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**ArmEnic**  
National Information Center for  
Academic Recognition and Mobility

# RECOGNITION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL DIPLOMAS, CERTIFICATES & STANDARIZED TESTS GIVING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN ASIA & PACIFIC

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# Background

- Recognition of secondary school leaving diplomas, certificates/access qualifications and standardized tests is an important though an overlooked area.
- The fact that we are moving more than halfway into the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals-Education 2030 Agenda.
- To contribute to the attainment of the SDG 4 including
  - ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (SDG4);
  - ensuring equal access to affordable technical, vocational and higher education (SDG 4.3);
  - eliminating all forms of discrimination in education(SDG 4.5); and
  - expanding higher education scholarships for developing countries (SDG 4b).
- With the need to balance expansion of access to HE with equity and quality in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond
- Growth of cross-border and international HE especially important in the Region where number of mobile students have increased 2.41 times ( in 2019 compared with 2000) compared to 1.89 times globally.



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# Rationale and objectives

- In 2021 UNESCO's Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education launched a study on the recognition of secondary school leaving diplomas, certificates and standardized tests giving access to HE.
- Armenia, China, Japan, Mongolia, Republic of Korea, New Zealand country case studies were studied- all Parties to the Tokyo Convention/APNNIC member countries.

## **Objectives:**

- Enhancing transparency and information sharing among countries,
- On a comparative basis fostering development of national recognition and higher education admission policies for both domestic and foreign students particularly in transition from secondary to higher education.
- Facilitating implementation of the 2011 Tokyo Recognition Convention and the Global Convention
- Promoting individual's rights to fair, transparent and nondiscriminatory evaluation of qualifications giving access to higher education.

## **Methodology:** A research template was developed for each country *to collect information*

- *Policies and practices in higher education systems,*
- HE admission system,
- Variety of school-leaving diplomas and certificates,
- Types of HE entrance examinations and standardized tests,
- Recognition policies and procedures.



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# Higher education systems

HE in all the participating countries is following three-cycle degree structure, but there are differences in relation to duration of studies, academic year, types of HEIs, governance, legal frameworks, HE participation rate, etc

**First level ( bachelor):** - Armenia, New Zealand ranges from 3-4 years,  
China - 4-5 years; Japan, Mongolia and ROK- 4-6 years.

**Types of institutions:** *Armenia and Mongolia* utilize traditional classification:  
university, institute, college, conservatory, academy

*China:* regular (university, independent colleges, private institutes) and adult education institutions.

*Japan, New Zealand, ROK:* more complex categorization with clear distinction between academic, research and vocational.

**Governance:** Armenia, Mongolia, Japan and ROK- centralised by ministries  
China- national&provincial levels, NZ- jointly by several bodies( ministry, universities, Tertiary Education Commission, NZ Qualifications Authority).

**Legal framework:** Japan and NZ have only school education law.

**QFs:** Exists in Armenia and NZ.

# National Systems of Admission

- Generally, admission systems are regulated by the bylaws established by the ministries while entrance exams are organized and carried by different agencies..
  - ARM- Assessment and Testing Center;
  - China:- examination authorities in each province and independent regions;
  - Japan- National center for university entrance examinations;
  - Mongolia and NZ- Education Evaluation Centers;
  - ROK –Korea Institute for curriculum and evaluation.
- NZ – no entrance tests, but the authority is responsible for university entrance award that is required for access to HE.
- All countries (except NZ) have developed testing systems as part of the admission requirements. Furthermore, testing systems have gone through transformation to address equity & access challenges, enhance their effectiveness.
- Entrance exams are organized either annually (could be more) and administered by test centers and are covering various subjects: languages, STEM and Humanities. *Transparency of the process* is clearly manifested by the countries.
- In China it is possible to enter without exams –through adult education.
- Universities can ask for additional exams.



# School Leaving Qualifications

- Diversity of school leaving qualifications- based on national, foreign and international curriculum.

All the participating countries developed national curriculums: identifying subjects, coverage, hours, passing requirements (Japan, Mongolia, NZ, ROK) and even knowledge assessment framework (Armenia and Mongolia).

- *Japan*- introduced general and speciality related subjects/ not obligatory which highlight level of flexibility in new upper secondary curriculum;
- *ARM* –national curriculum is divided into general, humanitarian, natural sciences and vocational streams (same type of qualification), and recognised Araratian Baccalaureate, French baccalaureate (issuing their own qualifications);
- *China*- issues school leaving qualifications after taking Academic Proficiency Test.

*Foreign secondary qualifications are issued in all the countries.*



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# Recognition of Entrance Exams & Standardized Tests

- There are no regulations for recognition, however there seems to be its general understanding of foreign school leaving qualifications and international test including SAT, IB, GCE A-level and ACT.
- Recognition is mainly based on equivalency to national education standards (usually based on years of study).
- Language exams including the foreign language tests is a common practice.
- National Information Centers do not have clear mandate in relation to school leaving qualifications.
  - *ArmENIC* - providing advisory statements which are not binding,
  - *China*- no body focused on recognition, the agencies are doing verification.
  - *Mongolia* - Ministry is in charge of admission, but there are no recognition procedures.
  - *NZ*- universities are in charge of recognition included in admission requirements developed institutionally.
  - *ROK*- up to universities to make decisions regarding recognition and admission.



# Challenges and Ways Forward

- Lack of efficient common approach and procedures for recognition of foreign school leaving qualifications.
- No guidelines for recognition of international standardized tests giving access to HE.
- Diversity of HEIs, their scope of responsibilities in admission process adds to complexity of the recognition.
- Understanding the differences between the education systems is essential for recognitions which in many cases is based on equivalence of compared qualifications( comparing years).
- In some countries there is not requirement for entrance exams (non-university institutions).
- Lack of national qualifications frameworks in majority of the countries in the region and alignment of national curriculums with QFs and level descriptors.
- No guidelines for recognition of the international tests, usually carried by HEIs.
- Further developments of the APNNIC network for sharing experience and exchange of information is extremely important.





# Thank you!



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