FIFTIETH MEETING OF THE
COMMITTEE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF GOVERNMENTS AND ADMINISTRATIONS
(17–19 November 2020, Virtual Meeting)

Information Paper

AGENDA ITEM No. 10: Report of the fifth annual meeting of the
Pacific Board for Education Quality (PBEQ)

(Paper presented by the Secretariat)

Purpose

1.   This paper presents the outcomes of the fifth annual meeting of the Pacific Board for Education Quality (PBEQ), a subcommittee of CRGA, as agreed by the members of the PBEQ on 2 September 2020. The full report is appended as Annex A.

2.   The Subcommittee met virtually on 2 September 2020 to discuss matters regarding regional education quality and regional qualifications.

3.   Key decisions from the PBEQ meeting:

   i.   The outcomes of the March 2020 extraordinary session of the PBEQ were adopted. These are attached as Annex B.

   ii.   The PBEQ endorsed with appreciation the 2019 EQAP Results Report.

   iii.   The PBEQ appreciated the progress of the accreditation and recognition process of the South Pacific Form Seven Certificate (SPFSC) qualification which is progressing well.

   iv.   The frequency of submission of accreditation applications to the PBEQ for endorsement will be quarterly.

   v.   The proposals to establish EQAP[1] focal points and focal points specifically related to the PacREF[2] MEL (monitoring, evaluation and learning) were supported in principle. The Board requires EQAP to articulate the specific roles that will be required for these contact points, and EQAP to work with the countries on how this can be achieved.

   vi.   The PBEQ Terms of Reference are to be amended to require the PBEQ to hold its annual meetings no less than twelve weeks prior to CRGA, instead of the current eight weeks.

Recommendation

4.   CRGA is asked to note the report from the fifth annual meeting of the Pacific Board for Education Quality (PBEQ), which is a subcommittee of CRGA.

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[1] Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (SPC).
[2] Pacific Regional Education Framework.

Report of the fifth annual meeting of the Pacific Board for Education Quality (PBEQ)

Background

5. The Ninth Conference of the Pacific Community endorsed governance changes to the operation of the former Pacific Board for Educational Assessment. The Conference agreed to rename the SPC programme as the Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP), and to approve the role and function of the Pacific Board for Education Quality as a Subcommittee of the Committee of Representatives of Governments and Administrations (CRGA). Terms of reference (TOR) were developed and endorsed by the PBEQ at its March 2016 meeting, the first official meeting of the new subcommittee. CRGA endorsed the TOR out of session in late 2017.

6. As per the TOR, the subcommittee is responsible for providing advice to EQAP and for assisting it with some of its delegated functions, to ensure the good governance of the programme. The following points from the terms of reference are provided as context for this report:

    - *It is expected that all Subcommittee members and member representatives have the expertise and authority to represent their nominating country or organisation with respect to the business of the PBEQ. It is expected that Subcommittee members and member representatives will in turn keep their national CRGA member representatives informed on PBEQ matters.*
    - *The Subcommittee shall make provision to convene an Issues Meeting at least eight weeks before the CRGA of each year.*
    - *In all meetings of the Subcommittee, outcomes shall be arrived at through discussion and consensus. Outcomes shall be agreed to by all members of the Subcommittee and shall be transmitted to the CRGA.*

7. The Subcommittee was set to meet in person during the third week of March 2020. That meeting was replaced by an Extraordinary Session of the PBEQ – held via email, sharing of papers and an online questionnaire – on 20 March to allow for continuation of important work despite the challenges of COVID preventing a face-to-face meeting. The outcomes are captured in Annex B.

8. The Subcommittee met virtually for the fifth time on 2 September 2020. A summary of key outcomes of the fifth meeting, endorsed by the group immediately following the discussions, is provided for CRGA below:

    i.   **Director's Report** – the report was positive, acknowledging that the EQAP business plan's high-level outcomes and corresponding activities have progressed well, and results in the first six months of 2020 have been positive, including strengthening of partnerships with EQAP business partners and the Board. The Board accepted the report, with appreciation.

    ii. **The 2019 EQAP Results Report** – the outcomes format of the report was appreciated by Board members. Samoa and Cook Islands experience high staff turnover, which is a challenge, so both countries are contemplating making use of EQAP expertise through new modalities to share the work activities.

    iii. **The SPFSC qualification accreditation negotiation** – there was a positive response from Board members on the steps taken to ensure that the SPFSC qualification is formally recognised and accredited by universities in New Zealand and Australia.

iv. **Process for accrediting qualifications** – EQAP will provide a revision to the recommendation to send recommendations for review and endorsement on a regular schedule, four times a year.

v. **EQAP focal points in the countries** – there was support for the motion from the Board; however, the specifics for the role are to be adapted to meet the varying needs in each country. The EQAP Director is to inform Board members of the progress of this in the latter part of 2020.

vi. **PacREF MEL focal points at the country level** – there was appreciation of the role of MEL in ministries and that the role has to work within the realities of education systems. As such, individual conversations with countries are essential, including to examine the TOR details. EQAP is to work on the TOR and communicate with individual countries further regarding this item.

vii. **PBEQ TOR amendment** – the Board agreed to make an amendment to its meeting schedule such that the PBEQ meets at least 12 weeks before CRGA, instead of at least 8 weeks before CRGA.

Recommendation

9. CRGA is asked to note the report from the fifth annual meeting of the Pacific Board for Education Quality (PBEQ), which is a subcommittee of CRGA.

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Annex A

Endorsed Outcomes of the Fifth Meeting (Virtual) of the Pacific Board for Education Quality (PBEQ)
2 September 2020

1.   Appointment of Vice Chair 2020 and Chair 2021

The Subcommittee agreed that the CEO of the Samoa Ministry of Education will continue as the Chair of PBEQ in 2021.

2.   Minutes/Outcomes of 2019 PBEQ and matters arising

The Subcommittee endorsed the draft minutes as a true record of the proceedings of the 2019 PBEQ meeting.

3.   Outcomes from March 2020 Extraordinary Session

The Subcommittee:
- a)   noted the comments "and strengthened" by the representative of Cook Islands, Danielle Cochrane.
- b)   endorsed the recommendations put forward in the paper.

4.   Outcome from the Director's report

The Subcommittee noted the Director's report with appreciation.

5.   Outcomes from the EQAP results report

The Subcommittee:

- a)   noted the important lessons that were learnt in view of the challenging circumstances that are being faced;

- b)   noted opportunities that the pandemic has brought forward in terms of greater participation of staff of organisations in regional meetings and forums;

- c)   appreciated the manner in which the results report had been compiled, where reporting was against outcomes instead of activities;

- d)   stated that it would make a request for EQAP to provide support on reporting against outcomes to members;

- e)   endorsed the results report.

6. **Outcomes from the South Pacific Form Seven Certificate (SPFSC) report**

The Subcommittee:

    a)   supported the paper on SPFSC accreditation negotiation;

    b)   noted the encouraging progress made on the recognition of SPFSC;

    c)   noted with appreciation that the earlier recommendations on SPFSC are being actioned;

    d)   thanked EQAP for the initiative;

    e)   agreed with the recommendations in the paper.

7. **Outcomes on qualifications**

The Subcommittee endorsed the recommendation on the revision of the accreditation process, whereby accreditation submissions will be received by PBEQ on a quarterly basis.

8. **Outcomes on country focal points**

The Subcommittee:

    a)   (some) appreciated the suggestions and ideas made in the paper;

    b)   noted the implications that the idea will have, particularly for smaller countries, with fewer staff and one officer being responsible for many assignments;

    c)   supported the idea of having focal points, in view of staffing changes in ministries and departments, and challenges in knowledge sharing for work with EQAP if there is no designated person on this;

    d)   advised that EQAP inform the heads of the ministries and departments of education on the idea of country focal points and the implementation of the initiative.

9. **Outcomes on PACREF MEL**

The Subcommittee:

    a)   (several members) supported the idea of a PACREF MEL focal point;

    b)   noted the concern expressed about the demands that the idea places on staffing in small countries;

    c)   suggested that EQAP develop a job description to determine the scope, volume and nature of the responsibilities of the position;

    d)   noted that EQAP will return to the drawing board, considering country needs, and revert to PBEQ at a later date.

10. **Outcomes on Amendment to PBEQ TOR**

The Subcommittee agreed to amend the TOR of the PBEQ to read as: "***The PBEQ shall meet at least 12 weeks prior to the CRGA Meeting***" instead of "*The PBEQ shall meet at least 8 weeks prior to the CRGA Meeting*".

11.   Outcomes on Other Matters

The Subcommittee noted that EQAP will consult with countries to finalise the dates for sitting the SPFSC examination for 2020.

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Annex B

Endorsed Outcomes of the PBEQ Extraordinary Session which was conducted in March 2020.

Preamble

The extraordinary session of the Pacific Board for Education Quality (PBEQ) CRGA Subcommittee convened on Wednesday 18 March 2020 as a result of the postponement of its annual and fifth meeting, which was scheduled for 16 to 20 March 2020. The postponement was the result of the travel restrictions caused by the COVID 19 pandemic, which affected most of the member countries, including Fiji where the meeting was supposed to be held.

As an alternative, EQAP attempted to set up this meeting through teleconference and Skype. However, this was unsuccessful due to unforeseen demands on technology, particularly securing international telephone lines to connect with member countries.

It was important for EQAP to obtain the input and endorsement of the PBEQ for pressing work to be carried out in 2020 and for this reason, a second alternative to the EQAP face-to-face meeting was implemented, using electronic communication. As members already had the papers ahead of the meeting, the input needed was gathered by asking the PBEQ to respond to a set of questions related to each agenda topic. Two forms of the questionnaire were circulated to: (1) the 15 member countries (Form A), and (2) a revised version, which was sent out to education development partners (Form B). The two forms are appended to this document as Annex 2 and Annex 3, respectively.

This outcomes document from this extraordinary session aims to provide a summary of the input from the PBEQ members to allow EQAP to move forward with necessary work whilst awaiting formal endorsement of the outcomes at the next PBEQ official meeting.

In attendance

A total of 14 out of 15 countries, and five education development partners, participated in this extraordinary session through responding to the electronic surveys. The full list of member representatives who participated is listed in Annex 1. =

Questions asked of members and the outcomes

Question 1: Data and EMIS[3] Questionnaires:

There is an agreement between SPC and UIS[4] where we actively support UIS to collect data and build related capacity for the region. EQAP has an extended data team tasked to follow up on UIS questionnaires for 2019 and previous years. Three countries have filled the 2019 questionnaire and sent the completed forms to UIS. Data extracted from the questionnaires are for preparing the status of education report for FEdMM[5] later this year. There is also a questionnaire called the EMIS Situational Analysis Report. Fourteen (14) of fifteen (15) countries have submitted this report and the request is for countries to review the information in this report.

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[3] Education Management Information System.
[4] UNESCO Institute of Statistics.
[5] Forum Education Ministers Meeting.

QUESTION: (Response required)

In keeping with the UIS EQAP agreement, we encourage your data focal points to copy the EQAP data team on data submissions correspondences with UIS. Are the board members willing to include EQAP on such correspondences?

Outcome
- All members indicated their support for this recommendation.

Question 2: Data and EMIS Statistical Outputs & PacREF / SDGs:

Ten (10) Countries have developed statistical digests at least within the last five (5) years. Five (5) countries have yet to develop theirs and four (4) countries may need to produce their updated ones. Countries are invited to start working on National, PacREF and SDG indicators to be published in national education monitoring reports. In our face to face meeting in July, we will discuss on the dissemination of tabulated education data for use to calculate and verify the regional SDG and PacREF indicators as this is a piece of activity that needs to be addressed.

QUESTION: (Response required)

Do you have a national process for monitoring SDG4?

Outcomes
- Nine of the 14 countries indicated they do have a system in place, either directly managed within their ministry or managed by other divisions of the government.
- Two countries could not confirm such as new members of HES, so data may be collected in an ad hoc manner.
- Two countries do not have any system in place.
- One country is using a system which does not have the SDG4 indicators built into it.

Question 3: Data and EMIS Statistical Outputs & PacREF / SDGs:

QUESTION: (Response required)

What support do you need from EQAP to provide the data needed for the Status of Pacific Education Report?

Outcomes:
- Clarification of indicators and types of data to enter
- Assistance and guidance on the process
- How to make use of the data
- To review and align the system currently in place to enable capture of appropriate data
- EQAP may be able to develop a generic template to compile data for the report.
- Clarification of what the report is, its purpose and audience for this report.
- Need technical assistance to provide the EMIS tool

Question 4: Data and EMIS

We can also discuss in the July meeting the possibility of having a regional workshop on data and our suggestion is for each country to appoint an SDG Coordinator and Data Officer who will attend the workshop planned for the end of the year.

QUESTION: (Response Required)

Do you have any comments on our suggestion?

Outcomes
- Members have indicated their support to the suggestion for a regional workshop.
- For consideration, if countries can be allowed to self-fund additional participants.
- Alignment between the objectives of this planned workshop and PacREF work on data.
- To add to the objective of the workshop, strengthening and generating Education Statistical Digests.

Question 5: SPFSC

To continue to improve the quality of the SPFSC program, EQAP secured the service of Dr David Tout of the Australian Council for Educational Research to review the substance and management of the SPFSC qualification and make necessary recommendations. [A copy of the report has been made available to you]. The ACER consultant made a number of interesting findings and also a number of recommendations for EQAP's attention that will enhance the quality of the qualification further. Two of those recommendations need your attention at this special meeting, and your mandate for EQAP to begin to work through the recommended activities and processes within the coming months. The ACER consultant found what EQAP and Ministries of Education know - that high achieving SPFSC students are accepted into a range of Australian and NZ Universities. However, a more formal recognition of the qualification that can be displayed on the EQAP website, the SPFSC handbook and SPFSC certificates, and in the documentations of respective Universities of NZ and Australia does not exist yet, and this is to be sought.

QUESTION: (Response required)

Do you want EQAP to pursue the formal recognition of the SPFSC qualification with the NZ Universities Council and with the Qualification Boards of the different Australian states?

Outcome
- All members unanimously agreed to the recommendation.

Question 6: SPFSC

In his discussions with the USP Enrolment Manager, the ACER consultant found that USP had rather outdated information related to the SPFSC qualification. A formal working relationship would open up the process of updating of relevant SPFSC information on USP's documents and website on a regular basis. Part of this collaboration will target the possibility of a strategic role that EQAP can provide for the region in the quality assurance of national Year 13 programs that certify year 13 students for USP studies.

QUESTION: (Response required)

Does EQAP have the mandate of the Board to pursue a formal working relationship with the University of the South Pacific, to share information that would enhance the quality of the SPFSC qualification?

Outcome
- All members unanimously indicated their support for this recommendation.

Question 7: Innovation Funding

For this session, we will be referencing two papers, the first paper is the 'supplementary paper on the innovation funding' and 'An EQAP innovation Project'. At the end of this session, each member of the Board will be asked to indicate a proposal for the innovation funding. What is innovation? Generally speaking, we can define innovation as "the process of making changes to something established (the status quo, if you like) by introducing something new to improve a process or a service. What is innovative funding? As part of Australia's funding of the EQAP Business plan, there is funding allocated each financial year for one or more innovation projects. These funds aim to finance innovative and pilot activities with countries which do not deflect attention from the core work and priorities, but provide opportunities for motivated and committed actors to pursue valued activities.

What we want from you?

EQAP will work closely with you to develop a high quality, relevant proposal. Three broad areas have already been identified by countries:

a. School leadership
b. Classroom-based assessment
c. Teaching strategies

To start this process, we would like to first ask you to identify a priority area for your proposal and second to nominate one or two individuals from your Ministry to work with us on the proposal development. These individuals need to be:

a. familiar with the national education strategic goals, plans and priorities.
b. able to consult with senior managers about their priorities and innovation ideas.
c. able to dedicate some time to developing the proposal (by email and phone).

QUESTION: (Response required)

Which innovation proposal would you like to participate in developing?

○ *School leadership*

○ *Classroom-based assessment*

○ *Teaching strategies*

Outcome

- The countries have indicated their preference and EQAP will engage with each group of countries in the development of the selected option. The responses show the following:
  - o   School leadership   –   3 countries
  - o   Classroom-based assessment   –   7 countries
  - o   Teaching Strategies   –   3 countries

Question 8: Regional Policy Workshop Paper 13:

Regional Workshop on Policy Development This question shall call on the Board's decision on EQAP's proposal to host a regional policy workshop. The proposal is based on two regional developments, the PaBER project and Pacific Policy Repository.
What is the status of education policy development in the region?

As some, if not all of you are aware, the PaBER (Pacific Benchmarking for Educational Results) project was piloted in Papua New Guinea, Samoa and the Solomon Islands from 2012 to 2016. PaBER was first conceptualised as an approach to address a regional concern that too many children leave primary schools without the necessary literacy and numeracy skills. PILNA[6] regional results in literacy and numeracy confirmed this concern.

Key Findings of PaBER There were two major findings from the PaBER research; a. The first is that policies were not always administered as intended - there are policy gaps that existed between policy intent and practice. b. Second finding is that it was difficult to measure the impact of the policy due to the absence of an implementation plan and there was a lack of reliable data available. Pacific Policy Repository One of the outcomes of the 2019 PBEQ was the decision of the Board to establish the Pacific Policy Repository. The Repository is now active and countries can start uploading their policies on their dedicated space. An important question to ask ourselves is what preparations do we need to do before we start uploading our policies on the Repository. The need for a Regional Policy Workshop The findings from PaBER confirm the mismatch between policy intents and policy implementation in the three countries. Could this also be the situation in other countries? In what ways can EQAP support countries identify these gaps in policy intent and policy in practice. Past experiences showed that practice and more so, the 'normal way of doing business' is more often taken as the 'unwritten policy' in the absence of a policy. The primary objective of the regional workshop will be to build the capacity and skills of member countries in reviewing and developing of education policies. EQAP will also train member countries on the use of new tools and frameworks to improve analysis and impact assessment of policy, distinguishing the elements of good policy and learn from policy failure. More importantly, the workshop will also focus on the use of various strategies for engaging effectively with stakeholders.

QUESTION: (Response required)

Is there a need and desire amongst the members to have a regional workshop on policy development?

○   *Yes*

○   *No*

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[6] Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment.

Outcome:

- 14 out of the 17 members have indicated their support for holding a regional workshop on policy development.
- In addition, there were comments on:
    - the need for guidance in the development/formulation of education policies to assist at the country level.
    - support for this initiative as an ongoing endeavour rather than a one-off workshop, given the valuable lessons from the findings of the PaBER approach.
    - the need to initially consult with the Institute of Education (IOE), USP, to explore a collaborative approach, as there is already some work on this in the region as mandated by the FEdMM of 2010.

Question 9: Policy Bank

Reference to Paper No. 5: Pacific Education Policy Repository.

What is the Pacific Policy Repository?

The Pacific Policy Repository is a regional database that contains a collection of information on education policies from member countries that can be easily accessed, managed and updated regularly. The Repository will serve as a one-stop shop for countries to share, to learn and to implement best practices from within the region in improving education quality through policy intervention. What is the progress on the Pacific Policy Repository? The Pacific Policy Repository is now up and running. The Annex in Paper 5 shows the main webpage of the Repository. Each country will have their own webpage together with restricted and authorized access to it. EQAP has successfully tested the Repository with education policies from a few countries, as you would see in the Annex.

What are the long term goals of the Repository?

There are three main phases for the Repository. We are currently at Phase 1, that is, we have developed the Repository and are now populating it with country policies. Phase 2 will be training of country focal points and Phase 3 is country ownership of the Repository with ongoing advisory and technical support from EQAP.

What we want from you?

The Repository is now ready and the Board is requested to nominate a country focal point to work with EQAP. NOMINATION (Name and contact details require)

Outcome:

- All countries have sent in the nomination for their focal point and the contact details.

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