



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING



Transnational Qualifications Framework

for the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth

Procedures
and
Guidelines

Revised April 2015



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FOREWORD

The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) is a network of, for and by small states. It is not a new university competing with existing providers but a mechanism for ministries of education and institutions to collaborate in content creation and capacity building within tertiary institutions in the small states.

The idea for a VUSSC was mooted in Halifax in 2000 at the triennial Conference of Commonwealth Ministers of Education and the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) was asked to facilitate its development. It was not until 2006 that the first VUSSC capacity building and course development workshop was held that prompted member states to rethink about the development and delivery of courses using open educational resources (OER). The following four years COL continued to support countries to collaborate and strengthen the capacity of their national education institutions through the VUSSC.

In 2007, participating countries proposed the development of a qualifications framework and the following year senior officials met in Singapore to discuss the proposed Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF). With the support of the South Africa Qualifications Authority (SAQA) a TQF was developed to support the development, international recognition, comparability and easy understanding of courses offered within the VUSSC context.

An important feature that stems out of the TQF is that it does not replace or review existing qualifications frameworks in the

small states, but it is a translation instrument between the systems in different countries and regions. This translation instrument is providing momentum for the transfer of courses, qualifications and learners between countries by providing a means through which qualifications frameworks could be compared and related.

Today, VUSSC is a growing network committed to the collaborative development of open educational resources (OER) and the delivery of courses and programmes. Eleven institutions in nine countries are offering VUSSC developed courses and programmes and six of these programmes are already registered on the TQF. The TQF has also been referenced against major Regional Qualifications Frameworks (RQFs) and National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) in small states. These are major achievements for VUSSC and the small states of the Commonwealth.

The TQF coupled with VUSSC are powerful examples of COL's strategic role in the development of both policy and institutional frameworks which will increase learner access, learning recognition and transferability and learner mobility.

Impact of the Commonwealth of Learning
2006 to 2015 report

Professor Asha Kanwar
President and CEO
Commonwealth of Learning

April 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this document

This document explains the concept and procedures and guidelines for the Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF) developed for the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). The document has been prepared to promote the credibility and reliability of qualifications developed by any of the national quality assurance agencies in the small states, as well as accredited education and training providers involved in the VUSSC. These guidelines are meant to be used as working tools by the various stakeholders.

The TQF is conceived as a reference system which will link national qualifications systems and frameworks in different small states together. In practice, the TQF will function as a translation device making qualifications more readable, which in turn, will help learners and workers that move between countries or change jobs. It is a key aim of the TQF to contribute to creating a workforce in small states that is mobile and flexible. For employers, the TQF will make it easier to interpret the qualifications of applicants from other countries. The TQF will support labour market mobility in small states both between and within countries and sectors by simplifying comparisons between qualifications and enabling a better match

between supply and demand for knowledge, skills and competences. For individuals, the TQF will make it easier to describe their broad level of competence to recruiters in other countries and make it simpler to read across from one qualification system to another, such as when looking for further education and training opportunities.

As an instrument for the promotion of lifelong learning, the TQF encompasses adult basic education and training, vocational education and training, as well as higher education. The ten levels of the TQF spans over qualifications from those achieved at the end of compulsory education to those awarded at the highest level of academic and professional or vocational education and training. Each level is in principle attainable by way of a variety of education and career paths. The TQF includes qualifications from Certificates to Doctoral Degrees. Learning outcomes and competencies are used to define and describe the qualifications. The qualification titles on the TQF are illustrative examples which encourage flexibility of assignment of qualifications to levels on the framework. To ensure easy access to the relevant and adequate information on the TQF a VUSSC TQF portal is being developed, consisting of a searchable database of qualifications and training providers involved in the VUSSC initiative.

The role of the TQF Management Committee

The first TQF Management Committee (TQFMC) was elected by the national representatives of Ministries of Education and national qualifications agencies that participated in a VUSSC TQF meeting hosted by COL in February 2008 in Singapore. The TQFMC elected its own chair and two vice-chairs. At the second meeting of the senior officials held in Kuala Lumpur, March 06, 2015 and in pursuance with the terms of reference of TQFMC, the following persons were elected to office for an initial period of three years:

- Mr. Franz Gertze (Chairperson, Namibia)
- Mr. Michael Bradshaw (Vice-chairperson, Trinidad and Tobago)
- Dr Yvonne Marchall (Jamaica)
- Dr Abdul Hannan Waheed (Maldives)
- Ms Edel Cassar (Malta)
- Mr. Lemalu Lafi Sanerivi (Pacific)

The TQFMC cooperates closely with the VUSSC Management Committee. For this reason the TQFMC chairperson is also an ex-officio member of the VUSSC Management Committee. The TQFMC held its first meeting in Singapore from 6-10 October 2008. At this meeting the initial work on the procedures and guidelines for the TQF took place, which was followed by further work that took place in an online mode, and has resulted in this procedure and guideline document.

Architecture and structure of TQF

Level descriptors

The TQFMC proposes a ten-level qualifications framework. This proposal is premised on the fact that most of the member states have or are developing NQFs with ten levels. The level descriptors

have been drafted and are included in this procedure and guideline document. It is imperative to note that where qualification types are listed this is done for illustrative purposes only. The actual registration of qualifications will employ the quality assurance mechanisms that have been collectively agreed to by small states of the Commonwealth.

Quality assurance guidelines

The quality assurance mechanism for the TQF adopts a flexible directive approach rather than being prescriptive. It relies exclusively on the quality assurance systems of the national quality assurance agencies (NQAAs) of the member states and/or other recognised agencies that have legitimate status. Guidelines have been drafted to which it is proposed that providers and NQAAs would subscribe, informed by the UNESCO guidelines for quality provision of cross-border higher education. The TQF is based on voluntary participation premised on acceptance of its guidelines prior to the registration of qualifications.

Qualifications guidelines

Although qualifications nomenclature is not uniform across the small states, there is a groundswell of common activities relating to quality assurance of education and training. This would strengthen the growth and the expansion of the TQF. The TQFMC was therefore also mandated to develop guidelines for translation of qualifications. To this end proposals are made with regard to different qualification types, credits, translation criteria and credit transfer. Attention was also given to processes leading to the registration of qualifications on the TQF.

Implementation strategy and processes

Development of this document

The initial draft of this document was made available to member states for their comments. Cluster meetings were held in the three regions as part of this consultation process: Africa–Mediterranean, Asia-Pacific, and the Caribbean. Reports from the cluster meetings and other commentaries received by the TQFMC were carefully considered, and where appropriate, incorporated into this document. It is envisaged that this is a living document and the consultative process will be ongoing for the next few years. This document is to be presented as a collectively agreed TQF document, through the facilitation of COL, to Ministers of Education.

The design of VUSSC TQF portal

The elements contained in the TQF procedure and guideline document inform the design of the VUSSC TQF portal.

Strategic and operational plans for the TQF

A three-year strategic plan with a corresponding operational plan containing a detailed budget will be prepared. An important part of this plan is the advocacy and promotion approaches to be followed during the implementation of the TQF. This plan will be implemented by the TQFMC working directly with the VUSSC Educational Specialist (located at COL), and in collaboration with the VUSSC Management Committee.

Major benefits of the TQF

Ministers of Education requested the creation of mechanisms to support the accreditation of qualifications and transfer of credits between countries, thereby

improving the socio-economic status of the member countries. The TQF will initially be available to 31 member states of the Commonwealth. As a result, students will potentially have access to a greater number, variety and quality assured programmes and courses. The TQF-recognised institutions will potentially reach millions of students, while international benchmarking of the TQF can lead to improved competitiveness and standards of national education and training providers.

Funding and staffing

Funding the development and registration of qualifications and further development and maintenance of the TQF and its portal, as well as developing quality assurance capacity in member states, will all require sustainable and sufficient resourcing especially funding and staffing. At this point COL staff includes a VUSSC Education Specialist, a full-time administrative assistant and additional staff that may be contracted when necessary. Members of the new TQFMC were elected at the second meeting of senior officers for an initial period of three years (up to 2018) and perform this function on a voluntary basis with the support of their respective governments.

Roles and responsibilities of the TQFMC

It is envisaged that the TQFMC will approve annual budgets for operational plans, while the VUSSC Management Committee and COL will be responsible for sourcing funds for TQF operations. The roles and responsibilities of TQFMC will include:

- developing and maintaining the TQF, such as the ongoing process of reviewing and updating qualifications at selected periods of time;
- evaluating the TQF;
- developing strategic and operational plans with budgets;

- developing promotional materials;
- promoting best international practice;
- collaborating and coordinating with VUSSC Management Committee members and other interlocutors on TQF operations, including promoting the TQF and preparing annual reports;
- advising on registration of qualifications at the appropriate levels;
- advising on, sharing information and facilitating the translation of qualifications;
- advising and supporting the NQAAs and other recognised quality assurance agencies.

The Ministers of Education conceived a collaborative system for capacity building of learning in small states of the Commonwealth and the TQF is a fitting response to this request.

The term of office for the TQFMC is three years.

Conclusion

The TQFMC takes pleasure in presenting this document of the guidelines, level descriptors and quality assurance procedures for the TQF to member countries, participating NQAAs, the VUSCC Management Committee and COL. The successful implementation of the TQF requires commitment and support of all 31 small states of the Commonwealth to ensure collective understanding, commitment and networking to realise the full potential of the VUSSC.

Most importantly, the TQF:

- relies on national quality assurance mechanisms for the registration of qualifications;
- will only accept qualifications from education and training providers that have been quality assured in their country of origin or by collaborative arrangements;
- aims to work with NQAAs to achieve coherence of the TQF as a translation instrument.

CHAPTER ONE:

SITUATING THE TQF CONCEPT

Introduction

The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) is an initiative of the Ministers of Education of the 31 small states¹ that account for two-thirds of Commonwealth member states. At present 31 Commonwealth small states participate in the VUSSC initiative: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Cyprus, Dominica, Fiji, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Kiribati, Lesotho, Maldives, Malta, Mauritius, Namibia, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Swaziland, The Bahamas, The Gambia, The Solomon Islands, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

Following a request from the participating small states of the Commonwealth in March 2007 to create mechanisms to support the accreditation of qualifications and transfer of credits between countries, a process was initiated to analyse and find commonalities between existing qualifications frameworks, with the view of using these as a basis for the development of a qualifications framework for VUSSC qualifications across member countries, hence developing a Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF).

¹ Small states of the Commonwealth are defined as states that have a population of less than 4.5 million (with no exception) or less than 1.5 million population (with exception)

Rationale

The VUSSC TQF spans thirty-one (31) member states from Africa, Asia, Caribbean, Europe and the Pacific regions. The TQF is not restricted to a particular area of geographical proximity neither does it cover an area that shares similar education backgrounds and systems. The 31 countries are spread across the globe. The TQF is seen as a transnational qualifications framework in the truest sense of the word and comprises of both national and regional frameworks.

Common to the states is their size i.e. the member states each has a population, not exceeding two million citizens. The total population of the 31 small states is about 32 million while the average educational expenditure averages 6% of the GDP.

James Keevy et al in their ETF report entitled Transnational Qualifications Framework provide the following data about the VUSSC TQF.

Remittances within VUSSC member states total USD 5,670 million for inflow and USD 1,798 million for outflow. Jamaica stands out with by far the highest inflow rate amongst the VUSSC member states (contribution 39% to the regional total), with Gambia the only other country with a significant inflow rate (if compared to the

other VUSSC member states). Jamaica's outflow rate is much lower than its inflow rate, although this still represents 26% of

the total inflow rate for the VUSSC member states. Cyprus and the Bahamas also show relatively high remittance outflow rates.

Figure 1: Commonwealth Small States Population and Education Expenditure

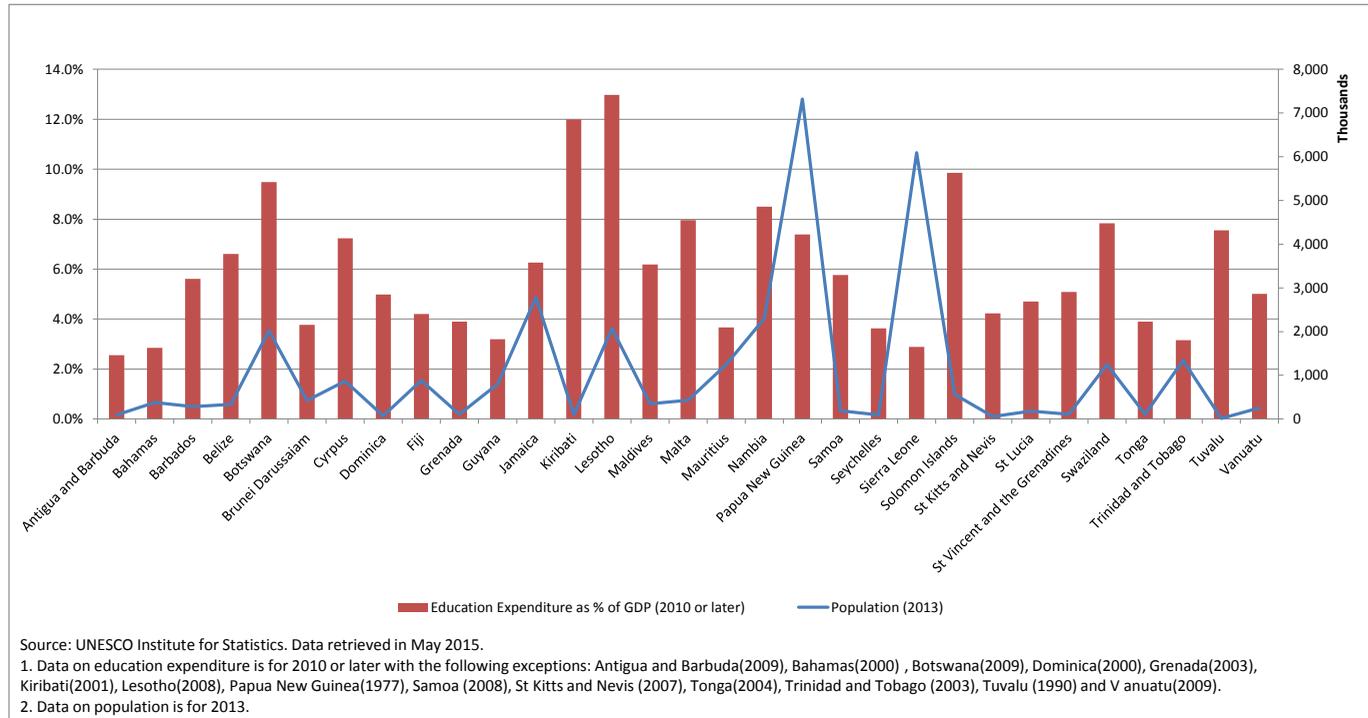


Figure 2: Commonwealth Small States Gross Enrolment, Youth Population and Adult Literacy

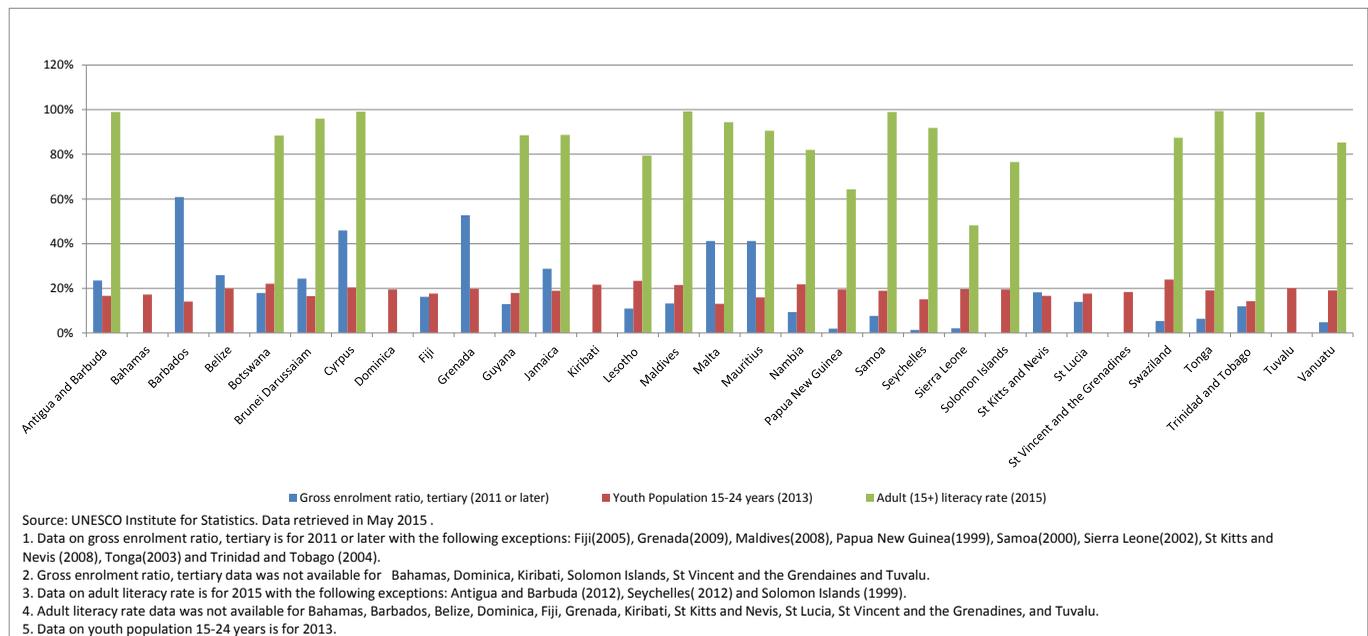
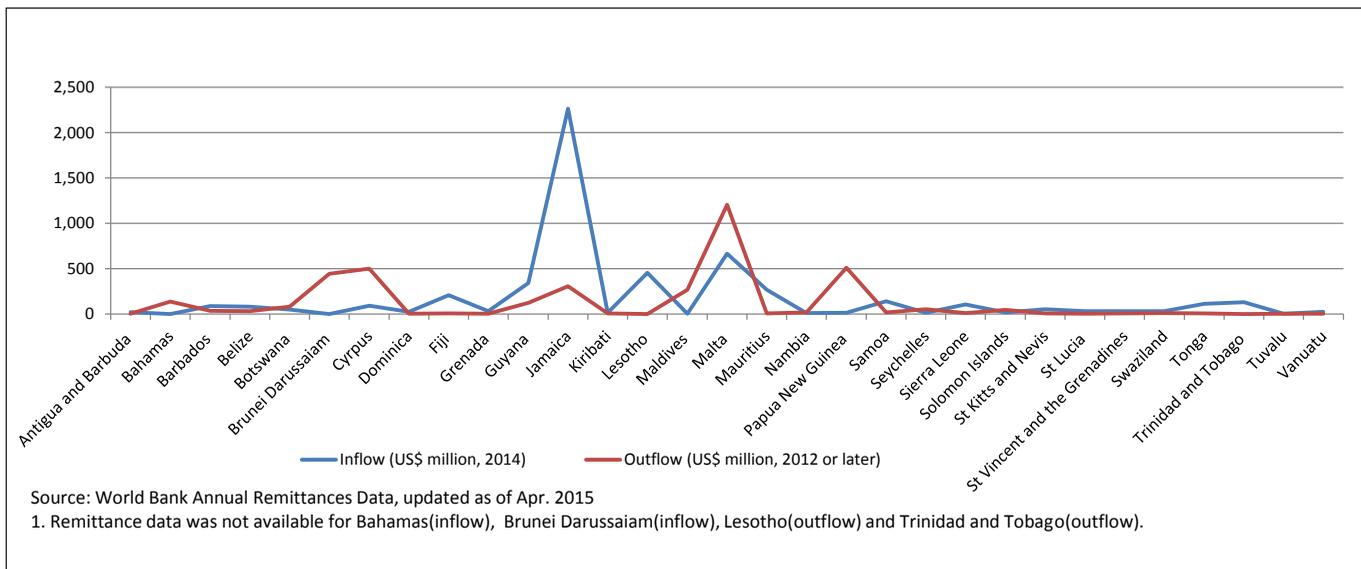


Figure 3: VUSSC Overview of Workers’ Remittances, Compensation of Employees and Migrant Transfers



It is a mammoth initiative to develop an instrument that will fully meet the diverse needs of all members states involved in the VUSSC. Qualifications frameworks are in different stages of development in different countries around the globe. Therefore, in order to develop an overarching “meta” qualifications framework that meets the needs of the majority of countries, it is important to find commonalities between existing qualifications frameworks with the view to using these as a basis for development of the TQF.

As a first step, a concept document for the TQF, designed to promote the recognition of qualifications offered by the VUSSC, was developed by the South Africa Qualifications Authority based on a review of existing qualifications systems in small states of the Commonwealth that was conducted in 2007. The concept document was presented to senior officials in February 2008 and an updated draft was endorsed by VUSSC interlocutors in July of the same year. Based on this process it was agreed that the TQF is intended to be used by small states of the Commonwealth to both register and access quality assured programmes. In this regard, it was further

agreed that the TQF should be reflective enough of all the member states in order for them to identify with it.

The guidelines, descriptors and quality assurance mechanisms used in the TQF have been adapted from a wide array of quality assurance agencies within member countries to ensure that the scope and depth is adequate and appropriate. The development of the TQF has been informed by the review of existing qualifications systems in small states of the Commonwealth conducted in 2007. The TQF is not intended to replace existing sectoral, national or regional qualifications systems, but rather to introduce a separate and flexible model for VUSSC to be employed as a mechanism for registering qualifications based on the principles of simplicity, incrementalism and local involvement.

The decision to use ten levels for situating qualifications on the TQF was based on international trends as well as on the dominant existence of this model among member states. In this regard, the choice of descriptors was also based on international best practice and preference amongst small state members. While the proposed TQF sought to describe

all the ten levels, a decision was taken to focus on qualifications at Level 4 (Certificate) and Level 5 (Diploma) in the initial stages. The qualifications at these levels generally include training that is competency based. Further, it was in this context that the issue of credits and level descriptors was discussed in the TQF document to determine the level of learning in individual modules and units. It was agreed that ten notional hours be applied to one credit. Here again, the decision was based on international best practice as well as commonality of use amongst member states.

Any qualifications framework must be informed by accepted quality assurance practices. While those listed in this document are not intended to replace those in NQAAs, they are intended to be a guide to national and regional agencies as to the criteria that the TQF will use to accept the registration of qualifications on its portal. This practice is intended to ensure that the rigor, transparency and integrity associated with quality assurance are adhered to.

Definition of the VUSCC

The VUSCC is not a tertiary institution but a world-spanning collaborative network for strengthening and developing the existing institutions in small states of the Commonwealth. Ministers of Education of small states in the Commonwealth requested the Commonwealth of Learning to facilitate this initiative in 2003.

Definition of a qualifications framework

The following is a broad working definition of a qualifications framework, based on a range of existing definitions:

A qualifications framework is an instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims to integrate and

coordinate qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression, comparability and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society.

The intention of this working definition is not to replace existing national or regional definitions, but instead to create a point of reference from which the concept of a TQF can be developed.

Definition of the TQF

In developing the TQF concept the unique characteristics of the VUSCC were taken into consideration. Although the VUSCC initially focused on a virtual mode of education, it has moved onto all modes of delivery, including blended learning, that are expected to improve access to educational opportunities and also enhance the quality of teaching and learning at reduced costs. All member countries also use English as a common language when working across borders. Participating VUSCC countries are all small states that share at least some common challenges in the face of globalisation and the increased mobility of highly skilled professionals. The 31 participating VUSCC countries are located across the globe within six regional groupings which present challenges to effective credit transfer: the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the European Union (EU), Asia-Pacific and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

The TQF is defined as:

A translation instrument for the classification of VUSCC qualifications according to set criteria for specified levels of learning achieved to improve credit transfer and promote common accreditation mechanisms between participating VUSCC countries.

The TQF has been approved as a unified qualifications framework that includes higher education qualifications and post-secondary technical and vocational qualifications offered through the VUSSC. It is noteworthy that the TQF is first and foremost a translation instrument, thus not intending to replace any existing sectoral, national or regional qualifications frameworks or quality assurance systems. The TQF is designed to rather provide a means by which different frameworks can be compared, linked and related. The TQF, as translation and relational instrument, rely heavily on existing national standards development processes and quality assurance systems, while only providing an alternative where a country has no such systems, or in some cases, where the country prefers to implement the broader transnational criteria.

Potential benefits of the TQF

Ministers of Education requested the creation of mechanisms to support the accreditation of qualifications and transfer of credits between countries thereby improving the socio-economic status of the member countries. The TQF will initially be available to 31 member States of the Commonwealth which represents millions of students. Students will potentially have access to a greater number, variety and quality assured programmes and courses, and as a result, the mobility of learners throughout the participating countries may improve substantially. TQF-recognised institutions can potentially reach these students and make available a variety of courses and qualifications to small states. As a translation tool, the TQF can potentially facilitate the portability of courses and recognition of qualifications amongst countries. International benchmarking through TQF may also lead to improved competitiveness and standards of national education and training providers. Furthermore, being part of a virtual university as a network can assist

countries to collaborate and strengthen the capacity of national education institutions.

Other potential benefits of the TQF include:

- Being able to offer educational programmes that are co-branded with the VUSSC, possibly by means of a “diploma supplement” such as is being used in the European context;
- Learners will have wider choices in choosing the courses/programmes they want to follow;
- Capacity building using South-South cooperation can take place as similar challenges face most of the small states;
- Support mechanisms to establish quality assurance systems and NQFs in countries can be developed.

The Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF), developed by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), was conceptualized as a reference system that will link national qualification systems and frameworks in different small states together and, as a consequence, function as a translation device making qualifications more readable, which in turn, will help learners and workers that move between countries or change jobs. In addition to the afore-mentioned, the over-arching aims of the TQF can be summarized as follows:

- contribute to creating a workforce in small states that is mobile and flexible;
- make it easier for employers to interpret qualifications of applicants from other countries;
- support labour market mobility (between and within countries) by simplifying comparisons between qualifications and enabling a better match between supply and demand for knowledge, skills and competences;
- make it easier for individuals to describe their broad level of competence to recruiters in other countries and simplify the process of reading across from one qualification system to another;

- enable employers to interpret and understand qualifications held by applicants from member countries;
- ensure better match between supply and demand for knowledge, skills and competences;
- facilitate credit transfer between Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) in member states;
- provide more learning opportunities and greater access to variety of programmes;
- increase the number of courses and programmes available in small states of the Commonwealth;
- contribute toward transparency of quality;
- create a mobile workforce with portable qualifications;
- serve as an instrument for promotion of lifelong learning, encompassing adult basic education and training, vocational education and training, and higher education.

qualifications. It is able to facilitate the mobility of workers and students across and within the small states and beyond. Also, the portability of qualifications and credit transfer are enhanced by the TQF.

The TQF is purposely developed as a reference system which aims to link national qualifications systems and NQFs in different small states together. Therefore it functions as a translation device making qualifications readable and thereby enables learners and workers to move between countries or change jobs. Furthermore, the TQF aims to promote lifelong learning and thus encompasses adult basic education and training, vocational education and training as well as higher education. The TQF is a reference framework that supports recognition of quality assured qualifications, facilitates lifelong learning, enhances portability of qualifications and credit transfer, and promotes worker mobility.

The key purposes of TQF and RQFs are mainly to:

- deepen integration and harmonization;
- support economic imperatives such as removal of barriers to trade;
- create a common identity;
- facilitate
 - transparency of multiple complex systems,
 - mobility of workers and students,
 - recognition and credit transfer,

A common reference framework respects well established national traditions while simultaneously providing a clear basis for mutual recognition and mobility of labour. Furthermore, a common reference framework strengthens a common understanding and cooperation.

The TQF potentially can thus deepen the integration and harmonization of

CHAPTER TWO: OVERVIEW OF THE TQF

This chapter deals in great detail with the core elements of the Transnational Qualifications Framework. It is important that the users and operatives within the TQF paradigm understand its architecture and

characteristics and that is what this chapter aims to achieve. The TQF requirements and specifications for qualifications and credits at a given level for certificates, diplomas and various degrees are elaborated upon.

Architecture of the TQF

The following architecture was adopted for the TQF:

Table 1: Architecture of the TQF

Level	Qualification Title	Minimum Credits
10	Doctoral Degree	360
9	Master's Degree	240
8	Postgraduate Certificate and Diploma Bachelor's Degree with Honours	120
7	Bachelor's Degree Graduate Certificate and Diploma	360
6	Advanced/Higher Diploma Associate Degree/Foundation Degree	240
5	Diploma	240
4	Advanced Certificate	120
3	Certificate III	40
2	Certificate II	40
1	Certificate I	40

Qualification titles

The qualification titles of the TQF are examples to encourage flexibility and the accurate assignment to a level. Each qualification on the TQF describes what a learner needs to know or what they must be able to do. It is generally agreed that learners' achievements can be recognised in a number of contexts and their knowledge and skills will be transferable between qualifications and providers. The qualification titles will allow for the comparability and easy understanding of qualifications, as well as the improved international recognition of qualifications.

Each qualification on the TQF will have a statement of learning outcomes. This includes statements about:

- what the qualification represents in terms of the application of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes; and
- the components of the qualification which, in their combination, make up the complete qualification.

Certificate

Certificates may be used in a wide range of contexts across all levels up to and including Level 7, and are often used to prepare candidates for both employment and further education and training. Certificates I-III have a minimum credit requirement of 40 credits. The Advanced Certificate has a minimum credit requirement of 120 credits. Entry to Certificates I-III is open. Entry to the Advanced Certificate is normally from a Secondary Certificate or from the completion of a relevant qualification from at least Level 3. Advanced Certificate may be used in a wide range of contexts and are often used to prepare candidates for both employment and further education and training. Certificates awarded beyond Level 7 may be termed graduate or post-graduate.

Diploma

A Diploma is a qualification that commonly has a wider theoretical base than a certificate and more specialised, technical, professional or managerial competencies. Diplomas often prepare learners for self-directed application of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes. These qualifications often build on prior qualifications or experience and recognise capacity for initiative and judgment across a broad range of educational and vocational areas, and in technical, professional, and/or management roles. A Diploma must have at least 240 credits contributing to the qualification at Level 5. Diploma awarded at Level 6 may be termed advanced or higher. Diplomas awarded beyond Level 7 may be termed Graduate or Postgraduate.

Associate Degree or Foundation Degree

An Associate or Foundation Degree is a programme designed to recognise and facilitate students' successful progression to the full degree or directly to employment. These degrees focus on learning within a work context, underpinned by both vocational and academic understanding, and enable learners to demonstrate learning outcomes that are explicitly relevant to employment and professional requirements. The Associate and Foundation Degree will have at least 240 credits of which at least 90 credits will match the Level 6 descriptor.

Bachelor's Degree

A Bachelor's Degree is a systematic, research-based, coherent, introduction to the knowledge, ideas, principles, concepts, research methods and to the analytical and problem-solving techniques of a recognised major subject or subjects. A programme leading to this qualification usually involves major studies in which significant knowledge is available. Programme content is taken to a significant depth and progressively developed

to a high level, which can provide a basis for post-graduate study and professional careers. A Bachelor's Degree requires a minimum of 360 credits from Levels 4 to 7, of which at least 120 will match the Level 7 descriptor. A maximum of 20 credits should be at Level 4 (such that the integrity of the qualification at the higher levels is maintained). A programme of study leading to a Bachelor's Degree builds upon prior study, work or experience and is open to those who have met the specified entrance requirements.

Bachelor's Degree with Honours

A Bachelor's Degree with Honours may be awarded to recognise advanced or distinguished study of a Level 7 Bachelor's Degree. This may occur by recognising outstanding achievement in a 480 credit (or more) Bachelor's Degree especially in relation to work of a research nature (typically at Level 8); or achieving at least 120 credits at level 8 following a Level 7 Bachelor's Degree (either as part of an integrated Honours degree or as a separate qualification).

Master's Degree

A Master's Degree is normally designed to extend the principal subject or subjects of the qualifying degree or may build on relevant knowledge and skills derived from advanced occupational experience. A Master's Degree contains a significant element of supervised research, normally embodied in a thesis, dissertation or substantial research paper. The Master's Degree requires a minimum of 240 credits, with at least 120 matching the Level 9 descriptor. Where the Master's Degree builds upon a four year (or longer) Bachelor's Degree, it can be fewer than 240 credits, but no fewer than 120 credits. Master's Degrees usually build on undergraduate degrees, Bachelor with Honours Degrees or Postgraduate Diplomas. Master's Degrees also build on extensive professional experience of an appropriate kind.

Providers of programmes leading to Master's Degrees are responsible for establishing entry requirements. Nevertheless, the minimum entry qualification for a 240 credit Master's Degree is normally a Bachelor's Degree or equivalent. For a Master's Degree of fewer than 240 credits, the minimum entry qualification is normally a Bachelor's Degree with Honours or a Postgraduate Diploma. Admission as a candidate for a Master's Degree is based on the evaluation of documentary evidence (including the academic record) of the applicant's ability to undertake postgraduate study in a specialist field of enquiry or professional practice. The candidate must have attained, through formal study, professional or other experience, a high order of knowledge about the principal subject(s), and have demonstrated interest in, and an aptitude for, scholarship.

A person who holds a Bachelor's Degree may be able to enroll for a Postgraduate Certificate or Postgraduate Diploma or Master's Degree. An applicant who holds either a Bachelor's Degree with Honours, or a Postgraduate Certificate, or Diploma may be exempted from all or some of the taught courses of the Master's Degree. A person who holds a Master's Degree which includes a substantial component of research may be considered for admission to a programme of advanced study and/or original research leading to a Doctoral Degree.

Doctoral Degree

The Doctoral Degree recognises a substantial original contribution to knowledge in the form of new knowledge or significant and original adaptation, application and interpretation of existing knowledge. A Doctoral Degree is a qualification that is at a significantly higher level than the Master's Degree, reflecting scholarly work independence. The Doctoral programme will be equivalent to a minimum of 3 years of full-time study, or 360 credits matching the Level 10 descriptor.

Typical Doctoral programmes and entry pathways are:

- the *research doctorate*, which is primarily achieved through supervised research, with entry from a research or part-research Master's Degree, or a Bachelor with Honours Degree (First or Second Class, upper division); and
- the *professional doctorate*, which may be undertaken through varying combinations of coursework and research, with entry from a combined research and coursework Master's Degree, a Bachelor with Honors Degree (First or Second Class, upper division) or equivalent, and requires significant professional practice either prior to and/or as part of the programme.

Learning outcomes

A learning outcome is a written statement of what the successful student, learner or trainee is expected to be able to do at the end of the module or course unit, or qualification.

Credits

A credit is a “currency” providing a measure of learning outcomes achieved in notional hours at a given level. It is awarded for learning that has been achieved and verified through reliable and valid assessment. In the TQF system one credit equates 10 notional hours of learning at the appropriate level. For example a minimum of 120 credits at Certificate Level 4 and a minimum of 240 credits at Diploma Level 5.

Qualifications criteria

Qualifications criteria specify the complexity, volume and level of learning expected for the qualification, and describes the expected outcomes of the qualification in the form of a broad profile of the learner's competencies.

Modularisation, unit awards and credit transfer

All qualifications should consist of modules² that are registered separately on the TQF. It is possible for the same modules to be used in more than one qualification. It is anticipated that the number of credits associated with modules will vary, but will in most cases be less than 40 credits. The necessary caution will have to be exercised to ensure that the minimum number of credits allocated to a module makes provision that such a module can exist as an independent and meaningful learning task. In some member countries unit standards based awards are being recognized. These awards, if forming part of a full and complete qualification may be recognized for credit transfer purposes in the TQF space.

Modules will be translated onto the TQF via level descriptors and registered at a particular level based on the TQF guidelines. The registration of modules on the TQF should assist sending and receiving institutions with the evaluation of credit transfers of VUSSC courses. The facilitation of student mobility through the TQF translation process will provide greater access to learning pathways that are not currently present in many small states. For example, an institution could identify modules available on the TQF that have not been or cannot be developed by the institution; these modules could then be used to complete a programme of study at that institution which could lead to a national qualification. Clearly, in such cases, the final qualification would be made up of VUSSC and national modules and could therefore be co-branded provided it is registered on TQF. This process has significant implications for curriculum design, quality assurance and increased programme offerings of institutions in small states. While credit transfers are predominantly the responsibility of the

² Modules are separate units of study. Synonyms used in various countries include: courses, units and papers. These units are studies usually put together to make up programmes of study that lead to qualifications.

receiving institution, collectively agreed TQF guidelines can be used to negotiate such processes between sending and receiving institutions if there is disagreement of credit transfers from one institution to another.

To successfully transfer credits the following criteria are suggested:

1. The educational institution which awarded the qualification must be recognised by the relevant national or regional accrediting body.
2. The original certificates and official transcripts, or notarised copies from the educational institutions where qualifications were awarded, must be provided. If these are not in English, official translations must be submitted with the documentation.
3. Qualifications (or part qualifications) must have been completed no more than ten years prior to the date of application for credit, unless the course content is still valid and taught as part of the current programme.
4. Assessment documentation and evidence may need to be presented for moderation before credit transfer is confirmed.
5. Translation of a qualification onto the TQF will be at a level where at least 60% of the credits making up that qualification are located, and where at least 20% of the credits are at higher levels. The remaining 20% of the credits that make up the qualification could come from any other level.

CHAPTER THREE:

TQF LEVEL DESCRIPTORS

Definition of level descriptors

Level descriptors refer to the statements describing the characteristics of the generic outcomes of each of the ten levels in the TQF. These characteristics consist of the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes that participants should possess or be able to demonstrate on completion of a programme, course or module. The following overarching principles apply:

- Level descriptors are broad, generic, qualitative statements that indicate specific learning outcomes at a given level on the TQF;
- Level descriptors take account of different types of learning at the same level, including knowledge and understanding, skills and wider personal and professional competencies;
- Levels are not intrinsically related to the period of study;
- Level descriptors are intended to integrate academic, technical-vocational education and training (TVET) and professional aspects of learning and apply to all learning contexts (class work, practical work, work-based learning, etc.);
- Level descriptors are not intended to be prescriptive but rather flexible enough to provide a guideline to practitioners involved in the design and delivery of the curriculum for any field of study;
- Level descriptors are developed with the intention that the curriculum specialist will use his/her professional expertise to translate them into his/her own field of study;
- The level descriptors may be used to aid the assessment of claims for recognition of prior learning;
- Level descriptors are designed to act as a guide to locate a qualification (and its associated learning programme) at the appropriate level on the TQF;
- Level descriptors should also help in making comparisons between qualifications in a variety of fields and disciplines that are located at the same level of the TQF.

Dimensions of the level descriptors

The TQF has ten levels, seven of which are situated at undergraduate level and three of which are at postgraduate level. In each case, such level represents groupings of qualifications sharing similar characteristics

as described by the level descriptors. Level descriptors are not the ceiling of each level but are indicators of the complexity of the quantum of the learning being done. It is

important to note that the illustrative examples of qualifications that appear in the table below are provided only as examples of qualifications that may exist at those levels.

Table 2: TQF Level Descriptors

TQF LEVEL DESCRIPTORS ³			
Level	Descriptors Holders of this qualification will:	Illustrative examples of qualifications	Minimum credit
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> acquire and possess a systematic understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice be able to create and interpret new knowledge at a most advanced frontier of a field of work or study through original and advanced research of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline and merit publication possess the most advanced and specialised skills and techniques to be able to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge or to solve critical problems or to refute or redefine existing knowledge demonstrate authority, innovation, autonomy, integrity and personal responsibility to the production or development of innovative ideas or processes in the context of an academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doctoral Degree 	360
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> have a logical understanding of a body of highly (seek another term) specialised knowledge some of which is at the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study, or area of professional practice, as a basis for original thought and/or the conduct of research and/or enquiry have a comprehensive understanding of the research skills and/or relevant established techniques applicable to their own research or to advanced scholarship that can be used to create and interpret knowledge demonstrate originality in the application of knowledge to solve problems, together with a practical understanding of how knowledge can be managed to transform work or study possess a conceptual understanding of how to analyse and critically evaluate current research in their academic discipline, field of study or work and to apply where appropriate to solve problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Masters Degree MA MSc MPhil MBA MEng 	240
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> have systematic, extensive and comparative knowledge of the key aspects of their academic discipline, field of study or work possess an ability to deploy accurately established analytical tools and/or techniques and enquiry within their academic discipline, field of study or work be able to use their knowledge, understanding and skills of a wide range of concepts, ideas and information to devise and sustain arguments and/or to solve problems display a critical understanding of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge and how it is developed possess the ability to manage their own learning and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (e.g. refereed research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bachelor (Honours) Degree Postgraduate Certificate Postgraduate Diploma 	120
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> have advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of the well-established principles and including an understanding of some advanced aspect(s) of their area(s) of their field of work or study; where appropriate, the application of those principles in an employment context have an understanding of the limits of that knowledge and how this influences analysis and interpretation based on that knowledge possess advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in their specialised field of work or study be able to manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision making in unpredictable work or study contexts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bachelor's Degree BA BSc BE BNursing 	360

³ The development of this table draws from various international examples, including the United Kingdom, New Zealand and others.

TQF LEVEL DESCRIPTORS ³			
Level	Descriptors Holders of this qualification will:	Illustrative examples of qualifications	Minimum credit
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> possess an in-depth knowledge and critical understanding of the ideas, concepts and principles in their field of work or study have knowledge of the methods of enquiry in the subject, and use a range of techniques to initiate and undertake critical analysis of information, proposing solutions to problems arising from that analysis demonstrate an ability to critically evaluate and apply the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems apply those concepts and principles more widely have an understanding of the limits of their knowledge, and how this influences analyses and interpretations effectively communicate information, arguments and analysis, in a variety of forms, to specialist and non-specialist audiences, and deploy key techniques of the discipline effectively have the qualities necessary for employment in situations requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advanced Diploma of Higher Education Associate Degree National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Regional Vocational Qualification (RVQ) 	240
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> have broad knowledge and understanding of the main underlying ideas, concepts and principles in a field of work or study be able to use their knowledge, understanding and skills to critically evaluate and determine appropriate methods and procedures to respond to a range of problems of a generally routine nature display qualities and transferable knowledge and skills necessary for employment in situations requiring the exercise of some personal responsibility communicate the results of their field of study or work accurately and reliably using a range of different modalities identify and articulate their own learning needs within defined contexts and undertake guided further learning in new areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diploma of Higher Education Associate Degree National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Regional Vocational Qualification (RVQ) 	240
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> have a broad knowledge and understanding of the main underlying concepts and principles in a field of work or study demonstrate a basic understanding of the major theories, principles, ideas and concepts of their particular area of study be able to use different approaches to identify, evaluate and solve problems of a generally routine nature be able to use their knowledge, understanding of a particular subject area to communicate accurately and reliably with structured and coherent arguments use their knowledge, understanding and skills to undertake further learning within a structured and managed environment possess the qualities and transferable skills needed for employment in situations requiring the exercise of some personal responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Certificate 	120
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrate a knowledge of basic concepts and principles in a field of work or study have command of analytical interpretation of information express informed judgment be able to display a range of known responses to familiar problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upper Secondary Education: Certificate III National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) National Certificate 	40

TQF LEVEL DESCRIPTORS ³			
Level	Descriptors Holders of this qualification will:	Illustrative examples of qualifications	Minimum credit
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate a narrow range of applied knowledge and basic comprehension in a field of work or study • display a narrow range of skills in a field of work or study • be able to use known solutions to familiar problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower Secondary Education: Certificate II • National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) • National Certificate • Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) Award 	40
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate basic literacy and numeracy skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entry Level 1 • Certificate I • Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) Award 	40

CHAPTER FOUR: TQF QUALITY ASSURANCE PRINCIPLES

Quality assurance in the TQF

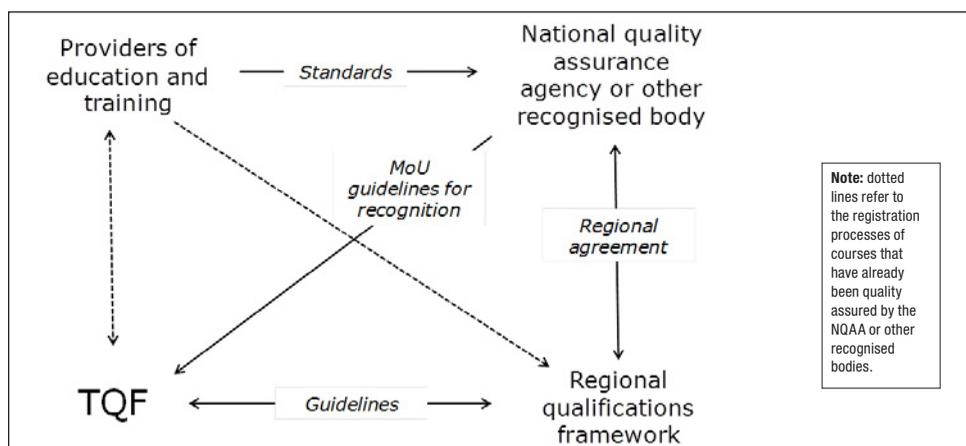
Qualifications on the TQF will form a subset of qualifications already registered elsewhere. The TQF will be first and foremost a translation instrument with no regulatory capacity. It is within this context that the approach of guidelines, and not standards or criteria, for quality assurance at national quality assurance agencies (NQAAs) has been developed. The TQF quality assurance guidelines are based on INQAAHE's Guidelines for Good Practice for Quality Assurance, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education's Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the Higher Education Area, and UNESCO's Guidelines on Quality Assurance

in Higher Education. The adaptation and reliance on these already agreed standards and guidelines stems from the fact that NQAAs in the small states of the Commonwealth also are members of such bodies like UNESCO and INQAAHE and in many cases have already accepted and approved these guidelines.

Registering qualifications on the TQF portal

After considering various national and regional quality assurance approaches, including the relationships between the different levels of quality assurance, the following model was adopted for the registration of courses/programmes on the TQF:

Figure 4: Registration of Courses on the TQF



The transnational qualifications criteria cover three critical areas:

- demand for the qualification
- fitness for purpose of the qualification
- assessment design

A qualification that meets the transnational qualifications criteria will be registered on the TQF portal. Such a qualification will be referred to as a “TQF-registered qualification”. The standards that the courses/programmes and providers must meet will be determined and monitored by the relevant NQAA, and should be aligned to the TQF level descriptors.

The challenges faced by the small states of the Commonwealth are unique. The quality assurance guidelines for the TQF have therefore been tailored to meet these challenges. It becomes obvious that while the quality assurance approaches, processes and guidelines for the TQF have similarities with ones that are already in existence, there are some distinct differences, more so as the TQF will function as a translation device for the existing systems, such as:

- The linkages between NQAAs and a regional qualifications framework (RQF) via collaborative arrangements amongst countries in that region. E.g. CARICOM, PRQR, SADC. Such linkages should revolve around collective negotiations of quality assurance in each of the member countries.
- The linkages between NQAAs and TQF via RQF or directly. In the absence of RQFs, this linkage would be initially via consensus and negotiation amongst NQAAs, and then between the NQAAs and TQF. Such agreements would include benchmarks and guidelines for recognition. This relationship however, is enabling and voluntary⁴ rather than prescriptive or regulatory.

⁴ Voluntary refers to the agreement to adhere to the principles and guidelines of VUSSC TQF that have been collectively agreed to.

- This linkage would include guidelines which have been arrived at through consensus and negotiation amongst RQFs, and between RQF and TQF management structures.

Six such qualifications have been approved by the TQFMC in March 2015, for registration on the TQF; these are:

1. Bachelor in Business and Entrepreneurship
2. BSc (Honours) Business Entrepreneurship
3. Diploma in Sustainable Agriculture in Small States
4. Certificate in Tour Guiding
5. Master in Educational Leadership
6. BSc (Honours) Environmental Science

Guidelines for education and training providers

All providers have the primary responsibility to commit to the quality of their activities and the standards of qualifications provided in their name, no matter where or how the qualifications are delivered. Providers within the TQF context are therefore expected to:

1. Ensure that they deliver relevant quality qualifications and services;
2. Develop, maintain or review current internal quality management systems so that they make full use of the competencies of stakeholders such as academic staff, administrators, students and learners, and take full responsibility for delivering education qualifications comparable in standard in their home country and across borders;
3. Cooperate with competent quality assurance and accreditation bodies.
4. Share good practices by participating in sector organisations and inter-institutional networks at national and international levels;

5. Develop and maintain networks and partnerships to facilitate the process of recognition by acknowledging each other's qualifications as equivalent or comparable;
6. Where relevant, use codes of good practice, such as the TQF guidelines.
7. Provide accurate, reliable and easily accessible information on the criteria and procedures of external and internal quality assurance and the academic and professional recognition of qualifications they deliver, and provide complete descriptions of programmes and qualifications, preferably with descriptions of the knowledge, understanding and skills that a successful student should acquire;
8. Collaborate, especially with quality assurance and accreditation bodies, and with student bodies, to facilitate the dissemination of information;
9. Ensure the transparency of the financial status of the institution and/or educational programme offered.

Some of the basic requirements of quality assurance systems include functional quality assurance systems, clear goals and objectives, official status, transparency and integrity of procedures, appeals mechanisms, and commitment to cooperation across national borders. As is the case with all other quality assurance systems, there must be agreement in terms of the requirements within the context of global considerations, principles, standards and guidelines of quality assurance that to a great extent should be common to all, regardless of size and development level of the particular nation. The system should be applicable to all providers both internally and externally, as well as to an agency or similar entity.

Not all of the members of the small states of the Commonwealth have national quality assurance agencies in place. Any entity in such a country should nonetheless either enter into agreements with the TQF, and/

or a NQAA from one of the members where the qualifications must be registered.

These guidelines aim to address the implementation of quality assurance principles within an international context and are not prescriptive but based on generally accepted quality assurance principles. The guidelines are designed to cater for national, regional and transnational requirements of the small states of the Commonwealth whilst at the same time incorporating international perspectives that will facilitate interchanges with other small states.

Guidelines for quality assurance and accreditation bodies

National quality assurance and accreditation bodies are responsible for assessing the quality of education provision in a given country. These NQAAs have different types of quality assurance systems. Some of these bodies have a legal status and others are non-governmental bodies. Furthermore, some differences exist in the terminologies used, the definition of quality, the purpose and function of the system including its link to the funding of students, institutions or programmes, the methodologies used in quality assurance and accreditation, the scope and function of the responsible body or unit, and the voluntary or compulsory nature of participation. Whilst the diversity is appreciated, it is also noted that there are common features of these systems.

Within this context, it is recommended that quality assurance and accreditation bodies:

1. Ensure that their quality assurance and accreditation arrangements include national, regional and TQF relationships. This means giving attention to assessment guidelines, ensuring that standards and processes are transparent, consistent and appropriate to take

- account of the shape and scope of the national education and training system, and adaptability to changes and developments in cross-border provision.
2. Sustain and strengthen the existing regional and international networks, or establish regional networks in regions that do not have. These networks can serve as platforms to exchange information and good practice, disseminate knowledge, and increase the understanding of international developments and challenges as well as to improve the professional expertise of staff and quality assessors. These networks could also be used to improve awareness of disreputable providers and dubious quality assurance and accreditation bodies, and to develop monitoring and reporting systems that can lead to identification of such bodies.
 3. Establish links to strengthen the collaboration between the quality assurance bodies of both the sending and the receiving countries and enhance the mutual understanding of different systems of quality assurance and accreditation. This may facilitate the process of assuring the quality of programmes delivered across borders and institutions operating across borders while respecting the quality assurance and accreditation systems of the receiving countries.
 4. Provide accurate and easily accessible information on the assessment standards, procedures, and effects of the quality assurance mechanisms on the funding of students, institutions or programmes where applicable, as well as the results of the assessment. Quality assurance and accreditation bodies should collaborate with other actors, especially education providers, academic staff, student bodies and academic recognition bodies to facilitate the dissemination of such information.
 5. Apply the principles reflected in current international documents on cross-border higher education such as the guidelines for the TQF, UNESCO, and the Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education used in the European context.
 6. Reach mutual recognition agreements with other bodies on the basis of trust in an understanding of each other's professional practice, to develop systems of internal quality assurance, and also regularly undergo external evaluations, making full use of the competencies of stakeholders.
 7. Consider adoption of procedures for the international composition of peer review panels, international benchmarking of standards, criteria and assessment procedures, and undertake joint assessment projects to increase the comparability of evaluation activities of different quality assurance and accreditation bodies.

Guidelines for TQFMC

1. The TQFMC shall peruse and approve the submissions for referencing.
2. Upon approval of the submission allocate a unique registration number for each qualification.
3. Regularly maintain and update a register of all registered qualifications.
4. Continually review and update the comparison tables of NQF, RQF and TQF.
5. Encourage registration and/or referencing and VUSSC qualifications on the TQF.
6. Be the focal point for the TQF development and promotion, and as such advise VUSSC and COL on matters pertaining to the TQF.
7. Facilitate continued liaison, capacity building and review of the TQF.

Processes for quality assurance

Registration of qualifications on the TQF

To register qualifications, the TQFMC should work through the NQAAs and other recognised accreditation authorities on issues of comparability of qualifications. *This is a very important and non-negotiable requirement for registration of qualifications on the TQF.* Providers will have access to course materials made available on the VUSSC website, but when the courses are translated into a qualification, the latter must be quality assured through NQAA and must comply with national standards and TQF guidelines. Providers are able to directly approach the TQFMC for registration of qualifications, however, this is discouraged.⁵ Special forms will be made available on the VUSSC website for use by education providers to apply through relevant NQAAs or RQFs for registering their courses and/or qualifications on the TQF.

Courses developed within the VUSSC bootcamps

There is a limited number of courses that were developed in VUSSC bootcamps that have preceded the development of the TQF. Modification of these courses may be necessary to meet NQAA standards and TQF guidelines. These courses need to be quality assured so that they can be registered on the TQF. The TQFMC will facilitate the quality assurance of such courses as a matter of priority and register them as standalone courses on the TQF.

Courses developed by providers

It is known that there are a number of institutions in VUSSC member countries

⁵ This is due to possible issues arising between NQAAs and TQFMC. The modulus operandi of TQF is one of trust and mutual recognition between TQF and NQAAs which provides for an enabling structure.

that have courses available that they would like to offer through the VUSSC and register on the TQF. Such courses can only be registered on the TQF if they have been quality assured by an NQAA (or recognised QAA) of one of the group of VUSSC countries that subscribes and adheres to the guidelines of TQF.

Once the TQF guidelines have been collectively agreed to by VUSSC countries, they will become available on the VUSSC website. Any institution developing a new qualification will need to ensure that these guidelines and the NQAAs standards are complied with before the qualification will be available on the VUSSC website.

Alignment between NQAAs and the TQF

NQAAs are required to subscribe and adhere to quality assurance guidelines of the TQF for qualifications to be registered on the TQF, and ultimately to appear on the VUSSC website. There is an understanding that the guidelines will be mutually agreed to and will undergo periodic reviews.

TQF portal

Building on the existing VUSSC electronic infrastructure, a TQF portal will be developed consisting of a searchable database of registered qualifications offered through the VUSSC including details as registered on the TQF (level, credits, etc.), as well as details relating to the qualification's possible registration on another qualifications framework. A searchable database of education and training providers that have been accredited by sectoral, national and regional qualifications agencies to offer TQF registered qualifications is also envisaged. The portal will be housed on an interactive site where agencies and providers can participate in informal discussions on TQF procedures and guidelines.

Only nationally registered and quality assured qualifications will be registered on the TQF and be accessible through the TQF portal. Qualifications registered on the TQF will be listed and linked to courses offered through the VUSSC. Information of providers will be documented and made available to learners with respect to types of courses, duration, content, and so on.

- determine additional learning experiences or gap training where appropriate.

The TQFMC recognises all forms and types of awards provided that these are quality assured and validated in the country where issued.

Recognition of prior learning⁶

Currently in small states, there exist many people who have broad experience in their field and yet do not possess any qualifications. Through recognition of prior learning (RPL) these persons can acquire a qualification. RPL can also be an access route to further learning for those learners who do not possess relevant qualifications to enter the programme.

RPL is a form of assessment aimed at confirming and recognising the competencies a candidate has obtained outside of a formal education and training environment. These competencies might have been gained through informal or non-formal training, or they may have been gained through life or relevant work experience. RPL enables individuals to have their competencies assessed, thus avoiding the need for unnecessary training that brings additional costs, including time and effort.

To recognise prior learning it is necessary to:

- ensure that candidates know that RPL provides an alternative pathway to course attendance;
- determine, in consultation with the candidate, demonstrated learning, skills and knowledge against the learning outcomes of the course or qualification for which entry or the award of credit is sought through an assessment that may confirm competence;

⁶ Also referred to as prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) and assessment of prior learning (APL)

CHAPTER FIVE: REFERENCING THE TQF

The need for referencing

The Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF), was developed by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), a reference system that will link national qualification systems and frameworks in different Small States together and, as a consequence, function as a translation device. Linking national qualification systems will increase the transparency of the education and training systems of all the VUSSC countries, support lifelong learning and promote mobility. The VUSSC countries agreed to create mechanisms to support credit transfer across the countries. This is one of the reasons for the establishment of the TQF, a device designed to enable different countries' national qualifications systems to relate to a common reference framework.

Individuals and employers and other users of qualifications would be able to use the TQF to better understand and compare the qualification levels of different countries and the different education and training systems.

Referencing is an important dimension of the VUSSC TQF–RQF – NQF relationship. As such, this tripartite relationship makes communication even more important between the VUSSC TQF, the RQF and NQF. Trust can only be cemented through communication. Therefore it is through communication of the referencing process that governments or

national authorities which are responsible for qualifications systems in cooperation with stakeholders involved in developing and using qualification can trust the process and give credence to the entire process.

Qualifications frameworks are developed and generated in many countries and regions but the approaches to development vary. This has obviously much to do with existing education and training traditions, institutional contexts, labour market structures, and the immediate policy issues and system problems that a qualifications framework is expected to solve. NQF development across small states shows the wide spectrum of positions on the need for an NQF.

Despite the differences among countries, there appear to be some elements that are common to all NQFs. They all have reference levels describing types of skill and knowledge in various qualifications, quality assurance principles and guidelines, and methods for recognising learning gained in different programmes and contexts. Building on these commonalities, the TQF is designed as a translation device between the different qualification systems. Each national qualification system needs to articulate with the TQF levels if the translation is to be facilitated across all countries. One way to do this is through an NQF where each level is referenced to a corresponding level on the TQF.

Similarly, the TQF can be referenced to other qualifications frameworks internationally.

The rationale for referencing

Referencing is a process that results in the establishment of a relationship between the levels of the common reference framework and that of the national qualifications framework (NQF) or system.

The referencing process essentially draws on the commonalities of NQFs, in that most NQFs have reference levels describing types of skills and knowledge in various qualifications, quality assurance principles and guidelines, and methods for recognizing learning gained in different programmes and contexts. Although all NQFs might not necessarily have all the above-mentioned features, depending on context, it is possible through referencing to link qualification frameworks globally. Referencing can potentially result in the strengthening of NQFs whilst also contributing to international recognition of national and VUSSC qualifications.

It needs to be reiterated that the referencing process facilitates the linking of qualification levels—and not the linking of actual qualifications – while the actual criteria and procedures for referencing are usually context specific.

The TQF serves two main purposes viz:

- Referencing tool
- Registration of VUSSC courses.

These two functions, albeit distinct and different must be accommodated in the TQF.

To register qualifications, the TQFMC shall work through the NQAAs and recognised accreditation authorities on issues of comparability of qualifications. This is stated as being a very important and non-negotiable requirement for the registration of qualifications on the TQF.

Course materials that are developed through the VUSSC boot camps are made available to training providers, but when these courses are to be offered the quality assurance must be done by the relevant national QAA in which the courses are offered.

Although providers of education and training in member states are able to directly approach the TQFMC for registration of their qualification, such direct approaches are discouraged. In view of the above, the TQF only enables or allows registration and referencing of qualifications that are already registered and quality assured by a national quality assurance agency (NQAA) in the country of origin.

The EQF, amongst others has one of its criteria that referencing national qualifications to the EQF should be done and/or certified by a (competent) national body which should have some legal competence and responsibilities.

The TQF mode of operation ipso facto ensures that only NQAAs are involved either directly or via the RQF structures.

Principles for referencing

Referencing national qualifications to the TQF is premised on agreed principles. The TQF requires that the following principles form the basis for a sound and credible referencing process.

1. Mutual trust
2. Quality assurance: Accreditation
3. Learning outcomes
4. Level descriptors
5. Credit Systems
6. Communication

Mutual trust

Mutual trust is the outcome of robust quality assurance systems that are rigorously administered. Member states are thus expected to have a shared commitment to the building of mutual trust between national education and training systems.

Transparency, development of shared understanding and cooperation will promote mutual trust in the education systems of the Small States of the Commonwealth. Mutual trust enhances and facilitates recognition of qualifications awarded, and courses studied in another national system. Without trust, mobility of students and the portability of qualifications get constraint.

Since the VUSSC relies on “soft law” mechanisms such as the use of guidelines and not laws per se, mutual trust assumes greater importance.

Referencing as a process for translating national qualifications to a qualifications framework is a relatively new process and if not understood it could become an oversimplified and purely technical activity and thus eroding the potential advantages and benefits of the TQF.

Designers and users of NQF need to be tolerant of the approximations that are necessary in how NQFs accommodate qualifications. It is argued that referencing which is based on the best fit philosophy captures both technical and social dimensions. Best fit is about building consensus among stakeholders on important and central elements of qualifications and their levels.

Quality assurance

There is little doubt that quality assurance is a basic tenet of the referencing process. Quality assurance aims to provide confidence that quality requirements are fulfilled within the education and training space. Quality assurance refers to planned and systematic processes that provide confidence in educational services provided by training providers under the remit of national authorities to ensure that set standards are met.

The TQF also subscribes to the principles of quality assurance as a requirement for referencing.

The TQFMC acknowledges the challenges faced by the small states. Although quality

assurance approaches, processes and guidelines for the TQF have similarities with ones that are already in existence at national levels, there are some distinct differences, more so as the TQF will function as a translation device and link for the existing systems, such as linkages between:

- NQAAs and a regional qualifications framework (RQF) via collaborative arrangements amongst countries in that region, e.g. CARICOM, PRQR, SADC. Such linkages should revolve around protocols or collective negotiations of quality assurance in each of the member countries.
- NQAAs and TQF via RQF or directly with the TQF. In the absence of RQFs, this linkage would be initially via consensus and negotiation amongst NQAAs, and then between the NQAAs and TQF. Such agreements would include benchmarks and guidelines for recognition. This relationship however, is enabling and voluntary rather than being prescriptive or regulatory and would include guidelines which have been arrived at through negotiation consensus amongst RQFs, and between RQF and TQF management structures.

In addition to the above, the TQFMC has developed guidelines with a view to entrench a quality culture. These guidelines have been developed to assist higher education institutions (HEIs), quality assurance and accreditation bodies, regional bodies and TQF operatives. The guidelines are found in Chapter Four of this document.

NQFs cannot function in any meaningful way, unless they are underpinned by systematic and transparent systems of quality assurance. Once they are underpinned by quality systems, NQFs themselves become tools to publicly guarantee quality and act as ‘gateways’ to, or ‘registers of’, approved, quality assured qualifications.

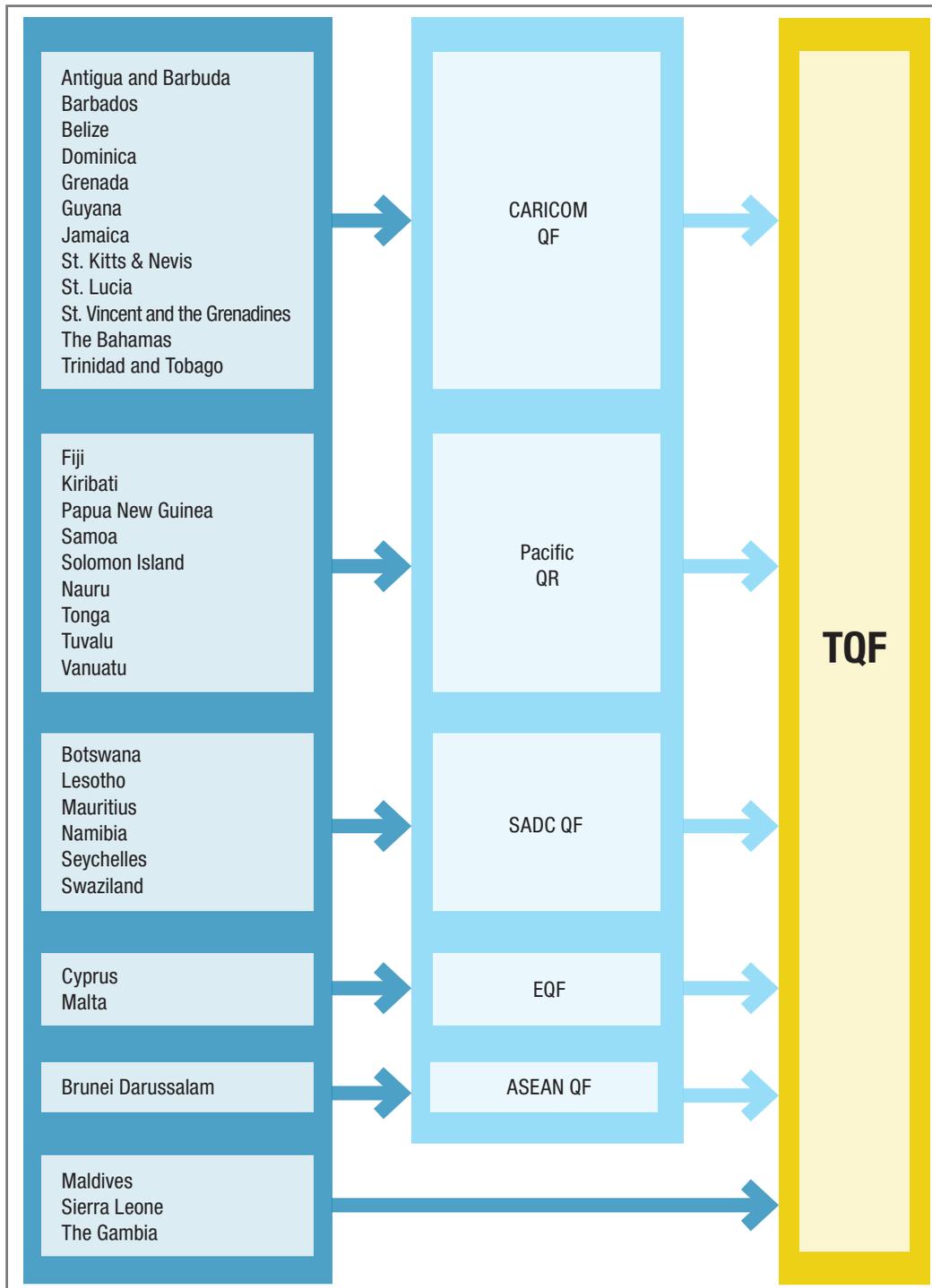
The TQF referencing will have a double layer of quality assurance. The process will include member countries referencing their

qualifications against the RQF first and secondly to the TQF. Jamaican qualifications, for example will at first be referenced to the CARICOM QF and then to the TQF. Provision is made for the referencing to be validated directly by the TQFMC but this provision is

made mainly for member states that are not linked to established and functional RQFs.

Referencing results in the establishment of a relationship between the levels of the TQF and those of the member countries' NQF systems.

Figure 5: Tiers of Referencing from National Through the Regional to the TQF



The Quality Assurance process in a nutshell

The translational function of the TQF occurs on three levels: registration of qualifications, quality assurance criteria, and IT systems that contain information. In the case of the registration of qualifications, the TQF translates the existing level and description of the qualification offered on a national or regional basis (and registered on the relevant national or regional qualifications framework), to the relevant TQF level and format. In the case where the qualification is not offered nationally or regionally, but only through the VUSSC, the qualification is registered only on the TQF. With respect to quality assurance criteria, the TQF translates the existing quality assurance criteria (implemented on a national or regional basis and prescribed within the relevant national or regional qualifications framework), to minimum transnational quality assurance criteria. In the case where the qualification is not offered nationally or regionally, or where no quality assurance is undertaken, the minimum transnational quality assurance criteria will apply. With respect to IT systems, the TQF translates the information of learners, qualifications and providers on a national or regional basis (located within the IT systems of the relevant national or regional qualifications framework), to the relevant TQF format and system.

Learning outcomes

As a translation mechanism, the TQF promotes the use of learning outcomes as a key feature of qualifications. Reference relies extensively on the descriptors of levels of the complexity and quantum of learning. The descriptors facilitate comparison of and links between qualifications frameworks or qualifications systems.

A learning outcome is defined as statement of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning

process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence (Source: Cedefop 2008c) or as a set of knowledge, skills and/or competences an individual has acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a learning process, formal, non-formal or informal (Source: European Commission, 2008b).

Globally qualifications frameworks are also constructed mainly as generic or at times specific statements of learning outcomes and the TQF is no exception.

In order to facilitate linking NQFs to the RQFs and the TQF a comparison table was developed. Learning outcomes not only indicate what a learner is expected to know and do but these also give an indication of what is in a qualification. Learning outcomes inform curricula, teaching and learning as well as assessment and are linked to professional competency requirements.

Level descriptors

Level descriptors of learning outcomes are defined to describe what the holder of a qualification at a specified level is expected to know and able to do.

NQFs are classification systems for qualifications and qualifications are normally classified to a hierarchy of levels. The number of levels is determined by national needs and expectations. Levels in a framework describe different degrees of complexity of the learning outcomes. Almost all qualifications frameworks aim to increase the transparency of qualifications and improve communication between stakeholders at both national and international level. Learning outcomes and level descriptors enable users to understand how qualifications awarded by different institutions as well as subsystems within and outside of countries relate and are linked. Thus qualifications frameworks generally serve to improve quality, are reference points for institutional comparison and qualifications.

Level descriptors must clarify or capture:

- how knowledge, skills and competencies increase in complexity, depth and breadth from one level to the next;
- the elements of employability;
- the needs for and rationale for the qualification and its socio-economic value for the nation;
- the need for the qualifications framework to be comprehensive and specific, inclusive of all parts of an education system;
- the ability of level descriptors to act as agreed and credible reference points for all stakeholders;
- the intrinsic role of quality assurance in the design of the qualifications framework.

Qualifications frameworks aim to bring clarity and coherence to qualifications and make comparison of qualifications easier.

When national qualifications frameworks are linked to each other, qualifications from different countries can be compared.

Many NQFs are now linked to Meta frameworks such as the TQF, EQF and RQFs. The intention is to address international challenges such as mobility of students, labour, migration, cross-border delivery of education and training and comparability of qualifications awards.

The TQF guidelines define level descriptors as statements describing the characteristics of the generic outcomes of each of the ten (10) levels in the TQF. These characteristics consist of the knowledge, skills, competencies and attitudes that learners should possess or be able to demonstrate on completion of a programme, course or module.

The guidelines further mention a number of principles i.e. the level descriptors ought to be broad, generic statements and:

- should take into account all types and fields of learning

- are not prescriptive but flexible
- are linked to TQF levels and associated level descriptors
- should aid referencing.

Also the level descriptors of the TQF which is a common reference framework, inadvertently encourages the development of NQFs in countries where none exist and for nations to align their NQFs to the TQF. The main differences and similarities between transnational qualifications frameworks and NQFs can be grouped as follows.

Purpose:

The purpose of transnational frameworks often includes mapping and translation functions, while NQFs attempt to build links between different sub-systems and sectors. Intra-national frameworks focus on coherence within a particular sector.

Scope:

Intra-national frameworks are mostly unified in scope and attempt to cover all aspects of the particular sector. NQFs on the other hand range in scope, where some include all sectors within the country, and others only certain sectors. Transnational frameworks, specifically regional qualifications frameworks are similar to NQFs in the extent to which the sectors included can vary. The more extreme versions of transnational frameworks are more inclined to be limited to a particular sector to be more manageable.

Prescriptiveness:

Intra-national frameworks are usually more prescriptive (also referred to as tighter). NQFs range in their prescriptiveness depending on the specific country context, while transnational frameworks are very loose

Credit systems

Credit transfer is an important goal of the TQF. Credit transfer mechanisms are deemed to play an important part in support and the development of the TQF. Also credit transfer facilitates portability of awards.

Referencing aims to establish a relationship between two or more NQFs and/or Meta frameworks. Such relation is informed by comparing amongst others, levels of the relevant QFs, the level descriptors, outcomes of learning, credits, qualification, titles and quality assurance mechanisms.

The credit, also referred to as a metric for the amount of learning, is defined by the TQF as a “currency” providing a measure of learning outcomes achieved in notional hours at a given level. One credit represents ten notional hours of learning for the TQF. Credits are awarded for learning that has been achieved and verified through reliable and valid assessment. In the TQF system one credit equates 10 notional hours. Notional

learning hours (NLHs) are a token estimate of the time it takes for an average learner to acquire the knowledge, skills and competence required by the qualification. It takes into account not only the guided learning hours (GLHs) but also the time spent by the learner in private study and practice of skills.

Whilst credits are useful to facilitate comparisons across the countries the use of credit as a sole criterion discouraged. Credits alone do not capture the social elements of qualifications and should be read in conjunction and together with other criteria for the purpose of referencing.

The core of the TQF is ten referencing levels describing what a learner knows, understands and is able to do. Levels of national qualifications will be placed at one of the reference levels, ranging from basic (Level 1) to advanced (Level 10). It will therefore enable much easier comparison between national qualifications and should also mean that people do not have to repeat learning if they move to another country.

Table 3: Ten TQF Referencing Levels

TQF Level	Qualification Titles	Minimum Credits of TQF	EQF & QF/EHEA	EQF Level
10	Doctoral Degree	360	No credits	8
9	Master's Degree	240	60 ECTS	7
8	Postgraduate Certificate and Diploma Bachelor's Degree with Honours	120	60 ECTS	
7	Bachelor's Degree Graduate Certificate and Diploma	360	180ECTS	6
6	Advanced/Higher Diploma Associate Degree/Foundation Degree	240 240		5
5	Diploma	240		4
4	Advanced Certificate	120		3
3	Certificate III	40		2
2	Certificate II	40		
1	Certificate 1	40		1

Criteria for referencing

Qualifications

There is a clear and demonstrable link between the education system or the NQFs, the RQFs and the TQF in terms of levels and level descriptors.

The qualification system or NQF is based on the principle of learning outcomes that validates all types of learning.

The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the NQF or for describing the place and levelness of qualifications in the frameworks are transparent.

Quality Assurance

The legal status and responsibilities/mandate of the NQAAs is clearly determined and published by the competent public authorities.

Only such NQAA or the competent public authority within the small states shall certify the referencing of the NQF or system with the RQF and/or TQF.

The national quality assurance system is consultative, public and consistent with the TQF procedures and guidelines.

The referencing process shall be actioned by the relevant NQAAs and validated by the RQF operatives before approval by the TQFMC. The latter that shall cause a register of such qualifications to be maintained and published.

Referencing qualifications

Requirements

1. Only quality assured qualifications shall be registered on the TQF.
2. Only qualifications that are verified and validated as quality assured shall be registered on the TQF.
3. Verification of the quality assured status is a function that rests with the NQAA or delegated authority as indicated in the criteria for referencing.
4. The NQAA shall be responsible for submitting the application for referencing of qualifications to the TQF.
5. Where there are no NQAAs, the bodies responsible for the RQF shall submit the referencing application to the TQFMC.
6. All submissions for referencing should at first be verified by the bodies responsible for the RQF.

The TQF and the RQFs

The table below gives an indication of the equivalencies of qualifications, issued and originating from the small states of the Commonwealth. The qualifications have been verified by the representatives of countries that participate in VUSSC activities.

Table 4: Equivalencies of Qualifications

TQF	CARICOM QF	SADC QF	PQF	ASEAN QF	EQF
Level 10	Level 10	Level 10	Level 10	Level 8	Level 8
Doctoral Degree	Doctoral Degree	Doctoral Degree	Doctoral Degree	Doctoral Degree	Doctoral Degree
Level 9	Level 9	Level 9	Level 9	Level 7	Level 7
Master's Degree	Master's Degree	Master's Degree	Master's Degree	Master's Degree	Masters
Level 8	Level 8	Level 8	Level 8	Level 6	Vocational University (Fachhochschule)
Postgraduate Diploma	Post Graduate Diploma	Bachelor Honours	Bachelor Honours		Postgraduate Diploma
Postgraduate Certificate	Postgraduate Certificate	Postgraduate Diploma	Postgraduate Diploma		Postgraduate Certificate
		Postgraduate Certificate	Postgraduate Certificate		
Level 7	Level 7	Level 7	Level 7	Level 5	Level 6
Bachelor's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Bachelor's Degree		Bachelor's Degree - Honours
Graduate Diploma			Graduate Diploma		Vocational University German State Certified Engineer
Graduate Certificate			Graduate Certificate		Business Manager and Designer (Fachhochschule)
					Bachelor
					German Fachwirt
					German Operative Professional
Level 6	Level 6	Level 6	Level 6		Level 5
Advanced/Higher Diploma	Associate Degree	Advanced/Higher Diploma	Diploma		Higher National Diploma
Associate Degree	Higher Diploma	Higher Certificate			
Foundation Degree	Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) Diploma				
Level 5	Level 5	Level 5	Level 5	Level 4	Level 4
Diploma	Diploma	Diploma	Diploma		Arbiter
	CAPE Certificate	Certificate			Vocational School
Level 4	Level 4	Level 4	Level 4	Level 3	Level 3
Advanced Certificate	Advanced Certificate	A – levels	Certificate		GCES
	CSEC 1-3	Certificate			
Level 3	Level 3	Level 3	Level 3	Level 2	Level 2
Certificate III	Certificate III	0 – level	Certificate		Lower Secondary School
		School leaving			
Level 2	Level 2	Level 2	Level 2		
Certificate II	Certificate II	Certificate	Certificate		
Level 1	Level 1	Level 1	Level 1	Level 1	Level 1
Certificate I	Certificate I	Certificate	Certificate		

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

In establishing the TQF for the VUSSC, the TQFMC devised various mechanisms for translating the vision of the Ministers of Education. Adopting and implementing the TQF will pave the way to successful cooperation among the small states of the Commonwealth. However, the small states will still face new challenges. To be able to address these challenges, VUSSC member countries need to maintain their sense of community such as that manifested during the last VUSSC Interlocutors meeting in July 2008.

The TQFMC needs to exert leadership and commitment through partnership with all small states of the Commonwealth and ensure that the member states commit to this project. To move forward this cooperation more effectively, the TQFMC will take into consideration the need to engage relevant partners from both within and outside VUSSC to jointly implement the TQF. The notion that “31 voices are better than one” will definitely contribute to leverage for the acceptance of the TQF by the more advanced economies.

The following mechanisms will be established to support the operations of the TQF over the next few years:

- VUSSC TQF portal
- Increased number of programmes and courses developed for the VUSSC

- Online approach to capacity building adopted in small states
- Collaborative arrangements for strategic partnerships.

For the TQF to be successful, support from international and regional organisations, such as COL, UNESCO, UCSIS, ILO and CPSC will be essential. More importantly however, will be the ongoing commitment from small states to an initiative that has originated within the small state community, and that is being ably championed from within this very same community.

The TQF Management Committee

April 2015

APPENDIX A:

CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES FOR TRANSLATING NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS TO TQF LEVELS

Criteria

The criteria to be used include the comparison, in sequential order, following NQF and TQF features and characteristics. The level of the translation may be established by comparison of only some features. In applying the criteria, the principles of fairness, transparency, integrity, equity and access should be adhered to.

- entry requirements–this characteristic should provide guidance for the level of the programme ;
- RPL – this characteristic will be used where appropriate to determine the level of the programme;
- articulation to the TQF level.

3. Referencing each NQF against TQF to produce a table of comparison.

Procedures

The following steps should be followed:

1. Each country is made aware of the overall process to reference each NQF to the TQF.
2. Each NQAA applies to the TQFMC to ensure that the level of national qualifications are translated to TQF levels, based on the following criteria:
 - recognition of qualifications in the country of origin;
 - level descriptors of the TQF;
 - qualification titles and definitions;
 - duration of programmes – this refers to the minimum period of time that the programmes need to be completed in;
 - credit systems for qualifications linked to notional learning hours;

The TQFMC is aware that there are some member states without an NQF. Such countries may find it more difficult to benchmark their qualifications against the TQF, and for this reason the TQFMC is committed to strongly support such processes using the criteria listed above, but excluding referencing (Step 3).

APPENDIX B:

IMPLEMENTATION AND RATIFICATION OF THE TQF

1. The 31 small states of the Commonwealth have automatic rights to ratify and use the Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF).
2. The TQF is a framework which provides general guidelines intended to facilitate the implementation of the Virtual University for Small States of Commonwealth (VUSSC).
3. The body to oversee, promote and facilitate the implementation of the TQF shall be the TQF Management Committee (TQFMC) through the VUSSC Secretariat and in close cooperation with the VUSSC Management Committee.
4. The states which are not party to this framework may participate in the meetings of the TQFMC as observers. Representatives of governmental and non-governmental organisations active in the field of quality assurance may also be invited to attend meetings of the TQFMC as observers.
5. The TQFMC shall adopt its Rules of Procedure. It shall meet at least every three years. The Committee shall meet for the first time within a year of the entry into force of this framework and annually for the first three years in order to manage implementation.
6. The TQF will come in force when 16 countries ratify this framework.
7. Each state shall appoint a member representing their NQAA or relevant authority to act as a focal point to the TQF initiative.
8. This framework shall be open for ratification by:
 - a. the small states of the Commonwealth;
 - b. any other signatory, contracting state or party to the TQF concerning quality assurance in the small states of the Commonwealth, which have been invited to participate.
9. These ratifying parties may express their consent to be bound by:
 - a. A signature without reservation as to ratification, acceptance or approval; or
 - b. A signature, subject to ratification, acceptance or approval, followed by ratification, acceptance or approval; or
 - c. An accession.
10. Signatures, instruments of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession shall be deposited with the VUSSC Secretariat.

After the entry into force of this framework, any state other than those falling into one of the categories listed under this section may request accession to this convention. Any request to this effect shall be addressed to VUSSC Secretariat who shall transmit it to the parties.

Withdrawal and amendments

1. Any party may, at any time, withdraw from this framework by means of a notification addressed to VUSSC Secretariat.
2. Such withdrawal shall become effective on the first day of the month following the expiration of a period of twelve months after the date of receipt of the notification by the depository. However, such withdrawal shall not affect any VUSSC arrangements taken previously under the provisions of this framework.
3. Any proposal for amendments shall be communicated to the VUSSC Secretariat, which shall transmit it to the TQFMC.

ACRONYMS

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
APQN	Asia-Pacific Quality Network
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CCEM	Committee of Commonwealth Education Ministers
COL	Commonwealth of Learning
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
CPSC	Colombo Plan Staff College
CVQ	Caribbean Vocational Qualification
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
EU	European Union
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
NQAA	National Quality Assurance Agency
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
PRQR	Pacific Regional Qualifications Register
QAA	Quality Assurance Authority
RQF	Regional Qualifications Framework
RVQ	Regional Vocational Qualification
SADC	Southern African Development Community
TQF	Transnational Qualifications Framework
TQFMC	Transnational Qualifications Framework Management Committee
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UCSIS	University Consortium for Small and Island States
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VUSSC	Virtual University for the Small States of the Commonwealth

SOURCE DOCUMENTS

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<http://www.nzqa.govt.nz>

<http://diplomamillnews.blogspot.com/>

GLOSSARY

Accreditation

Process through which a legally responsible agency or association grants public recognition to a school, institute, college, university, or programme of study that meets minimum established educational standards.

Assessment

The process of gathering evidence to determine whether a learner has met the required standards. Assessment is also used as part of the learning process to assist the learner in making progress.

Blended learning

Blended learning is learning which combines online and face-to-face approaches.

Certification

Process of formally validating knowledge, know-how and/or skills and competences acquired by an individual, following a standard assessment procedure, leading to the award of qualification by an accredited awarding body.

Co-branding

This refers to placing both the VUSSC and other logos on qualification certificates.

Competence

Proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities in work or study situations and in professional and/or personal development.

Credit

Credit is a “currency” providing a measure of learning outcomes achieved in notional

hours at a given level. It is awarded for learning that has been achieved and verified through reliable and valid assessment.

Credit accumulation

The process of gaining credits towards a qualification within an institution or closed system, such as when all qualifications offered by a single awarding body.

Credit transfer

The process by which credits gained in one institution or system may be recognised in another institution or system.

Curriculum

Set of actions followed when developing a learning programme, including defining training goals, content, methods, assessment and materials.

Learning outcomes

Statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, defined in terms of performance criteria based on knowledge, skills, attitudes and competence.

Learning programme

Programme of studies or training defined by a curriculum that may consist of one or more modules, units, subjects or courses or any combination of those elements.

Level

Position where a qualification is located on a qualifications framework based on level descriptors.

Level descriptor

A definition of the characteristics of a qualification that would lead to it being assigned to a particular level.

Modularisation

A system in which qualifications consist of a number of modules, each of which can be certificated independently. In some instances unitisation and modularisation is used to refer to a system in which learning programmes consist of a number of components.

Module

A component of a larger qualification which can be certificated independently.

Notional learning hours

Notional learning hours (NLH) include all aspects of the learning required to achieve a qualification, for example, self-directed study and distance learning. These include all formal and informal learning activities, practical work and practice, and all assessment-related activities.

Provider of education and training

Education and training body (institution, organisation, company, centre, collaborative partnership or consultancy) which delivers learning programmes that are directed to a specified NQF standard(s) and/or qualifications and manages the assessment thereof.

Qualification

Formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a recognised awarding body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes.

Qualifications framework

Instrument for the classification of qualifications according to an established set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, thereby improving the transparency, access, progression, comparability and quality of qualifications.

Quality assurance

Generic term for all activities that provide assurance that the educational and training services of an organisation are continually being delivered effectively, to the required standard, and in line with published goals and objectives.

Recognition of prior learning (RPL)

To recognise and validate competencies for purposes of certification obtained outside the formal education and training systems.

Regional qualifications framework (RQF)

A framework that consists of a set of agreed principles, practices, procedures and standardised terminology intended to ensure effective comparability of qualifications and credits across countries in a region.

Registration

Process of providing an institution with the opportunity to establish a formal, publicly recognised relationship with the relevant national body or other competent authority.

Skills

Ability to apply knowledge to complete tasks and solve problems. Skills are described as both cognitive (employing logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).

Transnational qualifications framework (TQF)

Translation instrument for the classification of VUSSC qualifications according to set criteria for specified levels of learning achieved to improve credit transfer and promote common accreditation mechanisms between participating VUSSC countries.

Validation

Process through which a legally responsible agency or association determines if a provider-based and/or national qualification meets minimum established criteria for registration on the qualifications framework.



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