ACQF
African Continental
Qualifications Framework

SESSION 29:

Referencing NQF-ACQF

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"Skills, qualifications and frameworks for mutual trust in a changing world"
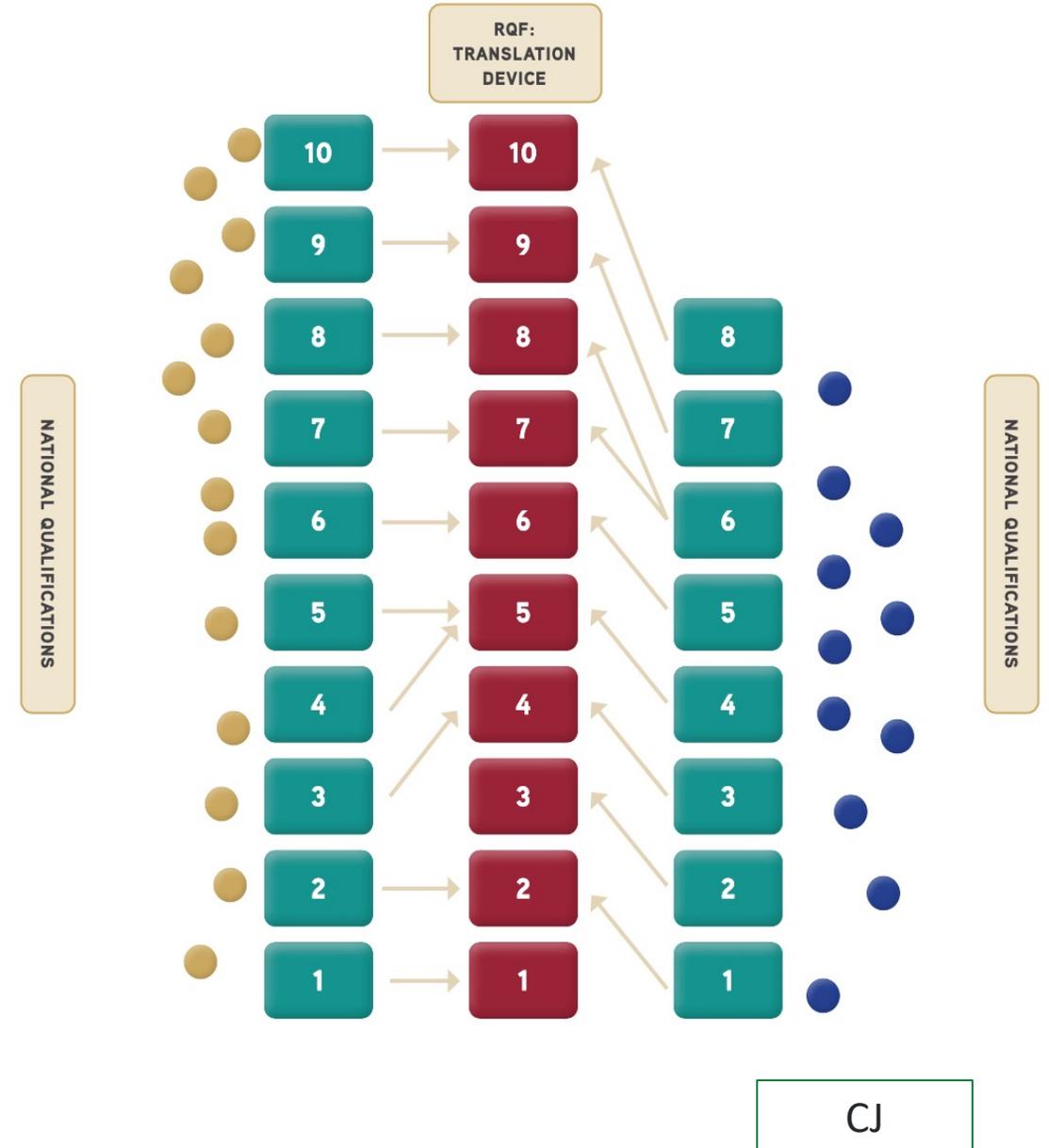
5-9 September: Johannesburg, South Africa

Introduction

This session elaborates on **referencing** of NQFs and systems to the ACQF as a core function of the ACQF as meta-QF for Africa.

To learn more:

✓ **ACQF Training Module 3**

At: https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/training-modules/training-modules-1-to-10-english

CJ

Guideline and TM 3: main topics – to help your referencing process

ACQF

Conceptual and technical basis of referencing

- Definitions, objectives, benefits
- Referencing facilitates recognition
- Post-referencing: ACQF levels on new qualifications documents

Referencing model for ACQF referencing

- Criteria
- Report
- Workflow

Annexes

- Draft ToRs for national referencing team
- Self-assessment 4 criteria and guidance

01

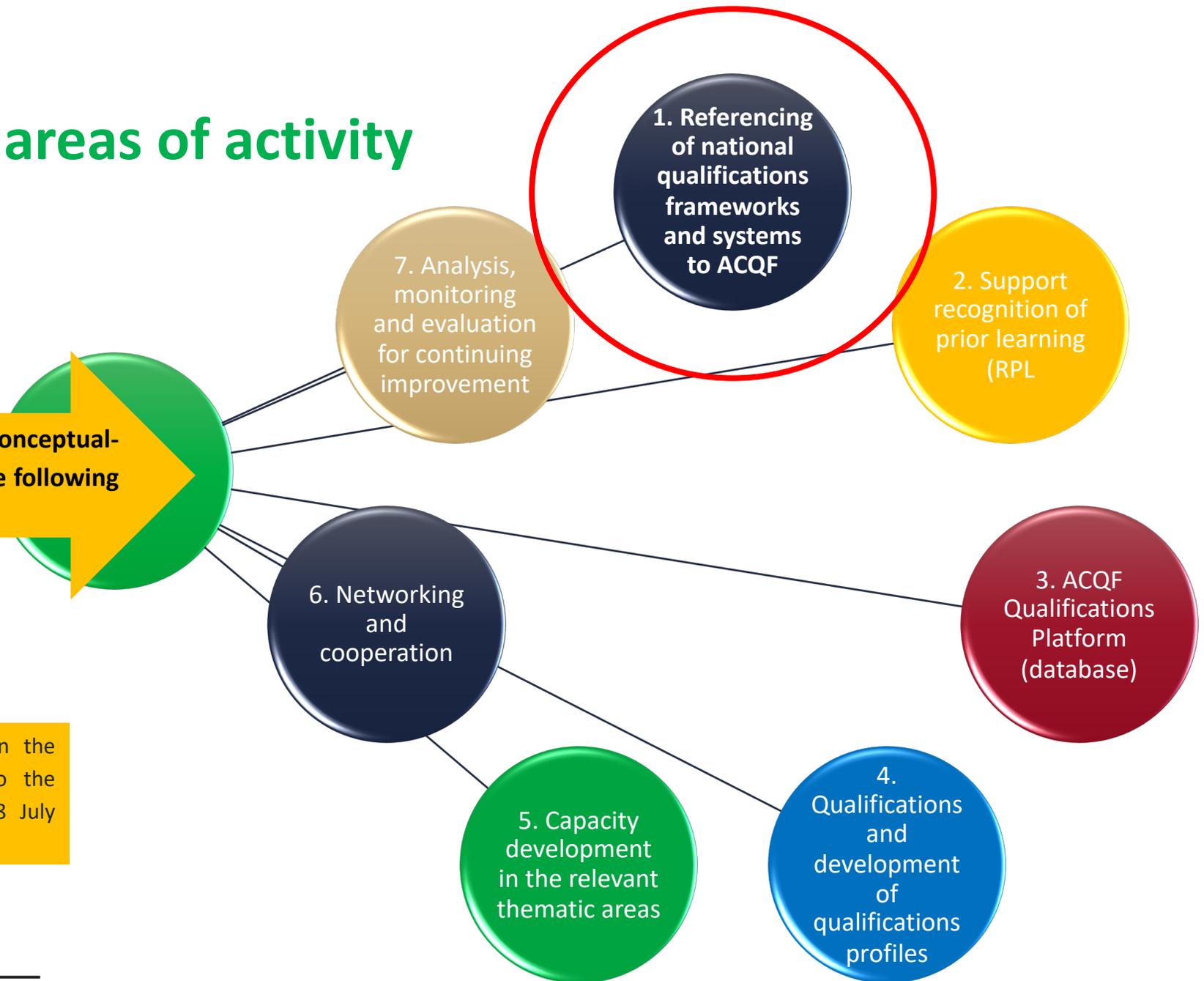# Referencing NQFs to RQF / ACQF: overview

Key elements of referencing

Referencing: ACQF areas of activity

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

These seven areas are developed in the ACQF Feasibility Study presented to the ACQF Advisory Group meeting of 28 July 2021.

1. Referencing of national qualifications frameworks and systems to ACQF

2. Support recognition of prior learning (RPL

3. ACQF Qualifications Platform (database)

4. Qualifications and development of qualifications profiles

5. Capacity development in the relevant thematic areas

6. Networking and cooperation

7. Analysis, monitoring and evaluation for continuing improvement

Referencing NQFs to RQF (ACQF)

- 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.**

Referencing…in other words…

Referencing to the ACQF:

- A process to compare national qualifications frameworks/ qualifications levels with those of the overarching qualifications framework (ACQF).

- Through a structured referencing process, based on agreed and common criteria and procedures, a national inter-institutional team (experts, stakeholders) defines and establishes the relationship/ link the NQF/ NQS levels and quality assurance with those of the ACQF.

- The purpose of referencing to the ACQF is to contribute to clarity and mutual trust between national (regional) qualifications frameworks and systems, to comparability of qualifications of different countries, to transparency through information-sharing on qualifications frameworks and systems.

Referencing: what it is and what it is not

Referencing

- is a process of comparison and linking national qualifications frameworks to the ACQF
- will be feasible for countries with operational NQFs/ whose NQFs are approved and in implementation / or at an advanced stage of development
- is conceived, structured, and conducted as a gradual process that can take longer in certain countries than in others. Where countries are unable to meet all the referencing criteria immediately, they can engage in a phased referencing
- **It is of benefit for the countries, regions and the continent: its about supporting, encouraging, self-improvement**

Referencing:

- is not a competitive process or intended as ranking between countries
- is not an exam to pass or fail. It is a process of mutual learning, comparison and transparency

Referencing requires capacity

ACQF implementation setting and ACQF Advisory Group (AG):

- In a transparent and participative approach, ACQF implementation setting will have the function and technical capacity to provide guidance and support to national referencing processes, to promote a participative and efficient model of referencing, to support information-sharing with all African Union countries, to endorse the completed countries' referencing reports, and ensure their publication on the ACQF website.

The **ACQF implementation setting and AG** will have the capacity to:
- Plan and prepare referencing
- Encourage countries to initiate referencing,
- Provide information, technical and methodological support to countries
- Support and provide guidance in referencing processes and consult with the countries / AG
- Organise the presentation, validation and publication of finalised referencing reports.

Referencing criteria

ACQF model

Takes account and is compatible with experience of other relevant RQFs: EQF, ASEAN QRF, SADCQF and goes beyond

Streamlined process and focus on major criteria

Enhances the self-assessment and peer learning aspects

Proposes elements of digitalisation of the process

Proposes support and capacity development to national referencing teams

Referencing criteria: why and what for?

Apply = to all countries / regions

Essence of referencing

Guide national referencing teams

Comparability and transparency of process and outcomes of referencing

Global comparability of referencing

Quality assurance of referencing

Trust

4 main criteria – focused on essential elements of any NQF

ACQF

| Level descriptors | Learning outcomes approach | Qualifications in the NQF | Quality assurance |

Criterion 1   **Criterion 2**   **Criterion 3**   **Criterion 4**

Four criteria: Interplay between ACQF-NQF/NQS

ACQF Referencing Criterion 1:

There is a clear and demonstrable link between the **qualifications levels in the NQF or NQS and the level descriptors of the ACQF.**

ACQF Referencing Criterion 2:

The NQF or NQS are based on **learning outcomes** principles and related to arrangements for **RPL (incl non-formal and informal)** and, where appropriate, to **credit systems.**

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.
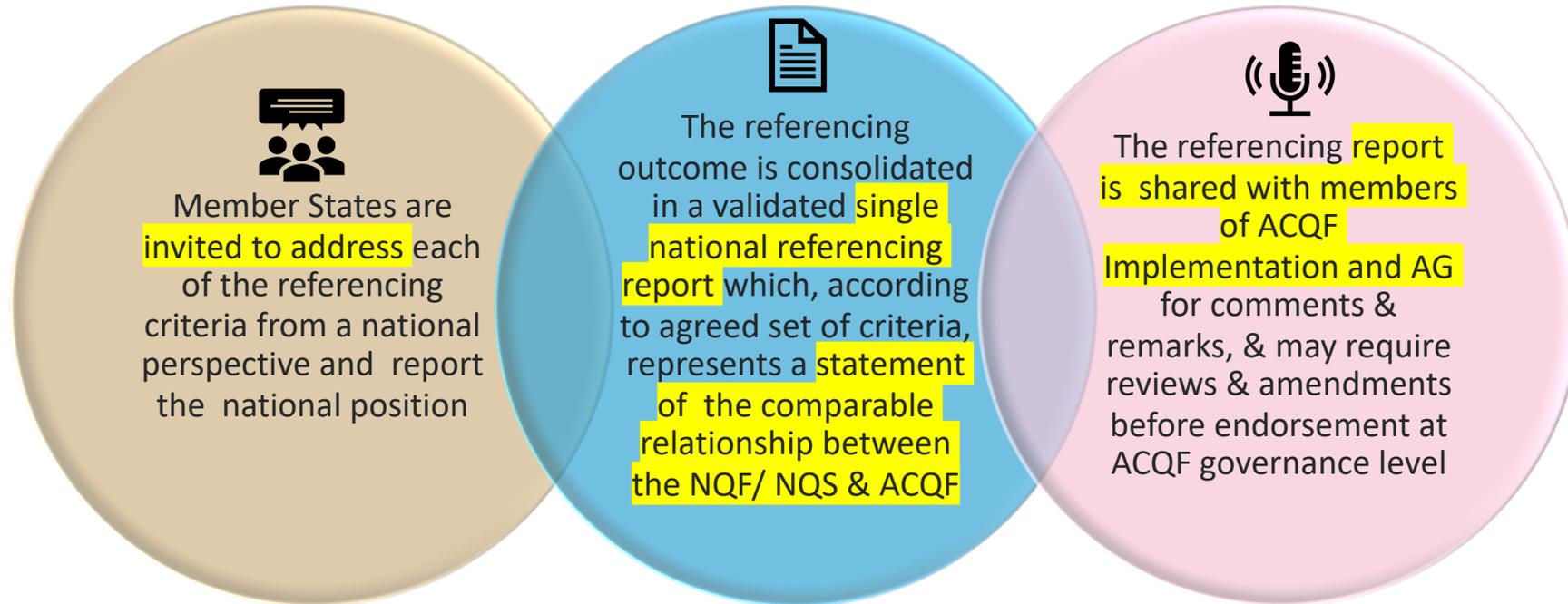
ACQF Referencing Criterion 4:

The national quality assurance **(QA) system** for education and training refers to the NQF or NQS and is consistent with the principles of QA of the ACQF.

ACQF

Governance, procedures and follow-up

1. **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.

2. The relevant national **quality assurance bodies state their agreement** with the referencing outcome and referencing report.

3. 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 implementation setting and AG on the involved **international experts.**

4. Competent national bodies certify the referencing to the ACQF and publish **one comprehensive, evidence-based referencing report,** which addresses all referencing criteria.

5. The **referencing outcome is published** by the participating country and the ACQF network upon its final validation by the ACQF implementation setting and AG, on the dedicated ACQF website.

6. 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.

Member states are invited…

Member States are invited to address each of the referencing criteria from a national perspective and report the national position

The referencing outcome is consolidated in a validated single national referencing report which, according to agreed set of criteria, represents a statement of the comparable relationship between the NQF/ NQS & ACQF

The referencing report is shared with members of ACQF Implementation and AG for comments & remarks, & may require reviews & amendments before endorsement at ACQF governance level
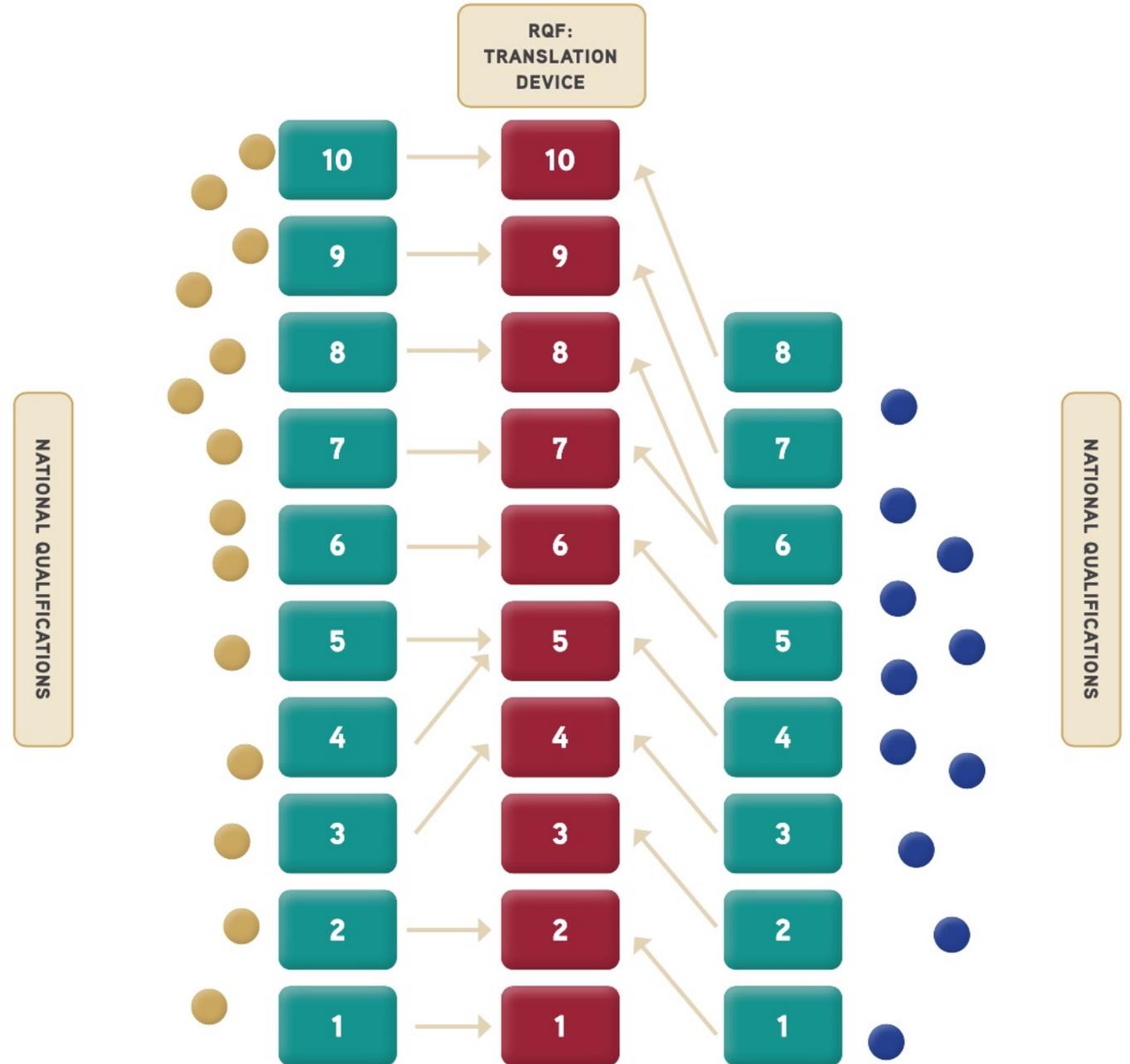
Follow-up upon successful referencing:
- **Publication of the endorsed referencing report on ACQF website**
- **Use of ACQF levels on qualifications documents and qualifications databases of the NQF referenced to ACQF.**

Linking NQFs through the overarching framework (RQF – ACQF)

> ➢ By means of NQFs
> Or…
> ➢ NQS (if its features allow)

Referencing report

ECB

ACQF

1 **Description of whole education and training system:**
Including adult learning, literacy and basic skills, continuing training; pathways for learners; QA; main institutions & stakeholders & their roles in the system; main legislative acts, regulatory texts

2 **The NQF:**
- Goals, principles, legal & regulatory acts, levels & descriptors, governance, registers / databases of qualifications, Status of implementation, Main challenges & plans for further development

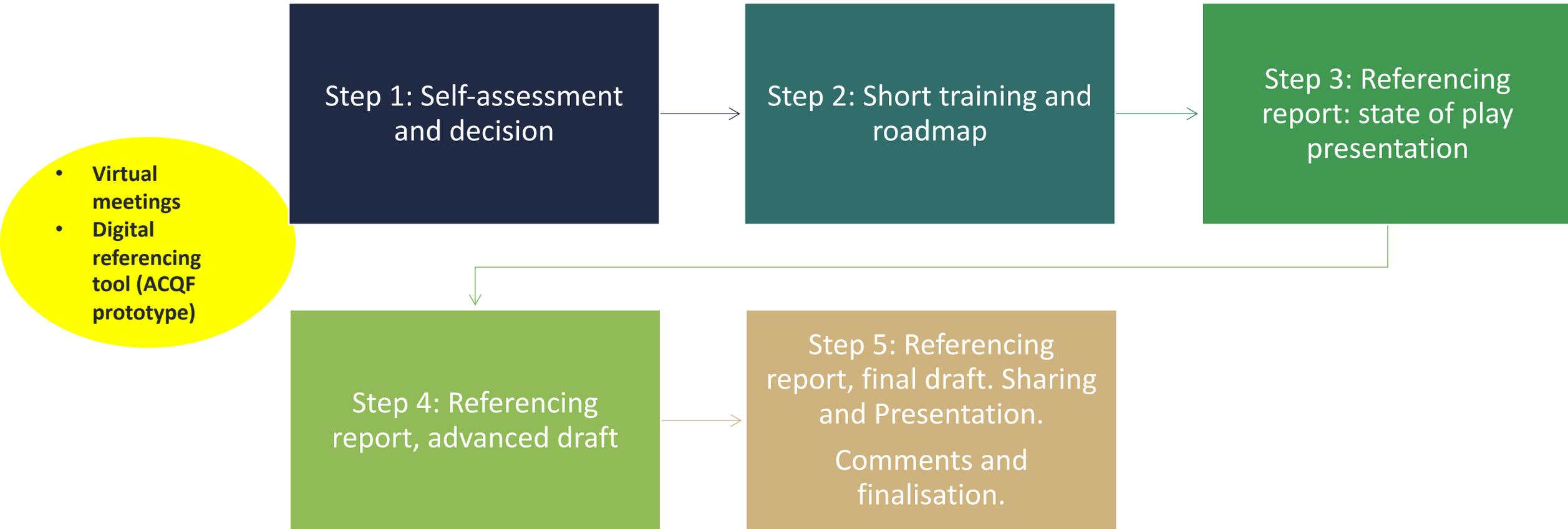**3** **Country response to ACQF referencing criteria- sections elaborated by criterion:**
- Each criterion addressed in a dedicated section. Examples and evidence by criterion – in the Annexes.
- Brief overview of referencing process, stakeholders' involvement, endorsement by national competence bodies, follow-up measures; builds (refers to) on chapters describing education & training & NQF; use of examples & references to sources contributes to robustness & credibility of argumentation in this chapter, & is recommended
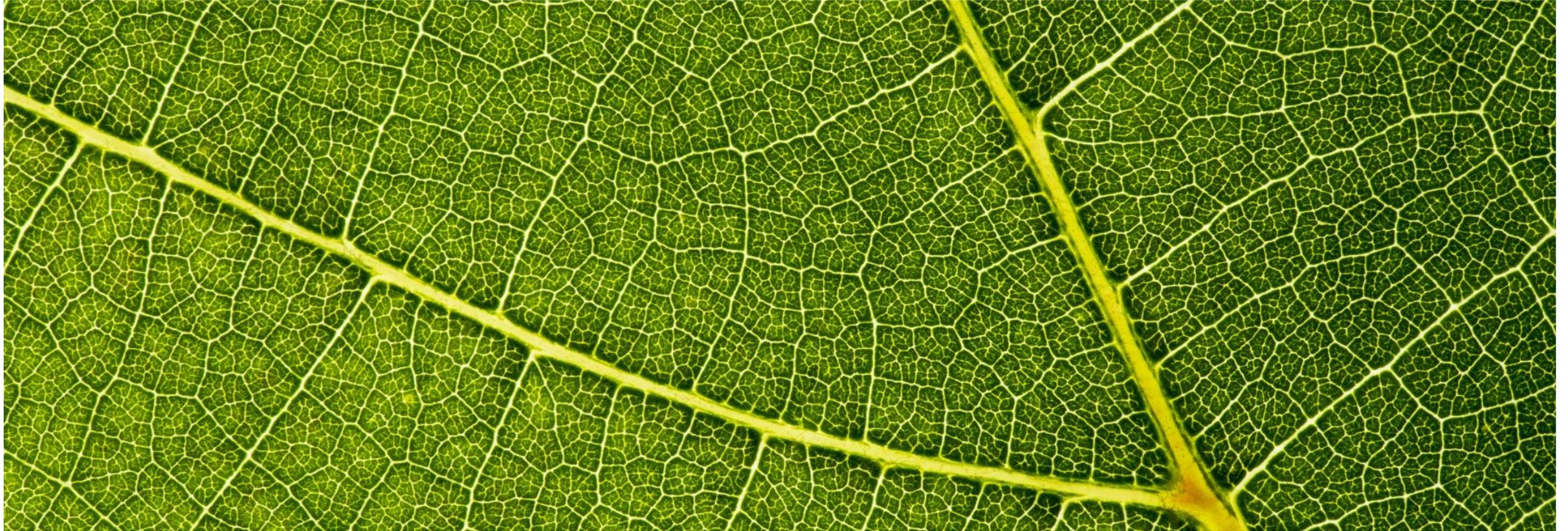
4 **Sources and annexes with relevant evidence**
- Relevant legislative-regulatory framework, guidelines, standards, important databases / registers, descriptions of qualifications types and examples

To ensure report is easy to read & understand, it should be structured in comprehensive & integrated way, make use of cross-referencing between chapters, use examples, & user-friendly layout

ACQF

Step 1: Self-assessment and decision

Step 2: Short training and roadmap

Step 3: Referencing report: state of play presentation

- **Virtual meetings**
- **Digital referencing tool (ACQF prototype)**

Step 4: Referencing report, advanced draft

Step 5: Referencing report, final draft. Sharing and Presentation.

Comments and finalisation.

Referencing capacity and arrangements

Support to countries

Principles

ACQF referencing will be coordinated, managed and quality assured by the ACQF implementation setting and AG, according to **principles:**

– The ACQF is a public policy and instrument

– The ACQF is holistic, integral and unified

– Referencing between NQFs and the ACQF is based on:
  o trust and integrity of the process,
  o coordination, support and continuous improvement of the process and outcomes
  o establishing and maintaining the zone of trust by providing transparency to the process

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

Support will be offered to countries to plan and carry out efficient and streamlined referencing processes

The country is the major beneficiary.

Referencing will be encouraged and advanced through:
- Regular referencing briefs from the ACQF governance structure
- Full use of various platforms and communication methods
- ACQF Website https://acqf.africa/
- Digital tool to support the referencing process
- Good documentation to ease the coordination and monitoring process
- Dissemination of ACQF Guidelines and training modules
- Established principles, templates and digital tools
- Training sessions (mostly virtual) in relevant languages
- Peer-sharing and Coaching
- Online communication and e-meetings

02

Getting practical

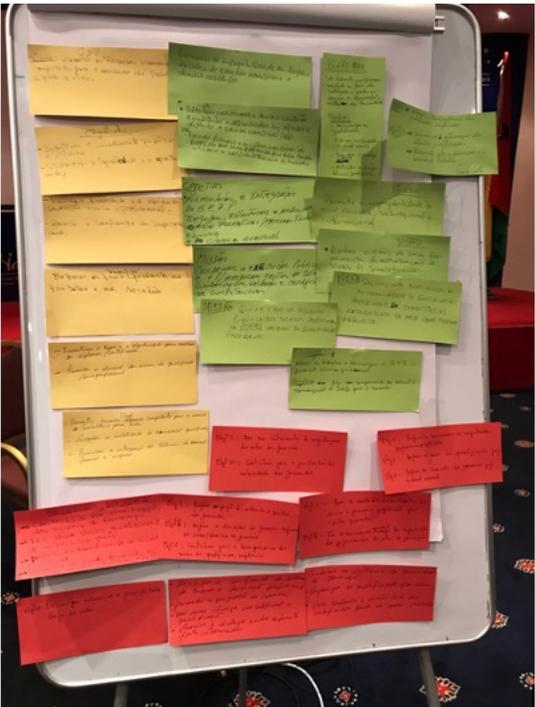# Preparing to referencing: What is essential...

1. Goal, plan
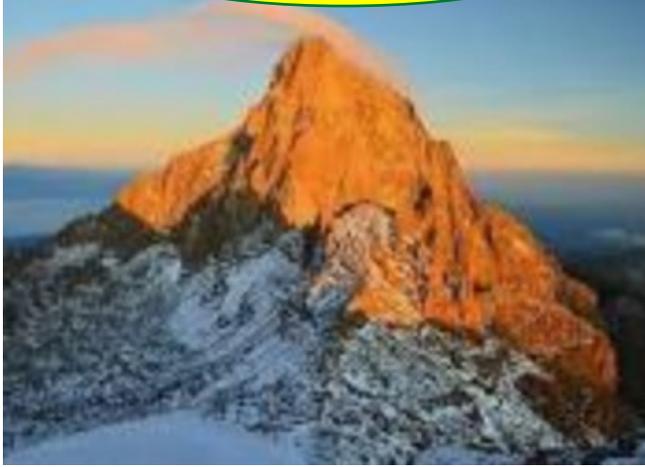
2. Determination, capacity

3. Analysis, dialogue, drafting, support

Essential information on the working table of the referencing team

- Overview of education and training system for LLL. Diagrammes.

- NQF legal and regulatory basis, different acts and texts

- NQF level descriptors

- Register, catalogue of qualifications

- Qualifications description

- Qualifications development, approval, levelling tools (technical-methodological)

- Learning outcomes, standards: competence, occupational

- Main components of Quality Assurance

Shaping the referencing report

- After self-assessment and short referencing training…agree main report outline (pertinent with goals of referencing and the country's stage of NQF implementation)

- Take stock of all essential sources, especially legislation, regulations, policies, classifications, methods.

- Allocate responsibilities in referencing team: in terms of information collection, clarifications, review

- Agree a roadmap and milestones for analysis and drafting (1-2 key drafters)

- Referencing chapter – 4 criteria: consult relevant institutions and experts; agree methodology / steps for each criterion, especially criterion 1

- Assemble the 1st draft report – discuss it

- Identify information gaps to be completed, systemic / NQF issues to be noted and acknowledged

- Draft 2 – more complete and nuanced. Stakeholders' workshop for wider discussion, and contributions

- Interact with ACQF team and with peers from other countries

- Finalise report - with issues, conclusions, annexes with evidence and examples

- Submit to ACQF implementation setting for discussion

Practical example

SQF-EQF referencing

https://europa.eu/europass/en/document-library/eqf-referencing-report-slovenia

- Slovenian NQF - EQF

- Conceptual comparison NQF-RQF

- More detailed comparison of level descriptors NQF-RQF
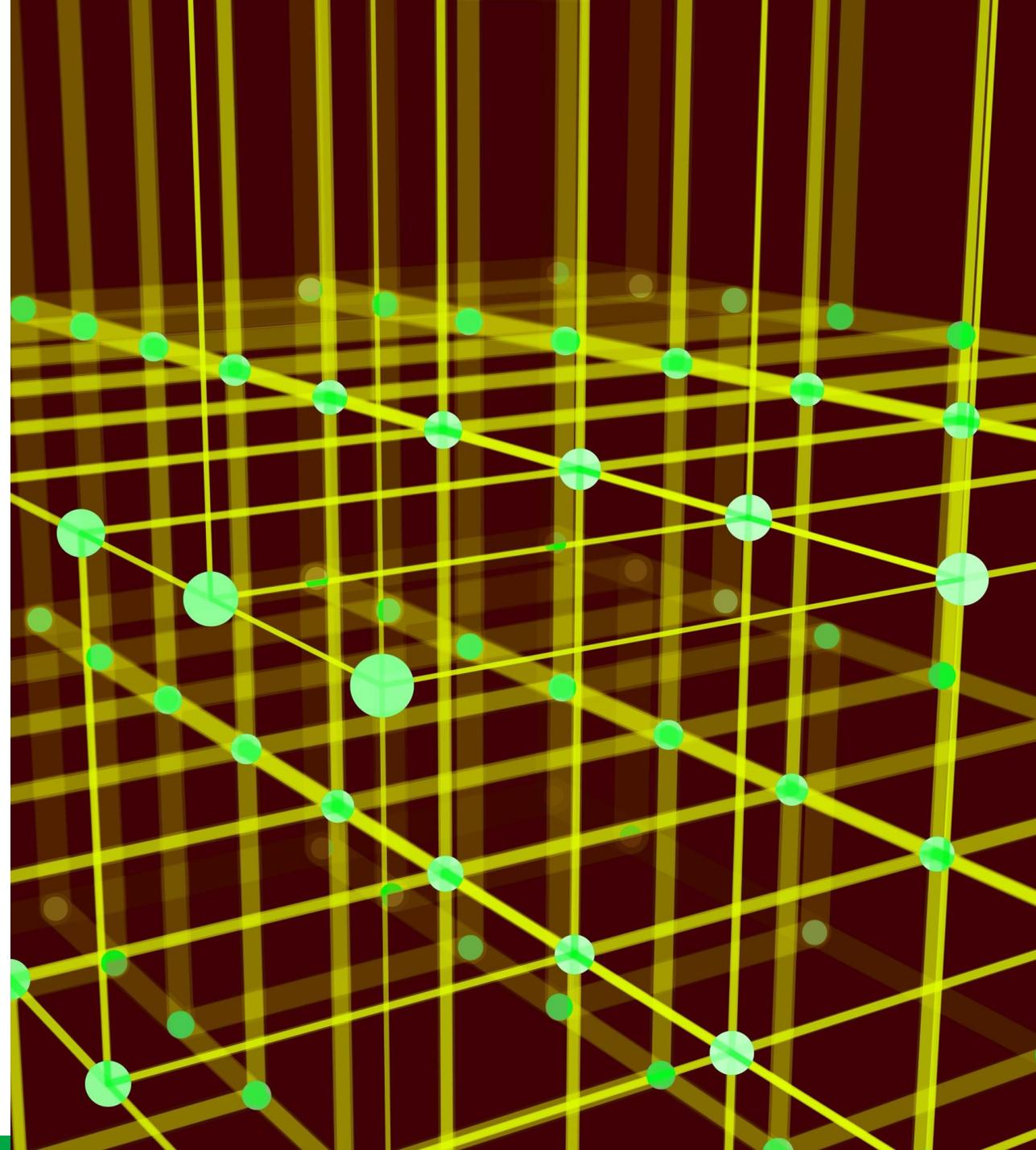
Criterion 1

- To show the clear and demonstrable link between the Slovenian Qualifications Framework (SQF) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), was carried out a three-stage methodological analysis:
  - ➤ Structural comparison of the two frameworks,
  - ➤ Conceptual comparison of the two frameworks,
  - ➤ Comparison of SQF descriptors and EQF descriptors.

Conceptual comparison of the 2 frameworks

- The SQF is based on a combination of Slovenia's existing Classification System of Education and Training (KLASIUS) and EQF guidelines. Each SQF level is described on the basis of the same three concepts – knowledge, skills and competences – as the levels in the EQF (in 2013). The above concepts are defined in a similar manner, although it may be observed that while the EQF describes them in generic terms, the SQF takes into account the characteristics of the national education system and labour market, for which reason the descriptors at all levels are for the most part more detailed.

- When comparing **similarities and differences between knowledge, skills and competences in the SQF and EQF**, noted:
  - *Knowledge.* The starting definitions of the concept of 'knowledge' are similar in both frameworks. In both cases knowledge is defined as the result of a learning process in different settings, with the definition in the SQF also specifically mentioning learning processes in the context of work and private & social life.
  - *Skills.* The definition of the concept of 'skills' in the SQF incorporates the distinction between cognitive skills and practical skills from the EQF definition but differs from the EQF in that it also emphasises the use of knowledge to carry out tasks and solve problems.
  - *Competences.* Both definitions of competences, in the SQF and the EQF, are coherent in the part that describes competences as the ability to use knowledge and skills in various situations, where the EQF places slightly more emphasis on the professional and personal development of the individual, while the SQF emphasises responsible conduct on the part of individual. Both frameworks include the notions of autonomy and responsibility.

More detailed comparison of the level descriptors

➤ In addition to the conceptual comparison of the two frameworks...

➤...a more detailed comparison of the contents of SQF descriptors and EQF descriptors, where are compared the similarities and differences of the Slovenian and European qualifications frameworks - domains knowledge, skills and competences.

➤ **Correspondences** between EQF descriptors and SQF descriptors are shown in red (*knowledge*), purple (*skills*) and green (*competence(s)*).

➤ Differences between knowledge, skills and competences in the two sets of descriptors are shown in **blue**.

Comparison of level descriptors: level 3

Comparison of SQF level 3 with EQF level 3

Knowledge: At level 3 the EQF describes knowledge very generically without an increase in requirements, while the SQF places knowledge at this level in the national context of education and work and therefore emphasises the practical and vocational nature of knowledge, the limitation of its theoretical basis and the situational orientation of learning tied to a specific discipline.

Skills: The EQF emphasises the practical nature of the accomplishment of tasks, which are based on the application of basic methods, tools, materials and information. The SQF adds the element of basic literacy and places skills in the context of the predictability of problems and standardisation of tasks.

Competences: The EQF descriptor for level 3 refers to the ability to take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study, while the SQF descriptor at this level is based on limited autonomy of operation and simple verbal and written instructions. The SQF also mentions the element of guidance, which relates to autonomy of operation.

SQF level 3 highlights the practical aspect of knowledge and skills and in this way builds on SQF level 2. SQF level 3 and EQF level 3 correspond in terms of degree of difficulty.

Conceptual of level descriptors (SQF 7-EQF 6)

Comparison of SQF level 7 with EQF level 6

Knowledge: At EQF level 6, knowledge is defined as 'advanced knowledge of a field of work or study' involving a 'critical understanding' of theories and principles, which corresponds to the definition of knowledge at SQF level 7, which talks about advanced technical, theoretical and practical knowledge 'in a specific field' as a basis for critical reflection (in the skills category).

Skills: At the level of skills, correspondences between the frameworks are apparent in the description of skills that demonstrate the mastery and innovation required to solve complex and unpredictable problems (EQF) and are the basis for original thinking/work and the mastery of complex work processes in new work situations (SQF).

Competences: We also find correspondence between the descriptors in the competences category. Similarity is apparent in the elements of taking responsibility for decision-making, operating in unpredictable contexts, taking the initiative and taking responsibility for professional development. The SQF descriptor also highlights the ability to devise and sustain arguments and transfer knowledge within a group.

We find that the descriptors of EQF level 6 correspond to those of SQF level 7.

Comparison of descriptors of level 3 (EQF-SQF)

Comparison of EQF level 3 with SQF level 3

EQF Levels	SQF Levels	EQF descriptors			SQF descriptors		
		KNOWLEDGE	**SKILLS**	**COMPETENCE**	**KNOWLEDGE**	**SKILLS**	**COMPETENCES**
3 level	3 level	Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information	Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study Adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems	Predominantly practical, life- and vocationally relevant knowledge with some theoretical basis, acquired primarily through the study of examples, imitation and practice in the context of a specific discipline.	Basic literacy and practical skills on a limited scale including the use of appropriate tools, methods and materials. Application of known solutions to resolve predictable problems on a limited scale. Ability to carry out transparent and standardised tasks.	Ability to acquire new knowledge and skills in a structured context with appropriate guidance. Ability to operate with limited autonomy in a predictable and structured context on the basis of simple verbal or written instructions. Taking a limited degree of responsibility.

- *Knowledge:* At this level the EQF describes knowledge very generically without an increase in requirements, while the SQF places knowledge at this level in its own context of education and work, emphasising the practical and vocational nature of knowledge, the limitation of its theoretical basis and the situational orien- tation of learning tied to a specific discipline.

- *Skills:* At this level the EQF emphasises the practical nature of the accomplishment of tasks, which are based on the application of 'basic methods, tools, materials and information'. The SQF again adds the element of basic literacy and places skills in the context of the 'predictability' of problems and 'standardisation' of tasks.

- *Competences:* The EQF descriptor for this level refers to the ability to take responsibility 'for completion of tasks in work or study', while the SQF descriptor at this level is based on 'limited autonomy of operation' and 'simple verbal and written instructions'.

- *SQF level 3 highlights the practical aspect of knowledge and skills and in this way builds on SQF level 2. SQF level 3 and EQF level 3 correspond in terms of degree of difficulty.*

Comparison of descriptors level EQF 6 / SQF 7

Comparison of EQF level 6 with SQF level 7

EQF Levels	SQF Levels	EQF descriptors			SQF descriptors		
		KNOWLEDGE	**SKILLS**	**COMPETENCE**	**KNOWLEDGE**	**SKILLS**	**COMPETENCES**
6 level	7 level	Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles	Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts. Take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups	Advanced technical/ theoretical and practical knowledge in a given field, supported by a broad theoretical and methodological basis.	Ability to carry out complex operational/ technical tasks, including the use of methodological tools. Mastery of demanding and complex work processes through autonomous application of knowledge in new work situations. Ability to diagnose and resolve problems in various specific work settings linked to the education and training domain. A basis for original thinking/work and critical reflection.	Ability to operate in different settings and functions and articulate new knowledge. Taking responsibility for defining and achieving own work results and/or work results of a heterogeneous group in defined fields of work. Ability to devise and sustain arguments within specific work settings related to the field of education and training. Identification of own learning needs, ability to take the initiative for own learning, ability to transfer knowledge within a group.

- *Knowledge:* At EQF level 6, knowledge is defined as 'advanced knowledge of a field of work or study' involv- ing a 'critical understanding' of theories and principles, which corresponds to the definition of knowledge at SQF level 7, which talks about advanced technical, theoretical and practical knowledge 'in a specific field' as a basis for 'critical reflection' (in the skills category).

- *Skills:* At the level of skills, correspondences between the frameworks are apparent in the description of skills that demonstrate the 'mastery and innovation' required to solve 'complex and unpredictable problems' (EQF) and are the basis for 'original thinking/work' and the mastery of complex work processes in new work situations (SQF).

- *Competences*: Correspondence between the frameworks at the level of competences is evident from 'taking responsibility for decision-making' and managing 'complex' activities or projects in the EQF and 'taking responsibility for determining and achieving (own) work results' and carrying out 'complex' tasks (in the skills category) in the SQF.

- The description of competences at SQF level 7 and EQF level 6 does, however, reveal differences too. These can be seen in the fact that the EQF emphasises 'taking responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups', while the SQF emphasises 'ability to participate in reasoned discussion in specific work settings' and 'identifying own learning needs', 'taking the initiative for own learning' and 'ability to transfer knowledge in a group'. From this point of view these competences in the SQF are, in contrast to the EQF descriptors, primarily oriented towards the professional development of the individual.

Comparison of descriptors of levels EQF 8 / SQF 10

Comparison of EQF level 8 with SQF level 10

EQF Levels	SQF Levels	EQF descriptors			SQF descriptors		
		KNOWLEDGE	**SKILLS**	**COMPETENCE**	**KNOWLEDGE**	**SKILLS**	**COMPETENCES**
8 level	10 level	**Knowledge at the most advanced frontier** of a field of work or study and **at the interface between fields**	The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, **including synthesis** and evaluation, required to **solve critical problems** in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice	**Demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes** at the forefront of work or study contexts **including research**	**Advanced knowledge serving as the basis for autonomous, original research/ artistic work** or the development of the discipline at the highest level, which is connected with scholarly, professional or artistic recognition both nationally and internationally.	Planning, managing and carrying out works of the highest complexity, **including participation in research projects/ artistic projects**, and **resolution of the most complex** theoretical and practical **problems.** Capacity for critical reflection, advanced abstract thinking and **synthesising new and complex ideas.**	**Capacity for highly autonomous work/ creative work of the highest standard, interpretation and the ability to find answers to abstract questions and questions of the greatest complexity** in a professional, academic or artistic field. Ability to **transfer knowledge** via critical dialogue between a professional discipline and an academic discipline, and **a capacity for responsible evaluation of the consequences of the application of new knowledge in different contexts.**

Let us focus on Competences – similarities and differences:

- *Competences*: Correspondence between competences at EQF level 8 and SQF level 10 is apparent in the demonstration of 'substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, academic and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes' including research in the EQF and a capacity for 'highly autonomous work/creative work of the highest standard, interpretation and the ability to find answers to abstract questions and questions of the greatest complexity' including 'research projects/ artistic projects' (in the skills category) in the SQF, with the difference that the SQF also places particular emphasis on the 'ability to make a responsible assessment of the consequences of the application of new knowledge in various contexts' and the 'transfer of knowledge between a professional discipline and an aca- demic discipline'. The latter confirms the difference in the description of competences already identified in a comparison of SQF level 9 and EQF level 8.

Differences EQF 8 / SQF 9

ACQF

Competences:

- Correspondence between EQF level 8 and SQF level 9 is apparent in the demonstration of 'substantial autonomy' and the development of 'new ideas or processes' in contexts including research in the EQF, and in the ability to carry out tasks autonomously and the ability to formulate 'original thinking/ work' (in the skills section) in connection with 'basic and/or applied research/artistic work' in the SQF,

- … with the difference that the SQF also places special emphasis on the 'ability to independently, professionally and ethically orient own learning and learning of others in various contexts'. The SQF emphasises the role of the individual in the broader social context with an emphasis on professional and ethical conduct that is not to be found in the EQF.

Some concluding questions of the referencing team...

- Is the NQF clear, integrated, coherent?

- Are the level descriptors contextualised?

- Do level descriptors express vertical and horizontal logic?

- Is the learning outcomes approach understood, applied and how? What challenges? What achievements?

- How are qualifications described, developed and included in NQF / register?

- What linkages between QA and development and leveling of qualifications?

- How does Quality Assurance work in this context of qualifications?

- What institutions and stakeholders participate and endorse the referencing report?

ACQF

Thank you!

- Coleen Jaftha
- Eduarda Castel-Branco