



DEVELOPING THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL  
QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (ACQF)



TRAINING MODULE FIVE

05

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE  
CONTEXT OF ACQF

**ACQF**

African Continental  
Qualifications Framework

**Session 12:**  
**Quality Assurance of  
Qualifications and National  
Qualifications Frameworks**  
**The Freetown Workshop**

Freetown, 26/Nov to 01/Dec

Facilitator: James Mwewa

**“Quality is remembered long after the price is forgotten” – Dale Carnegie**



**Quality of qualifications and NQFs is indispensable for trust – learners, workers, employers and society**

## Presentation Outline

Quality and Quality Assurance –  
General Underpinnings

Quality Assurance in Education  
and Training

Quality Assurance of Qualifications

Linkages between NQFs and QA

Reflective Questions

# 01

## Quality and Quality Assurance – General Underpinnings

# What is Quality?



Quality has different definitions some of which are:

- Fitness for purpose
- Meeting specified requirements
- A product or service free of deficiencies
- Conformance to requirements
- Quality in a product or service is not what the supplier puts in. **It is what the customer gets out and is willing to pay for**

**ISO 9001 defines quality as the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfil requirements.**

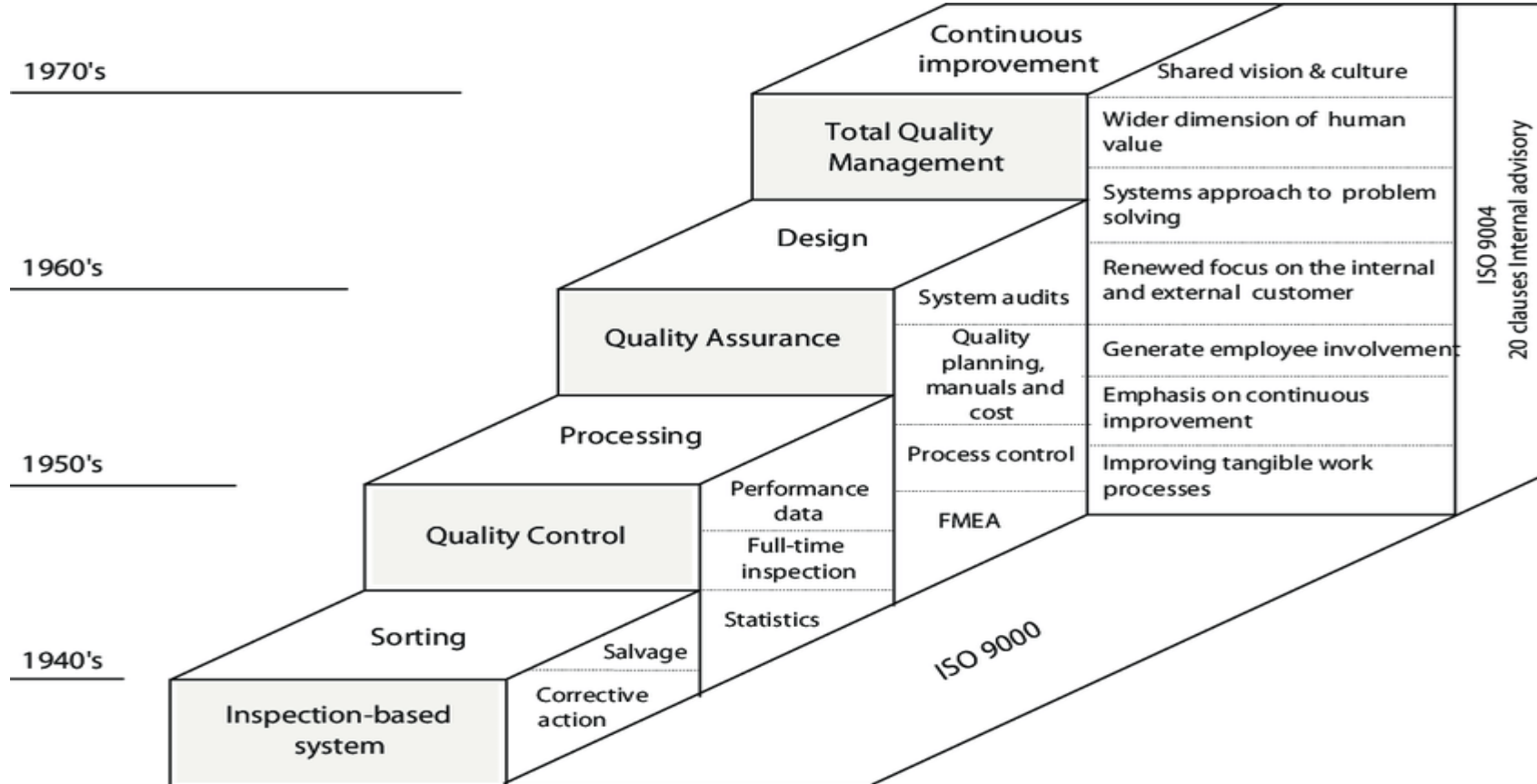
- Note: 1) Inherent means – existing in something  
2) Characteristics means – a distinguishing feature (e.g. Physical, Sensory, Behavioural, Ergonomic, Functional)

# What is Quality Assurance?



- “ Coordinated activities focused on providing confidence that quality requirements will be met” – ISO 9001.
- QA is a component of Quality Management. Quality Management is defined as a set of coordinated and interrelated or interacting activities to direct and control an organization with regard to quality – ISO 9001.

# The Evolution of Quality Management



Source: Hafeez et al., 2006b

# Key Principles of Quality Management (ISO 9001:2015)



# Why Implement a Quality Management System?



- A QMS is a very useful tool that aids in directing and controlling an organisation with regard to quality – ISO 9001.
- Benefits of a QMS include:
  - Continual improvement.
  - Customer reassurance.
  - Consistence.
  - Monitoring how the business operates.
  - Means of improved morale and motivation for employees.
  - Positive corporate image.
  - More efficient use of resources.



02

# Quality Assurance in Education and Training

# History of Quality Assurance in Education and Training in Africa

- **Affiliation** was the first form of Quality Assurance in African Higher Education
- The history of quality assurance in higher education in Africa goes back to the founding of the first universities in Africa
- For example, Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone (formed in 1827) and the University of Dakar (now Cheikh Anta Diop University) in Senegal, were regarded as an integral part of the British and French higher education systems, respectively.
- With affiliation, the institutions automatically became part of the British, French, Portuguese or other systems of quality assurance through their partner universities.
- Over time, some of the first institutions, such as the University of Cape Town, became mentors for younger institutions in South Africa, as was the case for Fort Hare University which was affiliated with Rhodes University.
- The **external examination system** continued to provide a level of quality assurance in many countries well beyond the end of the colonial era often using external examiners from neighbouring African states.

# History of Quality Assurance in Education and Training in Africa...

- Even before the current drive for quality assurance, a few examples of accreditation of African universities by foreign accreditors were noteworthy – e.g. University of Asmara in Eritrea in 1960 by the Superior Council of the Institute of Italian Universities and the University of South Africa (UNISA) by the Distance Education and Training Council, a United States distance education accreditor, in 1992.
- At independence, the role of state authority over higher education increased - most departments and ministries of education took an interest in the universities and asserted greater control over their governance and decision-making. **However, that was not always done in support of quality.**
- In some cases, the increased role of the state in university education contributed to a decline in the quality of higher education as a desire for political control of education, appointments to management and governing bodies were made largely on political, rather than on merit basis, also desire to control political dissent which was often seen as originating in the universities.
- Hence, there was increased demand and need for autonomous agencies to manage the quality assurance aspect in the education and training systems.

# Why Quality Assurance in Education and Training?

The first step towards the development or evolution of quality assurance systems should be a careful consideration of the specific reasons or purposes for establishing formalised quality assurance in the given country context.

- **Problems cited in education and training include:** unaccredited/unrecognised institutions (including diploma mills), unqualified academic staff, sub-standard curricula and lack of essential facilities, for example, laboratories.
- At the same time, calls for a higher quality of graduates from employers and society, together with governments' recognition of the need to be competitive internationally, are all viewed as drivers for quality assurance in education and training.

# 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.

# 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.**

## Definitions...

- 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**’*.

[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).

## Definitions...

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’.



# 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 Functions in Education and Training

According to Bateman, Keating, Gillis et. al. (2012: 9-10) quality assurance of qualifications and NQFs include:

- The accreditation of learning programmes;
- The registration of education and training providers through evaluation of their infrastructure, financial probity and health, staff qualifications and experience, management systems, delivery systems, and student support systems;
- The monitoring and auditing of provider processes and outcomes, including student learning and employment outcomes, and student and employer satisfaction levels;
- The control, supervision or monitoring of assessment, certification and graduation processes and outcomes;
- Provider or system wide evaluations, including evaluations by external agencies; and
- The provision of public information on the performance of providers such as program completions, employment outcomes, and student and employer satisfaction.

## Governance of Quality Assurance Functions in Education and Training

Not all functions necessarily fall under the remit of one agency. Bateman, Keating, Gillis et. al. (2012: 10) indicate that countries typically divide these functions across different types of agencies. The types of agencies noted include:

- Accreditation/ QA agencies.
- Qualifications agencies and awarding bodies.
- Self-accrediting and/or awarding providers – through Acts, Charters, Decrees.
- Provider registration and monitoring agencies.
- Licensing agencies and professional bodies.
- External quality agencies such as those responsible for the ISO standards.

# Quality assurance in the context of ACQF

## ACQF Guideline 5 and Training Module 5

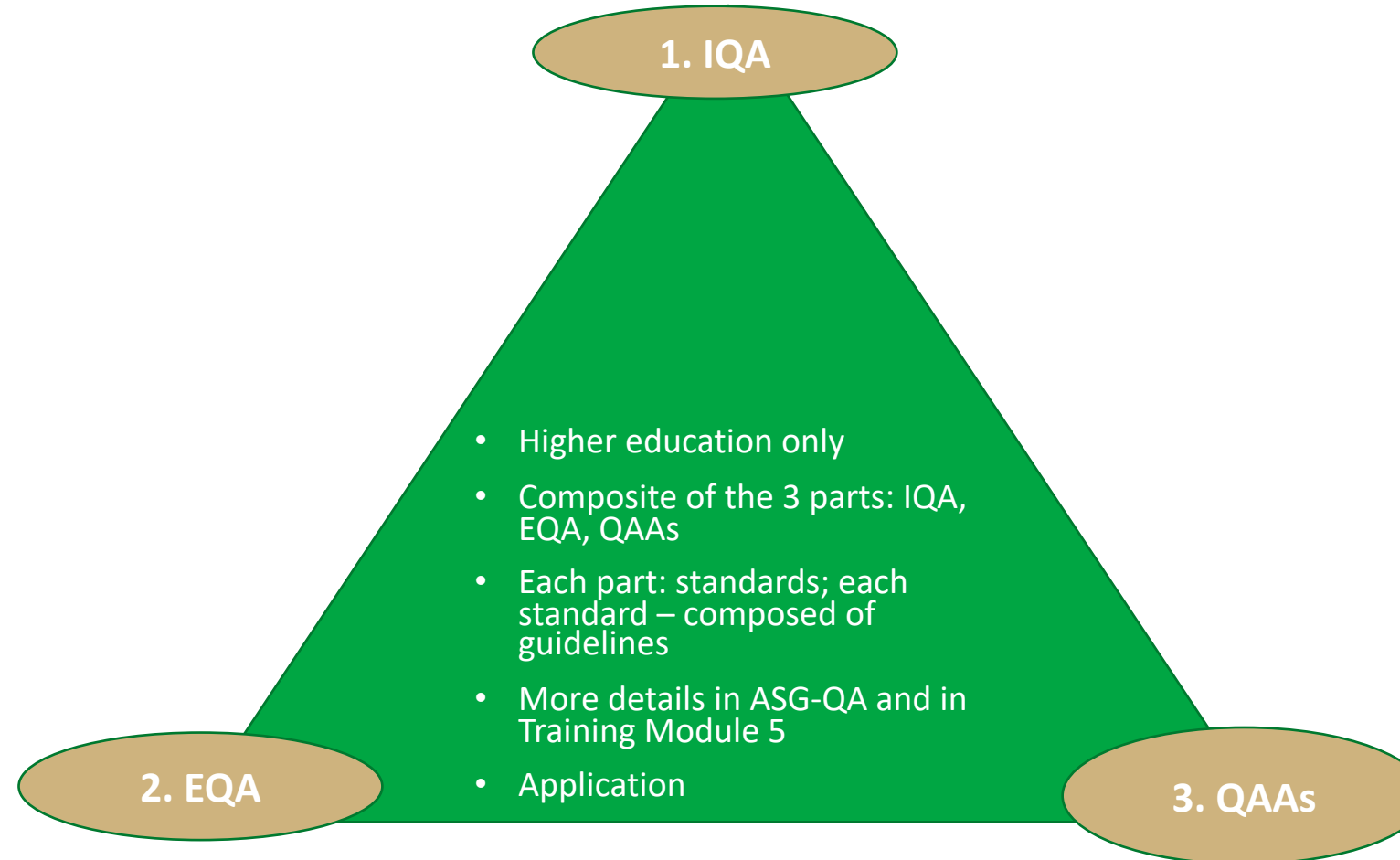
- Based on internationally accepted concepts and practice
- Complementary to national and regional systems (standards and guidelines) – not replacing...
- Consistent with African Union policies, e.g. CESA-16 and ASG-QA
- Address qualifications at all levels of learning
- Dialogue between quality assurance 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

# Snapshot – Quality Assurance in AU policies

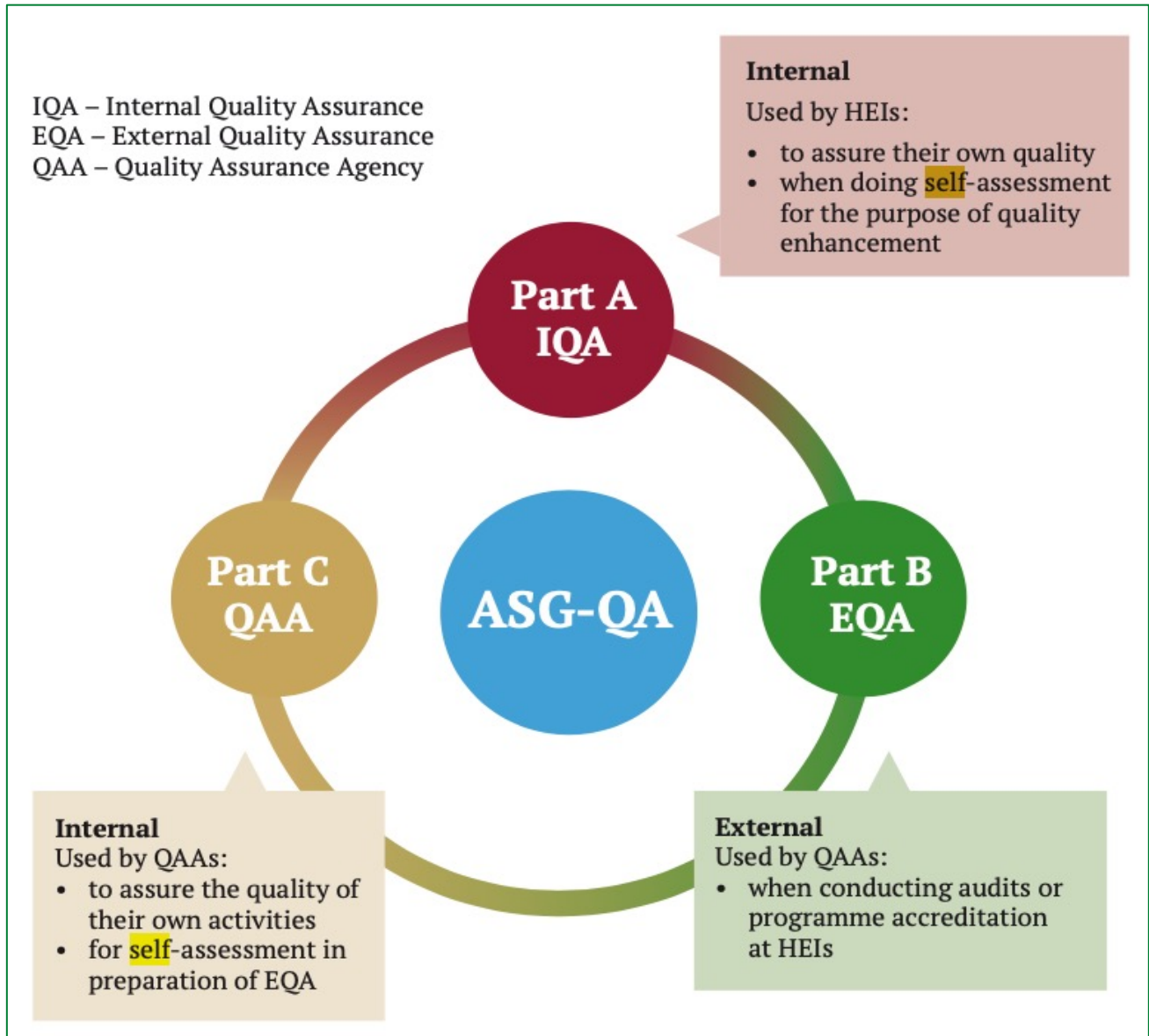
## In strategies and plans:

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

## African Standards and Guidelines for QA (ASG-QA)



# African Standards and Guidelines for QA (ASG-QA)



# Internal Quality Assurance

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

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

## Internal Quality Assurance

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

- Designed and implemented an ongoing and systematic cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, and resource allocation;
- Positioned its processes to support continuous improvement of its instructional programmes and support services, paying particular attention to student achievement and student learning;
- Prepared and implemented institutional plans for improvement supported by adequate sources of data and other evidence; and
- Established its own institution-set standards of performance regarding student achievement and student learning and assessed its effectiveness against those standards (ACCJC 2020).



# Internal Quality Assurance

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

- Mission, academic quality and institutional effectiveness and integrity;
- Student learning programmes and support services;
- Human resources;
- Physical resources;
- Technology resources;
- Financial resources; and
- Leadership and governance.

## External Quality Assurance

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

**Quality assurance through external evaluation includes:**

- Registration of education and training providers;
- Accreditation of training programmes;
- Re-accreditation of education and training providers;
- Periodic control of the implementation of training programmes;  
and
- Periodic control of providers.

# External Quality Assurance

**Authorisation provides recognition to an organisation as an education and training provider, which is granted permission to operate. Phases of accreditation include:**

- A provisional authorisation, that grants the right to carry out the education and training process and to organise the admission to education and training programmes, as the case may be; and
- A full accreditation after having satisfied all the requirements. Full accreditation also grants the right to issue diplomas, certificates and other documents recognised by the NQF, and to organise graduation/certification exams.

## External Quality Assurance

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

- Monitoring of education and training providers' and programmes' quality;
- Offering guidance and support to education and training providers in the quality assurance process, quality control to verify the fulfilment of the quality requirements;
- Proposals for quality improvement measures; validation of education and training providers' self-assessment reports; and
- Approval of education and training providers' improvement plans.

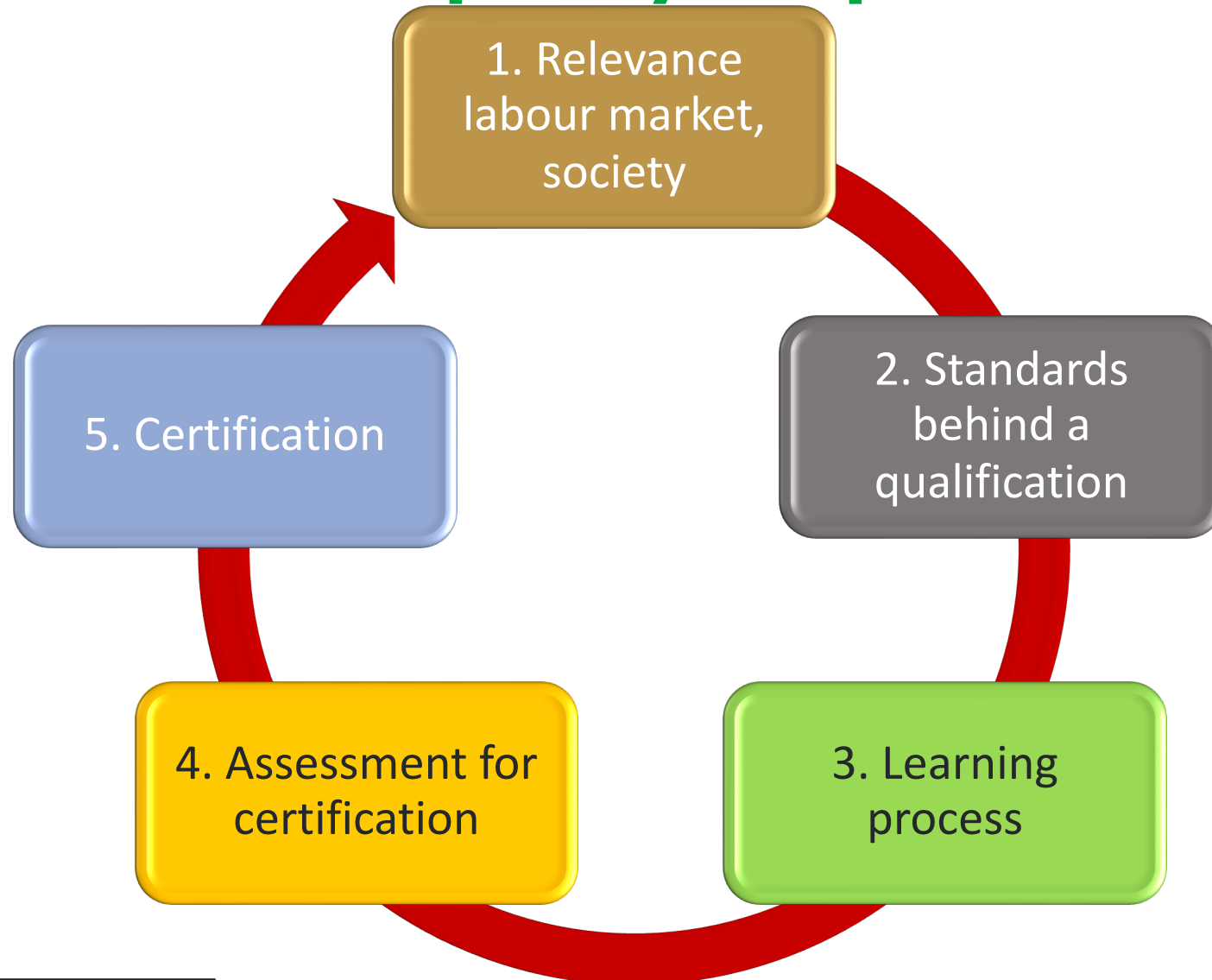
03

**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; and
4. Qualifications quality chain: from standards to awards.

# Minimum criteria for quality of qualifications



# Qualifications quality chain

- Quality assurance for quality qualifications consists of two broad processes:
  - Ensuring that qualifications are relevant and have value; and
  - Ensuring that the people who are certificated meet the conditions of the qualification.

**Back-chaining from the final outcome to the start of the process**





# 04

**Linkages between NQFs and QA**

# Linkages between NQFs and QA

- NQFs are used as quality assurance tools in the education and training systems.
- Evidence from the oldest National Qualifications Frameworks suggest that the link with quality assurance processes (regulatory arrangements) makes NQFs effective in driving towards transparency of the qualification systems.
- The admission (registration) of a qualification to the framework that is seen as the highest benchmark of quality: awarding organisations that seek this position aim to meet the criteria laid down for admission to the framework (Coles 2016: 24).

## Linkages between NQFs and QA...cont'd

**NQFs provide the initial basis for quality assuring qualifications through:**

- Describing levels of qualifications and of learning inputs or outcomes across these levels or qualification types, or both;
- Criteria that define the quality of qualifications included in the NQF (accreditation);
- Criteria that define the minimum standards of quality assurance operated by bodies issuing qualifications in the NQF;
- Regulations or guidelines for linking qualifications, either at the same level or between different levels;
- Regulations or guidelines for accepting validated non formal and informal learning for part or full qualification; and
- Rules or guidelines for the volume of learning that contribute towards a qualification.

## Linkages between NQFs and QA...cont'd

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- Rules or guidelines for the volume of learning that contribute towards a qualification.

## Can QA frameworks be user-friendly and also robust?



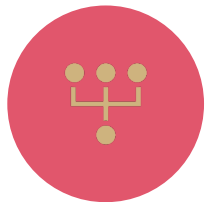
Balanced approaches – avoid over-regulation, over-bureaucratisation



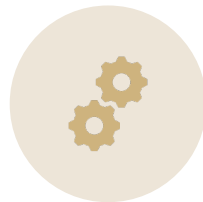
Measure effectiveness of QA arrangements using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods and data



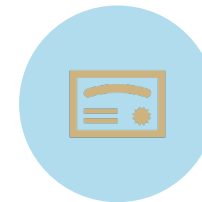
What is the cost of implementing vs non-implementing QA



How can QA adapt to change happening in learning and qualifications systems?



QA in LLL systems / LLL arrangements: a space for dialogue and learning across all sub-sectors; sharing of tools and methods; experimenting novel approaches



QA in spaces such: work-based learning, RPL, micro-credentials



And again: stakeholders buy-in and support is essential



Peer reviews

05

**Reflective questions**



1.
  - a) Is your organisation informed and applying elements of African Standards and Guidelines for QA (or planning to do so)?
  - b) If so, what elements of any of the 3 parts are you applying or planning to apply?
2. With respect to Quality Assurance (QA) in the context of NQF/ NQS in your country:
  - a) Is it quite similar or quite different from the definitions provided in this presentation?
  - b) Where is the emphasis of QA measures and processes in your national systems (education and training, NQF / NQS)?
    - i. At system level?
    - ii. At providers level?
    - iii. All levels?
3. Briefly discuss how developing innovative learning programmes, curricula, and experiences that lead to the development of demonstrable proficiencies, as aligned with 21st century skills can be both methodologically and politically challenging.
4. Suggest TWO ways in which quality assurance can be provided in the development of the innovative learning programmes.

**THANK**

**YOU!**