TRAINING MODULE FIVE

05

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF ACQF

ACQF
African Continental
Qualifications Framework

African Union

THE AFRICA-EU PARTNERSHIP
LE PARTENARIAT AFRIQUE-UE

**DEVELOPING THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL
QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (ACQF)**

**TRAINING MODULE FIVE:
QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF ACQF**

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ACRONYMS

ACQF	African Continental Qualifications Framework
ASG-QA	African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance
AU	African Union
BIBB	Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CESA	Continental Education Strategy for Africa
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance for vocational education and training
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
EURES	European Employment Services
MQA	Mauritius Qualifications Authority
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
QA	Quality Assurance
QAF	Quality Assurance Framework
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
TVET	Technical vocational education and training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VET	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 document 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.

ACQF Training Modules are designed to support, expand and clarify the ACQF Guidelines, which are references and sources for countries developing their national qualifications frameworks and systems. They provide a concise and comprehensive overview of the main concepts, principles, implementation steps and instruments, supported by cases and examples of application in relevant contexts. Moreover, the Guidelines and related Training Modules support and inform the ACQF governing structure, especially the ACQF implementation unit, in conducting and coordinating the ACQF activities.

This training quality assurance should be applied in conjunction with other ACQF Training Modules, especially the Training Modules on Learning Outcomes (No. 1), on Level Descriptors (No. 2), on Referencing to the ACQF (No. 3), on Monitoring and Evaluation (No. 7) and finally with the Training Module on National Qualifications Frameworks – the systemic view (No. 10).

This Training Module is structured as follows:
- Section 1 introduces the general features of the Training Module: context, abstract, expected learning outcomes and organisation of training delivery.
- Section 2 is the core chapter, as it defines the dimensions and principles of quality assurance in the context of the ACQF.
- Section 3 addresses the specific aspects of quality assurance of qualifications.
- Section 4 provides an overview of quality assurance in African Union policies in the domain of education and train-ing, with emphasis on the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA) in higher education. Two cases of regional (continental) approaches to quality assurance are included as examples with relevance for the ACQF.
- Section 5 elaborates elements of a concept for a quality assurance framework for technical vocational education and training (TVET) and adult learning.

1.1 Specific information on Training Module 5

This Training Module belongs to the package of ten ACQF Guidelines and Training Modules. It is a resource of the capacity development programme of the project elaborating the ACQF.

Theme of Module 5	Quality assurance in the context of the ACQF
Version and Date	Version 1.0, 05/04/2022
Authors	Eduarda Castel-Branco, Kaylash Allgoo
Reviewers	Coleen Jaftha, Andrea Bateman
Abstract	This Training Module is part of the ACQF capacity development programme and is linked with the ACQF Guidelines, developed as a technical foundation supporting the 'ACQF policy document' (2022). This Training Module describes the objectives, principles and application of quality assurance in the context of the ACQF. It also provides: - An overview of quality assurance approaches related to qualifications and qualifications frameworks and systems. - A concept for an African framework of quality assurance for TVET and adult education.
Expected Learning Outcomes	**At completion of this module, the learner is able to:** 1. Explain the main principles, objectives and benefits of Quality Assurance 2. Explain and apply the Quality Assurance criterion of ACQF Referencing (Criterion 4). 3. Contextualise quality assurance in key African Union policies and guidelines. 4. Distinguish quality assurance principles specific for qualifications. 5. Analyse and identify strengths, weaknesses and gaps of the quality assurance framework or system of the national education and training system or sub-sectors. 6. Explain and apply quality assurance guidelines and indicators for providers and education and training programmes.
Main Content of the Module – Structure	Table of contents List of acronyms 1. General information on the Training Module 2. Quality assurance in education and training, qualifications: definitions and concepts 3. Quality assurance in the context of the ACQF 4. Quality assurance in the context of regional policies and guidelines 5. Overview of quality assurance in other regional communities 6. Quality assurance of credentials and qualifications 7. Quality assurance framework for TVET and adult learning: proposal 8. Glossary 9. Sources 10. Cases and examples Assessment Reflective questions Specific questions Short assignment

1.2 General information on ACQF Training Modules

1.   Objective and scope

The package of ten ACQF Training Modules supports the dissemination and application of the ten ACQF Guidelines, and addresses 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
- Training Module 2: Level descriptors
- Training Module 3: Referencing national qualifications frameworks or systems to the ACQF
- Training Module 4: Validation of learning
- **Training Module 5: Quality assurance in the context of the ACQF**
- Training Module 6: Registers/databases of qualifications
- Training Module 7: Monitoring and evaluation in the context of qualifications frameworks or systems
- Training Module 8: Communication and outreach
- Training Module 9: Innovation and technology in the context of qualifications frameworks or systems
- Training Module 10: Qualification and qualifications frameworks – the systemic view

This Training Module expands the content of the ACQF Guideline 5 on 'quality assurance 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; or
- 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 and disseminate from the ACQF website; as digital content accessible via 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, such as:

- ministries and departments dealing with development and coordination of qualifications frameworks, especially in the 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, as optional or regular training modules on the themes and issues relating to 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; and
- 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, but expand on it, exploring the literature, recent research and experiences;
- raise questions and issues 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; and
- 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 can be addressed by an individual or by a group (workshop group, work group);
- learning activities that can be done by an individual or as a group (class/lecture group, work group);
- access to case studies or examples, readings, disparate views (if relevant); and
- assessment tasks.

Guidance for trainers and learners	**A. Baseline learner's background** Learners, readers, and users of this Training Module are expected to have: - general knowledge and understanding of education and training (structures, policies); and - practical experience in organisations involved in fields such as education and training, qualifications, curriculum, teacher training, recognition of prior learning, adult learning. **B. Notional time to complete the module: total 12 hours** - Reading: 5 hours - Face-to-face: 5 hours - Assessment: 2 hours **C. Materials** Materials needed are included in the training module (Annexes) **D. Organisation** - Training can be delivered in digital distance learning to groups, or individually. The ACQF Learning Management System provides orientations, and structured materials for autonomous and hybrid learning, and assessment. - Learning guided by trainers / coaches in traditional (non-digital, non-distance) contexts is planned and delivered taking into account the goals and capacities of the promoting organisation, the profile of participants, working languages. - The organisation of training delivery should promote combination of conceptual sessions with practical moderation and application. Elements of action-oriented debates are useful to stimulate contextualisation of knowledge to learners' national and / or institutional characteristics and needs. **E. Assessment** - Elements of assessment of acquired learning outcomes (see next block).
Assessment	Outline of the assessment approach and main tasks: a) Reflective questions – by chapter b) Questions for individual and group work c) Case study: individual or group
Appendices	Bank of cases and examples, references, web links

2   QUALITY ASSURANCE IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING: DEFINITIONS, CONCEPTS

2.1 Quality assurance: Rationale and concepts

Transparency and trust in qualifications

Transparency and trust in qualifications is key in a context of widespread international learner and labour mobility, and rapid transformation of types of qualifications and credentials for different needs and contexts of lifelong learning.

Quality assurance – as part of a range of measures by governments and institutions – increases transparency and should underpin trust in the relevance and quality of learning outcomes (that is, learners' knowledge, skills, autonomy, and responsibility, as certified by qualifications). Such trust in learning outcomes is, in turn, based on trust in the quality of the institutions and providers of education and training at all levels and in all subsectors.

Qualifications are used to certify levels of competence, allowing people to progress in education and training and to find employment. Qualification holders who have completed a programme and passed the required assessment must inspire confidence that they have acquired the learning outcomes associated with the qualification. Moreover, the role of certification in safeguarding this confidence and trust is crucial (CEDEFOP 2015).

Quality assurance: definitions

The term 'quality assurance' is relatively new in education and training, even though quality assurance concepts and measures have been intrinsic to the sector for a long time.

Definitions of quality assurance emphasise different dimensions of the concept. Some definitions highlight the complementarity between quality assurance at system level (wider scope) and at education providers' level. Other definitions focus specifically on procedures for internal and external quality assurance at providers' level and at the level of quality assurance agencies.

> The African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance **(ASG-QA)** define quality assurance as a 'general term for procedures in internal or external quality assurance procedures including accreditation, evaluation, audit both on programme and institutional levels and also concerning quality assurance agencies' (ASG-QA: 41).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education takes into account three levels of quality assurance: systemic, providers and programmes.

> Quality assurance is 'an ongoing process by which the quality of a higher-education system, institution, or programme is assessed by the competent authority/authorities to assure stakeholders that acceptable educational standards are continuously being maintained and enhanced' (UNESCO 2019).

In the context of the Asia-Pacific region, UNESCO developed a Guideline for the quality assurance of technical vocational education and training (TVET), in which emphasis is placed on confidence and trust.

> Quality assurance is defined as 'planned and systematic processes that provide confidence in services provided by TVET institutions under the remit of responsible bodies. Quality assurance of the assessment and qualification processes allows stakeholders in TVET qualifications (e.g., graduates and employers) to have confidence and trust in those qualifications' (UNESCO 2017: 3).

Quality assurance within the context of a qualifications system aims to build trust in, and transparency of, qualifications.

> Quality assurance includes the processes and procedures for ensuring that qualifications, assessment, and programme delivery meet certain standards. (Tuck 2007: 64)

The European Training Foundation supports a wider definition of quality assurance in vocational education and training, linking it with a multi-dimensional perspective.

Quality assurance can be viewed as the 'composite measures established to verify that processes and procedures are in place, which, when effective, ensure the quality and quality improvement of education and training [… and] guide quality assurance in VET policies and approaches so that they:

- are fit for purpose and context with emphasis on relevance and cost-effectiveness
- acknowledge that quality assurance is a dependent variable (on context and other policy themes)
- address education and training inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes
- apply the quality cycle: plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate, review and renew
- make visible strengths, weaknesses, and improvement successes
- promote quality improvement through a pervasive quality culture
- take into account internationally accepted quality assurance concepts and models' (ETF 2015: 40).

European Quality Assurance for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) is a Europe-wide framework to support quality assurance in vocational education and training (VET). EQAVET emerged from the 2009 Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council, which invited member states to use indicative descriptors and indicators to strengthen the quality of VET provision.

EQAVET supports the implementation of the Recommendation on vocational education and training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (European Union 2020). The VET Recommendation describes how EQAVET can be used to strengthen the quality of initial and continuing VET and presents the complete EQAVET framework.

The EQAVET framework can be used by VET providers and in VET systems to support:

• learning environments (school-based provision, work-based learning, apprenticeships, formal, informal and non-formal provision);
• all types of learning (digital, face-to-face and blended);
• public and private sector VET providers; and
• VET awards and qualifications at all levels of the European Qualifications Framework

The Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (2016) developed by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) for all providers defines quality assurance in the box below:

'Quality assurance is a term generally used to describe the processes that seek to ensure that the learning environment (including teaching and research) reaches an acceptable threshold of quality. Quality assurance is also used to describe the enhancement of education and training provision and the standards attained by learners' (QQI 2016: 2).

Reflective Question No. 1

These definitions of quality assurance expose commonalities and differences on the views and expectations about the scope and application of quality assurance.

›   What are the factors behind the major differences between these definitions – for example, purpose of the policy or legal document, level of application of the quality assurance framework, institutions, scope (regional, national) – please comment.

›   What definition is better suited for the context of national qualification frameworks and the ACQF? Please share your main arguments.
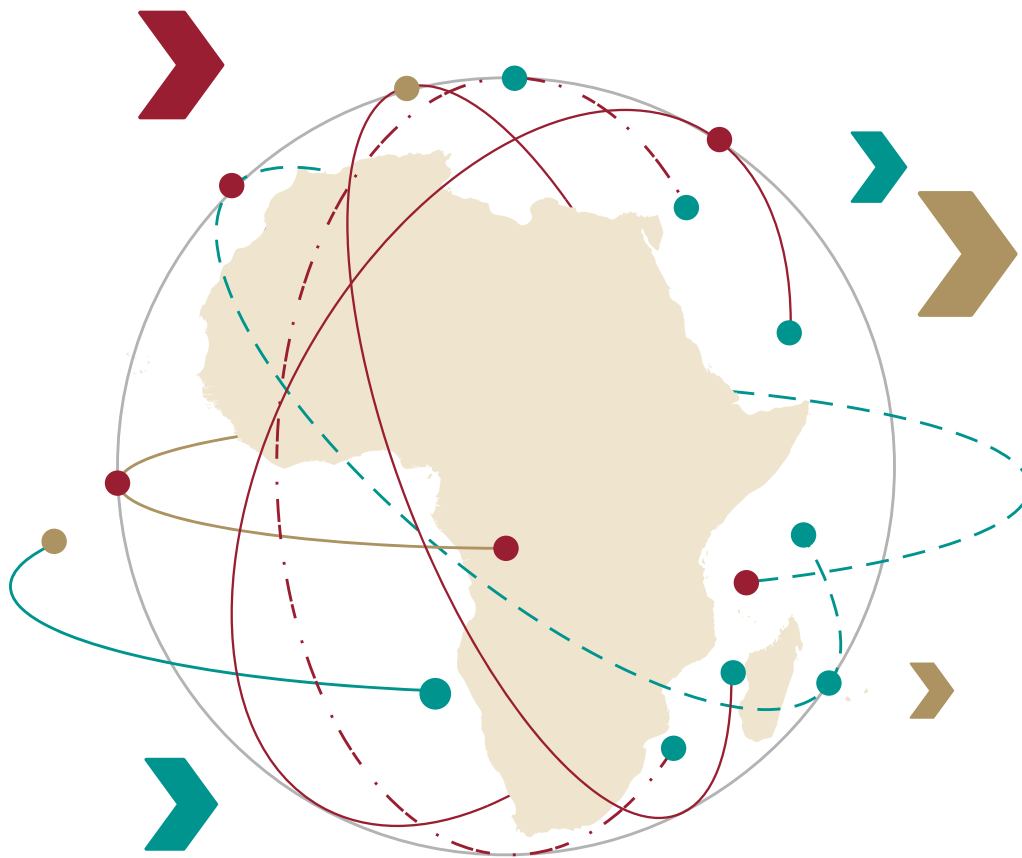
3   QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ACQF

3.1 Key message: Principles of quality assurance of the ACQF

Referencing to the ACQF is a process of transparency, self-assessment and continuous improvement. The referencing criteria provide the framework for comparability between countries, of the analytical process and results, and the robustness of the final report.

Quality assurance is the subject of Criterion 4 of referencing to the ACQF.

> **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).

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.

3.2   The ACQF: Policy for transparency and mutual trust

The ACQF is designed to be a referencing qualifications framework for the African continent, to enhance transparency, comparability and quality of qualifications and mutual trust between national qualifications frameworks and systems. These objectives can be reached by means of referencing national qualifications frameworks or systems to the ACQF. Other important related processes include information-sharing on qualifications by means of a continental qualifications platform, networking and collaboration between the ACQF and national and regional entities responsible for qualifications frameworks or systems, peer learning, support to countries' development of national qualifications frameworks and implementation capacities.

As a core function of the ACQF, referencing is based on a set of agreed criteria and procedures that assure consistency and credibility of the process and its results. Quality assurance features among the criteria for referencing national qualifications frameworks or systems to the ACQF (Table 1).

- The four ACQF referencing criteria are interrelated. A key question linking them is: Can existing quality assurance arrangements support the shift to learning outcomes and also the classification and registration of qualifications?"

Table 1: Quality assurance in the context of ACQF referencing criteria

	The main ACQF 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 national qualifications framework or system or for describing the place of qualifications 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).**

Source: ACQF Guideline 3 on referencing (March 2022), forthcoming

For more information on referencing to the ACQF: refer to ACQF Training Module 3.

3.3 Quality assurance for transparency and trust across all forms of learning and levels of qualifications

1. **Quality assurance requires the involvement of all education and training actors:** Improving and sustaining quality of learning outcomes is a priority of education and training policies and reforms across countries, in Africa and elsewhere. Quality of learning and qualifications is everybody's responsibility: achieving quality improvement and a culture of quality requires strategic vision, and a constant engagement at all levels – from higher levels of government to academic communities in higher education institutions; teachers, trainers and assessors at primary and secondary schools and centres of TVET; work-based learning and in-company training; hybrid, online and distance learning; structures working on recognition and certification of knowledge and skills acquired in non-formal and informal contexts; and last but not least, the awarding bodies and quality assurance agencies.

2. **Quality assurance is key to trust in learning outcomes in a rapidly changing learning context:** Quality assurance is the foundation of transparency and trust, the indispensable constant element in a rapidly changing world of education and work. Hybrid and online learning, digital assessment, new forms of certification supported by digitalisation, and the role of artificial intelligence in education have all grown fast in the last two years, accelerating

a trend started before the global Covid-19 pandemic obliged governments to enact wide-scale school closures. Adapting quality assurance principles and practices to innovation in education and emerging modalities of learning and certification will require collaboration across subsectors of education and training, and between countries and regions. While the potentialities of the digitalisation of learning and certification are vast, there are new challenges to be addressed, notably related to the adaptation of teachers and trainers, the learner-centred approach, the digital divide and inequality and individuals' data protection and privacy.

3. **Quality assurance and reforms of education and training systems:** Quality assurance policies and mechanisms can play an important role in helping education and training institutions and governments to address important challenges and goals of education and training, through all subsectors and modalities of learning (formal, non-formal, informal, hybrid, remote and non-remote). To this end, quality assurance indicators help in monitoring the relevant dimensions, goals, and challenges of national systems, thereby providing evidence and insights for decision-makers at macro (national) and micro (institutions) levels to shape reforms and implement improvements.

Reflective Question No. 2: On quality assurance in the context of rapid transformation of learning, credentials and qualifications

Learning, certifications, types of credentials, qualifications are changing: What does this mean for quality assurance?

> ⟩ What needs to change in quality assurance concepts, processes and methods to adapt to change and the growing diversity of learning, certification and awards?

> ⟩ What are the foreseeable challenges in planning and implementing change processes with regard to quality assurance? How can we address and solve such challenges?

3.4 Quality assurance in the context of the ACQF: Purposes and complementarity

4. **Based on internationally accepted concepts and practice:** The principles and recommendations of the ACQF Quality Assurance Guideline and the related Training Module are based on internationally accepted concepts and practice. They are intended as a reference source for countries developing and consolidating the quality assurance of their qualifications and qualifications frameworks and systems. Moreover, this ACQF Guideline and Training Module will be applied in the context of referencing to the ACQF.

5. **Complementary to national and regional systems:** The Guideline (and Training Module) conform to the principles of subsidiarity and complementarity to national and regional policies and systems. The Guideline (and Training Module) do not replace or supersede national and regional regulatory frameworks and methodologies on quality assurance of education and training but complement them.

6. **Consistent with African Union policies:** The Guideline and its Training Module are consistent and compatible with African Union policies, such as the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25), and with relevant standards and guidelines, notably the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA).

7. **Addressing qualifications at all levels, sectors and types of learning:** As an inclusive and comprehensive meta qualifications framework, the ACQF is designed to address all levels of qualifications from all subsectors of education and training and learning outcomes from different contexts (formal, non-formal, informal). This Guideline and its Training Modules are therefore designed in conformity with this wide scope of the ACQF and is not limited to one specific subsector.

8. **Focusing on three main dimensions:** In the context of the ACQF, quality assurance is addressed with an emphasis on three main dimensions, elucidated in the next sections of this Training Module:

    A. **Quality assurance and the ACQF: Considerable scope for dialogue**
    B. **The quality assurance of the referencing process to the ACQF**
    C. **The quality assurance of outcomes – qualifications**

3.5 Quality assurance and the ACQF: A considerable scope of dialogue and action

The intersection between quality assurance systems and qualifications frameworks (continental, regional, national) holds promise in a number of areas, especially with regard to improving governance and holistic approaches for renewal of the ecosystem of education, training and qualifications.

9. **Transparency and trust as a major objective:** Quality assurance systems and national qualifications frameworks share a major objective: to enhance transparency and mutual trust. Quality assurance systems focus on trust in learning systems and institutions, while qualifications frameworks concentrate on transparency and trust of outcomes (assessment, certification, credentialing). The ACQF builds on this convergence of principles and practices.

10. **Contributing to an African 'quality culture' across learning sectors and borders:** Quality assurance instruments, in conjunction with the ACQF and national qualifications frameworks and systems, should contribute to the development of a 'quality culture' across the education and skills development ecosystem. This synergy will facilitate comparability and transparency of learning outcomes, recognition of qualifications, learner mobility across borders and subsectors, and fair labour migration based on trusted and comparable qualifications of all levels and sectors.

11. **Accompanying/supporting the grand transformation of learning:** Learning and qualifications are in transformation. Triggers of change include massive digitalisation and automation, the global and local green agenda, societal movements for equity, access and rights, the transformation of work and demand for skills and jobs accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Individuals need to continuously acquire and upgrade skills to adapt to new societal demands and to emerging tasks, jobs, and technologies. Many occupations demand hybrid combination of skills across fields, and transversal and technical skills. Quality assurance systems, together with national qualifications frameworks, have a vast field of collaboration to develop common positions, policies and instruments supporting the transparency and adequacy of responses to the fast and wide transformation of learning, skills, qualifications, and respond to a growing need for diverse flexible lifelong learning. In this context, innovation and renewal of quality assurance of education and training and national qualifications frameworks need to be addressed as a shared agenda. The ACQF's principle of openness to innovation supports adaptation in the domain of qualifications and credentials.

3.6 Quality assurance in the context of referencing to the ACQF

12. **Principles governing ACQF referencing:** the referencing to the ACQF of national qualifications frameworks or systems demonstrates the degree to which the quality assurance of national qualifications:

    a. addresses the qualifications quality chain, from design of standards underpinning qualifications to learning, assessment, and certification;
    b. addresses the application of the learning outcomes approach;
    c. includes feedback instruments and processes supporting continuous quality improvement;
    d. addresses internal and external quality assurance, and the regular review of quality assurance agencies;
    e. is based on measurable objectives, standards, and guidelines for quality assurance;
    f. is supported by resources; and
    g. provides transparent information-sharing on results of evaluation.

13. **Promoting streamlined and efficient procedures for referencing to the ACQF:** The quality assurance of referencing to the ACQF as a process and outcome should promote streamlined and simplified criteria and procedures. Efficiency of the referencing process allows the available resources of national referencing committees/teams to be used in meaningful analysis, stakeholders' dialogue, and peer review.

14. **An opportunity for self-evaluation:** Referencing should be seen as an opportunity for countries (regions) to self-evaluate their qualifications framework or system, to plan and implement change and to boost meaningful debate on the conditions for impact and sustainability. In this sense, referencing contributes to systemic improvement; it is not an exam to pass or fail.

15. **Highlighting the complementarity between referencing criteria:** In the context of referencing of national qualifications frameworks and systems to the ACQF, countries should analyse and demonstrate the complementarity between referencing criteria, notably the question:

Can existing quality assurance arrangements support the shift to learning outcomes and also the classification and registration of qualifications?

Reflective Question No. 3: On quality assurance in the context of implementation of the ACQF

Referencing to the ACQF is a process of dialogue, self-assessment, and transparency.

❯ How can referencing to the ACQF contribute to a quality culture and continuous improvement of the national qualifications frameworks?

❯ What are the essential factors and elements of this interplay?

4   QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF REGIONAL POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

Concepts and approaches to define and build quality assurance systems for education and training have been developed, implemented, and reviewed for different contexts, notably at regional and country level. Besides national quality assurance systems, a few VET quality assurance frameworks of wider (regional or international) scope and applicability have been developed and supported by multilateral and intergovernmental bodies and organisations.

This section offers a brief overview of references to quality assurance in relevant African continental policies and guidelines. In addition readers have the opportunity to get acquainted with two regional quality assurance frameworks for TVET: EQAVET in the European Union; and the Asia-Pacific framework proposed by UNESCO.

4.1   Quality assurance in the context of African Union policies

In the context of the African Union policies, quality of education and training is an important priority. References and orientations concerning quality of education and training and quality assurance are integrated in several strategic objectives of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 2016-2025).

The African Union's Plan of Action for the African Decade for Technical, Professional, Entrepreneurial Training and Youth (2019–2028) sets nine focus areas for action, the second of which is focused on 'improving quality and relevance of TVET in Africa for an ever-changing world of work'.

The African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education have been developed to 'support higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies in Africa in implementing good quality assurance practices by guiding them in the application of standards and guidelines in higher education' (ASG-QA: 10). The ASG-QA is thus a major reference for this ACQF Guideline (and Training Module) on quality assurance, especially with regard to the application of the criteria for referencing of national qualifications or systems to the ACQF, as outlined in Table 1 above.

It is important to note that the ASG-QA apply exclusively to higher education. Other subsectors of education and training do not yet have continental guidelines on quality assurance. For complementarity with the ASG-QA, this ACQF Guideline proposes a set of principles on quality assurance applicable in other subsectors of education and training, especially TVET.

Table 2: African Union education and training policies and quality assurance – synthesis

Policy / framework / approach	Main objectives, features	Observations
African Union	CESA-25 mission: Reorient Africa's education and training systems to meet the knowledge, competencies, skills, innovation and creativity required to nurture African core values and promote sustainable development at the national, subregional and continental levels. The African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA) are validated and published, but concern exclusively higher education – brief information on the ASG-QA can be found in the section hereafter.	
CESA 2016-2025	Quality assurance is addressed in an integrated manner, not as a specific theme or domain of work. **Strategic Objective 1:** revitalise the teaching profession to ensure quality and relevance at all levels. Action area c) mentions quality and relevant teaching and learning materials; and d) is more specific: 'Enhance quality assurance and assessment mechanisms for learning outcomes'. **Strategic Objective 4:** Ensure the acquisition of requisite knowledge and skills as well as improved completion rates at all levels and groups. Action area e) mentions establishing and strengthening quality assurance mechanisms and monitoring and evaluation systems.	CESA 16-25 is a strategy. Specific information on programmes and measures supporting implementation are not included in CESA 16-25.
Plan of Action for the African Decade for Technical, Professional, Entrepreneurial Training and Youth	**Focus Area 2:** Improving quality and relevance of TVET in Africa for an ever-changing world of work. Planned intervention areas: - Building outcomes-/competency-based TVET systems in partnerships with the private sector and other stakeholders. - Harmonised qualifications and accreditation systems at regional and continental levels. - Establishing mechanisms for TVET engagement in the transformational sectors. - Capacity building of educators with relevant modern and practical competencies. - Improve infrastructure, equipment, e-technology. - Internal quality enhancement at TVET providers	Supported by a Matrix of activities (2019–2028)

4.2 African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA)

The ASG-QA is the composite of three interconnected parts addressing internal quality assurance, external quality assurance and internal quality assurance for quality assurance agencies. Each part is composed of standards, listed hereafter, and each standard is composed of guidelines.

- **Part A: Internal Quality Assurance**

  This part is used by higher education institutions to assure their own quality and supports self-assessment for the purpose of quality enhancement. Part A includes 13 standards, as follows:

  • Standard 1: Vision, mission and strategic objectives

  • Standard 2: Governance and management

  • Standard 3: Human resources

  • Standard 4: Financial resources management

  • Standard 5: Infrastructure and facilities

  • Standard 6: Student recruitment, admission, certification and support services

  • Standard 7: Design, approval, monitoring and evaluation of study programmes

  • Standard 8: Teaching learning and assessment

  • Standard 9: Research and innovation

  • Standard 10: Community engagement

  • Standard 11: Information management system

  • Standard 12: Public communication

  • Standard 13: Collaboration, staff and student mobility

- **Part B: External Quality Assurance**

  Used by quality assurance agencies when they conduct audits or programme accreditation at higher education institutions. Part B is composed of 7 standards:

  • Standard 1: Objectives of external quality assurance and consideration for internal quality assurance

  • Standard 2: Designing external quality assurance mechanisms fit for purpose

  • Standard 3: Implementation processes of external quality assurance

  • Standard 4: Independence of evaluation

  • Standard 5: Decision and reporting of external quality assurance outcomes

  • Standard 6: Periodic review of institutions and programmes

  • Standard 7: Complaints and appeals

- **Part C: Quality Assurance Agencies**

  This part is used by these agencies to assure the quality of their own activities, and for self-assessment in preparation of external quality assurance. Part C comprises 9 standards:

  • Standard 1: Legal status

  • Standard 2: Vision and mission statement

- Standard 3: Governance and management

- Standard 4: Independence of quality assurance agencies

- Standard 5: Policies, processes and activities

- Standard 6: Internal quality assurance

- Standard 7: Financial and human resources

- Standard 8: Benchmarking and collaboration

- Standard 9: Periodic review of quality assurance agencies

The ASG-QA are framed as minimum standards or requirements that must be complied with, but the individual institutions can complement them with additional standards reflecting their own context. The ASG-QA are based on the principles of autonomy, identity and integrity of higher education institutions.

Piloting the ASG-QA is benefiting the African Union member countries and regions in multiple ways, including through capacity building for substantial numbers of stakeholders and higher education institutions and pilot review of national quality assurance agencies. A first round of pilot reviews of quality assurance agencies was conducted in 2018–2019, and included countries from all regions of the continent.

4.3 African country case: Mauritius Quality Assurance Framework for TVET

Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) for the TVET Sector in Mauritius

The Mauritius Qualifications Authority (MQA) published its QAF in 2020, building on international practice and oriented to national needs. The focus of the QAF is on the performance of TVET providers and their learning programmes.

The QAF defines the scope, objectives and benefits as follows ensure that the MQA and the training institutions work together to achieve and enhance the quality of TVET and to have a single unified quality assurance process for the promotion of the sector.

The QAF comprises the following components:

- the QAF process;

- quality principles;

- self-assessment report; and

- audit.

The QAF addresses the following objectives:

- to enable training institutions to develop their internal quality assurance processes; and

- to have an instrument to better assess and monitor training institutions – for provision of high quality education and training.

The QAF generally covers three pillars:

- content and learning methodologies;

- delivery; and

- learner focus.

The benefits of the QAF are multiple, and tackle the needs of different groups:

For learners:

- equal opportunities for all;

- increased employability;

- learning programme meeting learners' expectations;

- proper information about educational and training offered;

- responsibility regarding academic and professional evolution; and

- teaching and learning process are centered on learners.

For employers:

- confidence in the provision of quality of TVET; and

- TVET programmes meet employers' demand.

For TVET providers:

- better control in offering TVET programmes;

- improved satisfaction of stakeholders;

- provides a culture for continuous improvement; and

- access to information about good practices and experiences of success.

For the community

- transparency of quality in TVET programmes; and

- responsibility of TVET providers as key elements in TVET quality assurance.

The model adopted for the QAF is a four-phase process, which shares commonalities with the EQAVET model (see section 5 of this Training Module).

Figure 1: QAF Model
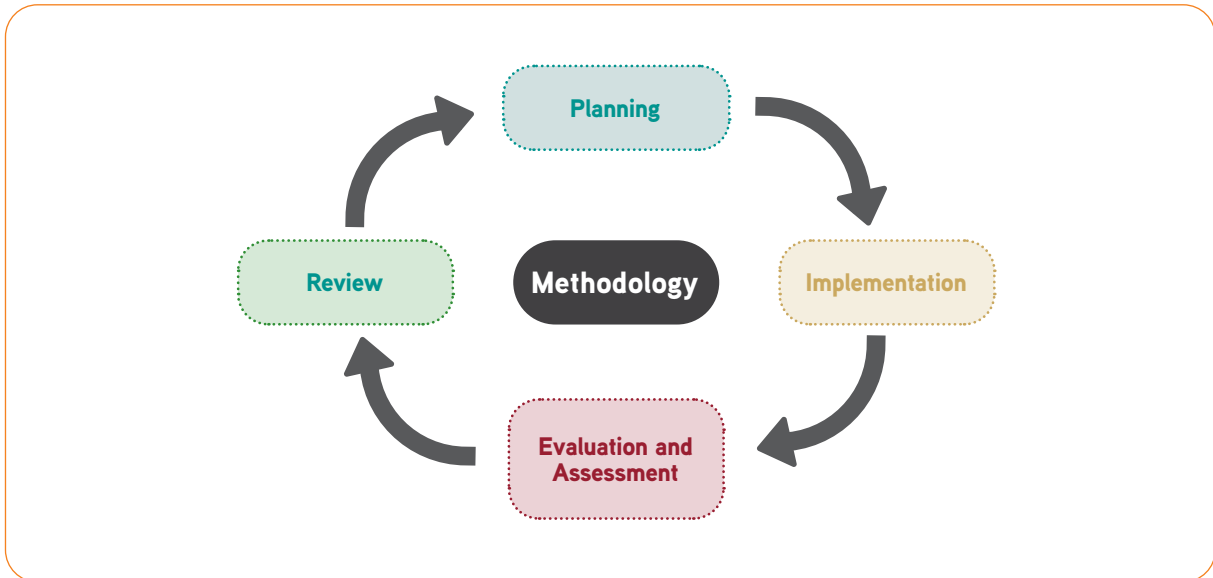
Source: adapted from the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) for the TVET Sector in Mauritius (p.8)

Reflective Question No. 4: on the ASG-QA

The ASG-QA is the most comprehensive set of standards and guidelines of a continental scope in Africa.

- ❯ What are the major strengths and benefits of the ASG-QA for national quality assurance developments?
- ❯ What needs to be reinforced in the interplay between the ASG-QA and the ACQF to ensure complementarity?
- ❯ Which of the ASG-QA Guidelines refer to key topics of the ACQF, such as learning outcomes and national qualification frameworks? Is this sufficient to ensure complementarity?
- ❯ How do you propose better disseminating of ASG-QA in your country?

5 OVERVIEW OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN OTHER REGIONAL COMMUNITIES

Concepts and experiences of other regional/continental mechanisms of quality assurance of qualifications and TVET are introduced in this section as reference cases and examples worth considering for the purposes of the ACQF. The two mentioned cases concern regions with substantial experience of regional cooperation in the domain of education and training: Asia-Pacific and the European Union.

5.1 Asia-Pacific: Guidelines for quality assurance of TVET qualifications

5.1.1   Scope and main definitions

The focus of the Guidelines for Quality Assurance of TVET Qualifications in the Asia-Pacific Region (UNESCO 2017) is on outcomes and the qualifications acquisition processes. The guidelines are set out in 13 principles (see section 5.1.2 below). Each principle is complemented by qualitative and quantitative indicators.

Quality assurance is defined as follows:

'In the context of TVET, quality assurance generally refers to planned and systematic processes that provide confidence in services provided by TVET institutions under the remit of responsible bodies. Quality assurance of the assessment and qualification processes allows stakeholders in TVET qualifications (e.g., graduates and employers) to have confidence and trust in those qualifications' (UNESCO 2017).

Quality assurance processes focus on:

- the consistency of the assessment and qualification processes, so that qualifications have currency; and
- ensuring that assessment meets the required standards, raising the likelihood that a qualification is a valid and reliable testament to a learner's knowledge, skills and wider competences.

The implementation of systematic quality assurance processes is paramount in any TVET qualifications system.

Quality assurance of TVET qualifications focuses on achieving quality outcomes. It is the responsibility of all key stakeholders, at all levels of the TVET qualifications system: the international, regional, national awarding body and TVET education institution levels. Quite often these various levels are connected and interrelated.

5.1.2   Principles of quality assurance of TVET qualifications

1. There is a clear vision for how quality assurance of TVET qualifications operates across the TVET qualifications system.
2. Organisations involved in quality assurance of TVET qualifications operate with clear and transparent governance arrangements.
3. Quality assurance of TVET qualifications practice is appropriately financed.
4. Quality assurance of TVET qualifications practice is based on clear and transparent quality standards.
5. Quality assurance of TVET qualifications practice addresses conception and formation of qualifications, assessment, validation, and certification processes.
6. Key stakeholder groups are involved in key aspects of quality assurance practice (conception and formation of TVET qualifications, assessment, validation, and certification).

7. Economic, social and environmental dimensions are explicit in quality assurance of TVET qualifications practice to: maximise access, social inclusion, pathways, articulation, participation of vulnerable groups, and participant retention and completion rates; and prioritise key industry sectors.

8. Barriers to assessment, including for non-formal and informal learning, are minimised.

9. Professionalisation of staff underpins quality assurance of TVET qualifications practices.

10. Continuous improvement underpins quality assurance of TVET qualifications practice; decisions are informed by data and research.

11. Organisations involved in quality assurance of TVET qualifications commit to internal evaluation and cyclical external evaluation, as well as to making public the findings of external evaluations.

12. Quality assurance of TVET qualifications practice remains fit for purpose and is sustainable.

13. Quality assurance of TVET qualifications practice is enhanced through national and international linkages and cooperation.

The guidelines elaborate a typology of governance arrangements and stages of implementation of quality assurance, taking into account case studies from the region.

5.1.3 Types of governance arrangements of quality assurance

1. **Type 1:** All quality assurance of all education and training (including schools, TVET and higher education qualifications) is directed by a single body, operating under national legislation or regulations.

2. **Type 2:** All quality assurance of post-compulsory school qualifications (including TVET and higher education qualifications) is directed by a single body, operating under national legislation or regulations.

3. **Type 3:** Quality assurance of TVET qualifications is seen as separate from the quality assurance of other education qualifications, and is directed by a single body, under national legislation or regulations.

4. **Type 4:** The quality assurance of TVET qualifications is carried out by two or more bodies; each body directs operations across their fields of competence.

5. **Unassigned:** Quality assurance processes are under development, and it is not yet possible to classify them in terms of the other types.

Quality assurance arrangements can be classified by **stages of implementation**, as indicated below. In some countries the quality assurance system is long-standing and linked with the national qualifications framework.

1. Emerging stage

Initial discussions for a systemic approach are underway. Some quality assurance requirements of TVET qualifications may be documented and implemented, but the approach is ad hoc and not systematic. The approach may not be well understood by key stakeholders. A desire for a systematic approach to quality assurance of TVET qualifications has been voiced by various stakeholders and discussed in policy documents, but no authoritative commitment has been made to a systematic approach.

2. Entry stage

An overarching vision of quality assurance of TVET qualifications has been agreed upon. Commitment to a systematic approach to quality assurance of TVET qualifications has been made by the responsible bodies or assessment providers. This commitment is documented in a policy paper or statement, vision statement, legislation and/or decree. The overarching design of the quality assurance of TVET qualifications has been documented and has been shared with key stakeholders for feedback and confirmation.

3. Intermediate stage

Quality assurance structures and processes have been agreed upon, communicated and are operational. The quality assurance structures and processes of TVET qualifications have been documented and made public. Documentation related to quality assurance of TVET qualifications could include:

- quality standards;
- quality assurance policies and procedures; and
- data standards for the systematic collection of data.

Pilot schemes are in the early stages of implementation. The agreed-upon quality assurance structures and processes are being implemented across the scope of quality assurance of TVET qualifications.

4. Advanced stage

Quality assurance structures and processes have been established for five years. The quality assurance structures and processes of TVET qualifications have been operational for five years. Implementation includes harmonisation of quality assurance structures and processes, monitoring and continuous improvement, internal evaluation, and external evaluation.

5. Mature stage

A review of quality assurance structures and processes is underway. The responsible bodies and/or assessment providers are reviewing the fitness for purposes and sustainability of the quality assurance structures and processes of TVET qualifications. This review is a systemic one at the national or education institution level, and includes all key stakeholders.

5.2 European Union: EQAVET

5.2.1 Scope and policy basis

EQAVET is a European-wide framework to support quality assurance in VET. EQAVET emerged from the 2009 Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council, which invited member states to use indicative descriptors and indicators to strengthen the quality of VET provision. EQAVET is a community of practice that promotes European collaboration in developing and improving quality assurance in VET.

More recently, EQAVET supports the implementation of the 2020 Recommendation on vocational education and training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience. The VET recommendation describes how EQAVET can be used to strengthen the quality of initial and continuing VET and presents the complete EQAVET framework.

The EQAVET framework can be used by VET providers and in VET systems to support:

- learning environments (such as school-based provision, work-based learning, apprenticeships, formal, informal and non-formal provision);

- all types of learning (digital, face-to-face and blended);

- public and private sector VET providers; and

- VET awards and qualifications at all levels of the European Qualifications Framework.

The implementation of the recommendation is supported by members of the EQAVET network, national reference points and the European Secretariat for EQAVET. The national reference points bring together relevant stakeholders at the national and regional level to:

- implement and further develop the EQAVET framework;

- inform and mobilise a wide range of stakeholders, including centres of vocational excellence, to contribute to the implementation of the EQAVET framework;

- support self-evaluation as one way to measure success and identify areas for improvement, including the digital readiness of VET systems and institutions;

- participate actively in the EQAVET network;

- provide updated descriptions of the national quality assurance arrangements based on EQAVET; and

- engage in European Union-level peer review to enhance the transparency and consistency of quality assurance arrangements, and to reinforce trust between member states.

By working collaboratively, the EQAVET network produces case studies and guidance on different ways to develop and improve the quality assurance of VET. Each year, the EQAVET network organises a range of support activities, including an annual meeting for those with an interest in the quality assurance of VET at the European level. The EQAVET work programme for 2020/2021 includes the following meetings:

- EQAVET Peer Review of 'Quality EQAVET Model for Spain': 30–31 March 2022;

- EQAVET Annual Network Meeting: 10 June 2022;

- EQAVET Peer-Learning Activity (topic to be confirmed): October 2022;

- EQAVET Webinar (topic to be confirmed): December 2022.

5.2.2   Components of EQAVET

EQAVET supports the implementation of the 2020 Recommendation on vocational education and training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience. The VET recommendation describes how EQAVET can be used to strengthen the quality of initial and continuing VET and presents the complete EQAVET framework, composed of:

- Indicative descriptors: aiming to support both VET systems and VET providers, as they deem appropriate, when implementing the EQAVET framework. They are structured by phases of the quality cycle: Planning – Implementation – Evaluation – Review. They can be applied to both initial and continuing VET and are applicable to all learning environments: school-based provision and work-based learning, including apprenticeships schemes. Refer to Annex 1 of this Training Module.
- A set of ten reference indicators, which can be used to support the evaluation and quality improvement of national/regional VET systems and/or VET providers when implementing the EQAVET framework (see Table 3).
- The ten indicators were revised in 2020. They are structured in three categories (Table 3):
  o   overarching indicators for quality assurance (indicators 1 and 2);
  o   indicators supporting quality objectives for VET policies (indicators 3 to 6); and
  o   indicators of context information (indicators 7 to 10).

Table 3: EQAVET reference indicators – synthesis

Indicator and definition	Purpose of policy	Type of indicator
1. Relevance of quality assurance systems for VET providers a) Share of VET providers applying internal quality assurance systems defined by law/ at own initiative b) Share of accredited VET providers	- Promote a quality improvement culture at VET-provider level - Increase the transparency of quality of training - Improve mutual trust on training provision	Context/input indicator
2. Investment in training of teachers and trainers a) Share of VET teachers and trainers participating in further training b) Amount of funds invested including for digital skills	- Promote ownership of teachers and trainers in the process of quality development in VET - Improve the responsiveness of VET to changing demands of labour market - Increase individual learning capacity building - Improve learners' achievement	Input/process indicator
3. Participation rate in VET programmes Number of participants in VET programmes according to the type of programme and the individual criteria	- Obtain basic information at VET-system and VET-provider levels on the attractiveness of VET - Target support to increase access to VET, including for disadvantaged groups	Input/process/ output indicator
4. Completion rate in VET programmes Number of persons having successfully completed/abandoned VET programmes, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria	- Obtain basic information on educational achievements and the quality of training processes - Calculate drop-out rates compared to participation rate - Support successful completion as one of the main objectives for quality in VET - Support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups	Process/output/ outcome indicator

Indicator and definition	Purpose of policy	Type of indicator
5. Placement rate in VET programmes a) Destination of VET learners at designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria b) Share of employed learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria.	- Support employability - Improve responsiveness of VET to the changing demands of the labour market - Support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups	Outcome indicator
6. Utilisation of acquired skills in the workplace a) Information on occupation obtained by individuals after completion of training, according to the type of programme and individual criteria b) Satisfaction rate of individuals and employers with acquired skills/competences	- Increase employability - Improve responsiveness of VET to changing demands in the labour market - Support adapted training provision, including for disadvantaged groups	Outcome indicator (mix of qualitative and quantitative data)
7. Unemployment rate according to individual criteria Unemployment rate (age group 15–74)	- Background information for policy decision-making at VET-system level	Context indicator
8. Prevalence of vulnerable groups a) Percentage of participants in VET classified as disadvantaged groups (in a defined region or area) according to age and gender b) Success rate of disadvantaged groups (from VET) according to age and gender	- Background information for policy decision-making at VET-system level - Support access to VET for disadvantaged groups - Support adapted training provision for disadvantaged groups	Context indicator
9. Mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market a) Information on mechanisms set up to identify changing demands at different levels b) Evidence of the use of such mechanisms and their effectiveness	- Improve responsiveness of VET to changing demands of the labour market - Support employability	Context/input indicator (qualitative information)
10. Schemes used to promote better access to VET a) Information on existing schemes at different levels b) Evidence of their effectiveness	- Promote access to VET, including for disadvantaged groups - Provide guidance to (potential) VET learners - Support adapted training provision	Process indicator (qualitative information)

Source: European Union (2020)

5.2.3   Lessons learned

Research undertaken by EQAVET indicates that in the European Union the common actions for the effective implementation of a VET quality assurance strategy are as follows:

- Key institutions (notably the relevant ministries and agencies) drive the development process.
- The main stakeholders are engaged and assume ownership as relevant and appropriate.
- A negotiated and agreed strategy and/or policy document on quality assurance in VET is published.
- National-level quality standards for VET providers are established.
- Measures to evaluate and review are in place and results are made public.

5.3 European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships

Quality and effective apprenticeships: An approach and framework for Europe

Quality apprenticeships can make a difference in helping people get into the labour market. They provide people with real work experience and skills, becoming a fast track to employment. They are a bridge to jobs.

The member states of the European Union have agreed and approved an approach and a framework defining the criteria and actions contributing quality and effective apprenticeships. In accordance with national legislation and in close cooperation with stakeholders, the countries should ensure that apprenticeship schemes are responsive to labour market needs and provide benefits to both learners and employers, by building on the criteria for quality and effective apprenticeships set out in the 2018 Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships.

Apprenticeships are defined as formal vocational education and training schemes with the features below:
- combine learning in education or training institutions with substantial work-based learning in companies and other workplaces;
- lead to nationally recognised qualifications;
- are based on an agreement defining the rights and obligations of the apprentice, the employer and, where appropriate, the vocational education and training institution; and
- the apprentice is paid or otherwise compensated for the work-based component.

Three years into the implementation of this Council Recommendation a report taking stock of progress and issues was published in 2021. This Commission report shows that the seven criteria on learning and working conditions are in place in the majority of member states, while further progress is needed in implementing the seven criteria on framework conditions.

- The report confirms that the framework continues to be relevant and up to date, and that it remains a key instrument to enhance the quality and effectiveness of apprenticeships across the European Union.
- The report also indicates that the framework supports member states in an incremental, continuous improvement of their apprenticeship schemes, including on those criteria that were already partially in place in 2018.
- The report includes country fiches with an assessment of the situation and progress in each member state.

The Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships defines 14 criteria, structured in two blocks: a) criteria for learning and working conditions; b) criteria for framework conditions. The criteria are presented below (Council Recommendation 2021: C153/4–C153/6).

A. Criteria for learning and working conditions

Written agreement

1. Before the start of the apprenticeship, a written agreement should be concluded to define the rights and obligations of the apprentice, the employer, and where appropriate the vocational education and training institution, related to learning and working conditions.

Learning outcomes

2. The delivery of a set of comprehensive learning outcomes defined in accordance with national legislation should be agreed by the employers and vocational education and training institutions and, where appropriate, trade unions. This should ensure a balance between job-specific skills, knowledge and key competences for lifelong learning, supporting both the personal development and lifelong career opportunities of the apprentices with a view to adapting to changing career patterns.

Pedagogical support

3. In-company trainers should be designated and tasked to cooperate closely with vocational education and training institutions and teachers to provide guidance to apprentices and to ensure mutual and regular feedback. Teachers, trainers and mentors, especially in micro-, small and medium-sized companies, should be supported to update their skills, knowledge and competences in order to train apprentices according to the latest teaching and training methods and labour market needs.

Workplace component

4. A substantial part of the apprenticeship, meaning at least half of it, should be carried out in the workplace with, where possible, the opportunity to undertake a part of the workplace experience abroad. Taking into account the diversity of national schemes, the aim is to progress gradually towards that share of the apprenticeship being workplace learning.

Pay and/or compensation

5. Apprentices should be paid or otherwise compensated, in line with national or sectoral requirements or collective agreements where they exist, and taking into account arrangements on cost-sharing between employers and public authorities.

Social protection

6. Apprentices should be entitled to social protection, including necessary insurance in line with national legislation.

Work, health and safety conditions

7. The host workplace should comply with relevant rules and regulations on working conditions, in particular health and safety legislation.

B. Criteria for framework conditions

Regulatory framework

8. A clear and consistent regulatory framework should be in place based on a fair and equitable partnership approach, including a structured and transparent dialogue among all relevant stakeholders. This may include accreditation procedures for companies and workplaces that offer apprenticeships and/or other quality assurance measures.

Involvement of social partners

9. Social partners, including, where relevant, at sectoral level and/or intermediary bodies, should be involved in the design, governance and implementation of apprenticeship schemes, in line with national industrial relations systems and education and training practices.

Support for companies

10. Financial and/or non-financial support should be envisaged, particularly for micro-, small- and medium-sized companies, enabling cost-effective apprenticeships for companies, taking into account, when appropriate, cost-sharing arrangements between employers and public authorities.

Flexible pathways and mobility

11. To facilitate access, entry requirements for apprenticeships should take into account relevant informal and non-formal learning and/or, if relevant, the accomplishment of preparatory programmes. Qualifications acquired through apprenticeships should be included in nationally recognised qualification frameworks referenced to the European Qualifications Framework. Apprenticeships should allow access to other learning opportunities, including at higher education and training levels, career pathways and/or, where relevant, the accumulation of units of earning outcomes. Transnational mobility of apprentices, either at the workplace or education and training institutions, should be progressively promoted as a component of apprenticeship qualifications.

Career guidance and awareness raising

12. Career guidance, mentoring and learner support should be provided before and during the apprenticeship to ensure successful outcomes, to prevent and reduce drop-outs as well as support those learners to re-engage in relevant education and training pathways. Apprenticeships should be promoted as an attractive learning pathway through widely targeted awareness-raising activities.

Transparency

13. The transparency of, and access to apprenticeship offers within and between member states should be ensured, including with the support of public and private employment services as well as other relevant bodies, and, when appropriate, by using Union tools such as European Employment Services (EURES) as provided for in the EURES regulation.

Quality assurance and tracking of apprentices

14. Quality assurance approaches should be in place, taking into account EQAVET, including a process allowing a valid and reliable assessment of the learning outcomes. The tracking of employment and career progression of the apprentices should be pursued, in accordance with national and European legislation on data protection.

Reflective Question No. 5: On regional frameworks for quality assurance of education and training

Quality assurance of education and training and of qualifications is not only a national matter. Regional cooperation can contribute to strengthening national policies and approaches and to establishing comparable quality assurance policies and criteria between countries belonging to a regional bloc. Please comment and present your argumentation on the following questions:

› What are the main commonalities and differences between the two regional quality assurance frameworks for VET (Asia-Pacific and EQAVET)?

› Asia-Pacific Guidelines for Quality Assurance of TVET qualifications: please analyse the types of governance arrangements and the stages of implementation, and relate them to your country's features.

› EQAVET Indicators (Table 3): please analyse and comment on the framework. What strengths do you notice? What is missing? What are the data requirements to implement this framework of indicators for quality assurance?

› Please comment on the criteria defined in the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships. In your view, what are the most important criteria? What are the most relevant the context of your country? What main challenges do you anticipate in implementation in your country context? Please justify your responses.

› In your view, what features and elements of these frameworks could be meaningful in the context of the African Union – not for policy borrowing, but as sources of policy learning?

6   QUALITY ASSURANCE OF CREDENTIALS AND QUALIFICATIONS

6.1   NQFs and quality assurance

This Training Module is to be read in conjunction with Training Module 10, which elaborates on national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) – the systemic view.

The link with quality assurance processes makes the NQF effective. There are two ways of considering NQFs and related quality assurance schemes.

- The first is that a NQF incorporates quality assurance provisions.

- Secondly, a NQF is simply considered to be a repository or classifier of all qualifications in a country, with little reference to the quality assurance provisions of these qualifications. Quality assurance processes and their governance can be seen as independent from the national framework. In this role, the NQF can be seen as merely establishing the levels and level descriptors to be met by qualifications. The design, assessment and certification arrangements for these qualifications are all independent of the NQF and may be subject to quality assurance independently of a NQF.

This Training Module elaborates on the notion that NQFs are instrumental to conceive, mediate and apply quality assurance to outcomes of learning and to certification, beyond the dimensions of inputs and processes.

6.2   Quality assurance of qualifications

Qualifications are the outcome of learning assessed by competent entities against given standards. Quality assurance of qualifications needs to address all dimensions that determine the trustworthiness (quality) of different forms and types of awards certifying achieved learning outcomes. In the context of this training module reference is made to the European Training Foundation's toolkit (2016) Getting organised for better qualifications.

Quality assurance of qualifications is concerned with four dimensions:

A. quality qualifications: concepts and characteristics, quality cycle;

B. minimum criteria for the quality of qualifications;

C. quality assurance elements from a qualification system perspective: qualification standards, assessment and certification; and

D. qualifications quality chain: from standards to awards.

A.   Quality qualifications: Concepts and characteristics, quality cycle

Table 4: Comparing key features of quality assurance of providers with quality assurance of qualifications

Quality assurance (QA) of providers	Quality assurance (QA) of qualifications
QA measures are focused on institutions	QA measures are focused on the candidates
Making sure the providers are capable of delivering training programmes based on educational standards	Making sure standards behind qualifications are relevant, based on identified needs, validated by stakeholders
Providers are focused on delivering outcomes (getting people to a qualification, getting people into employment)	Making sure everybody who is assessed and will be certified meets the learning outcomes in the standard
QA is focused on the planning, implementation, feedback and improvement within institutions, combined with external verification	QA is focused on assessment and certification, including the assessors, who issues the certificate and who externally regulates/provides QA of awarding bodies
QA is based on the assumption that 'good' learning processes lead to good results	QA is based on actual measurement of what has been learned by the candidate

B.   Minimum criteria for the quality of a qualification

Figure 2: Key areas for minimum criteria for the quality of a qualification
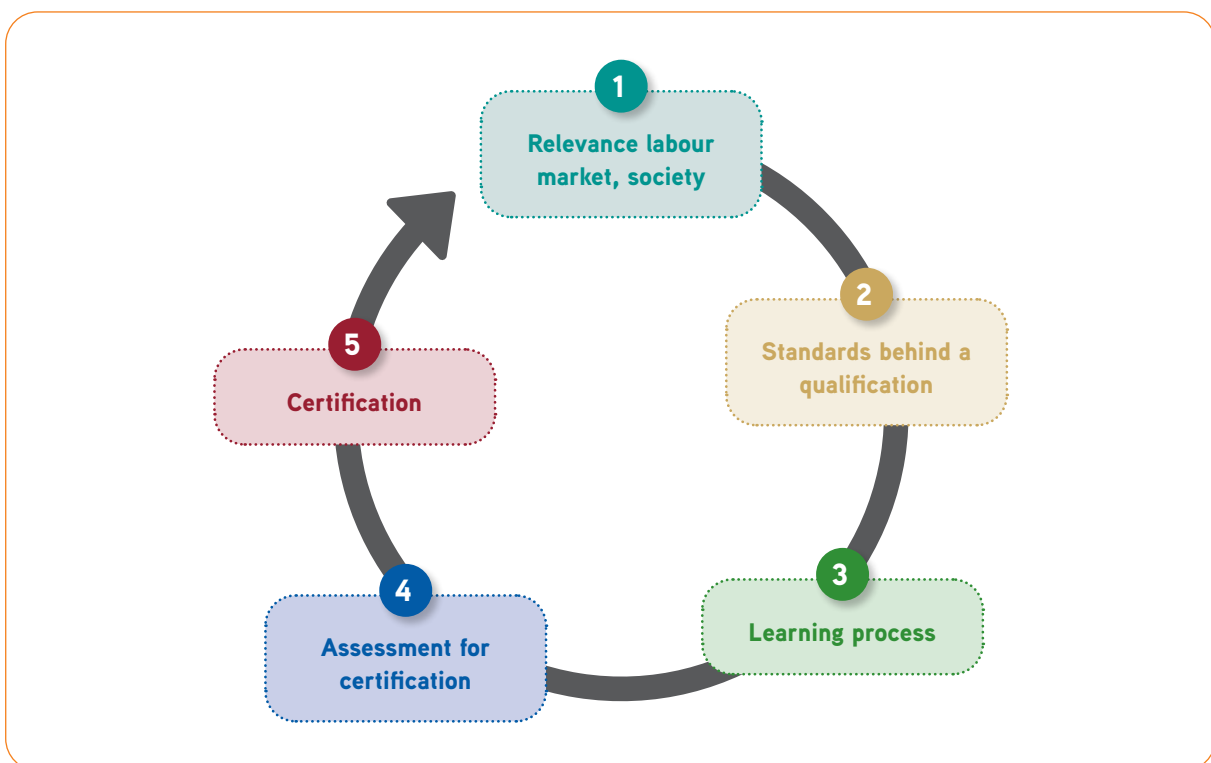
How to understand and use the proposed minimum criteria for the quality of qualifications (Figure 2)? Each area is related to specific minimum criteria, as summarised in Table 5.

Table 5: Key areas and related minimum criteria for the quality of qualifications

Area	Minimum criteria
1. Relevance for the labour market and individuals	• Involvement of labour market actors in defining needs for a qualification • Justification that the sector and the occupation has a relevance for a country
2. Standards behind a qualification	• All standards are (learning) outcome-based • All standards behind a VET qualification should relate to skills and competence requirements for an occupation or a group of occupations • Involvement of labour market actors in defining the standards of a qualification
3. The learning process	• The learning outcomes relate to the standards behind a qualification (skills and competence requirements for an occupation or a group of occupations) • The learning process has a substantial practical component for students to acquire skills and competences and not only theoretical knowledge
4. Assessment for certification	• Assessment is based on the standards behind a qualification (skills and competence requirements for an occupation or a group of occupations) • Assessment has a substantial practical component for students to acquire skills and competences and not only theoretical knowledge • Trained professionals are involved in assessment of skills and competences
5. Certification	• A numerical level is allocated to the qualification in order to compare the level with related qualifications from other countries • The certification has national value and is awarded by a competent body (ministry, federation, and so on) • The qualification allows for progression to further education or training

Source: Adapted from ETF (2017).

C. Focus on the quality assurance elements from a qualification system perspective: Qualification standards, assessment, and certification

Focus on certification

The place of certification in the quality assurance of qualifications is not always explicit, holistic, and articulated in many qualifications systems. Certification must be clearly included in quality assurance of qualifications.

• The process of certification is defined as 'the multiple (and sometimes overlapping) processes of assessment and verification of learning that lead to the awarding of a qualification or part thereof. The ultimate goal of a certification process is to ensure that the learner has acquired the required learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competence), which is then certified by the awarding of a qualification' (CEDEFOP 2015: 101).

• 'To strengthen trust in certification, results across the system based on the same qualification standards must be comparable. Comparability of results ensures that holders of the same qualification have actually achieved the learning outcomes required for it and therefore qualifications can be trusted.'

A set of recommendations concerning certification

1. Clearly articulate certification in VET policies
2. Define and use learning-outcome-based standards appropriately
3. Strengthen involvement of labour market stakeholders in certification and relevant quality assurance processes
4. Support a common understanding of certification requirements among stakeholders
5. Ensure that assessors are competent and trained
6. Share responsibility for quality assurance of certification at all levels
7. Strengthen evaluation and review of certification
8. Consider the possibility of a handbook to apply quality assurance principles in a coherent and holistic way.

Source: Adapted from CEDEFOP (2015).

D. Qualifications quality chain: The interplay of all phases and outputs towards acquisition of the qualification

Quality assurance for quality qualifications consists of two broad processes:

1. ensuring that qualifications are relevant and have value; and
2. ensuring that the people who are certificated meet the conditions of the qualification.

The processes, or steps, in the 'qualifications quality chain' target these aspects more closely. When building their legal and institutional infrastructure, countries must ensure that quality assurance is not addressed separately but should be an integrated part of developing or reforming that infrastructure, so as not to risk it becoming an after-thought.

Figure 3: Back-chaining from the final outcome to the start of the process
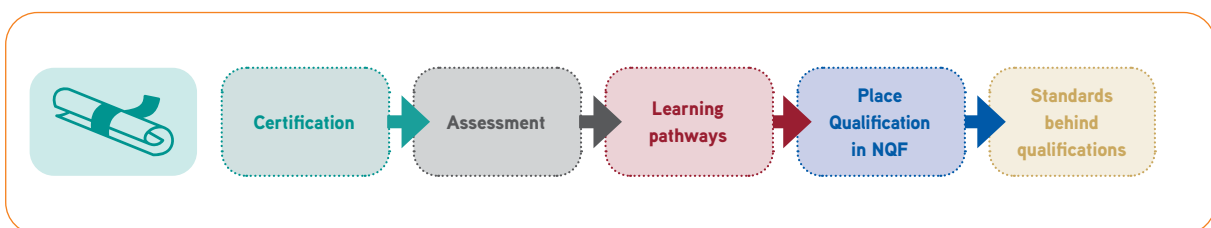
Source: Adapted from ETF (2017).

6.3 Quality assurance of micro-credentials

Globally the number and diversity of micro-credential offerings have expanded substantially in recent years, accelerated by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Micro-credentials hold promises and challenges. Trust and quality are fundamental requirements of policymakers, qualifications bodies and end-users towards micro-credentials.

In this context of growing attention to micro-credentials, there is an effort globally, as well as in regional communities and individual countries, to develop common approaches and understanding of definitions, principles, and information requirements, which help to clarify the potentialities, role and place of micro-credentials in education and national qualifications systems, in workers' career development and in lifelong learning policies.

Existing definitions (from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, European Commission, UNESCO, and Australian government) point to the following key characteristics of micro-credentials:

- referring to learning over a limited time period and/or in a specific area;
- may form part of or adding to formal qualifications;
- potentially 'stackable' over time, adding to individual learning careers;
- given their limited size and focus, more flexible than traditional qualifications;
- based on assessed learning; and
- frequently delivered in a digital form.

6.3.1   A national framework on micro-credentials: Australia

In 2021, the Australian government adopted National Micro-Credentials Framework, which uses the following definition:

'A micro-credential is a certification of assessed learning or competency, with a minimum volume of learning of one hour and less than an Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) award qualification, that is additional, alternate, complementary to or a component part of an AQF award qualification.'

What can constitute a micro-credential?
- VET skill sets or units of competency.
- Modularised, assessed components of existing higher education curriculum or subjects.
- Industry learning that is assessed (such as vendor certifications, professional learning).
- Other forms of assessed learning or competencies (vocational education/higher education/ industry courses not currently accredited by a regulatory authority, and those by other providers).

What does not constitute a micro-credential?
- Unassessed learning or courses, including work-integrated learning without an assessment.
- Badges obtained through participation only (without an assessment).
- Formal qualifications within the Australian Qualifications Framework and macro-credentials, including diplomas, certificates and master's degrees.

The Australian Micro-Credentials Framework elaborates minimum standards for micro-credentials on the Micro-Credentials MarketPlace, including on quality assurance (Australian government 2021: 15).

- Quality assurance protects the integrity of the micro-credentials ecosystem, by giving employers and recognising bodies confidence in the micro-credentials being delivered by an issuing authority, and by protecting learners. While most micro-credentials are unaccredited, a strong feature of stakeholder consultations is the need to ensure this framework is minimalist.

- Quality assurance measures are important and have been captured in various parts of this framework – the requirement for clearly stipulated learning outcomes, evidence of attainment, and critical information requirements (such as issuing institution, provider codes, relevant regulator, and approach to academic integrity and assessment).

- Micro-credentials should be reviewed regularly (and as appropriate) by providers to ensure that micro-credentials remain relevant and updated. Providers are encouraged to stipulate quality assurance processes on the Marketplace.

- 5.6.1. Where an issuing authority has not applied a regulated standard (the standards and academic integrity processes applied to award courses or components within a training package) to a micro-credential, they must provide a statement of assurance of quality on the Marketplace – a profile of the provider/institution, a description of the quality assurance processes undertaken, and the process for review/updating the micro-credential.

6.3.2   A perspective of a community of countries: European Union

The European Union is working to enhance lifelong learning. In December 2021 the European Commission adopted two proposals: a) on micro-credentials; on b) on individual learning accounts. These proposals were announced in the Skills Agenda and in the European Education Area Communication of 2020. They will help to tackle challenges related with upskilling and reskilling of the population, by opening up more opportunities for people to find learning offers, and employment opportunities. European Union member states set a target of 60 per cent of adults taking part in training by 2030.

For more information and access to the policy proposals (Council Recommendations) visit the website, view the infographic, and read the Brochure.

Micro-credentials – a common definition (in debate)

Micro-credentials certify the learning outcomes following a small learning experience (a short course or training). They offer a flexible, targeted way to help people develop the knowledge, skills and competences they need for their personal and professional development.

A micro-credential is the record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning. These learning outcomes have been assessed against transparent and clearly defined standards. Courses leading to micro-credentials are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills and competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs. Read the Brochure.

The proposed Council Recommendation elaborates on ten main characteristics of micro-credentials in the context of the European Union.

Principles to be considered

When designing and issuing micro-credentials some principles are recommended. They highlight the key characteristics of the European approach to micro-credentials. They are universal and may be applied in any area or sector.

1. **Quality:** Micro-credentials are subject to internal and external quality assurance by the system producing them (the education, training or labour market context in which the micro-credential is developed and delivered). Quality assurance processes must be fit for purpose, be clearly documented, accessible, and meet the needs of learners and stakeholders.

2. **Transparency:** Micro-credentials are measurable, comparable and understandable with clear information on learning outcomes, workload, content, level, and the learning offer, as relevant.

3. **Relevance:** Micro-credentials should be designed as distinct, targeted learning achievements, and learning opportunities leading to them are updated as necessary, to meet identified learning needs.

4. **Valid assessment:** Micro-credential learning outcomes are assessed against transparent standards.

5. **Learning pathways:** Micro-credentials are designed to support flexible learning pathways, including the possibility to stack, validate, and recognise micro-credentials from across different systems.

6. **Recognition:** Recognition has a clear signalling value of learning outcomes and paves the way for a wider offer of such small learning experiences in a comparable way across the EU. Micro-credentials are recognised for academic or employment purposes based on standard recognition procedures used in recognising foreign qualifications and learning periods abroad, when dealing with micro-credentials issued by formal education providers

7. **Portability:** Micro-credentials are owned by the credential-holder (the learner) and may be stored and shared easily by the credential-holder, including through secure digital wallets (such as Europass), in line with the General Data Protection Regulation. The infrastructure for storing data is based on open standards and data models, This ensures interoperability and seamless exchange of data, and allows for smooth checks of data authenticity.

8. **Learner-centred:** Micro-credentials are designed to meet the needs of the target group of learners. Learners are involved in the internal and external quality assurance processes and their feedback is taken into account as part of the continuous improvement of the micro-credential.

9. **Authentic:** Micro-credentials contain sufficient information to check the identity of the credential-holder (learner), the legal identity of the issuer, and the date and location of issuance of the micro-credential.

10. **Information and guidance:** Information and advice on micro-credentials should be incorporated in lifelong learning guidance services and should reach the broadest possible learner groups, in an inclusive way, supporting education, training, and career choices.

6.3.3   A global perspective: UNESCO

In 2020–2021 UNESCO promoted a global debate towards a common definition of micro-credentials, based on extensive expert consultation, analysis of definitions from 15 countries and literature review. The key proposals and underpinning reflection were discussed in September at an international conference (UNESCO 2021). The author of the report concludes:

'When it comes to micro-credentials, micro is the distinguishing feature, but to be accepted and trusted, micro-credentials must be seen to bear the quality hallmarks of credentials' (Oliver 2021: 31).

The proposed definition states that a micro-credential:

1. is a record of focused learning achievement verifying what the learner knows, understands or can do;
2. includes assessment based on clearly defined standards and is awarded by a trusted provider;
3. has stand-alone value and may also contribute to or complement other micro-credentials or macro-credentials, including through recognition of prior learning; and
4. meets the standards required by relevant quality assurance (Oliver 2021: 20).

6.4 African perspective: Towards a debate on quality of micro-credentials

An African continental initiative to reflect and elaborate a contextualised approach or framework on micro-credentials, including the dimensions of quality assurance and transparency, is yet to be proposed. Such a potential undertaking can be connected with the review and rethinking of CESA-25, with the strengthening of skills development policies and with the debate on digital learning strategy for the continent.

Other ongoing global and continental initiatives aiming to clarify common traits and quality assurance principles of micro-credentials have proposed pertinent aspects, which African constituencies and stakeholders might consider in further debates.

Micro-credentials are subject to internal and external quality assurance by the system producing them, such as the education, training or labour market context in which the micro-credential is developed and delivered. Quality assurance processes must be fit for purpose, be clearly documented, accessible, and meet the needs of learners and stakeholders.

External quality assurance is based primarily on the assessment of providers (rather than individual courses) and the effectiveness of their internal quality assurance procedures.

External quality assurance should conducted in line with:

-   ASG-QA, where applicable;
-   ACQF quality assurance principles and recommendations;
-   national and regional quality assurance frameworks, where applicable; and
-   other quality assurance instruments, including registries and labels, to build public trust in micro-credentials, where applicable.

Providers should make sure that internal quality assurance covers the overall quality of the micro-credential itself, based on the following dimensions:

- the quality of the course, where applicable, leading to the micro-credential;

- learners' feedback on the learning experience leading to the micro-credential; and

- peers' feedback, including other providers and stakeholders, on the learning experience leading to the micro-credential.

Reflective Question No. 6: On quality assurance of qualifications

Quality assurance of qualifications features specific dimensions that go beyond inputs and processes.

- ❯ Minimum quality assurance criteria of qualifications – what the priority areas and criteria? Please elaborate on your reasoning.

- ❯ How do you relate the minimum criteria with quality assurance of your country's NQF?

- ❯ Based on the information shared in this section, please comment: How does quality assurance contribute to effective quality of qualifications? What is the return on investment in quality assurance? What are the adverse effects of not investing in quality assurance of qualifications?

- ❯ Micro-credentials in the context of African qualifications frameworks and systems: What are your views on the development of a common understanding and framework on micro-credentials for Africa? What key principles and tools for quality assurance of micro-credentials do you recommend?

7   QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK FOR TVET: A PROPOSAL FOR THE AFRICAN UNION

7.1 Overview of a framework for quality assurance for TVET

The principles defined in this section are conceived with an emphasis on quality assurance of qualifications in TVET. Several of the principles and orientations outlined in this section can be applied to qualifications from other subsectors of education and training, without prejudice to existing relevant policies, standards and guidelines specifically addressing the objectives of different subsectors, notably secondary and tertiary education.

This overview of a framework for TVET quality assurance complements the existing African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA), whose scope is delimited to one subsector of education – higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies.

Principles:

1. Holistic and systemic view

The quality assurance system contributes to the lifelong learning and articulation purposes of the national qualifications framework, that is, the transparency of learning outcomes, mutual trust between the subsectors of education and training, vertical and horizontal mobility of learners, and recognition of prior learning and qualifications.

Intersections and complementarities: The holistic approach clarifies and strengthens the complementarities and intersections between the NQF, quality assurance, recognition of prior learning and recognition of qualifications to support lifelong learning, progression, and mobility.

Culture of continuous quality improvement: Quality assurance of qualifications should enable a culture of continuous quality improvement, not limited to quality control mechanisms.

2. Quality assurance for quality qualifications consists of two broad processes:

a) ensuring that qualifications are relevant and have value; and

b) ensuring that the people who are certified meet the requirements of the qualification.

The processes, or steps, in the qualifications quality chain target these aspects more closely. The qualifications *quality chain encompasses*:

-   standards behind qualifications;

-   inclusion of the qualification in the NQF;

-   learning pathways;

-   assessment; and

-   certification.

3. Quality must be assured and maintained

Achieving and sustaining quality in TVET requires a systemic and holistic quality assurance approach, which combines measures at various levels: policy and system; providers and awarding bodies; governance; qualifications standards; teachers and trainers; assessment, validation, and certification; and eventually, data and knowledge creation. Quality assurance system requires a set of processes, procedures, tools, and capacities, and monitor them to ensure that the outcomes of TVET meet expectations and demand.

In addition, quality assurance systems need to consider and adapt to specificities of different models and structures of TVET systems.

4. Qualification standards are:

- underpinned by reliable evidence defining the skills needs;
- based on learning outcomes;
- developed in partnership by state and social-economic partners, professional sectors, teachers and trainers;
- monitored and reviewed regularly; and
- used to underpin quality-assured programmes, curricula, and assessment.

5. Quality assurance processes and mechanisms can be aided by digital tools and new data sources to monitor indicators and operate with other relevant national and continental databases and analytical systems. National, regional and continental qualifications databases and registers can be harnessed to provide relevant data.

6. The role of certification in safeguarding confidence and trust is crucial. A transparent and quality-assured certification process has become even more important nowadays, with qualification systems increasingly allowing qualifications to be acquired through different learning pathways and assessment modes.

For the critical stage of assessment, validation, and certification of qualifications:

- The place of certification in the quality assurance of qualifications is not always explicit, holistic, and articulated in many qualifications systems. Certification must be clearly included in quality assurance of qualifications.
- To this end, it is important to foster a common understanding of certification among stakeholders and involve them in quality assurance processes.
- The use of appropriate and reliable standards and instruments of certification contributes to enhance quality of certification.

7. Quality cycle and stages: in defining and building the quality assurance framework and tools for TVET system and TVET providers, the specificities of each stage and the links between stages must be taken into account. The stages are: 1. Plan; 2. Implement; 3. Evaluate/monitor; 4. Review and renew.
- Planning stage: Set up clear, appropriate and measurable goals and objectives in terms of policies, procedures, tasks and human resources.
- Implementation stage: Establish procedures to ensure the achievement of goals and objectives, such as the development of partnerships, involvement of stakeholders, allocation of resources, and organisational and operational procedures.
- Evaluation phase: Design mechanisms for the evaluation of achievement and outcomes by collecting and processing data in order to make informed assessment.
- Review phase: Develop procedures in order to achieve the targeted outcomes and/or new objectives, after processing feedback and analysis.

8. **Minimum quality criteria:** Develop a common approach to minimum quality criteria covering the key components of the TVET system (formal, non-formal), the qualifications quality chain and the national qualifications framework.

9. **Indicators:** Develop a set of indicators to measure and monitor quality and support quality assurance, articulated and coordinated with the main performance indicators of the TVET system.

10. **Capacity development, networking, and mutual learning:** Establish and support networking and collaboration involving all TVET providers and key stakeholders. Supported by online platform, to organise joint activities, disseminate good practice, enhance mutual trust, and strengthen a culture of peer learning.

11. **Align the national quality assurance framework** (all subsectors) with other relevant regional frameworks (qualifications, recognition).

12. **Anticipate the future** – how changing and emerging roles, tasks, occupations and new skills will affect qualifications profiles, and the supply and demand for qualifications.

Reflective Question No. 7: On the proposed principles for quality assurance in TVET

The 12 proposed Principles of Quality Assurance cover different features and components of the TVET system.

> Please summarise these dimensions of the TVET system.

> What are the most important principles of quality assurance of TVET in your view?

> Why is it important to anticipate the future and consider such information in designing and implementing quality assurance of TVET systems? Please share your reasoning.

7.2 Quality assurance at system level

Quality assurance policies and mechanisms are central to the effective functioning of education and training systems, as they include the processes that ensure that education and training institutions are acting as per the identified standardised procedures and general principles as established by quality assurance authorities or agencies. Quality assurance activities are conducted with the goal of ensuring that processes are consistent and effective at producing their desired outcome. The quality assurance system adopted by the NQF is to safeguard the integrity of the framework and the registered qualifications.

Quality Assurance in TVET and qualifications systems should address several levels:

a) The system level:

Underpinning the TVET policy cycle, supporting the culture of continuous improvement, contributing to policy monitoring and review, and engaging the stakeholders.

b) The providers' level:

- Internal quality assurance
- External quality assurance

All education and training providers must take primary responsibility for the quality of education and training, suitability of their education and training programmes, qualification level of staff recruited, learning infrastructure and other services provided, thus ensuring their internal quality assurance system. External agencies can ensure quality of the education and training provider through external quality assurance measures, recurrent audits and evaluations conducted on site.

Quality assurance is essential for all education and training providers, and the overall objective is to establish a quality system for systematic self-evaluation and follow-up at provider level; as well as external evaluation, which is continuously conducted by the authority or the agency responsible for quality assurance. Internal and external quality assurance policies and procedures are complementary.

7.3 Quality assurance at providers' level

This section elaborates on:

- **Internal quality assurance**

  The education and training provider must establish a formal quality management system. This is ascertained by the availability of a quality audit structure within the system, a quality manual, a comprehensive data collection system and monitoring system aimed at continuous improvement.

- **External quality assurance**

  The role for an external quality assurance can vary from system to system and usually depends for its full effectiveness on there being an explicit internal quality assurance strategy, with specific objectives, and on the use, within institutions, of mechanisms and methods aimed at achieving those objectives.

  Whereas internal quality assurance is needed to enact the meaning of quality (Poole 2010; Doherty 2008), external quality assurance is required to guarantee the enactment of quality (Santiago et al. 2008; Hopper 2007)

The education and training provider demonstrates how management will exercise its responsibility to ensure effective resourcing and implementation of the quality system.

The education and training provider ensures that the following are fully in place, or planned, and endowed with resources:

- mission and vision;

- governance;

- financial resources and viability;

- ethical standards;

- procedures and policies;

- design, development and revision of learning programme;

- learning and digital resources;

- staff and learner's feedback;

- assessment and certification;

- monitoring of assessment/assessor;

- internal verification;

- external control;

- learner's appeal system; and

- performance indicators.

All the above ensure the quality of the products and services provided by the education and training provider.

7.3.1   Internal quality assurance: Self-evaluation of the education/training provider

Internal quality assurance procedures serve two major purposes: accountability and improvement.

- **Accountability –** summative approach: 'A central aspect of "accountability" in any form is that of "rendering an account" of what one is doing in relation to goals that have been set or legitimate expectations that others may have of one's products, services or processes, in terms that can be understood by those who have a need or right to understand "the account"' (Middlehurst and Woodhouse 1995).
- **Improvement – formative approach:** 'Quality assurance for improvement purposes implies a formative approach: the focus is not on control but on improving quality' (Billing 2004).

Self-evaluation conducted by an education and training provider of its own programme and services is a fundamental part of its quality assurance system. The purpose of this self-evaluation is to analyse, measure the gaps and report on the effectiveness of training programmes and the services provided to the students.

This internal quality assurance procedure allows the education and training provider to identify the existing gaps in its practices, as well as the good practices that need to be sustained. During the self-evaluation process, the education and training provider must reflect on the extent to which it has:

- designed and implemented an ongoing and systematic cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, and resource allocation;

- positioned its processes to support continuous improvement of its instructional programmes and support services, paying particular attention to student achievement and student learning;

- prepared and implemented institutional plans for improvement supported by adequate sources of data and other evidence; and

- established its own institution-set standards of performance regarding student achievement and student learning and assessed its effectiveness against those standards (ACCJC 2020).

The self-evaluation process is guided, however, on the guiding principles directed by the NQF, which are as follows:

- mission, academic quality and institutional effectiveness and integrity;

- student learning programmes and support services;

- human resources;

- physical resources;

- technology resources;

- financial resources; and

- leadership and governance.

This self-evaluation exercise allows education and training providers to produce a report that includes findings of the gap analysis and an improvement action plan, which will commit the education and training provider to implement corrective measures with regards to the training programmes and services provided. Quality procedures for improvement aim at promoting future performance rather than making judgements on past performance.

Sustainable improvement relies on internal engagement. Robin Middlehurst and David Woodhouse (1995) argue that 'achieving improvement requires an acknowledgement by providers of a need to improve, an understanding of the appropriate focus of improvement, knowledge of the means of achieving the objectives of improvement and an appreciation of the benefits that will accrue from the effort. In other words, improvement relies upon individual or group engagement with the desired objectives and commitment to their achievement.'

7.3.2   *External quality assurance of providers*

Authorisation and accreditation are external quality assurance measures put in place by the quality assurance body or agency.

Quality assurance through external evaluation includes:

- registration of education and training providers;

- accreditation of training programmes;

- re-accreditation of education and training providers;

- periodic control of the implementation of training programmes; and

- periodic control of providers.

7.3.2.1 Authorisation and accreditation of education/training providers

The processes of authorisation and accreditation are coordinated by the competent bodies, which certify that an education and training provider and its training programmes have met predetermined standards.

Authorisation provides recognition to an organisation as an education and training provider, which is granted permission to operate. Authorising an organisation to act as an education and training provider happens typically when it is determined that the institution is meeting a societal need and given requirements.

Phases of accreditation include:

- a provisional authorisation, that grants the right to carry out the education and training process and to organise the admission to education and training programmes, as the case may be; and

- a full accreditation after having satisfied all the requirements. Full accreditation also grants the right to issue diplomas, certificates and other documents recognised by the NQF, and to organise graduation/certification exams.

7.3.2.2 Training programme accreditation

Accreditation of training programmes is a review process to determine if educational programmes meet defined standards of quality. Accreditation is not perpetual – it is renewed periodically to ensure that the quality of the educational programme is maintained. The process of accreditation of the training programme evaluates the quality of the programme and its compliance with professional requirements, standards and levels of the NQF, as well as the volume of learning (credit). International comparability of the programme is applied, as adequate, in the accreditation process.

The accreditation of the training programme is issued for a defined period. Accreditation for training programmes lasting more than five years can be granted for the duration of that programme.

7.3.2.3 External quality assurance: Assessment/visits
'Addressing accountability requires the involvement of an external body' (Thune 1996)

External quality assurance focuses on initial and ongoing review of an education and training provider and works to ensure fitness for purpose, or to ensure the education and training provider effectively achieves its missions.

The external processes such as quality assurance assessments/visits are coordinated by a competent body. Such external processes consist of the following:

1. monitoring of education and training providers' and programmes' quality;

2. offering guidance and support to education and training providers in the quality assurance process, quality control to verify the fulfilment of the quality requirements;

3. proposals for quality improvement measures; validation of education and training providers' self-assessment reports; and

4. approval of education and training providers' improvement plans.

Visits are conducted as an essential component of the NQF. They ensure guidance and support to education and training providers in the self-assessment process and quality control of the education and training. Throughout the annual cycle of self-assessment, external monitoring visits of education and training quality of providers are carried out, the self-assessment report is validated, and the improvement plan proposed by providers is approved by visiting inspectors.

All visits must give a general view of the efficiency of the provision of education and training and of the extent to which it satisfies the needs of students. To that end, all visiting inspectors must first analyse the learning outcomes and evaluate the quality of the teaching – training – learning process.

This may take the form of interviews, surveys, and focus groups with current learners or recent graduates in order to evaluate what a learner is expected to acquire in the education and training programme.

On site the visiting inspectors conduct the following activities:

- discuss with employers and with work-based learning trainers and tutors;
- evaluate the data on rates of learner retention, progression and achievement; and
- discuss with stakeholder and users: representatives of students, teachers and trainers, management, quality assurance and evaluation teams, employers, and parents.

Themes and questions in providers' site visits:

- number of learners enrolled in the programmes;
- staff turnover;
- type and kind of evaluation procedures applied;
- monitoring of assessment;
- moderators´ reports;
- cases of appeal against results issued;
- number of certificates/awards issued; and
- type of feedback received and implemented recommendations.

Reflective Question No. 8: On quality assurance at system and providers' level

Quality assurance at system and providers' level is defined by different focal features and dimensions.

- › Please summarise the dimensions relating to quality assurance at system level.
- › Please comment on the links between internal and external quality assurance at providers' level.
- › Please compare with your country's approach to quality assurance at providers' level.
- › Please list and provide some information on external quality assurance bodies existing in your country.

7.3.3   Quality assurance of work-based learning

Work-based learning programmes are designed and developed in partnership with employers, students and other stakeholders (where appropriate) and contain learning outcomes that are relevant to work objectives. They are meant to enable learners to apply and integrate areas of subject and professional knowledge, skills and behaviours to enable them to meet education and training programme learning outcomes. Work-based learning programmes are designed, monitored, evaluated and reviewed in partnership with employers.

To quality assure the work-based learning system, the following criteria need to be met at the organisation site:

- **Focus on learners**
    o   The employer's work-based learning is in accordance with the learners' expectations.
    o   The employer offers equal opportunities in the access to the work-based learning programme.
    o   The learners are not exploited to replace missing human resources.

- **Characteristics of work-based learning**
    o   Programme-required facilities for work-based learning are available in the organisation.
    o   Learners participating in the work-based learning programme have the opportunity for mobility.

- **Monitoring and assessment**
    o   The organisation, together with the education and training provider, systematically monitors and evaluates the work-based learning.
    o   The organisation measures the learners' satisfaction with work-based learning.

- **Work-based learning trainers/teachers**
    o   The managers/leaders take responsibility for work-based learning in the organisation.
    o   The WBL trainers/teachers have all required competences for work-based learning.

- **Resources**
    o   The learning resources, including digital resources, are available in the organisation.

- **Communication and agreements between the employers and education and training providers**
    o   National institutions or other relevant stakeholders in the country support the organisation regarding work-based learning.
    o   The organisation communicates with education and training providers on learner achievements in work-based learning (Mulder 2020).

7.3.4   Quality assurance of RPL/validation of non-formal and informal learning (new)

People learn anytime, everywhere, through different modalities and contexts (formal, non-formal and informal). All learning is valuable. Non-formal and informal learning are fundamental parts of lifelong and life-wide learning. Recognition of prior learning (RPL) systems are candidate/learner centred.

Outcomes of prior learning in all contexts of life can be validated, recognised, and certified to give people new perspectives and opportunities in education and training, employment, entrepreneurship, and better jobs. Outcomes of learning in work and professional contexts, and in non-formal and informal modalities, are valuable for the individuals, enterprises, and the society at large. This life learning can be transformed, from invisible to visible, recognised, and actionable for further education and training, better employment and social roles.

Across the world, countries and regional communities increasingly recognise the value of non-formal and informal learning and many are establishing systems to acknowledge competencies gained through non-formal and informal modalities.

It is essential that each RPL system or programme meets quality assurance requirements and is aligned with principles and qualification standards of the NQF. This implies integrity of each RPL process, from the phase of motivation of candidates to their assessment and eventually – certification. The integrity of the RPL processes and the validity of the outcomes determine the wider trust and acceptability by society of RPL as an integral part of learning and qualifications ecosystems.

The context of RPL stakeholders and beneficiaries is diverse: individual candidates, RPL guidance professionals, assessors, trainers, certification bodies, and the users and promoters of RPL – employers, trade unions, civil society organisations, volunteering associations, education and training providers, policymaking and regulatory authorities.

Quality assurance is vital to ensure that RPL is a fair and transparent path to identify, document, assess and eventually certify outcomes of prior learning and work experience. Transparency and rigour of RPL assessment is a major factor in quality and trusted RPL. Panels of RPL assessors should be trained, diverse, and apply different techniques and filters of evaluation to be fair and inclusive of the diversity of RPL applicants.

There are two options for the establishment of a quality assurance system for RPL:

Either

- establish a quality assurance framework exclusively for RPL: mainly applicable if RPL is implemented as a stand-alone process and not integrated into the educational and training sector activities and standards;

or

- integrate quality assurance for RPL into existing quality assurance guidelines and regulations for education and training.

The above systems will have as main guidelines the following:

1. Use appropriate identification, documentation and assessment methodologies and tools
Use methodologies that support the learner-centred approach of RPL, and are valid, fair, reliable, and practical and provide evidence and meet the stated learning outcomes or standards.

2. Treat the candidates fairly
Treat the candidates fairly – from the time they apply for RPL, with proper support from the motivation and information phase till their assessment phase.

3. The issuing of certificates
Issue trusted certificates to the successful candidates for the appropriate assessment outcome, valid in the NQF.

4. Tracking and monitoring of all data
Track, monitor and evaluate all the information collected during the RPL process so as to improve the system

7.3.5 Who is responsible for quality assurance in the RPL system?

All role players involved in the process are responsible but indeed it also depends on the structure of the system in the country.

All institutions involved:

1 Regulatory body

2 Institution doing the RPL

3 Awarding body

4 Receiving entity (employer or education/training provider)

All Practitioners involved

1 Assessors can check the tools before use

2 Managers can monitor support provided

3 Moderators can verify the process

At all levels of the RPL process, elements of quality assurance should be applied:

1. Awareness and guidance

All awareness and guidance sessions must be clear and understandable. They should be accessible to all categories of individuals. The quality assurance part ensures that this process enables proper circulation of information and throughout all modalities, such as newspapers, pamphlets, digitalisation of resources.

2 Support during the application and filling up of RPL application/portfolio

At this level the quality assurance ensures that there is no discrimination between individuals who submit their application, that they are provided with the same support throughout the application and portfolio filling.

3. Assessment

During the assessment phase, quality assurance ensures that assessment is fair and reliable for all RPL candidates.

4. Moderation

Quality assurance ensures that during all assessment, whatever form it takes, moderators properly fulfil their role.

5. Issue of certificate

Quality assurance ensures that there is no discrepancy or delay in the issuing of certificates to RPL learners.

Therefore, the overall guiding principles for quality assurance at the level of RPL are the following:

Accessible
- Processes provide information, advice and access by being responsive to applicant questions
- Cost-efficient for both applicant and organisation
- Timely in both frequency of assessment and gap-filling options
- Adult learner-centred, voluntary, available, and inclusive of all abilities and differences

Consistent

- Decision-makers (advisor, assessor, administrator) work together to be consistent with criteria, training, tools, procedures, and outcomes
- Definitions must be agreed across sectors to allow for transferability

Fair

- Processes are unbiased and recognise a wide range of ways people learn. Therefore, applicants are allowed optional ways to prove learning
- An appeal mechanism is provided
- Policies and procedures of the organisation align with RPL principles

Valid

- Assessment methods align with the expected measures of achievement (competencies, occupational standards, goals, or outcomes)

Rigorous

RPL assessment methods:

- reflect the purpose for the required learning have equivalent expectations to traditional assessment methods;
- are conducted by subject matter experts; and
- meet requirements of work or performance criteria (CAPLA 2015)

It is important to note that unless RPL is a credible assessment process through proper quality assurance practices, it can easily become an area of contestation.

Reflective Question No. 9: On quality assurance of RPL system

RPL needs transparency and trusted processes and outcomes. Quality assurance of processes and phases of RPL is fundamental to ensure confidence of end-users in the outcomes of RPL processes.

- ❯ What possible adverse effects are there if RPL practices are not backed by transparency and quality assurance?
- ❯ How should quality assurance in the context of RPL consider and support the learner-centred approach?
- ❯ How does quality assurance of qualifications relate to quality assurance of RPL?

8 ASSESSMENT TASKS FOR LEARNERS

This set of assessment questions and tasks is oriented to application of the knowledge and understanding acquired through this Training Module. The questions and tasks refer to the thematic sections of the Training Module. Please reply to the three sets of questions, and to one of the two case studies.

1. Quality assurance in the context of the ACQF (section 3)

Referencing to the ACQF is a process of dialogue, self-assessment, transparency and improvement.

- Please interpret the principles of quality assurance of referencing to the ACQF. Do you anticipate any substantial challenges in applying these principles in the context of your country's NQF?

- The four referencing criteria are not isolated; they share points of intersection. Please share your understanding of this question linking the criteria. *'Can existing quality assurance arrangements support the shift to learning outcomes and also the classification and registration of qualifications?'*

2. Proposed 12 principles of quality assurance for TVET in the African Union (section 7.1)

- What is the importance of indicators for quality assurance? How do they link with the monitoring of policy performance?

- Are these principles similar (or rather different) to the quality assurance principles for TVET adopted in your own country?

- How can your country refer to these 12 principles, and if relevant, apply them?

3. Quality assurance of RPL processes and outcomes (section 7.3.3)

- How does your country quality assure the RPL process and ensure credibility of the issued certificate?

- What are the major role players in RPL in your country? Please consider the level of policy institutions and the levels of providers and practitioners.

4. Case study 1: On quality assurance indicators for TVET

Please study chapter 5.2 on EQAVET and read the ten EQAVET indicators in Annex 1.1. Please could you reflect and elaborate your own set of indicators for quality assurance in TVET, as you consider relevant for the context of: a) your country or b) the African continent as a whole.

5. Case study 2: On quality assurance of work-based learning

Consider the information summarised in section 5.3 of this Training Module – on the criteria defined in the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (Council Recommendation of 15 March 2018 on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships).

- How can these criteria be considered in the context of the principles for quality assurance of work-based learning proposed in section 7.3.4?

- Can you suggest your own proposal of principles and processes for quality assurance of work-based learning – adapted for your country context?

9   GLOSSARY

Refer to the general Glossary of the ACQF: <u>ACQF. 2021. Thematic Brief 1. Concepts and definitions.</u>

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11 CASES AND EXAMPLES

11.1 Case 1: EQAVET – Indicators

Relates to section 5

Case: EQAVET – Indicative descriptors aiming to support EU member states and VET providers in implementing the EQAVET Framework

European Union: Council Recommendation of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience. Annex: EQAVET – Quality Assurance Framework for VET.

Source: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32020H1202(01)&from=EN

This annex proposes indicative descriptors aiming to support EU member states and VET providers, as they deem appropriate, when implementing the EQAVET Framework. They are structured by phases of the quality cycle: Planning – Implementation – Evaluation – Review. They can be applied to both initial and continuing VET and are applicable to all learning environments: school-based provision and work-based learning including apprenticeships schemes.

Quality criteria	Indicative descriptors at VET-system level	Indicative descriptors at VET-provider level
Planning reflects a strategic vision shared by the relevant stake holders and includes explicit goals/objectives, actions and indicators	Goals/objectives of VET are described for the medium and long terms, and linked to European and Sustainable Development Goals taking into account environmental sustainability considerations Social partners and all other relevant stakeholders participate in setting VET goals and objectives at the different levels Targets are established and monitored through specific indicators (success criteria) Mechanisms and procedures have been established to identify the training needs of the labour market and society	European, national and regional VET policy goals/objectives are reflected in the local targets set by the VET providers Explicit goals/objectives and targets are set and monitored, and programmes are designed to meet them Ongoing consultation with social partners and all other relevant stakeholders takes place to identify specific local/ individual needs Responsibilities in quality management and development have been explicitly allocated There is an early involvement of staff in planning, including with regard to quality development

Quality criteria	Indicative descriptors at VET-system level	Indicative descriptors at VET-provider level
	An information policy has been devised to ensure optimum disclosure of quality results/ outcomes subject to national/ regional data protection requirements Standards and guidelines for recognition, validation and certification of competences of individuals have been defined VET qualifications are described using learning outcomes Mechanisms are established for the quality assurance of the design, assessment and review of qualifications VET programmes are designed to allow flexible learning pathways and to respond quickly to changing labour market needs	Providers plan cooperative initiatives with relevant stakeholders The relevant stakeholders participate in the process of analysing local needs VET providers have an explicit and transparent quality assurance system in place Measures are designed to ensure compliance with data protection rules
Implementation plans are devised in consultation with stakeholders and include explicit principles	Implementation plans are established in cooperation with social partners, VET providers and other relevant stakeholders at the different levels Implementation plans include consideration of the resources required, the capacity of the users and the tools and guidelines needed for support Guidelines and standards have been devised for implementation at different levels. These guidelines and standards include assessment, validation and certification of qualifications Implementation plans include specific support towards the training of teachers and trainers, including for digital skills and environmental sustainability	Resources are appropriately internally aligned/assigned with a view to achieving the targets set in the implementation plans Relevant and inclusive partnerships, including those between teachers and trainers, are explicitly supported to implement the actions planned The strategic plan for staff competence development specifies the need for training for teachers and trainers Staff undertake regular training and develop cooperation with relevant external stakeholders to support capacity building and quality improvement, and to enhance performance

Quality criteria	Indicative descriptors at VET-system level	Indicative descriptors at VET-provider level
	VET providers' responsibilities in the implementation process are explicitly described and made transparent A national and/or regional quality assurance framework has been devised and includes guidelines and quality standards at VET-provider level to promote continuous improvement and self-regulation	VET providers' programmes enable learners to meet the expected learning outcomes and become involved in the learning process VET providers respond to the learning needs of individuals by using a learner-centred approach which enables learners to achieve the expected learning outcomes VET providers promote innovation in teaching and learning methods, in school and in the workplace, supported by the use of digital technologies and online-learning tools VET providers use valid, accurate and reliable methods to assess individuals' learning outcomes
Evaluation of outcomes and processes is regularly carried out and supported by measurement	A methodology for evaluation has been devised, covering internal and external evaluation Stakeholder involvement in the monitoring and evaluation process is agreed and clearly described The national/regional standards and processes for improving and assuring quality are relevant and proportionate to the needs of the sector Systems are subject to self-evaluation, internal and external review, as appropriate	Self-assessment/self-evaluation is periodically carried out under national and regional regulations/frameworks or at the initiative of VET providers, covering also the digital readiness and environmental sustainability of VET institutions Evaluation and review covers processes and results/outcomes of education and training including the assessment of learner satisfaction as well as staff performance and satisfaction
	Early warning systems are implemented Performance indicators are applied Relevant, regular and coherent data collection takes place, in order to measure success and identify areas for improvement. Appropriate data collection methodologies have been devised, e.g. questionnaires and indicators/metrics	Evaluation and review includes the collection and use of data, and adequate and effective mechanisms to involve internal and external stakeholders Early warning systems are implemented

Quality criteria	Indicative descriptors at VET-system level	Indicative descriptors at VET-provider level
Review	Procedures, mechanisms and instruments for undertaking reviews are defined and used to improve the quality of provision at all levels Processes are regularly reviewed and action plans for change devised. Systems are adjusted accordingly Information on the outcomes of evaluation is made publicly available	Learners' feedback is gathered on their individual learning experience and on the learning and teaching environment. Together with teachers', trainers' and all other relevant stakeholders' feedback this is used to inform further actions Information on the outcomes of the review is widely and publicly available Procedures on feedback and review are part of a strategic learning process in the organisation, support the development of high-quality provision, and improve opportunities for learners. Results/outcomes of the evaluation process are discussed with relevant stakeholders and appropriate action plans are put in place

11.2 Case 2: Work-Based Learning

Relates to section 5

Source: https://www.wbl-toolkit.eu/index.php?id=336

About the Work-Based Learning Toolkit:

The Work-Based Learning Toolkit provides a single platform for the promotion of identified products, approaches and tools in addition to confirming the reach, users, benefits and state-of-play of work-based learning in Europe. The Toolkit is one of the core outputs of the Network Work Based Learning and Apprenticeships known as NetWBL. More information: http://www.net-wbl.eu/

NetWBL was a network of 29 national agencies, each responsible for delivering decentralised actions of the Erasmus+ programme, which was coordinated by the German National Agency at the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB). Network operations were funded directly by the European Commission and centre on the identification and promotion of good or interesting practices and products relevant to the development and delivery of work-based learning.

The benefits of work-based learning are assured only by the quality of work-based learning.

This part of the WBL toolkit provides products that centre on:

- quality assurance within work-based learning through the use of internal and external tools and approaches;
- mechanisms and standards for ensuring the quality of work-based learning; and
- quality-assured cooperation and collaboration involving education and training providers and companies.

For work-based learning to be quality-assured, there should be a focus on specific learning objectives and predefined learning outcomes, in addition to a confirmed methodology for delivering learning in which work-based or workplace elements are clear and complementary. In terms of assuring the quality of the learning experience, it is also important that all stakeholders in the learning process (learners, teachers, tutors, trainers, mentors, managers) are sufficiently committed and well informed on goals, processes and mechanisms for learning delivery.

The relevance and appropriateness of the targeted knowledge, skills and competences also needs to be assured, including for those elements delivered through work-based or workplace activity. In this respect, it is important to align learning ambitions (activities, courses, programmes) with existing qualification standards, with standards often developed through collaboration between professional or sectoral bodies and social partners, to ensure that learning outcomes and qualifications meet the needs of the future labour market.

Quality assurance in work-based learning also relies on the use of internal evaluation and quality assurance tools with examples including self-assessment tools and techniques, in-company visits and measures that enable the monitoring and assessment of learning outcomes.

Beyond this, external quality assurance mechanisms focus on verifying the existence and use of appropriate quality assurance procedures, ensuring that education and training providers (including companies) each fulfil minimum requirements and have processes in place to enable the planning, delivery and assessment of learning, and learning outcomes. External quality assurance is conducted by external bodies, often competent authorities, who assess the quality of a provider (or company) against defined standards, or through the use of established accreditation procedures. In some cases, the evaluation of education and training delivery can form a formal part of the licensing or accreditation procedure tied to the delivery of education and training and/or the use of public funds for this purpose.