

DEVELOPING THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL  
QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (ACQF)



**GUIDELINE** **01**

**Learning Outcomes in the context of  
qualifications frameworks and systems**

**Synthesis Guideline**



THE AFRICA-EU PARTNERSHIP  
LE PARTENARIAT AFRIQUE-UE



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## Acronyms

ACQF	African Continental Qualifications Framework
ACTS	African Credit and Transfer System
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
ASG-QA	African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
CATS	Credit Accumulation and Transfer System
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CESA	Continental Education Strategy for Africa
EAC	East Africa Community
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance for Vocational Education and Training
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority for Development
ILO	International Labour Organisation
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
NQF	national qualifications framework
NQS	national qualifications system
QA	quality assurance
REC	regional economic communities
RPL	recognition of prior learning
RQF	regional qualifications framework
TVET	technical vocational education and training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

## 1 Synthesis Guidelines supporting implementation of the ACQF

All Guidelines are accessible on the ACQF Website: <https://acqf.africa/resources/policy-guidelines/acqf-guidelines>.

The ten Synthesis Guidelines are an integral part of the ACQF Policy and Technical Document. The Synthesis Guidelines are high-level summaries of the respective Technical Guidelines, listed below. The ten ACQF Guidelines are the technical foundations of the ACQF, and are conceived to support implementation of the goals, principles, functions, and actions of the ACQF.

Moreover, the 10 ACQF Guidelines and the supporting Training Modules provide all African countries, institutions and stakeholders with a comprehensive and practical reference and methodological framework useful for development, implementation, improvement, and review of national qualifications frameworks (in a systemic view) including the key dimensions, components and instruments listed below.

The ten ACQF Guidelines are:

- Guideline 1: Learning outcomes in the context of NQFs and ACQF
- Guideline 2: Levels and level descriptors in the context of ACQF
- Guideline 3: Referencing to ACQF
- Guideline 4: Validation and recognition of learning
- Guideline 5: Quality assurance in the context of ACQF
- Guideline 6: Registers / databases of qualifications
- Guideline 7: Monitoring and evaluation in the context of NQF and ACQF
- Guideline 8: Communication and outreach in the context of NQF and ACQF
- Guideline 9: Innovation and technology in the context of NQF and ACQF
- Guideline 10: Qualifications and Qualifications Frameworks – the systemic view

The ACQF Guidelines are directed to various stakeholders at continental, regional and national levels in Africa, and is especially relevant in the context of ACQF. Target users are the ACQF implementation team, ACQF Advisory Group and other ACQF instances; national qualifications and recognition authorities; quality assurance agencies; competent authorities involved in curriculum development; education and training providers; assessment and certification entities; sector qualifications / skills committees / councils; career guidance, employment agencies; and other stakeholders involved in the management of qualifications.

## **1.1 Synthesis Guideline 1: Learning outcomes in the context of NQF and ACQF**

### **Objectives and scope of the Guideline 1**

This Synthesis Guideline is a high-level summary of the Technical Guideline 1 on learning outcomes in the context of NQF and ACQF.

The Guideline 1 is conceived as a reference document on learning outcomes. The Guideline elaborates on the key concepts and applications of learning outcomes and their role and place in education and training and in qualifications frameworks; and recalls the general rules for writing learning outcomes and addressing known challenges.

### **Purpose and scope of learning outcomes in the context of qualifications frameworks**

Learning outcomes are explicit statements about the results of learning - what a learner is expected to know, understand, and do after a learning process. Learning outcomes are the essential building blocks or “glue” for transparent education systems and present a common language for describing learning. They can be thought of as a common currency that enhances transparency at both national and international levels. They are expressed through a combination of knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes that an individual is expected to achieve after successfully engaging in various learning experiences. Learning outcomes approaches contribute to learner-centred education and training and to the lifelong learning objectives of the ACQF.

Most qualifications frameworks are underpinned by learning outcomes approaches. Qualifications described in terms of learning outcomes will strengthen transparency of learning and trust in qualifications levels of member countries. The increased transparency will benefit the country stakeholders as well as those outside the country who are interested in understanding the qualification systems. Application of the learning outcomes approach contributes to greater transparency and comparability of qualifications between countries about what holders of qualifications know and can do, and to identification, documentation and recognition/ certification of learning outcomes irrespective of the context of the learning and acquisition of the learning outcome (formal, non-formal, informal, hybrid, online and distance learning).

Learning outcomes are verb-driven statements that encourage a systematic approach to qualifications design, promote overall transparency, coherence and quality assurance and assist in clarifying the intentions of learning. However, learning outcomes do not entirely replace considerations on inputs to the learning process but rather adds value, supplements, enhances, and complements the existing input-oriented approaches.

Describing and formulating learning outcomes must be followed by implementation i.e., there must be a synergy between statements of learning outcomes, the teaching and learning activity, assessment and certification, and feedback from the labour market. This synergy and continuous improvement will enhance the movement from statements of expected learning outcomes to achieved outcomes and support open and active learning that encourages learners to reach their full potential.

#### **Learning outcomes in the specific context of ACQF**

The learning outcomes principles are important backbones of the ACQF, and this is expressed in at least three ways:

- in the level descriptors of the ACQF,
- in the ACQF referencing criteria, and
- in the principle that all learning is valuable and validation and recognition of learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning, from work and social experience is fundamental for lifelong learning and needs to be supported by NQFs and ACQF.

Most importantly, criterion 2 of referencing to the ACQF is focused on the principle of learning outcomes: “The national qualifications frameworks or systems are based on learning outcomes principles and related to arrangements for recognition of prior learning (including non-formal and informal) and, where appropriate, to credit systems.” More information on referencing to ACQF is available in ACQF Guideline 3.

#### **Learning outcomes applications**

Learning outcomes have applications in various contexts: in qualifications frameworks, curricula and learning modules in different sectors (higher education, general education and TVET), quality assurance systems, credit accumulation and transfer systems, validation and recognition of prior learning (including non-formal; and informal learning), and recognition of foreign qualifications. These contexts are important as they will affect the way the learning outcomes are defined and formulated.

In the education and training context, learning outcomes are applied in different situations including

- level descriptors
- competence-based training/ approche par compétences
- developing common profiles of qualifications
- qualification descriptors, qualification standards,
- diplomas, certificates, and related supplements
- levelling and classification of qualifications in the NQF
- quality assurance of education and training
- coherence in the qualifications’ quality chain, from standards underpinning qualifications, to curricula and units / modules, assessment, and certification

- credit accumulation and transfer
- evaluation of foreign qualifications
- career guidance
- recognition of prior learning (RPL)

#### In validation and recognition of learning from experience, non-formal and informal learning

Learning outcomes are essential for transparent and fair processes of validation and recognition of peoples' knowledge, skills and competences acquired in different contexts of work and social experience in a lifelong learning continuum (non-formal and informal learning). By focusing on learning outcomes and not on training duration and training institutions, RPL gives all people new opportunities for social inclusion, to access decent work and to further education and training.

In the work context, learning outcomes principles are used in:

- Definition of the skills / competencies in occupational / professional standards
- Recruitment, job vacancies / advertisements
- Supporting matching of job seekers' curricula vitae (CVs) to vacancies
- Job descriptions
- Performance appraisals

In a personal context, learning outcomes are useful and applied in:

- learning outcomes in qualifications documents, passports of lifelong learning experiences
- writing curricula vitae (CVs)
- descriptions of professional experience
- applications for jobs
- RPL process, notably in the identification and documentation of the individuals' experiences, and acquired competences, and in the assessment process.

#### **Challenges in formulating learning outcomes and ways to address them**

Learning outcomes should be fit-for-purpose and orient a learning process and not restrict it. Too detailed and prescriptive statements can undermine and lead to a "dumbing down" of the learning and assessment process. To prevent and minimise these challenges, learning outcomes should:

- Be written as threshold / minimum statements that do not prevent learners to go beyond these thresholds / minimum expectations
- Be defined and written in a way which allows for local adaptation and interpretation by teachers and learners
- Assist teachers in identifying and combining teaching and assessment methods
- Find the balance between prescriptive and descriptive learning outcomes.

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ACQF Training and Peer learning webinars: <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/webinars>

ACQF Thematic Briefs: <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/thematic-briefs>

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### 3 Glossary

This list of definitions is not exhaustive but is complemented by the specific glossaries annexed to each of the Guidelines and are included in [ACQF Thematic Brief 1. Concepts and definitions](#).

#### **Main terms:**

##### **Qualification**

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

##### **International qualifications**

International qualifications are awarded by a legally established international body (association, organisation, professional sector, or company) or by a national body acting on behalf of an international body, are used in more than one country and include learning outcomes assessed with reference to standards established by an international body.

##### **National Qualifications Framework**

A policy and instrument for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims at integrating and coordinating national qualifications

subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society.

### **National Qualifications System**

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

### **Regional qualifications framework**

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

### **Credit**

'Credit' means confirmation that a part of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of learning outcomes has been assessed and validated by a competent authority, according to an agreed standard; credit is awarded by competent authorities when the individual has achieved the defined learning outcomes, evidenced by appropriate assessments and can be expressed in a quantitative value (e.g. credits or credit points) demonstrating the estimated workload an individual typically needs for achieving related learning outcomes.

'Credit transfer' means the process of allowing individuals who have accumulated credit in one context to have it valued and recognised in another context.

### **Learning outcomes**

Statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.

### **Level descriptors**

A statement describing learning achievement at a particular level of the National Qualifications Framework (that provides a broad indication of the types of learning outcomes that are appropriate to a qualification at that level).

### **Knowledge**

In the context of ACQF 'Knowledge' includes various kinds of knowledge such as facts, principles and theories in various areas.

### **Skills**

In the context of ACQF 'Skills' refer to the ability to use knowledge to respond to information and address problems. Skills include cognitive, communication, digital, green, innovation, practical and social skills.

### **Autonomy and responsibility**

In the context of ACQF 'Autonomy and responsibility' refers to the context and extent of the application of autonomy and responsibility.

### **Informal learning**

Learning resulting from daily activities and experiences which is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support; it may be unintentional from the learners' perspective.

### **Non-formal learning**

Learning which takes place outside formal education and training through planned activities in terms of learning objectives and learning time and where some form of learning support is present.

**Recognition of prior learning**

Confirmation by a competent authority that the learning outcomes, that an individual has acquired in non-formal and informal learning settings, has been measured against a relevant standard.

**Recognition of foreign qualifications**

A formal acknowledgment by a competent recognition authority of the validity and academic level of a foreign education qualification, of partial studies, or of prior learning for the purpose of providing an applicant with outcomes including, but not limited to: (a) the right to apply for admission to higher education; and/or (b) the possibility to seek employment opportunities.