

# DEVELOPING THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (ACQF)



## GUIDE TO TEST REFERENCING TO ACQF

Focus on self-assessment

This is a brief guide for testing the ACQF referencing criteria. It is based on excerpts from the Training Module on referencing to the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) which is elaborated in 2022 within the project AU-EU Skills for Youth Employability/Skills Initiative for Africa, Technical Cooperation – Developing the African Continental Qualifications Framework (further: “the project”).

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## 1. CONTEXT

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

## 2. PURPOSE

This document presents a detailed approach to the referencing test. This document is based on selected excerpts from the ACQF [Training Module 3 on Referencing](#).

The purpose of testing the ACQF referencing criteria is to focus on self-assessment against the four main criteria and block governance procedures. It is not a complete referencing process.

## 3. OVERVIEW

### 3.1 What is referencing of the NQF?

As a meta- and referencing qualifications framework for the African continent, the ACQF aims at connecting the national (and regional) qualifications frameworks (NQF and RQF) of the community of African Union (AU) member states. This core function is based on the process of referencing national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) or systems to the ACQF, following agreed criteria and procedures and peer review by the member countries. The ACQF implementation unit and the Advisory Group, coordinate and assure the quality of the ACQF referencing process.

Referencing is a process aimed at comparing national qualifications frameworks or systems to the ACQF, thereby building on national ownership, collaboration between relevant institutions and stakeholders, provision of evidence for transparency of the analysis and reporting on all referencing criteria and procedures. At national levels, referencing contributes to self-assessment of the status of the national qualifications framework and system to identify areas for reform and improvement and to draw attention to the NQF among national policy institutions and stakeholders. At continental level and between countries, referencing to the ACQF of a significant and increasing number of national qualifications or systems leads to the creation of a common area of trusted qualifications and enables the transformative potential of the ACQF for the continent.

### 3.2 Benefits of referencing

#### 3.2.1 ACQF as common reference point for comparison and translation

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





### 3.2.2 *Strengthened learning outcomes approaches*

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

### 3.2.3 *Collaboration, transparency and deeper understanding of NQF/NQS*

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

National players can facilitate a self-directed review by benchmarking their own NQFs against the referencing criteria thus contributing to the growth and improvement process of their NQF/ NQS. The process will also support member countries to develop, consolidate or review their NQFs, as engagement in the process offers an opportunity for critical reflection and identification of areas for further development of the RQF/NQF/NQS.

### 3.2.4 *Referencing facilitates recognition of qualifications*

Referencing to ACQF and the resulting reports and comparable information on NQFs and qualifications contributes to facilitate recognition of qualifications between countries. The ACQF is not an instrument equipped to carry out recognition of qualifications, which is a policy domain under the responsibility of each country. To ascertain the indispensable coherence with existing international Conventions, the ACQF acknowledges and works in complementarity with other relevant policies and conventions related to recognition of qualifications. Information sharing and the robustness of the referencing documentation are major contributors to transparent and efficient recognition practices. Referencing facilitates recognition in different ways:

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

### 3.2.5 *Post-referencing display of ACQF levels on qualifications documents*

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



### 3.2.6 Information-sharing on qualifications

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

### 3.2.7 Internationalisation and referencing to other RQFs

Referencing will contribute to internationalisation of qualifications from African NQFs/ NQs and also strengthen international co-operation with other continents and regions. The ACQF is part of a global community of 17 RQF initiatives. As the ACQF develops and progresses, it can be referenced to other RQFs. This will enhance international collaboration initiatives and the comparability of the ACQF with other parts of the world, and eventually the global transparency of qualifications.

## 4. REFERENCING CRITERIA AND PROCESS

### 4.1 ACQF Referencing criteria

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

Table 1: ACQF referencing criteria

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





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

Governance procedures and follow-up
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Responsibilities and/or legal competence of relevant national bodies involved in the ACQF referencing process are clearly defined and published by the relevant competent authorities.</li><li>• The relevant national quality assurance bodies state their agreement with the referencing outcome and referencing report.</li><li>• People from other countries who are experienced in the field of qualifications are involved in certain aspects and steps of the referencing process. Their role is advisory and supports transparency, improvement and credibility. The national referencing committee informs the ACQF Governance Structure on the involved international experts.</li><li>• Competent national bodies certify the referencing to the ACQF and publish one comprehensive, evidence-based referencing report, which addresses all referencing criteria.</li><li>• The referencing outcome is published by the participating country and the ACQF network upon its final validation by the ACQF Governance Structure, on the dedicated ACQF website.</li><li>• Following the completion of referencing, all newly issued documents related to qualifications that are part of the national qualifications frameworks or systems (e.g.: certificates, diplomas, supplements) and qualifications registers issued by the competent national authorities will contain a clear reference to the appropriate ACQF level, based on national legislation and procedures.</li></ul>

### 4.1.1 ACQF quality assurance principles

Quality assurance is the subject of Criterion 4 of referencing to the ACQF. To clarify the interplay between quality assurance and referencing, the following principles are recommended:

- Quality assurance: the referencing to the ACQF of national qualifications frameworks or systems demonstrates the degree to which quality assurance of national qualifications:
  - o addresses the qualifications quality chain, from design of standards underpinning qualifications to learning, assessment, and certification;
  - o addresses the application of the learning outcomes approach;
  - o includes feedback instruments and processes supporting continuous quality improvement;
  - o addresses internal and external quality assurance, and the regular review of quality assurance agencies;
  - o is based on measurable objectives, standards, and guidelines for quality assurance;
  - o is supported by resources; and
  - o provides transparent information-sharing on results of evaluation.
  - o 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.



### 4.2 ACQF Referencing report

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

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

### 4.3 Minimum elements of the referencing report

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

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

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

- **Description** of the whole education and training system, including adult learning, literacy and basic skills, continuing training; pathways for learners; quality assurance; main institutions and stakeholders and their roles in the system; main legislative acts, regulatory texts.
- **The NQF:** goals, principles, legal and regulatory acts, levels and descriptors, governance, registers / databases of qualifications. Status of implementation. Main challenges and plans for further development.
- Brief **overview of the referencing process**, stakeholders' involvement, endorsement of the report by the national competence bodies, and follow-up measures.
- The **fundamental component** of the report: a chapter dedicated to demonstrate how the NQF / NQS meets the ACQF referencing criteria. Each referencing criterion is addressed separately. To avoid duplication and ensure coherence, the analysis in this chapter should build (refer to) on the chapters describing the education and training system and the NQF. The use of examples and references to sources contributes to the robustness and credibility of this chapter. Use annexes.
- **Sources and annexes:** relevant legislative-regulatory framework, guidelines and standards, important databases / registers.

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

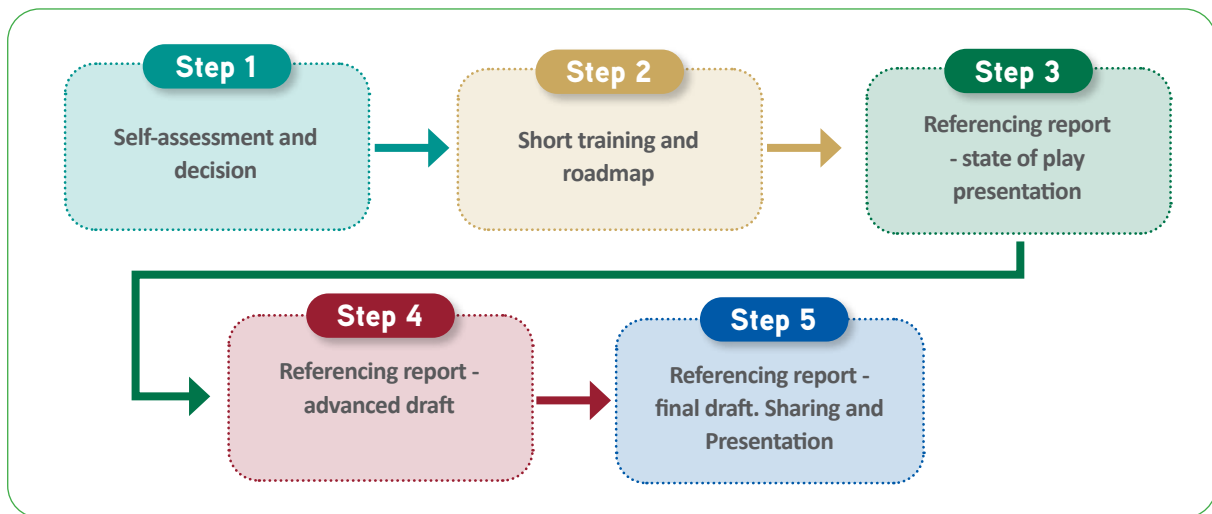




### 4.4 Referencing workflow: indicative overview

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

Figure 1: Indicative five-step referencing process - recommendation



#### Step 1: Self-assessment and decision to start process

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

#### Step 2: Short training and Roadmap for referencing

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

- A plan / roadmap for the referencing process is elaborated, with support of the ACQF implementation unit if needed, and agreed by all involved national bodies and stakeholders including the type of referencing approach (full or phased referencing).
- Training – delivered by ACQF experts' team: At least 1 day, according to a flexible schedule depending on the country team availability and readiness
- Training materials: Guideline 3 and related training module, templates and examples, video recording
- Practical exercises on the referencing criteria, adjusted to the country / NQF context



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## Focus on self-assessment

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

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

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

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

### Step 4: Referencing report – advanced draft

Capacity: indicative orientation

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

The country sends brief updates to the ACQF implementation setting. The national referencing team will manage the drafting process, decide on version control and coordination of roles and responsibilities.

### Step 5: Referencing report - final

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

#### Capacity: 1 coordinator and 1 drafter

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

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



## 5. FOCUS ON SELF-ASSESSMENT

### 5.1 Self-assessment exercise for ACQF Referencing Criterion 1

ACQF Referencing Criterion 1: There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the ACQF			
Self-assessment	Yes, fully: indicate evidence	Partly: indicate evidence	No: Comments
<b>Country descriptors</b>			
1. The country NQF is adopted and in application			
2. The country level descriptors (LDs) are clear and understood			
3. The LDs are agreed and used by the relevant stakeholders			
<b>Link with the ACQF</b>			
4. There is an agreed approach (method) to present the demonstrable link of the country LDs with that of the ACQF			
5. There is a demonstrable link between the NQF/ NQS levels and the ACQF level <i>Explanatory note: This is one of the outputs of the referencing process</i>			
<b>Main sources of information you can refer to:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- NQF legal document/ policy</li> <li>- The scope of the NQF/ NQS</li> <li>- The contexts in which the LDs are applied/ used</li> <li>- The features and descriptions of the level descriptors</li> <li>- Comparison to show the link between the national levels and ACQF levels (NB this is an output of the referencing process)</li> <li>- Studies/ research/ analyses</li> </ul>			

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

*Explanatory note:*

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



### GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR REFERENCING CRITERION 1

#### 1.1 National qualifications levels

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

1. The scope of the NQF/ NQS
2. The description of the level descriptors; contexts in which the LDs are applied/ used; features of the level descriptors
3. The agreement and application by specific sectors

Scope of country NQF/ NQS:

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

Country Level descriptors

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

What are some of the contexts in which the level descriptors are applied/ used in the NQF/ NQS? For example, to:

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

What are some of the language features of the level descriptors, for example are they:

- Based on learning outcomes
- Clear/ unambiguous
- Easily understood by stakeholders
- Free of jargon
- Not repetitive
- Written in positive terms





- Generic and not specific to a particular sector
- Inclusive of all learner groups
- Applied in practice
- Developmental in that each successive level implies a higher level of complexity of learning
- The key basis for pegging/ locating/ classifying a qualification at a particular NQF level

Describe how the following sectors agree and use the level descriptors

- Higher Education
- General/ primary and secondary education
- Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)
- Other sectors included in the NQF

### 1.2 Link between the LDs of the ACQF and the national LDs

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

1. Agreed approach
2. Comparison to show the link between the levels

Agreement and proposed approach:

- Has referencing to the ACQF LDs been discussed with stakeholders?
- Approach to comparison: Structural, conceptual and technical (semantic/ linguistic) to present the link between the national level descriptors/ qualifications levels and the ACQF level descriptors?

Structural: This requires a description of the differences in the NQF/NQS and the ACQF LDs in terms of:

- Purpose
- Number of levels (similarities, differences)
- Domains and sub-domains of level descriptors (similarities and differences)

Technical (semantic/ linguistic): This requires an analysis of the actual text of the level descriptors, and requires a Level-to-level comparison highlighting the similarities of terms (concepts) between the NQF/ NQS levels and the ACQF levels. Countries may highlight in different manners: a) perfect fit of terms; b) partial fit of terms; c) important differences. This approach provides a clear comparative demonstration. Many countries use a table format to show the comparison.

Interpreting the results of the comparison. The interpretation summarises the main findings from the comparison (table), and provides comments on the meaning and rationale of the similarities and differences.



### Observations:

As happens with any other RQF, the ACQF level descriptors are more generic than the level descriptors of most NQFs, therefore logically the comparison will not result in a perfect match.

The comparison should be transparent, clear and show how NQF level descriptors express the national objectives, system characteristics and context.

The comparison between ACQF and NQF level descriptors is an essential element for referencing of NQF levels and ACQF levels. Unlike NQF levels, ACQF levels are not attached to qualifications types, since they are conceived as “translation devices”.

One of the outcomes of the comparison of referencing criterion 1, can be a decision of the NQF institutions to undertake a review of the national level descriptors at an adequate moment.

### Actual comparison to show the links

- Underlying research/ text/ evidence/ sources to support the referencing position of the NQF/ NQS to the ACQF, supported by a diagram / table format showing the highlighted similarities and differences.



### 5.2 Self-assessment exercise for ACQF Referencing Criterion 2

ACQF Referencing Criterion 2: The national qualifications frameworks or systems are based on learning outcomes (LO) principles and related to arrangements for recognition of prior learning (including non-formal and informal) and, where appropriate, to credit systems			
Self-assessment	Yes, fully: indicate evidence	Partly: indicate evidence	No: Comments
<b>Learning outcomes (LOs)</b>			
1. The LO approach is enabled by legislation			
2. The LO approach is agreed and applied in all sub-sectors			
3. The key features of the LO approach are clear and understood			
4. There are links between learning outcomes and classification of qualifications levels			
<b>Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)</b>			
5. RPL is related to the NQF			
6. RPL is defined and agreed at policy level			
7. Assessment of LOs apply to formal, non-formal and informal learning			
8. RPL is applied in all sub-sectors of education and training			
<b>Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)</b>			
9. CAT is related to the NQF			
10. CAT is defined and agreed at policy level			
11. CAT is applied in all sub-sectors			
<b>Studies/ research/ analyses</b>			
12. There are studies/ research/ analyses to support this referencing criterion			
<b>Main sources of information you can refer to:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Learning outcomes (LOs): legislation, agreement, application, features, platforms, supporting tools</li> <li>- RPL: legislation, application, assessment</li> <li>- CAT: legislation and application</li> <li>- Studies/ research/ analyses</li> </ul>			

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

*Explanatory note:*

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



## GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR REFERENCING CRITERION 2

### 2.1 Learning outcomes approach

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

1. Legislation
2. Agreement and application
3. Features of the LO approach
4. Links between learning outcomes and qualifications levels

#### **Legislation:**

- Is the learning outcomes (LO) approach included in relevant legislation?
- Is the LO approach enabled by relevant legislation, measures and resources?

#### **Agreement and application**

Is the LO approach specific to the particular needs of each sub-sector of education and training? Is it:

- agreed in all or some sub-sectors? Which ones?
- agreed in all or some qualifications? Which ones?
- applied in all or some sub-sectors? Which ones?
- being practised in all or some qualifications? Which ones?

#### **Features of the LO approach in the country and application of assessment for formal, non-formal and informal learning, for example are they linked to:**

- design and description of qualifications in the country
- credits for qualifications
- professional standards
- the curriculum and subjects
- assessment
- comparison of qualifications achieved in other countries
- recognition of non-formal and informal learning

How does the learning outcomes approach:

- Promote lifelong learning
- Approximate with labour market, industry needs, societal needs
- Facilitate mobility (learners and labour)







How is the learning outcomes approach supported by:

- technical and methodological tools, handbooks, web resources, debates, training
- research (gaps, challenges, new developments and approaches)
- involvement of labour market players/ sector councils

### **Links between learning outcomes and classification of qualifications levels**

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

## **2.2 Recognition of prior learning**

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

1. Legislation
2. Assessment
3. Application

### **Legislation**

- How is the recognition of non-formal and informal learning related to the NQF/NQS?
- Is the recognition of non-formal and informal learning defined and agreed at policy level? Is it enabled by legislation / resources?

### **Assessment**

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

### **Application**

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



### 2.3 Credit accumulation and transfer

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

1. Legislation
2. Application

#### Legislation

- Does the country have a national credit accumulation and transfer system? Is it enabled by legislation, and resources?
- How is the credit accumulation and transfer system related to the NQF/NQS?
- How is the credit accumulation and transfer system related to the learning outcomes approach?

#### Application

- Is the national credit accumulation and transfer system being implemented in all sectors? Which sectors are excluded?

### 5.3 Self-assessment exercise for ACQF Referencing Criterion 3

ACQF Referencing Criterion 3: There are transparent processes and procedures for including qualifications in the NQF or for describing the place of qualifications in the NQS and information on qualifications is accessible, trustworthy and verifiable in a national register(s) of qualifications			
Self-assessment	Yes, fully: indicate evidence	Partly: indicate evidence	No: Comments
<b>Classification of qualification levels</b>			
1. The NQF provides for all levels and types of qualifications			
2. Existing legislation defines the roles, principles and responsibilities for developing, approving, classifying (levelling) and awarding qualifications			
3. Processes for classifying a qualification at a particular NQF level are agreed, transparent and applied consistently			
4. Classifying a qualification in the NQF is based on transparent interactions of the relevant bodies (e.g. in charge of QA, sectoral committees, certification, NQF decision making bodies)			
5. Classification of qualifications in the NQF is quality-assured			

ACQF Referencing Criterion 3: There are transparent processes and procedures for including qualifications in the NQF or for describing the place of qualifications in the NQS and information on qualifications is accessible, trustworthy and verifiable in a national register(s) of qualifications			
Self-assessment	Yes, fully: indicate evidence	Partly: indicate evidence	No: Comments
<b>Managing qualifications information</b>			
6. There is legislation regarding the management of qualifications information			
7. Database(s) of qualifications are up-to-date, accessible and transparent for users. There is a register or catalogue of qualifications online			
<b>Studies/ research/ analyses</b>			
8. There are studies/ research/ analyses to support this criterion			
<p><b>Main sources of information you can refer to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Structure and scope of the NQF</li> <li>- NQF decision making regarding classification (Legislation, process, institutional arrangements, QA of the classification)</li> <li>- Verifiable, national registers of qualifications information (legislation, description of registers, responsible authorities)</li> <li>- Studies/ research/ analyses</li> </ul>			

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

*Explanatory note:*

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



### GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR REFERENCING CRITERION 3

#### 3.1 Classification of qualification levels

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

1. Sectors, levels and types covered by the NQF/ NQS
2. Legislation
3. Process
4. Institutional arrangements
5. Quality assurance of the classification

#### Sectors, levels and types covered by the NQF/ NQS

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

#### Legislation

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

#### Process

Describe the process for classifying a qualification at a particular NQF Level or placing a qualification in the NQS. Is it:

- Set out in legislation?
- Agreed by all sectors/ stakeholders?
- Transparent?
- Applied?
- Based on a comparison of the level descriptors of the NQF with the learning outcomes of the qualification?

#### *Is the process applied consistently for:*

- all levels of qualifications,
- all types of qualifications (micro-credentials, part-qualifications, qualifications obtained through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), qualifications from other countries)





### **Institutional arrangements/interactions**

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

### **Quality assurance of the classification**

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

## **3.2 Verifiable, national registers of qualifications**

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

1. Legislation
2. Description of registers
3. Responsible authorities

### **Legislation**

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

### **Description of registers of qualifications**

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

### **Responsible authorities**

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



### 5.4 Self-assessment exercise for ACQF Referencing Criterion 4

ACQF Referencing Criterion 4			
The national quality assurance system for education and training refers to the national qualifications framework or system and is consistent with the principles of quality assurance of the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF)			
Self-assessment	Yes, fully: indicate evidence	Partly: indicate evidence	No: Comments
<b>National Quality Assurance (QA)</b>			
1. The national QA systems are operational and the various related institutions act in a co-ordinated and linked manner			
2. Labour market and society stakeholders are involved in relevant phases / aspects of quality assurance of qualifications			
3. The development, approval and award of qualifications are quality-assured and use explicit and transparent procedures and arrangements			
4. Quality assurance procedures refer to context, inputs, process and output dimensions while giving special emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes			
5. Quality assurance of learning outcomes refers to: planning; implementing; reviewing; feedback			
6. Quality assurance measures include qualification requirements for teachers/ trainers, assessors; accreditation; and external evaluation of providers of programmes			
<b>Compatibility with ACQF</b>			
7. The national QA framework (legislation, institutions, policy) is compatible with the QA guidelines of the ACQF			
<b>Studies/ research/ analyses</b>			
8. There are studies/ research/ analyses to support this referencing criterion			
<b>Main sources of information you can refer to:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- National QA systems (QA relationships, QA arrangements)</li> <li>- Compatibility with ACQF QA guidelines</li> <li>- Studies/ research/ analyses</li> </ul>			

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

Explanatory note:

- o The guiding questions serve the purpose of guiding the action plan.





### GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR REFERENCING CRITERION 4

#### 4.1 National QA systems

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

1. QA relationships
2. QA arrangements

##### QA relationships

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

##### QA arrangements

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

#### 4.2 Compatibility with the ACQF QA guidelines

1. Describe how the national QA systems are compatible with the quality assurance (QA) principles of the ACQF listed in chapter 4.1.1.



### 5.5 Self-assessment exercise for ACQF governance procedures and follow-up

<b>ACQF governance procedures and follow-up:</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Responsibilities and/or legal competence of relevant national bodies involved in the ACQF referencing process are determined and published by the relevant competent authorities</li> <li>- The relevant national QA bodies state their agreement with the referencing outcome and referencing report.</li> <li>- People from other countries who are experienced in the field of qualifications are involved in certain aspects and steps of the referencing process. Their role is advisory and supports transparency, improvement and credibility. The national referencing committee informs the ACQF Governance Structure on the involved international experts.</li> <li>- Competent national bodies certify the referencing to the ACQF and publish one comprehensive, evidence-based referencing report, which addresses all referencing criteria.</li> <li>- The referencing outcome is published by the participating country and the ACQF network upon its final validation by the ACQF Governance Structure, on the dedicated ACQF website.</li> <li>- Following the completion of referencing, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and other documents issued by competent authorities will contain a clear reference to the ACQF level.</li> </ul>			
Self-assessment	Yes, fully: indicate evidence	Partly: indicate evidence	No: Comments
<b>National Referencing Team</b>			
1. The bodies that will be part of the National Referencing Team (NRT), and their responsibilities, have been determined and finalised			
2. The national referencing team has resources and a work plan for ACQF-related activities			
<b>Communication about the ACQF and referencing</b>			
3. All the relevant national bodies and stakeholders been informed about the decision to reference to the ACQF			
4. The communication (about the ACQF and referencing to the ACQF) with the broader public and stakeholders is clear, prepared and organised			
<b>Referencing tasks, report and post-referencing</b>			
5. A state-of play presentation on the country's NQF/ NQS has been prepared			
6. The roadmap (for referencing to the ACQF) for presentation to the ACQF Governance Structure is clear, prepared and organised			
7. The referencing roadmap ensures quality and peer reviews of the process and report			
8. There are clear plans for including ACQF levels on qualifications awards (post-endorsement by the ACQF)			
<b>Main sources of information you can refer to:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- National Referencing Team/ Committee (establishment, functioning)</li> <li>- Referencing milestones have been determined</li> <li>- Robustness, quality and peer reviews</li> <li>- Visibility of ACQF levels on qualifications documents</li> <li>- Studies/ research/ analyses</li> </ul>			





**Indicative: Roadmap – prepare to meet the Governance procedures and follow-up, based on the results of self-assessment**

No	Action	By whom	Timeframe
1			
2			
3			

*Explanatory note:*

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

## GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR GOVERNANCE PROCEDURES AND FOLLOW-UP

### 5.1 National Referencing Team

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

#### Establishing the National Referencing Team

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

#### Communication about the ACQF and referencing

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

#### Referencing tasks, report and post-referencing

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



## 6. ACTIVITIES IN TESTING AND TIMELINE

### 6.1 Purpose of testing

The purpose of testing the ACQF referencing criteria is to:

- focus on self-assessment against the 4 main criteria and block governance procedures

The testing phase:

- is not intended for drafting the detailed report
- does not involve large numbers of participants
- is not a complete referencing process

### 6.2 Proposed approach to testing referencing and workflow

Testing is a technical activity to test, raise awareness and collect feedback:

- The time allocated for testing is from mid-September to mid November 2022
- Scope: Three countries are interested in participating Cape Verde, Kenya and Zimbabwe.
- The methodological support is presented in Guideline 3 + [Training Module 3](#) + [PPT](#).
- The ACQF team works directly with, and guides, the country teams
- The workflow of the proposed testing is shown below

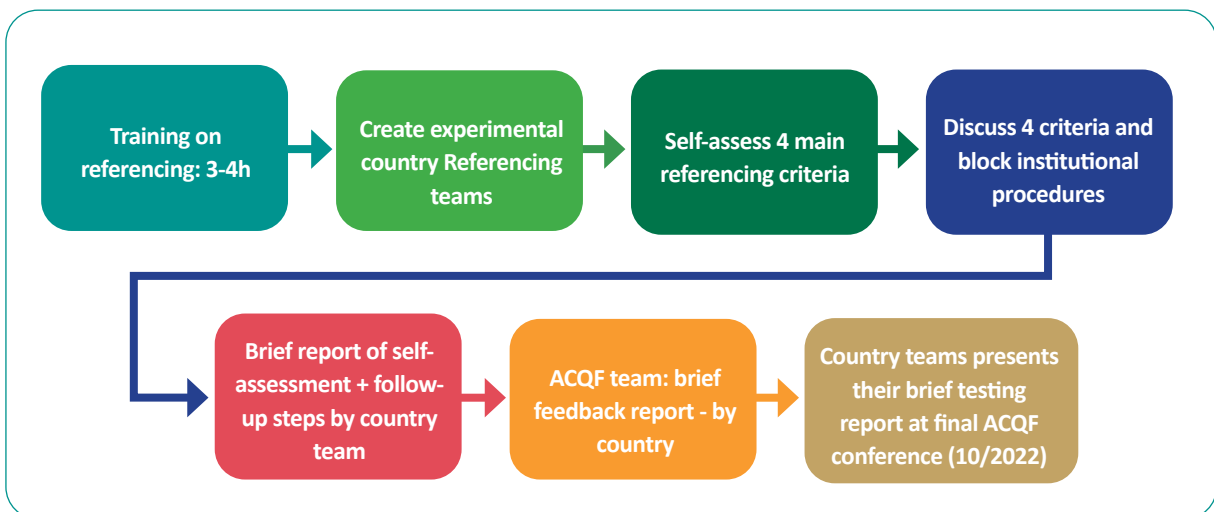


Figure 2: workflow of proposed testing of referencing to ACQF (focused on self-assessment)

Source: Castel-Branco, E. ACQF AG meeting, May 2022





### 6.3 Main activities - 3 months duration

- Step 1:
  - o Sending of Training Module 3 and Training PPT to country representative to get acquainted
  - o Invitation to country participants
  - o Training with ACQF team 3-4 h.
  - o Trainers: Coleen Jaftha, Eduarda Castel-Branco. Complementary trainers: Kaylash Allgoo, Eusebius Mukhwana
- Step 2: Creation of experimental national referencing teams (2-4 persons with relevant roles in the NQF / NQS process)
- Step 3: Self-assessment on the 4 main referencing criteria: 2 half-days (country referencing team)
- Step 4: Discuss the 4 criteria + institutional procedures
- Step 5: Prepare a brief report of main findings: 2 pages per criterion + 2 pages of follow-up steps
- Step 6: ACQF Team produces a brief feedback report by country, and confirms completion of the testing of ACQF referencing
- Step 7: National teams present their brief reports of testing at final ACQF AG meeting (Nov 2022)

An incentive: the successful completion of the testing counts for future ACQF referencing



### 7. MAIN CHALLENGES IN REFERENCING TO ACQF

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

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

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

Table 3: Challenges to referencing

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

## LIST OF MAIN ACRONYMS

AU	African Union
LO	Learning outcomes
LD	Level descriptors
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NQS	National Qualifications System
QA	Quality Assurance

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