacific Nations labour and learner mobility; and, they are members of PIF and SPC as well as the broader Pacific region.

Given that there are limited potential funds, there are limited options available to progress the PRQS into the future. The following approach is proposed:

1. The biggest expense is that of human resources (staffing costs). The proposed future model has less focus on implementing external quality assurance and audit of agencies and more emphasis on coordination of the model's activities and providing secretariat support to the governing committee. Therefore, future staffing could be restricted to 1 (at the most 2) staff members.
2. If the Pacific model resides with EQAP or a QA body then co-opting internal services (administrative, financial and information technology support) would assist on-going support staffing costs.
3. Limiting the focus of the future model to a strategic and operational role (i.e. excluding providing recognition services and advice):
 - Facilitating a common understanding and harmonising activities related to recognition and quality assurance, and to building trust through referencing NQFs and benchmarking quality assurance arrangements
 - Facilitating adaptation of existing national qualifications to become regional qualifications (including occupational standards, assessment standards, qualification completion rules and PQF level), rather than developing new regional qualifications.⁵⁸
 - Maintenance (and enhanced transparency) of the register.

The governing committee could seek additional donor support for specific regional initiatives from other aid agencies, such as UNESCO, ILO and World Bank. This could include the development of regional occupational standards or qualifications, and any benchmarking activities of pre-existing national qualifications to these standards/qualifications and/or international standards/qualifications.

Transitioning to a new model – from one led by EQAP to one governed by the Pacific Nations – will require a concentrated input over the next 3–5 years. Initially, efforts should focus on developing a revised model design with the Pacific Nations and on the establishment of the governing committee and protocols. Once established, the focus should be on increasing the portability of qualifications and occupations through the development of agreed regional qualifications, and benchmarking of existing national qualifications to the regional qualifications. This focus on portability of qualifications is linked to competent QA body recognition processes and the need to harmonise recognition processes. Not all Pacific Nations have established recognition processes (although Fiji Higher Education Commission and Samoa Qualifications Authority are active in this area). Establishing similar recognition processes in Pacific Nations with emerging QA systems will raise the quality and quantity of their decisions. This harmonisation of processes will enhance the opportunities for recognising other country qualifications.

For promoting internal and external quality assurance of competent QA bodies and any referencing and benchmarking activities, the responsibility (and costs) will fall on competent QA bodies. Providing some funding for external review (although the current model places a costing on an audit by EQAP) and

⁵⁸ To develop new regional qualifications would require a higher costing threshold than adapting pre-existing qualifications.

referencing of NQF and benchmarking quality assurance processes or national qualifications may also be a priority to offset the financial burden and provide an incentive to participate.

APTC in its regional role could assist in the benchmarking of Pacific Nations national qualifications to other qualifications (e.g. Australia and New Zealand) to assist in the development and agreement of regional qualifications. APTC could also assist in benchmarking activities and support QA agencies to benchmark their national qualifications to those on the Register or emerging regional qualifications.

Bilateral programs could also support qualification benchmarking activities, fund the development of national qualifications (for the purposes of regional adaptation in line with the regionally agreed protocol),⁵⁹ and promote the uptake of regional qualifications through funding incentives.

3.6 Recommendations

The review concluded that there is still a need, or even a greater need, for a future Pacific model and that the full potential of the current PRQS has not been realised. It is timely to review and shift the focus of the PRQS and provide some stability and clear direction for the next 3–5 years.

It is recommended that DFAT:

1. Commit to funding a future Pacific model for the next 3–5 years, and to seeking support from New Zealand as a donor partner
2. Confirm with the Pacific Nations a revised model that includes:
 - a. Development of regional qualifications (occupational standards, assessment standards, and qualification completion rules, PQF level) to facilitate benchmarking and recognition of qualifications, occupations and skills across the Pacific and beyond⁶⁰
 - b. Fostering a high level of trust and accountability by its members by referencing NQFs and NQAFs to the PQF and PQAF, and which is fit-for-purpose, given the size and scope of the qualifications systems and appropriate level of engagement by relevant stakeholders
 - c. Fostering a high level of trust and accountability by its members to be facilitated by clear and unambiguous agreed quality assurance processes, including:
 - i. A robust self-assessment process for competent QA body recognition for entry onto the register
 - ii. Strengthening internal self-review and evaluation of competent QA bodies and requiring external quality evaluations on a periodic basis.
 - d. Supporting mutual recognition of competent QA body decisions through:
 - i. Harmonising processes in regards to accreditation of qualifications, registration of providers and approval to deliver processes across countries
 - ii. Harmonising benchmarking and recognition of qualification processes.
 - e. Having strategies for badging and promotion of the revised Pacific model to strengthen its profile across the Pacific and internationally, beyond the key stakeholders. This may include (but is not limited to) using a Diploma Supplement model and/or logo on qualifications based on regional occupational standards.

⁵⁹ To be developed

⁶⁰ Countries can either utilise these regional qualifications and supplement for national accreditation purposes or benchmark their existing qualifications to these regional qualifications. A simple way to promote the recognition of these qualifications is to ensure that the PRQS website includes in detail the occupational and assessment standards, and the qualification completion rules. In addition, certificates issued at a national level could include details of the qualification's relationship to the regional qualification.

3. Work with participating Pacific Nations to confirm revised governance arrangements:
 - a. Whereby a governing committee is established, with all PIF countries and territories members having equal voting status, to foster ownership and engagement⁶¹
 - b. With an intent to engage other countries in the greater Pacific region by encouraging observer status
 - c. That distances donors from the management and operations of the initiative
 - d. That are supported by a small secretariat to provide strategic focus and operational assistance.
4. Ensure that the future Pacific model:
 - a. Is documented in a briefing paper that outlines the scope, purpose and structure of the model, as well as competent body obligations, governing committee roles and functions, and secretariat roles and functions
 - b. Is designed and agreed by PIF countries and territories' competent QA body representatives as members of the governing committee
 - c. Has a 3-, 5- and 8-year plan with final transition from a donor-funded program to being supported by the broader Pacific region and supplemented by fee for service activities
 - d. Is accepted and confirmed by PIF education ministers, trade ministers and economic ministers, with the governance arrangements requiring reporting to the three sets of ministers.
5. Confirm funding for a technical advisory team to assist in fine tuning the design and providing support and advice to the Secretariat and governing committee over the longer term
6. Strengthen the use of the future Pacific model (especially the PQF and PQAF) through inclusion in bilateral or multilateral agreements related to occupations or occupational standards (e.g. mutual recognition agreements) or in benchmarking of qualification activities (either regionally or internationally).

In addition, DFAT should promote associated pre-conditions required within Pacific Nations, by:

7. Working with Australia Posts in the Pacific and bilateral programs to establish the pre-conditions, such as ensuring country competent QA bodies have the legal remit to quality assure post-secondary sector, have the capacity to implement processes and manage the key functions and to undertake rigorous internal quality assurance and review of their own processes
8. Working with APTC to support key or strategic providers to improve their capacity to deliver quality training and assessment, and meet external quality standards
9. Considering funding to USP to assist higher education institutions in Pacific Nations to improve internal quality assurance and curriculum accreditation arrangements
10. Working with bilateral programs to coordinate and rationalise the development of national qualifications to avoid duplication, promote sharing and using the protocols for developing regional qualifications so there is an agreement of minimum requirements for an occupation or qualification outcomes across the region
11. Working with bilateral programs to incentivise uptake of regional qualifications.

⁶¹ Australia and New Zealand representatives have not been considered members of the PRQS. They will need to make their position clear in terms of whether they are members of the future model, or non-voting members, or observers.

Appendix 1: Terms of Reference

The purpose of the review is to

- Identify lessons learned from Pacific Register of Qualifications Standards' (PRQS) efforts to facilitate the benchmarking of Pacific qualifications against international standards and to facilitate Pacific learner and labour mobility.
- Recommend to DFAT a future model of support that will promote greater institutional and program compliance with quality standards, foster international recognition of qualifications, and facilitate Pacific learner and labour mobility.

The review will focus on the following areas

- What happened (what worked well/less well; what was achieved)?
- So what else needs to be done? (is it enough, relevant?)
- What now (recommendations)?

The DAC Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance (effectiveness, relevance, efficiency and sustainability) were to guide the review.

Key Evaluation Questions (KEQ)

Effectiveness: (Have we achieved what we set out to do?)

KEQ 1: Is PRQS contributing sufficiently to benchmarking of Pacific qualifications, and is this facilitating improved learner and labour mobility?

- To what extent, and how, has PRQS contributed to strengthening compliance of Pacific tertiary institution and program compliance with quality standards?
- To what extent, and how, has PRQS facilitated increased international recognition of Pacific qualifications?
- To what extent, and how, has PRQS increased opportunities for learner mobility?
- To what extent, and how, has PRQS facilitated increased mobility of labour?
- Relevance: (Are we doing the right things? Are we working in the right way?)

KEQ 2: To what extent, and how, is PRQS relevant to Pacific context and needs?

- To what extent, and how, is international recognition of qualifications necessary and/or sufficient to facilitating increased mobility of labour in the Pacific context?
- To what extent, and how, are the PRQS outcomes, approach and implementation arrangements relevant in delivering improved learner and labour mobility?
- What are the key gaps or limitations of current support to strengthen international recognition of Pacific qualifications and facilitate increased mobility of labour?
- Would there be value in including other development partners in this program? Eg NZ

Additional Evaluation Questions

Efficiency:

- How efficiently does SPC/EQAP manage the PRQS program – stakeholder engagement, program delivery, financial and people management?

- Value for money – how (well) has DFAT funding been used?

Sustainability:

- Does SPC (or any other body) have the capacity to continue PRQS in the absence of donor project funding?
- Other than DFAT, are there any other potential funding sources?

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E):

- How robust is the PRQS M&E framework? What are the evaluation criteria?
- Does the M&E framework allow SPC/EQAP to assess program effectiveness?

Recommendations

The team should recommend to DFAT options for a future model of support that will promote greater institutional and program-level compliance with quality standards, foster increased international recognition of qualifications, and facilitate Pacific learner and labour mobility, including consideration of:

- Key reforms required to effectively deliver on outcomes associated with PRQS (e.g. increasing political and technical influence and authority)
- Likely impact of PACER Plus Trade Agreement on mutual recognition of qualifications and labour mobility in the region
- Leveraging existing Regional program investments.

Appendix 2: Methodology

The review included:

- Documentary analysis of key reports related to the PRQS program. These reports were provided to DFAT on a six-monthly basis and included two over-arching program conclusion reports (November 2008 to June 2013, and November 2008 to June 2016).
- Documentary analysis of PRQS reviews and regional quality assurance reviews
- Documentary analysis of reports, strategic plans and frameworks related to the Pacific
- Analysis of minutes of meetings, for example, Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP) board, PRQS advisory board
- Analysis of key initiatives within the region
- Review of regional labour mobility data and student mobility data
- Interviews with stakeholders; conducted over a two-week period. A list of interviewees is included in Appendix 3.
- Responses of a written survey provided to Pacific Island countries and territories.

The data collection period was limited to two weeks in country in the Pacific. The review team undertook all face-to-face and teleconference interviews, except for one teleconference interview with the Solomon Islands Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, which was undertaken by the team leader. Interviews were sought with Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus representatives from Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) New Zealand, and with Fiji National University, but could not be secured during the data collection period.

Although the written survey was provided to key contacts in all Pacific Island countries and territories; however, only six surveys were returned.⁶² This response rate was not as high as the team would have liked, but responses did cover those countries with established competent bodies and frameworks, those working directly with the Accreditation and Standards Unit at EQAP, and those with limited connection to the PRQS at this stage. Comments received from the responses are included throughout the report.

⁶² Survey responses were received from: Ministry of Education Cook Islands, Fiji Higher Education Commission, South Pacific Association of Theological Schools, Samoa Qualifications Authority, Ministry of Education Palau, Department of Education Niue. Tokelau representatives made contact with the team leader, but did not respond directly to the survey as they considered that they had had little contact with the PRQS to be able provide useful feedback.

Appendix 3: Interviewees

Name	Role	Organisation
Dr Michelle Belisle	Director	EQAP, Secretariat of the Pacific Community
Dr Uhila-moe-Langi Fasi	Senior Educational Assessment Specialist – Research	EQAP, Secretariat of the Pacific Community
Mr Lemalu Lafi Sanerivi	Senior Educational Assessment Specialist –(PRQS Project Team Leader)	EQAP, Secretariat of the Pacific Community
Ms Selai Qereqeretabua	Educational Assessment Officer (EAO) - Qualifications	EQAP, Secretariat of the Pacific Community
Mr Rajendra Prasad	Education Officer (EO) – Quality Assurance	EQAP, Secretariat of the Pacific Community
Mr Ram Anoj Sharma	Finance Officer	EQAP, Secretariat of the Pacific Community
Dr Audrey Aumua	Deputy Director General (Suva)	Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Suva
Thierry Nervale	Deputy Director – Transport, Economic Development Division	Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Suva
Dr Sarah Hemstock	Team leader, USP-SPC EU-PacTVET Project, Economic Development Division	Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Suva
Dr Tess Martin	USP-SPC EU-PacTVET Project, Economic Development Division	Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Suva
Mrs Katalina Pasiale Taloka	Director	Education Department, Ministry of Education, Youth & Sports, Tuvalu
Mr Peteli Paulo		Education Department, Ministry of Education, Youth & Sports, Tuvalu
Ms Elizabeth Campbell-Dorning	Director, Qualifications Recognition Policy, International Mobility Branch International Group	Australian Government Department of Education and Training
Ms Evanor Palacmcmiken	Director, PACER Plus Trade Negotiations Section	Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Mr Phil Holmes	Assistant Director, PACER Plus Trade Negotiations Section	Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Mr Molia Mata'u	Acting CEO	Samoa Qualifications Authority, Samoa

Name	Role	Organisation
Ms Melesete Lino Mariner	Assistant CEO, Quality Assurance Division	Samoa Qualifications Authority, Samoa
Mr Mose Asani	Assistant Chief Executive Office, Corporate Services Division	Samoa Qualifications Authority, Samoa
Ms Lealiilano Easter Manila Silipa	ACEO, Research Policy and Planning Division	Samoa Qualifications Authority, Samoa
Mrs Salote Rabuka	Director	Fiji Higher Education Commission, Fiji
Mr Eci Naisele	Team leader (Professional Services Unit)	Fiji Higher Education Commission, Fiji
Mr Pita Waqawai	Professional Officer – National Qualification Implementation	Fiji Higher Education Commission, Fiji
Ms Ani Lacanivalu	Professional Officer – Accreditation	Fiji Higher Education Commission, Fiji
Ms Mere Ledua	Programme Assistant – Accreditation	Fiji Higher Education Commission, Fiji
Mr Martin Roy	Senior Trade Advisor	Office of the Chief Trade Adviser (OCTA), Vanuatu
Mr Steve Siro	Trade Policy Officer	Office of the Chief Trade Adviser (OCTA), Vanuatu
Mr Sailosi Kepa	Trade Policy Officer, Economic Governance Programme,	Pacific Island Forum Secretariat, Suva
Mr Filipe Jitoko	Social Policy Adviser	Pacific Island Forum Secretariat, Suva
Dr Akanisi Kedrayate-Tabualevu	Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Law and Education	The University of the South Pacific
Ms Aiolupotea Lili Tuioti	Chief Advisor Pasifika, International and Policy	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
Ms Karen Chalmers	Director International and Policy, International and Policy	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
Dr Franco Rodie	Permanent Secretary	Ministry of Education, Human Resource Development, Solomon Islands
Mr David Lambukly	Chief Executive Officer	Vanuatu Qualifications Authority, Vanuatu
Pesetā Dr Desmond Mene Lee-Hang	Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic and Research)	National University of Samoa
Ms Tea Tepora Wright	Director, Academic Quality Unit	National University of Samoa

Name	Role	Organisation
Ms Denise O'Brien	Chief Executive Officer	Australia-Pacific Technical College (APTC)
Ms Carol-Anne Blecich	Executive Director - Strategy	Australia-Pacific Technical College (APTC)
Rev Dr Steve Currow	Principal	Fulton College (and South Pacific Association of Theological Schools representative)

Appendix 4: The PRQS model

Purpose of the PRQS

The PRQS aimed to:

- Support the mobility of Pacific learners and labour through a common regional quality standard and recognition arrangement for either qualifications or occupational standards that foster and sustain regional integration.
- Facilitate informed decisions and choices about comparable and recognised qualifications, accrediting agencies, education and training institutions, professional status of workers, and regional occupational standards in the Pacific region.⁶³

The PRQS is a database and comprises options to include:

- Quality assured qualifications
- Pacific traditional knowledge and indigenous skills
- Professional licensing and occupational standards
- Regional benchmarks, such as those related to literacy, numeracy and life skills for basic education.

The database also hosts information on accrediting agencies, quality assurance instruments used by each country and an overview of the educational systems of each of the participating Pacific Nations. Functionality of the database is limited and information is not available on all these areas unless full access rights are provided.

History of the PRQS model

The PRQS program became operational February 2009. The initial goal of the program was the development and maintenance of a Pacific Regional Qualifications Register. The register title changed to the Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards (PRQS) to better reflect its various components.

The proposal to set up a regional qualifications framework was first raised in 2001 at a meeting of Ministers of Education of PICTs in Auckland. During various discussions from 2001 to 2007, the Ministers of Education in the Pacific confirmed that:

- A Pacific Qualifications Register be developed as a first step towards a Pacific Regional Qualifications Framework (Pacific Heads of Education meeting 2004)
- The South Pacific Board of Education Assessment be tasked to coordinate the development of the register (2009).⁶⁴

Initial 5-year funding (November 2008 – January 2013) was provided by the Australian government through AusAID for the development of the PRQS. The second phase of funding was for the support of the Accreditation Unit, now called the Accreditation and Standards Unit, which implements the PRQS program. This unit sits within the Education Quality and Assessment Program, formerly the Secretariat of

⁶³ SPC 2015a, p. 6.

⁶⁴ SPBEA was originally an autonomous body, which merged into the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) in 2010.

the Pacific Board of Educational Assessment (SPBEA).⁶⁵ Australia's financial support for the second phase was extended for another year to June 2014 and subsequently for another two years until June 2016.

There have been two extensive reviews of PRQS commissioned by the Australian Aid Program and by SPC. They were:

- Pacific Qualifications Register Independent Preliminary Progress Review: Final Report (Eadie 2010)
- Review of the Secretariat of the Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA) (Assessment Research Centre 2013).

In addition, an Australian Aid Program related review of quality assurance mechanisms in the Pacific commented on the PRQS and its role:

- Review of Quality Assurance Mechanisms for Post-Secondary Education in the Pacific (Bateman 2013).

The first review looked into the progress of PRQS within the first phase and provided recommendations related to governance, communication and engagement of stakeholders. The second review looked into the quality assurance role of PRQS in the broader context of SPBEA/EQAP. The regional review looked into the potential role of PRQS within the region. All three reviews resulted in a number of recommendations for PRQS and SPBEA/EQAP, some of which have been implemented.

DFAT and the EQAP, in August 2015, reviewed and clarified the PRQS program logic to refocus the program. The resulting redefined goal for PRQS was to strengthen Pacific quality assurance systems that facilitate the international recognition of Pacific qualifications and opportunities for learner and labour mobility. The premise of the program is that mutual recognition of qualifications will drive labour and learner mobility, which will in turn stimulate economic development.

The logic identified:

- Two end of program outcomes
 - Increased scope for job/study matching
 - Increased recognition of Pacific qualifications.
- Intermediate outcomes
 - Graduates and employers apply the standards and frameworks
 - Increased comparability of Pacific qualifications
 - Standards are understood and consistently applied
 - Institutions understand the role and benefits of quality assurance and recognized qualifications.

PRQS model

The PRQS aims to enhance and support regional cooperation in supporting the recognition of qualifications and learning, support the mobility of the region's learners and labour, and support the implementation of regional trade agreements.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ In 2013, the name of SPBEA changed to the Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP) to reflect its shift in focus from assessment to a more expanded mandate towards quality in education. EQAP currently sits as a program of the Director General's office of SPC.

⁶⁶ SPC 2015a

To promote these aims the PRQS model links a regional qualifications framework and a regional quality assurance framework to that of a register of recognised agencies, approved qualifications and providers.

The Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF) is a common reference framework to link national qualifications frameworks of participating Pacific Island Forum countries and territories. It aimed to function similar to that of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

Amongst a range of purposes, it aims to:

- Enhance international comparability and recognition of Pacific qualifications to facilitate portability of learning and integration of labour mobility into the international labour market
- Provide a platform for stakeholder communication and strengthening multi-sectoral cooperation.⁶⁷

The PQF also has additional features (e.g. qualification descriptors and credit profile descriptors) that enable its use as a national qualifications framework for those countries that do not have the capacity to develop their own national qualifications framework.

The PRQS model is both complex and multi-faceted. The PRQS model goes beyond that of a common reference framework and includes:

- A quality assurance framework
- A register of quality assured agencies and qualifications.

The quality assurance framework includes a set of quality assurance standards for agencies (including the registration of providers and accreditation processes of qualifications) and minimum standards for providers. The quality assurance framework aims to:

- Improve the quality assurance functions and responsibilities of accrediting agencies
- Cultivate and maintain a culture of quality and excellence within Pacific institutions of learning.⁶⁸

The quality assurance framework ensures that qualifications entered on the regional Register meet agreed standards. All qualifications entered onto the register are referenced against the PQF, for example, a PQF level profile is included in the information on the register.

The PRQS model also includes options for additional components:

- Professional licensing and occupational standards
- Traditional knowledge and indigenous skills
- Regional benchmarks (e.g. literacy, teacher standards).⁶⁹

Funding and staffing of the PRQS

Australia has funded the PRQS from its inception and funding was extended to the end of December 2016. The following table outlines the monies allocated over this period.

⁶⁷ SPS 2015b

⁶⁸ SPC 2015c

⁶⁹ Some of these domains have change over time.

Table 2: PRQS budget

Dates	Amounts (AUD)
RQR Budget	
15 June 2007	120,000.00
PRQS Budget	
25 November 2008	330,774.00
28 August 2009	244,592.00
4 May 2010	122,310.00
17 May 2010	122,310.00
24 September 2010	234,358.00
2 June 2011	237,522.00
9 February 2012	384,826.00
6 March 2013	144,140.00
22 January 2014	200,000.00
27 March 2014	150,000.00
15 October 2014	350,000.00
10 June 2015	337,567.00
19 April 2016	80,000.00
Total	3,058,399

The figure below outlines the allocation of expenditure of the period up to 2016.

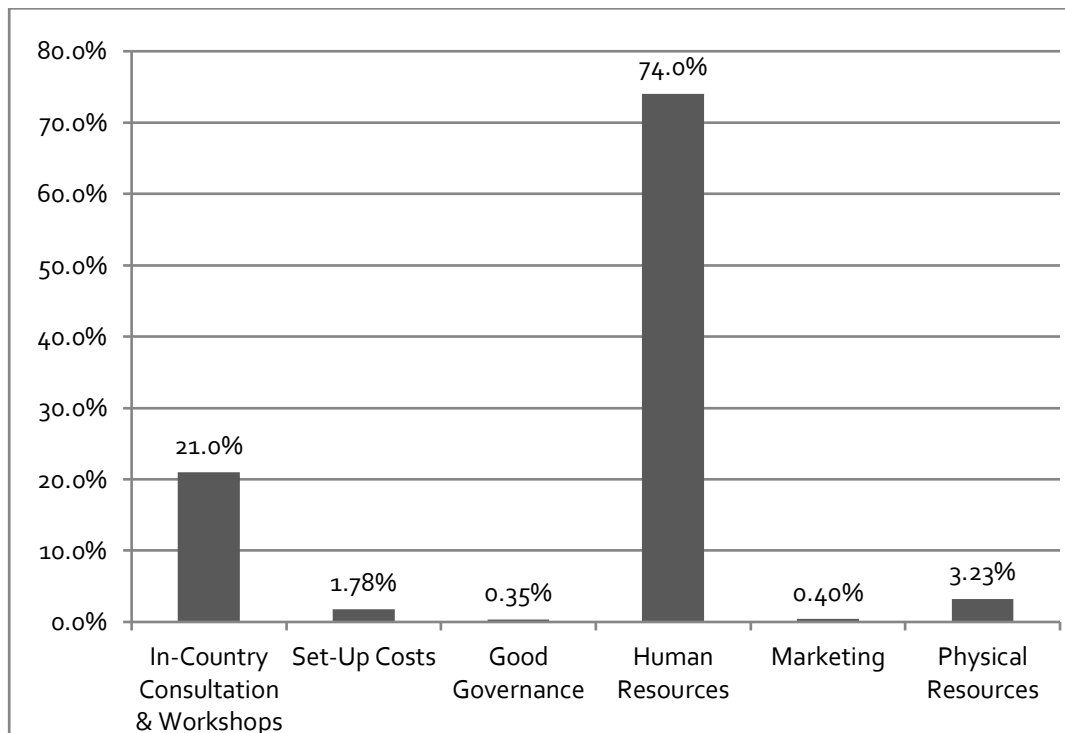


Figure 1: Allocation of expenditure

As can be seen in the figure above, over the funding period, the two most significant costs were staffing salaries and benefits, and workshops/meetings and consultancy fees, with human resources costs being 74% of the overall expenditure.

Current staffing includes:

- One Senior Education Specialist (Accreditation and Standards)
- Two Educational Assessment Officers (Qualifications, and Quality).

Workshops and in-country consultation costs, and consultancy fees accounted for 21% of expenditure. Since inception, there have been regular meetings and workshops, at regional, sub-regional and national levels. Regional workshops included those focussing on quality assurance (2011) and mutual recognition (2012), labour mobility (2013). Regional consultation meetings occurred in 2009, 2011, 2016. The team faced financial issues within 2015 due to a clerical error on an estimated 'roll over' which resulted in underfunding for that period. This has affected the type and level of activity that the Accreditation Unit could undertake.

The remainder of expenditure was just under 6% and included set up costs, good governance, marketing and physical resources. Good governance included membership to quality assurance networks (e.g. membership of Asia Pacific Quality Network [APQN] and International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education [INQAAHE]). More recently, savings have been gained through shared support services (e.g. information technology support and administrative assistance) with EQAP through Secretariat of the Pacific Community core funding to EQAP. These in-kind contributions should be acknowledged.

Progress to date

The register

A key focus of the PROS is the register itself and much of its perceived success (or lack thereof) has been measured by the number of registered qualifications or standards on the database. The PROS recognizes the following competent bodies:

1. Regional accrediting agencies:
 - The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) of the United States.
2. National accrediting agencies:
 - Fiji Higher Education Commission
 - New Zealand Qualifications Authority (it quality assures Institutions and Programs in Cook Islands and Niue)
 - Papua New Guinea's Office of Higher Education
 - Samoa Qualifications Authority
 - Tonga National Qualifications and Accrediting Board
 - Vanuatu Qualifications Authority.
3. Sectoral accrediting agencies for:
 - Theological education: South Pacific Association of Theological Schools
 - Maritime Training: SPC's Transport Programme (Economic Development Division).⁷⁰

⁷⁰ SPC 2015a.

It was not clear whether the processes for populating the register were benchmarked against processes used by other similar regional registers that exist internationally e.g. European Tertiary Education Register.

In terms of qualifications that have been accredited by these competent bodies, the most recent figures are noted in the table below. The population of the register is dependent on the preparedness of competent bodies and the capacity to quality assure qualification accreditation.

Table 3: PRQS qualifications entries

PQF Level	APTC	Fiji	PNG	Samoa	Tonga	Total
10						
9						
8						
7						
6					4	4
5		1			5	6
4	2	31		13	8	54
3	15			14	1	30
2				14		14
1				2		
Total	17	32	14*	43	18	124

Source: ASU May 2016. *PQF level unassigned.

The number of qualifications in each sector is summarised in the table below. Duplication of qualifications at a similar level is noted in a range of sectors, including agriculture, automotive, carpentry, cookery, electrical engineering, fabrication and welding, fitting and machining, heating and air conditioning, plumbing, and tourism and hospitality.

Table 4: PRQS qualifications by sector and level

Qualification Sector	APTC	Fiji	PNG	Samoa	Tonga
Agriculture		1 (L4)		4 (L1,2,3,4)	4 (L4, 5)
Aircraft Maintenance		1 (L4)			
Automotive		3 (L4)		3 (L2,3,4)	
Baking and Patisserie		2 (L4)			
Building & Construction	2 (L3)				
Business & Commerce					3 (L4, 6)
Carpentry	1 (L3)	5 (L4)		3 (L2,3,4)	1 (L4)
Cookery	1 (L3)	2 (L4)		1 (L3)	
Education				1 (L4)	
Electrical Engineering	1 (L3)	3 (L4)		3 (L2,3,4)	1 (L4)
Electronic Engineering		1 (L4)			
Mechanical Engineering	3 (L3)				1 (L4)
Fabrication & Welding	1 (L3)	2 (L4)		3 (L2,3,4)	
Fitting & Machining		2 (L4)		3 (L2,3,4)	

Qualification Sector	APTC	Fiji	PNG	Samoa	Tonga
Health Science	1 (L3)				1 (6)
Heating and Air-Conditioning		1 (L4)		3 (L2,3,4)	
Heavy Commercial Vehicle		1 (L4)			
Horticulture				2 (L2,4)	
Information Technology			3		2 (L5,6)
Marine Engineering		1 (L5)		3 (L2,3,4)	
Maritime				3 (L2,3,4)	
Mobile Plant		1 (L4)			
Navigation & Seamanship		1 (L4)			
Office Administration			3	2 (L2,3)	1 (L3)
Panel Beating & Spray Painting		1 (L4)			
Plumbing	1 (L3)	2 (L4)		3 (L2,3,4)	
Printery		1 (L4)			
Saw Doctoring		1 (L4)			
Security					2 (L5)
Social Services	4 (L3,4)				
Tourism & Hospitality	2 (L3)			5 (L2,3,4)	2 (L4)
Trade Foundation Skills				1 (L1)	
Training & Assessment			8		

Source: ASU May 2016.

Other components of the PRQS (such as Professional licensing and occupational standards, and traditional knowledge and indigenous skills) have not been populated.

The standards in the education component of the register include regional benchmarks in literacy and numeracy, regional standards for school leaders, and regional standards for school teachers.

Support to countries and territories

The Accreditation and Standards Unit is currently supporting Kiribati and Tuvalu in the accreditation and registration processes within country. The Accreditation and Standards Unit has also supported the Solomon Islands in the initial drafting of its NQF and quality assurance arrangements.

Appendix 5: International context

Regional qualifications frameworks

A regional qualifications framework or a common reference framework is 'a means of enabling one framework of qualifications to relate to others and subsequently for one qualification to relate to others that are normally located in another framework'.⁷¹ Regional common reference frameworks can:

- Deepen integration and harmonisation
- Create a common identity
- Facilitate:
 - Transparency of multiple complex systems
 - Mobility of workers and students
 - Recognition and credit transfer
- Support economic imperatives such as removal of barriers to trade.⁷²

There is considerable variation in the characteristics of regional qualification frameworks; they vary in their purposes, coverage of sectors, design and use.⁷³ There are several regional qualifications frameworks or common reference frameworks at various stages of development or implementation, each with a different focus or emphases that are relevant to this review. These include:

- The *European Qualifications Framework (EQF)* is a translation tool that helps communication and comparison between qualifications systems in Europe. The EQF is a key instrument for the promotion of lifelong learning and its eight levels cover the 'entire span of qualifications, from those achieved at the end of compulsory education to those awarded at the highest level'.⁷⁴ This framework requires each country to undertake a rigorous referencing process of their qualifications framework and system to the EQF that is peer reviewed. The EQF is enshrined in *The Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning* adopted by the European Parliament and the Council on 23 April 2008.
- The *Caribbean Community (CARICOM)*⁷⁵ has established a shared 5-level vocational qualifications framework and has taken a number of initiatives in the development of regional occupational standards and qualifications. The regional association of national quality assurance agencies approves occupational standards and qualifications that developed at a national level and which meet the regional development process and criteria to be identified as regional.⁷⁶ Documentation includes a list of competencies, the completion rules, nominal training hours⁷⁷ and units of competency. This association manages the quality assurance of agencies. CARICOM has recently proposed a 10-level regional qualifications framework to act as a translation device.⁷⁸
- *ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQR)* is a common reference framework that will function as a translation device to enable comparisons of qualifications across participating

⁷¹ Commission of European Communities 2005, p. 13.

⁷² Coles (2012) personal communication as cited in *The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework* (Bateman & Coles 2014)

⁷³ Keevy, Chakroun & Deij (2010), Tuck (2007)

⁷⁴ EQF (2010)

⁷⁵ CARICOM is a grouping of twenty countries – fifteen Member States and five Associate Members. It is a community that aims for economic integration; foreign policy coordination; human and social development; and security.

⁷⁶ They are national qualifications and accepted as regional if requirements are met.

⁷⁷ Which is often seen as a de facto measure of quality

⁷⁸ <http://www.collegesinstitutes.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/CARICOM-Qualifications-Framework.pdf>

ASEAN countries.⁷⁹ The development of this framework was driven by the establishment of an economic community and free trade agreements; and will be linked to mutual recognition agreements. The AQRF endorsement document was endorsed by three ministers (education, trade and economic) from each country to be enacted.

Regional quality assurance frameworks

A key aim of a regional quality assurance framework is to develop mutual understanding of quality and quality assurance of qualifications amongst member countries. In addition, it can act as:

- An instrument to promote and monitor the improvement of member countries' education and training systems
- A reference instrument that outlines benchmarks to help member countries to assess clearly and consistently whether the measures necessary for improving the quality of their education and training systems have been implemented and whether they need to be reviewed.⁸⁰

There are varying models or frameworks at a regional level such as:

- The *European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET*⁸¹ was established through the European Parliament and Council in June 2009. Its key purpose is as 'a reference instrument...to promote and monitor continuous improvement of...VET systems'.⁸² The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework is supported by an active and highly effective community of practice⁸³ (Member States, employers, trade unions and the European Commission) which promotes European collaboration in developing and improving quality assurance.
- *East Asia Summit Technical and Vocational Education and Training Quality Assurance Framework (EAS TVET QAF)* is a recently developed quality assurance framework covering 18 countries.⁸⁴ This framework aims to support countries to promote and monitor the improvement of their quality assurance systems, facilitate cooperation and mutual understanding between member countries and to support other initiatives within and across the region that enhance connectivity, integration, education and labour mobility.⁸⁵
- *International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) Guidelines of Good Practice in Quality Assurance*⁸⁶ is an international standard for agencies and providers, agreed to by its members (e.g. quality assurance agencies or providers). Obligations of members require an external review every five years and the report being made public.
- The *European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*⁸⁷ aims to improve consistency of quality assurance, strengthen procedures for recognition of qualifications, enhance credibility of quality assurance agencies, strengthen trust and assist mutual recognition.

⁷⁹ Bateman & Coles, ASEAN 2014. ASEAN includes 10 countries.

⁸⁰ Bateman, Keating, Gillis, Dyson, Burke & Coles 2012

⁸¹ http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/lifelong_learning/c11108_en.htm

⁸² European Union 2009, p. 2.

⁸³ Refer to www.eqavet.eu

⁸⁴ The 18 member countries of the East Asia Summit (EAS) include the ten Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries (Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam), as well as Australia, China, India, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Russia and the United States.

⁸⁵ Bateman, Keating, Gillis, Dyson, Burke & Coles 2012

⁸⁶ [http://www.inqaahe.org/admin/files/assets/subsites/1/documenten/1231430767_inqaahe---guidelines-of-good-practice\[1\].pdf](http://www.inqaahe.org/admin/files/assets/subsites/1/documenten/1231430767_inqaahe---guidelines-of-good-practice[1].pdf)

⁸⁷ <http://www.enqa.eu/files/ENQA%20Bergen%20Report.pdf>

Appendix 6: Regional context

Stakeholders

The region that encompasses the Pacific islands generally refers to those island countries and territories that are within the tropics, but can include those outside the tropics in certain instances (e.g. Pitcairn Island).

The PROS⁸⁸ notes its education stakeholders as including Pacific accrediting agencies and Ministries of Education from PIF countries (i.e., Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu).⁸⁹

However, the remit of the PROS is not straightforward. The EQAP is within the Pacific Community with a membership of PIF countries and territories as well as French Polynesia, Guam, New Caledonia, Northern Mariana Islands, Pitcairn Islands, Tokelau, and Wallis and Futuna.⁹⁰ To complicate further the clarity of a stakeholder group, EQAP contribution paying Pacific island countries (i.e. members) include a smaller group: Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, Tokelau, Vanuatu, Tuvalu, Kiribati, and Solomon Islands.

Status of countries

Pacific Island countries and territories are at varying stages of development in regards to national qualifications frameworks and quality assurance processes. In some countries, the establishment of an NQF and a quality assurance agency is still in development (e.g. Solomon Islands). However, some Pacific Nations are not considering such approaches due to the expense of developing and maintaining a NQF and national quality assurance strategies in relation to the small number of providers and qualifications to be quality assured (e.g. Tokelau). There are others (e.g. the USA aligned countries) where there is no NQF and no national quality assurance agencies (although there are quality assurance agencies such as Western Association of Schools and Colleges [WASC]).

Table 5: Current status of countries

Country	Established QA and QF	QA Focus
Cook Islands	NZQA registration and accreditation New Zealand Qualifications Framework	NZ
Federated States of Micronesia	Seeks registration and accreditation with Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)	WASC (USA)
Fiji	Fiji Higher Education Commission Fiji Qualifications Framework	National
Kiribati	A legislative and policy framework for education has been established. Has sought services from EQAP to accredit qualifications and register providers. Adopted the PQF and PQAF	EQAP (proposed)
Nauru	Australian Qualifications Framework	Australia (through registered provider)

⁸⁸ SPC 2015a

⁸⁹ Australia and New Zealand are also PIF members. Associate members includes New Caledonia, French Polynesia and Tokelau. Pacific island observers include: Wallis and Futuna, Guam, American Samoa and Northern Mariana Islands, and, as a special observer, Timor-Leste,

⁹⁰ Plus Australia, France, New Zealand and the United States of America

Country	Established QA and QF	QA Focus
Niue	NZQA registration and accreditation New Zealand Qualifications Framework	NZ
Papua New Guinea	Department of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology PNGNQF – schematic pathways	National
Republic of Palau	Seeks registration and accreditation with Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)	WASC (USA)
Republic of the Marshall Islands	Seeks registration and accreditation with Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)	WASC (USA)
Samoa	Samoa Qualifications Authority Samoa Qualifications Framework	National
Solomon Islands	<i>Proposed</i> NQF and Quality Assurance agency	<i>National (proposed)</i>
Tokelau		<i>NZ (anticipated)</i>
Tonga	TNQAB Tonga Qualifications Framework	National
Tuvalu	Has sought expert advice from EQAP to register and accredit programs under the PQF. Adopted the PQF and PQAF, and is establishing a QA unit.	National
Vanuatu	Vanuatu Qualifications Authority Vanuatu Qualifications Framework	National

Source: Adapted and updated from Bateman (2013)

Countries are characterised by a small number of post-secondary providers with a narrow scope of offerings and reliance on donor funding for many of the quality assurance activities. In most cases, even countries with an established quality assurance agency and an NQF are still at the implementation stages of their NQF and quality assurance arrangements.

Learner and labour mobility

Learner mobility

The increasing demand for post-secondary education has influenced the growth of students seeking education in countries other than their own. One of the potential benefits of the PRQS is to assist in the assessment of qualifications to facilitate the mobility of students.

Collated data to track the extent of learner mobility within the Pacific regional countries, not including Australia and New Zealand, is not easy to source. UNESCO Institute for Statistics provides collated data of learner mobility in the Pacific, but this data is patchy in relation to country responses (excluding Australia and New Zealand). There is no known collated source of recognition of qualifications undertaken across the Pacific. Individual organisations were approached for data of both learner mobility and recognition of qualifications; due to the time limitations on the collection period for this review, responses were restricted to those noted below. A potential role for the Assessment and Standards Unit could be to facilitate country processes in terms of data collection and recognition processes. In addition, the ASU could provide a central responsibility of collated annual reports provided by each participating country of learner mobility and especially of qualifications recognition, to better inform other regional strategies.

Learner mobility data derived from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics shows significant differences in trends between countries in the Pacific community, including Australia and New Zealand. When Australia and New Zealand are excluded from the data set, in terms of inbound students only Fiji and Samoa from

Pacific Nations received students. For Fiji, available data was limited to years 2004 (4211 students) and 2008 (7444 students). For Samoa, available data is limited to years 1999 and 2000 with 221 students overall. The lack of data from other Pacific Nations possibly reflects a lack of systematic data collection activity as opposed to lack of activity.

By comparison, outbound student data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics shows that students were leaving their home countries for further studies. Australia and New Zealand data was included to provide a comparison to Pacific islands country data. Considerable increases were found between 2011 and 2013 for Timor Leste and the Solomon Islands. Other island countries that showed gradual increase in out-bound student numbers in the same period were Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Tokelau, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Samoa, Niue, Cook Islands and Marshall Islands showed a constant flow of outbound students. Refer to the table below.

Table 6: Total outbound internationally mobile tertiary students studying abroad, all countries, both sexes (number)

Country	2010	2011	2012	2013
American Samoa	..	..	..	..
Australia	10629	10807	11084	11650
Cook Islands	237	212	220	223
Fiji	1647	1485	1319	1248
French Polynesia	..	..	..	..
Marshall Islands	245	209	253	195
Micronesia (Federated States of)	..	..	..	..
Nauru	154	156	135	130
New Caledonia	..	..	..	..
New Zealand	4759	5227	5362	5370
Niue	74	45	52	45
Norfolk Island	..	..	..	..
Northern Mariana Islands	..	..	..	..
Palau	..	..	..	..
Papua New Guinea	991	966	1071	1318
Pitcairn	..	..	..	..
Samoa	679	712	771	792
Solomon Islands	3148	3174	3193	3211
Timor-Leste	3710	3687	3362	3524
Tokelau	63	63	81	66
Tonga	1505	1208	1168	1220
Tuvalu	444	417	434	437
Vanuatu	1775	1797	1852	1856

Source: UNESCO 2016

The University of the South Pacific (USP) student data indicates that between 2011 and 2015, an average of 9.5% of students at the USP campuses in Fiji were non-Fiji nationals from 74 countries in the five-year period. USP is a regional university jointly owned by the governments of 12 countries.⁹¹ The data indicates that, apart from the 12 countries, between 2011 and 2015 students from 52 other countries outside of USP's scope have come for further studies in Fiji. The table below outlines the number of non-nationals at five USP campuses, with other campuses not having international students.

⁹¹ Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Samoa. The University has campuses in all member countries.

Table 7: Headcount of international students in USP campuses (number)

Campuses	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Fiji	2057	2291	2428	2499	2639
Cook Island	36	31	28	32	19
Kiribati	3	10	9	8	15
Samoa	101	114	126	133	153
Vanuatu	193	217	235	251	487

Source: USP 2016.

USP's main campus is in Fiji; the School of Agriculture and Food Technology is in Samoa; and, the School of Law is in Vanuatu. This has influenced the numbers of international students at these three campuses. At the three campuses there has been a consistent increase in international students with Vanuatu almost doubling in one year; in the other campuses (i.e. Kiribati and Cook Islands) the trend is less clear.

Data was sought on qualification recognition activities across the Pacific from ASU, relevant national agencies (only Fiji Higher Education Commission provided data) and USP. This data is indicative only of the level of activity of qualification recognition at these particular organisations and does not necessarily reflect total activity undertaken by other national agencies (e.g. ministries of labour) and institutions. The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) Qualifications Recognition Services also provided data.

Between 2009 and 2016, ASU received 32 requests for assessment of qualifications to support applications for further studies in Fiji and abroad. The data provided indicates that 25 of the requests were for students wishing to seek tertiary education in Fiji institutions; six were requests by outbound students from Fiji, and two were outbound students from Tuvalu. The ASU has proposed that they limit their assessment activity to foreign (non-Pacific) qualifications.

For Fiji Higher Education Commission, applications for evaluation of qualifications for immigration, further study, employment and registration purposes are outlined in the table below.

Table 8: Applications for qualifications assessment – Fiji Higher Education Commission

Assessment required	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<i>For further studies</i>					
Within Fiji	1			1	
Fiji – Outbound	4	1	1	1	
Fiji – Inbound	2	1	1	3	1
<i>For Employment</i>					
Fiji – Outbound	1				
Fiji – Inbound		1	1	12	2
Within Fiji				1	
<i>General evaluation of qualifications</i>					
Within Fiji	1			1	
for NZQA	1				
TOTALS	10	3	3	19	3

Source: FHEC, 2016

The NZQA Qualifications Recognition Services has also received applications from Pacific citizens for evaluation of qualifications for immigration, further study, employment and registration purposes. The overwhelming majority of applications between 2013 and 2015 have come from Fiji. Over the same period, both Samoa and Tonga received such applications, most recently, from French Polynesia and New Caledonia. It is interesting to note that no applications were received from other Pacific island countries (e.g. Solomon Islands, Kiribati or Vanuatu) which have emerging national qualifications frameworks or no current national qualifications framework in place. Refer to the table below.

Table 9: Applications for qualifications assessment – NZQA Qualifications Recognition Services

Country of individual	2013FY	2014FY	2015FY
Fiji	308 (IQA)	103	258 (IQA)
	120 (PAR)		95 (PAR)
Tonga	6 (IQA)	11	2 (IQA)
Samoa	4 (IQA)	3	-
French Polynesia	-	-	1 (PAR)
New Caledonia	-	-	1 (PAR)
PNG	-	-	-

Note: IQA – international qualifications assessment, PAR – pre-assessment results. There was no breakdown between international qualifications assessment and pre-assessment results provided for 2014 figures.

Labour mobility

The decision in 2003 to develop a regional qualifications register (which later morphed into the PRQS) aimed to improve comparability, access and quality of Pacific qualifications. The register was intended to facilitate international recognition of qualifications and enable the mobility of both learners and labour. The importance of the register was underscored by:

- An action point from Recommendation 3 of the 2013 PRQS review⁹² specified, “That the goal for *the next phase (of PRQS) is to facilitate labour mobility and qualifications portability*”.
- The Pacific Community Strategic Plan 2016 –2020⁹³ states: “Goal 1: Pacific people benefit from sustainable economic development” and one of the initiatives is to “Improve pathways to international markets by facilitating the mobility of learners and workers, assisting private enterprises to access international markets, and providing support to PICTs to improve their capacity to meet phytosanitary and biosecurity standards to safeguard trade.”

Data to track the extent of labour mobility within the Pacific region, not including Australia and New Zealand, is not easy to source. The Pacific Dialogue Ltd (2012) report on south-south labour mobility identified that there is a weakness in Pacific islands mobility literature with specific references to the lack of data gathering and analysis. The absence of data (and its analysis) has been identified to significantly undermine policy development in labour mobility within the region. However, both Australia and New Zealand have reported on the mutually beneficial movement of labour in the Pacific region (Ball 2015, Stott and Malaulau 2014).

The report by Stott and Malaulau (2014) on New Zealand labour market forecast an increase in labour supply of under 30,000 per year by end of 2021. The number will not match the average demand for 35,500

⁹² Assessment Research Centre, University of Melbourne 2013.

⁹³ Pacific Community 2015

workers forecast in the same period. The shortfall presents employment opportunities for Pacific Islanders across all skill levels where the key areas are agriculture, construction, tourism and hospitality, and caring in the health sector.

Data stated by Stott and Malaulau (2014) indicated that in New Zealand in 2009/10, 16, 728 work visas were approved for Pacific Island Forum country workers. The number declined to 13, 772 in 2013/14. Numbers of visa approval for skilled workers (mainly from Fiji) dropped from 3,760 in 2009/10 to 2,120 in 2013/14. These numbers represent 11.4% and 6.6% respectively of all skilled worker approvals from all countries. Fiji makes up 80% of the temporary visa approvals for skilled workers and the decrease noted was probably due to sanctions imposed on Fiji citizens after the military coup.

Data that is more recent provides indicative figures for visa on arrival into New Zealand from Pacific Nations (refer to the table below). Individual arrivals (not persons who enter multiple times) totalled 320,777. Of these 16,048 visa were for work purposes, and that 6,739 were for study. The country that had the largest number of visas for work or study purposes was Fiji, followed by Tonga and Samoa.

Table 10: Work and student visas on arrival, New Zealand, 2013–2016

Sum of Number of Clients		Visa on Arrival	
Nationality	Financial Year of Arrival	Student	Work
American Samoa	2013/16		
Federated States of Micronesia	2013/16	12	8
Fiji	2013/16	4,088	11,650
Samoa	2013/16	920	2,070
Tonga	2013/16	1,597	2,299
Tuvalu	2013/16	122	21
Grand Total		6,739	16,048

Source: <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/research-and-statistics/statistics>, 15/07/2016

For Australia, Ball (2015) notes that the Pacific is not an important source of migrants to Australia. However, of the 166,272 Pacific Islanders in Australia, 35% are from Melanesia, 64% from Polynesia and 1% from Micronesia. Melanesia, especially Fiji, is the dominant country of origin for Pacific Islanders moving to Australia, while the Polynesian countries of Samoa and Tonga are more important for New Zealand (refer to Australian Census data 2011).

Ball (2015) indicated that skilled migration from the Pacific to Australia is very low. Although Pacific Islanders have the same opportunities as people from other countries to seek work and residence in Australia and New Zealand, access is constrained by a points-based selection system for skilled migration. Ball (2015) stated that the skills-based points systems do not target the skills of most Pacific peoples, especially those from rural areas. Fijian Indians who have gained entry under this points system dominate skilled migration from the Pacific.

Ball (2015) noted that any temporary and permanent employment opportunities for Pacific Islanders in Australia would be best strategically linked to growth sectors of the Australian economy. Bell (2015) suggests five sectors, which offer both high growth rates and Australian advantage, as agribusiness, gas, tourism, international education, and wealth management.

In terms of seasonal worker programs in both New Zealand and Australia, productivity outcomes of using Pacific seasonal workers have been positive for both Australia and New Zealand. The Australian

seasonal worker programs allow for small gradual growth in labour demand in Australia, well under the New Zealand scheme of 9,000 by year 2015/16 with just 4,250 visas available.

Based on current population trends, youth and working age populations in the Pacific Nations (especially Melanesia) will continue to grow and remain high compared to Australia and New Zealand. While population growth rates vary by region, the working age population (15–64) in Pacific Nations has steadily increased since 1970s. This proportion will reach 63–65% of the regional population by 2035. In contrast, for Australia and New Zealand, this figure will decline between now and 2030 to approximately 60% of the total population. These figures indicate both the long-term need to generate employment for Pacific youth, and the clear demographic capacity to meet growing labour demand in Australia and New Zealand (Ball 2015).

Regional initiatives

The need for a regional approach to quality assurance and to mutual recognition of qualifications has long been acknowledged by the PICTs. Given the increased interest in labour mobility in addition to learner mobility the focus has turned to the PRQS to further facilitate mutual recognition of qualifications.

In 2015, the Hiri Declaration, “strengthening connections to enhance Pacific regionalism” commits Pacific Island Forum countries to deepening regional integration and cooperation in three core areas: people to people, institutional, and physical connectivity. Clause 11.b specifically refers to strengthening linkages through labour mobility, committing PICs to:

11. Encourage and strengthen our linkages and common aspirations through enhanced [...] Economic, trade, business and investment arrangements including labour mobility and reduction of trade barriers.

In recent years, there has been the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement (PICTA), which is a free trade agreement amongst the 14 countries. Under this agreement, virtually all barriers (import tariffs and quotas) to merchandise trade between Forum Island countries will be subsequently removed. The initial PICTA, which only covered trade in goods, was signed in 2001 and came into force in 2006. Currently, the agreement is being broadened to trade in services. It covers 11 service sectors: business communication, construction, distribution, educational, environmental, financial, health, tourism, recreational and transport; it also includes temporary movement of natural persons (labour mobility).⁹⁴

The focus on labour mobility has intensified with another regional initiative, PACER Plus trade agreement. PACER Plus includes the PIF countries and territories including Australia and New Zealand. PACER Plus aims to provide long-term opportunities to create jobs, enhance private sector growth, raise standards of living, and boost economic growth in PIF countries and territories. It recognizes that labour mobility is a key factor if countries are to reap the full benefits of this trading agreement.

Currently, the PACER Plus negotiations are yet to be finalised; however, the impact of PACER Plus on the future focus of the Pacific model will be significant. Current draft PACER Plus documents indicate that mutual recognition of qualifications is a key factor in facilitating labour mobility.

In the chapter of the draft PACER agreement related to labour mobility, paragraph 9 Facilitation of Recognition of Qualifications and Registration of Occupations notes:

1. The Participants acknowledge the importance of recognition of qualifications throughout the region and will consider the opportunities offered in this area by their accession to the Revised Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education 2011.

⁹⁴ <http://www.mit.gov.fj/index.php/divisions/trade-division/regional-trade-agreement/the-pacific-island-countries-trade-agreement-picta>

2. The developed country Participants will, to the extent possible, support the developing country Participants to increase their capacity to assess qualifications and facilitate the development, accreditation and registration of qualifications and recognition of those qualifications.
3. For licensed and registered occupations, the Participants will endeavour to make publicly available the regulations and processes to be followed by applicants to achieve licensing or registration by the accredited boards.
4. The Participants will encourage their relevant qualification and occupation assessment and accreditation bodies to consult with each other and with relevant regional bodies with a view to exploring possibilities of recognition of qualifications within a reasonable period of time following the commencement of this arrangement.

This paragraph emphasises the need to assess/recognise qualifications and references the Revised Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education 2011. This Convention provides general guidelines intended to facilitate the implementation of regional cooperation regarding recognition of qualifications in the higher education/TVET sector. The basic principles addressed in the Convention include:

- The assessment of qualifications
- Recognition providing access to programs
- Recognition of partial studies
- Recognition of qualifications
- Recognition of qualifications held by refugees
- Displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation
- The provision of information
- The implementation of the convention.

Currently none of the Pacific island countries or territories are signatories to this Convention.⁹⁵ However, once the Pacific island countries or territories are signatories, the implications of the role of the PRQS in assisting and encouraging the uptake of the principles, and providing support for benchmarking and harmonising recognition approaches across the region, could be significant.

In addition, in the PACER Plus draft chapter related to Trades in Services, paragraph 8 Recognition, a number of paragraphs are specifically relevant, including the following:

1. For the purposes of the fulfilment, in whole or in part, of its standards or criteria for the authorisation, licensing or certification of service suppliers, and subject to the requirements of Paragraph 4, a Party may recognise the education or experience obtained, requirements met, or licenses or certifications granted in a particular country. Such recognition, which may be achieved through harmonization or otherwise, may be based upon an agreement or arrangement with the country concerned or may be accorded autonomously.
5. Where appropriate, recognition should be based on multilaterally agreed criteria. In appropriate cases, Parties shall work in co-operation with relevant inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations towards the establishment and adoption of common international standards and criteria for recognition and common international standards for the practice of relevant services trades and professions.
6. The Parties shall actively encourage their competent bodies to consult with each other and with relevant regional bodies after entry into force of this Agreement to explore the possibilities for recognition of

⁹⁵ Note that Australia ratified this Convention in 2014.

qualifications or professional recognition or registration. The Parties shall report periodically to the Joint Committee for review.

This chapter calls upon countries to develop harmonisation or mutually agreed strategies to facilitate the recognition of qualifications or professional recognition or registration.

Appendix 7: AQRF referencing criteria

The referencing process includes 11 criteria:

1. The structure of the education and training system is described.
2. The responsibilities and legal basis of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process are clearly determined and published by the main public authority responsible for the referencing process.
3. The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualification system are transparent.
4. There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the AQRF.
5. The basis in agreed standards of the national framework or qualifications system and its qualifications is described.
6. The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications framework or system are described. All of the bodies responsible for quality assurance state their unequivocal support for the referencing outcome.
7. The process of referencing has been devised by the main public authority and has been endorsed by the main stakeholders in the qualifications system.
8. People from other countries who are experienced in the field of qualifications are involved in the referencing process and its reporting.
9. One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing and the evidence supporting it shall be published by the competent national bodies and shall address separately and in order each of the referencing criteria.
10. The outcome of referencing is published by the ASEAN Secretariat and by the main national public body.
11. Following the referencing process all certification and awarding bodies are encouraged to indicate a clear reference to the appropriate AQRF level on new qualification certificates, diplomas issued.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Bateman & Coles, ASEAN 2014

Appendix 8: Future model

The review team, as part of their scope of work, proposed a revised model for the Pacific. This proposed model would require further consultation, refinement and agreement by the participating PIF countries and territories, and is merely presented here as an informed suggestion.

This proposed model builds on the approach and the body of work undertaken to date by the PROS team. The future model outlines suggested key focus, structures and governance arrangements.

For the future model it is proposed that a new title be 'coined' to distinguish it from the previous phase; a working title proposed is the 'Greater Pacific Qualifications Framework (GPOF)'. This working title brings the focus back to a regional qualifications framework (which is internationally understood) and emphasises that the framework is relevant to countries in the greater Pacific region.

Focus and purpose

Although the focus of the GPOF will be on the qualifications meta framework, the key purposes as documented in the PROS (SPC2015a), PQF (SPC 2015b) and PQAF (SPC 2015c) documents have not intrinsically changed. Any re-write of the model will require rationalisation and restructuring of purposes and benefits.

Structures

The GPOF will remain a common reference framework that will function as a translation device for Pacific NQFs. The PQF level descriptors will not change; it will remain a 10-level framework.

The meta framework should not be confused with the components that are part of a national qualifications framework. The additional structures are discussed later in this section.

Support structures, mechanisms and documents

The meta framework will be supported by a number of structures, mechanisms and documents.

1. **Pacific Quality Assurance Framework (PQAF)**. This framework will not change and includes quality standards related to the practice of competent bodies, accreditation and registration (provider standards). It should be clear that these standards are the minimum quality standards to which the competent bodies for each representative country agree to meet within their national quality assurance processes. Countries that do not have a quality assurance framework can adopt the PQAF as a national quality assurance framework.
2. Pacific Register will contain:
 - **Competent QA bodies** recognised by the governing committee, including details and website
 - **Qualifications (including short programs and skill sets)** that the competent bodies have approved according to agreed protocols (e.g. accreditation standards). This register will continue to identify the PQF level of each of these qualifications, short programs and skill sets. Competent bodies will submit with each accreditation submission an accreditation summary document and a rating/levelling form clearly showing the process used and outcomes. The submission of this additional evidence places the obligations on the competent body to justify the alignment of the accredited program to that of the PQF. The Secretariat, on behalf of the governing committee, will review this justification. To be listed on the Pacific Register, qualifications, short programs and skill sets entries need to be accredited and approved by a recognised competent body. Regional qualifications (and components) will be included as for national entries.
 - **Professional and occupational standards**
It is proposed that the professional standards component remain for at least another 3–5 years to enable the governing committee to keep a watching brief on developments in the region. It

should contain at a minimum a register of regional professional bodies and links to their websites, standards and licensing arrangements.

- **Traditional knowledge and indigenous skills**

It is proposed that the traditional knowledge and indigenous skills component of the register remains for at least another 3–5 years to enable the governing committee to determine the best approach to deal with this domain at a regional level. A better approach may be for the future Pacific model to provide a central point for sharing practice within and beyond the Pacific and, therefore, not directly be part of the register.

3. **Harmonisation mechanisms and agreements** that aim to build trust and support recognition

- **Regionally agreed occupational standards/qualifications**

This component forms the basis of agreed occupational standards (and qualification outcomes) for identified occupations in the Pacific. These occupational standards will be developed and agreed according to a protocol and will include an occupational standard and assessment standard (as per Australian training package competencies), a qualification standard (completion rules, PQF level and possibly a qualification title as per the PQF, and a training standard limited to credit point profile).⁹⁷ Another option is that these occupational standards have the potential to be documented in a full program accreditation template for a qualification, but may require a slightly simpler template due to national variations in certain areas.

An agreed template may be designed and agreed by member countries to enable competent QA bodies to accredit the qualification. This aspect of the model will focus on TVET, but it does not preclude regional occupational standards (and qualifications) to be developed in the Higher Education sector.

Regionally agreed qualifications will be listed on the register but will be accredited by the individual competent QA bodies at a national. The register will identify that the occupational standards/qualification have been regionally agreed.

Full details of the qualifications (including the occupational standards, assessment standards, qualification completion rules and PQF level) will be included in addition to the register listing.

Pacific Nations may also agree to include a notation on the certification issued to indicate alignment to the regional qualification. Alternatively, they could utilise the Pacific Diploma Supplement model to include this information.

- An agreed **Pacific Diploma Supplement model** is in development but needs reconsideration. This model should consider a name that is more meaningful to the region⁹⁸ and some clear guidance on data retention. The fields that should contain agreed common text should outline the GPQF including the PQF and the PQAF, and the register. This approach will promote internationally the quality assurance of qualifications in the Pacific. Only countries that have met initial recognition requirements and continue to meet their obligations as members of the GPQF can utilise the regional information on the Pacific Diploma Supplement.

- To support a common understanding of critical issues, obligations of members, and transparency of processes for the Pacific members, **concept notes, guidelines and protocols** should be developed and approved by the governing committee. These documents shall be available in the public domain. It is proposed that the following concept notes and guidelines will need to be developed:

⁹⁷ Regional occupational standards could be identified and developed according to agreed criteria, or be enhanced national occupational standards/qualifications that have met the agreed criteria (this is similar to that model used in CARICOM and approved by CANTA).

⁹⁸ Possibly a Pacific Graduate Statement

Concept notes:

- Learning outcomes
- Graduate outcomes
- Recognition of non-formal and informal learning
- Traditional knowledge and indigenous skills

Guidelines or protocols:

- Referencing guidelines
- Protocols for developing and maintaining regional occupational standards and/or regional qualifications
- Protocols for entry onto the Pacific Register
- Pacific Diploma Supplement model and guidelines
- Recognition of qualifications guidelines
- Mutual recognition of agency decisions guidelines
- Mutual recognition of qualifications guidelines
- Internal and external evaluation, and continuous improvement guidelines.⁹⁹

- **Referencing**

A full and robust referencing process shall be introduced into the future model. Recognised competent bodies shall be obligated to undertake a referencing process as soon as possible. This referencing process shall be similar in format to the European Qualifications Framework and ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework, but should be fit-for-purpose, given the size and scope of the qualifications systems and desired level of engagement by relevant stakeholders. It shall be driven by the participating member and include a national referencing panel which will comprise stakeholders (including industry) representation, one international expert in qualifications frameworks/referencing and one Pacific member representative. Referencing panel membership, roles and responsibilities will be outlined in the referencing guidelines.

The referencing process will include the country benchmarking their qualifications system to the GPOF and quality assurance arrangements specifically to the PQAF. It will include peer review by members of the governing committee and finalisation of an agreed national report that will be made public on the GPOF website.

Guidelines will need to be developed to include criteria for referencing, and guidance to support member countries and territories. It is suggested that criteria will outline how the referencing process will be conducted, and obligations of the member countries and territories.¹⁰⁰ Referencing reports will be placed on the website.

- **Recognition of qualifications**

Recognition services against the PQF could be a key service of the Secretariat. As the GPOF gains more traction it is anticipated that the role of the Secretariat (on behalf of the governing body) could undertake assessments of foreign qualifications and comparability to the PQF. This role is the only function that is not directly facilitating regional processes and will require database development.

In addition, the Secretariat (on behalf of the governing body) could establish a central repository and information centre details pertaining to international qualifications system and provide a

⁹⁹ This is not an exhaustive list and others may be identified.

¹⁰⁰ Refer to both EQF and AQR for approaches to referencing criteria. Refer to Appendix 7.

service to competent bodies on recognition of foreign qualifications. This then would be a service that Pacific island competent bodies do not need to replicate. This facility could link with those in Australia and New Zealand.

Careful consideration should be given of both these services, as they both require database support and significant research input.

The GPQF website should also include summaries of qualifications systems of member countries that are publicly accessible to raise the profile of Pacific qualifications and systems. The aim is to facilitate transparency of qualifications systems and support any benchmarking or recognition of Pacific qualifications internationally.

Quality assurance of competent bodies

Competent QA body inclusion on the register has always been predicated on a quality assurance process, and that inclusion confers some form of recognition of quality. To further enhance trust and support mutual recognition strategies it is proposed that the model should strengthen initial recognition process and internal review, as well as external review.

Initial recognition

To be a recognised competent QA body, the body needs to apply to the governing committee for inclusion. It is proposed that the competent body will undertake a:

- Levelling exercise of the NQF against the PQF
- Evaluation of the national quality assurance arrangements against the PQAF
- Evaluation of level of implementation across the qualifications system.

This self-assessment needs to include a representative of another competent body and an international person experienced in the field of quality assurance. The report shall be submitted to the governing committee for comment, discussion/queries/clarification and subsequent acceptance.

Internal and external review

The PQAF currently includes the requirement for competent QA bodies to undertake their own internal review and continuous improvement. Competent QA bodies will need to adhere to this obligation.

All competent QA bodies will be required to undertake an external review of their compliance with the PQAF. This external review, commissioned by the competent QA body, moves the responsibility from the Secretariat undertaking the review but still require the competent QA body to have an external review. The review panel will include at least one independent quality assurance expert and one representative from another Pacific competent QA body. The inclusion of an independent quality assurance expert will promote the independence and externality of the review; the inclusion of one Pacific competent QA body representative aims to promote confidence and sharing of good practice within the Pacific.

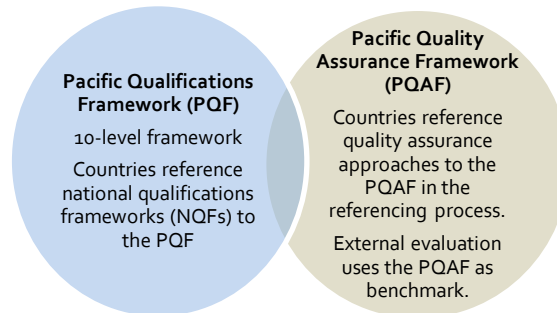
The external review shall be required to be undertaken every five years and the responsibility for managing a schedule of reviews and ensuring obligations are met will be the role of the governing committee supported by the Secretariat.

The report shall be submitted to the governing committee for comment, discussion/queries/clarification and subsequent acceptance. This report shall be made available to all members and be public on the competent QA body's website, and potentially on the GPQF website. The competent QA body can supplement this report with an action plan to describe how any issues and/or suggestions identified will be addressed. The governing committee will undertake monitoring of these action plans.

Additional national structures

The PQF can also function as a NQF for countries that have chosen to utilize the existing 10-level framework (the PQF), but separation of the Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF) and that of the NQF is paramount. For this purpose there are currently in place: documented qualification types, qualifications

descriptors and credit profile. It should be clear that these additional structures are not part of the meta framework. These structures should remain. Overtime these will need to be reviewed to ensure the currency and applicability. The following diagram summarises the key structures, outputs and mechanisms of a proposed Greater Pacific Qualifications Framework.



Register:
<p>Recognised competent QA bodies (including contact details)</p> <p>Nationally accredited:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualifications • Short programs/Skill sets <p>Each entry will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include core details (e.g. accrediting agency, PQF level, currency) • Identify if it meets, exceeds or partially meets a regional occupational standard/ qualification. • Be accompanied by a summary document, including purpose, list of components (core/elective), summary completion rules, and period of accreditation. • Indicate whether it is a qualification based on Traditional knowledge and indigenous skills <p>Regionally agreed occupational standards/qualifications with assessment standard and completion rules to meet either a: skills set or qualification. Each entry will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include core details (e.g. PQF level, currency) • Be accompanied by a summary document, including purpose, list of components (core/elective), summary completion rules, and period of approval. • Indicate whether it is a qualification based on Traditional knowledge and indigenous skills. <p>Regional professional and licensing associations/bodies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Title and detail of regional associations/bodies • Weblink <p><i>Note: Professional associations and licensing bodies should be responsible for maintaining professional standards or licensing requirements on their website, and maintain a list of members, licensed workers.</i></p>
Reports, Harmonisation documents and Agreements:
<p>Regionally agreed occupational standards/qualifications with assessment standard and completion rules to meet either a: skills set or qualification. This entry will include all details of the occupational standards, assessment standards and completion rules.</p> <p>Reports:</p>

- Referencing reports of qualifications system (NQF to PQF), including national quality assurance systems to PQAF
- External evaluation quality reports
- Country benchmarking reports of national qualifications to regional occupational standards/qualifications.

Concept notes

- Learning outcomes
- Graduate outcomes
- Recognition of non-formal and informal learning
- Traditional knowledge and indigenous skills

Guidelines:

- Referencing guidelines
- Pacific Diploma Supplement model and guidelines
- Recognition of qualifications guidelines
- Mutual recognition of agency decisions guidelines
- Mutual recognition of qualifications guidelines
- Internal review and external evaluation, and continuous improvement guidelines

Protocols

- Protocols for developing and maintaining regional occupational standards and/or regional qualifications (including agreed process for development, approval and review, templates)
- Protocols for entry onto the Pacific Register

Diploma Supplement template that includes option to record:

- Alignment of qualification to regional occupational standards and/or regional qualifications
- PQF alignment to NQF or specific qualification
- QA alignment to PQAF

NQF support for those countries wishing to use the PQF as an NQF. Additional support documents include: qualification type descriptors and credit profile.

Recognition services: Information, application forms. A database will need to be maintained for applications and decisions, and another for details of international qualifications systems.

Website:

Endorsed regional qualifications framework

Endorsed regional quality assurance framework

Summary of qualifications system for each member country

Facility to compare NQFs with PQF (currently in place)

Facility to compare national QA systems with PQAF

All harmonisation documents (concept notes, guidelines and protocols; templates)

All referencing reports and external evaluation quality reports

Shared best practice of Traditional knowledge and indigenous skills

Regionally agreed occupational standards with assessment and completion rules to meet either a: skills set or qualification. Currently the regional benchmarks are PDF documents. Consideration as to whether occupational standards/qualifications should be treated in the same way.

Register (Agencies and qualifications, Regional professional associations and licensing)

Recognition services: information and application form

Additional support documents for the PQF to be used as an NQF: PQF qualification type descriptors and credit profile

Figure 2: Proposed Greater Pacific Qualifications Framework

Governance

The governing committee will manage and monitor the GPQF and associated structures and mechanisms.

The governing committee shall include all PIFs as voting members (1 member per country, although additional staff can attend as observers).¹⁰¹ All other Pacific Nations recognised by PIF or SPC shall be given observer status.¹⁰² Additional observers shall include:

- Donor representatives (1 per major donor)
- PIF advisors (3 = trade, education and economics).

Protocols for accepting new members, especially voting membership, should be developed over time.

Election of a Chair and Vice Chair shall be for up to a 2-year period. Selection shall be in line with PIF protocols or, alternatively, they could be voted in, or be on rotating basis. Voting protocols shall also be in line with PIF protocols.

Face-to-face meetings shall be conducted on a regular basis for the next 3–5 years, at least twice a year, to best inform the members and allow time for discussion:

- Meetings shall focus on confirming reports, concept notes and guidelines. For Pacific members to understand the issues, meetings may be preceded by a workshop focussing on the issues to be discussed.
- Distribution of meeting papers to members no later than two weeks prior to the meeting.

To promote support, engagement and drive progress, additional meetings via Skype or teleconferences can be undertaken.

The governing committee terms of reference shall include:

1. Ensuring that the GPQF is implemented in a transparent, trustworthy and coherent way across the Pacific member countries:
2. Strategic management for the continued implementation of the GPQF and associated structures and mechanisms
3. Consideration of self-assessment reports submitted from each 'new' competent body on how the national qualification system relates to the levels of the PQF and PQAF
4. Consideration of external review reports submitted from each recognized competent body on how its quality assurance arrangements meet PQAF (every 5 years), including follow up of any action plans
5. Consideration of a referencing report submitted from each PIF's referencing panel on how the national qualification system relates to the levels of the PQF and PQAF
6. Oversight of the schedules for external review and for referencing by each participating PIF

¹⁰¹ PIF countries include: Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Australia and New Zealand will need to determine whether they are included as voting or non-voting members.

¹⁰² Tokelau, New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Wallis and Futuna, American Samoa, Guam, Northern Marianas Islands and Timor Leste.

7. Facilitation of the identification and development of regional occupational standards and resultant regional qualifications; and approving these outcomes.¹⁰³ These standards will be listed on the Pacific Register as regional occupational standards (and qualifications).
8. Facilitation of benchmarking activities, including: benchmarking of accreditation and registration criteria and processes of PIFs competent bodies, evaluation and assessment of foreign qualifications for learner or labour mobility, and, country processes for assigning PQF levels for country qualifications entry onto the register
9. Promotion of the use of the GPQF among PIFs to enable support for lifelong learning (for flexible qualification linkages and pathways in education and training within and across all education and business sectors, including recognition of non-formal and informal learning)
10. Promotion of the quality assurance processes that underpin the GPQF and fostering use of quality assurance frameworks as a benchmark
11. Facilitation of the GPQF in addressing emerging regional and international qualifications framework issues in the regional and international arena
12. Enhancing the effectiveness of the GPQF by monitoring and evaluating its implementation
13. Periodically reporting to higher relevant bodies on progress and activities and on further strategic steps to improve regional and national consistency and relevance, such as PIF ministers and donors
14. Provision of information and advice on the GPQF to interested parties
15. Sharing approaches for further capacity building related to GPQF among PIFs
16. Consideration of concept notes and guidelines (e.g. for referencing) to enhance a common understanding of PIFs.

Secretariat

The roles of the governing committee are extensive and it will require significant support by the Secretariat to ease the management and administrative burden of the governing committee. The Secretariat should work closely with and support the Chair and Vice Chair.

The Secretariat shall have the following key functions:

1. Provide support to the governing committee and work directly with the Chair. This function will include, but is not limited to:
 - Management of the Pacific Register. This includes review of submitted entries by recognised competent bodies and making robust evidence-based recommendations to the governing committee in relation to inclusion on the register.
 - Management of schedules, meetings, workshops
 - Management of the development of regional occupations (and/or qualifications), including sourcing supplementary funding to assist the development – although, as much as possible, collaboration between the countries and territories is the desired model.
 - Provision of robust evidence-based recommendations to the governing committee in terms of approving regional occupational standards and qualifications. Monitoring and maintenance of the regional occupational standards and qualifications to ensure the currency and ongoing relevance.

¹⁰³ The practice does not assume accreditation, but approval that the agreed criteria and process has been met at that the outcomes essentially meet the PQAF accreditation standard.

- Maintaining the website and providing a central point for international relationships, including representing the governing committee in international fora
 - Preparing all reporting documents and ensuring timelines are met, including to donors, and PIF ministers.
2. Providing technical support to PIF countries and territories.
The Secretariat will provide (or source) support to members. This support needs to be regionally strategic but also responsive to national priorities. The support should align with the core functions of the future model and should encourage the implementation of the said model.
 3. Ensuring donor reporting requirements are met and collating annual reports
 4. Support recognition services.
The Secretariat will provide recognition services in relation to foreign qualifications on behalf of the governing committee, ensuring that the decisions are consistent and evidence based. The Secretariat will also maintain an information repository of details of international qualifications systems to better inform the national competent bodies. This facility will aim to support the consistency of qualification evaluation decisions made by competent bodies, as well as encourage consistent data collection of recognition services undertaken by Member Nations. It is to provide a central point for collated data on the level and nature of recognition of qualifications, to better inform regional initiatives.¹⁰⁴

Timelines

The proposed governing committee and its Secretariat will need to develop:

- A strategic plan
- A business case for transition.

The implementation of the revised model should include achievable and identifiable steps. These steps as documented are skeletal in nature, but outline clearly what needs to be achieved over the next eight years. It is important for the governing committee to establish a well-grounded monitoring and evaluation plan to effectively inform their practices. The monitoring and evaluation plan should look beyond the achievement of key actions (e.g. number of meetings, document confirmed) to focus on whether trust and confidence in member countries has been achieved; how well the structures and mechanisms have contributed to the developments; and, what future strategic directions could be considered.

It is suggested that the following timelines for 1, 3, 5 and 8 years be considered.

Table 11: Timelines and actions

Timelines	Actions to be completed
1 year	<p>Concept document for the revised Pacific model finalised and confirmed by governing committee and by PIF ministers, including framework, support structures and mechanisms, obligations of members, role of governing committee.</p> <p>Separation of associated NQF documents finalised</p> <p>Governance roles and responsibilities confirmed</p> <p>Communication strategy confirmed; such as common text for competent bodies to use in marketing material and websites.</p> <p>Harmonisation of national accreditation and registration processes</p> <p>Schedules confirmed:</p>

¹⁰⁴ This is part of an extended model, and the inclusion of this service does have financial and staffing issues attached.

Timelines	Actions to be completed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings of governing committee • External review • Referencing • Any reporting requirements. <p>The following protocols developed and confirmed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protocols for development and approval of occupational standards (and qualifications) including agreed templates • Protocols for entry onto the Pacific Register. <p>The following guidelines developed and confirmed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referencing guidelines • Recognition of competent body decisions • Recognition of qualifications • Internal and external review, continuous improvement.
2 year	<p>Strategic plan and business case developed for transition at the end of year eight. This could include proposed funding by members and donors, future as a CROP member, fee for services activities, and identification of any other opportunities (e.g. Pacific skills passport).</p> <p>Identification, development and approval of three occupational standards (and qualifications)</p> <p>Concept notes developed and confirmed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of non-formal and informal learning • Learning outcomes • Graduate outcomes <p>The following guideline developed and confirmed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutual recognition of qualifications guidelines <p>Five competent bodies complete external review and reports accepted by governing committee</p> <p>Concept design for recognition of qualifications database for international qualifications assessment completed.</p> <p>Harmonisation of recognition of qualifications processes. Underway.</p>
3 years	<p>Three additional competent bodies complete external review and reports accepted by governing committee</p> <p>Three countries complete referencing of the NQFs and qualifications to the regional framework, with reports accepted by governing committee</p> <p>Harmonisation of recognition of qualifications processes. Complete.</p>
5 years	<p>Five additional countries complete referencing of the NQFs and qualifications to the regional framework, with reports accepted by governing committee</p>
8 years	<p>Transition arrangements established, member funding agreed and implemented, and fee for service activity agreed.</p>

Appendix 9: Glossary

<p>Achievement standards</p>	<p>Statement approved and formalised by a competent body, which defines the rules to follow in a given context or the results to be achieved. A distinction can be made between competency, educational, occupational, assessment, validation or certification standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • competency standard refers to the knowledge, skills and/or competencies linked to practising a job; • educational standard refers to statements of learning objectives, content of curricula, entry requirements and resources required to meet learning objectives; • occupational standard refers to statements of activities and tasks related to a specific job and to its practise; • assessment standard refers to statements of learning outcomes to be assessed and methodology used; • validation standard refers to statements of level of achievement to be reached by the person assessed, and the methodology used; • certification standard refers to statements or rules applicable to obtaining a qualification (e.g. certificate or diploma) as well as the rights conferred.¹⁰⁵
<p>Accreditation</p>	<p>The official approval of achievement standards, including qualifications or unit(s) of a qualification, usually for a particular period of time, as being able to meet particular requirements defined by an accrediting agency.¹⁰⁶</p>
<p>Accrediting agency</p>	<p>Accrediting agencies are those competent bodies (such as national qualifications agencies, national accreditation agencies, official review boards or other nationally approved bodies or agencies with the responsibility to approve qualifications) that manage program and qualifications accreditation under national legislation. Accrediting agencies function within a quality assurance system.¹⁰⁷</p>
<p>Qualifications framework</p>	<p>Instrument for development and classification of qualifications (at national or sectoral levels) according to a set of criteria (such as using descriptors) applicable to specified levels of learning outcomes.¹⁰⁸</p>
<p>Qualifications system</p>	<p>Qualifications system includes all aspects of a country's activity that result in the recognition of learning. These systems include the means of developing and operationalising national or regional policy on qualifications, institutional arrangements, quality assurance processes, assessment and awarding processes, skills recognition and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. Qualifications systems may be more or less integrated and coherent. One feature of a qualifications system may be an explicit framework of qualifications.¹⁰⁹</p>
<p>Quality assurance</p>	<p>A set of principles, guidelines, tools and standards that act as a reference for</p>

¹⁰⁵ Cedefop (2011), p. 109, included in ASEAN QRF.

¹⁰⁶ ASEAN 2015

¹⁰⁷ ASEAN 2015

¹⁰⁸ Cedefop Glossary (2011) p. 82.

¹⁰⁹ Coles & Werquin (2006), p. 22.

framework	guiding the consistent application of quality assurance activities. ¹¹⁰
Referencing	Referencing is a process that results in the establishment of a relationship between the national qualifications framework and that of a regional qualifications framework.
Regional qualifications framework	A broad structure of levels of learning outcomes that is agreed by countries in a geographical region. A means of enabling one national framework of qualifications to relate to another and, subsequently, for a qualification in one country to be compared to a qualification from another country.
Registering agency	Registering agencies are those competent bodies responsible for approving education and training providers e.g. national qualifications agencies, official review boards or other nationally approved bodies or agencies. Registering agencies function within a quality assurance system. ¹¹¹
Registration of providers	<p>Registration processes include formal acknowledgement by a registering agency that a provider meets relevant quality standards. Under NQFs it is usual for a provider to be registered in order to deliver and assess accredited programs and issue awards.</p> <p>Some agencies differentiate between the two processes, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • formal acknowledgement that the provider meets key generic standards • formal acknowledgement that the provider meets specific standards related to the provision of teaching, learning and assessment of a specific program.¹¹² <p>For the purpose of this report, registration of providers is the term used for both processes.</p>
Training standard	A training standard could be an educational standard as noted in 'Achievement Standards' or could be a standard that is less detailed and provides advice related to training expectations and inputs, such as associated achievement standards; resources (for example staff, students, materials) which should be available in an institution; duration or volume of learning of the programme; NQF level of qualification. This working definition for the literature review includes both these notions.

¹¹⁰ Adapted from Cedefop Glossary (2011), p. 21

¹¹¹ ASEAN 2015

¹¹² ASEAN 2015

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