www.acqf.africa

SUMMARY NOTES

5th ACQF Continental Forum

Date: 30 July – 1 August 2025

Theme: Transparency, comparability, and mobility across national and regional qualifications systems.

Venue: @Sandton Hotel, Sandton, Johannesburg, South Africa

Introduction

The 5th ACQF Forum, held in Sandton, South Africa from 30 July to 1 August 2025, provided a strategic platform for African countries to advance qualifications harmonization. Convened by the ACQF Network and co-hosted by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), the Forum's theme, "Transparency, Comparability, and Mobility Across National and Regional Qualifications Systems," emphasizes the collective effort to promote skills recognition and support academic and professional mobility across the continent.

By bringing together policymakers, technical experts, and training institutions, the Forum actively contributed to achieving the African Union's vision of an integrated, knowledge-based, and prosperous Africa.

For the first time, the organization of the 5th Forum was led by the Presidency of the ACQF Network, newly elected in April this year. The Presidency proposed a good quality programme and has been demonstrating strong leadership.

Participating Countries

The event brought together representatives from 25 African Union member states, alongside regional bodies (e.g. SADC, CCMEFP-UEMOA) and development partners (e.g. EU, ILO, ETF).

Conduct of Forum

Day 1 was chaired by Nadia Starr, Chief Executive Officer, SAQA

Nadia Starr opened the Forum, followed by a welcome address by Ambassador M. Dlomo from the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO). The purpose of the forum was explained as serving as a vital platform for strengthening mutual trust, sharing best practices, and building capacity in areas such as quality assurance, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), and the digitalization of qualifications. This was followed by presentations from all participants.

Keynote speech

Peril and Promise: New Digital Technologies and the ACQF

Emeritus Professor Martin Hall's keynote highlighted digital technologies as both a catalyst and a challenge for ACQF. He emphasized their potential to enhance transparency, mobility, and lifelong learning through secure credentialing and AI tools. However, barriers such as limited internet access and widespread qualification fraud threaten progress. Hall urged ACQF to address connectivity gaps and enforce strong credential verification standards. He stressed the need for ethical oversight and low-data, mobile-friendly solutions to ensure equitable access. He concluded that innovation had to be balanced with vigilance to fully realize ACQF's transformative goals.

ACQF Progress and Roadmap for 2025-2027

Dr Alice Kande, CEO of the Kenya National Qualifications Authority (KNQA) spoke on how the ACQF-II (2023–2026) builds on past achievements, focusing on national and continental implementation to enhance qualifications transparency, lifelong learning, and mobility. Key priorities include: Referencing NQFs to ACQF, supporting Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), and expanding the Qualifications and Credentials Platform (QCP), Capacity-building through forums (e.g., 11 multi-country workshops) and country-specific support (e.g., NQF development in Angola, DRC, Zambia), Green skills, micro-credentials, and collaborative research to align with AU strategies (e.g., African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), African Credit Transfer

System (ACTS)) and ACQF Network sustainability, emphasizing peer learning, data-driven tools, and regional partnerships.

The roadmap for 2025–2027 continues these efforts, ensuring interoperability, policy coherence, and continental recognition of African qualifications.

Research on the impact of the Zambian National Qualifications Framework on education, training, and employment

Jericho Kashiya from ZAQA spoke on how a study on Zambia's National Qualifications Framework (NQF) assessed its impact on education, training, and employment using human capital and capability theories. Before implementation, Zambia faced fragmented qualifications and weak quality assurance. Post-NQF, improvements were noted in curriculum alignment and certification, though challenges remain in stakeholder awareness and employer engagement. The study used mixed methods—policy analysis, interviews, and labor market data—and found incremental gains in skills recognition and mobility. However, uneven implementation and data gaps persist. Recommendations include boosting stakeholder sensitization, industry partnerships, and digital credentialing to enhance transparency and labor market relevance.

Peer Learning Session 1: South African Good Practices
Enhancing Access through the National Qualifications Register – Enabling Data-Driven Recognition and Mobility

Omotola Akindolani explained how the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) leverages the National Qualifications Framework Management Information System (NQFMIS) to strengthen recognition, verification, and evaluation of qualifications and inform decision-making at the macro policy level. Current trends reveal shifts in foreign qualification evaluations and the need to understand where South African qualifications are presented outside the country. Planned enhancements to the system include linking qualifications to scarce skills, integrating micro-credentials, and understanding qualification mobility.

Looking ahead, SAQA aims to explore interoperability with other qualifications ecosystems through open data standards and sharing, and the increased use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to build a collaborative, connected, and learner-focused qualifications ecosystem.

Peer Learning Session 2: Continental Showcases

Transforming qualifications management through digital innovation- Kenya's journey towards transparency and inclusion

Haron Chege spoke on Kenya's pilot referencing of its National Qualifications Framework (KNQF) to the ACQF, exemplifying how digital innovation can enhance transparency and inclusivity in qualifications management. By leveraging digital tools for stakeholder engagement, real-time data verification, and iterative reporting (e.g., Draft 3 of the Referencing Report), the Kenya National Qualifications Authority (KNQA) has streamlined cross-border recognition and addressed challenges like credential fraud and labor market dynamism. The integration of digital platforms for peer reviews (e.g., ACQF webinars) and multi-stakeholder consultations ensures broader participation, while the forthcoming National Qualifications Register will further democratize access to verified qualifications. Kenya's approach—combining rigorous referencing criteria with scalable digital solutions—sets a precedent for data-driven, equitable skills mobility in Africa.

NQF Alignment with TVET Reform – Ghana

Sampson Damptey Tetey explained how Ghana's education reforms, driven by the 2020 Education Regulatory Bodies Act, strategically align the Ghana National Qualifications Framework (GhNQF) with TVET transformation. The Commission for TVET (CTVET) promotes competency-based training across all sectors, ensuring industry-led standards and quality assurance. The 8-level National TVET Qualifications Framework integrates into the 10-level GhNQF, supporting credit transfer, assessments, and external verification. Collaboration between CTVET and GTEC enhances tertiary-level accreditation. Policies like Recognition of Prior Learning and CATS foster lifelong learning and mobility. This cohesive system positions Ghana's TVET as a model for skills development and continental harmonization under the ACQF.

RPL for Public Sector Recruitment - **Namibia**

Joseph Amunyela described how Namibia leverages Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to promote inclusive public sector recruitment and address skills gaps. Guided by the Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA) and policies like the Public Service Act (1995) and National RPL Policy (2009), RPL validates informal and non-formal learning for government roles. Accredited providers issue RPL certificates accepted as formal qualifications. Innovations like digital portfolios and integration into the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) enhance RPL's

impact. Despite challenges like low awareness and assessment complexity, RPL supports equitable employment and strengthens Namibia's competency-driven public workforce.

ACQF Referencing Journey - Angola

Antonieta Fernandes highlighted how Angola's ACQF referencing journey, led by the Instituto Nacional de Qualificações (INQ), aims to align its national qualifications framework (QNQ) with continental standards. Backed by legal instruments like Decreto Presidencial nº 210/22 and national development plans, the QNQ spans ten levels and includes formal, non-formal, and informal learning. Angola meets the ACQF referencing criteria such as level descriptors, learning outcomes, and quality assurance. With over 390 qualifications in its national catalogue, the country emphasizes green and digital skills, micro-credentials, and RVCC. Through regional collaboration, Angola enhances transparency, mobility, and recognition of its qualifications across Africa and beyond.

Referencing journey and outcomes – Seychelles

Fiona Ernesta described how the Seychelles Qualifications Authority (SQA) emphasized the critical role of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) in standardizing qualifications, ensuring quality assurance, and enabling recognition across education systems, while underscoring the importance of referencing to enhance learner/worker mobility, international comparability, and trust. Seychelles' referencing process to the ACQF followed six key steps— establishing a National Referencing Team (NRT), stakeholder engagement, comparative analysis, and report documentation, revealing strong alignment (e.g., 10-level structure, learning outcomes) but also differences (e.g., domains of learning, descriptor formulations). Challenges included weak quality assurance mechanisms, limited stakeholder involvement, and data gaps. With SQA Board approval secured, the next steps involve seeking national endorsement from the Ministry of Education and Cabinet.

Day 2 was chaired by Mercy Ngoma, Director General of ZAQA

Establishment of the ACQF Technical Clusters

The ACQF Network's Technical Clusters were established to enhance the implementation of the ACQF through specialized, multi-stakeholder collaboration. Four clusters were formed:

1. Referencing to ACQF and Recognition of Qualifications,
2. QCP and Digitalization, Research
3. Implementation of NQFs/RPL/CATS, and
4. Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing.

The clusters aim to promote sustainability, provide country-level support, drive innovation, and improve coordination. The clusters will operationalize ACQF's strategic priorities and foster peer learning across member states.

Cluster Working Session

The cluster sessions began with the election of the Chairperson/Vice-Chairperson and Secretariat. This was followed by fine-tuning their Terms of Reference (ToRs) and activity plans for 2025-26 with noticeably high engagement and motivation of all members. The dates for online follow-up meetings of the clusters were also set moving forward.

Mobility in qualifications and credentials

AU Share projects on the continent: Digital and non-digital – African Union

Chigozie Emmanuel Okonkwo spoke of how the African Union (AU) is advancing qualification mobility through a dual approach combining digital innovation and policy harmonization to unlock skills portability across the continent. Key initiatives like the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) and African Credit Transfer System (ACTS) standardize qualifications and enable seamless credit recognition, while the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) fosters professional mobility through Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs).

Digital solutions—such as blockchain-secured credentials, online verification systems, and e-learning platforms—complement non-digital strategies like bilateral recognition agreements and in-person assessments. Supported by the AU TVET Strategy (2025–2034) and Pan-African Quality Assurance Framework (PAQAF), these efforts address challenges like skills underutilization and fragmented systems, aligning with Agenda 2063's vision for integrated, skills-driven growth. By bridging digital and traditional methods, the AU empowers learners, workers, and employers to harness Africa's human capital potential.

Mobility of qualifications and skills: The role of the Addis Ababa Convention

Prof Massamba Diouf, Chairperson of the UNESCO 'Addis' Recognition Convention Committee, spoke of the Addis Ababa Convention playing a pivotal role in advancing the mobility of qualifications and skills across Africa by establishing a legal and policy framework for the mutual recognition of academic credentials. Adopted in 2014 and revised in 2019 under UNESCO's auspices, the Convention promotes fairness, transparency, and non-discrimination in recognizing diplomas, certificates, and other formal and informal learning outcomes.

It supports academic and professional mobility, transnational education, diaspora reintegration, and harmonization of national qualification frameworks and quality assurance systems.

With 14 ratifying countries, the Convention fosters regional integration and aligns with key continental agendas like Agenda 2063 and SDG 4. Challenges include limited ratification, data gaps, and the need for interoperable information systems. However, noting the shared objectives of the ACQF network, Prof Diouf spoke of opportunities to create synergies with frameworks like the ACQF, investing in digital infrastructure, and strengthening institutional capacities. Ultimately, the Convention is a strategic lever for building a more integrated and competent Africa through inclusive recognition and valorization of its human capital, and the ACQF network is a strong potential partner. Prof Diouf therefore extended his readiness to collaborate with ACQF, providing for the potential of a valuable exchange between the network and the Convention activities.

Digitizing Qualifications for Improved Mobility: Africa's Role in a Global Linked Data Pilot
Scott Cheney, CEO, Credential Engine, spoke of the global pilot project led by Credential Engine, which focuses on digitizing qualifications using linked open data to enhance transparency and mobility. Through the Credential Transparency Description Language (CTDL) as one option, the initiative enables structured, interoperable, and multilingual data on credentials, frameworks, and competencies. Partnering with SAQA and others, the project demonstrates how national and regional qualification data can be published and aligned for global comparability. By applying SOLID principles, it supports faster, more reliable recognition of learning and career pathways, empowering learners, employers, and institutions worldwide with accessible, verifiable credential information.

Curation of the European Qualifications Framework – EQF Advisory Group
Koen Nomden from the European Commission shared very practical insights on how the European Qualifications Framework is curated. The EQF is a regional reference tool designed to enhance the transparency, comparability, and portability of qualifications across Europe. Managed by the EQF Advisory Group, the framework supports lifelong learning, labor mobility, and social integration. The Advisory Group, composed of EU member states, stakeholders, and agencies like Cedefop and the European Training Foundation, oversees referencing processes, quality assurance, and the integration of learning outcomes.

Countries link their national frameworks to the EQF through detailed referencing reports, reviewed via peer feedback and expert validation. The EQF also promotes digital transformation through tools like the European Learning Model and the Europass platform, enabling structured, accessible qualification data.

Unlocking the Potential of the QCP: From Data to Policy Impact

Stefan Jahnke and Honza Forster from the QCP Team provided a broad overview of the Qualifications and Credentials Platform (QCP) as a strategic digital tool developed under the ACQF to support national certification systems across Africa. Designed as an interoperable open data platform, QCP enables structured recording, management, and comparison of qualifications linked to national and continental frameworks. It enhances visibility, recognition, and mobility of skills by connecting public users (students, job seekers) and institutional stakeholders (ministries, employers, quality assurance bodies). QCP supports manual and automated data uploads, quality assurance, and public search functions. It empowers African countries to shape a shared semantic model for qualifications, fostering transparency and regional integration.

QCP capacity building

The capacity building programme (over two half days) was prepared and delivered by the QCP team. It was based on the experiences from the last few months of data entry into the QCP and users' feedback collected from the qualification agencies. It is hoped that it will result in an accelerated data entry process in the upcoming months.

The capacity-building focused on the strategic implementation of the QCP over three sessions. Sessions 1 and 2 were held on Day 2, and Session 3 was held on Day 3. Session 1 introduced QCP's role in quality assurance, data governance, and regional integration. Session 2 engaged participants in stakeholder mapping and readiness assessment using design thinking.

Day 3, chaired by Dr Alice Kande, CEO, KNQA

The QCP Capacity Building Session 3 held on Day 3 addressed policy-level challenges through collaborative labs, followed by solution sharing and country-specific action planning. These sessions fostered peer learning, strategic alignment, and practical roadmaps for embedding QCP in national systems.

Sustainability of the QCP was mentioned several times but will be explored more in- depth during the next Forum scheduled on 30 September – 2 October in Mauritius**.**

Technical Clusters – Report Back

The four Technical Clusters, namely: 1. Referencing to ACQF and Recognition of Qualifications, 2. QCP and Digitalization, 3. Research and Implementation of NQFs/RPL/CATS, and 4. Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing reported on the deliberations from their respective sessions, including the election of the Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, and Secretariat, review of their TORs, setting priorities, resource mapping, and continental collaboration opportunities. It was agreed that the fifth cluster dealing with Sustainability and Funding would be managed directly by the Troika presidency with coopted expertise as necessary.

Open Discussion and Synthesis Session with final reflections

The plenary session on Cluster Nominations and Reflections confirmed leadership roles across the four technical clusters. Fiona Ernesta (Seychelles), Haron Chege (Kenya), Jericho Kashiya (Zambia), and Ivey Koin (Kenya) were elected as Chairs of Clusters 1 to 4, respectively. Vice Chairs and Secretaries were also appointed from various member states.

Reflections emphasized the importance of peer learning, capacity building, stakeholder engagement, and aligning ACQF activities with AU strategies such as ACTS, AfCFTA, and PAQAF. The QCP roadmap was outlined in phases, and referencing NQFs to ACQF remains a key ongoing activity.

The four thematic clusters thus became operational – this is an important step enabling streamlining and gradual handing-over of various ACQF-II project activities to the Network.

Conclusions

Considering that the ETF-supported ACQF-II project is entering its last year of operations, there is a need for structured discussions on the available options regarding the handing over of the digital infrastructure developed by the project, in particular its Qualifications and Credentials Platform, including their feasibility. The follow-up forum scheduled on 30 September – 2 October in Port Louis, Mauritius, will provide an opportunity to present the consolidated work plans of the Technical Clusters and discuss several sustainability scenarios.