

# **ASEAN QUALIFICATIONS REFERENCE FRAMEWORK (AQRF) REFERENCING GUIDELINE**

**August 2020**



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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

<b>AANZFTA</b>	ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area
<b>AEC</b>	ASEAN Economic Community
<b>AECSP</b>	AANZFTA Economic Cooperation Support Programme
<b>AEM</b>	ASEAN Economic Ministers
<b>ALMM</b>	ASEAN Labour Ministers Meeting
<b>AMS</b>	ASEAN Member State(s)
<b>APEC</b>	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
<b>APQN</b>	Asia-Pacific Quality Network
<b>AQAN</b>	ASEAN Quality Assurance Network
<b>AQAF</b>	ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework
<b>AQRF</b>	ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework
<b>ASEAN</b>	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
<b>ASED</b>	ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting
<b>EQF</b>	European Qualifications Framework
<b>INQAAHE</b>	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
<b>MRA</b>	Mutual Recognition Arrangements
<b>QA</b>	Quality Assurance
<b>QF</b>	Qualifications Framework
<b>NAC</b>	National AQRF Committee
<b>NQF</b>	National Qualifications Framework
<b>RQF</b>	Regional Qualifications Framework
<b>TOR</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>TVET</b>	Technical and Vocational Education Training
<b>VET</b>	Vocational Education Training

## **FOREWORD**

This document is the second revision of the Referencing Guideline to the ASEAN Qualifications Referencing Framework (AQRF) as adopted by the AQRF Committee at its 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting held on 24 August 2020. This version supersedes the original AQRF Referencing Guidelines which was adopted by the Task Force on ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (TF-AQRF) in September 2016.

Since the establishment of the AQRF Committee as the implementing body of the AQRF in September 2016, the Committee has undertaken reviews of Referencing Reports submitted by ASEAN Member States (AMS) and completed four (4) of them namely Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand.

Over the course of the reviews, AQRF Committee has enriched its understanding of the referencing process and in particular the unique situation of ASEAN Member States in such process. The valuable experiences gained throughout the process resulted in the understanding of various elements in the AQRF Referencing Guidelines that could be further improved to better assist AMS in developing high quality Referencing Reports.

The revisions in this version also include the AQRF Committee's decisions related to the referencing process, as well as several other edits and restructuring to improve usability and readability of the document within the ASEAN context.

The Guideline will remain a living document which could be further refined as the AQRF Committee continues to gain further understandings and experiences in undertaking a robust referencing process.

## **1. BACKGROUND**

The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) is a regional common reference framework which functions as a device to enable comparisons of qualifications across ASEAN Member States (AMS). It addresses all education and training sectors and promotes the wider objective of lifelong learning.

The ASEAN Charter (hereinafter referred to as ‘the Charter’), signed by the ten ASEAN Leaders (hereinafter referred to as ‘the Leaders’) in Singapore on 20 November 2007, provides the basis for a region-wide qualifications reference framework in ASEAN.

The Charter aims to “create a single market and production base which is stable, prosperous, highly competitive and economically integrated with effective facilitation for trade and investment in which there is free flow of goods, services and investment; facilitated movement of business persons, professionals, talents and labour; and free flow of capital” and to “develop human resources through closer cooperation in education and lifelong learning and in science and technology, for the empowerment of the peoples of ASEAN and the strengthening of the ASEAN Community”.<sup>1</sup>

In 2007, the 10 AMS<sup>2</sup> adopted the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Blueprint (ASEAN, 2007). It provided a mandate for further deepening of economic cooperation, including the recognition of professional qualifications. MRAs in seven regulated professional services were concluded to-date, namely Engineering, Architecture, Accountancy Surveying, Medicine, Dentistry and Nursing services. There is also another MRA for Tourism Professionals. Another important component of the AEC Blueprint was the establishment of the free flow of skilled labour through “harmonisation and standardisation” (ASEAN, 2007:18), along with the establishment of the AEC on 31 December 2015.

Subsequently, the Leaders at the 27<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit in November 2015 adopted the “*Kuala Lumpur Declaration on ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together*” which comprised the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) Blueprint 2025, the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprint 2025, and the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Blueprint 2025. The ASCC Blueprint 2025 called for “*Empowered People and Strengthened Institutions*” and “*Equitable Access for All*”.

The AEC Blueprint 2025 aspires for a region which will be “highly integrated and cohesive, competitive, innovative and dynamic, with enhanced connectivity and

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<sup>1</sup> Charter of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (2007), Chapter 1, Article 1, Paragraphs 5 and 10.

<sup>2</sup> The ten ASEAN Member States are Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam.

sectoral cooperation, and a more resilient, inclusive, and people-oriented, people-centred community, and integrated with the global economy”.

Typical of other global regions, ASEAN is characterised by varying levels of economic development as well as levels of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs). Some AMS have established comprehensive NQFs, others have sectoral frameworks in place, and others have yet to develop or implement qualifications frameworks. Within this context, the AQRF aims to accommodate different types of NQFs that are at different stages of development, ranging from those that are initial conceptual proposals to those that are fully developed and functioning.

The AQRF was developed following a collaborative process between AMS with the support of Australia and New Zealand through the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area (AANZFTA) Economic Cooperation Support Programme (AECSP). The AECSP’s Project on *Education and Training Governance: Capacity Building for National Qualifications Frameworks* carried a proposal for a region-wide qualifications framework, which was considered at the 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the FTA Joint Committee for AANZFTA in May 2010 in Manila and approved intersessionally in July 2010.

A multi-sectoral Task Force on AQRF (TF-AQRF) was established in 2012 to develop the AQRF and worked on several iterations of the Framework. The TF-AQRF comprised officials from ASEAN ministries of trade in services, labour/manpower development, education, other relevant ministries and qualification agencies. Representatives of Australia and New Zealand participated as non-voting members of the TF-AQRF.

The TF-AQRF finalised the text of the AQRF at its 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting in March 2014. The AQRF was subsequently endorsed by the ASEAN Economic Ministers (AEM) in August 2014; the ASEAN Education Ministers (ASEM) in September 2014; and the ASEAN Labour Ministers (ALMM) through ad-referendum from November 2014 to May 2015.

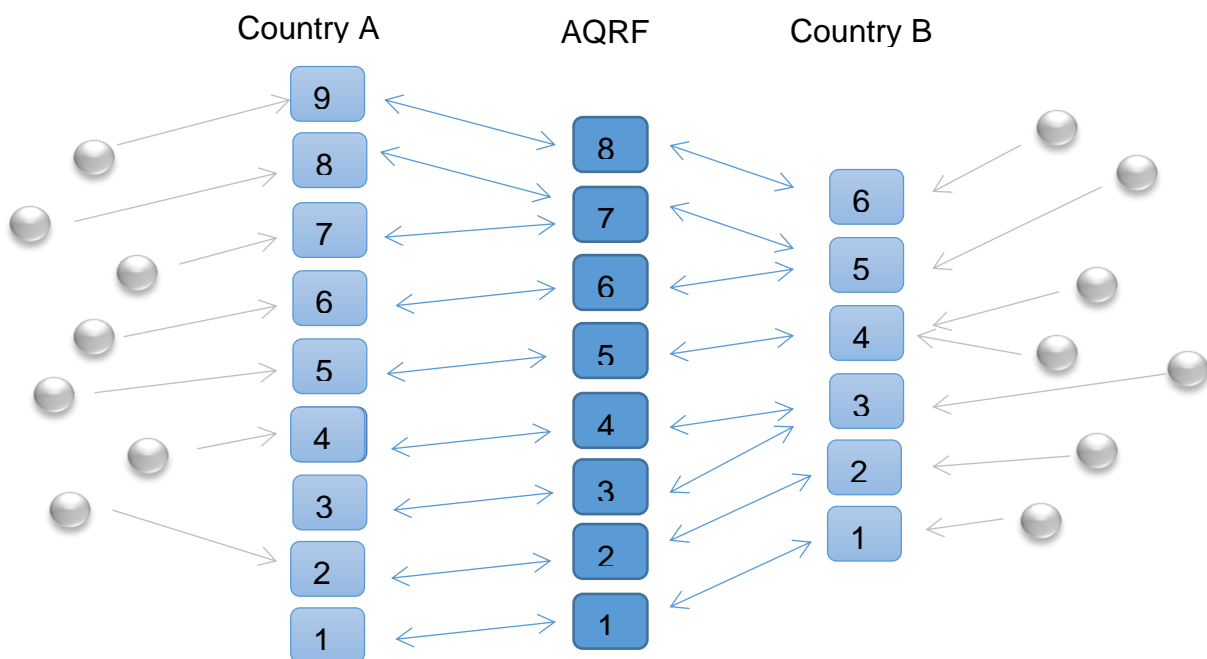
ASEAN is actively implementing the AQRF through the AQRF Committee established and commenced meeting in 2017. The processes include referencing of national qualifications framework and quality assurance systems against the AQRF with increasing number of AMS involved.

## **2. OVERVIEW OF THE AQRF**

The AQRF is a regional common reference framework that functions as a translation device to enable comparisons of qualifications across AMS. It addresses education and training sectors, with the wider objective of promoting lifelong learning on the one hand, and of facilitating mobility of learners and workers on the other hand. It also aims

to support and enhance a Member State's NQF or qualifications system<sup>3</sup>, while serving as a mechanism for comparison, transparency and higher quality qualification systems. The education sector in the AQRF is defined broadly to incorporate informal, non-formal and formal learning<sup>4</sup>.

The AQRF has neutral influence on NQF and national qualifications systems. Its goal is to make NQFs or national qualifications systems explicit with respect to the AQRF, without requiring changes to national qualifications systems. The AQRF respects a Member State's specific structures and processes to maintain its responsiveness to national priorities.



The AQRF, as a translation device, also broadens the understanding of an AMS' NQF or national qualifications systems for people in and outside ASEAN. It provides a common spine of levels to which all ASEAN NQF levels relate. As illustrated in Figure 1, if an NQF level for a Member State links to AQRF level 4, it will enable a comparison of all other NQF levels linked to AQRF level 4.

As the implementation progresses, the AQRF can be used to link to NQFs outside ASEAN and to other common or regional qualifications frameworks (RQF).

The key characteristics and purposes of regional qualifications frameworks (or meta frameworks) should not be confused with those of NQF; and that they serve different

<sup>3</sup> National qualifications system includes but not limited to National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Countries with no NQF can still undertake reference to the AQRF using the qualifications conventions and common practices.

<sup>4</sup> Formal learning includes but is not limited to post compulsory schooling, adult and community education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and higher education.



functions. Regional qualifications frameworks aim to add value to the NQF, and the distinction in functions has to be clear in the referencing process.

<b>Component</b>	<b>NQF</b>	<b>AQRF</b>
<b>Main function:</b>	Act as a benchmark for the level of learning recognised in the national qualifications system or the NQF, and possibly an indication of volume and type of learning	Act as a benchmark for the level of any learning recognised in a qualification or defined in an NQF linked to the AQRF
<b>Developed by:</b>	Regional bodies, national agencies and education and training bodies	Jointly developed by ASEAN Member States
<b>Responsive to:</b>	Local, regional and national priorities (e.g. levels of literacy levels, labour market needs)	Collective priorities for transparency of qualifications systems across ASEAN
<b>Currency/value depends on:</b>	Factors within the national context	Level of trust between regional and international users
<b>Quality based on:</b>	Practices of national bodies and learning institutions	Common application of the 11 referencing criteria, and procedures and the robustness of the referencing process linking NQF levels to the AQRF levels
<b>Levels defined by:</b>	National benchmarks embedded in different specific learning contexts (e.g. school education, work or higher education)	General progression in learning in all contexts across all Member States

As a meta-framework, Member States' qualification levels are referenced to the AQRF through their respective NQFs, instead of directly linked to the other NQFs. The AQRF will link the Member States' NQF or qualification systems to one another.

## **2.1. Level Descriptors based on Learning Outcomes**

The AQRF is a hierarchy of levels of complexity of learning using learning outcomes as the metric. The level descriptors of the AQRF aim to provide the reference point for the levels of NQFs and national qualifications systems.

The level descriptors include the notion of competence as the ability to extend beyond the possession of knowledge and skills. It includes:

- Cognitive competence: involving the use of theory and concepts, as well as informal tacit knowledge gained experientially
- Functional competence (skills or know-how): those things that a person should be able to do when they work in a given area
- Personal competence: involving knowing to conduct oneself in a specific situation
- Ethical competence: involving the possession of certain personal and professional values.

The level descriptors do not make explicit reference to personal competence or ethical competence. However, ASEAN Member States value personal competence and ethical competence as they contribute to the capacity of people to know things, act skillfully, work effectively in different settings, and show responsibility and accountability. Personal competence and ethical competence include attributes such as attentiveness, intercultural awareness, active tolerance and acceptance of diversity. These attributes could also be included in individual NQFs.

The level descriptors of the AQRF cover two domains:

- **Knowledge and Skills** include the various kind of knowledge (i.e. facts and theories), as well as the skills use (i.e. practical and cognitive skills); and
- **Application and Responsibilities** define the context in which the knowledge and skills are used in practice, as well as the level of independence, including the capacity to make decisions and the responsibility for oneself and others.

The level descriptors assume that the learning outcomes are cumulative by level, i.e., the knowledge, skills and conditions at one level include those at the lower levels. The domains must be read together to give a true indication of the level.

Regional frameworks, such as the AQRF, have a strong influence on the use of learning outcomes in education and training. The NQF to the AQRF referencing process, the QA of the referencing process, and the influence on learning programmes are examples of the ways the AQRF can influence NQFs and the curricula, assessment as well as the qualifications that underpin them. By defining the levels in terms of learning outcomes (i.e. level descriptors) in the AQRF, Member States are required in the referencing process to explain the levels in their NQF or qualifications systems in terms of learning outcomes. Similarly, the qualifications that are included

in each level will need to be explained in terms of learning outcomes. Hence, the referencing process to the AQRF is a stimulus for Member States to further develop the scope of learning outcomes in the whole qualifications system.

AQRF can act as a top-level reference point for policies to further develop the use of learning outcomes. The more immediate driver for expanding the use of learning outcomes comes from arrangements in Member States through: (i) NQF, (ii) national QA processes, (iii) teacher training, (iv) projects, and (v) developing platforms and tools that require the use of learning outcomes.

## **2.2. Quality Assurance Principles**

One key aim of the AQRF is to build trust in qualifications issued across Member States in ASEAN. As such, the framework is underpinned by a set of agreed quality assurance (QA) principles and broad standards related to:

- the functions of the responsible approving agencies;
- systems for the assessment of learning and the issuing of qualifications; and
- regulation of the issuance of certificates

The AQRF requires Member States to refer to one or more established QA frameworks as the basis for the agreed QA principles and broad standards. These frameworks would be used as the benchmark for evaluating the QA systems for the relevant education and training sectors. The referencing process also requires referencing AMS to describe their education and training QA systems.

## **3. REFERENCING TO THE AQRF**

The AQRF is a tool for enabling comparisons of qualification levels across AMS to support the recognition<sup>5</sup> of their NQF or national qualification systems and to encourage worker and learner mobility. Its success depends on AMS undertaking the referencing process (**“Referencing AMS”**) and for this process to be effective, transparent and coherent. The aim of the referencing process is to develop and enhance the zone of trust within the ASEAN Community for the qualifications awarded in each AMS.

Referencing is an autonomous national process where the relevant national stakeholders and authorities agree on the link between each of the levels of their national qualifications system or NQF and their corresponding level in the relevant

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<sup>5</sup> The AQRF does not offer automatic recognition of qualifications in other countries. However, it offers a useful first step in recognition by indicating the equivalent level of a qualification in a participating AMS. It, therefore, helps the bodies that offer recognition useful information about qualifications levels in other participating AMS.

international or regional qualifications framework, and in this case the AQRF. The referencing of national qualifications or NQF to the AQRF facilitates further linkage to the qualifications levels in other AMS through a comparison of the national qualification levels linked to the same level of the AQRF.

The referencing process requires consultations with stakeholders on the proposed links between the NQF and the AQRF levels. The referencing AMS subsequently presents the outcomes of these consultations to the AQRF Committee for review and approval of the official linkage of an AMS' NQF with the AQRF. This referencing process is a complex process entailing technical work with a significant socio-political dimension.

The AQRF principles stipulate the inclusion of all education and training sectors (i.e. schools, higher education, vocational education and training (VET), and other adult learning) in the referencing process. However, AMS with NQFs based on a limited range of learning sectors could proceed with a partial referencing of their NQF to the AQRF.

This AQRF Referencing process is undertaken based on 11 referencing criteria to ensure that the process is effective, transparent, consistent and coherent across all AMS. This Guideline elaborates on each criterion to assist AMS in the conduct of their referencing process as well as in their reporting of the outcomes of this process. The AQRF does not prescribe how the referencing process would be undertaken, although it identifies 11 referencing criteria to be used.

The methods used to create a link between an NQF and the AQRF may vary from one Member State to the other, and there is no single right way to reference to the AQRF. However, regardless of the method chosen, it must be explained in a way that creates maximum trust in the link for people outside the referencing Member State.

Finally, the referencing process involves setting up appropriate committees at the national level, making a defensible proposal that links the NQF levels to the AQRF levels, consulting national stakeholder groups and writing a referencing report to be presented to the AQRF Committee for review and eventual endorsement.

### **3.1. Concepts Related to Referencing**

#### **3.1.1. Learning Outcomes**

The AQRF is a hierarchy of levels of complexity of learning which use learning outcomes as the metric. Thus, the level descriptors in the AQRF use learning outcomes to facilitate comparisons of and links between qualifications and qualifications systems across Member States in ASEAN.

The concept of learning outcomes is about what someone knows and can do after their learning. Learning outcomes are increasingly used in describing curricula, qualifications specifications, assessment processes and NQF level descriptors. Learning outcomes are also of value in the work setting. For example, learning outcomes are used in occupational standards, job profiles, and recruitment and appraisal schemes. Guidance settings, such as in writing course and job search details, and job adverts, also value learning outcomes. Last but not least, learning outcomes are valued in the personal context, for example in writing curriculum vitae (CV) and describing job experience.

The learning outcomes approach is used in the different educational sectors in different Member States to varying degrees at the level of individual qualifications, standards, assessment criteria, curricula, etc. Therefore, the process of describing the referencing would be different from one Member State to the other and from sector to sector. Some Member States will find it necessary to reference to the AQRF on the basis of both inputs and outcomes since in most practical situations both measures are considered.

Programme specifications can be supplemented with outcome information, for example:

- Competency-based systems can be supplemented with input information, such as the duration of an apprenticeship, internship or attachment programme.
- Assessment or evaluation methods can use input for completion of programmes, and outcomes for objective or external assessment or evaluation.
- Recruitment processes can use both inputs for the time a person has worked with reputable employers) and outcome information for qualifications and proofs of competence.

The task of referencing qualifications levels that are not expressed in terms of learning outcomes will require a different approach. It is critically important that the stakeholders agree on the linkages between the types of national qualifications and their corresponding NQF and AQRF level descriptors, and to produce evidence to support a referencing position.

When learning outcomes are not available for matching with an NQF or AQRF level, the technical process of referencing would inevitably be weakened, and there would be no textual analysis. The emphasis shifts to standards that are not written in terms of learning outcomes, such as common progression routes from qualifications to qualifications, and entry requirements for study at specific levels. The views of stakeholders would become more important. This social aspect of referencing and the consultations on the referencing outcomes will need to be taken more seriously in the referencing process.

### **3.1.2. The Concept of Best-Fit**

The NQF and AQRF levels and level descriptors are rarely a perfect fit given that the objectives, purposes and priorities are different. This is likely the case even if the national levels are described in terms of learning outcomes. In Member States with NQFs, the level descriptors are normally more detailed and specific than those of the AQRF and are closely linked to the specific national context. For these reasons, it is unlikely to have a perfect correlation to the AQRF level descriptors, which are broader and more general.

The concept of best-fit has roots in the mathematical and engineering idea of finding harmony between two sets of data, or two or more devices. The main feature of the best-fit concept is that it recognises and accepts that perfect-fit is not always possible, and it is necessary to apply some judgement or approximation to link and to solve a problem. In the case of matching NQF and AQRF level descriptors, the concept of best-fit would demand a common judgement from a range of stakeholders to enhance the confidence in the outcome of the approximation. It is useful to consider using the best-fit approach for decision-making based on collective professional judgements of stakeholders.

When using the concept of best-fit to link the levels between frameworks, it is important to be mindful that the qualifications in these levels are not necessarily equal or equivalent, or carry the same value. Qualifications at the same level may vary in knowledge, skills and competencies, as well as the volume of learning and the routes to learning and the opportunities for permeability and progression

The application of the best-fit concept would be most needed where there are differences in the categories and dimensions used for structuring level descriptors, particularly in the number of levels in an NQF and the AQRF.

For the sake of confidence in the decisions made about level-to-level linkages, it is important to explain in full how best-fit is used, and why the best-fit is the best level-to-level fit. These decisions have to be explicitly elaborated in the referencing report, by indicating where the best-fit decision differs from what some stakeholders considered to be perfect-fit.

Some questions may be useful to guide the description of best-fit in referencing reports:

- Is the expression of level descriptors in the NQF suitable for the use of best-fit (i.e. the coverage of knowledge, skills and competence, or the level of detail)?
- What are the major differences in the scope of the NQF level descriptors compared to those in the AQRF? For instance, are there additional elements like description of personal value, key competences, or aspects of self-management?
- Where does a broad consideration of text in the two sets of level descriptors suggest a linkage between NQF levels and the AQRF levels?

- Is there a potential difference between the technical approach referencing (i.e. text analysis) and the expected referencing based on the opinion of stakeholder groups (i.e. a social approach)?
- What evidence and sources were available to support the decision-making about level-to-level referencing?
- Have stakeholder groups approved the best-fit outcomes? Is the evidence of consultation with stakeholders available?
- Is there evidence to demonstrate that the final referencing decision is based on collective professional judgements of stakeholders?

### **3.2. Managing the Referencing Process**

The referencing process aims to link the levels on the NQF<sup>6</sup> to those in the AQRF in a consistent, trusted and transparent manner. The transparency of the process in each Member State is important for people in other Member States to understand and trust the validity of the outcomes of the referencing process.

The referencing process should provide compelling evidence of the link between the level of an NQF or national qualifications and that of the AQRF. The management of the referencing process, including the reporting of the process to other Member States, needs to be designed to support these aims.

#### **3.2.1. Stages in the Referencing Process**

A Member State can design the referencing process in a way that suits its normal procedures and institutional structures. Regardless of the design, the process will involve eight stages.

- i. Set up the relevant body or bodies at a national level to manage the referencing process.
- ii. Develop a proposal for the level-to-level linkages between the NQF and the AQRF.
- iii. Carry out national consultations with relevant stakeholders on the basis of the proposal.
- iv. Write the referencing report responding to the 11 AQRF referencing criteria, taking into account the outcomes of national consultations and the views of international expert(s).
- v. Ensure the relevant responsible body or bodies within the referencing AMS approve the referencing report.

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<sup>6</sup> For countries without an NQF, it is possible to link mainstream qualifications to the AQRF levels by comparing the learning outcomes of the qualifications to those in the AQRF level descriptors. This process requires the application of “best-fit”, additional consultation and QA procedures.

- vi. Present the referencing report to the AQRF Committee with a subsequent discussion, including peer-review from other AMS.
- vii. Provide clarification and further evidence to questions and comments from the AQRF Committee.
- viii. Update the referencing report whenever changes in the NQF and in the relationship between the NQF and the AQRF occur.

### **3.2.2. Pre-conditions for Referencing**

Prior to conducting a formal referencing process involving stakeholders, it is necessary to ensure that the conditions are favourable for a successful outcome. For example, the AQRF is in the public domain, its key concepts are generally understood, and the development of work related to the underpinning concepts (i.e. learning outcomes) is underway.

Some pre-conditions to determine the readiness of a Member State to undertake a formal referencing process include:

- i. **The AQRF is seen in the Member State as an enhancement to regional cooperation.** There is a process underway to disseminate and examine the perceptions and value (or otherwise) of the AQRF.
- ii. **Capacity building is underway with regard to understanding and using of the AQRF,** including the creation of an official portal and a level of consultation with various agencies and bodies.
- iii. **Governance and management structures are in place or being formulated.** This includes determining the responsible body for referencing and setting up the competent committees.
- iv. **QA in the qualifications system is effective.** Review the current quality assurance systems to include the use of learning outcomes and NQFs.
- v. **Links with other contexts for QA are clear.** Consider how national quality assurance systems, for example, the standards for programme design, interface with the AQRF structure and principles.
- vi. **There is an enhanced awareness of complementary projects,** such as Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) and other alignments. Understand the interdependence of the AQRF with those relevant projects, which need to be scoped and understood.

Creating the right conditions for a referencing process can take time. In some respects, the activities listed above are ongoing process to ensure that the AQRF makes a positive impact on the portability and quality of qualifications. Some Member States may consider these pre-conditions as a barrier to carrying out a referencing process in the short-term. It is, however, the responsibility of each Member State to determine if the pre-conditions are in place before initiating a referencing process.



### **3.2.3. Governance**

To determine the responsibilities of the various stakeholders in the AQRF referencing process and the production of the report, it is important to make clear who is in-charge of the process and who makes the final decisions. The roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders involved should be described in the referencing report. Normally one body, often the relevant ministry, has the final authority in the decision-making process. For some Member States with highly decentralised structure, the final decisions may need to be made by consensus. Subsequently, the final decision of the Member State shall be conveyed to the AQRF Committee by a single representative body acknowledged by all relevant stakeholders of that Member State.

At the regional level, the AQRF Committee oversees the referencing process. This Committee undertakes peer-review of the referencing reports submitted by Member States, and offers advice on how they might be made more transparent and trusted. The AQRF Committee is a high-level executive committee and engages with the complex policy and technical issues arising from the implementation of the AQRF and the evolution of a regional qualifications framework.

The AQRF Committee is able to draw on its membership for up-to-date information from each AMS, and be regarded as an authority in its decision-making. The AQRF Committee is also responsible for building the zone of trust by providing transparency through regular updates of its meeting to the relevant ministerial tracks (of trade, labour and education) as well as publication of endorsed Referencing Reports to the public.

### **3.2.4. Stakeholders and Responsible Bodies**

The referencing process should include all education and training sectors (e.g. schools, higher education, vocational education and training and other adult learning) according to the AQRF principles. The engagement of a full range of sectors and corresponding educational sector groups has proven to be a key factor in making regional frameworks, such as the AQRF, a success.

Some Member States may proceed with a partial or sectoral referencing of their NQF to the AQRF first. For example, the higher education qualifications framework (QF) or the QF for the VET sector may be referenced. If the NQF does not include qualifications from a full range of educational sectors, it is nevertheless useful to communicate formally with stakeholders from the sectors that do not have qualifications in the NQF. This is especially the case when the long-term goal of the NQF is for it to become inclusive of all qualifications to correspond with the breadth of scope of the AQRF.

The following questions are critical in this process:

- Who should be involved to contribute to the results to ensure the success of the referencing?
- How should stakeholders be involved (e.g. in form of working groups, advisory boards or in a consultation process)?
- What is the position and role of stakeholders (e.g. social partners) in the referencing process?

It is important that there is an open consultation to enable interested persons to participate. Seminars and conferences, for instance, can be designed to engage stakeholders in the referencing process and to enhance interaction between the different stakeholder groups.

The range of legitimate stakeholder groups could include the following:

- A government ministry or agency in the capacity of leading and/or managing
- Education experts (in various education and training sectors and levels - general education, VET, higher education, further education and training, etc.), including:
  - curriculum and assessment experts
  - learning providers or institutions
  - teachers and trainers
  - learners
- Social partners, including:
  - Employers
  - Trade unions
  - Professional bodies
  - Licensing bodies
- Organisations awarding qualifications
- Organisations responsible for qualifications recognition
- A wider range of government bodies responsible for qualifications in their respective areas (e.g. ministries of youths, agriculture and social security)
- Non-governmental organisations, including volunteering organisations and charities that may be in charge of specific qualifications
- Education and training funding agencies
- Qualifications agencies
- QA agencies and/or bodies with similar responsibilities
- Research community, particularly international expert and technical consultants.

### **3.2.5. National AQRF Committee**

The National AQRF Committee (NAC) is the body that interfaces between the national policymaking bodies and qualifications agencies on one hand, and with the AQRF

Committee on the other hand. The NAC considers information and issues from the AQRF Committee, and is the single source of national information provided to the AQRF Committee on the progress of its referencing to the AQRF.

The NAC should be the representative of the main stakeholders in the qualification systems in the Member State (within the constraints of keeping membership to a manageable level). The discussions in the NAC can be considered to be well informed, expert and cognisant of policy positions in the Member State.

The NAC will be responsible for the referencing report, although not necessarily be responsible for writing the report or conducting the referencing process. The NAC is responsible for all aspects of the national link with the AQRF, including the referencing process. Its role includes guiding the referencing process and the referencing outcome (i.e. the level-to-level linkage and the referencing report).

The membership is best made up of the leaders of the main bodies involved or their nominated representatives. The NAC in some Member States may request another body to carry out the referencing process. However, this will not devolve the responsibility of the NAC for the referencing report and the referencing outcome. The referencing report and outcome must be approved by the NAC.

The terms of reference (TOR) of the NAC can vary according to each Member State's preferred arrangements. Generally, the NAC responds to the following TOR:

- i. To discuss the most effective ways to reference to the AQRF and promote its use for national and international recognition and comparability of qualifications standards as well as the alignment of qualifications standards and frameworks.
- ii. To consider the design of a referencing process that will inspire trust in the qualifications and qualifications framework in the Member State.
- iii. To discuss and agree on a provisional level-to-level linkage between the NQF and the AQRF.
- iv. To consider the results of a national consultation on the provisional linkage and amend the proposal if necessary.
- v. To approve a draft referencing report to be submitted to the AQRF Committee for review.
- vi. To consider the discussion of the referencing report during the reviewing process of the AQRF Committee, and to agree on any amendments.

The chairpersonship of the NAC is an important role. The chairperson may become a public face of the referencing process. In some Member States, this will be best seen as a government figure, possibly from the ministry of education. In other Member States, the preference is for a person independent of government to chair the panel, possibly the leader of a non-government organisation or an industry leader.

The membership of the NAC is the remit of the Member States. The composition of the NAC should include representatives of the stakeholders listed above. These members should be selected based on their expertise and the role to be undertaken. A checklist for the AQRF referencing process is included in [Appendix 1](#).

### **3.2.6. Involvement of International Experts**

Through the development and implementation of the AQRF, opportunities were created for international exchanges and cooperation in the forms of meetings and discussion of the emerging framework. International experts from non-ASEAN countries could contribute and engage in exchanges by being invited to take part in the referencing process. Such involvement and engagement may include:

- i. offering advice on the transparency of the referencing process and external benchmarks for levels, and
- ii. communicating the referencing outcomes to an international audience.

It is the decision of the referencing AMS on how to best use international experts. It is useful for referencing AMS to indicate the reasons and motivation to involve and engage international experts from non-ASEAN countries in their referencing process. Member States could choose experts by considering the following points:

- i. Should the international expert come from a country with similar educational and training structures as the referencing AMS (i.e. “like-minded expert”)? In this way, the international expert would not require much time to appreciate or understand the qualifications system. Alternatively, AMS might choose an international expert from a country with a very different education and training structure instead, so that he or she would be able to provide feedback on the referencing report (i.e. if the information is understandable and clear for someone not familiar with the system)
- ii. Should the international expert come from a country where there is existing cooperation (i.e. the country with whom the referencing AMS has significant mobility of learner and/or worker)? The international expert, however, could come from a country where cooperation should be established or intensified.
- iii. Should the international expert have specific competence in one or more of the following areas: (i) general education, (ii) VET, and (iii) higher education, to complement the expertise of the referencing AMS experts?
- iv. Should the international expert be familiar with other NQFs or regional frameworks?
- v. Should the international expert be familiar with the AQRF and have experience in working on the international level?
- vi. Should the international expert be proficient or at least be able to communicate in the referencing AMS’ language or lingua franca?

Preferably, the international experts are open-minded and have the ability to provide constructive feedback to national referencing bodies as “critical friends”. It is important that the international experts demonstrate the ability to exercise professional

judgement to balance transparency and openness, and are mindful of the need to keep sensitive information confidential (e.g. issues or challenges arising from the referencing process).

The decision to include a formal statement from the international expert in the referencing report depends on the message the national authority in charge of the referencing report wants to communicate.

Positive statements from international experts could be useful to enhance the credibility of the referencing process and report. However, a constructive statement from the international expert highlighting critical issues and areas for improvements could enhance the transparency and credibility of the referencing process and report. It is the decision of the referencing AMS to include and what kind of statements from the international experts to be included in the referencing report.

When involving the international experts, it is useful and helpful that the referencing AMS provides them with a briefing and relevant documents that could facilitate their understanding of the qualifications system, as well as the motivation and intention to undertake the referencing process. The opportunity to meet the main national stakeholders involved in the referencing process is important to help the international experts to understand and appreciate the different perspectives.

### **3.2.7. Important Roles of ASEAN Observers**

Using observers from another ASEAN Member State(s) is a unique feature of the AQRF referencing process. This is to facilitate and enhance mutual trust, as well as build capacity within the region. At least one representative from other AMS shall be invited to participate in the referencing process.

The decision about how to best use ASEAN observers depends on the referencing AMS. Similar to the engagement of an international expert, it would be useful for referencing AMS to indicate their reasons and motivation for inviting the ASEAN observers. It is also helpful for the ASEAN observers to be provided with a briefing and relevant documents that will help them better understand the qualifications system, as well as the motivation and intention to undertake the referencing process. Opportunities to meet the main national stakeholders are also important to help the ASEAN observers understand and appreciate the different perspectives.

### **3.2.8. Structure of the Referencing Report**

The referencing report should contain all relevant information on the results of the referencing of national qualifications levels to the AQRF, and to refer to further resources for evidence including the QA system. Minimum structure of the report is as follows:

**1. Introduction**

- Status of the referencing report (e.g. edition)
- Executive summary
  - Summary of the level-to-level referencing process results to meet the 11 AQRF referencing criteria
  - Description of the preparation of the referencing report
  - Statement of approval of the referencing report by stakeholders involved in the process

**2. Response to the 11 AQRF Referencing Criteria**

**3. Annexes**

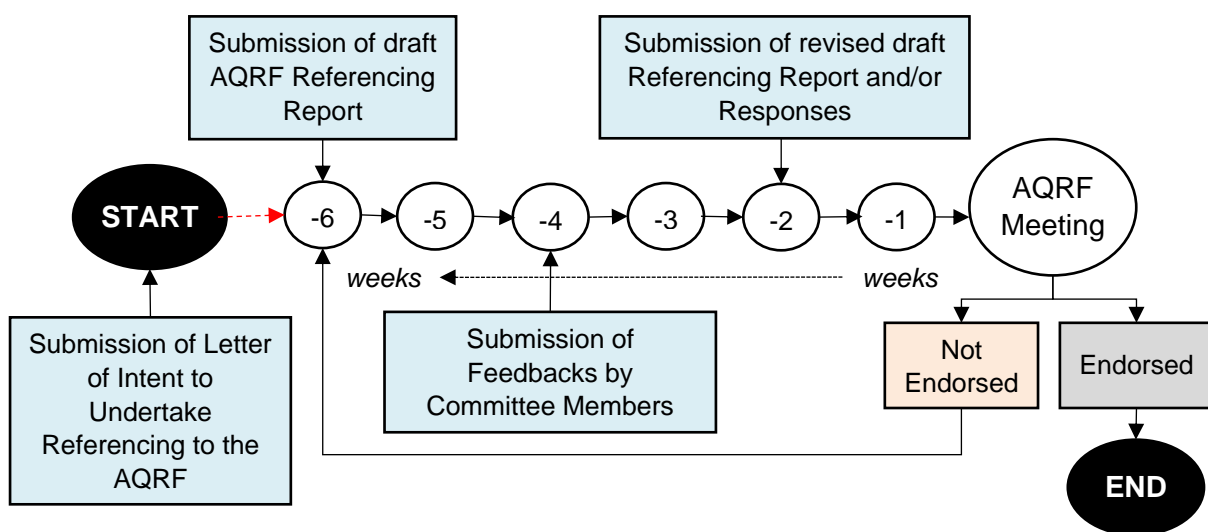
- List of stakeholders involved in the referencing process and preparation
- Reviews from stakeholders and statement from international experts and observers from other AMS
- Mapping of NQF to the AQRF

**4. Glossary**

**5. References**

**3.2.9. Submission and Review of the Referencing Report**

The process for submitting and reviewing the referencing report is as follows:



*Note: The numbers represent week before the AQRFC meeting*

**Submission of Letter of Intent to Undertake Referencing to the AQRF**

AMS who is interested to undertake referencing to the AQRF is requested to submit an official **Letter of Intent to Undertake Referencing to the AQRF** to the AQRF Committee through its Secretariat. This would be the only official letter documenting the interest and commitment of the Referencing AMS to undertake the referencing. A written acknowledgement signed off by the Chair and Vice-chair of the AQRF Committee will be issued upon receipt of the original copy of the letter(s) by the Secretariat. All official letters shall be deposited with the Secretariat, and scanned copies shall be circulated to the AQRF Committee.

**Submission of Draft AQRF Referencing Report**

The Referencing AMS submitted its draft partial or full **AQRF Referencing Report** once ready and received official approval at its national level for presentation to the AQRF Committee. The partial or full AQRF Referencing Reports shall be submitted to the AQRF Committee through the AQRF Secretariat, at least **six (6) weeks** before the upcoming AQRF Committee meeting.

**Submission of Feedbacks by Committee Members**

AQRF Committee Representatives from each AMS shall submit their specific written feedbacks on the each of the criterion in the submitted full or partial AQRF Referencing Report based on the guidelines stipulated above. The feedbacks shall be circulated to the AQRF Committee, through the Secretariat, at least **four (4) weeks** before the upcoming AQRF Committee meeting.

**Submission of revised draft Referencing Report and/or Responses**

The Referencing AMS may submit a revised draft Referencing Report and/or response to the feedbacks from other AMS at least **two (2) weeks** before the upcoming AQRF Committee meeting.

**Endorsement by the Committee**

During the AQRF Committee Meeting, the Referencing AMS and the other AMS may exchange further clarifications on the draft Referencing Report and the feedbacks received. For full draft AQRF Referencing Report, the Committee will decide whether the draft is endorsed or will need to be further amended.

If a draft AQRF Referencing Report requires further amendment, the revised Referencing Report shall be re-submitted in accordance with the cycle of six weeks prior to the meeting as stipulated in the flowchart above.

Once the draft full AQRF Referencing Report is endorsed by the AQRF Committee, the progress shall be notified to the three (3) ASEAN Ministers namely, the ASEAN

Economic Ministers (AEM), the ASEAN Education Ministers (ASED), and the ASEAN Labour Ministers (ALMM through their respective Senior Officials.

Upon final endorsement by the AQRF Committee, the full AQRF Referencing Report, as may be further fine-tuned by the referencing AMS for minor editorial errors, shall be published on the referencing AMS' website as well as the AQRF webpage<sup>7</sup>.

To ensure the AQRF and the qualifications systems remain relevant, effective, consistent and transparent, the referencing AMS shall provide an update once every three (3) years or sooner on the changes, if any, and/or the progress in specific areas identified in their respective AQRF Referencing Reports to the AQRF Committee. An example would be the status and progress on developing a register of qualifications or adopting a learning outcomes approach.

#### **4. THE AQRF REFERENCING CRITERIA**

The 11 AQRF referencing criteria agreed by all AMS are the means of bringing consistency to the referencing process. A referencing AMS is requested to address each criterion from a national perspective, and to report the national position to other AMS in a referencing report. Once all the referencing criteria are met to the satisfaction of the AQRF Committee and duly endorsed, the qualifications levels in the Member State can be considered formally linked to those of the AQRF, and the referencing process for that Member State is, therefore, considered complete.

<b>Criterion</b>	
<b>1</b>	The structure of the education and training system is described.
<b>2</b>	The responsibilities and legal basis of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process are clearly determined and published by the main public authority responsible for the referencing process.
<b>3</b>	The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualifications system are transparent.
<b>4</b>	There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the AQRF.
<b>5</b>	The basis in agreed standards of the national framework or qualifications system and its qualifications is described.
<b>6</b>	The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training that refer(s) to the national qualifications framework or system are described. All of the bodies responsible for quality assurance state their unequivocal support for the referencing outcome.

<sup>7</sup> The AQRF webpage is currently at this link: <http://asean.org/asean-economic-community/sectoral-bodies-under-the-purview-of-aem/services/asean-qualifications-reference-framework/>



Criterion	
<b>7</b>	The process of referencing has been devised by the main public authority and has been approved by the main stakeholders in the qualifications system.
<b>8</b>	People from other countries who are experienced in the field of qualifications are involved in the referencing process and its reporting.
<b>9</b>	One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing and the evidence supporting it shall be published by the competent national bodies and shall address separately and in order each of the referencing criteria.
<b>10</b>	The outcome of referencing is published by the ASEAN Secretariat and by the main national public body.
<b>11</b>	Following the referencing process, all certification and awarding bodies are encouraged to indicate a clear reference to the appropriate AQRF level on new qualification documents issued.

The 11 AQRF referencing criteria are written in general terms, and require interpretation by referencing AMS. To support Member States in their referencing processes, this section focuses on the elaboration and amplification of each criterion.

Given the possibility of duplication of information and the interlinkages between criteria, the referencing report should be structured in a way that it responds to the criteria in sequence from Criterion 1 to Criterion 11, with appropriate cross-referencing.

### **CRITERION 1**

#### ***The structure of the education and training system is described***

**Purpose:** to help outsiders understand the education and training system better – too much detail can confuse.

**Information required:** The essential structure of the system covering ages, stages and pathways of education and training, including formal, non-formal and informal learning should be described in the outline. Linkages between these pathways and major progressions should be clear. General statistics on the education and training sector should be included for better appreciation of the size, diversity and complexity of the system in focus.

For people from other countries to appreciate the national response to the other referencing criteria, it is essential that they understand how the national qualifications system is currently structured, and how it operates within the broader education and training system. The national qualifications systems are always complex as they have evolved for many years, and this makes the creation of a simple yet comprehensive description of the current position a challenging task. A historical account of the evolution of the education and training system and the qualifications system is only useful here if it explains what outsiders might consider anomalies in structures and terminology.

The description should cover the essential basic structure of the qualifications system covering ages, stages, institutions and pathways of education and training, including formal, non-formal and informal learning opportunities. Linkages between these pathways and major progression routes should be clear. Where possible general statistics should be included that shows the number of people and qualifications that are involved in the different stages and pathways. A diagrammatic representation of the education and training system and the qualifications systems is often useful.

Some questions to consider when responding to criterion 1 include:

- Does the description cover the basic structure of the current education and training system?
- Is the overview an accurate reflection of the current status of the education and training system including current reforms?
- Is the description of the education and training system clear and is the level of detail appropriate for a reader from the other country?
- Does the overview include a diagrammatical representation of the system? If so, is it clear and easily understood?
- Are statistical data included so that the relative size of the sectors and levels of participation and qualifications are clear?
- Does the overview accurately describe the linkages between the education and training sectors?
- Does the overview outline the pathways and major progression routes, including non-formal and informal learning?
- How does the NQF, where one is available, encompass the qualifications and qualifications levels in the AMS? Include the NQF levels in the diagrammatic representation of the levels, the progressions, the pathways etc.
- To what extent has the NQF been implemented in the education and training sectors?
- How are foreign qualifications addressed in the national education and training system described?

## **CRITERION 2**

***The responsibilities and legal basis of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process are clearly determined and published by the main public authority responsible for the referencing process***

**Purpose:** To show the breadth of (official) support for the outcome of the referencing process and the report itself.

**Information required:** Institutional structures are different across Member States. It is, therefore, necessary to take into account all bodies that have a role in the referencing process, and to make clear their roles for international readers.

Where a large number of relevant national bodies are involved, the summary of their roles and responsibilities would be sufficient to be included in the referencing report in response to this criterion. More detailed information can be included in an Annex. Any reference to the legal basis could include web-links. There is no requirement to include copies of legislations.

Types of functions and roles of relevant national bodies:

- Bodies responsible for governing the processes through which nationally recognised qualifications are designed and awarded
- Bodies that support the labour market relevance of education and training
- Bodies responsible for QA of design and award of qualifications in the NQF
- Bodies managing and maintaining a QF (if one exists)
- Bodies responsible for the recognition of foreign qualifications and providing information on qualifications in the NQF
- Representatives of institutions awarding qualifications
- Representatives of those using qualifications (employers, learners)

The referencing report needs to make clear that all relevant bodies have been consulted and had an opportunity to engage with the referencing process. It follows that the national referencing panel should include members representing the above-listed types of bodies. Where the referencing role is assigned to a division or subdivision of a larger national body, the referencing AMS should focus on the focal division with an appropriate explanation of the interface with the larger or national body.

Some questions to consider when responding to criterion 2 include:

- Does the report list the bodies that have been involved in the referencing process?
- Are responsibilities of these bodies clear, especially those of the lead bodies?
- Is the representation of the key committees/ panels/working groups explained?
- Does the report demonstrate that all the responsible bodies were consulted and engaged (or were provided with the opportunity to engage) in the referencing process?

**CRITERION 3**

***The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualifications system are transparent***

**Purpose:** To make people outside the Member State understand how a qualification is allocated to a level in the qualifications framework, or a place in a hierarchy in the qualifications system.

**Information required:** The qualifications that exist in the Member State are described in terms of the education provision in the Member State, and how they are located at an NQF level, where one exists. Allocating specific qualifications to an NQF level brings meaning to the NQF for citizens, and through the referencing process to the AQRF level. It is, therefore, critically important that the ways a qualification is located at an NQF level in the referencing process are described clearly and in full, and that examples are provided to illustrate how the rules governing the process are applied. The NQF level of all the major qualifications (or types) needs to be evident in the referencing report.

The following questions may be helpful to elaborate on the link between qualifications in the Member State with an NQF level:

- What criteria and procedures are used to make the decisions on the inclusion and level of individual qualifications in the NQF? This might involve legal arrangements, sectoral regulations or quality assurance committees, encompassing formal, non-formal and informal learning.
- What is the technical evidence that supports such decisions? This might involve the use of analysis of learning outcomes in qualifications and level descriptors. Are the decision making processes transparent, professional and independent?
- What other evidence is used to support such decisions? For example, the views of business sectors, the national traditions in qualifications levels or the analysis of progression pathways.
- If social evidence is used, how is the evidence from different sources combined, perhaps involving the best-fit principle, to formulate a single decision about the level of a qualification?

The principles and the methodologies of the technical analysis of the relationship between the descriptors of individual qualifications and the NQF levels may not only differ from one Member State to the other, but also between the different education and training sub-systems in the Member State as they follow the logic of the sub-system concerned. Therefore, the principle or concept of best-fit may also be interpreted differently. Hence, it is useful to elaborate in the referencing report on how the principle or concept of best-fit apply when the qualification level of a certain qualification is determined, and whether this differs across the range of education sectors?

**National Qualifications and National Registers**

Information on the legal implementation status, scope, guiding principles of the framework and its qualifications is crucial for a better understanding of the NQF that is referenced to the AQRF. Member States normally include qualifications awarded in the formal education and training system in their NQFs. The NQFs, however, do not always cover all sub-systems of the education and training system, and similarly, not all qualifications from a specific sub-system may be included in the framework. Therefore, referencing reports need to make clear whether general or basic education, VET, higher education and other subsystems that are part of the formal education and training are all covered by the NQF. The referencing report needs to provide information on what kind of qualifications remain outside the formal system and the NQF, and describe any future steps that are planned.

NQF (whether established or newly formed) is part of QA arrangements, and is a tool to support quality. For example, NQF can be used as a “gateway” for approved quality assured qualifications. Phrases such as “This qualification is in the NQF” arise from this QA function. Entry to such frameworks is governed by criteria, and transparency of the referencing process is enhanced if such criteria are included in referencing reports.

National registers, catalogues or databases are used in many Member States. They store information on qualifications, qualifications standards, certificates, degrees, diplomas, titles and/or awards. International enquiries about qualifications can be referred to these databases. It is useful if they are publicly available on designated websites. The databases usually include definitions of all officially recognised qualifications, and it is common to have each qualification ascribed to an NQF level. It is also useful to include information in the register or database, where one exists, in the referencing report.

NQF in most Member States is still developing at the time of the referencing processes. Ideally, the NQF would be fully established so that it is clearly a public statement of qualifications levels in use in the Member State. In a partially established NQF, the level-to-level linkage with the AQRF may be more difficult to establish. For these new or partially established NQF, the referencing report should make clear the state or status of the NQF implementation, and what the next stages are expected to achieve.

For new and partially established NQFs, the most important task of the referencing process remains the development and full implementation of the NQF, and wherever possible, without the distraction of referencing. It should also be borne in mind that the attention of the international experts involved in referencing might be directed towards the new NQF design and issues arising. This can be partly justified since the levels that are established are important for the AQRF referencing process.

Where there is no explicit NQF with descriptors that are detailed and tailored to national qualifications, it is necessary to demonstrate how the learning outcomes for main qualifications, sometimes called reference qualifications, correspond to the AQRF level descriptors.

Some questions to consider when responding to criterion 3 taking into account the above-mentioned points, include:

- Does the report explain the structure, scope and status of the implementation of an NQF?
- Does the report make clear the current implementation status of allocating qualifications to levels of the NQF?
- Does the report clearly outline the criteria and procedures used to make the decisions on the inclusion and the level of individual qualifications or qualification types in the NQF?
- Does the report outline which body is responsible for this role, including any legal arrangements?
- Does the report explain why the qualifications from an education sector are not included in the NQF?
- Does the report outline the technical evidence that supports the decisions of allocating qualifications to levels?
- Does the report explain the extent to which the learning outcomes embedded in qualification specifications and level descriptors are used to allocate qualifications to levels?
- Does the report include any other evidence used to support such decisions? For example, social factors such as the views of business sectors, the national traditions in qualifications levels or the analysis of actual progression pathways?
- If social evidence is used, does the report explain how the evidence from different sources is combined, perhaps involving the best-fit principle, to formulate a single decision about the level of a qualification?
- Is the report describing the allocation of qualifications to NQF levels in a way which is clear to a reader from another country?

#### **CRITERION 4**

***There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the AQRF***

**Purpose:** To establish a convincing and trusted link between the NQF or qualification system levels and the AQRF levels.

**Information required:** A clear statement of the agreed link or relationship between the national qualifications systems and the AQRF levels is made. Referencing AMS can be creative in presenting information on the linkages between the NQF and the AQRF in a clear and demonstrable manner. Where an NQF exists, the levels in the framework should be used. The procedure for matching or linking the levels needs to be described in detail. This procedure should be robust and transparent, and is useful to include explanations of assumptions, approximations and professional judgements in the referencing report.

Together with Criterion 3, this Criterion is possibly the pivotal point of what makes a quality referencing outcome. For a clear and demonstrable link to be established, there needs to be an understanding of the AQRF and NQF levels, and how they relate. When this understanding is established, the procedure for linking levels needs to be described. This procedure should be robust and transparent, probably including a careful application of a “best-fit” process.

### ***The General Nature of the AQRF***

The AQRF levels are general models of progression in learning that may, in some circumstances, appear to be limited. For instance, the AQRF level descriptors do not make reference to personal qualities or transversal skills. The AQRF is necessarily general to accommodate a range of descriptions of national qualifications levels. NQF level descriptors might include additional categories than the two domains of the AQRF. NQF can also be more specific, and the level descriptors often reflect a Member State’s view of what is valued in qualifications.

To have a good understanding of each AQRF and NQF levels, it is necessary to appreciate that a level is probably more than the sum of the parts (i.e. domains) that make it up (i.e. knowledge, skills, application and competence). An appreciation of a level comes from reading across the descriptors. This creates a narrative meaning, that is, the knowledge (i.e. facts, principles and concepts) that can be used with these skills (i.e. cognitive and practical) in this kind of context, indicating levels of autonomy and responsibility.

The AQRF levels are also in a hierarchy where the content of one level is assumed to include the content of lower levels. Each level descriptor, therefore, describes the additional or higher demands for that particular level of learning.

Having established a clear and demonstrable link between each national level to an AQRF level, it is important that this link is explained to a wide range of audience, such that all assumptions and approximations are made clear. In demonstrating the link between the levels, it might be useful to provide examples of qualifications that make the link clearer in the referencing report for national and international readers.

The creation of an NQF that meets national expectations well can be a challenge in the referencing process. The following differences will require the application of the best-fit principle or concept:

- **Differences in levels:** Member States may have more or fewer levels than the AQRF
- **Differences in categories of descriptors:** Member States may have defined the domains of level descriptors in a different way that are used in the AQRF
- **Differences in descriptors:** descriptors of qualification levels need to reflect accurately the common understanding of the users of the qualifications. This is likely to require that, as an NQF is interpreted by a sector, the descriptors will become more specific to that sector,
- **Different kinds of qualifications:** comprehensive NQFs usually also reflect the different kinds of qualifications that are used in other countries.

Where there is a problem with the process of allocating qualifications to the NQF, there is a tendency for it to be considered as an issue with the NQF-to-AQRF referencing process, instead of being resolved at the NQF stage. For example, where a qualification is comfortably located in an NQF, but the consequential AQRF level becomes problematic.

### ***Technical and Social Approaches to Referencing***

Technical aspects of referencing involve a detailed analysis of the text of the level descriptors of the NQF and the AQRF. The process aims to show the similarities or differences between the sets of level descriptors for a particular level. It can also involve the analysis of any supportive documentation for a qualification type where a qualification type defines an NQF level (i.e. the specifications of Bachelor degrees where these are a main qualification at the NQF level).

The technical approach to referencing works best when the NQF descriptors are based on learning outcomes. Sometimes this is not the case, and technical referencing does not properly reflect the way a Member State understands its qualifications link to the AQRF levels. In this case, the major stakeholder groups can be consulted about the ways the levels relate to one another. Sometimes data from recruiters for jobs and courses can indicate how they see the best level-to-level relationship. This approach is termed social referencing.

This social approach may lead to a different level-to-level linkage than the technical analysis of descriptors and qualification types. In the social analysis, it is important to take into account evidence gathered from stakeholders and published literature on the value and status of key or major qualifications, and present this evidence in support of the proposed referencing. Sometimes the results of this social analysis might appear more transitory than the outcomes of a technical analysis process. However, the



value-added of the social analysis is to develop and enhance trust amongst stakeholders, and to maintain the confidence of citizens in the outcomes.

If the links between the NQF and the AQRF levels are derived from technical and social considerations, it leads to different outcomes, and the process of “best-fit” may be necessary. This will include considerations on the weights given to the technical and social dimensions in making the final referencing decisions.

Some questions to consider when responding to criterion 4 include:

- Does the report explain the basis of linking levels in the national qualifications system or NQF to the AQRF level descriptors?
- Are there structural differences between the AQRF and the national system of NQF that need to be underlined, for example, differences in numbers of levels, differences in the number and nature of domains of level descriptors?
- Is the procedure for the linking of qualifications levels in the AMS to the AQRF-levels clearly described?
- Does the procedure include an explanation of assumptions, approximations and professional judgements?
- If it was necessary to use best-fit, is there an explanation of any issues that could not be resolved?
- Is there confidence in the established links between the NQF (or qualifications system) levels and the AQRF levels? If not, why not? What work needs to be completed to engender full trust in the outcome?

#### **CRITERION 5**

***The basis in agreed standards of the national framework or qualifications system and its qualifications is described***

**Purpose:** To give insights to people in and outside the Member State into how agreed standards of qualifications are fixed and maintained.

**Information required:** Whenever possible these standards should be based on the principle of learning outcomes. They should include achievements standards, credit arrangements, and other methods of validation where these are available.

Understanding how NQF or the qualifications system supports the consistent quality of qualifications is crucially important to people outside the Member State who want to compare qualifications through the AQRF mechanism. The basis in agreed standards is likely to involve:

- National education standards which are used for teaching in schools and colleges;
- Standards which specify outcomes of learning programmes;

- Validation standards which are used to specify how validation should be carried out;
- Standards which show how a modular programme and unit-based assessment (sometimes called credit systems) should be carried out;
- National occupational standards which are used for specifying jobs, work processes, vocational qualifications and training programmes;
- Standards designated by trade organisations which are used to unify products and services used or produced in the industry; and
- Standards defined by higher education institutions which include programme content and assessment processes.

These standards can be expressed in different ways. However, the AQRF supports the use of learning outcomes. As more standards are expressed as learning outcomes or competencies<sup>8</sup>, it is likely that the trust shown in the standards will increase.

Describing qualifications in terms of learning outcomes is part of reforms in many countries. This means these countries, sectors and institutions are in transition from learning inputs to using learning outcomes. They will be referencing to the AQRF using national benchmarks or standards that are not yet explicit in terms of learning outcomes. In some cases, benchmarks (i.e. level descriptors) based on learning outcomes will be used, but without being fully implemented at the level of qualifications. These countries, therefore, need to develop trust by explaining these implicit standards carefully and clearly to users outside the country. The conditions that need to be met in terms of standards and QA will need to be included in referencing reports to reassure others that the country is moving towards a generalised use of learning outcomes.

Some Member States have national systems for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, and some have national credit systems. The functions of systems to validate non-formal and informal learning, and the ways credit systems work need to be made explicit in the referencing report. They are important for opening up qualifications systems to national and international users. It is particularly important to explain how validation processes and credit systems are related to the NQF.

Some Member States may also have agreements or processes around recognition of formal learning such as credit transfer arrangements that are unrelated to national credit system. Such arrangements should be explained with a clear indication of its scale.

Some questions to consider when responding to criterion 5 include:

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<sup>8</sup> Competencies can be considered as a type of learning outcomes. When a competence is defined, the learning outcomes are expressed in a context of application or learning, and is assessed in that context.

- Has the report clearly described the range of standards that are currently used in the qualifications system, for example, published educational and occupation standards, assessment or qualification standards, standards used by businesses?
- Does the report explain how the sets of standards are applied to ensure consistency of the quality of qualifications?
- Does the report clearly describe the role learning outcomes in the standards used?
- Has the report explained the plans for continuous improvement of the quality of qualifications?
- Has the report clearly outlined how non-formal and informal learning is validated so that outcomes can be recognised alongside those from other routes to qualifications?
- Has the report clearly described the use of credits and outlined the level of implementation of a credit system?
- Has the report adequately outlined how the NQF is used to support validation processes and credit systems?

#### **CRITERION 6**

***The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications framework or system are described. All of the bodies responsible for quality assurance state their unequivocal support for the referencing outcome***

**Purpose:** To help develop trust in national qualifications and provide confidence to users of the AQRF.

**Information required:** Referencing reports need to explain the main national quality assurance system(s) that operate in the education, training and qualifications system. Other QA measures that could be addressed include, for example: (i) qualifications requirements for teachers and trainers, (ii) accreditation and external evaluation of providers or programmes, and (iii) relationship between bodies responsible for quality assurance from different levels and with different functions.

Presenting QA processes for international readers is a challenging task. There are several reasons for this. First, much of QA is based on implicit agreements and processes, and therefore makes it difficult to describe formally. A second reason is that sometimes there is no single body with responsibility for all QA, such that several bodies that manage the process over a specific sector or a sub-system often carry out this function. A third reason is that documentation is usually a diverse body of texts with little obvious linkage between them. Member States that have referenced their qualifications systems confirm that the referencing process is an opportunity to bring coherence to QA arrangements. This is possible because all the main QA bodies have been involved in referencing.

### **Quality Assurance Bodies**

A range of competent QA bodies are important to the referencing process, such as but not limited to the following:

- the government ministries;
- qualifications bodies, particularly those with national oversight of the system or of the major sectors (i.e. general/basic, vocational, higher education), including bodies that assess learning, validate non-formal and informal learning and issue awards and certificates;
- QA bodies that set standards for learning in general, vocational and higher education, and those that evaluate institutions or programmes;
- bodies that set occupational, vocational and educational standards in the Member State or employment/education sector;
- bodies that manage the development and implementation of NQF, especially the NQF that regulate standards in sectors and nationally; and
- bodies that disburse public funds to learning institutions and require compliance with quality criteria.

Benchmarks for evaluating QA processes for all education and training sectors may be based on but not limited to the following quality assurance frameworks:

- East Asia Summit Vocational Education and Training Quality Assurance Framework (includes the quality principles, agency quality standards and quality indicators)
- International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) Guidelines of Good Practice for Quality Assurance
- ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework (AQAF), ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (AQAN)

The QA benchmark is not intended to assess the level of QA of the referencing AMS. This Criterion is about describing the current situation of the QA, and it may outline how the referencing AMS' QA is encouraging the implementation of learning outcomes. The benchmark can be used to support the analysis and identifying any gaps.

### **Quality Assurance in Action**

Some attention should be paid to explaining the scope or breadth of the QA system(s) in the Member State and how they work. Particularly in relation to using learning outcomes in QA:

- **Planning:** defining learning outcomes to ensure their relevance
- **Implementing:** using learning outcomes in teaching, learning and testing, as well as grading individuals
- **Reviewing:** assessing the extent to which learning outcomes have been achieved
- **Feedback:** evaluating the planned learning outcomes to ensure they are relevant for users in the labour market, teaching and assessment. This is useful for updating learning outcomes based on this feedback and data.

QA bodies are key stakeholders in the referencing process and are required to agree with the level-to-level referencing, as well as the way the QA system in the Member State is described. This includes the laws, regulations, procedures, and areas for improvement.

Some questions to consider when responding to criterion 6 include:

- Have the quality assurance systems for education and training been described in a way which is likely to be understood by someone from another country? In particular, have the quality assurance systems for qualifications included in the NQF been fully described?
- Have all the stages of internal or external checking against standards been described, including any informal or implicit arrangements?
- Does the referencing report explain how the quality assurance systems work in practice, including reference to the use of learning outcomes and educational and/or occupational standards in planning and reviewing?
- Have all of the bodies that are responsible for quality assurance, including those indirectly involved in the NQF processes, such as teacher training institutions and the financing of educational institutions, been identified and are their roles explained?
- Where international bodies conduct QA activities either in lieu of or in addition to, national QA practices, such practices should be adequately explained with the data on scale of such practices.
- Has each body expressed its full support for the proposed level-to-level match between the NQF for qualification system and the AQRF as it is described in the referencing report?
- Have the quality assurance processes been benchmarked against an international quality assurance framework or principles such as the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework?

**CRITERION 7**

*The process of referencing has been devised by the main public authority and has been approved by the main stakeholders in the qualifications system*

**Purpose:** To provide users of the AQRF with the confidence that the national approach is indeed inclusive and consultative, and is approved at the highest level of government and the key high-level actors in the qualifications system.

**Information required:** A statement is required that describes the management process used to provide a valid, reliable and trusted outcome of referencing. The statement needs to describe the body (i.e. the NAC) with overall responsibility for the referencing process and its official link with government in the Member State.

One body may lead and manage the referencing process, but this body will need to work with a range of bodies that have a legitimate interest in the qualifications system. These have been identified in the response to Criterion 2. These bodies need to make a clear statement of support for the outcome of the referencing work and the way it is reported.

Some questions to consider when responding to criterion 7 include:

- Has the main public authority devised the process for referencing?
- Are the main stakeholders clearly identified?
- Is the approval of the main stakeholder groups explicit in the report?
- Do any major stakeholder groups sit outside the referencing process?

**CRITERION 8**

*People from other countries who are experienced in the field of qualifications are involved in the referencing process and its reporting*

**Purpose:** To provide additional transparency in the referencing process and the reporting of its outcomes through the engagement of international experts.

**Information required:** The referencing process and report should clarify the relationship between the AQRF and the NQF or national qualifications system for a person without particular understanding of the qualifications system concerned. To support this process, at least one international expert must be involved in the referencing process to act as adviser and supporter or critical reviewer of the referencing process and its outcomes. The advice of the external persons should be given with a view to optimising the trust in the use of the AQRF as an instrument for transparency. The referencing AMS can choose how they report the involvement and comments of these international experts.

The referencing report should state these international experts involved, and explain why these experts were invited, as well as how they were involved in the referencing process (i.e. roles and activities), and at what stage and how their feedbacks were taken into account.

These international experts are not required to be involved in all stages of the referencing process. However, they can be involved productively when concrete issues emerge as NQF levels are assigned to AQRF levels, and/or when a draft version of the report becomes available.

There are various options in involving international experts. They might be invited to meetings of the national referencing panel or asked to provide written feedback and recommendations. The level of engagement is for the national authorities to decide. There is no obligation on the referencing AMS to accept the advice of the international expert.

In addition to the above and unique to ASEAN, the referencing AMS shall invite at least one observer from other AMS to participate in the referencing process to provide greater transparency to the process and to help develop referencing capacity in participating AMS.

Some questions to consider when responding to criterion 8 include:

- Has the referencing process included international expert(s) from other countries?
- Has the report clearly outlined the characteristics sought in the international expert(s) and show how they were selected?
- Has the report clearly outlined the role and level of participation of these experts?
- Has the report included and clearly outlined the role of the AMS observer(s) in the referencing process?

### **CRITERION 9**

***One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing and the evidence supporting it shall be published by the competent national bodies and shall address separately and in order each of the referencing criteria***

**Purpose:** To insist on a single point of authoritative reference for those using the AQRF to compare qualifications.

**Information required:** Whatever the scope of the referencing process, this report should be written by the competent bodies, in consultation with stakeholders and agreed upon by the national committee responsible for carrying out the referencing as outlined in criterion 2. The single report should contain all relevant information on the results of the referencing of national qualifications levels to the AQRF and refer to further resources for evidence if necessary. The centrality of the set of 11 AQRF

referencing criteria in the referencing report is underscored in this criterion. There should be no supplementary or minority view reports.

Some questions to consider when responding to criterion 9 include:

- Is the submission of one comprehensive document?
- Are there any minority reports that challenge the contents of the referencing report?
- Does the report address each of the criterion separately and show how the criterion has been fully met by the referencing process?
- Does the report contain all relevant information on the results of the referencing of national qualifications levels to the AQRF and refer to further sources for evidence, if necessary?
- What plans does the referencing AMS have for publishing this report within the country?

Although Criterion 9, along with Criteria 10 and 11, are related to post-referencing activities, the referencing AMS shall respond to these Criteria to the best possible. Once Criteria 1 to 8 have been met, the referencing AMS shall immediately finalise its domestic processes and update Criteria 9 to 11 accordingly, including the publication of the Report at the AMS' and ASEAN Secretariat's website. With these, Criteria 9 to 11 would be automatically fulfilled.

#### **CRITERION 10**

***The outcome of referencing is published by the ASEAN Secretariat and by the main national public body***

**Purpose:** To make public the referencing process and its outcome.

**Information required:** A significant part of the AQRF implementation, particularly for employers, is the building up of a central resource that provides information on the results of the referencing process to a wider public.

Some questions to consider when responding to Criterion 10 include:

- What plans does the referencing AMS have for providing the finalised report to the ASEAN Secretariat?
- Is a final date for national approval been set?
- When and how will the referencing report be published?

Although Criterion 10, along with Criteria 9 and 11, are related to post-referencing activities, the referencing AMS shall respond to these Criteria to the best possible. Once Criteria 1 to 8 have been met, the referencing AMS shall immediately finalise its domestic processes and update Criteria 9 to 11 accordingly, including the publication



of the Report at the AMS' and ASEAN Secretariat's website. With these, Criteria 9 to 11 would be automatically fulfilled.

**CRITERION 11**

***Following the referencing process all certification and awarding bodies are encouraged to indicate a clear reference to the appropriate AQRF level on new qualification certificates, diplomas issued***

**Purpose:** To raise the public profile of the AQRF and its added value. It also shows in an explicit way that the AQRF is a force for cooperation and mobility of direct relevance to citizens of ASEAN.

**Information required:** Indicating an AQRF level on a certificate would help stakeholders ascertain the level of a national qualification, and facilitate comparison of qualifications from different systems (i.e. mobility of learners and workers). Once the level-to-level agreements are in place and qualifications are linked, through NQF to the AQRF levels, the AQRF can be seen as adding international currency to national qualifications. For this added value to be clear to all users, all qualifications in NQF need to be associated with an AQRF level.

Some questions to consider when responding to Criterion 11 include:

- Has the referencing AMS affirmed that it will encourage certification and awarding bodies to provide clear reference to the AQRF levels on its certification documents?

Although Criterion 11, along with Criteria 9 and 10, are related to post-referencing activities, the referencing AMS shall respond to these Criteria to the best possible. Once Criteria 1 to 8 have been met, the referencing AMS shall immediately finalise its domestic processes and update Criteria 9 to 11 accordingly, including the publication of the Report at the AMS' and ASEAN Secretariat's website. With these, Criteria 9 to 11 would be automatically fulfilled.

**QUESTIONS ARISING FROM THE REFERENCING PROCESS**

Questions will arise in the course of the referencing process. Below is the list of common questions identified by ASEAN Member States with answers.

Questions	Answers
<p><b>How long does a referencing process take?</b></p>	<p>There is no one way of carrying out a referencing process. The criteria are common, but Member States will have different ways of showing how its referencing process meets each criterion. Some Member States need to spend time longer than others in consulting and building consensus. Institutional structures are more complex in some Member States. The process might take 6 months in some Member States, and two years or more in others. Having the pre-conditions for referencing in place before the process begins and having a well-prepared referencing committee helps speed up the process.</p>
<p><b>Why does a Member State have to have an NQF before the referencing process can begin?</b></p>	<p>NQF is extremely helpful for referencing and can help make the process more transparent and trusted. It is possible to link a qualifications system to the AQRF levels by considering the hierarchy of major qualifications in the Member State. However, this will entail a lot of consultations with stakeholders, and gathering robust evidence to support a match between major qualifications and the AQRF level descriptors.</p> <p>It is better to spend time developing an NQF and making sure it is properly populated with qualifications than to rush into a referencing process before the NQF is built and well understood by stakeholders, including citizens.</p> <p>Member States developing an NQF at the same time as referencing it to the AQRF have to judge the optimum time to spend on these two processes.</p>
<p><b>Is it easier to reference one sector at a time or reference all education and training sectors at once?</b></p>	<p>Much depends on the NQF. Member States aiming to make a comprehensive approach to referencing will have developed an NQF that is comprehensive in covering all the education and training sectors. The level descriptors will be meaningful and accepted by all education and training sectors, and the sectors will have qualifications associated with certain NQF levels. This is the basic position. Aiming for a comprehensive approach to</p>

Questions	Answers
	<p>referencing without a comprehensive NQF is challenging as it presumes that each sector will see the position of other sectors in relation to its own qualifications structure.</p> <p>If the NQF is a sectoral one, it is better to reference this sector first, and take care to disseminate the results to other sectors.</p>
<p><b>In order to start referencing is political commitment necessary?</b></p>	<p>Yes. NQF is a national entity, and a referencing position is important national information that will be used internationally. Political approval enhances the status of the referencing outcome and supports a higher level of trust.</p> <p>The added value for the NQF that is referenced to the AQRF to a Member State is significant. Political commitment makes it easier for stakeholder groups to capitalise on this added value, for example in developing trade agreements, and in the use of the NQF for supporting recognition.</p>
<p><b>There may be resistance to the referencing process from specific stakeholder groups. How can this resistance be overcome?</b></p>	<p>In some cases, it is possible to trace the resistance to an earlier stage of NQF development. Possibly, one group feels its position is undermined by another group, or possibly has a sense of bias towards one sector or another. It is best to ensure that all groups have been appropriately consulted in the NQF development process.</p> <p>Where there is resistance, the root of the problem needs to be identified. This could be due to poor management structures, poor communications, poor understanding of the need for full engagement, or protection of privileged positions. Solutions would depend on the nature of the problems.</p> <p>A general response is to dissolve existing consultative arrangements and establish new membership and TOR for the committee carrying out the referencing.</p>
<p><b>Is it possible to reference without a referencing committee?</b></p>	<p>Yes. However, a referencing outcome which has been determined without consulting the main stakeholders is unlikely to command a high level of trust. If a referencing committee is not used, much work will be needed with</p>

Questions	Answers
	stakeholders and the international community to establish trust in the outcome.
<b>Does referencing lead to automatic recognition of qualifications in another AMS?</b>	No. The AQRF referencing simply links the national qualifications levels of AMS to this common regional framework, and helps in the understanding of the levels of other Member States. Recognition of qualification by a body in another country may be easier after referencing, but not guaranteed. More information about the qualifications and its level is needed before any recognition can be given.
<b>What triggers a review of a Member State referencing report?</b>	The Member State decides when its report needs to be updated. There is no schedule for review, or shelf-life of a report. The decision to update may be based on a significant change in the NQF, a development in the education, training and qualification system or a growing appreciation that the current report does not adequately describe the Member State's position with the AQRF.

## **Appendix 1. Checklist for the Referencing Process**

### **Pre-conditions for Referencing**

- Is the AQRF seen in the Member State as an enhancement to regional cooperation?
- Is capacity building underway on the understanding and use of the AQRF?
- Are governance and management structures in place or being formulated?
- Is the QA in the qualifications system effective?
- Are the links with other contexts for QA clear?
- Is there enhanced awareness of complementary projects, such as MRAs and other alignments?

### **1. The National AQRF Committee (NAC)**

- How will members be identified?
- How will their individual contributions be optimised?
- Will they need to be an independent voice or a representative voice?
- Who will be the chairperson?
- What is the role and authority of the chairperson?

### **2. Managing the referencing process**

- What will be the managing agency?
- What will be the management structure?
- How will the parts of the management structure operate and interface?
- What will be the timeline for the referencing process?
- What kind of financing support will be needed, for example for consultation, experts, gathering and analysing evidence?
- Will there be a national ambassador for the AQRF work?
- How will the work on this project linked with other projects in the qualifications system (national and international)?

### **3. Stakeholders**

- What is the understanding of the AQRF and/or NQF by stakeholders, and does it need to be improved in view of making consultation meaningful?
- What are the main stakeholder bodies in the qualifications system?
- How will each body's contributions be optimised?
- What will be their role in managing their own constituencies?

### **4. Making a proposal for the referencing process**

- Who will generate the first proposal: an expert, a small group of experts?
- What methodologies will they use?
- How will the social and technical dimensions be applied together in the referencing process?

- How will best-fit be used?
- How widely will the first proposal be tested?

## **5. International experts**

- How many international experts will be used?
- At what stage of the process will they be engaged?
- What are the priorities for their contributions?
- What will be the profile of the experts and reasons for the selection?

## **6. Communications**

- What is the level of awareness of the AQRF and/or NQF issues in the Member State?
- Has sufficient communication towards stakeholders been carried out before consultation?
- What needs to be communicated (what are the key stakes for the Member State / different types of actors)?
- How can these issues be communicated in an accessible manner?
- What resources are available?

## **7. Consulting**

- Will the first proposal be the focus of a full national consultation or a more limited consultation?
- What forms will the consultation take (surveys, events, face-to-face meetings)?
- How will the results be analysed and reported?
- Are there key groups or organisations that must respond to provide the appropriate validation of the referencing?

## **8. Decisions on a final level-to-level referencing**

- How will a firm proposal for level-to-level referencing be made?
- Are there key stakeholders who must be given priority for the agreement?
- How will referencing issues be resolved?

## **9. Reporting the outcome of referencing**

- Who will structure the report?
- Who will write it?
- How will it be signed off as a national agreement?
- Who will present it to the AQRF Committee?
- How will comments from the AQRF Committee be taken into account?

## **10. General communications and dissemination**

- What events and publications will be needed?
- What web-based information will be made available?

- How will the referencing (and examples of qualifications) be included in the AQRF portal?
- Who will deal with questions on the referencing process and outcomes?
- What international dissemination is needed?

**Appendix 2. The AQRF Level Descriptors**

Level	Knowledge and Skills	Application and Responsibility
<b>8</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is at the most advanced and specialised level and at the frontier of a field</li> <li>• involve independent and original thinking and research, resulting in the creation of new knowledge or practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are highly specialised and complex involving the development and testing of new theories and new solutions to resolve complex, abstract issues</li> <li>• require authoritative and expert judgment in management of research or an organisation and significant responsibility for extending professional knowledge and practice and creation of new ideas and/or processes.</li> </ul>
<b>7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is at the forefront of a field and show mastery of a body of knowledge</li> <li>• involve critical and independent thinking as the basis for research to extend or redefine knowledge or practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are complex and unpredictable and involve the development and testing of innovative solutions to resolve issues</li> <li>• require expert judgment and significant responsibility for professional knowledge, practice and management</li> </ul>
<b>6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is specialised technical and theoretical within a specific field</li> <li>• involve critical and analytical thinking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are complex and changing</li> <li>• require initiative and adaptability as well as strategies to improve activities and to solve complex and abstract issues</li> </ul>
<b>5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is detailed technical and theoretical knowledge of a general field</li> <li>• involve analytical thinking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are often subject to change</li> <li>• involve independent evaluation of activities to resolve complex and sometimes abstract issues</li> </ul>
<b>4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is technical and theoretical with general coverage of a field</li> <li>• involve adapting processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are generally predictable but subject to change</li> <li>• involve broad guidance requiring some self- direction and coordination to resolve unfamiliar issues</li> </ul>
<b>3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• includes general principles and some conceptual aspects</li> <li>• involve selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are stable with some aspects subject to change</li> <li>• involve general guidance and require judgment and planning to resolve some issues independently</li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is general and factual</li> <li>• involve use of standard actions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• involve structured processes</li> <li>• involve supervision and some discretion for judgment on resolving familiar issues</li> </ul>
<b>1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is basic and general</li> <li>• involve simple, straightforward and routine actions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• involve structured routine processes</li> <li>• involve close levels of support and supervision</li> </ul>



## Appendix 3. Useful Resources

### **ASEAN official documents and publications**

ASEAN (2016), “ASEAN Guiding Principles for Quality Assurance and Recognition of Competency Certification Systems”, ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta

<https://asean.org/storage/2012/05/Guiding-Principles-for-Quality-Assurance-and-Recognition-of-Competency-C....pdf>

ASEAN (n.d.), ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework

<https://asean.org/asean-economic-community/sectoral-bodies-under-the-purview-of-aem/services/asean-qualifications-reference-framework/>

ASEAN (2015), “ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework”

<https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/ED-02-ASEAN-Qualifications-Reference-Framework-January-2016.pdf>

ASEAN (2016), “ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework Governance and Structure Document,”

<https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/ED-01-AQRF-Governance-and-Structure-document.pdf>

ASEAN (2017), “Briefing Paper No. 1 - Qualifications Frameworks and Quality Assurance Systems”, Briefing Paper, No. 1, ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta

<https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/AQRFC-2-23-BP-No.-1-on-QFs-and-QAS-for-publicationrev-26-June-2017.pdf>

ASEAN (2016), “Concept Note No. 1 - Non-formal and Informal Learning”, Concept Note, No. 1, ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta

<https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/DD-02-Concept-Note-1-on-AQRF-Non-formal-and-informal-learning-January-2016.pdf>

ASEAN (2016), “Concept Note No. 2 – Learning outcomes and qualifications frameworks”, Concept Note, No. 2, ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta

<https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/DD-03-Concept-Note-2-on-AQRF-learning-outcomes-January-2016.pdf>

AQRF website:

<https://asean.org/asean-economic-community/sectoral-bodies-under-the-purview-of-aem/services/asean-qualifications-reference-framework/>

### **European Training Foundation (ETF) papers**

A selection of ETF documents related to qualifications systems, VET quality assurance and VET governance:

[http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/publications\\_by\\_topic](http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/publications_by_topic)

**European Qualifications Framework (EQF) Guidance Notes**

Note 1 – Explaining the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning  
[http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/eqf/brochexp\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/eqf/brochexp_en.pdf)

Note 2 – Added value of National Qualifications Frameworks in implementing the EQF  
[http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/eqf/note2\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/eqf/note2_en.pdf)

Note 3 - Referencing National Qualifications Levels to the EQF (2011 version)  
[http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/eqf/note3\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/eqf/note3_en.pdf)

Note 4 – Using learning outcomes  
[http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/eqf/note4\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/eqf/note4_en.pdf)

Note 5 – Referencing national qualifications levels to the EQF Update 2013  
[https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-efq/files/EQF%20131119-web\\_0.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-efq/files/EQF%20131119-web_0.pdf)

**European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP)**

Understanding Qualifications:

<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/understanding-qualifications/index.aspx>

The selection of CEDEFOP publications relevant for EQF and NQF implementation:

<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/19313.aspx>

**United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) papers**

Toolkit for the Recognition of Foreign Qualifications:

<http://www.unescobkk.org/education/news/article/toolkit-for-the-recognition-of-foreign-qualifications-a-reference-for-asia-pacific-practitioners-2/>

**Bologna Process**

Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)

<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/efq/efq.asp>

**Information on mobility and lifelong learning instruments**

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/mobility\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/mobility_en.htm)

**Glossary of Terms Relevant to the Referencing Process**

**Accreditation** The official approval of achievement standards, including qualifications or unit(s) of a qualification, usually for a particular period of time, as being able to meet particular requirements defined by an accrediting agency.

<b>Accredited qualifications</b>	Qualifications which have been granted approval by an accrediting agency or organisation as having met specific requirements or standards of quality.
<b>Accrediting agency</b>	Accrediting agencies are those competent bodies (such as national qualifications agencies, national accreditation agencies, official review boards or other nationally approved bodies or agencies with the responsibility to approve qualifications) that manage program and qualifications accreditation under national legislation. Accrediting agencies function within a quality assurance system.
<b>Achievement standards (in education and training)</b>	<p>Statement approved and formalised by a competent body, which defines the rules to follow in a given context or the results to be achieved.</p> <p>A distinction can be made between competency, educational, occupational, assessment, validation or certification standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• competency standard refers to the knowledge, skills and/or competencies linked to practicing a job;</li> <li>• educational standard refers to statements of learning objectives, content of curricula, entry requirements and resources required to meet learning objectives</li> <li>• occupational standard refers to statements of activities and tasks related to a specific job and to its practice;</li> <li>• assessment standard refers to statements of learning outcomes to be assessed and methodology used;</li> <li>• validation standard refers to statements of level of achievement to be reached by the person assessed, and the methodology used;</li> <li>• certification standard refers to statements of rules applicable to obtaining a qualification (e.g. certificate or diploma) as well as the rights conferred</li> </ul>
<b>ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework</b>	A common reference framework which functions as a device to enable comparisons of qualifications across ASEAN Member States (AMS).

<b>Certifying and/or awarding body</b>	Body issuing qualifications (e.g. certificates, diplomas or titles) formally recognising the achievement of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) of an individual, following an assessment and validation procedure
<b>Common reference framework</b>	A meta framework, or a regional framework such as the AQRF, that the levels in an NQF can be linked to, to facilitate international comparisons of national qualifications.
<b>Competence</b>	Competence is an ability that extends beyond the possession of knowledge and skills. It includes: i) cognitive competence involving the use of theory and concepts, as well as informal tacit knowledge gained experientially; ii) functional competence (skills or know-how), those things that a person should be able to do when they work in a given area; iii) personal competence involving knowing how to conduct oneself in a specific situation; and iv) ethical competence involving the possession of certain personal and professional values
<b>Credit</b>	Credit describes the value of an amount of learning. It can be transferred to a qualification from learning achieved from formal, informal and non-formal settings. Credit can be allowed to accumulate to predetermined levels for the award of a qualification. The processes involved in valuing credit, transferring credit and accumulating credit are governed by rules in a credit framework
<b>Education Sectors</b>	Main subgroups within education and training e.g., schools, technical and vocational education, and higher education.
<b>Informal learning</b>	Learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective
<b>Learning outcomes</b>	Clear statements of what a learner can be expected to know, understand and/or do as a result of a learning experience.
<b>Level descriptor</b>	A general statement that summarises the learning outcomes appropriate to a specific level in a qualifications framework. They are usually grouped in domains of learning.
<b>Lifelong learning</b>	All learning activity undertaken throughout life, which results in improving knowledge, know-how, skills, competences and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons

<p><b>National Qualifications Framework</b></p>	<p>Instrument for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria or criteria for levels of learning achieved. This set of criteria may be implicit in the qualifications descriptors themselves or made explicit in the form of a set of level descriptors. The scope of frameworks may be comprehensive of all learning achievement and pathways or may be confined to a particular sector, e.g., initial education, adult education and training, or an occupational area. Some frameworks may have more design elements and a tighter structure than others; some may have a legal basis whereas others represent a consensus of views of social partners</p>
<p><b>Non-formal learning</b></p>	<p>Learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view</p>
<p><b>Programme</b></p>	<p>The arrangements made for the teaching and learning of a body of knowledge, set of skills and of wider competences. A learning programme can lead to a qualification.</p>
<p><b>Provider</b></p>	<p>An organisation that plans and delivers education/training and assessment services that often leads to the award of qualifications or components of qualifications.</p>
<p><b>Qualification</b></p>	<p>A formal certificate issued by an official agency, in recognition that an individual has been assessed as achieving learning outcomes or competencies to the standard specified for the qualification title, usually a type of certificate, diploma or degree. Learning and assessment for a qualification can take place through workplace experience and/or a program of study. A qualification confers official recognition of value in the labour market and in further education and training</p>
<p><b>Qualifications Framework</b></p>	<p>Instrument for development and classification of qualifications (at national or sectoral levels) according to a set of criteria (such as using descriptors) applicable to specified levels of learning outcomes</p>
<p><b>Qualifications system</b></p>	<p>This includes all aspects of a Member State'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</p>

	<p>systems may be more or less integrated and coherent. One feature of a qualifications system may be an explicit framework of qualifications</p>
<b>Quality assurance</b>	<p>A component of quality management which is “focused on providing confidence that quality requirements will be fulfilled”</p> <p>In relation to education and training services, it refers to planned and systematic processes that provide confidence in the design, delivery and award of qualifications within an education and training system. It ensures that stakeholders’ interests and investment in any accredited program are protected.</p>
<b>Quality assurance framework</b>	<p>A set of principles, guidelines, tools and standards that act as a reference for guiding the consistent application of quality assurance activities.</p>
<b>Quality indicators</b>	<p>Formally recognised figures or ratios used as yardsticks to judge and assess quality performance</p>
<b>Quality principles</b>	<p>Overall intentions and direction of a quality framework or an organisation with regard to quality assurance.</p>
<b>Quality standards</b>	<p>Technical specifications which are measurable and have been drawn up by consensus and approved by an organisation recognised at regional, national or international levels. The purpose of quality standards is optimisation of input and/or output of learning</p>
<b>Quality assurance system</b>	<p>This includes all aspects of a Member State's activity related to assuring the quality of education and training. These systems include the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• clear and measurable objectives and standards, guidelines for implementation, including stakeholder involvement,</li> <li>• appropriate resources,</li> <li>• consistent evaluation methods, associating self-assessment and external review,</li> <li>• feedback mechanisms and procedures for improvement, and</li> <li>• widely-accessible evaluation results.</li> </ul>
<b>Referencing</b>	<p>A process that results in the establishment of a relationship between the national qualifications framework and that of a regional qualifications framework.</p>

<b>Referencing criteria</b>	A set of 11 criteria that each referencing AMS must meet to reference its qualifications system to the AQRF.
<b>Referencing process</b>	Establishing a relationship between the NQF levels and the levels in a regional qualifications framework such as the AQRF.
<b>Reference qualifications</b>	Mainstream qualifications that are well-known, used commonly and which can be regarded in the Member State as benchmarks for levels of learning in the qualifications system
<b>Regional qualifications framework</b>	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.
<b>Registering agency</b>	Competent bodies responsible for approving education and training providers, e.g., national qualifications agencies, official review boards or other nationally approved bodies or agencies. Registering agencies function within a quality assurance system.
<b>Registration of providers</b>	<p>Registration processes include formal acknowledgement by a registering agency that a provider meets relevant quality standards. Under NQFs it is usual for a provider to be registered in order to deliver and assess accredited programs and issue awards.</p> <p>Some agencies differentiate between the two processes, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• formal acknowledgement that the provider meets key generic standards</li> <li>• formal acknowledgement that the provider meets specific standards related to the provision of teaching, learning and assessment of a specific program.</li> </ul> <p>For the purpose of the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework, registration of providers is the term used for both processes.</p>
<b>Sectoral or partial qualifications framework</b>	AN NQF that includes qualifications from one education and training sector, for example TVET or higher education.

<b>Social aspect of referencing</b>	The process links the NQF levels to the regional qualifications framework levels according to evidence from stakeholders and data on the understandings of the value of qualifications in the country.
<b>Standard (in education and training)</b>	Statement approved and formalised by a competent body, which defines the rules to be followed in a given context or the results to be achieved. Also refer to Achievement Standards.
<b>Technical aspect of referencing</b>	This process links the NQF levels to the AQRF levels after detailed examination of the descriptors.
<b>Transparency</b>	The degree to which a qualifications system can be understood by users. It depends on the clarity of the meaning of a qualification (outcomes, content, levels, standards, awards). It implies the exchange of information about qualifications in an accessible way within and outside the country of award. When transparency is achieved, it is possible to compare the value and content of qualifications at national and international level.
<b>Validation of learning outcomes</b>	Confirmation by a competent body that learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competencies) acquired by an individual in a formal, non- formal or informal setting have been assessed against pre-defined criteria and are compliant with the requirements of achievement standards, including qualifications or unit(s) of a qualification. Validation typically leads to certification. This includes the notion of recognition of prior learning (RPL) or accreditation of prior learning.



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