

DEVELOPING THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (ACQF)

**TRAINING MODULE FIVE** **05**

**QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF ACQF**

ACQF African Union THE AFRICA-EU PARTNERSHIP LE PARTENARIAT AFRIQUE-UE

# Session 24: National qualifications frameworks and Quality Assurance

National Qualifications Frameworks and linkages to quality assurance (both internal and external)

NQF's strength is dependent on the linkages to quality assurance at different levels.

Quality Assurance is essential for trust in qualifications

Speaker: Andrea Bateman

# Main topics

1. Introduction, context

2. Quality assurance: multi-level definitions

3. QA at regional-international level

4. National level

4A. QA of qualifications development and levelling to NQF

4B. National level: provision of qualifications

4C: External QA

4D. Provider level: internal QA

4E. Registers of qualifications and QA

5. Final notes

# Learn more: ACQF Training modules and guidelines

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**TRAINING MODULE TEN** **10**

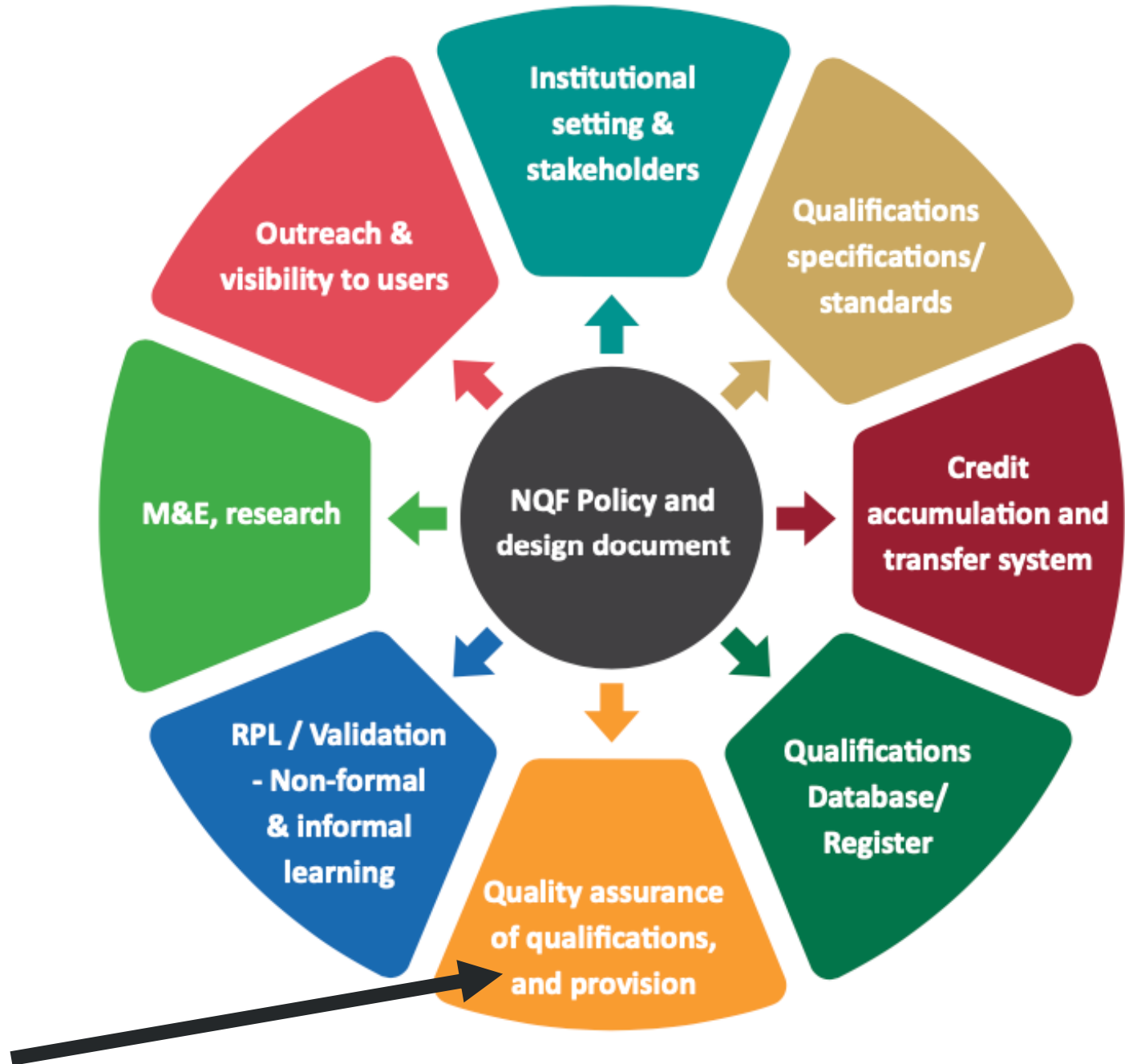
**QUALIFICATIONS AND NQFS (OR NQSS): A SYSTEMIC VIEW**

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01

**Introduction, context**

# Quality assurance in context of a NQS



The strength of an NQF is derived by its linkages and strategies deployed.

- **National (and international) initiatives**, e.g., lifelong learning, facilitation of learning pathways, validation and recognition of all learning (formal, non-formal, informal), emerging skills and jobs, youth employment, technology and innovation...
- **Governance: strategies, role and functions, stakeholders, visibility**
- **Quality assurance arrangements:**
  - Quality assurance of qualifications (utilising qualification quality standards, policies, guidelines, stakeholders' involvement)
  - Quality assurance of providers and their programmes leading to a qualification (utilising quality standards, policies, guidelines)
  - Registers/databases of qualifications approved onto the NQF

# Recalling...

## What is a qualifications system?

- A national **qualifications system** includes all aspects of a country's activity that result in the recognition of learning. These systems include the means of developing and operationalising national or regional policy on qualifications, institutional arrangements, **quality assurance** processes, assessment and awarding processes, skills recognition and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. Qualifications systems may be more or less integrated and coherent. One feature of a qualifications system may be an **explicit framework of qualifications**.
- Source: OECD 2006 p. 22

# Recalling... What is a qualification?

**Means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent authority determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards.**

Source: EQF 2017

Therefore a qualification is a specification of learning outcomes that is approved by an authority (accrediting body) as meeting the requirements of the NQF.



# Qualification vs Programmes

- A qualification **is not** the same as an education-training programme. The latter is developed by a provider to meet the requirements of the qualification.

*A programme: A coherent set or sequence of educational activities designed and organised to achieve pre-determined learning objectives or accomplish a specific set of educational tasks over a sustained period. Within an education programme, educational activities may also be grouped into sub-components variously described in national contexts as 'courses', 'modules', 'units' and/or 'subjects'. A programme may have major components not normally characterised as courses, units or modules – for example, playbased activities, periods of work experience, research projects and the preparation of dissertations. (Source <http://uis.unesco.org/>)*

# 02

**Quality assurance:  
multi-level definitions**

# 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.**
-

# **Asia-Pacific, UNESCO: Guideline for the quality assurance of technical vocational education and training**

- 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’.

# QA: Different definitions

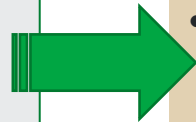
UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education takes into account three levels of quality assurance: **systemic, providers and programmes**.

➤ 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).

- 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’.

# Quality assurance in TVET: wider definition - as 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).

# Quality assurance: definitions

- Quality assurance includes the **processes and procedures for ensuring that qualifications, assessment and programme delivery meet certain standards.**

Source: Tuck 2007

# 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).

The system level

The provider level

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.



03

**Quality assurance at  
regional-international level**

# Quality assurance – at different levels

Regional -  
international level

National level

Regional  
qualifications  
framework

Standards and  
Guidelines QA

Conventions

System-policy  
level

Internal  
provider,  
education  
institution  
level

QA  
agency

External and internal QA

## Regional / international level:

1. RQF: referencing criteria; QA guidelines
2. Agreed standards and guidelines (TVET, HE, apprenticeships, other sub-sectors)
3. Agreements and conventions

## National level (system-policy)

1. Qualification design, e.g. approval processes of qualification specifications
2. Provision of the qualification, e.g. approval of providers and approval to provide a programme leading to a qualification on the NQF
3. Monitoring and review of provider provision, process and outcomes, including student learning and employment outcomes, and student and user satisfaction levels
4. Control, supervision or monitoring of assessment outcomes, certification and graduation procedures
5. System wide evaluations of quality, including evaluations by external agencies and reviews of stakeholder engagement and implementation of related initiatives
6. Provision of public information, e.g. databases/registers of qualifications that meet the requirements of the NQF, registers of approved providers of NQF qualifications, performance of providers such as programme and component completions, student and employer satisfaction, system wider evaluations.

Oversight by a responsible body, e.g. QA agency/ies

## Provider, education institution level:

- ✓ Internal quality assurance (in relationship to external QA)

# Regional Qualifications Framework

- A broad structure of levels of learning outcomes that is agreed by countries in a geographical region. A means of enabling one national framework of qualifications to relate to another and, subsequently, for a qualification in one country to be compared to a qualification from another country.

ASEAN QRF: [ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework, A Practical Guide and All you Need to Know. Page 33.](#)

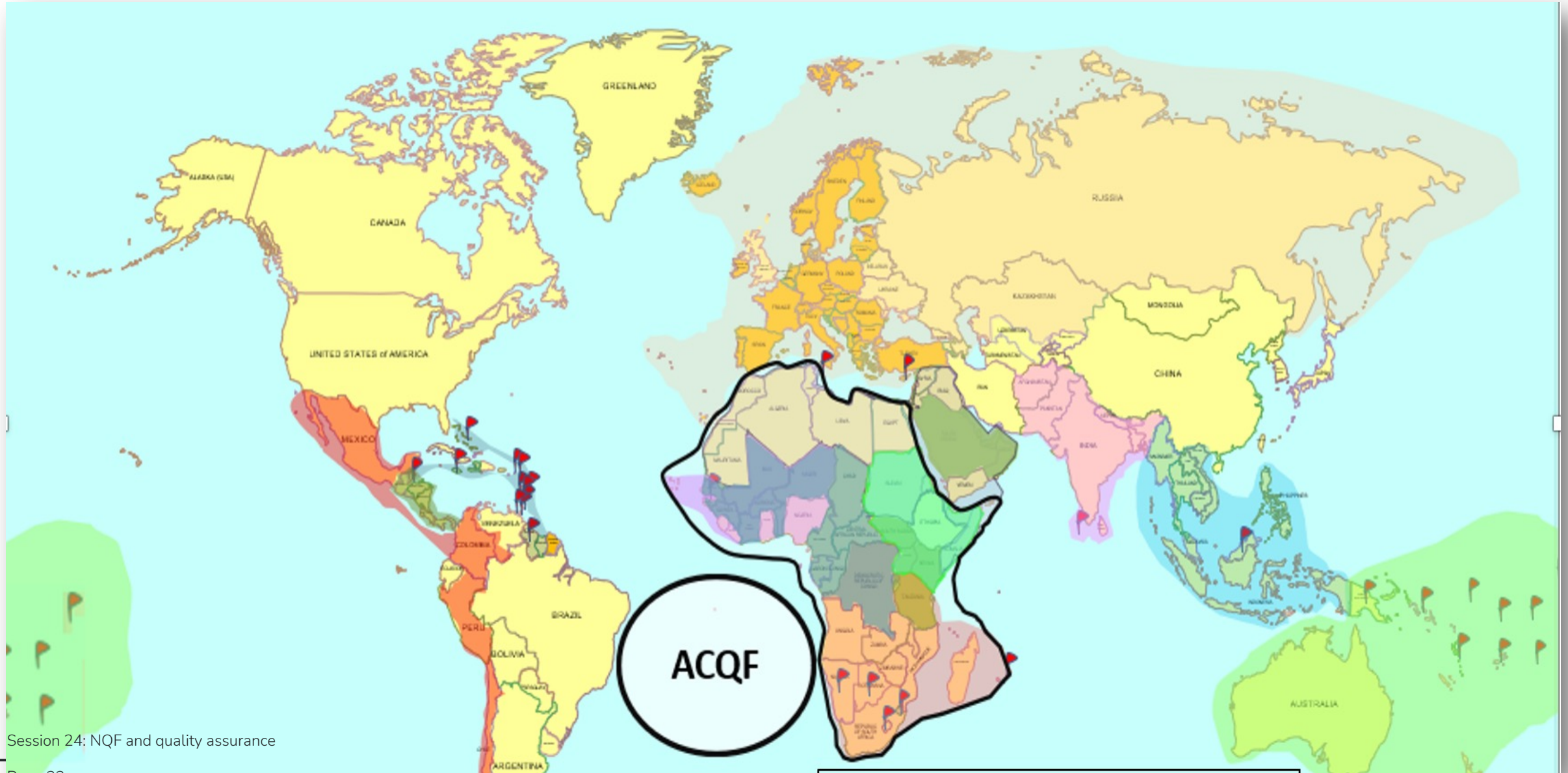
- Regional Qualifications Framework: consists of a set of agreed principles, practices, procedures and standardised terminology intended to ensure effective comparability of qualifications and credits across countries in a region

Tuck R. 2007. An Introductory Guide to NQF

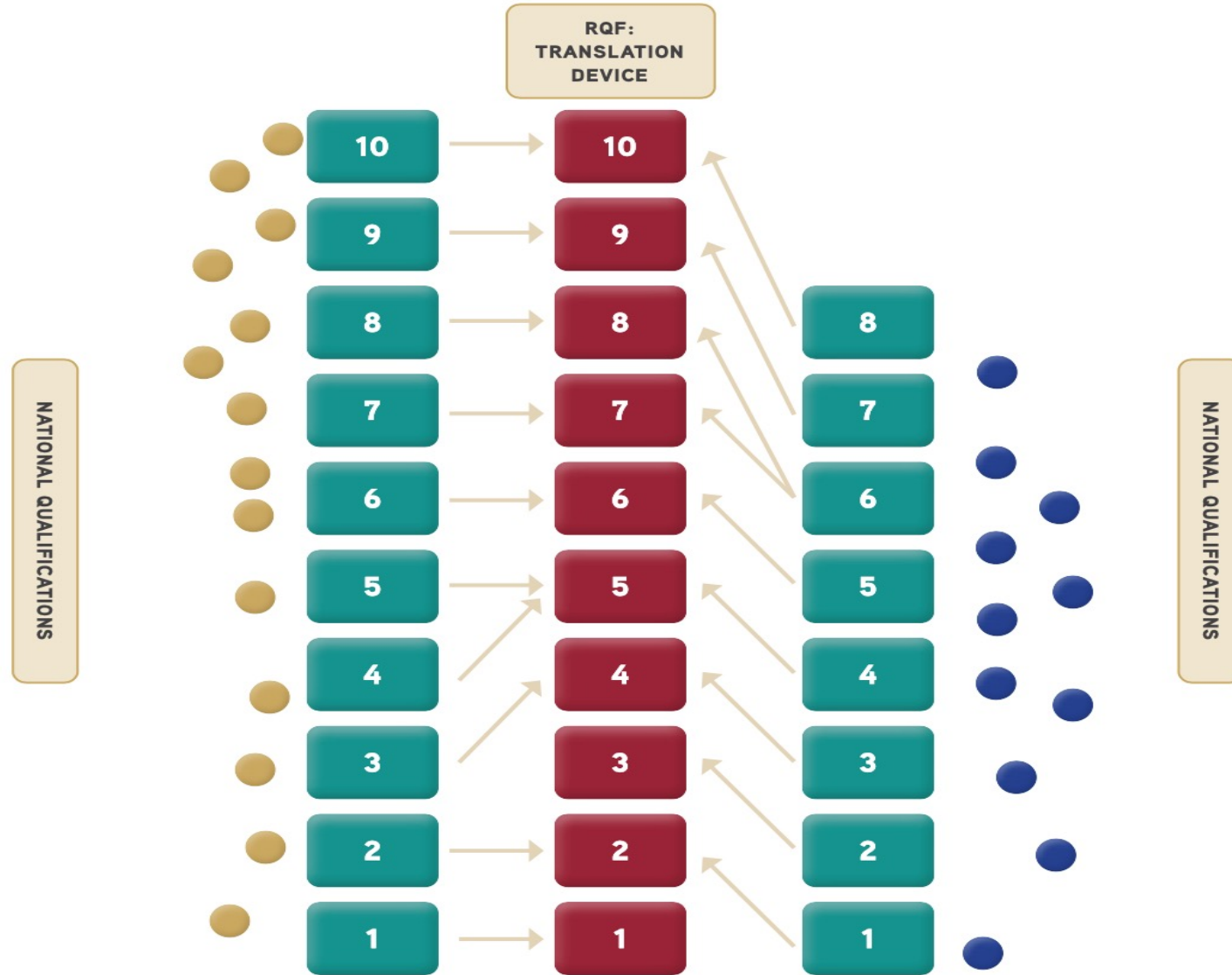
# RQF in the world: 15 initiatives (+ EQF)

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

# ACQF – a very large Regional qualifications framework



# Regional Qualifications Framework: connecting NQFs



# Regional Quality assurance frameworks

- Various regional quality assurance frameworks:
  - ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework
  - European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (EQAVET) -
  - Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area ([ESG – 2015](#))
  - European Qualifications Framework for LLL (referencing criterion 5)
  - European Framework for quality and effective apprenticeships (EFQEA)
  - Guidelines for the quality assurance of TVET qualifications in Asia-Pacific Region
  - Southern African Development Community (SADC)
  - African Standards and Guidelines for QA in Higher Education (ASG-QA)
  - ACQF (referencing criterion 4; Guideline 5 on QA)

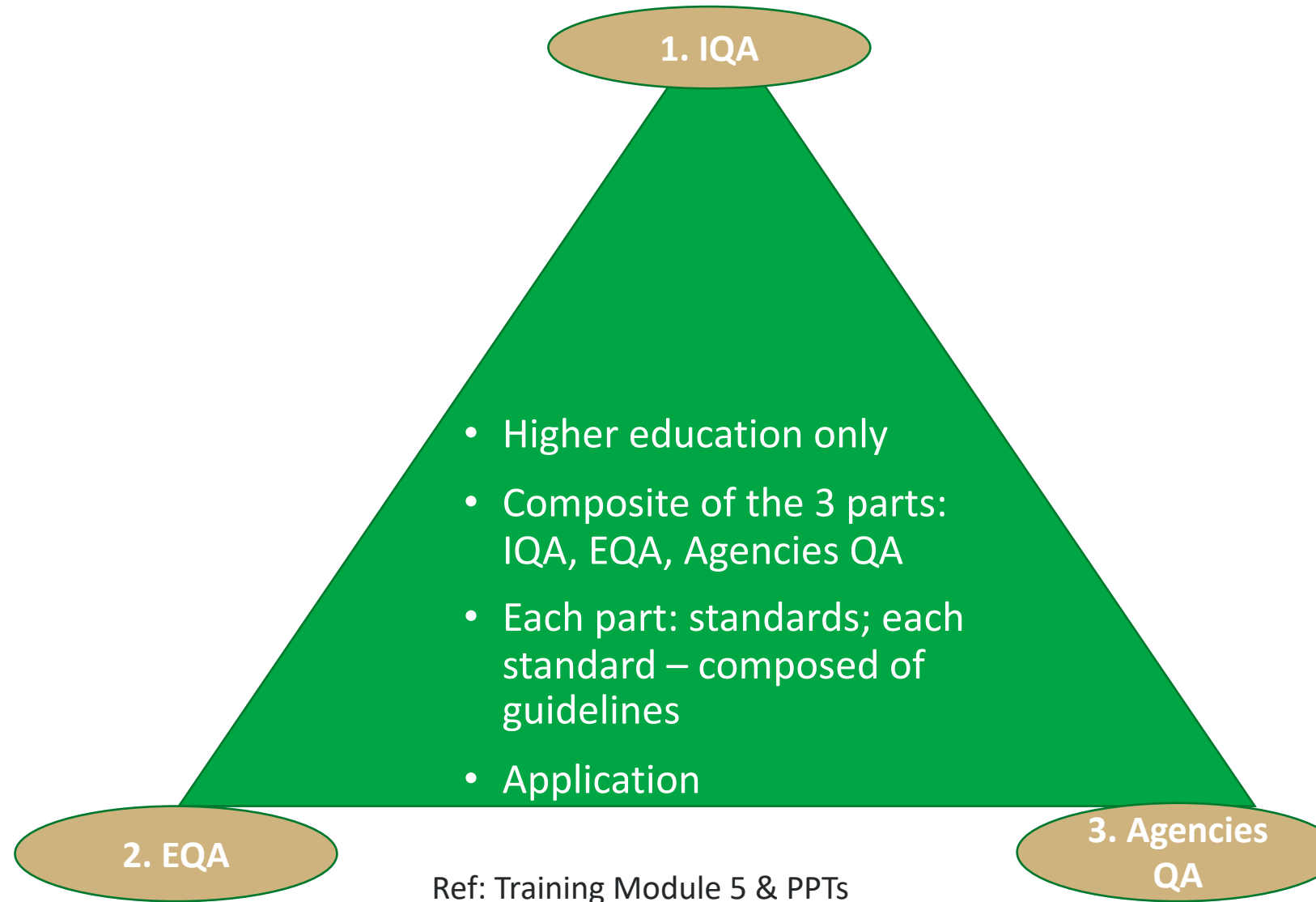


# Snapshot – Quality Assurance in AU policies

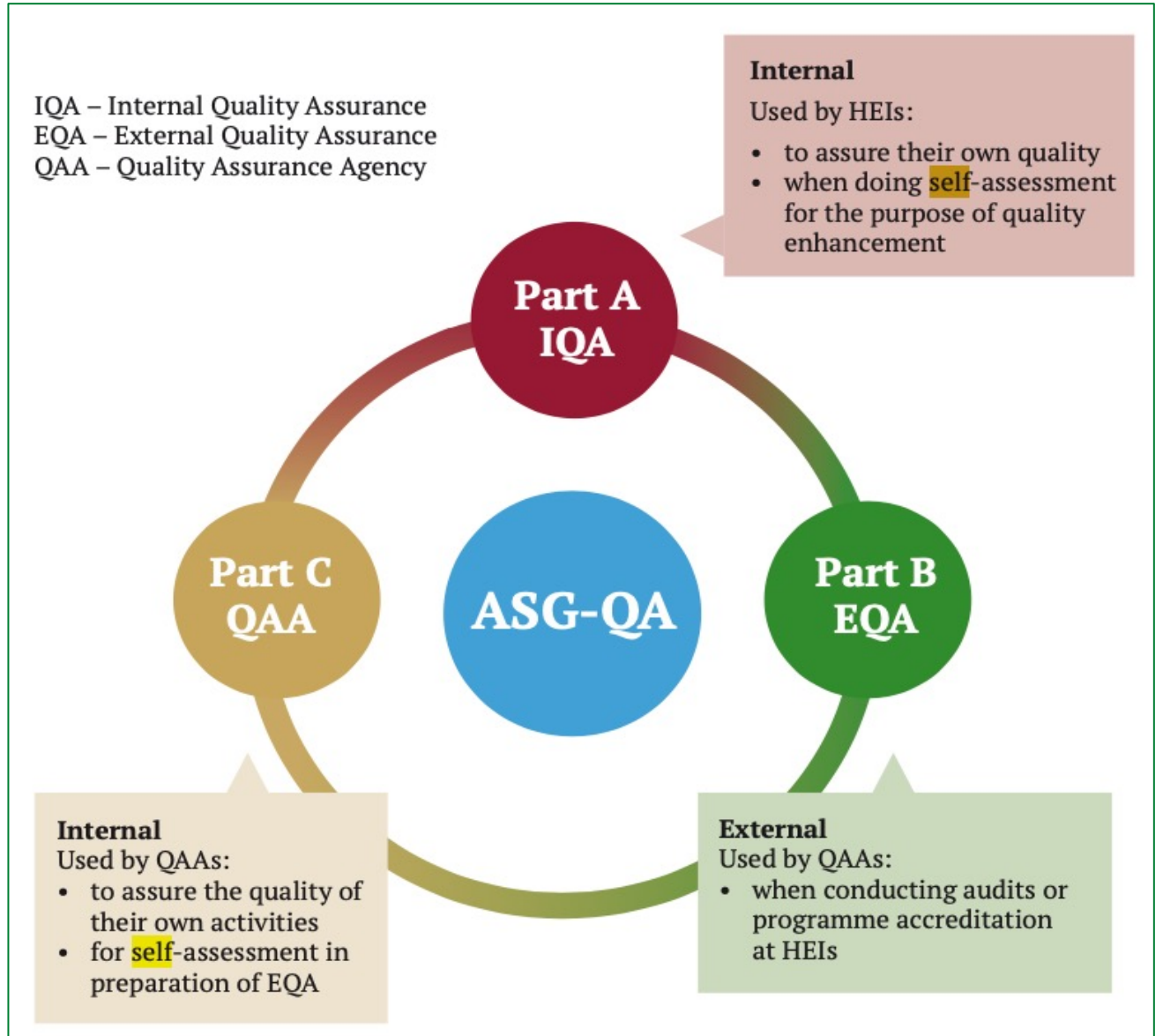
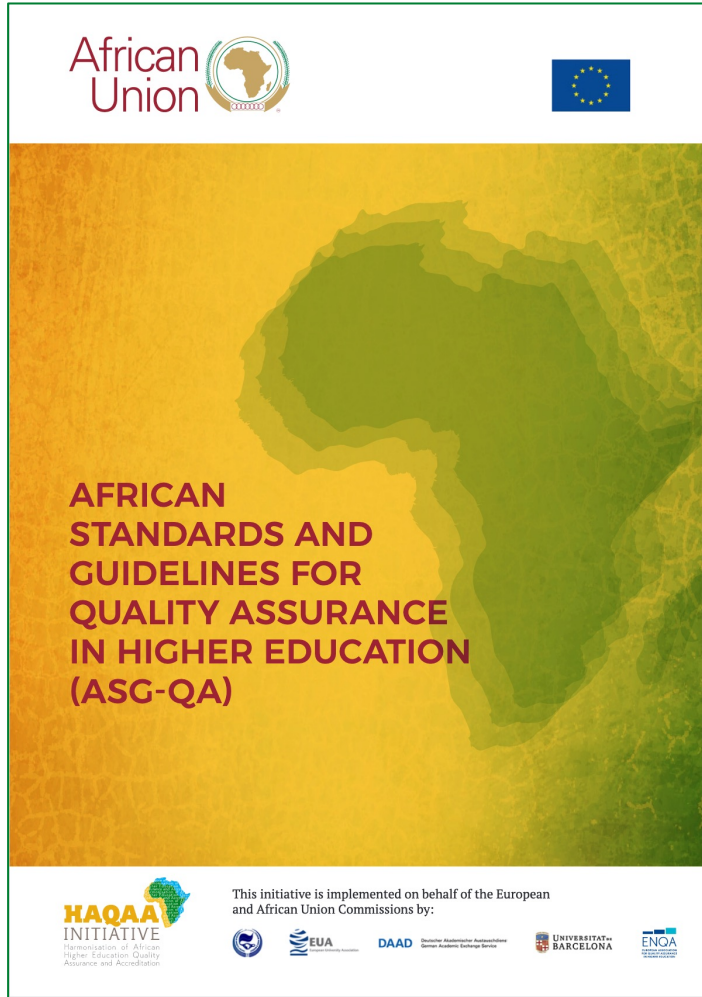
African Standards and Guidelines for QA (ASG-QA)

## In strategies and plans:

- CESA-25
- Plan of Action for the African Decade for Technical Professional Entrepreneurial Training and Youth



# ASG-QA



# QA in 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 | <b>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).</b>  |

At heart  
of  
Criterion  
4

- 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.
-

# ACQF Quality assurance in the context of ACQF

- Based on internationally accepted concepts and practice
- Complementing / enhancing national and regional systems (standards and guidelines) – not replacing them
- Consistent with African Union policies, e.g. CESA-16 and ASG-QA
- Address qualifications at all levels and modalities of learning
- Dialogue between quality assurance systems and qualifications frameworks
- Quality assurance of referencing process to ACQF
  - Streamlined and efficient procedures, analysis, stakeholders' dialogue, peer review
  - Referencing: opportunity for self-evaluation
  - Highlight the complementarity between referencing criteria
- Quality assurance of outcomes – qualifications

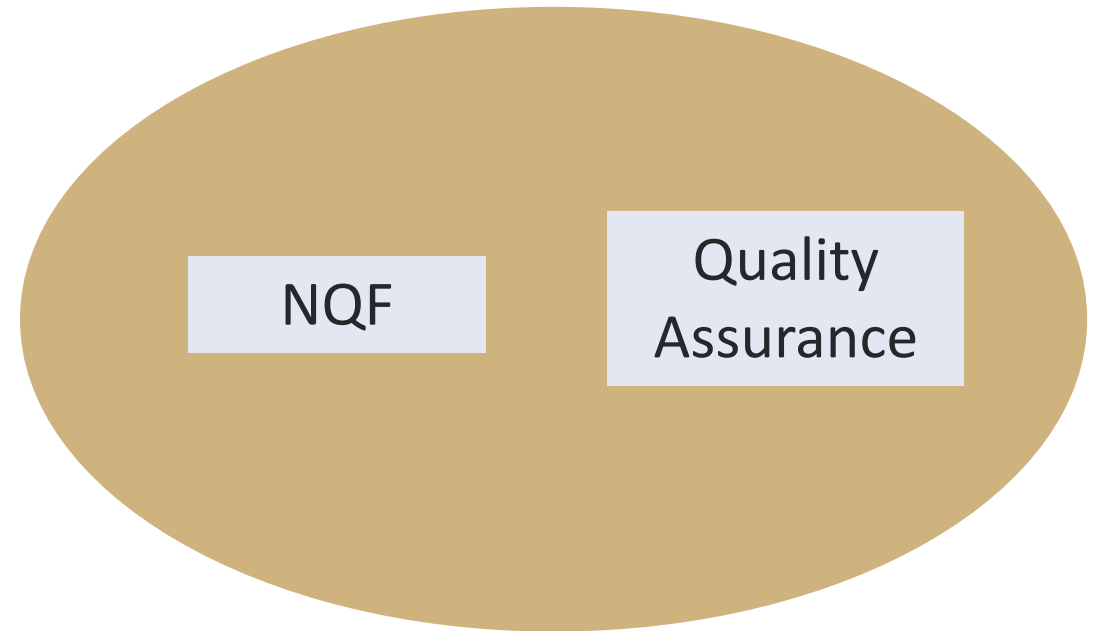
04

**Quality assurance at  
national level**

# ACQF Relationship NQF-Quality assurance



Some countries consider the national qualifications framework as incorporating the quality assurance arrangements

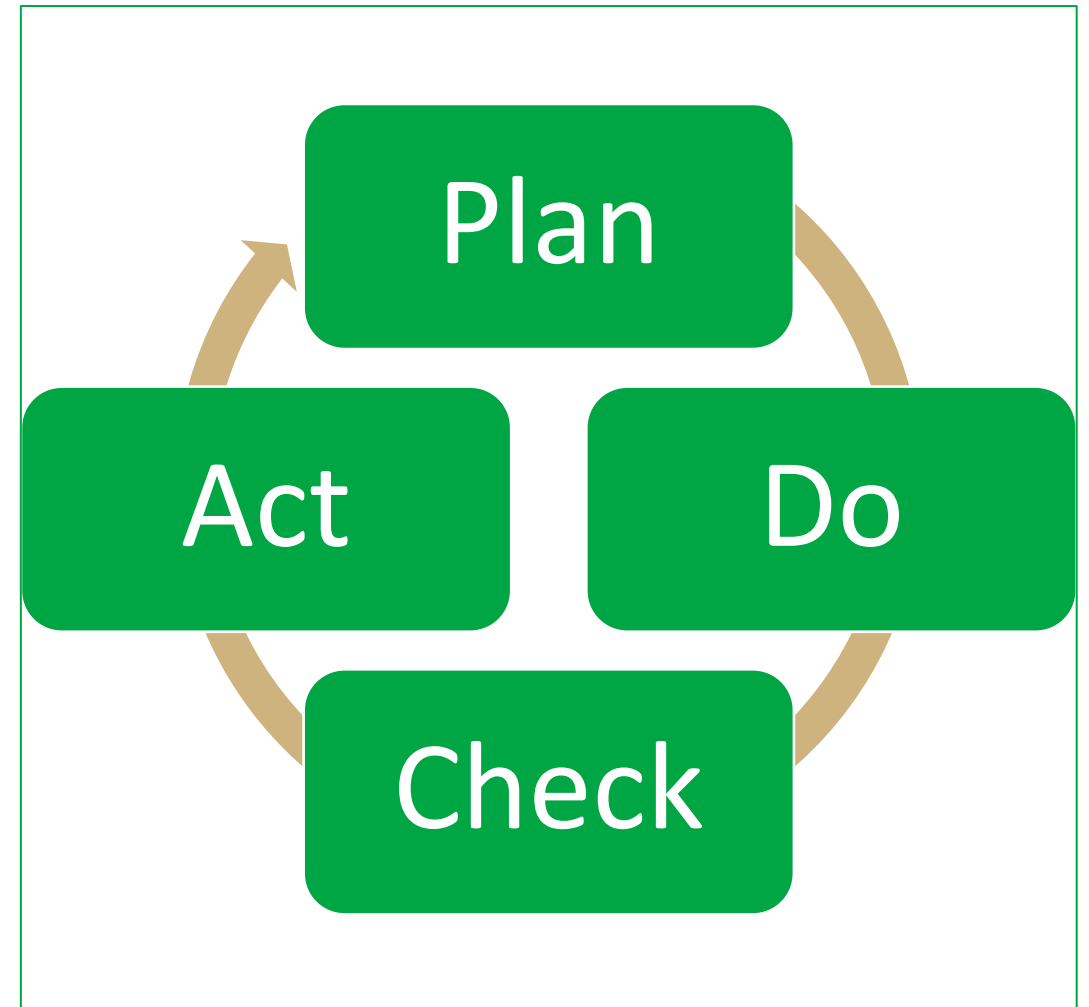


NQF and quality assurance arrangements as two separate (but interlinked) components within a qualifications system.

# PDCA cycle

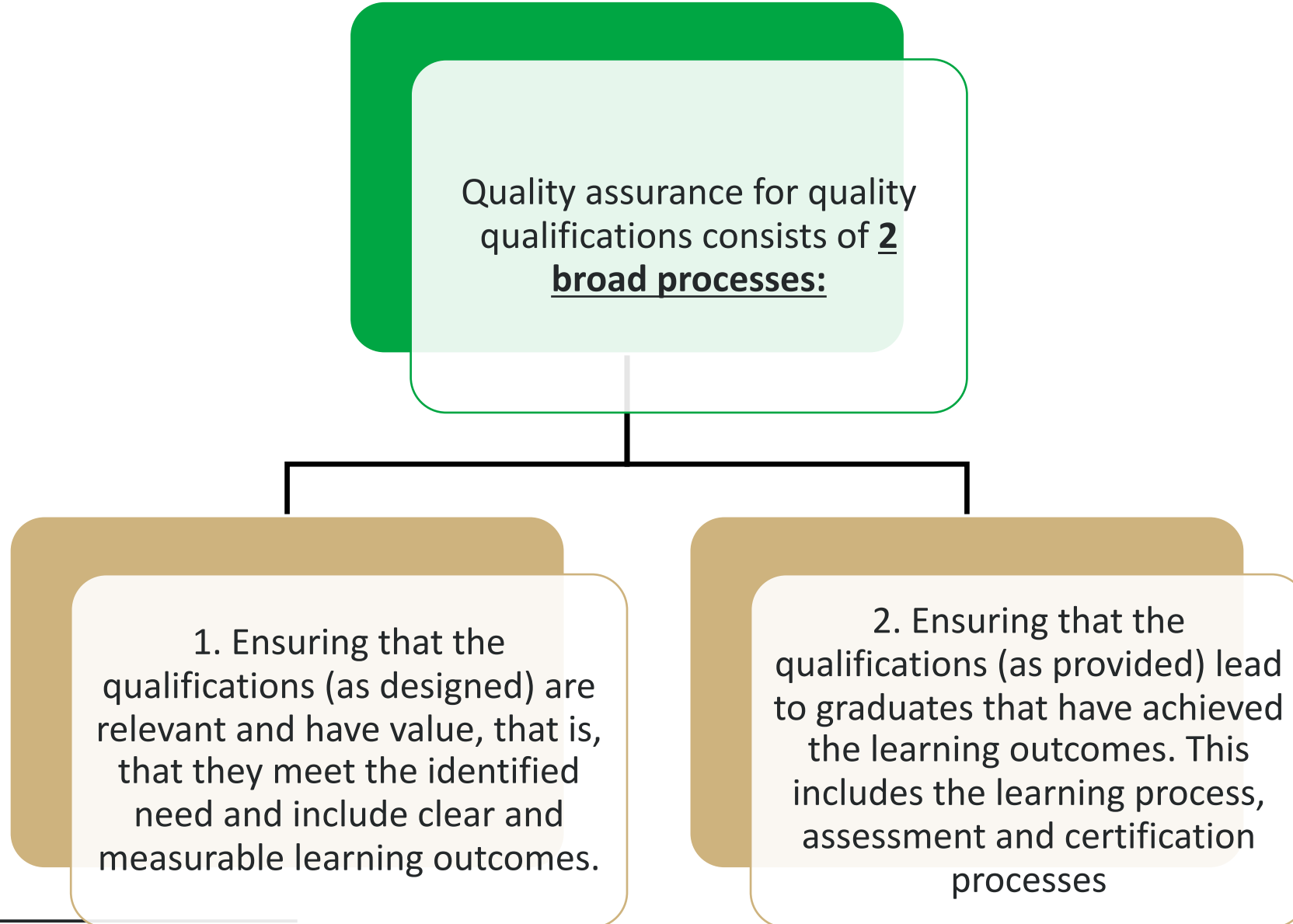
- **Quality management system (at national or provider level)** should be premised on a continuous improvement approach, which is commonly known as the **Plan, Do, Check, Act cycle** (quality cycle)
- At a **regional level**, the EQAVET Framework organises its quality criteria (and indicative descriptors at system and provider level) according to a continuous improvement approach, e.g., planning, implementation, evaluation and review.

Annex II (EU VET Recommendation of 2020): [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H1202\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H1202(01)&from=EN)





# Focus of quality assurance of qualifications



## Quality assurance of qualifications is concerned with four dimensions



1. Quality qualifications: concepts and characteristics, quality cycle



2. Minimum criteria for the quality of qualifications



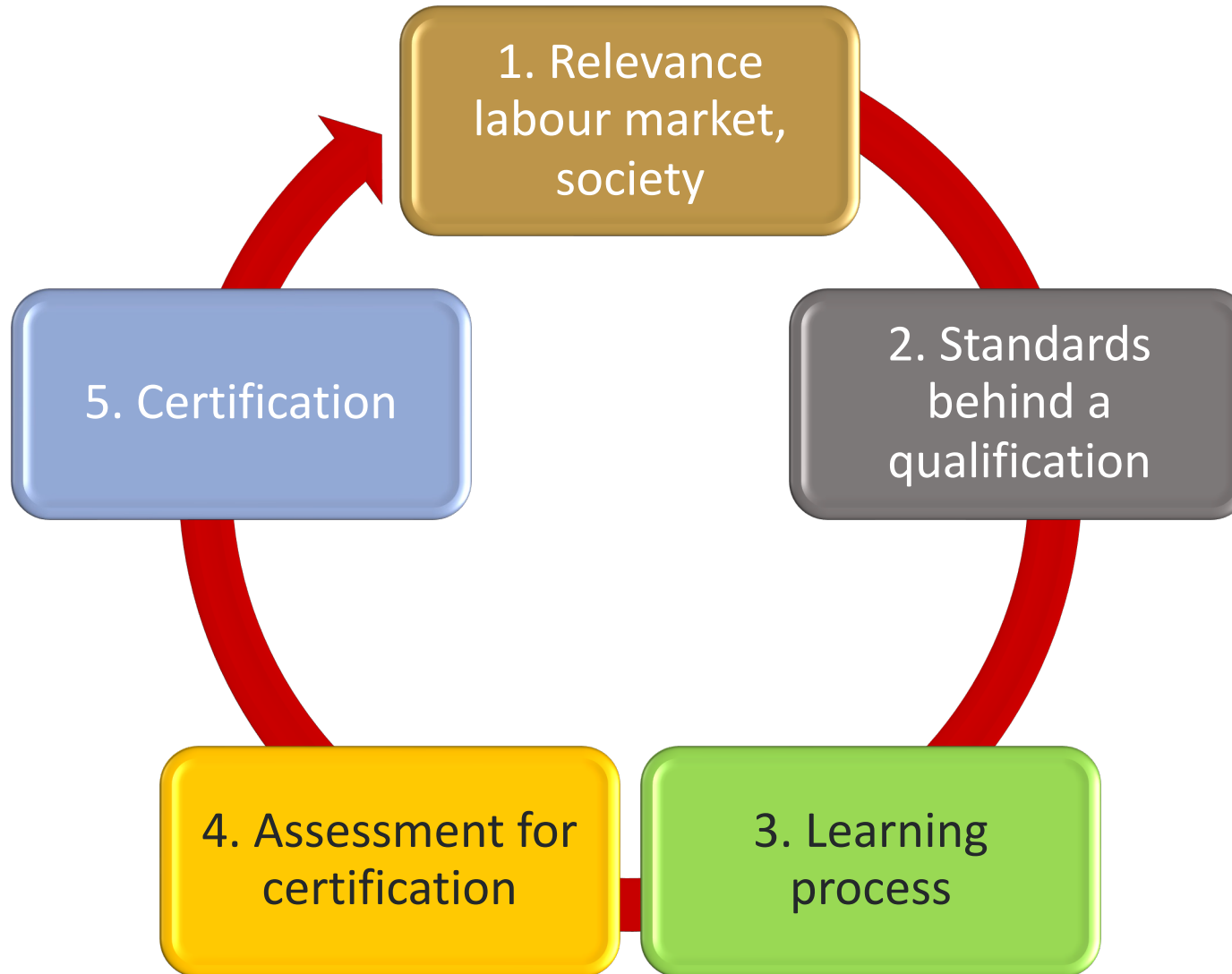
3. Quality assurance elements from a qualification system perspective: qualification standards, assessment and certification



4. Qualifications quality chain: from standards to awards.

In: ACQF Training Module 5

# Minimum criteria for quality of qualifications



## External quality assurance

- Measures that are undertaken by an authorised responsible body:
  - Design of qualifications
  - Provision of qualifications (provider)
- Based on standards, rules
- Monitoring and evaluation, including provider review or audit
- Locus of control is with the responsible body, and generally is based on continuous improvement approach

## Internal quality assurance

- Enables the provider to self-evaluate (or self-assess) progress against pre-determined standards or targets (which may be external or internal)
- Focussed on continuous quality improvement (culture of quality)

# 04A

## **National level: development of qualifications**

- **Approaches to quality assurance of the process of formulation, development and leveling of qualifications**

# Quality assuring the formulation and approval of a qualification

Aim is to build trust and transparency in qualifications

Some countries use legislation (e.g. law) to define the parameters of the quality assurance system, and then use a series of cascading documents to further the level of detail of the quality assurance systems, for example:

- Regulations, which are easier to update than the law but still relatively difficult to update or change
- Rules or quality standards, which may or may not be legislated
- Policy, which is developed by the quality assurance agency or responsible body
- Procedures, guidelines, forms and templates, which are developed by the quality assurance agency or responsible body.

**Reflection:** In your country's qualifications system: what document (standard/guideline/policy) orients / regulates the formulation and development of a qualification? Are these policies similar for all sub-sectors of education and training (HE, TVET, general...)

# Process for qualifications development

- To ensure that the qualification meets a need, external quality assurance agencies may:
  - Require establishment of, and endorsement from, sectoral/industry steering committees
  - May require consultations of a range of stakeholders
  - May require international peer review
- **Tuning Project identified these key steps:**
  1. Has the social need for the programme on a regional/national/European level been identified? Has this been done on the basis of a consultation of stakeholders – employers, professionals and professional bodies?
  2. Is the programme of sufficient interest from the academic point of view? Have common reference points been identified?

# Africa – two examples

## Botswana

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Identify need                            | 9. Develop qualification structure                         |
| 2. Stakeholder consultation                 | 10. Consider design requirements                           |
| 3. Identify relevant standards              | 11. Analyse needs – functional analysis                    |
| 4. Identify gaps in qualification provision | 12. Establish qualification structure                      |
| 5. Identify qualification development team  | 13. Develop units  |
| 6. Establish stakeholder support            | 14. Internal verification or review to check the proposal. |
| 7. Outline qualification profile            |  |
| 8. Seek approval to develop.                |  |

## Cape Verde – TVET qualifications

1. Sector study and define the features of professional family
2. Establishment and organisation of the sector council (COS) and the technical sectoral committee (CTS)
3. Elaboration of the professional profile (functional map, units of competence, performance criteria, general competence of the qualification)
4. Design of the training plan (training modules)
5. Validation of the training programme and the professional qualification.



# ACQF **Format of qualifications specifications**

To also ensure consistency of documentation - control of qualification specifications format may be through quality standards, forms or templates. Common themes to be addressed include:

1. Title of the qualification
2. Purpose of the qualification, brief description
3. Links to national / international classifications (education, occupations)
4. NQF Level
5. Number of number of credits (or other volume measure relevant to the NQF) – whole or components
6. Approval: dates (start and end dates of approval), code, institution(s); expiry date / renewal
7. Outcomes, e.g. short description of learning outcomes; outcomes related to licensing or professional association outcomes
8. Requirement for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)
9. Requirements for Credit accumulation and transfer
10. Structure and completion rules (e.g. core, electives)
11. Suggested delivery methods and assessment methods (and process to quality assure assessor judgements);
12. Specific resources required (focussing on specialist resources/equipment)
13. Evaluation or review processes
14. List of components (e.g. modules, units of competency)
15. Component specifications (for all those listed above).

# Determining the level and qualification type

- Purpose of NQFs is to indicate the location of a particular qualification on the NQF.
- Important step in the approval process but it may be unclear how this is determined.
- Different factors influence the leveling approach
- Options:
  - ✓ Best-fit approach
  - ✓ Credit-based approach
  - ✓ Combination

# Options – on a continuum



## Best fit approach

When matching the outcome of a qualification to the NQF level descriptors and qualification type descriptor:

*'The concept of 'best-fit' is ... the acceptance that perfect fit is probably not possible and some judgement or approximation is necessary to make a link and solve a problem.'* (EQF Note, 2011a, p. 32)

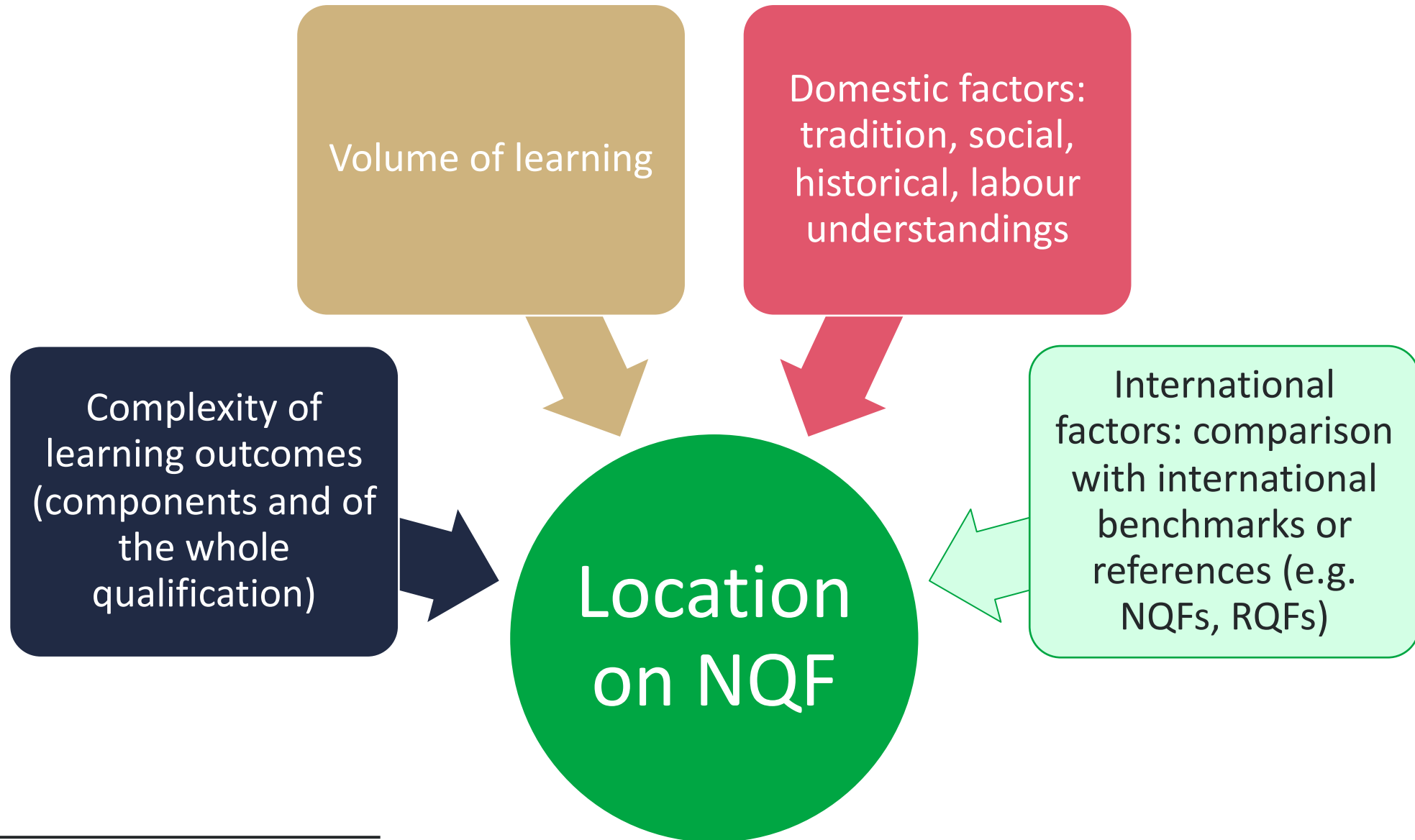
*'the concept of 'best-fit' requires a common judgement from a range of stakeholders so that there can be confidence in the outcome of the approximation. It is therefore useful to consider 'best-fit' as a decision that is based on collective professional judgements of stakeholders.'* In addition, an important characteristic of using 'best fit' is that *'of flexibility and tolerance in interpretation.'* (EQF Note, 2011a, p. 32)

## Credit based approach

- A formula for determining the level and qualification type is used.
- To be able to determine an overall credit value, qualification developers allocate a level and credit value to each component and finally to the whole qualification.
- This is often termed a rating activity. Developers may use an expert panel in this process to promote an accepted outcome with stakeholders.
- It is not just a 'numbers game', as the qualification should have a coherent outcome and be consistent with other aspects of the NQF qualification type descriptor.

Reflection: In your country how are qualifications leveled/located on your NQF?

# Factors that influence location in the NQF



# Africa example – Lesotho

## Determining the level of complexity of the qualification

1. Ensure alignment with the level descriptors in terms of depth, breadth, complexity and volumes of learning
2. Specific learning outcomes (attached to units/courses/modules) must lead to the attainment of the attributes in the level outcomes.
3. Qualification descriptors, especially for specialist and professional programmes, regulate the planning and design to improve rigour and the recognition of qualifications.

## Rating the credit value to each component (e.g., subject, unit, competency) of the qualification and of the qualification as a whole

Consideration of the potential activities, such as:

- Formal teaching sessions (lectures/classes, coaching, seminars, tutorials)
- Practical work (in laboratories and other locations)
- Relevant ICT activities
- Use of the library or learning resource centres for reading and research
- Private study time
- Self-directed study time using online and/or text-based open learning materials
- Informal learning activities (e.g., community groups or workshops)
- Reflection
- Assessment.

Approval of qualifications will depend on the legislative context within each country, and may vary depending on the type of provider

If centralised processes through a responsible body, it provides assurance that:

- There is a need and that stakeholder consultation has been undertaken
- That peer review or industry endorsement has been achieved
- That the qualification specification has met the quality standards/rules expected by the responsible body

Responsible bodies may use checklists or forms, some of which are specified in legislation or policy

Self-accrediting providers should have processes that replicate or are similar to the responsible body

- Depending on the legislative context, qualifications are approved for specific periods, generally between 3 – 5 years
- Review of qualifications may include:
  - Analysis of labour market [job vacancies, skills mismatch analysis, forecasting approaches]
  - Engagement and feedback from industry stakeholders or councils
  - Data feedback loop, through surveys [graduate tracking, graduate and employer satisfaction]
- Process for renewal generally reflects the approach to development of qualifications

# 04B

## National level: provision

- Approaches to quality assurance of the provision of qualifications



# Quality assurance of provision

- Important for engendering trust in the outcomes of the qualification
- Focus is on provider requirements, potentially based law or policy
- Common themes at institution level:
  - Governance (institutional and academic)
  - Financial sustainability and probity
  - Data management and certification processes
  - Internal quality assurance and continuous improvement
  - Learner support
  - Programme delivery capability

# Quality assurance of provision

- Common themes for programme delivery:
  - Design a programme specific to the qualification outcomes and mode of delivery, e.g., face-to-face, online, blended
  - Have in place facilities and equipment required for the programme
  - Have in place educational/training materials and assessment tools required for the programme
  - Have sufficient number and profile of educators with vocational/professional qualifications and experience, including pedagogical qualifications and experience.
- Note that this theme may be blended with approval of qualification specifications

# 04C

**National level:**

- **External quality assurance**

# External quality assurance

- Monitoring of providers and provision of qualifications
- Monitoring and review of assessment, certification and graduation procedures
- System wide evaluations led by the responsible body or another entity may include:
  - Evaluation of system by external bodies or experts
  - Reviews of stakeholder engagement
  - Reviews of national or sectoral initiatives, e.g. implementation of RPL, apprenticeships

# 04D

## National level:

- **Provider internal quality assurance**

# Provider (internal) quality assurance

- There are two complementary forces:
  1. Regulatory obligations in regards to internal quality assurance (required by the responsible body, e.g. self assessment reports, quality assurance unit within the provider)
  2. Provider's need to ensure that qualifications (and the programmes leading to these qualifications) meet employer needs and graduate expectations
- Quality management system enables the provider to:
  - Design and implement a process of continuous improvement
  - Allows for planning and investment
  - Identify gaps and prepare plans for improvement
  - Develop own targets and standards against which progress can be assessed

# Provider (internal) quality assurance

- Focus is often on:
  - Self-assessment
  - Satisfaction surveys [professional associations, employers, graduates]
  - Graduation destination data
- Internal quality assurance system:
  - Inputs, e.g. purchasing of equipment, facilities
  - Outcomes/outputs, e.g. completion/drop out rates, satisfaction

# 04E

## National level:

- Registers of qualifications and quality assurance



# What is a Qualifications Register?

- The qualifications register/database is the conclusion of the quality assurance process
- National quality assured qualifications are placed in the NQF qualification register/database
- Registers/databases are tools for transparency and provide stakeholders with assurance that quality requirements have been met.

# Qualifications registers

- The content of registers may vary from country to country; and digital formats, access and platforms.
- National qualifications systems may have one or more registers
  - May have sectoral registers
  - May have micro-credentials registers
- Registers may be directed at:
  - Qualifications approved under the quality assurance arrangements
  - Providers approved under the quality assurance arrangements to provide education and training services related to NQF approved qualifications
- Web interface may combine these two registers

# Related sessions

- Session 19 addresses registers/databases in more detail

05

**Final notes**

# Quality assurance - summary

- Quality must be assured and maintained
- Aims to build trust and transparency of qualifications and the learning outcomes (expected and achieved)
- Multi-level: regional, national (system and provider level)
- Focusses on:
  1. Design of qualifications
  2. Provision of qualifications, including monitoring and review of provider processes and outcomes
  3. Control, supervision or monitoring of assessment, graduation and certification processes
  4. System wide evaluations – contribution to system monitoring and evaluation
  5. Provision of public information
- Needs to be strongly linked to the NQF and other aspects of the qualifications system
- Anticipate the future (skills and jobs) and adapt to innovation and new technology
- **Quality assurance concerns everybody**

# Thank you

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