The African Qualifications Verification Network (AQVN) hosted the 2019 Conference, and Annual General Meeting (AGM) from the 28th – 29th October 2019 in Johannesburg. The Theme of the Conference was: *Qualification Recognition beyond Borders: Collaboration to Ease Verification of Qualifications in Africa*. Institutions from thirteen (13) countries attended the meeting, namely Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, Uganda, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Representatives from Cameroon, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Senegal, Seychelles and Tunisia sent their apologies.

The objectives of the Conference were to:

1. Share the latest trends and debates in verification and evaluation of qualifications;
2. Reiterate (especially to new members and guests) the mandate of the network;
3. Share experiences of key achievements or products developed as well as challenges of verifications and related activities;
4. Review the AQVN plan for 2019-2020 and
5. Develop a plan of action for 2020-2021.

On the first day of the conference, the Chairperson of the AQVN, Mrs. M.A. Chiyaba, gave a special welcome and thanked everyone for attending the 2019 conference. She recognised and thanked City and Guilds for sponsoring the conference and said it was because of such gestures that AQVN was growing. The Conference Theme for 2019 was “*Qualification Recognition beyond Borders: Collaboration to ease verification of qualifications in Africa.*”

As a means of introducing the theme, the Chairperson made mention of key issues and challenges surrounding verification of qualifications in different Member States. These included but were not limited to:
1. Lack of development of Regional Qualifications Frameworks that harmonise Basic Education, Technical Vocational Education and Training and Higher Education;
2. Presence of National Qualification Frameworks (NQF) in some Member States;
3. Language issues across the African continent;
4. Unavailability of centralised National Learner Records as well as Qualification Data Bases amongst the Member States was also a challenge; and
5. Rising cases of Fraud and Diploma Mills across the continent.

The Chairperson emphasised that the network needed to overcome the above challenges to make verification of qualifications easy and quick. The Conference was informed that the advent of the Africa Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) is an initiative that will enhance the work of the AQVN.

The Chief Executive Officer of the South Africa Qualifications Authority (SAQA), Mr Joe Samuels, made opening remarks at the conference. The salient highlights of his address included the following:

1. The AQVN has emerged at an appropriate time with enabling structures such as the Addis Convention and development of the Africa Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF);
2. The AQVN Member States were encouraged to invite other Member States of the African Union into the network such as Eastern/ Western/ Central and Northern parts of Africa;
3. The AQVN Member States were also encouraged to ratify the Addis Convention as there were currently nine (9) countries out of the possible ten (10) that had ratified the convention;
4. There is the need for democratic participation in the AQVN by Member States to network, collaborate and share best practices in qualification verification through adoption of Databases for Registered Qualifications and Institutions and Centralized National Learner Records.
5. The AQVN Member States were called to seriously consider how the 4th Industrial Revolution was affecting verification of qualifications, duration of the processing and real-time service provision.

Independent quality assurance bodies and associate organisations also shared qualifications verification practices they were currently using. These included Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) and Purchasing Consortium Southern Africa (PURCO).

For purposes of information sharing and collaboration the following presentations were also made:

- The role of AQVN in the development of ACQF;
- Capacity Assessment of AQVN Members by the Groningen Declaration Network (GDN) supported by the American Association of Collegiate Registers and Admissions Officers (AACRAO);
- UNESCO Qualifications Passport- ZAQA’s pre-piloting experience; and
- SAQA initiative to recognise the qualifications of refugees.

On the second day of the Conference, Dr Rita Makumbi made a presentation on the East African Community Higher Education Qualifications Framework, approved in 2015. Notable achievements for the East African Community included: East African Community Qualifications Framework for Higher Education; East African Credit Accumulation and Transfer System; Staff Mobility Programme and Reciprocal Recognition Programme in some prioritised areas. The East African Community challenges included: skills deficit in the health sector, rapid population growth,
uneven distribution of the economy and varying academic durations of programmes. The countries that are part of the East African Community include Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Uganda.

The participants made input into the AQVN draft five year strategic plan which will be implemented in the period 2020 - 2024.

The AQVN held its 3rd Annual General Meeting on the 29th October 2019 where the Annual and Financial Reports were presented and adopted. The next AQVN meeting dates are 26 - 27 October 2020 and the host country is Kenya.