

Section 4 Concluding Comments

Introduction

This final section of the report offers a few brief reflections on the research process in an attempt to contribute to the ongoing development of new technologies that can be used to increase the transparency of qualifications beyond those that were possible within the limitations of this study.

The Research Design

The conceptual clarity required to develop the comparability table formed a critical component of the overall research design. Breaking new ground required a research design in which data collection could take place within a semi-completed framework, a framework that could only be fully completed after the data had been collected. This iterative process proved beneficial, but also resulted in the need to engage in extensive conversations with the respondents to verify data within the evolving framework, and where this was lacking, additional information had to be sourced.

The use of the online survey was largely successful, although in some cases respondents had difficulty accessing the website and resorted to manual responses. Overall, the quality of the data relied heavily on the official responses from senior officials, who, in a few isolated cases, provided contradictory information. It is hoped that, based on the initial progress made available through the comparability table, such discussions within countries will be broadened beyond ministries to include other role players such as professional bodies and academics.

Re-thinking Comparability

At the outset of this research the limitations of using existing technologies, including the piloted comparability table, to improve the transparency of qualifications, was acknowledged. The point was made that, while it is critical to understand and point out the limitations, the quest to contribute to new thinking and new technologies should not be abandoned. This thinking forms an important thread that runs throughout the research.

The subsequent development of the conceptual framework wherein the research is located brought a

number of important developments to the fore. One of these was that a credible theory of action required the language of comparability to be refined. As a result, the conceptual clarity achieved by differentiating between transparency (as an overall process that can be achieved at varying levels), comparability (limited transparency), and equivalency (deeper transparency) constituted an important foundation for the study. In turn, this clarity contributed to the design of a fit-for-purpose format or framework in the guise of a comparability table made up of ISCED levels, contextual and professional factors, and specific criteria (such as the duration and practical components of qualifications). The comparability table was put forward as the best available technology to contribute to the transparency of teacher qualifications, albeit in a modest manner.

The comparability table was populated with data on initial teacher qualifications from 35 Commonwealth countries. The subsequent analysis of the data proved valuable to improving the transparency of teacher qualifications across the Commonwealth, but only at the level of comparability. It should not be expected that much would be achieved in terms of equivalency with an instrument designed for comparability. The point is that the application of the instrument (the comparability table) has promoted a move in the right direction, that is, towards improved transparency. As pointed out earlier, the extent of this move is limited by the available technologies, but it has opened up new opportunities and thinking that, in the long run, can be further developed.

The Research Findings

In terms of the actual research findings following the development of the comparability table, the following observations can be made:

It is apparent that initial teacher qualifications offered in the 35 participating Commonwealth countries vary greatly on a number of levels, including the duration, levels and emphasis on practical components. This was to be expected, considering the range of different contexts in the countries. However, it was evident that (largely due to the Commonwealth legacy), there are a number of commonalities, as well.

The majority of qualifications are pegged at ISCED levels 4 and 5, while most countries offer at least two pathways to full qualified status, and include three different qualifications across these pathways.

The duration to fully qualified status ranges between 2.6 to 3.8 years for primary teachers, and 2.9 to 4.1 years for secondary teachers. The practical components included in the qualifications pathways range from 11.4 to 20.4 weeks for primary teachers, and 12.0 to 21.0 weeks for secondary teachers.

In addition, eight main qualifications are offered across the Commonwealth (ranging from academic Bachelor Degrees to professional Postgraduate Certificates in Education). The Bachelor Degree in Education is by far the preferred qualification for both primary and secondary teachers, and is offered by 26 out of the 35 countries (74 per cent).

In terms of professional requirements, the research highlights a critical weakness across most Commonwealth countries (with the exception of only eight countries). This weakness lies largely outside the scope of this research and was therefore not pursued any further. Suffice it to say that much needs to be done in terms of capacity building, prioritisation, and targeted research (see below).

In terms of country-specific findings, the report steered away from focusing on specific countries, and concentrated on cross-cutting issues where possible, considering that the comparability table has a country-specific focus and that additional analysis will be possible by using this resource. Countries interested in country-specific findings are encouraged to contact the researchers through the Commonwealth Secretariat using the contact details provided.

Suggestions for Further Research

Limited technologies are available to improve the transparency of qualifications. At the most extreme points these technologies range from traditional time-based approaches (viewed by some as outdated and misleading), to the more recent preference for outcomes-led approaches (viewed by others as inadequate proxies for educational quality). The comparability table developed in this initiative, while firmly located within the context of outcomes-led qualifications framework developments, relied in part on the time-based ISCED instrument for the specific purpose of comparability. In the process, it was signalled that the choice for a predominantly time-

based model would be inadequate to achieve the deeper levels of transparency required to determine the equivalency of qualifications but would, at least in a modest way, contribute to the recognition of teacher qualifications on the level of comparability. We hope that the findings of this research, and the further consideration of pedagogy, institutions, curriculum, assessment, as well as the outcomes, will contribute to the broader international debate on the recognition and transparency of qualifications - more so as the national, regional and transnational qualifications frameworks in Europe, Southern Africa and elsewhere gain ascendancy.

In particular, the potential benefits of outcomes-led developments to increased transparency require more in-depth scrutiny. Emerging research on the design of overly behaviourist outcome statements in favour of a more constructivist approach located within specific communities of practice (see Moll 2009), is opening a new space wherein the current limitations of outcome statements can be addressed. While this thinking is still new and will require further development to be translated in the practice of qualifications design, it does offer new avenues, also in terms of the comparability of qualifications.

Case studies that focus on quality assurance within specific sectors and countries will also be of great value, and while these were not possible within the limitations of the research project, they were seriously considered. This key ingredient in building trust across borders requires more investigation. In this regard, the recent quality assurance benchmarking study in SADC (SADC 2007) can provide a useful point of reference.

This research is located in the broader context of teacher migration and cross-border provisioning. The challenge of developing the conceptual framework for the comparability table and gathering data from 35 countries placed limitations on the extent to which the broader applicability of the research could be located within the current thinking on migration and cross-border provisioning. However, this is a critical area that should be developed in future.

Similarly, the location of the comparability table within the arena of professional teacher requirements, and the extent to which professional requirements contribute to transparency of qualifications, can be further developed. Sharing the findings through conferences and publications by all involved will be an important route through which greater awareness can be created and further research encouraged.