DEVELOPING THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL
QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (ACQF)

TRAINING MODULE THREE ❯❯ 03

REFERENCING TO ACQF

ACQF
African Continental
Qualifications Framework

African Union

THE AFRICA-EU PARTNERSHIP
LE PARTENARIAT AFRIQUE-UE

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Acronyms

ACQF	African Continental Qualifications Framework
AQRF	ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AU	African Union
AUMS	AU Member States
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
EXCO	Executive Committee
MS	Member State/s
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NQS	National Qualifications System
QA	quality assurance
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RQF	Regional Qualifications Framework
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADCQF	Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework
TCCA	Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training

1. General information on the Training Module

The African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) is a policy initiative of the African Union, underpinned by continental cooperation and integration policies ranging from education to free movement of persons and free trade. Development of the ACQF is underway (2019-2022), and includes analysis and research, elaboration of the ACQF policy and Guidelines, networking and stakeholders' outreach and the capacity development programme. The [ACQF website](#) contains information on all components, activities and outputs of the ACQF development project.

1.1 Overview

1. Objective and scope

The package of ten ACQF Training Modules supports the dissemination and application of the ten ACQF Guidelines, and address the same themes relevant in the domain of qualifications and qualifications frameworks. The list of training modules is as follows:

- Training Module 1: Learning outcomes in the context of NQFs and ACQF
- Training Module 2: Levels and level descriptors in the context of ACQF
- Training Module 3: Referencing to ACQF
- Training Module 4: Validation and recognition of learning
- Training Module 5: Quality assurance in the context of ACQF
- Training Module 6: Registers / databases of qualifications
- Training Module 7: Monitoring and evaluation in the context of NQF and ACQF
- Training Module 8: Communication and outreach in the context of NQF and ACQF
- Training Module 9: Innovation and technology in the context of NQF and ACQF
- Training Module 10: Qualifications and Qualifications Frameworks – the systemic view

This Training Module expands the content of the ACQF Guideline 3 on "Referencing in the context of the ACQF".

2. Utilisation of the Training Module

The Training Modules are designed for:

- Self-paced learning (individual)
- Teacher / trainer / facilitator directed learning – which may include group learning
- A combination of the above.

The Training Modules are freely accessible in several formats for flexible adaptation to different contexts and to learners' needs and possibilities: as PDF files to download from ACQF Website and disseminate; as digital content accessible via the ACQF digital Learning Management System, accessible online or offline, including via an App for Mobile phones.

Interested users (learners, teachers / trainers and organisations) may use the full set of Modules, or focus on just a few.

ACQF Training Modules can be used in a variety of situations, e.g.:

- Ministries and departments dealing with qualifications frameworks development and coordination, especially in early stages of the development process, or when operationalisation starts and more staff, stakeholders and technical resource persons are involved
- Quality councils, quality assurance agencies - for their staff, members and technical resource persons

- Technical projects designing or reviewing national qualifications frameworks with national taskforces and working groups
- Education and training providers, e.g., as optional or regular training modules on the themes and issues related with qualifications frameworks and systems: teacher training institutes, higher education institutions (departments of education), training centres for staff of public sector institutions, training centres of employers' associations and professional bodies, sector skills councils involved in development of qualifications
- International organisations' training centres and capacity development activities.

3. Concept and structure

The Training Modules

- Are based on the content elaborated in the Technical Guideline, and expand it, exploring the literature, recent research, and experiences
- Raise questions and issues in debate that could not be expressed in the Technical Guideline
- Provide examples and cases illustrating the main concepts, issues and application of the approaches and methods
- Examples and cases are taken from relevant practices and developments worldwide, with a focus on frameworks and systems with substantial and relevant experience for the different themes.

The Training Modules include

- Reflective questions that could be addressed as an individual or as a group (e.g. workshop group, work group)
- Learning activities that could be addressed as an individual or as a group (e.g. class/lecture group, work group)
- Access to case studies or examples, readings, disparate views (if relevant)
- Assessment tasks

2. Overview of Training Module 3: Referencing

2.1 Abstract

Referencing is a process of self-assessment, comparison and transparency. Training Module 3 on referencing sets out to explain the concept of referencing and its purpose and benefits as a translation mechanism. It sets out the four referencing criteria, streamlined and focused, contextualised specifically for the African continent, based on key learnings from successful implementation of referencing in other regional qualifications frameworks. It also establishes governance procedures and follow-up to ensure that peer reviews and quality is catered to in the country's response to referencing. More importantly, it provides some support to ease the implementation of referencing processes in countries.

2.2 Expected learning outcomes

At the end of this training module the learner will be able to:

1. Communicate the purpose and benefits of referencing
2. Communicate the benefits of a streamlined approach to the referencing process
3. Propose draft timelines for completion of referencing criteria
4. Propose a draft outline for the country referencing report
5. Propose a draft timeline for completion of the referencing process

2.3 Key definitions

For the purposes of this Training Module, the following concepts are important: Referencing to ACQF; ACQF Governance Structure.

Referencing to ACQF: A process to compare national qualifications frameworks/ qualifications levels with those of the overarching qualifications framework (ACQF). Through a structured referencing process, based on agreed and common referencing criteria and procedures, a national multi-stakeholder team experts defines and establishes the relationship/ link the NQF/ NQS levels and quality assurance with those of the ACQF. The purpose of referencing to ACQF is to contribute to clarity and mutual trust between national qualifications frameworks and systems, to comparability of qualifications of different countries, to transparency and information-sharing on qualifications frameworks and systems.

ACQF Governance structure: At the continental level, the ACQF Governance structure is participative and transparent, and has an oversight responsibility for the referencing process. It has the mandate and technical capacity to provide guidance and support to national referencing processes, to promote a participative and efficient model of referencing, to support information-sharing with all African Union countries, to endorse the completed countries' referencing reports, and ensure their publication on ACQF website.

3. Referencing in relation to the ACQF

Referencing of national qualifications frameworks and systems to the ACQF is the core function of the ACQF as a meta qualifications framework for the African continent.

The objectives, principles, and scope of the ACQF are defined in the ACQF policy document, in which the main areas of activity of the ACQF are formulated as follows:

"By virtue of its objectives, principles and conceptual-technical design, the ACQF will deliver on the following main areas:[1]

1. Referencing of national qualifications frameworks and systems to the ACQF, following agreed criteria and procedures. This includes the adequate support – for example, coordination, common instruments to facilitate the process, guidance and technical support to national referencing teams, and review and analysis on the state of play of referencing.

2. Support recognition of prior learning – for example, the development of common guidelines and approaches, updated inventory of RPL systems on the continent, and a wide information and support campaign.

3. ACQF Qualifications Platform (database): a set of digital instruments to systematise and disseminate information on national qualifications frameworks and systems, on national and international qualifications and credentials, on recognition of prior learning. The ACQF Qualifications Platform will also provide other services, such as digital certification and data analysis and monitoring.

4. Qualifications: a range of activities such as research and design of common approaches and methodologies. Development of qualifications profiles adequate for common continental use related to new and emerging tasks, technologies, skills, and occupations linked with continental integration policies such as AfCFTA; and to continental strategies related with specific economic sectors, especially sustainable agriculture, which is poised to be a major contributor to growth and jobs.

5. Capacity development in the relevant thematic areas, including a range of training programmes in hybrid and digital formats, an e-learning platform, peer-learning activities and thematic communities of practice. Provision of technical support to countries in developing, implementing and reviewing their national qualifications frameworks and systems and preparing for referencing with ACQF. Cooperation and mutual learning across African regions, supporting their initiatives related to qualifications frameworks and systems and recognition of prior learning.

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[1] These areas are developed in the ACQF Feasibility Study (ACQF. 2021d), presented to ACQF Advisory Group meeting of 28 July 2021.

6. Networking and cooperation with African stakeholders, especially the national and regional entities responsible for qualifications frameworks or systems, organisations delivering international qualifications, recognition bodies and committees, education and training providers, social partners, professional and sector associations, employment sector institutions, job centres and online job vacancies websites, labour market and skills observatories, and students' unions. International networking and cooperation with regional and national qualifications frameworks on other continents, international organisations active in certification, recognition and research in the domain.

7. Analysis, monitoring and evaluation on ACQF implementation and other policy and technical themes relevant for the continuing improvement of the efficiency and effectiveness of the ACQF and its instruments."

Referencing to the ACQF is guided by four Referencing *Criteria* (Table 1) and a set of procedures and follow-up steps defined in the *Governance procedures and follow-up step*s (Table 2).

Referencing is a process of comparison and linking national qualifications frameworks to the ACQF and should be done through the national qualifications frameworks or, where these do not exist, national qualifications systems.

Table 1: ACQF referencing criteria

Referencing criteria	
1	There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the ACQF.
2	The national qualifications frameworks or systems are based on learning outcomes principles and related to arrangements for recognition of prior learning (including non-formal and informal) and, where appropriate, to credit systems.
3	There are transparent processes and procedures for including qualifications in the NQF or for describing the place of qualifications in the NQS and information on qualifications is accessible, trustworthy and verifiable in a national register(s) of qualifications.
4	The national quality assurance system for education and training refers to the national qualifications framework or system and is consistent with the principles of quality assurance of the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF).

Table 2: Component ACQF referencing governance procedures and follow-up

Governance procedures and follow-up
• Responsibilities and/or legal competence of relevant national bodies involved in the ACQF referencing process are clearly defined and published by the relevant competent authorities. • The relevant national quality assurance bodies state their agreement with the referencing outcome and referencing report. • People from other countries who are experienced in the field of qualifications are involved in certain aspects and steps of the referencing process. Their role is advisory and supports transparency, improvement and credibility. The national referencing committee informs the ACQF Governance Structure on the involved international experts. • Competent national bodies certify the referencing to the ACQF and publish one comprehensive, evidence-based referencing report, which addresses all referencing criteria. • The referencing outcome is published by the participating country and the ACQF network upon its final validation by the ACQF Governance Structure, on the dedicated ACQF website. • Following the completion of referencing, all newly issued documents related to qualifications that are part of the national qualifications frameworks or systems (e.g.: certificates, diplomas, supplements) and qualifications registers issued by the competent national authorities will contain a clear reference to the appropriate ACQF level, based on national legislation and procedures.

3.1 Purpose and benefit of referencing to the ACQF

Referencing is one of the methodologies used to compare, and build trust in qualifications frameworks/ qualifications levels. In the ACQF context, referencing is a way of comparing qualifications levels, using the ACQF and its level descriptors as a common reference point to link qualifications frameworks (QFs) to the ACQF. Through a structured and transparent referencing process, a national multi-stakeholder group / committee agrees, with the ACQF Governance Structure, on the link between each of the levels of the NQF/ NQS and the corresponding level in the ACQF.

Referencing to the ACQF should be done through the NQFs or, where these do not exist, NQSs, on condition that their qualifications levels are clearly described and qualifications included follow transparent and quality assured processes.

3.1.1 ACQF as common reference point for comparison and translation

The ACQF is envisaged as an overarching qualifications reference framework that promotes a lifelong learning objective, comprises all types of learning, is based on learning outcomes and built on a set of level descriptors. This common point of comparison will serve as a translation device between the NQF/ NQS on the African continent. Member States will relate their own learning outcomes based frameworks/ systems to the level descriptors of the ACQF through the referencing process which in turn enables further linkages to qualification level descriptors in other AU Member States. The increased transparency will further enhance mutual understanding of qualifications and quality assurance and promote cooperation. The EQF is a good example of the implementation of an RQF that acts as a translation device.

> **Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion**
>
> **Click on the link to see an example of how the EQF works as a translation device**
>
> Select two countries for your comparison
> *NB: This is a post-referencing exercise*

The ACQF is a framework of NQFs. National qualifications are not to be registered in the ACQF, because they are in the respective NQFs. The referencing process determines the level to level correspondence between the NQF and the ACQF. By this process, national qualifications that are included in the referenced NQF are referenced to the ACQF. This is a key outcome of the process. Further to the referencing process, all newly issued documents related to qualifications that are part of the NQF or system (e.g. certificates, diplomas, certificate supplements, diploma supplements) and / or qualification registers issued by the competent authorities should contain a clear reference, by way of the NQF or systems, to the appropriate ACQF level.

ACQF Qualifications Platform (database)

AU member states are encouraged to use the ACQF Qualifications Platform / database, as a free service, to publish information on their NQF and their national qualifications. Besides information on national qualifications published by the national competent authorities on a voluntary basis, the ACQF Qualifications Platform will contain information on other qualifications and standards, such as i) international qualifications and ii) common continental qualifications profiles related with continental integration objectives (e.g.: AfCFTA). For more information: refer to ACQF Guideline 6.

3.1.2 Referencing connects community of AU member States

The policy documents and strategic initiatives of the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) have called for integration and recognition of education outcomes. This intention is strengthened in the objectives of the ACQF which are:

− To ensure comparability, quality and transparency of qualifications and support lifelong learning,

- To facilitate recognition of learning outcomes in different contexts, diplomas and certificates, and support mobility (learners, workers, businesses)
- To work in cooperation and complementarity with National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) and Regional Qualifications Frameworks (RQFs) and support the creation of an African education and qualifications space, and
- To promote cooperation, referencing between qualifications frameworks (national and regional) in Africa and worldwide.

As an overarching and referencing qualifications framework for the African continent, the ACQF aims at connecting the national (and regional) qualifications frameworks of the AU community. This core function is based on the process of referencing NQFs or systems to the ACQF, following agreed referencing criteria and procedures, and peer review by the member countries.

Referencing to ACQF is a way of creating a common zone of trusted qualifications by bringing together the African Union member states and key stakeholders to compare qualifications frameworks/ systems and disseminate updated information on qualifications and the referenced NQFs. Integration is further strengthened through the collaborative element of participating in the referencing process to enhance trust, transparency, recognition of learning outcomes and to support mobility. National players can facilitate a self-directed review by benchmarking their own NQFs against the referencing criteria thus contributing to the growth and improvement process of their NQF/ NQS.

3.1.3 Strengthened learning outcomes approaches

The ACQF level descriptors are written as a hierarchy of learning complexity, based on learning outcomes. In order to ease the comparison between national qualifications systems and the ACQF, countries engaging in referencing are encouraged to use learning outcomes approaches to describe their qualifications and related standards. In this way the referencing process itself will promote the strengthening of learning outcomes approaches across the continent.

3.1.4 Collaboration, transparency and deeper understanding of NQF/NQS

Referencing is, however, much more than a technical exercise of linking qualifications levels. It is also a social, collaborative process, based on nationally agreed objectives and contributing to improvement of the NQF / NQS. It involves an inter-stakeholder group at national level, led by a relevant body that ensures the quality and reliability of the referencing process. This inter-stakeholder group is the interface between the national process and the ACQF Governance Structure. Confidence and trust in the ACQF referencing process requires that the relevant stakeholders work together to consult, review and agree on the level-to-level linkages between the national qualification levels and the levels of the ACQF.

Engagement in the structured referencing process is beneficial as it will bring together key stakeholders in a collaborative process to promote mutual learning, share good practice and build trust. The process will also support member countries to develop, consolidate or review their NQFs, as engagement in the process offers an opportunity for critical reflection and identification of areas for further development of the RQF/NQF/NQS.

A key benefit of referencing is that it allows stakeholders to develop a deeper understanding of NQFs/ NQSs referenced to the ACQF. The comparable and accessible information generated through referencing enhances trust, transparency and comparability of qualifications and NQFs/NQS on the continent. It also strengthens integration by offering some agreement on a common language and concepts regarding qualifications and qualifications frameworks across diverse NQFs/ NQS on the continent. In this context, transparency is understanding similarities and differences between frameworks and systems of different countries.

3.1.5 Referencing facilitates recognition of qualifications

Referencing to ACQF and the resulting reports and comparable information on NQFs and qualifications contributes to facilitate recognition of qualifications between countries. By referencing national qualifications levels to a single continental qualifications framework (the reference point or translation device), the community of countries creates a transparent relationship and correspondence between levels of different NQFs / NQS.

But the ACQF is not an instrument equipped to carry out recognition of qualifications, which is a policy domain under the responsibility of each country. To ascertain the indispensable coherence with existing international Conventions, the ACQF acknowledges and works in complementarity with other relevant policies and conventions related to recognition of qualifications, such as the UNESCO's Addis Recognition Convention (entered into force on 15/12/2019)[2] and the UNESCO's Global Recognition Convention[3] (not yet entered into force as of May 2022), and it is not intended to interfere or replace national recognition legislation and mechanisms.

Information sharing and the robustness of the referencing documentation are major contributors to transparent and efficient recognition practices. Referencing facilitates recognition in different ways:

− Information-sharing via a common source (ACQF Qualifications Platform / database) on qualifications of NQFs and systems referenced to the ACQF.
− Comparable and coherent information on the NQFs / NQS of all involved countries.
− Involvement of national recognition bodies in the referencing process and in the validation of national referencing reports.

National referencing reports are valuable and relevant for credential evaluators and entities involved in, and in charge of, recognition of qualifications. By bringing referencing reports into the public space, the ACQF contributes to easier dissemination of credible information for learners, quality assurance and awarding bodies, education and training institutions, and recognition bodies.

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Study Section 3.1 on the purpose and benefit of referencing to the ACQF

1. What are the potential benefits for your own NQF from the referencing process?
2. What do you expect?
3. How can the national process be oriented to better meet your expectations?

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Referencing is not an exam to pass or fail, it is a process of self-assessment, comparison and transparency.

1. What is your comment on the statement above?
2. How can this view of referencing support better dialogue and cooperation between stakeholders?
3. How can this view of referencing support improvement of the NQF and its tools and governance?

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[2] UNESCO, 2014. Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States 2014. http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=49282&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html#STATE_PARTIES

[3] UNESCO, 2020. Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373602.locale=en

3.1.6 Post-referencing display of ACQF levels on qualifications documents and / or qualifications register

After successful referencing, all newly issued documents related to qualifications that are part of the NQF or system (e.g. certificates, diplomas, certificate supplements, diploma supplements) and / or qualification registers issued by the competent authorities may contain a clear reference, by way of NQF or systems, to the appropriate ACQF level. This display of the relevant ACQF levels on qualifications documents is a major benefit of the ACQF referencing. The referencing outcomes and implications, in particular the labelling/ acknowledgement of ACQF levels on qualifications documents will support mobility for lifelong learning by easing recognition of qualifications as well as the facilitation of learner and worker mobility inside and outside the continent.

3.1.7 Information-sharing on qualifications

The ACQF supports information-sharing on NQFs in Africa to facilitate recognition and portability of qualifications.

The ACQF is a framework of NQFs, but national qualifications are not to be registered on the ACQF because they are registered in their own respective NQFs and their integrity maintained in accordance with national legislation. To facilitate access to open, comparable and reliable information on qualifications of African countries for all users, the planned digital ACQF Qualifications Platform will enable publication of information on national qualifications by the relevant institutions, and support the use of common minimum fields of data for electronic publication of such information.

Also, the ACQF contributes to innovation in the domain of qualifications and credentials and its main instruments for information-sharing are the website and the (future) Qualifications Platform / database. The database development will be supported by adequate and transparent procedures and be conceived to cater to the diversity of qualifications systems and ongoing rapid developments related with new types of qualifications and credentials. AU MS are encouraged to use the ACQF Qualifications Platform/ database to publish information on their NQF and their national qualifications.

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

After successful referencing to the ACQF, each country will have the possibility to display the ACQF levels on newly issued qualifications documents (jointly with the national level) in line with the general rules and regulations on qualifications documents

1. Where do you think the ACQF level should be displayed?
a. On the actual diploma/ certificate
b. On the transcript
c. On diploma / certificate supplement
d. On national qualifications register/ database
e. Other

2. What needs to be put in place in order for this to happen?
a. In legislation (national level)
b. In the higher education sector
c. In the TVET sector
d. In general, and further education
e. Other

3.1.8 Internationalisation and referencing to other RQFs

Referencing will contribute to internationalisation of qualifications from African NQFs/ NQSs and also strengthen international co-operation with other continents and regions. The ACQF is part of a global community of 17 RQF initiatives (European Training Foundation, 2021a):

1. African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF)
2. Arab Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (AQF; ANQAHE model)
3. ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF)
4. CARICOM Qualifications Framework (CQF)
5. Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement supérieur (CAMES)
6. ECOWAS Regional Qualifications Framework of West Africa
7. East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (EAQFHE)
8. European Qualifications Framework (EQF)
9. Gulf Qualifications Framework (GQF)
10. Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Eastern Africa
11. Marco de Cualificaciones Alianza del Pacifico (Pacific Alliance) (MCAP)
12. Marco de Cualificaciones para la Educación superior centroamericana (MCESCA)
13. Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards/ Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF)
14. Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA)
15. Southern African Development Community (SADC) Qualifications Framework (SADCQF)
16. South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Regional Qualifications Framework
17. Transnational Qualifications Framework for the Virtual University for the Small States of the Commonwealth (TQF VUSSC)
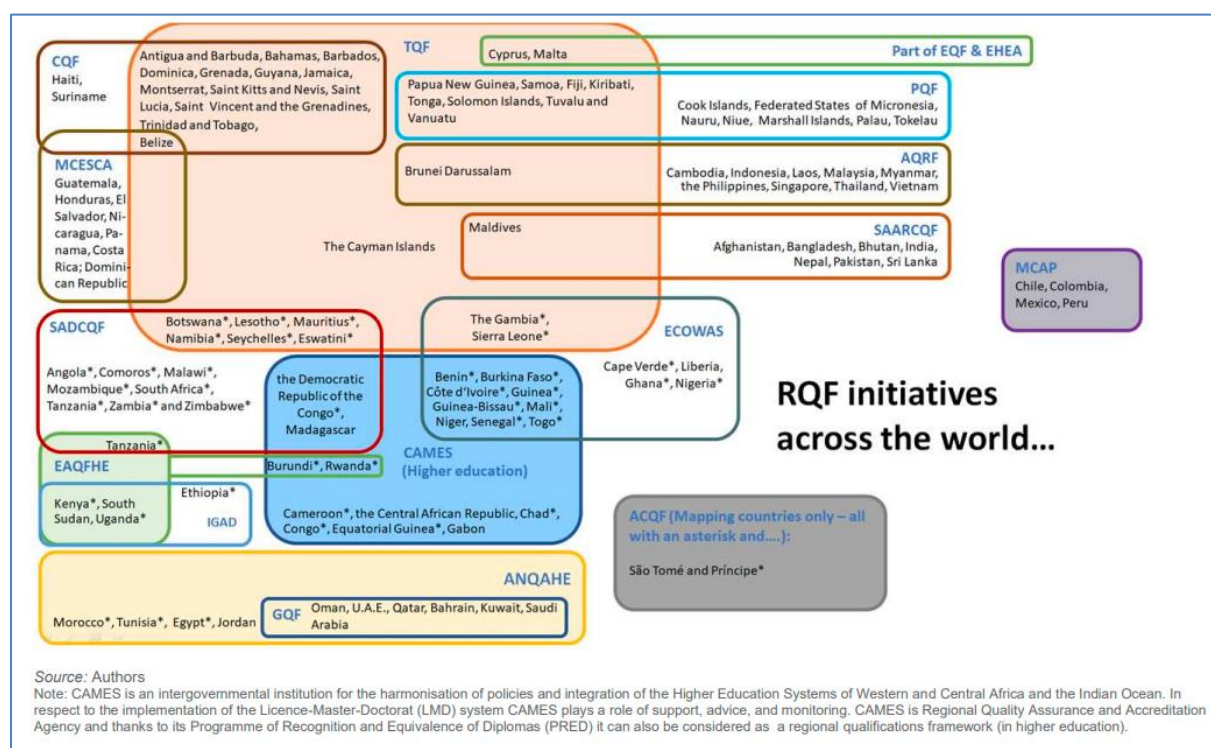

Figure 1: RQF initiatives around the world (excluding EQF and EHEA)

Source: ETF, 2021a, p.44

Figure 1 shows where the ACQF mapping countries fit into the regional initiatives, with many African countries belonging to more than one RQF. As the ACQF develops and progresses, it can be referenced to other RQFs. This

will enhance international collaboration initiatives and the comparability of the ACQF with other parts of the world, and eventually the global transparency of qualifications.

3.2   Examples of RQFs that implement referencing

The ACQF can, to its advantage, draw upon established knowledge on the referencing processes undertaken in three RQFs (ACQF, 2021a to j, ETF, 2021a and b) namely:

- European Qualifications Framework (EQF)
- Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF) and
- Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF)

As in the case of the ACQF, the three RQFs are also described as regional common reference frameworks that function as a translation device to enable comparisons of qualifications across their member countries. These RQFs relate to the ACQF as they also include all types and levels of qualifications (incorporating formal, non-formal and informal learning), with the wider objective of promoting lifelong learning and facilitating mobility of learners and workers. As is the case of the ACQF, these RQFs encourage learning outcomes approaches, support and enhance Member States' NQFs/ NQSs, while serving as a mechanism for comparison, transparency and quality of qualifications.

The SADCQF and the AQRF adapted their alignment and referencing criteria respectively using the EQF referencing criteria as a basis.

EQF: Referencing has its origins in Europe where it was developed as a methodology to establish a correlation between the EQF and qualifications levels / NQFs in European countries. The EQF was set up in 2008 and revised in 2017. In March 2009, the EQF Advisory Group adopted ten referencing criteria and procedures for the referencing of national qualifications levels to the EQF. By November 2021, 38 EQF countries had referenced to the EQF, 33 (out of 38) countries use EQF levels in qualifications and Europass supplements and 23 countries in qualifications databases. The actual reports on the referencing of NQFs to EQF can be accessed at Europass / EQF.

The main achievements of the EQF for transparency of qualifications and mutual trust between NQFs, as of February 2022 can be summarized as follows:

- EQF acted as a catalyst to develop NQFs. If in 2008 only three EQF countries had NQFs, 37 out of 38 involved countries have adopted and are implementing NQFs.
- The large majority of EQF countries have developed and launched digital qualifications databases, accessible online.
- 36 (out of 38) involved countries have completed the process of referencing to EQF, and five countries have presented a renewed updated referencing report.
- 33 (out of 38) countries are using EQF levels on their qualifications documents (certificates, diplomas, supplements) and 23 are using EQF levels on their national qualifications databases.
- Other transparency tools of the EQF include the portal of referencing reports (in which 31 reports are published), and the digital tool to compare NQFs across Europe (in which 29 NQF are included).
- More recent developments include the connection of national qualifications databases and registers with the EQF (Europass) Qualifications database register. A growing number of countries are linking their databases through this mechanism.

SADCQF: The SADCQF, for purposes of accelerating the adoption of mutual standards and the development of NQFs in SADC used the word "alignment" instead of referencing to describe its process. The SADCQF was approved by relevant ministers in 2011 but a number of constraints delayed implementation. The process was revived in 2016 and the SADCQF was technically launched in 2017. The SADC Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA) is responsible for implementing the SADCQF and adopted ten alignment

criteria in September 2016 to accelerate the alignment process. The ten SADCQF alignment criteria are similar to the referencing criteria used in the EQF. At the time of writing this report, two SADCQF countries (South Africa and Seychelles) had completed the alignment process with the SADCQF, while one country had reached the final stage of the process (Mauritius).

AQRF: The AQRF was fully endorsed in 2015 and the eleven AQRF referencing guidelines were adopted in 2016 and revised in 2020. The AQRF and the referencing process is implemented through the AQRF Committee established in 2017 for this purpose. The AQRF referencing criteria are also based on the EQF referencing criteria with some differentiation. By the time of writing this report four AQRF countries had completed their referencing reports: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand.

> **Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion.**
>
> **Referencing has been extensively implemented in Europe, and also undertaken in the ASEAN and the SADC regions as outlined above. The referencing reports provide good guidance as to how the countries structured the reports and responded to the core referencing criteria. These reports are good sources of information for African countries.**
>
> **Click on the link to access the database of EQF referencing reports.**
> **Click on the links here to access the alignment reports of South Africa and Seychelles**

3.3   Referencing: clarifying what it is not

The intention of referencing is often misunderstood. While it is important to communicate the purpose and benefit of referencing, it is also important to communicate what it is not. Importantly, referencing:

- does not mean automatic recognition of qualifications and
- does not harmonise or standardise or replace NQFs/ NQSs.

> **Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion**
>
> **Referencing does not standardise or replace NQFs/ NQSs**
> 1.   What is your response to the statement above? Do you agree or disagree?
>
> **Referencing does not imply automatic recognition of foreign qualifications but facilitates recognition thanks to enhanced transparency and information-sharing between qualifications frameworks and systems of different countries**
> 1.   What is your comment on the statement above? Do you agree or disagree?
> 2.   What do you suggest to improve and strengthen information-sharing on NQFs upon their referencing to the ACQF – for the sake of more efficient and robust processes of recognition of foreign qualifications?

Referencing is a demanding process, requiring coordination between the national and regional authorities, technical expertise to carry out the analysis and draft the conclusions based on the referencing criteria, and collaboration of the relevant national stakeholders. Some challenges and possible solutions are summarised in table 3.

Table 3: Challenges to referencing

Challenges to referencing	
Challenge	**Possible solutions**
There are typically many referencing criteria, with many being procedural and related to governance of the process.	This guideline proposes a focus on four main referencing criteria that actually deal with the relationship/ interplay between the NQF/ NQS and the ACQF, while the governance components are gathered in one block. This allows a more streamlined referencing process.

The referencing processes may span many years due to delays in national decision-making processes	By The National ACQF Referencing Committee (team or Exercise force) may propose ways to minimise delays in decision-making.
It may be difficult to link NQFs (with actual qualifications) to a meta-framework RQF like the ACQF that has no qualifications	A methodology, for linking, is proposed to bring some consistency to the process. Only the QF levels will be used
Learning outcomes approaches may not be adopted or well developed, or well understood	The referencing process itself will strengthen learning outcomes approaches
Countries may not be able to meet all the referencing criteria fully	A phased referencing process is proposed for these countries
Some countries only have sectoral QFs and only these may have QF levels. How will referencing be undertaken here?	A partial/ sectoral referencing is proposed for these countries
Countries may not fully meet the requirements of all the referencing criteria, but are committed to undertake the preparation to referencing. How will they be encouraged?	The national referencing report will explicitly indicate the main gaps and challenges of the NQF/ NQS by referencing criterion. The ACQF Governance Structure will discuss and agree a roadmap for improvements with each AUMS, for a period of up to 3 years. A revised report with evidence on the improvements and responses to ACQF remarks will be submitted and discussed for validation. This process motivates the countries to plan and undertake the necessary improvements.

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Study the challenges and solutions to referencing (Table 3)
1.   Do you think the challenges and solutions are sufficiently covered?
2.   If not, what would you add?

4. Referencing model for the ACQF

This section elaborates a set of processes to support the African Union Member States (AUMS) to initiate, undertake and report on the outcomes of its referencing namely:

-    Process of establishing ACQF referencing criteria
-    Referencing criteria, governance procedures and follow-up
-    Report structure, referencing steps and digitalised process
-    Referencing capacity and arrangements

4.1   Process of establishing ACQF referencing criteria

To ensure that the ACQF "linking" process is consistent, coherent and transparent, referencing criteria are proposed. ETF (2021b) reports that some countries that have engaged in referencing have suggested that consideration be given to reducing the referencing criteria to focus on building trust and transparency, and separating these criteria (for comparison of key features of the NQF and ACQF) from procedural components.

In developing the ACQF referencing criteria, the referencing approaches of the most operational RQFs (AQRF, EQF and SADCQF) were analysed and lessons considered, and the details of this exercise are annexed in this module. Common key referencing criteria across RQFs are essential for ensuring comparison of the ACQF with other RQFs, in view of future cooperation and comparison between RQFs.

The ACQF approach compared the existing referencing criteria and methods to establish a set of streamlined ACQF referencing criteria. The ACQF referencing model focuses on the four criteria providing for comparison of key features of NQF/ NQS and ACQF. These features are: levels and level descriptors; application of the learning outcomes approach; transparency of the procedures applied for inclusion of qualifications in NQFs; quality assurance.

Once the referencing criteria have been validated all the countries will apply the same set of criteria and procedures. AU MS typically work together, within their national stakeholder groupings to provide a national response to each of the referencing criteria.

4.2   ACQF referencing criteria and governance procedures

There are four referencing criteria and one governance procedures component.

Referencing criteria

1	There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the ACQF.
2	The national qualifications frameworks or systems are based on learning outcomes principles and related to arrangements for recognition of prior learning (including non-formal and informal) and, where appropriate, to credit systems.
3	There are transparent processes and procedures for including qualifications in the NQF or for describing the place of qualifications in the NQS and information on qualifications is accessible, trustworthy and verifiable in a national register(s) of qualifications.
4	The national quality assurance system for education and training refers to the national qualifications framework or system and is consistent with the principles of quality assurance of the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF). ACQF Guideline 5 elaborates the QA principles of ACQF

Governance procedures and follow-up

-   Responsibilities and/or legal competence of relevant national bodies involved in the ACQF referencing process are determined and published by the relevant competent authorities.
-   The relevant national QA bodies state their agreement with the referencing outcome and referencing report.
-   People from other countries who are experienced in the field of qualifications are involved in certain aspects and steps of the referencing process. Their role is advisory and supports transparency, improvement and credibility. The national referencing committee informs the ACQF Governance Structure on the involved international experts.
-   Competent national bodies certify the referencing to the ACQF and publish one comprehensive, evidence-based referencing report, which addresses all referencing criteria.
-   The referencing outcome is published by the participating country and the ACQF network upon its final validation by ACQF Governance Structure, on the dedicated ACQF website.
-   Following the completion of referencing, all newly issued documents related to qualifications that are part of the national qualifications frameworks or systems (e.g.: certificates, diplomas, supplements) and qualifications registers issued by the competent national authorities will contain a clear reference to the appropriate ACQF level, based on national legislation and procedures.

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

The ACQF referencing (criteria and procedures) are more streamlined and focused compared with other RQFs (See Annex 8.2.1 which shows the development of ACQF referencing criteria building on the three RQFs that have undertaken referencing).
1.   What are the benefits of this streamlined approach to referencing?
2.   What are the links and interplay between the 4 main referencing criteria?

4.2.1 Use of the referencing criteria

The national report of referencing to ACQF provides the argumentation and evidence on the degree to which the agreed referencing criteria are met.

For a focused elaboration, it is recommended that the country report presents this argumentation criterion by criterion, and specifies the used conceptual and methodological underpinnings, the main conclusions, and relevant evidence. Each criterion addresses a different dimension and requires a dedicated section in the report. However, it is also important to consider the linkages between the key referencing criteria, especially between quality assurance, the use of learning outcomes and transparency in the inclusion and classification of qualifications in the NQF.

Understanding the referencing criteria is therefore an essential premise for effective referencing processes. The workflow of ACQF referencing comprises preparatory steps that contribute to self-assess the country's readiness to engage with the process and to raise awareness and train the relevant stakeholders and contributors to the process and write-up of the referencing report.

4.2.2 ACQF Referencing Criterion 1

> There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the ACQF.

- The purpose of this referencing criterion is to demonstrate the compatibility and define the link between each level of the NQF (or level of qualifications in the NQS) and the ACQF level descriptors.
- The level descriptors make it possible to compare and link qualifications levels across the involved countries, following the referencing process.
- Complementary methodological orientation is given in Guideline 1 - Learning outcomes and in Guideline 2 - Level descriptors.

The ACQF level descriptors are written as a hierarchy of learning and are formulated as learning outcomes. This feature allows the comparison and the demonstration of correspondence between levels of the NQF (or NQS) and the levels of the ACQF. When a number of countries complete this process of referencing of national qualifications levels to the ACQF levels following the agreed rules, the comparison of qualification levels between the involved countries (NQFs) becomes clear (transparent) and well-grounded (reliable).

To meet this criterion the country's referencing group analyses and compares the level descriptors of the NQF and those of the ACQF, showing the similarities and differences in terms of:

- Scope of the frameworks
- Levels' structure
- Domains of learning underpinning the level descriptors
- The level descriptors – semantic comparison, purpose, vertical and horizontal logic

The response to this referencing criterion typically encompasses 1) National qualifications levels; 2) Compatibility and link between the level descriptors of the ACQF and the NQF.

A perfect fit between the national and ACQF descriptors is not expected as they serve distinctly different purposes. National level descriptors serve a national context and will be more detailed than those of the ACQF, whereas the ACQF descriptors will be broader and more general.

There will be no national qualifications directly linked / registered to the ACQF, as a result of referencing, since the comparison is between levels (NQF and ACQF). National qualifications are pegged / registered to the national framework or system.

Meeting criterion 1 is a major output of the referencing process, therefore the used approach must be robust and clear in explaining the relationship between the NQF/ NQS and the ACQF levels. The method or procedure

for linking levels must be transparent, consistently applied and described. Most importantly there should be good understanding of the NQF and ACQF levels and descriptors.

> **Exercise: Country groups**
> **Study the self-assessment exercise for Referencing Criterion One (Annex 8.2.2)**
> 1. Think of your own country's NQF/ NQS
> 2. Work through the various items
> 3. Draft a response (self-assessment), namely is the item fully met, partly met or not met
> 4. Where it is fully met, indicate where evidence can be found
> 5. Where it is partly met or not met, propose the action that is required, who should be responsible for the action and give an estimate of the timeframe
>
> *NB: Some of these questions have already been covered in Training Manual 2: Level descriptors*

4.2.3 ACQF Referencing Criterion 2

> The national qualifications frameworks or systems are based on learning outcomes principles and related to arrangements for recognition of prior learning (including non-formal and informal) and, where appropriate, to credit systems.

- The purpose of this referencing criterion is to provide insight into the learning outcomes approach used in the NQF/NQS and its links with non-formal and informal learning and credit systems.
- The response to this referencing criterion will increase the transparency and comparability of qualifications across the involved countries. This response typically encompasses: 1) Learning outcomes approach and status of application in the different sub-sectors of education and training (primary, secondary general and vocational, post-secondary, tertiary, continuing training, employment training); 2) Importance for expansion and credibility of Recognition of prior learning (RPL); 3) Credit accumulation and transfer.
- The relevant complementary methodological orientation is given in the Guideline 1 - Learning outcomes approach and in the Guideline 4 - Validation and recognition of learning

The ACQF is a meta-qualifications framework for lifelong learning that embraces all forms of learning. Referencing to the ACQF supports the lifelong learning objectives and encourages quality-assured learning outcomes approaches, recognition of non-formal and informal learning and development of credit accumulation and transfer systems. The ACQF level descriptors are written as a hierarchy of learning complexity, based on learning outcomes and involved countries are encouraged to use learning outcomes approaches to describe their qualifications. This shift eases the comparison between national and the ACQF descriptors. In this way the referencing process itself will promote the strengthening of learning outcomes approaches across the continent.

A learning outcomes approach is one which signals a move from input and duration of learning to output and actual knowledge, skills and competences acquired through the learning process. As such, this approach supports RPL and CAT. The use of learning outcomes contributes to greater transparency and comparability of qualifications of different national systems.

Assessed learning outcomes usually lead to a qualification (full or part), which signals that an individual has achieved the relevant learning outcomes according to standards. These learning outcomes may be obtained through formal, non-formal or informal learning modalities and pathways. The learning outcomes information and links with RPL should therefore be transparent and accessible.

The learning outcomes principles are implemented differently in different countries and in different contexts e.g. level descriptors, qualifications, professional standards, assessment standards, curricula, etc.

> **Exercise:**
> **Study the self-assessment exercise for Referencing Criterion Two (Annex 8.2.3)**
> 1. Think of your own country's NQF/ NQS
> 2. Work through the various items
> 3. Draft a response (self-assessment), namely is the item fully met, partly met or not met

4.2.4 ACQF Referencing Criterion 3

There are transparent processes and procedures for including qualifications in the NQF or for describing the place of qualifications in the NQS and information on qualifications is accessible, trustworthy and verifiable in a national register(s) of qualifications.

- The purpose of this referencing criterion is to explain how the qualifications are levelled and classified in the NQF, or where there is no NQF, how these qualifications are described and placed in the NQS. It also relates to the accessibility of the qualifications information in a publicly open, trustworthy, verifiable national register of qualifications.
- It is important that the level of a qualification is attributed in a transparent way, which key stakeholders can understand and trust. The response to this criterion is an additional and substantive contribution to transparency and mutual trust expected from robust referencing processes.
- The responses may include: 1) Scope of the NQF/ NQS: which qualifications and levels are included; 2) Qualifications development and approval process and relationship with NQF/ NQS decision-making on levels / classification; 3) Verifiable, national register(s) of qualifications.
- Complementary orientation is given in Guideline 2 - Level descriptors; Guideline 6 - Registration of qualifications and Guideline 9 - Innovation and technology in NQF/ NQS and ACQF.

Through this criterion the referencing process clarifies the policies and methods used by the countries to develop, approve and level qualifications, and the compatibility and coherence of those procedures with the NQF structure and its principles of transparency and trust. This offers an opportunity for the country to showcase the NQF levels/ NQS qualifications levels of all the key qualifications (or types), and the processes that lead to decisions on classification in the NQF/ NQS.

The classification of qualifications in an NQF level adds to the currency of the NQF and relevant NQF level for countries. The referencing process and its outcome will highlight the currency of the NQF at ACQF level. Critical to the referencing process, then, is the way a qualification is placed in NQF/ NQS levels.

Qualifications signal trust and indicate the successful outcome of assessment and certification, made visible through qualifications documents. It stands to reason that qualifications have an important role in mobility of learners and workers as the qualification may grant access to further learning, work opportunities, and/or may grant access to certain professions. One of the purposes of a qualification is to signal to education and training authorities and employers what learning outcomes have been achieved by the qualification holder (what the holder knows and is able to do). Qualifications based on learning outcomes are therefore pivotal to personal and social achievement. Moreover, learning outcomes-based qualifications contribute to social inclusion and equity by facilitating access of people with limited formal schooling to recognition of their learning outcomes gained in professional and work experiences, volunteering and other social activities, with the possibility to acquire part of full qualifications.

It would defeat the mobility purpose if the information on qualifications cannot be verified in accessible, trustworthy, national databases / platform(s) (preferably online). This description of the national qualifications information systems would also align with some of the counter-fraud protocols of the Addis Convention (UNESCO, 2014).

Many countries have national registers/ catalogues/ databases of their quality assured qualifications. These registers store information, including information on officially recognised qualifications (certificates, degrees, diplomas), qualifications standards, titles, credits, NQF levels and more. These registers need to be available and accessible to facilitate mobility of learners and workers, and organisations seeking information should be

able to access and verify the information. It is critically important that the information be credible and trustworthy.

> **Exercise:**
> **Study the self-assessment exercise for Referencing Criterion Three (Annex 8.2.4) which is also a summative exercise in this module**

4.2.5 ACQF Referencing Criterion 4

> The national quality assurance system for education and training refers to the national qualifications framework or system and is consistent with the principles of quality assurance of the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF). ACQF Guideline 5 elaborates the QA principles of ACQF.

- The purpose of this referencing criterion is to establish trust in the QA of the qualifications of ACQF Member countries, and also to establish a link between the QA of members and the QA instruments available on the continent. The relevant ACQF guideline is Guideline 5: Quality assurance

One objective of the ACQF is to foster trust in the quality of qualifications of the Member States. The referencing report needs to describe and explain the key national QA systems that operate in the country. Given that there may be many QA systems operating in one country, the referencing process is an opportunity to bring coherence to the system. It also presents an opportunity to present the country's response to the quality assurance of the learning outcomes approach used in the country. A further strengthening of the country's QA can be demonstrated in its compatibility with any overarching QA principles/ ACQF QA guidelines.

To clarify the interplay between quality assurance and referencing, the following principles are recommended:

> **Quality assurance – a criterion for ACQF referencing**: **the referencing to the ACQF of national qualifications frameworks or systems demonstrates the degree to which quality assurance of national qualifications:**
>
> - addresses the qualifications quality chain, from design of standards underpinning qualifications to learning, assessment, and certification;
> - addresses the application of the learning outcomes approach;
> - includes feedback instruments and processes supporting continuous quality improvement;
> - addresses internal and external quality assurance, and the regular review of quality assurance agencies;
> - is based on measurable objectives, standards, and guidelines for quality assurance;
> - is supported by resources; and
> - provides transparent information-sharing on results of evaluation.
> - takes account of African Union policy orientations such as African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (for higher education), to which both internal and external quality assurance adhere.

The responses (Annex 7.2.2) may include: 1) National QA systems and their relationship with the NQF; 2) Compatibility with regional/ overarching ACQF QA guidelines.

> **Exercise:**
> **Study the self-assessment exercise for Referencing Criterion 4 (Annex 8.2.5)**
> 1. Think of your own country's NQF/ NQS
> 2. Work through the eight items
> 3. Draft a response (self-assessment), namely is the item fully met, partly met or not met
> 4. Where it is fully met, indicate where evidence can be found
> 5. Where it is partly met or not met, propose the action that is required, who should be responsible for the action and give an estimate of the timeframe
> *NB: Quality assurance is covered in Guideline and Training Manual 5*

4.2.6 Governance procedures and follow-up

The governance procedure is composed of six items:

- Responsibilities and/or legal competence of relevant national bodies involved in the ACQF referencing process are determined and published by the relevant competent authorities.
- The relevant national QA bodies state their agreement with the referencing outcome and referencing report.
- People from other countries who are experienced in the field of qualifications are involved in certain aspects and steps of the referencing process. Their role is advisory and supports transparency, improvement and credibility. The national referencing committee informs the ACQF Governance Structure on the involved international experts.
- Competent national bodies certify the referencing to the ACQF and publish one comprehensive, evidence-based referencing report, which addresses all referencing criteria.
- The referencing outcome is published by the participating country and the ACQF network upon its final validation by ACQF Governance Structure, on the dedicated ACQF website.
- Following the completion of referencing, all newly issued documents related to qualifications that are part of the national qualifications frameworks or systems (e.g.: certificates, diplomas, supplements) and qualifications registers issued by the competent national authorities will contain a clear reference to the appropriate ACQF level, based on national legislation and procedures.

- The purpose of these procedures is to demonstrate the participation, transparency, mutual learning, support and quality of the referencing process.
- The relevant ACQF guidelines for further information are: Guideline 8 - Communication and Guideline 10 - Qualifications and qualifications systems, the systemic view.

It is important to establish clearly the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders in the referencing process, as this can contribute to broaden and improve stakeholder participation in the NQF dialogue at country level. Critical to the referencing process in each country is the establishment of a National Referencing Team or Committee. Annex 6.2.3 includes draft Terms of Reference (ToRs) that may be used to guide this process. This Task Team is a multi-stakeholder referencing group duly mandated to coordinate, draft, consult, quality assure the process, report to the ACQF Governance Structure and present the referencing outcomes and report.

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion
Study the draft ToRs for a proposed National Referencing Team (or working group, Task Force) (Annex 8.2.7)

1. What do you think this Team will be named in your country?
2. Which ministries, agencies and stakeholders will be represented on your country's Team?
3. How will appointments to the Team be made?
4. What kind of support would the Referencing Team need to smoothly carry out the referencing process, for example?
a. initial training of the team
b. follow-up coaching
c. guidelines
d. examples
e. expert support
f. peer review with other countries
g. other

5. Propose draft ToRs for your country's Team.

To ensure consistency and transparency in the process, the involved African Union member states are invited to address each of the referencing criteria from a national perspective and to report the national position in a referencing report. However, it is not expected that all member states will be able to meet all the referencing criteria immediately. The way that referencing is used / applied in the ACQF context is a matter of organisation,

phasing, follow-up, and dialogue, and the process will allow for gradual improvement. It also ensures the robustness of the process and peer review can contribute to a quality, consulted outcome.

Once the ACQF Governance Structure is satisfied that the referencing criteria have been met, and they endorse the referencing (formal linking) of the NQF/ NQS levels to the ACQF, the referencing process is considered to be complete. After endorsement by the ACQF governance structure:

- the report will be finalised and uploaded onto the ACQF website
- the adequate post-referencing steps will be undertaken, as defined in the report.

Following endorsement of referencing, an important aspect is to make visible the benefit of referencing to the ACQF, and ensure that qualifications are associated with an ACQF level. Because of the diversity of qualifications systems, MS may develop plans within their countries, to see how best to show the ACQF level on newly issues qualifications documents. Different sectors in each member country may have a different approach and may require changes to legislation on qualifications awards. Qualifications are constantly evolving and national qualifications frameworks/ systems change over time and therefore referencing to the ACQF should be reviewed and updated, as and when required. Annex 7.2.2 provides some guidance on the response to this Referencing Criterion.

> **Exercise:**
> **Study the self-assessment exercise for Governance procedures and follow up (Annex 8.2.6)**
> 1.   Think of your own country's NQF/ NQS
> 2.   Work through the six items of the governance procedure
> 3.   Draft a response (self-assessment), namely is the item fully met, partly met or not met
> 4.   Where it is fully met, indicate where evidence can be found
> 5.   Where it is partly met or not met, propose the action that is required, who should be responsible for the action and give an estimate of the timeframe

4.3   Referencing report

Member States are invited to address each of the referencing criteria from a national perspective and to report the national position. The referencing outcome is consolidated in a validated single national referencing report which, according to the agreed set of criteria, represents a statement of the comparable relationship between the NQF/ NQS and the ACQF. This referencing report is shared with members of the ACQF Governance Structure for comments and remarks, and may require reviews and amendments before endorsement at the ACQF governance level.

4.3.1   Minimum elements of the referencing report

The structure of the referencing report may be defined by the country's referencing team. However, there are a few minimum elements:

- Description of the whole education and training system, including adult learning, literacy and basic skills, continuing training; pathways for learners; quality assurance; main institutions and stakeholders and their roles in the system; main legislative acts, regulatory texts.

- The NQF: goals, principles, legal and regulatory acts, levels and descriptors, governance, registers / databases of qualifications. Status of implementation. Main challenges and plans for further development.

- Brief overview of the referencing process, stakeholders' involvement, endorsement of the report by the national competence bodies, and follow-up measures.

- The fundamental component of the report: a chapter dedicated to demonstrate how the NQF / NQS meets the ACQF referencing criteria. Each referencing criterion is addressed separately. To avoid duplication and ensure coherence, the analysis in this chapter should build (refer to) on the chapters describing the education and training system and the NQF. The use of examples and references to

sources contributes to the robustness and credibility of the argumentation in this chapter, and is strongly recommended..

- Sources: relevant legislative-regulatory framework, guidelines and standards, important databases / registers.

To ensure that the report is easy to read and understand, the report should be structured in a comprehensive, and integrated way, be focused on the essential information and argumentation, use examples, and have an attractive layout. The readability of the report is an important requirement, given the international nature its target readers / users.

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion
Study the minimum elements of the referencing report structure
1.   Reflect on your country's referencing report. What other chapters would you recommend be included in your report?
2.   Provide a draft report outline of the referencing report for your country

4.4   Referencing workflow: indicative overview

In the ACQF, referencing is important as a process of transparency and mutual learning. Referencing is process that can last up to approximately 1-1,5 years depending on the maturity of the NQF, existing national capacity and efficiency of the organisation.

The ACQF referencing process will be supported by a digital referencing tool. Many parts of the process can be done via virtual meetings and using the ACQF digital referencing tool. Five steps are proposed (Figure 2).
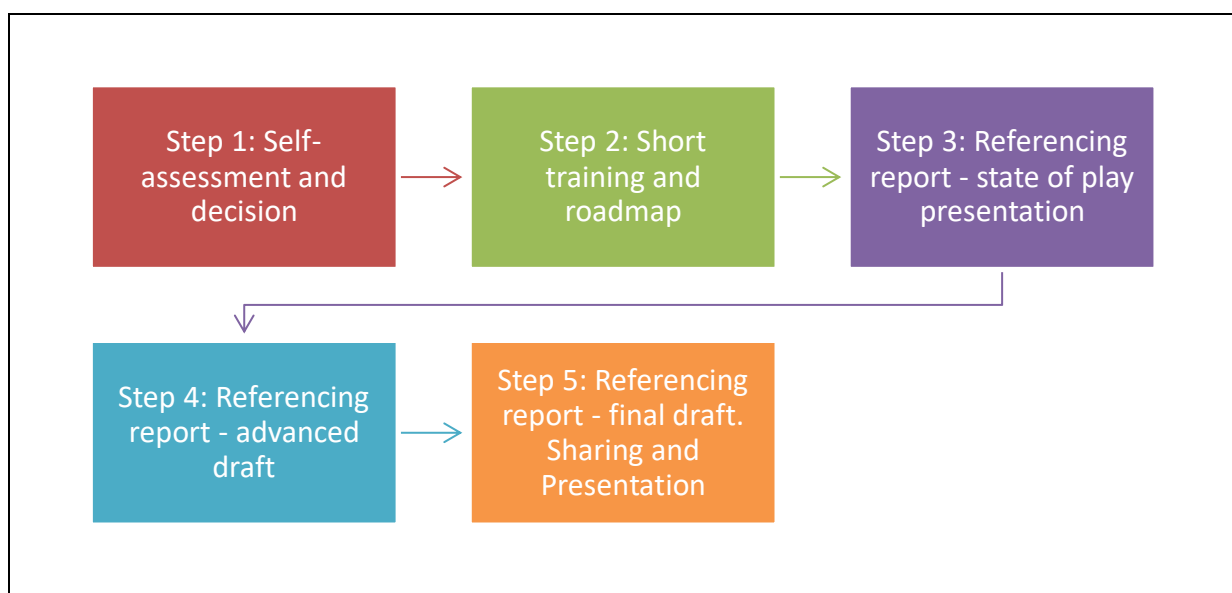
Figure 2: Indicative five-step referencing process - recommendation

Step 1: Self-assessment and decision to start process

The country signals its interest by requesting access to the digitalised referencing tool and conducts a self-assessment to gauge how close it is to meeting the referencing criteria. The country makes a decision to start the process and informs the ACQF governance structure.

Step 2: Roadmap Plan and short training

A short virtual training on ACQF referencing and Introduction to a Referencing Intranet will be provided to the country Referencing Team.

- A plan for the referencing process is elaborated, with support of the ACQF implementation unit if needed, and agreed by all involved national bodies and stakeholders including the type of referencing approach: (full or phased referencing); detailed information on the process and milestones, the number of months required to complete the process/ phases, and details of a focal point person(s) at country level for all information and communication related with the referencing process.
- Training – delivered by ACQF experts' team: At least 1 day, according to a flexible schedule depending on the country team availability and readiness
- Training materials: Guideline 3 and related training module, templates and examples, video recording
- Practical exercises on the referencing criteria, adjusted to the country / NQF context
- Use of the digital referencing tool to support and ease the process

Step 3: Referencing report Part 1- State of play presentation via remote meeting to ACQF Governing structure and Q&A

The country makes a state-of-play initial presentation to the ACQF governance structure including:

- Main features of the NQF / NQS and the stage of implementation / operationalisation
- Main issues identified
- Key information sources, important evidence
- Revised roadmap / milestones of the referencing process
- Any needs in technical or other support to the national referencing team
- Inputs into the quality/ reliability of the referencing process and final report
- Questions and answers session

This session is very useful: to provide initial information to both the referencing country and the ACQF governance structure, share views, organise complementary information or support to the process, and start the dialogue.

Step 4: Referencing report – advanced draft

Capacity: indicative orientation

- 2 drafters + 1 co-ordinator
- Up to 5 referencing team members (from all education and training sub-sectors) for consultation and discussion
- 1-2 wider meetings / workshops with stakeholders
- External expert for review and opinion

The country sends brief updates to the ACQF governance structure, via the digital platform, building on the initial position. The national referencing team will manage the drafting process, decide on version control and coordination of roles and responsibilities.

Step 5: Referencing report - final

- Final national consultation meeting (workshop, conference), validation by key institutions.
- Final report submitted to ACQF Governing structure.
- Presentation via remote meeting to ACQF Governing structure.
- Upon validation and acceptance - publication of report.

Capacity: 1 coordinator and 1 drafter

In case of important comments and requests for clarification by the ACQF governance structure, the comments will be addressed and the report amended. If needed, additional time will be allocated for corrective actions, for introduction of additional evidence collected, or plan of action on main problem points.

We will then present the amended report addressing the comments.

After successful referencing, we will undertake relevant post-referencing actions, such as publication on ACQF website for dissemination, and use of ACQF levels on newly issued national qualifications documents (diplomas, certificates, supplements) and on qualifications databases / registers.

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Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Study the section (Annex 6.2.4) which proposes draft timelines for each of the five steps of the referencing process
1. Comment on the suitability of the timelines added to the five steps.
2. Using the five steps, propose and draft a timeline for your country's referencing process

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4.5   ACQF Referencing capacity and arrangements

⇒ **Referencing contributes to continuous improvement of the NQF / NQS and to mutual understanding between countries.**

The referencing process will be open to all countries that have operational NQFs or whose NQFs are at an advanced stage of development/ approved. However, the referencing process should not be seen as a competitive process or a ranking between countries. Referencing is a process of transparency and mutual learning and is conceived, structured, and conducted as a gradual process that can take longer in certain countries than in others. Where countries are unable to meet all the referencing criteria, they can engage in a phased referencing.

⇒ **Support to countries to plan and carry out efficient and streamlined referencing processes**

The ACQF governance structure and Support Team will have the capacity to: encourage countries to initiate referencing, provide technical and methodological support to countries to support the ACQF and NQFs, advance referencing processes and endorse and publish referencing reports.

Specific country projects can be supported by ACQF to assist national referencing teams in organising efficient, streamlined and good quality referencing processes.

Referencing will be encouraged and advanced through regular referencing briefs from the ACQF governance structure, including full use of various platforms and communication methods including: ACQF Website; Digital tool to support the referencing process, ensure good documentation and ease the coordination and monitoring process; Dissemination of ACQF Guidelines and training modules; Established principles, templates and digital tools; Training sessions (mostly virtual) in relevant languages; Peer-sharing and Coaching, online communication and e-meetings.

The needed robustness of referencing should not be the result of overly complex and time-consuming activities, but of dialogue, peer review, analysis, franc self-assessment, and an evidence-based report. The country is the major beneficiary.

The implementation of the ACQF will require a programme to prepare various stakeholders to implement the ACQF at national, regional and continental levels. The sustainability of the referencing component of the ACQF should be built into its implementation plan. Communication about the potential benefits and capacity (political, human, technical, financial) to support the ACQF and NQFs and related operations should be embedded within the capacity development plan and programmes. Support for referencing will be enhanced through a comprehensive training and capacity development programme for the ACQF Implementation Unit (which will include all involved staff).

ACQF referencing will be coordinated, managed and quality assured by the ACQF governance structure, acting in full respect for the following principles:

-   The ACQF is a public policy and instrument, free for use by all African Union countries and institutions

- The ACQF is holistic, integral and unified
- Referencing between NQFs and the ACQF is based on:
  - trust and integrity of the process,
  - coordination, support and continuous improvement of the process and outcomes
  - establishing and maintaining the zone of trust by providing transparency to the process

Support will be provided through dissemination of a full set of support materials available on the ACQF website https://acqf.africa/

The referencing criteria remains a living working document that can be further refined as the AU MS gain further experience and strengthen their understanding of the process.

5. Summary

Referencing is a comparison exercise and a translation tool that will assist in making transparent the information on African qualifications frameworks and systems. By encouraging self-reflection and self-assessment of their own NQFs and national qualifications systems, the referencing process supports the review, further development and renewal of qualifications frameworks and systems across the continent.

Referencing has been undertaken successfully and fully implemented in Europe. The key learnings from the implementation has provided useful information for the streamlined referencing criteria for use in the context of the African Union.

6. Guidance for trainers and learners

At the end of this training module the learner will be able to:
1. Communicate the purpose and benefits of referencing
2. Communicate the benefits of a streamlined approach to the referencing process
3. Propose draft timelines for completion of referencing criteria
4. Propose a draft outline for the country referencing report
5. Propose a draft timeline for completion of the referencing process

The following guidance is provided to trainers and learners in terms of the demands of the learning programme.

Area of guidance	Notes
Recommended Pre-requisite	There are no pre-requisites to undertake this Training Module. However, given the technical nature of the material, learners should have the following background: – General knowledge and understanding of qualifications, qualifications frameworks and governance arrangements related to qualifications frameworks – Practical experience (for example, in organisations dealing with NQFs, qualifications)
Notional time to complete the module	The Training Module scopes a wide range of information pertaining to qualifications and qualifications framework with a series of reflective questions and activities.

Area of guidance	Notes
	It is anticipated that if this Training Module is undertaken on an individual basis or as a group, it should take approximate 8 hours of learning and 4 hours of assessment: - Reading: 4 hours - Face-to-face: 4 hours - Assessment: 4 hours.
Materials	Most of the materials are included in this Training Module. However, it is important that learners/ users have access to the internet to access links to the web-based comparison tool showing how an RQF functions as a translation tool as well as to have access to completed referencing reports.
Organisation	If delivered within a group it is suggested that groups be restricted to about 4 – 6 people to encourage participation of each member. It is suggested that each group, for each task, allocates a note taker and speaker. Views should be shared across all groups and prompt further discussion and revelations.
Assessment	The assessments can be undertaken as an individual or as a group. If the Training Programme becomes a part of an accredited component (e.g. module, subject) then the assessments would need to be adjusted to ensure that individual performance can be demonstrated.

7. Assessment

7.1 Approach

The assessments in the Training Module 3 are designed to encourage debate and develop confidence in the country NQF processes and referencing processes. Referencing encompasses some of the content found in other training modules (TM), in particular TM1 on learning outcomes and TM2 on level descriptors and some of the self-assessment exercises are initiated in TM1 and TM2. Trainers and learners should see the preparatory tasks covered in TM1 and TM2, not as duplication, but as complementary exercises that aim to increase user confidence in participating in referencing processes.

The assessment approach includes:

- a number of formative exercises spread throughout the Training Manual
- two summative assessments

7.2 Formative exercises (collation)

Assessment/ reflection Exercises: TM3- referencing

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Click on the link to see an example of how the EQF works as a translation device

Select two countries for your comparison
NB: This is a post-referencing exercise

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Study Section 3.1 on the purpose and benefit of referencing to the ACQF

1. What are the potential benefits for your own NQF from the referencing process?
2. What do you expect?
3. How can the national process be oriented to better meet your expectations?

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Referencing is not an exam to pass or fail, it is a process of self-assessment, comparison and transparency.

1. What is your comment on the statement above?
2. How can this view of referencing support better dialogue and cooperation between stakeholders?
3. How can this view of referencing support improvement of the NQF and its tools and governance?

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

After successful referencing to the ACQF, each country will have the possibility to display the ACQF levels on newly issued qualifications documents (jointly with the national level) in line with the general rules and regulations on qualifications documents

1. Where do you think the ACQF level should be displayed?
- On the actual diploma/ certificate
- On the transcript
- On diploma / certificate supplement
- On national qualifications register/ database
- Other

2. What needs to be put in place in order for this to happen?
- In legislation (national level)
- In the higher education sector
- In the TVET sector
- In general, and further education
- Other

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion.

Referencing has been extensively implemented in Europe, and also undertaken in the ASEAN and the SADC regions as outlined above. The referencing reports provide good guidance as to how the countries structured the reports and responded to the core referencing criteria. These reports are good sources of information for African countries.

Click on the link to access the EQF referencing reports. Click on the links here to access the referencing reports of South Africa and Seychelles

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Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Referencing does not standardise or replace NQFs/ NQSs
1.What is your response to the statement above? Do you agree or disagree?

Referencing does not imply automatic recognition of foreign qualifications but facilitates recognition thanks to enhanced transparency and information-sharing between qualifications frameworks and systems of different countries

2. What is your comment on the statement above? Do you agree or disagree?
3. What do you suggest to improve and strengthen information-sharing on NQFs upon their referencing to the ACQF – for the sake of more efficient and robust processes of recognition of foreign qualifications?

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Study the challenges and solutions to referencing (Table 3)
1. Do you think the challenges and solutions are sufficiently covered?
2. If not, what would you add?

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

The ACQF referencing (criteria and procedures) are more streamlined and focused compared with other RQFs. See Annex 8.2.1 which shows the development of ACQF criteria building on the three RQFs that have undertaken referencing).
1. What are the benefits of this streamlined approach to referencing?
2. What are the links and interplay between the 4 main referencing criteria?

Exercise: Country groups
Study the self-assessment exercise for Referencing Criterion 1 (Annex 8.2.2)
1. Think of your own country's NQF/ NQS
2. Work through the five items
3. Draft a response (self-assessment), namely is the item fully met, partly met or not met
4. Where it is fully met, indicate where evidence can be found
5. Where it is partly met or not met, propose the action that is required, who should be responsible for the action and give an estimate of the timeframe
NB: Some of these questions have already been covered in Training Manual 2: Level descriptors

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Exercise:
Study the self-assessment exercise for Referencing Criterion 2 (Annex 8.2.3)
1. Think of your own country's NQF/ NQS
2. Work through the twelve items
3. Draft a response (self-assessment), namely is the item fully met, partly met or not met
4. Where it is fully met, indicate where evidence can be found
5. Where it is partly met or not met, propose the action that is required, who should be responsible for the action and propose an estimate of the timeframe
NB: Some of these questions have already been covered in Training Manual 1: Learning outcomes

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This has been included as a summative Exercise:
Study the self-assessment exercise for Referencing Criterion 3 (Annex 8.2.4)
1. Think of your own country's NQF/ NQS
2. Work through the eight items
3. Draft a response (self-assessment), namely is the item fully met, partly met or not met
4. Where it is fully met, indicate where evidence can be found
5. Where it is partly met or not met, propose the action that is required, who should be responsible for the action and give an estimate of the timeframe

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Exercise:
Study the self-assessment exercise for Referencing Criterion Four (Annex 8.2.5)
1. Think of your own country's NQF/ NQS
2. Work through the eight items
3. Draft a response (self-assessment), namely is the item fully met, partly met or not met
4. Where it is fully met, indicate where evidence can be found
5. Where it is partly met or not met, propose the action that is required, who should be responsible for the action and give an estimate of the timeframe

NB: Quality assurance is covered in Guideline and Training Manual 5

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion
Study the draft ToRs for a proposed National Referencing Team (or working group, Task Force) (Annex 8.2.7)

1. What do you think this Team will be named in your country?
2. Which ministries, agencies and stakeholders will be represented on your country's Team?
3. How will appointments to the Team be made?
4. What kind of support would the Referencing Team need to smoothly carry out the referencing process, for example?
a. initial training of the team
b. follow-up coaching
c. guidelines
d. examples
e. expert support
f. peer review with other countries
g. other

5. Propose draft ToRs for your country's Team.

Exercise:
Study the self-assessment exercise for Governance procedures and follow up (Annex 8.2.6)
1. Think of your own country's NQF/ NQS
2. Work through the eight items
3. Draft a response (self-assessment), namely are the item fully met, partly met or not met
4. Where it is fully met, indicate where evidence can be found
5. Where it is partly met or not met, propose the action that is required, who should be responsible for the action and give an estimate of the timeframe

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Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Study the minimum elements of the referencing report structure
1. Reflect on your country's referencing report. What other chapters would you recommend be included in your report?
2. Provide a draft report outline of the referencing report for your country

7.3   Summative exercises

7.3.1 Task 1

TASK ONE

NB: Consult the referencing reports that were completed in other areas: Europe, ASEAN and SADC.
In your response, indicate which referencing report you used

Exercise:
Complete the self-assessment exercise for Referencing Criterion 3
1. Think of your own country's NQF/ NQS
2. Work through the eight items
3. Draft a response (self-assessment), namely are the items fully met, partly met or not met
4. Where it is fully met, indicate where evidence can be found
5. Where it is partly met or not met, propose the action that is required, who should be responsible for the action and give an estimate of the timeframe

ACQF Referencing Criterion 3:

There are transparent processes and procedures for including qualifications in the NQF or for describing the place of qualifications in the NQS and information on qualifications is accessible, trustworthy and verifiable in a national register(s) of qualifications			
Self-assessment	Yes, fully: indicate evidence	Partly: indicate evidence	No: Comments
Items			
Classification of qualification levels			
1. The NQF provides for all levels and types of qualifications			
2. Existing legislation defines the roles, principles and responsibilities for developing, approving, classifying (levelling) and awarding qualifications			
3. Processes for classifying a qualification at a particular NQF level are agreed, transparent and applied consistently			
4. Classifying a qualification in the NQF is based on transparent interactions of the relevant bodies (e.g. in charge of QA, sectoral committees, certification, NQF decision making bodies)			
5. Classification of qualifications in the NQF is quality-assured			
Managing qualifications information			
6. There is legislation regarding the management of qualifications information			
7. Database(s) of qualifications are up-to-date, accessible and transparent for users. There is a register or catalogue of qualifications online.			
Studies/ research/ analyses			
8. There are studies/ research/ analyses to support this criterion			
Main sources of information you can refer to:			
- Structure and scope of the NQF - NQF decision making regarding classification (Legislation, process, institutional arrangements, QA of the classification) - Verifiable, national registers of qualifications information (legislation, description of registers, responsible authorities - Studies/ research/ analyses			

Indicative / proposal: Roadmap to prepare the conditions to meet Referencing Criterion 3 based on the results of the self-assessment			
No	Action	By whom	Timeframe
1			
2			
3			
4			

Explanatory note:
- o **The guiding questions support the elaboration of an action plan.**

Indicative guiding questions for Referencing Criterion 3

3.1 Classification of qualifications by NQF levels

Responses to this item may be based on:
1. Sectors, levels and types covered by the NQF/ NQS
2. Legislation
3. Process

4. Institutional arrangements
5. Quality assurance of the classification

Sectors, levels and types covered by the NQF/ NQS
- What sectors and sub-sectors are covered by the NQF. What are excluded?
- What levels of qualifications are covered by the NQF/ NQS? What are excluded?
- What types of qualifications are covered by the NQF/ NQS? What are excluded? Describe the NQF's response to:
  o Part-qualifications
  o qualifications that can be obtained through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)
  o qualifications from other countries
  o international qualifications
  o micro-credentials
  o qualifications that are not quality-assured

Legislation
- How does the existing legislation define the:
  o key principles for developing and approving qualifications?
  o roles and responsibilities for developing and approving qualifications? How are the different sectors and sub-sectors involved? Who are the key bodies and stakeholders and what are their roles and responsibilities?

Process
Describe the process for classifying a qualification at a particular NQF Level or placing a qualification in the NQS. Is it:
– Set out in legislation?
– Agreed by all sectors/ stakeholders?
– Transparent?
– Applied?
– Based on a comparison of the level descriptors of the NQF with the learning outcomes of the qualification?

Is the process applied consistently for:
– all levels of qualifications,
– all types of qualifications (micro-credentials, part-qualifications, qualifications obtained through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), qualifications from other countries)

Institutional arrangements/interactions
– Describe the institutional arrangement for NQF/ NQS decision-making (for example Agency, department, Board, Council).
– When classifying a qualification on a particular NQF level or placing a qualification in the NQS, how are the relevant bodies represented (e.g. in charge of Quality Assurance, sectoral committees, certification, NQF decision making bodies)?

Quality assurance of the classification
– How does the process ensure that the qualifications have been quality-assured before being classified in the NQF/ NQS?
– How is the classification of qualifications in the NQF/ NQS quality-assured?
– How are the key bodies, by sub-sector, represented in the quality assurance component?

3.2 Information on National registers of qualifications

Responses to this item may be based on:
1. Legislation
2. Information from registers of qualifications
3. Responsible authorities

Legislation
- Does the legislation give indications concerning the processes for managing qualifications information?
- Is there any legislation related to registers/ catalogues/ databases of qualifications?
- Is there any legislation regarding misrepresented/ fraudulent/ fake qualifications?

Description of registers of qualifications
- Where can the information be found? URLs if available.
- How is the information arranged? How is it kept up to date?
- Do you have one or more registers / databases of qualifications?
- Is the information of the register / database of qualifications shared with recognition bodies from other countries and regions?

Responsible authorities
- Who are the authorities/ agencies that are responsible for providing information on qualifications in the various sector?
  o Higher education
  o General education/ primary and secondary education
  o TVET
  o Any other types of qualifications

7.3.2 Task 2

TASK 2

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Study the draft timelines for each of the five steps of the referencing process
1. Comment on the suitability of the timelines added to the five steps.
2. Using the five steps, propose and draft a timeline for your country's referencing process
Present your outcomes in a PPT presentation (no more than five slides)

Referencing is process that can last up to approximately 1-1,5 years.

The ACQF referencing process will be supported by a digital referencing tool. Many parts of the process can be done via virtual meetings and using the ACQF digital referencing tool.

```
Step 1: Self-          Step 2: Short          Step 3: Referencing
assessment and    →    training and     →     report - state of
decision               roadmap                play presentation

Step 4: Referencing    Step 5: Referencing
report - advanced  →   report - final draft.
draft                  Sharing and
                       Presentation
```

Indicative scheme – main steps and work flow of referencing process

Step 1: Self –assessment and decision to start process

Duration: Maximum - 2 days

A self-assessment will be conducted to gauge how close our country is to meeting the referencing criteria.

We will then make a decision to start the process and inform the ACQF governance structure.

Step 2: Roadmap Plan and short Training

Duration: 2 days

Our Country Referencing team will participate in a short virtual training on ACQF referencing and Introduction to the Referencing Intranet.

- We will elaborate a plan for the referencing process which will be agreed by all involved national bodies and stakeholders:
    - including the type of referencing approach: (full or phased referencing)
    - detailed information on the process and milestones
    - the number of months required to complete the process/ phases
    - details of a focal point person(s) at country level to respond to questions and make any amendments using the digital tool

Step 3: Referencing report Part 1- State of play presentation via remote meeting to ACQF Governing structure and Q&A

Duration: 3 days preparation, 2-3 hour meeting

We will make a state-of-play initial presentation to the ACQF governance structure including:

- Main features of the NQF / NQS and the stage of implementation / operationalisation
- Main issues identified
- Key information sources, important evidence.
- Revised roadmap / milestones of the referencing process
- Any needs in technical support or other support to the national referencing team
- Inputs into the quality/ reliability of the referencing process and final report.
- Question and answer session.

This session is very useful: to provide initial information to both the referencing country and the ACQF governance structure, share views, organise complementary information or support to the process, and start the dialogue.

Step 4: Referencing report - advanced draft

Estimated duration: Workload up to 9 months (5 days a month)

Capacity: indicative orientation

- 2 drafters + 1 co-ordinator
- Up to 5 referencing team members (from all education and training sub-sectors) for consultation and discussion
- 1-2 wider meetings / workshops with stakeholders
- External expert for review and opinion

We will send brief updates to the ACQF governance structure, via the digital platform, building on the initial position. The national referencing team will manage the drafting process, decide on version control and coordination of roles and responsibilities.

Step 5: Referencing report - final

Duration: 2 months (5 days a month)

- Final national consultation meeting (workshop, conference), validation by key institutions
- Final report submitted to ACQF Governing structure
- Presentation via remote meeting to ACQF Governing structure
- Upon validation and acceptance - publication of report

Capacity: 1 coordinator and 1 drafter

In case of important comments and requests for clarification by the ACQF governance structure, the comments will be addressed and the report amended. If needed, additional time will be allocated for corrective actions, for introduction of additional evidence collected, or plan of action on main problem points.

We will then present the amended report addressing the comments.

After successful referencing, we will undertake relevant post-referencing actions, such as publication on ACQF website for dissemination, and use of ACQF levels on newly issued national qualifications documents (diplomas, certificates, supplements) and on qualifications databases / registers.

8. Sources

8.1 On regional qualifications frameworks

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8.4   ACQF training modules

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9. Appendices

9.1 Cases and examples

9.1.1 Development of the ACQF referencing criteria: cases of EQF, SADCQF and AQRF

The referencing criteria bring transparency and consistency to the process. AUMS typically work together, within their national stakeholder groupings to provide a national response to each of the referencing criteria. The ACQF referencing criteria were distilled from referencing criteria used in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), SADC Qualifications Framework (SADCQF) and the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF). This section examined the referencing criteria across the three frameworks and:

− Related the purpose of each criterion
− Examined the wording of each criterion as used in the EQF, SADCQF and AQRF
− Determined whether the referencing criteria were suitable for the ACQF and whether they were relevant to the:
  o relationship/ interplay between the NQF/ NQS and the ACQF or
  o ACQF governance and referencing procedures
− Proposed options for wording in the ACQF context and whether the referencing criteria were suitable as ACQF referencing criteria or for governance, procedures and follow up. The conclusions are taken up in the Tables below and colour coded for easier reference.

ACQF referencing criteria

Referencing criteria	
1	There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the ACQF.
2	The national qualifications frameworks or systems are based on learning outcomes principles and related to arrangements for recognition of prior learning (including non-formal and informal) and, where appropriate, to credit systems.

3	There are transparent processes and procedures for including qualifications in the NQF or for describing the place of qualifications in the NQS and information on qualifications is accessible, trustworthy and verifiable in a national register(s) of qualifications.
4	The national quality assurance system for education and training refers to the national qualifications framework or system and is consistent with the principles of quality assurance of the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF).

ACQF referencing governance, procedures and follow-up

Governance, procedures and follow-up
• Responsibilities and/or legal competence of relevant national bodies involved in the ACQF referencing process are clearly defined and published by the relevant competent authorities.
• The relevant national quality assurance bodies state their agreement with the referencing outcome and referencing report.
• People from other countries who are experienced in the field of qualifications are involved in certain aspects and steps of the referencing process. Their role is advisory and supports transparency, improvement and credibility. The national referencing committee informs the ACQF Governance Structure on the involved international experts.
• Competent national bodies certify the referencing to the ACQF and publish one comprehensive, evidence-based referencing report, which addresses all referencing criteria.
• The referencing outcome is published by the participating country and the ACQF network upon its final validation by the ACQF Governance Structure, on the dedicated ACQF website.
• Following the completion of referencing, all newly issued documents related to qualifications that are part of the national qualifications frameworks or systems (e.g.: certificates, diplomas, supplements) and qualifications registers issued by the competent national authorities will contain a clear reference to the appropriate ACQF level, based on national legislation and procedures.

Legal competence of bodies involved in ACQF referencing

This criterion refers to the legal competence of bodies involved in the ACQF referencing, and includes communication with stakeholders. The purpose of this criterion is to demonstrate transparency and show the official support for the ACQF and for the country undertaking the referencing process.

EQF wording	SADCQF wording	AQRF wording	Relevant to ACQF- NQF/S relationship	Relevant to ACQF governance
1. The responsibilities and/or legal competence of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process are clearly determined and published by the competent authorities	1. Responsibilities of relevant national bodies involved in the alignment process are determined and published by the relevant competent authorities	2. The responsibilities and legal basis of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process are clearly determined and published by the main public authority responsible for the referencing process		X

The wording of this criterion is consistent across EQF Criterion 1, SADCQF criterion 1 and AQRF Criterion 2.

• Option for wording for use in the ACQF: *"Responsibilities and/or legal competence of relevant national bodies involved in the ACQF referencing process are clearly defined and published by the relevant competent authorities".*

• This criterion refers more to referencing procedures and governance processes than criteria related to the ACQF-NQF/S relationship. It is proposed that this Criterion be grouped with other ACQF referencing components that refers to governance and referencing procedures.

Linking levels of the NQF/NQS with the ACQF

This criterion refers to linking the levels of the NQF/ NQS with the ACQF. The purpose of this criterion is to establish a link between the relevant NQF level, or placement of qualifications in the NQS, and the ACQF.

Links between level descriptors

The ACQF level descriptors will make it possible to compare and link qualifications levels across AUMS. The methodology employed to show this link must be robust and clear in explaining the relationship between the NQF/ NQS and the ACQF levels. This is a major output of the referencing process.

The ACQF level descriptors will be written as a hierarchy of learning based on learning outcomes, to encourage the comparison and explicit links needed for referencing national qualifications levels to the ACQF. A focus on learning outcomes based level descriptors will contribute to greater transparency and comparability of qualifications of different national systems. The referencing process itself will become a stimulus for countries to further develop learning outcomes approaches.

In order that this link and comparability is trusted, this criterion requires an understanding of both the national level descriptors/ qualifications levels and the ACQF level descriptors. The national descriptors, which are the foundation of the conceptual and technical building blocks of the NQFs/ NQS will need to be explained in terms of learning outcomes.

EQF wording	SADCQF wording	AQRF wording	Relevant to ACQF- NQF/S relationship	Relevant to ACQF governance
2. There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications frameworks or systems and the level descriptors of the EQF	2. There is a clear and demonstrable link between qualification levels in the NQF/ National Qualification System (NQS) and level descriptors of the SADCQF	4. There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the AQRF	X	

The use of this criterion is consistent across EQF Criterion 2, SADCQF Criterion 2 and AQRF Criterion 4.

- Option for wording for use in the ACQF: "*There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the ACQF"*.
- This criterion is relevant to the ACQF-NQF/S relationship and it is recommended that it be included in a set of ACQF referencing criteria.

Learning outcomes, recognition of prior learning, credit systems

This criterion refers to learning outcomes, recognition of prior learning and credit systems. The purpose of this criterion is to provide insight into the learning outcomes approach used in the NQF/NQS and its links with non-formal and informal learning and credit systems.

Learning outcomes, validation of learning and credits

A learning outcomes approach is one which signals a move from input and duration of learning to output and actual knowledge, skills and competences acquired through the learning process. As such, this approach supports recognition of non-formal and informal learning and credit accumulation and transfer.

Achievement of assessed learning outcomes usually culminate in a qualification award, and signals that an individual has achieved the relevant learning outcomes. These learning outcomes may be achieved through formal, non-formal or informal pathways. The learning outcomes information and links with validation or recognition of prior learning (RPL) should therefore be transparent and accessible.

The learning outcomes principles are implemented differently in different countries and in different contexts e.g. level descriptors, qualifications, professional standards, assessment, curricula, etc. However, the ACQF mapping and feasibility study showed that a learning outcomes approach is being applied in the AU environment. A response to this criterion will increase the transparency and comparability across AU countries.

The ACQF level descriptors are written as a hierarchy of learning complexity, based on learning outcomes. MS are encouraged to use learning outcomes approaches to describe their qualifications systems to ease the comparison between national systems and the continental descriptors. In this way the referencing process itself will promote the strengthening of learning outcomes approaches across the continent.

EQF wording	SADCQF wording	AQRF wording	Relevant to ACQF- NQF/S relationship	Relevant to ACQF governance
3. The national qualifications frameworks or systems and their	3. The NQF/ NQS is based on learning	5. The basis in agreed standards of the	X	

qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and related to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where appropriate, to credit systems	outcomes and links to non-formal and informal learning and credit systems (where these exist)	national framework or qualifications system and its qualifications is described		

There is similarity between the EQF Criterion 3 and SADCQF Criterion 3. Although the AQRF criterion 5 speaks of "agreed standards" in the criterion, its supporting document states that a learning outcomes principle is favoured.

- Option for wording for use in the ACQF: "*The national qualifications frameworks or systems are based on learning outcomes principles and related to arrangements for recognition of prior learning (including non-formal and informal), where appropriate, to credit systems*.
- This criterion is relevant to the ACQF-NQF/S relationship and it is recommended that it be included in a set of ACQF referencing criteria.

Transparency regarding procedures for classifying a qualification in the NQF/ NQS

This criterion refers to the transparency regarding the procedures for classifying a qualification in an NQF/NQS. The purpose of this criterion is to explain how the qualifications are classified in the NQF, or where there is no NQF, how these qualifications are placed in the NQS. It also relates to the accessibility of the qualifications information in an accessible, trustworthy, verifiable national register of qualifications.

Qualifications and trust

Qualifications indicate the successful outcome of assessment and validation, made visible through formal qualifications documents. It stands to reason that qualifications have an important role in mobility of learners and workers as the qualification may grant access to further learning, work opportunities, and/or may grant access to certain professions. One of the purposes of a qualification is to signal to education and training authorities and employers what learning outcomes have been achieved by the qualification holder (what the holder knows and is able to do). Qualifications based on learning outcomes are therefore pivotal to personal and social achievement.

It is important that stakeholders trust the qualifications levels. The information presented in this criterion will facilitate a better understanding of the quality assurance of the "levelling" process in the member country.

Accessible, trustworthy, verifiable national register of qualifications information

It would defeat the mobility purpose if the information on qualifications cannot be verified in an accessible, trustworthy, national platform (preferably online). It is suggested that this aspect be included in this criterion that deals with central qualifications information systems. This would align with the counter-fraud protocols of the Addis Convention (UNESCO, 2014).

The ACQF is also envisaged to have a continental database linking all national registers and databases/ catalogues.

EQF wording	SADCQF wording	AQRF wording	Relevant to ACQF- NQF/S relationship	Relevant to ACQF governance
4. The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualification system are transparent	4. Procedures for including qualifications in the NQF or describing the place of qualifications in the NQS are transparent	3. The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualifications system are transparent	X	

These criteria are the same for EQF Criterion 4, SADCQF Criterion 4 and AQRF Criterion3.

It is suggested that this criterion be more explicit regarding the evidence of inclusion of qualifications in a type of database or register that is accessible and verifiable. It is preferable that this information is online. However, some countries will not have this information in an online format, but in other types of formats. At the start of the ACQF referencing history; and as NQFs and countries become acquainted and as systems develop, the level of requirements may rise.

- Option for wording for use in the ACQF: *"There are transparent processes and procedures for including qualifications in the NQF or for describing the place of qualifications in the NQS and information on qualifications is accessible, trustworthy and verifiable in a national register(s) of qualifications".*
- This criterion is relevant to the ACQF-NQF/S relationship and it is recommended that it be included in a set of ACQF referencing criteria.

Transparency of national Quality Assurance (QA) systems

This criterion refers to transparency of national Quality Assurance (QA) systems. The purpose of this criterion is to establish trust in the QA of the qualifications of ACQF Member countries, and also to establish a link between the QA of members and the QA instruments available in the continent.

EQF wording	SADCQF wording	AQRF wording	Relevant to ACQF- NQF/S relationship	Relevant to ACQF governance
5. The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications frameworks or systems and are consistent with the principles on quality assurance as specified in Annex IV to this Recommendation	5. The National Quality Assurance System for education and training refers to the NQF or NQS and is consistent with quality assurance guidelines of the SADCQF	6. The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications framework or system are described	X	

This criterion is similar across EQF criterion 5, SADCQF criterion 5 and AQRF criterion 6.

- Option for wording for use in the ACQF: *"The national quality assurance system for education and training refers to the national qualifications framework or system and is consistent with the principles of quality assurance of the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF)."*
- This criterion is relevant to the ACQF-NQF/S relationship and it is recommended that it be included in a set of ACQF referencing criteria.

Referencing endorsement by QA bodies

This criterion refers to endorsement of the referencing process by QA bodies. The purpose of this criterion is to reassure the public that the referencing process is inclusive, consultative and the QA bodies agree on the outcomes.

EQF wording	SADCQF wording	AQRF wording	Relevant to ACQF- NQF/S relationship	Relevant to ACQF governance
6. The referencing process shall include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies that the referencing report is consistent with the relevant national quality assurance arrangements, provisions and practice	6. There is a clear indication of the relevant national authorities responsible for the verification of the qualifications obtained in the national system 7.The alignment process shall include a stated agreement of relevant quality assurance bodies	6. All of the bodies responsible for quality assurance state their unequivocal support for the referencing outcome		X

This criterion is consistent across AQRF criterion 6, EQF criterion 6 and SADCQF criterion 7.

- Option for wording for use in the ACQF: *"The relevant national quality assurance bodies state their agreement with the referencing outcome and referencing report".*
- This criterion refers more to referencing procedures and governance processes than criteria related to the ACQF-NQF/S relationship. It is proposed that this Criterion be grouped with other ACQF referencing components that refers to governance and referencing procedures.

Review by key players

This Criterion refers to a review by key players. The purpose of this criterion is to demonstrate an additional layer of transparency in the referencing process through engaging experts from other countries.

EQF wording	SADCQF wording	AQRF wording	Relevant to ACQF- NQF/S relationship	Relevant to ACQF governance
7. The referencing process shall involve international experts and the referencing reports shall contain the written statement of at least two international experts from two different countries on the referencing process	NB: SADCQF did not include this in the criteria due to cost implications. It was, however, included as a procedural component. The SADCQF replaced this criterion with a verification criterion (see other criteria below)	8. People from other countries who are experienced in the field of qualifications are involved in the referencing process and its reporting		X

This criterion is consistent in AQRF criterion 8 and EQF criterion 7.

The SADCQF did not include this as a criterion as it had a cost implication. However, it was included as part of the referencing procedure. Members submitted their alignment reports to the Executive Committee (EXCO) of the Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA). The EXCO was regarded as the international experts from Botswana, Eswatini, Namibia, SADC Secretariat, South Africa, and Zambia. The TCCA EXCO underwent a capacity development exercise to enrich their understanding of the SADCQF alignment reports. Responses to the EXCO comments were mandatory, SADC MS had to show, in their final submission to the TCCA, how they responded to each of the EXCO's comments.

- The option for wording: "*People from other countries who are experienced in the field of qualifications are involved in certain aspects and steps of the referencing process. Their role is advisory and supports transparency, improvement and credibility. The national referencing committee informs the ACQF Governance Structure on the involved international experts*".
- The cost implications of the inclusion of this criterion need to be considered.
- This criterion refers more to referencing procedures and governance processes than criteria related to the ACQF-NQF/S relationship. It is proposed that this Criterion be grouped with other ACQF referencing components that refers to governance and referencing procedures.

Endorsement and publication of referencing reports

This criterion refers to the endorsement and publication of a referencing report. The purpose of this criterion is to ensure that the referencing report is endorsed by competent bodies, and also to ensure that there are plans for adoption and publication.

EQF wording	SADCQF wording	AQRF wording	Relevant to ACQF- NQF/S relationship	Relevant to ACQF governance
8. The competent authority or authorities shall certify the referencing of the national qualifications frameworks or systems with the EQF. One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing, and the evidence supporting it, shall be published by the competent authorities, including the EQF National Coordination Points, and shall address separately each of the criteria. The same report can be used for self-certification to the QF-EHEA, in accordance with the self-certification criteria of the latter	8. Competent national bodies shall certify the alignment of the NQF/ NQS with the SADCQF. A comprehensive report on alignment and its evidence must be published by competent national bodies	7. The process of referencing has been devised by the main public authority and has been endorsed by the main stakeholders in the qualifications system. 9. One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing and the evidence supporting it shall be published by the competent national bodies and shall address separately and in order		X

		each of the referencing criteria		

This criterion is consistent in EQF criterion 8, SADCQF criterion 8 and AQRF criterion 7 and 9.

- Option for wording for use in the ACQF: *"Competent national bodies certify the referencing to the ACQF and publish one comprehensive, evidence-based referencing report, which addresses all referencing criteria."*
- This criterion refers more to referencing procedures and governance processes than criteria related to the ACQF-NQF/S relationship. It is proposed that this Criterion be grouped with other ACQF referencing components that refers to governance and referencing procedures.

Maintenance of referencing report register

This criterion deals with the maintenance of a referencing report register. The purpose of this criterion is to make sure that the referencing process and its outcome is available to the broader public.

EQF wording	SADCQF wording	AQRF wording	Relevant to ACQF- NQF/S relationship	Relevant to ACQF governance
9. Within 6 months from having referenced or updated the referencing report, Member States and other participating countries shall publish the referencing report and provide relevant information for comparison purposes on the relevant European portal	9. The official platform of the country must provide for a public comment process for the alignment report	10. The outcome of referencing is published by the ASEAN Secretariat and by the main national public body.		X

This criterion is consistent across EQF criterion 9, SADCQF criterion 9 and AQRF criterion 10. However, in the SADCQF the responsibility of publishing the report at a regional level was removed from this SADCQF alignment criterion. This was largely due to constraints at regional level including cost implications. It was then agreed that the national platform will be used, to ensure a public comment process as well as publication on a national platform.

- Option for wording for use in the ACQF: *"The referencing outcome is published by the participating country and the ACQF network upon its final validation by the ACQF Governance Structure, on the dedicated ACQF website".*
- This criterion refers more to referencing procedures and governance processes than criteria related to the ACQF-NQF/S relationship. It is proposed that this Criterion be grouped with other ACQF referencing components that refers to governance and referencing procedures.

Visibility of ACQF levels on qualifications documents

This criterion deals with referencing visibility on qualifications documents. The purpose of this criterion is to make visible the benefit of referencing to the ACQF, and ensure that qualifications are associated with an ACQF level.

EQF wording	SADCQF wording	AQRF wording	Relevant to ACQF- NQF/S relationship	Relevant to ACQF governance
10. Further to the referencing process, all newly issued documents related to qualifications that are part of the national qualifications frameworks or systems (e.g. certificates, diplomas, certificate supplements, diploma supplements) and/or qualification registers issued by the competent authorities should contain a clear reference, by way of national	10. Clear plans have been made to make changes to legislation and policy supporting alignment to SADCQF levels on new qualification certificates, diplomas and other documents issued by competent authorities	11. Following the referencing process all certification and awarding bodies are encouraged to indicate a clear reference to the appropriate AQRF level on new qualifications		X

qualifications frameworks or systems, to the appropriate EQF level		certificates, diplomas issued		

This criterion is consistent across EQF criterion 10, SADCQF criterion 10 and ACQF criterion 11. In the SADCQF, because of the diversity of qualifications systems, it was agreed that MS would develop plans within their countries, to see how best to respond to this criterion. Different sectors in each member country may have a different approach and may require changes to legislation on qualifications awards. The SADCQF did not allocate a time-frame to this criterion as the consultation process could span many months.

- Option for wording for use in the ACQF: *"Following the completion of referencing, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and other documents issued by competent national authorities will contain a clear reference to the ACQF level."*
- This criterion refers more to referencing procedures and governance processes than criteria related to the ACQF-NQF/S relationship. It is proposed that this Criterion be grouped with other ACQF referencing components that refers to governance and referencing procedures.

Other criteria

Counter-fraud/ verification component introduced in the SADCQF alignment criteria in line with the Addis Convention protocols

In line with the counter-fraud requirements encapsulated in the Addis Convention (UNESCO, 2014), the SADCQF included Criterion 6: "There is a clear indication of the relevant national authorities responsible for the verification of the qualifications obtained in the national system".

- This aspect is included in the criterion that deals with classification of qualifications in the NQF/ NQS and national registers of qualifications information.

Description of education and training system

This aspect was introduced as a criterion in the AQRF referencing process. However, the EQF and SADCQF did not include this in the criteria but included it in the structure of the referencing report.

- This aspect is included in the structure of the national referencing reports.

9.1.2 Self-assessment exercise for ACQF Referencing Criterion 1

ACQF Referencing Criterion 1: There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the ACQF			
Self-assessment	**Yes, fully:** **indicate evidence**	**Partly:** **indicate evidence**	**No:** **Comments**
Country descriptors			
1. The country NQF is adopted and in application			
2. The country level descriptors (LDs) are clear and understood			
3. The LDs are agreed and used by the relevant stakeholders			
Link with the ACQF			
4. There is an agreed approach (method) to present the demonstrable link of the country LDs with that of the ACQF			
5. There is a demonstrable link between the NQF/ NQS levels and the ACQF level ***Explanatory note: This is one of the outputs of the referencing process***			
Main sources of information you can refer to: - NQF legal document/ policy - The scope of the NQF/ NQS - The contexts in which the LDs are applied/ used			

- The features and descriptions of the level descriptors	
- Comparison to show the link between the national levels and ACQF levels *(NB this is an output of the referencing process)*	
- Studies/ research/ analyses	

Indicative: Roadmap – preparing to meet Referencing Criterion 1 based on the results of self-assessment			
No	**Action**	**By whom**	**Timeframe**
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

Explanatory note:
- o **The guiding questions serve the purpose of guiding the action plan.**

Guiding questions for Referencing Criterion 1

1.1 National qualifications levels

Responses to this referencing sub-criterion may be guided by:
1. The scope of the NQF/ NQS
2. The description of the level descriptors; contexts in which the LDs are applied/ used; features of the level descriptors
3. The agreement and application by specific sectors

Scope of country NQF/ NQS:
- Does the country have an NQF? Is it comprehensive (includes general education/ primary and secondary education, TVET and higher education). If not which sub-sector does it cater to?
- Does the NQF include a register of all qualifications awarded in the country?
- Does the NQF cater to non-formal and informal learning, and recognition of learning from work experience?
- Does the NQF include international qualifications and smaller qualifications (short courses, micro-credentials)?
- Is the NQF agreed? Is the NQF included in legislation? Is the NQF being implemented?

Country Level descriptors
- Does the country have level descriptors? What is the purpose of the level descriptors? Number of levels? Categories of domains and sub-domains including definitions

What are some of the contexts in which the level descriptors are applied/ used in the NQF/ NQS? For example, to:
- guide the development of qualification standards
- guide the development of education and training programmes/ curriculum
- improve coherence between curriculum, assessment and certification in all sub-sectors of education and training
- support the determination of the level of a qualification for registration on an NQF
- build trust in qualifications regionally and internationally?
- ease comparison and referencing between qualification frameworks?
- facilitate an understanding of NQF or NQS qualifications
- improve transparency of NQF or NQS qualifications
- promote the recognition of NQF or NQS qualifications and credit transfer arrangements, nationally
- reform/ modernise existing curriculum

What are some of the language features of the level descriptors, for example are they:
- Based on learning outcomes
- Clear/ unambiguous
- Easily understood by stakeholders
- Free of jargon
- Not repetitive
- Written in positive terms
- Generic and not specific to a particular sector
- Inclusive of all learner groups
- Applied in practice

9.1.3 Self-assessment exercise for ACQF Referencing Criterion 2

ACQF Referencing Criterion 2:			
The national qualifications frameworks or systems are based on learning outcomes (LO) principles and related to arrangements for recognition of prior learning (including non-formal and informal) and, where appropriate, to credit systems			
Self-assessment	Yes, fully: indicate evidence	Partly: indicate evidence	No: Comments
Learning outcomes (LOs)			
1. The LO approach is enabled by legislation			
2. The LO approach is agreed and applied in all sub-sectors			
3. The key features of the LO approach are clear and understood			
4. There are links between learning outcomes and classification of qualifications levels			
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)			
5. RPL is related to the NQF			
6. RPL is defined and agreed at policy level			
7. Assessment of LOs apply to formal, non-formal and informal learning			
8. RPL is applied in all sub-sectors of education and training			
Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)			
9. CAT is related to the NQF			
10. CAT is defined and agreed at policy level			
11. CAT is applied in all sub-sectors			
Studies/ research/ analyses			
12. There are studies/ research/ analyses to support this referencing criterion			
Main sources of information you can refer to: - Learning outcomes (LOs): legislation, agreement, application, features, platforms, supporting tools - RPL: legislation, application, assessment - CAT: legislation and application - Studies/ research/ analyses			

Indicative: Roadmap and action plan to achieve Referencing Criterion 2 based on the results of self-assessment			
No	Action	By whom	Timeframe
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

Explanatory note:
- o **The guiding questions serve the purpose of guiding the action plan.**

Guiding questions for Referencing Criterion 2

2.1 Learning outcomes approach

Responses to this referencing sub-criterion may be guided by:
1. Legislation
2. Agreement and application
3. Features of the LO approach
4. Links between learning outcomes and qualifications levels

Legislation:
- Is the learning outcomes (LO) approach included in relevant legislation?
- Is the LO approach enabled by relevant legislation?

Agreement and application

Is the LO approach specific to the particular needs of each sub-sector of education and training? Is it:
- agreed in all or some sub-sectors? Which ones?
- agreed in all or some qualifications? Which ones?
- applied in all or some sub-sectors? Which ones?
- being practised in all or some qualifications? Which ones?

Features of the LO approach in the country and application of assessment for formal, non-formal and informal learning, for example are they linked to:
- design and description of qualifications in the country
- credits for qualifications
- professional standards
- the curriculum and subjects
- assessment
- comparison of qualifications achieved in other countries
- recognition of non-formal and informal learning

How does the learning outcomes approach:
- Promote lifelong learning
- Approximate with labour market, industry needs, societal needs
- Facilitate mobility (learners and labour)

How is the learning outcomes approach supported by:
- technical and methodological tools, handbooks, web resources, debates, training
- research (gaps, challenges, new developments and approaches)
- involvement of labour market players/ sector councils

Links between learning outcomes and classification of qualifications levels
- How do learning outcomes differentiate between the intended learning outcomes and achieved learning outcomes
- How are the country's national level descriptors and underpinning domains related to the learning outcomes approach in the country?
- What is the link between how qualifications are classified in the NQF and the learning outcomes of the qualification? If there is no NQF, what is the process for linking qualifications to the NQS?

2.2 Recognition of prior learning

Responses to this referencing sub-criterion may be guided by:
1. Legislation
2. Assessment
3. Application

Legislation
- How is the recognition of non-formal and informal learning related to the NQF/NQS?
- Is the recognition of non-formal and informal learning defined and agreed at policy level?

Assessment
- Does the assessment of learning outcomes differ for formal, non-formal and informal learning? If the answer is 'Yes", describe the similarities and differences

Application
- Is the recognition of non-formal and informal learning applied in all sectors? Which sectors are excluded?
- Can all qualifications in the NQF be acquired through RPL processes? If not, what qualifications can be acquired through RPL?

2.3 Credit accumulation and transfer

Response to this referencing sub-criterion may be guided by:
1. Legislation

9.1.4 Self-assessment exercise for ACQF Referencing Criterion 3

ACQF Referencing Criterion 3: There are transparent processes and procedures for including qualifications in the NQF or for describing the place of qualifications in the NQS and information on qualifications is accessible, trustworthy and verifiable in a national register(s) of qualifications			
Self-assessment	Yes, fully: indicate evidence	Partly: indicate evidence	No: Comments
Classification of qualification levels			
9. The NQF provides for all levels and types of qualifications			
10. Existing legislation defines the roles, principles and responsibilities for developing, approving, classifying (levelling) and awarding qualifications			
11. Processes for classifying a qualification at a particular NQF level are agreed, transparent and applied consistently			
12. Classifying a qualification in the NQF is based on transparent interactions of the relevant bodies (e.g. in charge of QA, sectoral committees, certification, NQF decision making bodies)			
13. Classification of qualifications in the NQF is quality-assured			
Managing qualifications information			
14. There is legislation regarding the management of qualifications information			
15. Database(s) of qualifications are up-to-date, accessible and transparent for users. There is a register or catalogue of qualifications online.			
Studies/ research/ analyses			
16. There are studies/ research/ analyses to support this referencing criterion			
Main sources of information you can refer to: - Structure and scope of the NQF - NQF decision making regarding classification (Legislation, process, institutional arrangements, QA of the classification) - Verifiable, national registers of qualifications information (legislation, description of registers, responsible authorities - Studies/ research/ analyses			

Indicative: Roadmap and action plan to achieve Referencing Criterion 3 based on the results of self-assessment			
No	Action	By whom	Timeframe
1			
2			
3			
4			

Explanatory note:
- o **The guiding questions serve the purpose of guiding the action plan.**

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Guiding questions for Referencing Criterion 3

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3.1 Classification of qualification levels

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Responses to this referencing sub-criterion may be guided by:
6. Sectors, levels and types covered by the NQF/ NQS
7. Legislation
8. Process
9. Institutional arrangements
10. Quality assurance of the classification

Sectors, levels and types covered by the NQF/ NQS
- What sectors and sub-sectors are covered by the NQF. What are excluded?
- What levels of qualifications are covered by the NQF/ NQS? What are excluded?
- What types of qualifications are covered by the NQF/ NQS? What are excluded? Describe the NQF's response to:
    - o Part-qualifications
    - o qualifications that can be obtained through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)
    - o qualifications from other countries
    - o international qualifications
    - o micro-credentials
    - o qualifications that are not quality-assured

Legislation
- How does the existing legislation define the:
    - o key principles for developing and approving qualifications?
    - o roles and responsibilities for developing and approving qualifications? How are the different sectors and sub-sectors involved? Who are the key bodies and stakeholders and what are their roles and responsibilities?

Process
Describe the process for classifying a qualification at a particular NQF Level or placing a qualification in the NQS. Is it:
– Set out in legislation?
– Agreed by all sectors/ stakeholders?
– Transparent?
– Applied?
– Based on a comparison of the level descriptors of the NQF with the learning outcomes of the qualification?

I*s the process applied consistently for:*
– all levels of qualifications,
– all types of qualifications (micro-credentials, part-qualifications, qualifications obtained through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), qualifications from other countries)

Institutional arrangements/interactions
– Describe the institutional arrangement for NQF/ NQS decision-making (for example Agency, department, Board, Council).
– When classifying a qualification on a particular NQF level or placing a qualification in the NQS, how are the relevant bodies represented (e.g. in charge of Quality Assurance, sectoral committees, certification, NQF decision making bodies)?

Quality assurance of the classification
– How does the process ensure that the qualifications have been quality-assured before being classified in the NQF/ NQS?
– How is the classification of qualifications in the NQF/ NQS quality-assured?
– How are the key bodies, by sub-sector, represented in the quality assurance component?

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3.2 Verifiable, national registers of qualifications information

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4. Legislation
5. Description of registers
6. Responsible authorities

Legislation
- Does the legislation state the processes for managing qualifications information?
- Is there any legislation related to registers/ catalogues/ databases of qualifications?
- Is there any legislation regarding misrepresented/ fraudulent/ fake qualifications?

Description of registers of qualifications
- Where can the information be found? URLs if available.
- How is the information arranged? How is it kept up to date?
- Do you have one or more registers / databases of qualifications?
- Is the information of the register / database of qualifications shared with recognition bodies from other countries and regions?

Responsible authorities
- Who are the authorities/ agencies that are responsible for providing information on qualifications in the various sector?
  - Higher education
  - General education/ primary and secondary education
  - TVET
  - Any other types of qualifications

9.1.5 Self-assessment exercise for ACQF Referencing Criterion 4

ACQF Referencing Criterion 4 The national quality assurance system for education and training refers to the national qualifications framework or system and is consistent with the principles of quality assurance of the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF)			
Self-assessment	Yes, fully: indicate evidence	Partly: indicate evidence	No: Comments
National Quality Assurance (QA)			
1. The national QA systems are operational and the various related institutions act in a co-ordinated and linked manner			
2. Labour market and society stakeholders are involved in relevant phases / aspects of quality assurance of qualifications			
3. The development, approval and award of qualifications are quality-assured and use explicit and transparent procedures and arrangements			
4. Quality assurance procedures refer to context, inputs, process and output dimensions while giving special emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes			
5. Quality assurance of learning outcomes refers to: planning; implementing; reviewing; feedback			
6. Quality assurance measures include qualification requirements for teachers/ trainers, assessors; accreditation; and external evaluation of providers of programmes			
Compatibility with ACQF			

7.	The national QA framework (legislation, institutions, policy) is compatible with the QA guidelines of the ACQF			
	Studies/ research/ analyses			
8.	There are studies/ research/ analyses to support this referencing criterion			

Main sources of information you can refer to:
- National QA systems (QA relationships, QA arrangements)
- Compatibility with ACQF QA guidelines
- Studies/ research/ analyses

Indicative: Roadmap and action plan to achieve Referencing Criterion 4 based on the results of self-assessment			
No	Action	By whom	Timeframe
1			
2			
3			
4			

Explanatory note:
- o   **The guiding questions serve the purpose of guiding the action plan.**

Guiding questions for Referencing Criterion 4

4.1 National QA systems

Responses to this referencing sub-criterion may be guided by:
1. QA relationships
2. QA arrangements

QA relationships
- Describe the national QA systems, which may include: QA bodies with oversight of the system (general education, TVET, higher education); Assessment bodies; Bodies that validate non-formal and informal learning; Certification bodies; Standard-setting bodies; Industry bodies; NQF authorities/ agencies; Funding bodies that require quality assurance compliance;
- What is the relationship between the QA systems? Are the QA systems operational? How do the various QA bodies from various sectors work together?
- Describe how labour market and society stakeholders are involved in relevant phases / aspects of quality assurance of qualifications

QA arrangements
- Describe the quality assurance arrangements underpinning the development and approval of qualifications and the award of qualifications
- Describe how quality assurance procedures refer to context, inputs, process and output dimensions while giving special emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes
- Describe how quality assurance of learning outcomes refers to: planning, implementing, reviewing, feedback
- Describe how quality assurance measures include qualification requirements for teachers / trainers, assessors; accreditation; and external evaluation of providers of programmes

4.2 Compatibility with the ACQF QA guidelines

1. Describe how the national QA systems are compatible with the quality assurance (QA) guidelines of the ACQF. See Guideline 5

9.1.6 Self-assessment exercise for ACQF Governance procedures and follow up

ACQF governance procedures and follow-up:
- **Responsibilities and/or legal competence of relevant national bodies involved in the ACQF referencing process are determined and published by the relevant competent authorities**
- **The relevant national QA bodies state their agreement with the referencing outcome and referencing report.**
- **People from other countries who are experienced in the field of qualifications are involved in certain aspects and steps of the referencing process. Their role is advisory and supports transparency, improvement and credibility. The national referencing committee informs the ACQF Governance Structure on the involved international experts.**
- **Competent national bodies certify the referencing to the ACQF and publish one comprehensive, evidence-based referencing report, which addresses all referencing criteria.**
- **The referencing outcome is published by the participating country and the ACQF network upon its final validation by the ACQF Governance Structure, on the dedicated ACQF website.**
- **Following the completion of referencing, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and other documents issued by competent authorities will contain a clear reference to the ACQF level.**

Self-assessment	Yes, fully: indicate evidence	Partly: indicate evidence	No: Comments
National Referencing Team			
1. The bodies that will be part of the National Referencing Team (NRT), and their responsibilities, have been determined and finalised			
2. The NRT has necessary resources and a work plan for ACQF-related activities			
Communication about the ACQF and referencing			
3. All the relevant national bodies and stakeholders been informed about the decision to reference to the ACQF			
4. The communication (about the ACQF and referencing to the ACQF) with the broader public and stakeholders is clear, prepared and organised			
Referencing tasks, report and post-referencing			
5. A state-of play presentation on the country's NQF/ NQS has been prepared			
6. The roadmap (for referencing to the ACQF) for presentation to the ACQF Governance Structure is clear, prepared and organised			
7. The referencing roadmap ensures quality and peer reviews of the process and report			
8. There are clear plans for including ACQF levels on qualifications awards (post-endorsement by the ACQF)			

Main sources of information you can refer to:
- National Referencing Team/ Committee (establishment, functioning)
- Referencing milestones have been determined
- Robustness, quality and peer reviews
- Visibility of ACQF levels on qualifications documents
- Studies/ research/ analyses

No	Action	By whom	Timeframe
Indicative: Roadmap – prepare to meet the Governance procedures and follow-up, based on the results of self-assessment			
1			
2			

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Explanatory note:
  o **The guiding questions serve the purpose of guiding the action plan.**

<div style="text-align:center">Guiding questions for Governance procedures and follow-up</div>

5.1 National Referencing Team

Responses to this referencing sub-criterion may be guided by:

Establishing the National Referencing Team
— Is a Referencing Team in place with a lead/ co-ordinating body and focal point?
— Have the relevant competent institutions and social partners been informed of the process?
— Is there an adequate process of consultation involving the relevant authorities and stakeholders?
— Does the referencing team have the mandate and resources to carry out referencing tasks?

Communication about the ACQF and referencing
— Have all the relevant bodies and stakeholders been informed about the country's intention to participate in referencing with the ACQF?
— Has the communication (about referencing to the ACQF) with the broader public and stakeholders been prepared? Is there evidence of communication with relevant stakeholders?

Referencing tasks, report and post-referencing
— Has an initial state-of-play presentation been prepared to demonstrate the country's education and training system?
— Have referencing milestones been set? Is there a roadmap with dates for achieving the various referencing milestones?
— Robustness and quality of the process is ensured: Has the process taken into account various quality aspects such as public comment periods, international stakeholder input, peer reviews, proofreading and editing, relevant validations/ approvals/ endorsements at national level?
— Visibility of ACQF levels on qualification documents is important. What are the country's plans to show the ACQF levels on qualification documents?

9.1.7 Draft ToRs for a proposed National Referencing Team

Critical to the referencing process in each country is the establishment of a multi-stakeholder referencing group duly mandated to coordinate, draft, consult, quality assure the process, report to the ACQF Governance Structure and present the report. In this report this group is referred to as the National Referencing Team or Committee. However, countries may call it any other designation that fits their context.

1. **The National Referencing Team/ Committee:**
   a. is the interface between the ACQF Governance Structure and the country's referencing process
   b. has expertise in the NQF/NQS and related policy positions of the country it represents and is responsible for the referencing process and report
   c. is an *ad hoc* national, multi-stakeholder referencing group operating in the Member State and convening for the sole purpose of ensuring that the AU Member State references to the ACQF, in line with the agreed criteria.

2. **Composition**
Each country may determine:
   a. a lead agency in the Member State to lead and coordinate the process and
   b. agencies/ organisations that may be represented on its Referencing Team, for example:
   - Government bodies: relevant ministries and agencies
   - Social partners (employers, trade unions)
   - NQF bodies (authorities, coordination units, councils)
   - Relevant Departments dealing with qualifications

- Quality Assurance Agencies
- Education and training institutions (different sub-sectors of education and training)
- Professional bodies
- Employers, industry (confederations, associations)
- Research capacities in the relevant domains (e.g: education, training, qualifications, employment policies, labour market trends)
- Student organisations
- Civil society organisations
- Any other authority/ agency/ group that may add value to the process

3. Appointments
   a. Each country determines the best way to appoint Task Team/ Committee members, and manage their roles, and time allocation.

4. Responsibilities
The Referencing Team is responsible for coordinating, drafting, consulting, quality assuring the process, reporting to the ACQF Governance Structure and presenting the report. The Referencing process and report require efficient allocation of roles and tasks within the Referencing Team, notably:

- a coordinator who animates and manages the process, communicates with the national stakeholders and with the ACQF Governance Structure, and ensures the integrity and timeliness of the process;
- a core team / person in charge of drafting the report and coordinating its different versions;
- a person who coordinates and follows-up the inputs to the report from the relevant sub-sectors and structures related to the themes of the report;