The first meeting of the Management Committee of the Transnational Qualifications Framework held in Singapore from 6 to 10 October 2008.

Opening Presentation by Sir John Daniel and Paul West

Read by Mr Samuel Isaacs, Executive Officer, South African Qualifications Authority

Welcome back to Singapore and to the first meeting of the Management Committee of the VUSSC’s Transnational Qualifications Framework. This committee was established at the full meeting of VUSSC country CEOs of national qualifications authorities held in February of this year. You represent all regions of the small states from across the Commonwealth.

The Virtual University for the Small States of the Commonwealth has progressed from an idea of Ministers of Education in 2000, to a concept agreed by Ministers in 2003 and initial implementation in 2005 with meetings of Ministry representatives or Interlocutors held in Singapore.

The concept of a transnational qualifications framework began its first steps with Ministers of Education responding to a request for information about national qualifications frameworks in 2007. A meeting of CEOs of national qualification authorities was held in February 2008, resulting in a conceptual framework and the appointment of your committee. The Ministry appointed representatives of VUSSC, the Interlocutors, discussed and accepted the TQF document at their bi-annual meeting this last July in London, UK.

With the concept document now completed, agreed and published, we need to move rapidly to the implementation phase. This brings us to the present. Today, you will be starting an important week of work, to move us from a conceptual framework, to an implementation framework. In the near future, we need a few things to help further build credibility and strength in the education sectors and of institutions in small states:
1. Institutions in small states need to be formally accredited and monitored by their Ministries of Education. This includes weeding out any bogus institutions or degree mills that might have arrived from near or far. Only nationally recognised institutions should have the right to lay claim to a national and VUSSC co-branded qualification under the TQF. We hope that countries will also submit their lists of nationally recognised institutions for inclusion in UNESCO’s global portal of accredited institutions.

2. National Qualifications Authorities need to exist either in each of the small states, or jointly through cooperative agreements with other countries, and all qualifications that are to carry the VUSSC logo, should have acquired the stamp of approval from the appropriate national authority. National qualification authorities in turn, need to ensure that they constantly compare their own qualifications frameworks with other countries' frameworks to ensure that no one can legitimately complain about the standard of quality of qualifications acquired in a small state that participates in VUSSC.

3. If there is a functioning regional qualification authority or registry, it should examine and approve each qualification to be registered as a "VUSSC qualification" by a national institution.

4. With the preceding criteria met, qualifications may be listed on a VUSSC website that will be setup in November 2008. We hope that with a small start in 2008, the status of co-branded, internationally offered qualifications, by nationally recognised institutions in small states participating in VUSSC, will become a motivating factor for small states to focus on the quality of their post secondary education sectors.

While a few institutions may begin to offer programmes of study entirely online, we understand that other institutions will offer face-to-face programmes in classroom settings, that include learners who choose to come to study in small states. These will become known as institutions that are a part of the international network known as the Virtual University for the Small States of the Commonwealth.

**VUSSC Capacity Building**

While you have been working at the important area of qualification frameworks for VUSSC, other groups have been working at increasing the ICT skills of educational professionals in your countries. Well over 100 people have been through the VUSSC workshops, or bootcamp experience. We have received much applause for what they have learned and how the participants are impacting on national education systems. Each person has been asked to train others in their home country and we believe that over 500 people have gain indirectly from the training participants have received.

Feedback from Ministries shows that VUSSC participants have impacted on education systems and institutional thinking. This happens through having new perspectives, not only from their new-found ICT skills, but also from having learned about the systems and cultures in other small states, sometimes 15 or 20,000 km away from themselves. They have learned about aspects of teaching, life skills, disaster management and critically important industries - all from each other; and in doing so, have begun to
create communities of practice across regional boundaries that they had little reason to consider until they had met in a bootcamp.

The VUSSC workshops have started the process of content development, but more importantly, they have increased skills, both directly with the participants and indirectly with colleagues of participants; they have motivated Ministry officials and encouraged education professions to resume their professional development.

The process of materials developed has matured during the 2 years of implementation to date, and now comprises:

1. Researching the availability of open educational resources from organisations around the world,
2. creating drafts of learning content using the COL Instructional Design Template (available free on COL's website),
3. sharing and discussing drafts using BaseCamp as an online team work-space,
4. engaging an educational-editor to review and re-work the content with the team,
5. saving the content to a range of formats for easy use by anyone (usually doc, odt and pdf), and
6. publishing the content on COL's website. In the near future, all VUSSC content will be published on VUSSC's own website for anyone to use.

With the increase in ICT skills amongst education professionals and the creation of the Transnational Qualifications Framework, the time is fast approaching for two new activities to start:

1. Professional development of VUSSC educators through the use of online technologies will begin.
2. Institutions will be in a position to offer programmes of study internationally, either by offering them entirely online, or by using some combination of online and face-to-face tuition.

Soon, potential learners in bigger countries will be able to make legitimate choices to study through institutions in small states either online, or by travelling to small states, and reasonably expecting that these qualifications will be recognised around the world. With a block of 30 countries standing together, we believe there is far greater hope of other countries taking small states seriously than if the 30 small states each stand separately.

You have an important task ahead of you this week and we know we have the best talent from across the small states here to accomplish it. Our own travel restrictions this week prevent either of us from joining you in person, but we will monitor your progress via BaseCamp. We wish you energy and strength for the week and thank you for the important work you are doing.

Sir John Daniel & Paul West
6 October 2008