

# Regional Policy Review 2024 from Third Countries not Associated to the Programme

## The Pacific

REGIONAL REPORT



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## Introduction

*The Erasmus+ regional policy review acts as a bridge between the Erasmus+ program and third countries not associated with it, shedding light on the policy landscape that shapes educational exchange and collaboration. By examining the interplay between local policies and Erasmus+ objectives, the document aims to foster a more cohesive and effective approach to international education, enhancing the program's reach and impact across diverse educational systems.*

## Regional Report

The main approach of the report is aggregating the national policy framework of the third countries not associated to the Erasmus+ programme within a specific region, offering a macroscopic view of how regional policies support, complement, or diverge from the goals and practices of the Erasmus+ program. It aims to identify common themes, challenges, and opportunities for collaboration across the region, providing insights into the broader regional stance towards international educational cooperation and mobility.

The report offers an analysis of the region's specific educational policies as they relate to the Erasmus+ program. They examine the extent to which national policies facilitate or hinder participation in Erasmus+ activities through a regional lens, highlight successful alignments, and pinpoint areas where policy adjustments could enhance cooperation.

## Individual Country Reports

National reports from individual countries within the region are embedded into the regional report. However, country data and statistics are available in the annex. These country reports have been prepared by the Erasmus+ National Focal Points (ENFPs). The documents are important in understanding the nuances of each country's engagement with Erasmus+ and for identifying tailored strategies to improve integration and outcomes.

## Erasmus+ Priorities and Features

The regional policy review of the third countries will be underpinned by the priorities that align with the overarching goals of the European Union, particularly focusing on digitalisation, the green deal, inclusion and diversity, and active participation in democratic life. These priorities reflect the EU's commitment to addressing current global challenges through education and training, ensuring that the Erasmus+ programme contributes to building a more sustainable, inclusive, and digitally advanced future. It will also look at the important features, most notably on internationalisa-

tion, and how this is implemented in the regions.

**Internationalisation:** As a fundamental feature of Erasmus+, internationalisation involves promoting cross-border collaboration and cultural exchange. This facet of the programme is designed to broaden participants' horizons, fostering mutual understanding and respect among diverse cultures. Through international partnerships and mobility opportunities, Erasmus+ aims to create a global learning community that values diversity and global interconnectedness. In this document, a probe is done on how this important feature is implemented in the countries not associated to the programme.

*There will be six regional reports: Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Latin America, Caribbean, the Middle East, and the Pacific, along with annexed country reports.*

## Contents

<b>1. Overview of Educational Policy in the Pacific.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. Current Initiatives: Innovations and Solutions for Educational Advancement.....	1
1.2. AUSTRALIA .....	2
1.3. NEW ZEALAND .....	3
1.4. Pacific Developing Member Countries .....	3
1.5. Fiji .....	3
1.6. Papua New Guinea.....	4
<b>2. Synergies and Collaboration.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Conclusions and Recommendations.....</b>	<b>5</b>



University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand

## 1. Overview of Educational Policy in the Pacific

The Pacific region presents a study in contrasts, embodying both the pinnacle of educational attainment and the evident challenges of developing nations within a single geographical tapestry. On one end of the spectrum, countries like Australia and New Zealand stand as beacons of higher education, attracting a global cohort of students with their advanced academic infrastructures, cutting-edge research opportunities, and inclusive educational policies. These nations not only contribute significantly to the global knowledge economy but also set benchmarks in educational quality, innovation, and accessibility. Conversely, although the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) has its own rich and diverse background, together, they share many of the same development challenges: limited resources, fragile environments, and remote, isolated and susceptible to natural disasters, the impacts of climate change, and external shocks. Most are also dependent on international trade and external financing. These factors render their growing population prone to a lot of vulnerabilities, which inherently impact their educational frameworks and outcomes.

This dichotomy within the Pacific region offers a unique lens through which to examine the complexities of education, shedding light on the interplay between global educational leadership and localised developmental challenges.

This report is structured to provide a compounded analysis of the region's approach to education, initially

offering an overarching examination of the systemic educational practices and challenges faced by the region as a whole. Following this holistic analysis, individual country profiles, statistics, and data will be presented as annexes. This structure is designed to not only highlight the regional educational trends and commonalities but also to provide detailed insights into the unique educational landscapes of each country within the Pacific, thereby offering a comprehensive overview that can inform targeted interventions and collaborative efforts under the auspices of programs like Erasmus+.

### 1.1. Current Initiatives: Innovations and Solutions for Educational Advancement

Several educational initiatives and frameworks in the region primarily focus on Pacific Island countries, reflecting the collaborative efforts of these nations to address shared challenges in education and skills training. The Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP) plays a crucial role in the Pacific Community's (SPC) efforts to enhance the quality of education across Pacific Island countries (PICs). As part of SPC, EQAP is committed to improving educational outcomes in the region, aligning its work with the broader goals of the Framework for Pacific Regionalism, which aims to foster peace, harmony, security, social inclusion, and economic prosperity in the Pacific. The programme operates under the guidance of the Pacific Board for Educational Quality, a subcommittee of SPC's Committee of Representatives of Govern-



ments and Administrations (CRGA), which provides strategic oversight and direction for EQAP's initiatives. While New Zealand and Australia have more developed systems, they play crucial roles in supporting and actively participating in these programs across the Pacific. EQAP's support provides a multitude of goods and services that will continue to respond to the needs of SPC member countries including: Education Data, Quality and System Management; Information Technologies for Education; Education Policy; Education Research; Large Scale Assessments; Curricula and Assessments; Teacher Competencies and Qualifications and Accreditations.

EQAP serves as a crucial partner, coordinator, and lead for Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) in promoting regional education policy priorities as set out in the Pacific Education Regional Framework (PacREF) and by the Conference of Pacific Education Ministers (CPEM). This role complements the educational investments made by Australia and New Zealand throughout the Pacific. The collaboration is grounded in partnership principles between Australia/New Zealand and SPC, emphasizing mutual respect and responsibility, improved donor coordination, a focus on outcomes and impact, and ensuring transparency and visibility.

Another key example is the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations Plus (PACER Plus), which, while primarily an economic and trade agreement, includes components that enhance labor mobility and skills development. PACER Plus involves Australia, New Zealand, and 11 Pacific Island countries and aims to facilitate the movement of skilled workers between these nations, thereby improving educational and training outcomes. The agreement includes programs designed to build the capacity of Pacific Island countries to develop skills and training systems that are closely aligned with labor market needs in the Pacific, Australia, and New Zealand. This alignment promotes sustainable economic development and enhances the employability of Pacific Islanders across the region.

The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), which includes all Pacific Island countries, Australia, and New Zealand, coordinates several educational and training initiatives across the region. One such initiative is the PacREF, where both New Zealand and Australia are significant contributors. The framework aims to improve education quality, access, and outcomes across the Pacific through regional cooperation, with both Australia and New Zealand providing technical support, funding, and expertise.

Both Australia and New Zealand have developed labor mobility programs that include Pacific Island countries. The Pacific Labour Scheme (Australia) and the

Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme (New Zealand) are key components of these efforts. These programs not only allow Pacific Islanders to work temporarily in Australia and New Zealand but also include training and skills development components. Workers gain valuable skills that they can apply upon returning to their home countries, thereby contributing to the development of local economies.

These initiatives illustrate the interconnectedness of Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Island countries in their efforts to enhance education and training across the region. Through these programs, the countries work together to address shared challenges, improve education quality, and build the capacity of the region's workforce, all while respecting the unique cultural and educational contexts of the Pacific Island nations.

## 1.2. AUSTRALIA

In 2021, Australia embarked on a visionary journey to redefine its stance on international education through the launch of a revised national strategy, ambitiously extending its outlook to the year 2030. This strategic pivot not only aims to rejuvenate the Australian international education sector post-pandemic but also aligns remarkably with the global education ethos embodied by the Erasmus+ program. Central to both initiatives is the commitment to fostering innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability in higher education, reflecting a shared vision that transcends geographical boundaries and cultural differences.

At the heart of Australia's strategy is a robust financial commitment, earmarked to nurture innovation and capacity within the educational landscape. Notably, the provision of \$8 million in seed funding to develop up to 70 globally relevant micro-credentials exemplifies a concerted effort to bridge the gap between education and industry. This initiative resonates with Erasmus+ priorities around enhancing employability and skills development through focused, flexible learning pathways. By facilitating international and onshore implementation of these credentials, Australia mirrors Erasmus+ emphasis on promoting cross-border educational mobility and lifelong learning opportunities.

The strategy further delineates a comprehensive support framework for the international education sector, including significant fee relief and targeted funds aimed at expanding the diversity and accessibility of education offerings. The \$27.8 million allocation for fee relief and the \$9.4 million Innovation Development Fund for ELICOS providers are instrumental in accelerating the sector's recovery and transformation. These measures echo the Erasmus+ principle of removing financial barriers to education, ensuring that

quality education is accessible to all, irrespective of socio-economic backgrounds.

Moreover, Australia's commitment to legislative review and the fostering of an inclusive, diverse international student body is indicative of a shared ethos with Erasmus+. The review of the ESOS Act and the National Code, alongside the discussion on international student diversity, underscores a proactive approach to embracing innovation, ensuring high-quality education provision, and enhancing the student experience. These efforts align with Erasmus+ objectives of supporting policy reform, institutional development, and fostering inclusivity within the educational domain.

### 1.3. NEW ZEALAND

On the other hand, two pivotal initiatives, the refreshment of The New Zealand Curriculum and the launch of Te Ara Paerangi Future Pathways, embody New Zealand's dedication to fostering a holistic, adaptable educational ecosystem but also mirror the core priorities of the Erasmus+ programme, highlighting a shared global commitment to nurturing the next generation of learners, innovators, and leaders.

The refreshment of The New Zealand Curriculum, a comprehensive six-year programme, is poised to redefine educational experiences nationwide. By ensuring the curriculum is inclusive, aligned with Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and focused on the learning that genuinely matters, New Zealand boldly states the value of cultural respect, equity, and relevance in education. This initiative resonates with Erasmus+ emphasis on inclusive education that respects and integrates cultural diversity and promotes learning mobility. The phased development and implementation approach, allowing schools until 2027 to adopt the refreshed curriculum, reflects a thoughtful, inclusive process that parallels Erasmus+ strategic support for educational innovation and reform across Europe.

Simultaneously, Te Ara Paerangi Future Pathways illuminates New Zealand's ambition to sculpt a future-focused research, science, and innovation system. This multi-year programme underscores the importance of building a resilient, adaptable research infrastructure capable of navigating future challenges and seizing emerging opportunities. A profound synergy lies with Erasmus+ dedication to enhancing research and innovation capacities within the European Union and beyond. Te Ara Paerangi's vision of a modern research ecosystem echoes Erasmus+ objectives of fostering excellence in innovation, supporting collaborative projects, and enhancing the global competitiveness of the educational sector.

### 1.4. Pacific Developing Member Countries

Meanwhile, the Pacific DMCs face a constellation of challenges that hinder their educational progress, starkly contrasting with the affluence of educational opportunities in their more developed counterparts. In 2015, the Pacific Heads of Education Systems (PHES) began to work towards shaping a more comprehensive, longer-term and calibrated programme to raise educational quality across the region. In doing so, the PHES partnered with the regionally based international education agencies to develop a new framework – Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF): Moving Towards Education 2030 (Pacific et al., 2018). This framework was endorsed by FEEdMM in 2018 and formally aligned with the timeline established for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the achievement of the SDGs. The PacREF provides a means for identifying and understanding similarities and differences across the Pacific region. It offers organising mechanisms for sector planning, reporting and collaboration, and it provides development partners with an understanding of where the Pacific region's resourcing priorities lie. It supports activities that are politically feasible and technically sound and that have a high probability of producing the desired outcomes. The PacREF is driven by six principles, as follows: 1. Regionalism and mutually beneficial partnerships 2. Application of evidence to policy and practice 3. Efficiency in the use of resources 4. Equity in access and opportunity 5. High-quality and relevant inputs 6. Sustainable and high-quality outcomes (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2018).

### 1.5. Fiji

In the heart of the Pacific, Fiji is spearheading an educational transformation that aligns with the Pacific Regional Education Framework. The Fiji National Qualifications Framework (FNQF), a strategic initiative designed to redefine learning landscapes nationwide, is central to this transformation. By establishing clear, interconnected learning pathways, the FNQF promotes learner mobility and ensures that qualifications are comprehensively mapped within the national system. This approach fosters educational coherence and fluidity and mirrors the Erasmus+ commitment to enhancing learning mobility, recognition, and cooperation across borders.

The FNQF embodies Fiji's dedication to creating an inclusive, flexible educational ecosystem accommodating diverse learning needs and aspirations. This initiative directly supports the Pacific Regional Education Framework's goals of improving quality, relevance, and

access to education across the Pacific. By clarifying the relationships between qualifications, Fiji is not only simplifying navigation through its educational system for its citizens but also enhancing its compatibility with international education systems. This strategic alignment facilitates the recognition of Fiji's qualifications abroad, encouraging a reciprocal flow of knowledge and learners between Fiji and the world, echoing the Erasmus+ priority of promoting international education and training opportunities.

Moreover, the FNQF's emphasis on learner mobility and the establishment of varied learning pathways mirrors the Erasmus+ principle of supporting lifelong learning and flexibility in education. The FNQF reflects a shared understanding that education must be adaptable, recognizing how individuals engage with learning throughout their lives. Fiji's approach, supported by the FNQF, champions the idea that educational pathways should not be linear but rather reflective of learners' diverse, evolving needs in a rapidly changing world.

### 1.6. Papua New Guinea

Similarly, Papua New Guinea (PNG) is advancing its educational ambitions through the establishment of the PNG National Qualifications Framework (PNGNQF), a comprehensive system that categorizes formal qualifications within post-secondary education. This framework plays a pivotal role in recognizing academic achievements through a range of formal awards, including certificates, diplomas, bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, and doctorates. At the core of the PNGNQF is the delineation of ten distinct levels of qualifications, meticulously defined by specific learning outcomes and the requisite volume of learning.

The innovative structure of the PNGNQF assigns a dual categorization to each qualification: a level (1-10) that indicates the standard of learning attained, and an Award-Type, which elucidates the award's purpose, the scope of learning, and the potential pathways for academic and professional progression. This dual categorization is instrumental in fostering clarity and coherence within Papua New Guinea's tertiary education system, ensuring that each qualification is not only nationally significant but also internationally comparable.

This initiative aligns seamlessly with the broader goals of the Pacific Regional Education Framework, emphasizing quality, accessibility, and relevance in education. Moreover, it resonates with the Erasmus+ principles of promoting lifelong learning, enhancing the quality and inclusivity of education, and fostering the internationalization of education systems.

## 2. Synergies and Collaboration

Australia's approach to international education and research is characterized by a suite of dynamic and diverse programs designed to foster global engagement, academic excellence, and professional development. Through initiatives like the Destination Australia Program, the Destination Australia Cheung Kong Exchange Program, the Australia Awards, the Research Training Program, and the New Colombo Plan, Australia is actively contributing to a global partnership in education, alongside peers like the European Union. Each program, while unique in its focus and objectives, shares the common goal of enhancing Australia's educational landscape and fostering international collaboration and understanding.

New Zealand's commitment to global education and development is exemplified through its Manaaki New Zealand Scholarships. These scholarships offer a life-line of opportunity to eligible citizens from developing countries, echoing a shared mission with the European Union's Erasmus+ program: to foster international understanding, skill development, and academic exchange across borders. By providing scholarships for undergraduate and postgraduate study, as well as short-term training and English language training for officials, New Zealand not only opens doors for individuals from the Pacific, Southeast Asia, Timor-Leste, and select African and Asian countries but also nurtures the potential for future leaders and professionals to emerge and thrive.

New Zealand's Manaaki New Zealand Scholarships offer a comprehensive suite of opportunities for international education and professional development, aligning closely with the ethos of the Erasmus+ program. These scholarships range from full tertiary education for students from developing countries to study at New Zealand or Pacific universities, to short-term training scholarships that provide vocational skills and on-the-job experience for workers from the Pacific, Timor-Leste, and Southeast Asia. Additionally, the English Language Training for Officials Scholarships (NZELTO) enhance the linguistic capabilities of government officials from eligible African and Asian countries. Together, these programs aim to bolster academic prowess, professional competencies, and effective governance, thereby fostering global growth, cultural exchange, and sustainable development.

Australia's engagement with European education systems is a testament to the rich tapestry of academic, cultural, and developmental synergies that span continents. Rooted in Europe's esteemed tradition of research and development, the bilateral educational cooperation between Australia and Europe is fur-



ther enriched by robust academic linkages, a vibrant exchange of international students, and deep cultural and people-to-people connections. Annually, Australia becomes a learning abode for over 40,000 European students, underscoring the dynamic educational exchange that flourishes between these diverse educational landscapes.

The Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (DIISRTE) in Australia plays a pivotal role in fostering this active educational relationship with the European Union (EU). Together, DIISRTE and the European Commission embark on initiatives aimed at enhancing student and academic mobility and facilitating a bilateral exchange of best practices on pivotal policy issues. This collaboration reflects a mutual commitment to nurturing a global educational ecosystem characterized by openness, innovation, and shared growth.

Since 2003, this partnership has given rise to seven rounds of joint cooperation projects focused on student mobility, each spanning three years. These projects unite consortia of EU and Australian universities, along with vocational education and training institutions, in a structured exchange of students and academics. Focused on a joint subject area, these exchanges are not just about crossing geographical boundaries but also about transcending academic and cultural barriers, fostering innovative curriculum development, and establishing credit transfer arrangements that reflect a commitment to academic excellence and flexibility.

The dialogue between Australia and the EU has also ventured into policy arenas, with three policy dialogues held since 2009 on topics of mutual interest in education and training. These dialogues serve as a platform for policymakers and practitioners to exchange insights and best practices, thereby enriching the educational policies and strategies of both regions.

Integral to this collaborative framework is the European Union-Australia Partnership Framework, a document that encapsulates the essence of this bilateral cooperation. Launched in 2008 and subject to annual updates, this framework chronicles the array of activities contributing to the flourishing partnership between Australia and the EU, symbolizing a shared journey towards educational innovation and global competence.

A notable milestone in this journey was the renewal of the Agreement of Mutual Recognition of Qualifications in October 2009, facilitated by Universities Australia alongside the French Vice-Chancellors' Committee and French Engineering Schools Directors' Committee, with DEEWR playing a key role in its formulation. This

agreement exemplifies the tangible outcomes of such international cooperation, ensuring that qualifications earned are acknowledged and respected across borders.

Further solidifying this collaborative spirit, a Joint Declaration was signed in 2007 between Australia and the European Commission, aimed at reinforcing cooperation in the fields of education and training. This declaration not only symbolizes a mutual recognition of the value of educational exchange but also commits to a future where such exchanges are the bedrock of a globally connected and educated world.

Through these multifaceted initiatives, Australia and Europe continue to weave a rich narrative of educational cooperation, characterized by mutual respect, shared values, and a united vision for a world where education transcends boundaries, fostering an interconnected community of learners, scholars, and global citizens.

### 3. Conclusions and Recommendations

Despite the myriad challenges it faces, the Pacific region is endowed with a wealth of opportunities for educational transformation, notably through the avenues of innovation and collaboration. This region, characterized by its educational dichotomy, presents an unparalleled opportunity for reciprocal learning and exchange between the advanced educational frameworks of countries like Australia and New Zealand and the developing educational systems of the Pacific Developing Member Countries (DMCs). Such an environment is conducive to leveraging technology and digital learning platforms, thereby overcoming geographical constraints to provide remote and island communities with access to superior education and global knowledge networks. This approach not only aligns with the Erasmus+ priorities of enhancing digital education and promoting lifelong learning but also underscores the importance of inclusivity and accessibility in education.

Collaborative partnerships between Pacific nations and their more developed counterparts can significantly boost educational exchanges, capacity building, and the sharing of resources, in line with the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and Erasmus+ objectives of supporting policy reform and institutional development across educational systems. Moreover, the potential for integrating indigenous knowledge systems with contemporary educational curricula offers a unique pathway to enrich learning experiences and champion cultural preservation. This integration mirrors the Eras-

mus+ principle of incorporating intercultural understanding and diversity into education, thus fostering a more holistic and inclusive approach to learning.

In embracing these opportunities, the Pacific region is poised to develop a resilient, inclusive, and adaptive educational ecosystem, setting a precedent for innovation and cooperation on the international stage. Such an ecosystem not only leverages the region's diverse strengths but also addresses its educational disparities, paving the way toward a future where education acts as both a bridge and a beacon—connecting islands, nations, and cultures, while highlighting routes to sustainable development and shared prosperity. This vision for the Pacific not only significantly contributes to the regional policy review but also aligns with the Erasmus+ principles, offering valuable insights into the global dialogue on education, equity, and resilience. Through this alignment, the Pacific's educational landscape embodies a compelling narrative that reinforces the shared global commitment to transforming education into a tool for unity, innovation, and enduring growth.

*For detailed information on initiatives in the Pacific, please check out the Country Factsheets in the Annexes.*

