

1st QS-MAPLE advances global recognition of higher education in Middle East and Africa

A total of 160 participants from 93 institutions in 35 countries attended the inaugural QS-MAPLE (Middle East and Africa Professional Leaders in Education) conference and exhibition organised by QS Asia in Dubai, UAE earlier this month.

The event, themed 'Globalising Higher Education in Middle East and Africa', was co-hosted by Dubai International Academic City (DIAC) and held at the Dubai Knowledge Village.

Some 66 speakers from 26 countries discussed and debated emerging trends and major developments in higher education in the region. They spoke on 40 subject areas in five parallel tracks.

In addition, 14 exhibitors representing leading higher education institutions and organisations from 12 countries were also present to provide information on higher education opportunities and services.

QS-MAPLE was conceived in response to great interest from the international higher education community in meeting at a major annual forum similar to QS-APPLE – QS Asia Pacific Professional Leaders in Education Conference and Exhibition – that addresses the emerging globalisation of higher education in the Middle East and Africa. It offers participants the opportunity to learn and exchange best practices, network and explore global partnership and collaboration with peers from across the world.

The 1st QS-MAPLE in Dubai provided strategic insights into key issues in Middle East and African higher education through the plenary sessions, country reports, parallel sessions and keynote speeches.

Dr Abdullah Al Karam, Director General of Dubai's Knowledge and Human Development Authority, gave the keynote address in the opening plenary. He said that Dubai's model was a good example of how a transnational higher education system had worked well. Although the model might be the most recent, he said that it was the fastest growing.

More than half of the 1st QS-MAPLE delegates rated their overall conference experience as above average to excellent. The most cited benefits of attending the event were:

- Networking with participants from Middle East and African universities;
- Sharing of ideas and concepts with other participants; and
- Acquiring new experiences and knowledge from global institutions.

Here are some comments received from delegates:

“It’s a good opportunity for networking with other universities from the Middle East and Africa. I have also made friends with peers from Asian and European universities.”

- Kairat Kurakbayev, Director, Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Kazakhstan

“From a meeting such as this, there will be a re-invigoration of higher education not only in South Africa but in Africa also. I think this QS conference will add value to the development of higher education in Africa.”

- Malegapuru W Makgoba, Vice-Chancellor, University of Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa

“It has been very exciting because people present here have a concern with tertiary education, and they want the best for their students.”

- John Kirkland, Associate Professor, Education, Royal University for Women, Bahrain

“The conference was no doubt very enriching and comprehensive in every aspect. I am looking forward to attending the 2nd QS-MAPLE in South Africa next year.”

- Zainab Qadir, National University of Sciences and Technology, Pakistan

After reviewing the inaugural QS-MAPLE, Mandy Mok, Managing Director of QS Asia, said: “We had wanted to replicate the success of QS-APPLE that we have been staging for the past six years. We are delighted with the outcome of the 1st QS-MAPLE, as we have achieved our targets in terms of the number of participants and the quality and scope of the conference programme.”

She added: “The 1st QS-MAPLE is the first step in realising our vision for Middle East and African higher education. We are pleased with the positive feedback and congratulatory messages that we have received, but we will not rest on our laurels as we plan to produce a bigger and better 2nd QS-MAPLE next year.”

Dr Ayoub Kazim, Managing Director of DIAC and TECOM Investments’ Education Cluster, said: “Our partnership with QS recognises the importance of addressing issues linked to the internationalisation of higher education in the Middle East and African region. With increasing globalisation, the internationalisation of education offers both opportunities and challenges. The QS-MAPLE conference served as an important platform to discuss the driving forces that influence the development of higher education.”

To enhance the learning experience of QS-MAPLE participants, the 5th QS World University Rankings and Evaluation Workshop was held one day after the conference. Participants from 20 institutions in 15 countries attended the workshop to hear expert speakers discuss the latest developments in university rankings and how institutions could improve their performance and global recognition at the institutional and subject levels. Delegates were given an update on how Arab universities were rising on the world stage. They were also given a sneak preview of the top-line results of the QS World University Rankings for biomedical subjects.

Next year, the 2nd QS-MAPLE will take place in South Africa on 3-4 May. QS Asia is organising it in partnership with the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa.