

The VUSSC TQF is launched in Namibia

By Franz Gertze
Director, Namibia Qualifications Authority
Member, TQF Management Committee

The Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF) for the Virtual University for the Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) was formally launched at the Country Club in Windhoek, Namibia. COL President Sir John Daniel presided at the occasion, which heralded the introduction of probably the most international, collaborative system for capacity building, skills development and greater access to quality assured qualifications.

The timing and venue for the TQF launch was most opportune as it coincided with the 2010 Forum of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies (INQAAHE) which was hosted by the Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA).

Present at the launch were representatives from a wide spectrum of role players in education and training including guests from UNESCO, GIQAC, the World Bank, INQAAHE and Regional Quality Networks in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe and Latin America. Many international leaders from within the education sector certainly became aware of the TQF and its benefits following a presentation on the TQF by Franz Gertze, Director of the NQA and a member of the TQF Management Committee.

There was sense of palpable excitement in the air. Ms Stamenka Uvalic-Trumbic, Chief of the Section for Reform, Innovation and Quality Assurance in UNESCO's Higher Education Division in Paris noted that the incorporation of some elements of UNESCO/OECD Guidelines on Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education is a clear indication that we serve a common purpose and as such are expected to work together for the good of humankind.

Some of the guests were of the opinion that discussions on the OER's should be linked to the TQF as the providers may consider using the available OER's when they develop their qualifications. Such qualifications could then be registered onto the VUSSCTQF.

At the same occasion the President of INQAAHE, David Woodhouse wondered if the TQF should not rather be called an International Qualifications Framework – thus extending its reach to more nations. A question of this kind underscores the thinking that the basic tenets of the TQF are sound and applicable in a broader context.

The Deputy Minister of Education in Namibia, Dr. David Namwandi was extremely pleased that Namibia had the honour to co-host such an unprecedented international launch. He encouraged all providers to seize the opportunities offered by VUSSC and its TQF. The Deputy Minister further stated that Namibia, like many other small states face challenges that relate to access to education and training. Other challenges that the TQF can help to address are of a qualitative nature and include, amongst others, processes such as standards setting, accreditation, validation, credit transfer and the recognition of local qualifications across borders.

Sir John Daniel expressed his gratitude with the VUSSC TQF that is now in place. He commended everyone who contributed to a tool of the magnitude of the TQF. In his words, the publication of the TQF takes the conceptualisation of the TQF a step further by providing procedures and guidelines to small states with or without national qualifications frameworks, for translating quality assured national qualifications to the levels of the TQF. He emphasised that the sustainability of the TQF depends on the commitment of the member states and encouraged all members to mould the TQF together and to ensure that it works. The fate of this worthwhile initiative is in our hands, he said before officially launching the TQF.

COL hosted a similar launch of the TQF in the beautiful setting of the Two Oceans Aquarium in Cape Town, South Africa.

The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) was conceived at the Conference of Commonwealth Ministers of Education in 2000. After approval of the VUSSC concept in 2003 by the Ministers, COL was asked to assist countries to collaborate and strengthen the capacity of national education institutions through VUSSC. Following a period of four years of course development through the VUSSC “bootcamps”, the small states proposed the development of a qualifications framework as a mechanism to support the development, international recognition, comparability and understanding of the VUSSC courses.

COL commissioned a study on the viability of such a framework. Senior officials from the participating small states at their meeting in Singapore discussed that draft document and agreed that the TQF is viable. They also noted that the TQF, although plausible, should not replace or review exiting qualifications framework, but that it should function as a translation instrument between the qualifications systems in the different countries. The intention has been that the TQF would provide the impetus for the portability of quality assured qualifications and learners between countries by providing a means for the comparison of national qualification frameworks.