



Bangkok Office
Asia and Pacific
Regional Bureau
for Education

Network for Education Quality Monitoring in the Asia-Pacific Region (NEQMAP)

**Network Meeting
27-28 March 2013**

Imperial Queen's Park Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand

Concept Note

1. Background and Rationale

As the year 2015 approaches, the international education community and others around the world are increasingly concerned with meeting the educational targets of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA). With more and more children worldwide now enrolled in school, there is a growing concern that the quality of education in many developing countries has stagnated or even worsened. The issue of quality and the subsequent question of whether and how well students are learning are therefore occupying an increasingly prominent place in international discourse on education. Examples range from the World Bank's focus on 'Learning for All' as the strategy for education and the Learning Metrics Task Force convened by the Brookings Institution and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. This concern has been echoed at the highest levels including by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon through the Global Education First Initiative (GEFI), which places improvement of the quality of learning as one of its three priority areas. Noting the prevalence of "ineffective systems to evaluate the performance of students" as one of the barriers to quality learning, GEFI emphasizes the importance of education systems to be able to closely monitor how well students are learning.¹

With this renewed focus, the question of how to monitor and measure learning is more salient than ever. While it may be acknowledged that the region has a tradition of public examinations, many countries are yet to initiate the systematic monitoring and measurement of learning which can be meaningful to the individual, the system and the society at large. As the World Bank (2012) notes, "too few countries have in place the policies, structures, practices and tools that would constitute an effective student assessment system. This is particularly the case for low-income countries, which stand to benefit the most from systematic efforts to measure student learning outcomes."² At the time, middle-income and developed countries also have a number of concerns in regard to monitoring and measurement of learning, including potential mismatches between curriculum and assessment, issues of bias and a number of potential side effects associated with assessments, including the phenomenon of 'rote learning', 'teaching to the test' and the increase of private tutoring.

The countries of the Asia-Pacific region are particularly concerned with the monitoring of educational quality. With most countries in this region having made great strides in extending access to education to all, the crucial issue is that of quality, as increase in enrolment does not necessarily equate to improved learning. Furthermore, the measurement of learning outcomes is important for accountability and for governments to justify investments in education. This concern is motivating countries to re-conceptualize national educational assessments as well as to sign up for participation in large-scale, international assessments such as the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the IEA's Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), in order

¹ Global Education First Initiative (2012). <http://www.globaleducationfirst.org/>

² World Bank (2012). *Education Notes: Measuring Learning – How Effective Student Assessment Systems Can Help Achieve Learning for All*. Washington: World Bank.

to monitor how their students and schools compare with their counterparts in the region (particularly important in the context of increasing regional integration) and worldwide.

UNESCO's Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education (UNESCO Bangkok) has undertaken a programme of analytical work to examine the trends and experiences in the region concerning assessment issues.

The publication *Examination Systems* (Hill, 2010)³ presented the different approaches to examinations in the region (particularly at secondary level) and highlighted key considerations and challenges associated with existing examination systems. The publication *Student Learning Assessment* (Ho, 2012)⁴ then went further, providing an overview of various types of assessments in the region including public examinations, other types of national/sub-national assessments, international assessments as well as school- and classroom-based assessment. This publication noted the tendency in the region towards adopting a multilevel approach to educational quality monitoring and observed that "countries appear to share common challenges in building their monitoring systems, especially for developing countries trying to establish...sustainable assessment system(s)" (p. 31). Both of these publications were published as booklets in UNESCO Bangkok's Asia-Pacific Education System Review Series. Also in an attempt to expand the knowledge base, UNESCO administered a survey on the use of assessments for policy and learning improvements in the region and the side effects of assessments. The report summarizing the responses of 17 countries is now being finalized and will be published in early 2013.

One of the major findings to emerge from this work and from UNESCO Bangkok's provision of technical support to selected countries on assessment issues is that countries in the region are increasingly interested in sharing experiences and learning from each other. Given this concern and drawing upon UNESCO's successful experience in establishing, managing and supporting similar networks in other parts of the world⁵, ***UNESCO Bangkok seeks to establish a regional platform for networking and information exchange among countries in the Asia-Pacific region on the issue of monitoring educational quality in the region.*** This platform, likely to be known as the ***Network for Education Quality Monitoring in Asia and the Pacific (NEQMAP)***, has potential to serve as a forum for reflection, debate and sharing of experience, lessons learned and best practice in the monitoring of educational quality. Such a forum or network has not existed thus far in the Asia-Pacific region, unlike other parts of the world such as Sub-Saharan Africa (PASEC and SACMEQ) and Latin America (LLECE). An initial meeting to constitute and plan the activities of the network is proposed for 27-28 March 2013 in Bangkok.

2. Aim of the Meeting

Despite the rich experience in monitoring educational quality in the region via various forms of assessment, there have been limited opportunities to share information and exchange on such experiences. This meeting will allow for information sharing on a range of trends and innovative activities in selected countries, including (for example): linkages between national and international assessments and practices (e.g. Republic of Korea); capacity building in technical skills for educational quality monitoring (e.g. Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand, Viet Nam); school- and classroom-based assessment reforms (e.g. Hong Kong SAR, New Zealand, Singapore) and large population-based, grassroots-level assessment exercises (e.g. India).

³ Hill, P. (2010). *Examination Systems*. Volume 1, Asia-Pacific Secondary Education System Review Series. Bangkok: UNESCO Bangkok. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001878/187826e.pdf>

⁴ Ho, E. (2012). *Student Learning Assessment*. Volume 5, Asia-Pacific Education System Review Series. Bangkok: UNESCO Bangkok. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002178/217816e.pdf>

⁵ This includes the Latin American Laboratory of Assessment of Quality of Education (LLECE), which is managed by UNESCO's Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (OREALC/UNESCO Santiago), and the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ), which is supported by technical assistance from UNESCO'S International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP).

The meeting will also allow for exchange on some of the collaborative initiatives which are already underway in the region. This includes regional inputs into the global work of the Learning Metrics Task Force as well as the initiative to develop a sub-regional (SEAMEO) learning metric for the primary education level, currently under development by UNICEF and SEAMEO. In addition, efforts have been undertaken by UNESCO Delhi/UIS to develop a regional assessment for South Asian countries specifically. UNESCO Bangkok has also initiated policy research on integrating non-cognitive skills⁶/competencies in education through its Education Research Institutes Network (ERI-Net).

Lastly, this initial meeting will lead to further discussions and concrete plans for how the network can best contribute to greater regional collaboration in the monitoring of educational quality, eventually leading to increased cooperation and partnership in this area in the context of regional economic integration and beyond. Tentative activities could include: establishment of a regional knowledge base on educational quality monitoring issues; a regional collaborative research project on the definition of quality of education; promotion of knowledge sharing (via study visits, exchanges and technical assistance); collective mobilization of resources for capacity building activities for countries where capacity constraints are prominent; implementation of a potential regional assessment on non-cognitive aspects of learning and collaborative research on a range of topics (e.g. assessment of non-cognitive skills, how countries utilize assessment results). The meeting will also discuss how the network will be managed and how resources will be mobilized for carrying out its work.

3. Specific Objectives

- To share information about current practices of monitoring educational quality in the region
- To exchange latest information on collaborative initiatives on monitoring educational quality which are underway in the region
- To establish the Network for Education Quality Monitoring in Asia and the Pacific (NEQMAP)
- To chart the future directions of the network by identifying possible activities and discussing management and resourcing issues

4. Participants

A small group of experts and researchers from education institutes and think-tanks from around the Asia-Pacific Region will be invited, including representatives from the following organizations:

- Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), Australia
- Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), Australia
- Secretariat of the Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA), Fiji
- Hong Kong Institute of Educational Research (HKIER), Hong Kong SAR
- Assessment Survey Evaluation Research Centre (ASER), India
- Learning Links Foundation, India
- National Institute for Educational Policy Research (NIER), Japan
- Educational Development Service Center (EDSC), Nepal
- New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), New Zealand
- Korea Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation (KICE), Republic of Korea

⁶ The term “non-cognitive skills” to address the skills that go beyond literary and numeracy is highly contested and alternative terms have been suggested, including “21st century skills”, “non-academic skills”, “higher-order skills” and “transferable skills”.

- Centre for International Cooperation in Education Development (CICED), Russia
- National Institute of Educational Testing Service (NIETS), Thailand
- Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA), Thailand
- Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI), Thailand

In addition, selected developing and middle-income country Ministries of Education (e.g. Cambodia, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Viet Nam) will be invited to send a representative to participate in the meeting. Representatives from regional institutions including SEAMEO and experts from UN sister agencies (e.g. UNICEF, UNESCAP) will also be invited to share their experience in regional work for the monitoring of educational quality.

5. Dates and Venue

Dates: 27 (Wednesday) – 28 (Thursday) March 2013

Venue: Imperial Queen’s Park Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand

6. Working Methods and Documents

Preparation for the meeting will be undertaken by UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education (UNESCO Bangkok, Education Policy and Reform Unit). The language of the meeting is English.

The meeting will focus primarily on discussions around the potential activities of the network. Several participants may be asked to make short presentations to share country experiences, while all participants would be expected to draw on country specific experiences in contributing to the discussions. A questionnaire would be circulated prior to the meeting in order to elicit participant feedback on the scope, structure and activities of the network.

7. Funding and Organizational Arrangements

Participants should seek funding from their own or other sources. A logistical note will be circulated nearer the date of the meeting with more information. Participants with special requests or requiring further clarification should contact the organizers directly.

8. Contact Persons

Ramya Vivekanandan Rodrigues (Ms)
 Programme Specialist
 Education Policy and Reform Unit
 UNESCO Bangkok
 Tel: +66-2-3910577 Ext. 380
 Fax: +66-2-391-0866
 Email: r.vivekanandan@unesco.org

Stella Yu (Ms)
 Programme Officer
 Education Policy and Reform Unit
 UNESCO Bangkok
 Tel: +66-2-3910577 Ext. 385
 Fax: +66-2-391-0866
 Email : s.yu@unesco.org