

ZIMBABWE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (ZNQF)

DRAFT REFERENCING REPORT TO THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (ACQF)

Country: Republic of Zimbabwe

National Qualifications Institution Responsible: National Referencing Committee (NRC), Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development (MHTEISTD)

Drafting Team: Prof N. Takaidza, Dr L. Nembaware, Mr V.T. Mguni, Prof K.P. Dzvimbo, Prof W. Parawira, Dr H. Kwandayi, Dr C. Mandizvidza, Mr W. Sonono, Eng. W. S. Mtisi, Mr T. Damba; National Referencing Committee Members

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1. SUMMARY

The Zimbabwe National Qualifications Framework (ZNQF) was formally established in 2018 following Cabinet approval and has been progressively implemented through comprehensive legislative instruments, including Statutory Instruments 135, 136, and 137 of 2021. The ZNQF is a 10-level outcomes-based framework that integrates all education and training sectors—basic education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and higher education—into a single coherent system.

This report presents the findings of the first referencing pilot exercise between the ZNQF and the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF), conducted in accordance with the ACQF Referencing Guidelines. The referencing process was led by the National Referencing Committee (NRC), comprising representatives from the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development (MHTEISTD), the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE), the Higher Education Examinations Council (HEXCO), and the Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC).

Key Findings:

Criterion	Assessment	Summary
Criterion 1: Level Descriptors and Learning Outcomes	Compatible	ZNQF employs a 10-level structure with learning outcomes-based descriptors across Knowledge, Skills, and Autonomy and Responsibility domains. Level descriptors demonstrate strong alignment with ACQF.
Criterion 2: Learning Outcomes, RPL, and Credit Systems	Compatible	ZNQF is firmly grounded in learning outcomes principles. Comprehensive RPL mechanisms exist, including industrial trade testing (established 1986), mature entry policies, and module exemptions. Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS) established with 10 notional hours = 1 credit.
Criterion 3: Transparent Procedures and Qualification Register	Compatible with Gaps	Transparent registration procedures are enshrined in Statutory Instruments. Minimum Bodies of Knowledge (MBKs) ensure 70-80% comparability. Three separate registers exist (EMIS, HEMIS) with plans for a centralised portal.

Comentado [1]:
I thought that we are compatible here. The instruments are available to ensure compliance. The instruments can be visited and revisited as the environments change.

Criterion 4: Quality Assurance System	Compatible	Multi-level QA architecture with clearly defined roles for ZIMSEC, HEXCO, and ZIMCHE. QA addresses the full qualifications quality chain and aligns with SADCQF and ACQF principles.
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Overall Compatibility:

The referencing exercise confirms that the ZNQF is compatible with the ACQF across the four referencing criteria. Zimbabwe is committed to deepening this alignment through:

- Establishment of the Zimbabwe National Qualifications Authority (ZNQA) – draft Bill in place
- Development of a centralised ZNQF Qualifications and Credentials Portal(QCP)
- Digital transformation of qualification management and verification systems
- Enhanced capacity building for quality assurance and RPL
- Development of a Micro credential framework
- Greening the ZNQF

The referencing outcome demonstrates Zimbabwe's commitment to continental integration and the free movement of skilled labour under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

2. STRUCTURE OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM. OVERVIEW OF NQF – STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

2.1 Zimbabwe's Education and Training System

Zimbabwe's education and training system is structured into three main sectors:

Sector	Sub-Sectors	Responsible Bodies	Qualifications Offered
Basic Education	Primary (7 years), Secondary (6 years)	Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education; ZIMSEC	Primary Certificate; Ordinary Level; Advanced Level
Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)	Professional Bodies(IPMZ, ICSAZ,IMM etc),Polytechnics, Industrial Training Colleges, Vocational Training Centres	Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education; HEXCO	National Certificates, National Diplomas, Higher National Diplomas; Trade Testing Certificates
Higher Education	Universities, Teachers' Colleges	Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education; ZIMCHE	Bachelor's Degrees, Honours Degrees, Master's Degrees, Doctorates

2.2 Overview of the Zimbabwe National Qualifications Framework (ZNQF)

2.2.1 Establishment and Legal Basis

The ZNQF was approved by Cabinet in June 2018 and is implemented through:

Band	ZNQF Levels	Education Sector
Band 1	Levels 1-4	Primary and Secondary Education; Vocational Training
Band 2	Levels 5-6	College Diplomas and Technical Qualifications
Band 3	Levels 7-10	University Degrees and Postgraduate Qualifications

2.2.2 Designated Quality Assurance Agencies administering the three bands

Instrument	Purpose	Coverage
ZIMCHE ZNQF Regulations (SI 135 of 2021)	Higher education qualifications	Levels 7-10
HEXCO ZNQF Regulations (SI 136 of 2021)	TVET qualifications	Levels 3-6

ZIMSEC ZNQF Regulations (SI 137 of 2021)	Basic education qualifications	Levels 1-3
Manpower Planning and Development Act (MPDA) [Chapter 28:02] (amended 2023)	Parent Act for all three bands	Levels 1-10

2.2.3 Eight Legibility Aspects of NQFs

	Aspect	Status
1	Legal Framework	Fully established (SIs 135-137; MPDA amendment)
2	Level Descriptors	Fully developed and published
3	Qualification Registration	Operational for all three sectors
4	RPL Mechanisms	Established (trade testing since 1986; mature entry policy)
5	Credit Accumulation and Transfer	Operational (10 notional hours = 1 credit)
6	Minimum Bodies of Knowledge	Developed and ratified across TVET and university institutions
7	National Register	Three registers operational (EMIS, HEMIS: NEMIS: Dura Isiphala 263); centralised portal planned
8	National Qualifications Authority	Draft Bill in place; target establishment 2026

2.2.4 Structure of the ZNQF

The ZNQF consists of 10 qualification levels, divided into three bands:

Band	ZNQF Levels	Education Sector
Band 1	Levels 1-4	Primary and Secondary Education; Vocational Training
Band 2	Levels 5-6	College Diplomas and Technical Qualifications
Band 3	Levels 7-10	University Degrees and Postgraduate Qualifications

Table 1: Qualification Types on the ZNQF

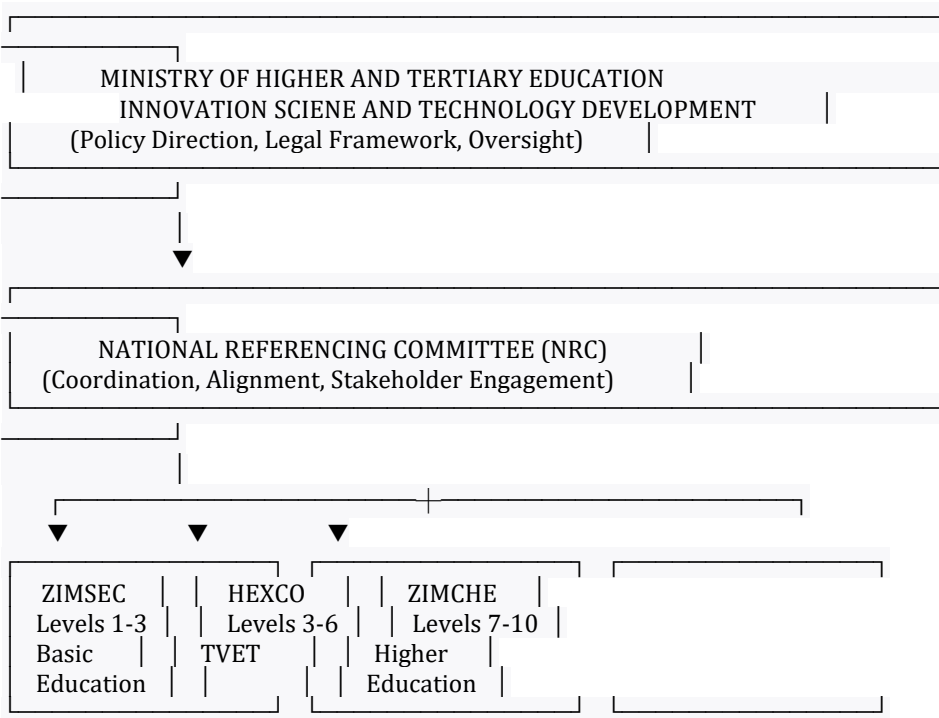
ZNQF Level	Qualification Type	Awarding Body
1	Primary Level Certificate	ZIMSEC
2	Ordinary Level Certificate / National Foundation Certificate	ZIMSEC
3	General Advanced Level Certificate	ZIMSEC
4	National Certificate	HEXCO
5	National Diploma	HEXCO
6	Higher National Diploma	HEXCO
7	General Degree	ZIMCHE

8	Honours Degree (and Postgraduate Diplomas)	ZIMCHE
9	Master's Degree	ZIMCHE
10	Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)	ZIMCHE

2.2.3 Governance and Administration

The ZNQF is governed by a National Referencing Committee (NRC) , formerly the National Alignment Committee, comprising stakeholders from ministries and professional bodies that domicile qualifications. The NRC ensures that ZIMCHE, HEXCO, and ZIMSEC, as ZNQF regulatory authorities, maintain flexibility, autonomy, and responsibility in implementing the framework.

Figure 1: ZNQF Governance Structure



2.2.4 Minimum Bodies of Knowledge (MBKs)

A key feature of the ZNQF is the development of Minimum Bodies of Knowledge and Skills (MBKs) for qualifications at the same level across different institutions. MBKs are developed using a learning outcomes-based competency modular approach and ensure 70-80% comparability of qualifications offered at the same level across institutions. This has:

- Eliminated parity of qualifications: Made all Institutions qualifications to have comparable qualifications across Higher and Tertiary Education Institutions (HTEIs)
- Introduced portability of qualifications; Facilitated the transfer of credits and free movement of students between institutions;
- Supported the development of articulation pathways between TVET and higher education institutions.
- Subsequently TVET is now part of feedstock for university enrolment without repeating areas already covered in TVET institutions.

2.2.5 Stage of Development and Implementation

Aspect	Status
Legal Framework	Fully established (SIs 135-137; MPDA amendment)
Level Descriptors	Fully developed and published
Qualification Registration	Operational for all three sectors
RPL Mechanisms	Established (trade testing since 1986; mature entry policy)
Credit Accumulation and Transfer	Operational (10 notional hours = 1 credit)
Minimum Bodies of Knowledge	Developed and ratified across TVET and university institutions

National Register	Three registers operational (EMIS, HEMIS: Dura Isiphala 263); centralised portal planned
National Qualifications Authority	Draft Bill in place; target establishment 2026

3. REFERENCING CRITERION 1: CLEAR AND DEMONSTRABLE LINK BETWEEN ZNQF LEVELS AND ACQF LEVEL DESCRIPTORS

3.1 ACQF Level Descriptors

The ACQF defines level descriptors across three domains of learning:

Domain	Definition
Knowledge	Includes various kinds of knowledge such as facts, principles, and theories in various areas
Skills	The ability to use knowledge to respond to information and address problems; includes cognitive, communication, digital, green, innovation, practical, and social skills
Autonomy and Responsibility	The context and extent of the application of autonomy and responsibility, including responsibility for self, group outcomes, and resources

3.2 ZNQF Level Descriptors

The ZNQF employs a 10-level structure with level descriptors formulated using learning outcomes language, divided into three domains: Knowledge, Skills, and Autonomy and Responsibility.

Table 2: ZNQF Level Descriptors (Levels 7-10)

ZNQF Level	Qualification Type	Knowledge	Skills	Autonomy and Responsibility
10	PhD	Cutting edge research and creation of new knowledge in the development of the study; advance new techniques, ideas or approaches	Expert skills and techniques demonstrating innovation; formulate and test theories	Autonomous in research conducted; management of new ideas
9	Master's	Mastery of knowledge in the field of study; analysis of complex issues; in-depth expert knowledge	Specialised skills based on systematic scrutiny of information	Participate in resource management and supervision of others; function with wide-ranging independence

8	Honours Degree	Methodical comprehension of strategic facets of area of specialty	Implement precise analysis and enquiry procedures; work out setbacks using methods in area of specialty	Work within wide-ranging self-sufficiency
7	General Degree	Comprehensive knowledge in the area of specialty	Apply recognised tenets to work out challenges in diverse settings	

Table 3: ZNQF Level Descriptors (Levels 4-6)

ZNQF Level	Qualification Type	Knowledge	Skills	Autonomy and Responsibility
6	Higher National Diploma	Specialised knowledge in the area of specialty	Relate various and specific methods entailing elementary investigation	Work within wide-ranging self-sufficiency

5	National Diploma	Comprehensive knowledge in the area of specialty	Relate wide-ranging procedures to work out real problems in non-routine situations	Work under broad supervision
4	National Certificate	Operational knowledge in the area of specialty	Relate diverse techniques to address recognisable problems in moderately usual settings	Work under general supervision

Table 4: ZNQF Level Descriptors (Levels 1-3)

ZNQF Level	Qualification Type	Knowledge	Skills	Autonomy and Responsibility
3	General Advanced Level Certificate	In-depth knowledge in specific subject areas	Relate series of techniques to resolve challenges in broad circumstances	Function under general supervision

2	Ordinary Level Certificate	Broad-based knowledge	Relate basic procedures and techniques	Work in controlled atmosphere under direct supervision
1	Primary Level Certificate	Rudimentary knowledge	Relate elementary techniques to mastery and mathematical ability	

3.3 Level Referencing Map

The following table presents the mapping between ZNQF levels and ACQF levels:

ACQF Level	ZNQF Level	ZNQF Qualification	ACQF Level Descriptor Summary
10	10	PhD	Substantial and original knowledge contribution; expert skills; expertise in management of new ideas
9	9	Master's	Mastery of complex knowledge at forefront; originality in research; highly specialised contexts
8	8	Honours Degree	Advanced knowledge; specialised skills; wide-ranging self-sufficiency

7	7	General Degree	Comprehensive knowledge; apply principles to diverse settings; manage/supervise
6	6	Higher National Diploma	Specialised knowledge; various methods; wide-ranging self-sufficiency
5	5	National Diploma	Comprehensive knowledge; wide-ranging procedures; broad supervision
4	4	National Certificate	Operational knowledge; diverse techniques; general supervision
3	3	Advanced Level	In-depth knowledge; series of techniques; general supervision
2	2	Ordinary Level	Broad-based knowledge; basic procedures; direct supervision
1	1	Primary Certificate	Rudimentary knowledge; elementary techniques; intermittent guidance

3.4 Skilled Worker/ Trade Testing /Recognition of Prior Learning Level Descriptors

In addition to academic and technical qualifications, the ZNQF provides level descriptors for skilled workers certified through recognition of prior learning/ industrial trade testing, demonstrating the framework's inclusivity:

ZNQF Level	Trade Class	Eligibility	Level Descriptor
5	Class One	5+ years	Performs complex non-routine tasks; can diagnose, analyse, effect solutions; supervises others
4	Class Two	4 years	Performs complex non-routine tasks with minimum supervision; can diagnose, analyse, rectify
3.2	Class Three	3 years	Performs complex routine tasks with minimum supervision; can supervise lower classes
3.1	Class Four	2 years	Performs basic routine tasks under supervision; demonstrates safe working procedures

3.5 Compatibility Analysis

The ZNQF level descriptors demonstrate strong alignment with ACQF level descriptors across all three domains:

Domain	ZNQF Approach	ACQF Approach	Compat ibility
Knowledge	Progressive from rudimentary (Level 1) to cutting edge research (Level 10)	Progressive from basic factual to advanced specialised knowledge	Fully aligned
Skills	Progressive from elementary techniques to expert skills and innovation	Progressive from basic cognitive/practical to complex specialised skills	Fully aligned
Autonomy and Responsibility	Progressive from supervised work to autonomous research leadership	Progressive from supervised contexts to full autonomy and leadership	

3.6 Conclusion on Criterion 1

The Zimbabwe National Qualifications Framework (ZNQF) meets Criterion 1 in full. The framework:

- Employs a 10-level structure aligned with the ACQF
- Uses learning outcomes-based level descriptors across the same three domains (Knowledge, Skills, Autonomy and Responsibility)
- Demonstrates clear progression in complexity, depth, and breadth across levels
- Provides comprehensive level descriptors covering both academic qualifications and skilled worker certifications

Areas for Improvement:

- Level descriptors to incorporate green skills, soft skills etc

- Micro Credentials to included and be well defined

4. REFERENCING CRITERION 2: LEARNING OUTCOMES PRINCIPLES, RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL), AND CREDIT SYSTEMS

4.1 Learning Outcomes Principles

The ZNQF is firmly grounded in learning outcomes principles. Learning outcomes are:

- Compulsory and supported from Level 1 to Level 10
- Used to develop Minimum Bodies of Knowledge and Skills (MBKS) for qualifications
- Applied in programme quality management and assessment design
- Used to determine admission through RPL at appropriate levels
- Applied to make comparisons across qualifications at the same level

The ZNQF defines learning outcomes as statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand, and be able to do after successful completion of a learning process.

Application of Learning Outcomes:

Application	Implementation
Qualification Design	Learning outcomes guide curriculum development and MBKS
Level Assignment	Qualifications are pegged at appropriate levels based on learning outcomes
Assessment	Assessment measures achievement against stated learning outcomes
RPL	Learning outcomes provide the benchmark for RPL assessment
Credit Allocation	Credits assigned based on notional hours required to achieve learning outcomes

4.2 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

4.2.1 Definition and Scope

The ZNQF defines Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as a process of identifying, assessing, and recognising what a person knows and can do. It assesses the skills and knowledge a person may have developed as a result of formal and/or informal learning, either in the workplace or through life experiences.

The ZNQF supports RPL as a key component of lifelong learning and a mechanism for equity and social inclusion.

4.2.2 RPL Mechanisms

Mechanism	Description	Evidence
Industrial Trade Testing	Workers with informal apprenticeships assessed and certified through trade testing	System established 1986; reviewed by industry every three years; 15,338 artisans certified 2021-2026
Module Exemptions	Students exempted from modules already completed	Processed through ZIMSEC, HEXCO, ZIMCHE
Mature Entry Policy	Adults without formal qualifications access higher education based on experience	Standard policy across universities
Credit Transfer	Credits transferred between qualifications or institutions	Up to 50% in higher education sector

4.2.3 Policy Guidelines

- ZIMCHE Zimbabwe Credit Accumulation and Transfer System Guidelines (2018)

- HEXCO Industrial Training RPL Guidelines System (established 1986, reviewed by industry every three years)
- University Mature Entry Policy Guidelines

4.2.4 RPL in the ACQF Context

The ACQF supports quality and accessible RPL as a key component of lifelong learning policies and a mechanism for equity and social inclusion. The ZNQF RPL approach demonstrates full alignment:

ACQF RPL Principle	ZNQF Implementation
RPL for further study	Mature entry policy enables access to higher education
RPL for employment	Trade testing enables certification and career progression for informal and non formal learners
RPL for qualifications	RPL can lead to full or part qualifications
Equity and social inclusion	RPL provides pathways for informal workers and adults

4.3 Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS)

4.3.1 Key Principles

Principle	Description
Credit Value	10 notional hours = 1 credit
Credit Accumulation	Learners accumulate credits as they complete modules/units

Credit Transfer	Credits may be transferred between qualifications or institutions
Articulation	Vertical and horizontal progression pathways established

4.3.2 Articulation Pathways

The ZNQF has successfully facilitated articulation between different education and training sectors:

Pathway	Implementation	Evidence
Vertical Progression	Basic Education → TVET → Higher Education	Learners progress through levels
Horizontal Comparability	Same level across institutions	MBKs ensure 70-80% comparability
TVET to University	TVET Diplomas as entry to undergraduate programmes	NUST, MSU, HIT, ZOU, CUT accept HEXCO Diplomas

4.3.3 CATS in the ACQF Context

The ACQF supports credit transfer and credit accumulation and transfer systems in different academic and vocational pathways. The ZNQF CATS aligns with this continental approach, with the 10 notional hours = 1 credit standard being widely recognised.

4.4 Micro-Credentials

Zimbabwe has not actively started developing micro-credential frameworks aligned with the ZNQF. The Ministry is yet to engage in:

- Developing policy frameworks for micro-credentials in TVET
- Piloting micro-credentials in priority sectors (agriculture, mining, ICT, renewable energy)
- Aligning with SADC and ACQF micro-credential guidelines

4.5 Conclusion on Criterion 2

The ZNQF meets Criterion 2 in full. The framework:

- Is firmly grounded in learning outcomes principles, with learning outcomes embedded in qualification design, assessment, and quality assurance
- Has comprehensive RPL mechanisms, including a long-standing industrial trade testing system (established 1986) and mature entry policies
- Has established a robust Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS) with 10 notional hours = 1 credit
- Supports articulation between TVET and higher education, facilitating learner mobility

Areas for Improvement:

- Develop a associated framework for development of Micro Credentials
- Establishment of the Zimbabwe National Qualifications Authority

5. REFERENCING CRITERION 3: TRANSPARENT PROCESSES FOR INCLUDING QUALIFICATIONS AND ACCESSIBLE, TRUSTWORTHY, VERIFIABLE REGISTER

5.1 Legislative Framework for Qualification Registration

The ZNQF is operationalised through comprehensive legislative instruments that ensure transparent procedures for the inclusion of qualifications on the NQF Register.

Table 5: Legislative Framework

Instrument	Coverage	Registration Process
ZIMCHE ZNQF Regulations (SI 135 of 2021)	Higher education qualifications (Levels 7-10)	Institutions submit qualifications to ZIMCHE for review against MBKs and level alignment

HEXCO ZNQF Regulations (SI 136 of 2021)	TVET qualifications (Levels 3-6)	HEXCO evaluates qualifications against industry standards and ZNQF level descriptors
ZIMSEC ZNQF Regulations (SI 137 of 2021)	Basic education qualifications (Levels 1-3)	ZIMSEC ensures alignment with curriculum and assessment standards

5.2 Minimum Bodies of Knowledge and Skills (MBKS)

A distinctive feature of the ZNQF is the development of Minimum Bodies of Knowledge and Skills (MBKS) for qualifications at the same level across different institutions.

Functions of MBKS:

- Standardise curriculum content across institutions
- Ensure 70-80% comparability of qualifications at the same level
- Facilitate credit transfer and learner mobility
- Align education outputs with labour market needs

Development Process:

Step	Activity	Responsible Body
1	Industry needs analysis	Industry bodies, NAMACO
2	Competency mapping	ZIMSEC/HEXCO/ZIMCHE
3	Learning Outcomes development	Curriculum experts

4	Stakeholder validation	Institutions, industry
5	Approval and publication	Regulatory authority

5.3 Qualification Registration Process

The process for registering qualifications on the ZNQF is transparent and accessible:

Step	Activity	Timeline	Responsible Body
1	Qualification submission	Ongoing	Institution/Provider
2	Curriculum review against MBKs	Every three years	ZIMSEC/HEXCO/ZI MCHE
3	Alignment to ZNQF level	Concurrent	ZIMSEC/HEXCO/ZI MCHE
4	Quality assurance review	30 days	ZIMSEC/HEXCO/ZI MCHE
5	Registration on NQF Register	Upon approval	ZIMSEC/HEXCO/ZI MCHE
6	Publication for public access	Upon registration	ZIMSEC/HEXCO/ZI MCHE

5.4 National Qualification Registers

Zimbabwe currently maintains three qualification registers, which are in the process of being harmonised into a centralised portal through dura Isphala and SADC Qualifications and Credentials Portal (QCP):

Register	Responsible Body	Coverage	Status
EMIS System	ZIMSEC	Basic education learner records	Operational
HEMIS: Dura Isphala 263; and NEMIS	ZIMCHE and HEXCO	Higher education and TVET qualifications	Operational
Centralised ZNQF Portal	Planned	All qualifications	Under development

Future Development: Zimbabwe has submitted an application to the ACQF for technical and financial support to harmonise these registers into a single centralised ZNQF Qualifications and Credentials Portal (QCP).

5.5 Transparency and Accessibility

The ZNQF ensures transparency and accessibility through:

Feature	Implementation
Public Access	Qualification information available to learners, employers, and institutions upon request
Clear Criteria	Registration criteria clearly defined in Statutory Instruments
Appeals Mechanisms	Providers may appeal registration decisions

Regular Review	Qualifications reviewed periodically to ensure continued relevance (Every three years)
Stakeholder Engagement	Industry and professional bodies involved in qualification development

5.6 Planned Establishment of Zimbabwe National Qualifications Authority (ZNQA)

Zimbabwe targets the establishment of a Zimbabwe National Qualifications Authority (ZNQA) to align with the next phase of implementation of the ZNQF, SADCQF, and ACQF. A draft Bill is in place.

Functions of the Proposed ZNQA:

- Centralised verification of all Zimbabwean qualifications
- Standardised assessment of foreign qualifications
- Maintenance of a comprehensive National Qualifications Register
- Coordination of referencing to SADCQF and ACQF
- Development of qualification standards and guidelines

5.7 Gaps and Planned Improvements

Gap	Current Status	Planned Improvement
Fragmented Registers	Three separate registers	Centralised ZNQF Qualifications and Credentials Portal
Manual Systems	Limited digitalisation	Digital transformation of qualification management
Verification Processes	Manual verification	Blockchain-based credentialing; digital badges
Public Access	Limited online access	Publicly accessible online portal

5.8 Conclusion on Criterion 3

The ZNQF meets Criterion 3, with the following strengths and areas for improvement:

Strengths:

- Comprehensive legislative framework (Statutory Instruments 135-137)
- Minimum Bodies of Knowledge ensuring 70-80% comparability
- Clearly defined registration processes
- Active stakeholder engagement in qualification development (industry, government, quality assurance agencies and training institutions).

Areas for Improvement:

- Harmonisation of three separate qualification registers into a centralised portal: ZNQF QCP.
- Digital transformation to enhance accessibility and verification
- Establishment of the Zimbabwe National Qualifications Authority

6. REFERENCING CRITERION 4: QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM CONSISTENT WITH ACQF PRINCIPLES

6.1 Overview of Quality Assurance in the ZNQF

The ZNQF incorporates comprehensive quality assurance mechanisms that ensure the credibility and integrity of qualifications registered on the framework. The QA system addresses the full qualifications quality chain, from design of qualification standards, skills proficiency schedules to modules and course regulations up to certification.

6.2 ACQF Quality Assurance Principles

The ACQF referencing guidelines specify eight principles for quality assurance:

Principle	Description
1	QA addresses the qualifications quality chain, from design of standards to learning, assessment, and certification

2	QA addresses the application of the learning outcomes approach
3	QA includes feedback instruments and processes supporting continuous quality improvement
4	QA addresses internal and external quality assurance, and the regular review of QA agencies
5	QA is based on measurable learning outcomes, standards, and guidelines
6	QA is supported by resources
7	QA provides transparent information-sharing on results of evaluation
8	QA takes account of African Union policy orientations such as ASG-QA

6.3 ZNQF Quality Assurance Architecture

The ZNQF quality assurance architecture comprises three levels:

Level	Responsible Body	Function
Policy Level	Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development	Policy direction, legal framework, oversight
Regulatory Level	ZIMSEC, HEXCO, ZIMCHE	Programme accreditation, qualification registration, quality audits

Institutional Level	Universities, colleges, polytechnics, industrial training centres, professional bodies etc	Internal quality assurance, curriculum delivery, assessment
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6.4 Quality Assurance Instruments

Instrument	Purpose	Responsible Body
Minimum Bodies of Knowledge (MBKs)	Standardise curriculum content; ensure comparability	ZIMSEC/HEXCO /ZIMCHE
Programme Accreditation	Ensure programmes meet quality standards before implementation	ZIMSEC/HEXCO /ZIMCHE
Institutional Audits	Assess institutional capacity to deliver quality education	ZIMSEC/HEXCO /ZIMCHE
External Moderation	Industry Experts verify assessment standards across institutions	ZIMSEC/HEXCO /ZIMCHE
Assessment Guidelines	Ensure fair, valid, and reliable assessment	ZIMSEC/HEXCO /ZIMCHE
Appeals Mechanisms	Provide recourse for learners and providers	ZIMSEC/HEXCO /ZIMCHE

6.5 Alignment with ACQF Quality Assurance Principles

Principle 1: QA addresses the qualifications quality chain

Stage	ZNQF Implementation
Design of Standards	Minimum Bodies of Knowledge (MBKs) define curriculum standards
Learning	Programme accreditation ensures quality delivery
Assessment	Assessment guidelines and external moderation ensure validity
Certification	Certification processes are regulated and verified

Principle 2: QA addresses the application of learning outcomes approach

Application	ZNQF Implementation
Qualification Design	Learning outcomes guide MBK development
Curriculum	Learning outcomes define programme content
Assessment	Assessment measures achievement against learning outcomes
RPL	Learning outcomes provide benchmark for RPL assessment

Principle 3: QA includes feedback instruments and processes supporting continuous quality improvement

Instrument	Implementation
Stakeholder Feedback	Industry and professional bodies involved in MBK review
Institutional Self-Assessment	Annual institutional reviews
External Audits	Periodic audits by regulatory authorities
Learner Feedback	Course evaluations and graduate surveys

Principle 4: QA addresses internal and external QA, and regular review of QA agencies

Type	ZNQF Implementation
Internal QA	Institutional quality assurance units; self-assessment processes
External QA	Programme accreditation; institutional audits; external moderation
Agency Review	Regular review of ZIMSEC, HEXCO, ZIMCHE performance

Principle 5: QA is based on measurable objectives, standards, and guidelines

Element	ZNQF Implementation
Measurable Objectives	Performance indicators in institutional charters
Standards	Minimum Bodies of Knowledge; level descriptors
Guidelines	Assessment guidelines; accreditation criteria

Principle 6: QA is supported by resources

Resource	Status
Human Resources	Qualified QA officers at ZIMSEC, HEXCO, ZIMCHE; institutional QA units
Financial Resources	Government funding; ZIMDEF levy; institutional budgets
Infrastructure	Growing digital infrastructure; plans for centralised portal

Principle 7: QA provides transparent information-sharing on results of evaluation

Transparency Measure	Implementation
Accreditation Status	Publicly available; published on registers
Audit Reports	Available to institutions; summary reports published
Qualification Register	Accessible to stakeholders

Principle 8: QA takes account of African Union policy orientations such as ASG-QA

ASG-QA Alignment	ZNQF Implementation
Internal QA	Institutional QA policies and practices
External QA	Programme accreditation; institutional audits
QA Agency Standards	ZIMSEC, HEXCO, ZIMCHE aligned with regional standards
Stakeholder Engagement	Industry and professional bodies involved in QA. National Manpower Planning Advisory Council also plays this critical role.

6.6 Alignment with Regional Frameworks

The ZNQF QA mechanisms are aligned with:

- SADCQF Quality Assurance Guidelines: Zimbabwe participates actively in the SADC Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA)
- ACQF Quality Assurance Principles: The ZNQF supports the ACQF approach to quality assurance
- African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA): Zimbabwe is working towards full alignment with ASG-QA

6.7 Roles of Regulatory Authorities

Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC):

- Quality assurance for basic education (Levels 1-3)
- Development and administration of national examinations
- Management of EMIS learner records database

Higher Education Examinations Council (HEXCO):

- Quality assurance for TVET qualifications (Levels 3-6)
- TVET accreditation and programme approval
- TVET continuous assessments and national examinations
- Industrial Training and Trade Testing leading to artisan certification
- RPL assessment and certification
- Management of NEMIS qualifications database

Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE):

- Quality assurance for higher education (Levels 7-10)
- University accreditation and programme approval
- Management of HEMIS qualifications database

6.8 Challenges and Opportunities

Challenge	Current Status	Planned Improvement
Manual Data Systems	Limited digitalisation	Digital transformation of QA systems
Fragmented QA Processes	Separate systems for three sectors	Harmonised QA framework

Capacity Constraints	Limited QA personnel	Capacity building programmes
Digital Verification	Manual verification processes	Blockchain-based credentialing

6.9 Conclusion on Criterion 4

The ZNQF meets Criterion 4, demonstrating:

- QA that addresses the full qualifications quality chain, from design to certification
- Strong application of learning outcomes principles in QA
- Internal and external QA mechanisms with clear roles for three regulatory authorities
- Alignment with SADCQF and ACQF quality assurance principles
- Commitment to digital transformation and continuous improvement

Areas for Improvement:

- Adoption of African Quality Assurance Standards across Agencies
- Adoption of blockchain technology to seal qualification certifications and qualifications assessments
- Ubiquitously Digitalise all services provided for under the three bands from level 1-10.

7. GOVERNANCE PROCEDURES AND FOLLOW-UP OF REFERENCING

7.1 Responsibilities and Legal Competence

The responsibilities and legal competence of national bodies involved in the ACQF referencing process are clearly defined:

Body	Legal Basis	Responsibilities
Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education	Constitution of Zimbabwe; Manpower Planning and Development Act	Policy direction; legal framework; oversight
National Referencing Committee (NRC)	Cabinet decision	Coordination of referencing process; stakeholder engagement
ZIMSEC	ZIMSEC Act; SI 137 of 2021	Basic education qualifications (Levels 1-3)
HEXCO	Manpower Planning and Development Act; SI 136 of 2021	TVET qualifications (Levels 3-6)
ZIMCHE	ZIMCHE Act; SI 135 of 2021	Higher education qualifications (Levels 7-10)

7.2 Agreement of Quality Assurance Bodies

The relevant national quality assurance bodies (ZIMSEC, HEXCO, ZIMCHE) have stated their agreement with the referencing outcome and referencing report through their participation in the National Referencing Committee and endorsement of this report.

7.3 International Expert Involvement

People from other countries who are experienced in the field of qualifications have been involved in certain aspects and steps of the referencing process. Their role has been advisory and supports transparency, improvement, and credibility. The National Referencing Committee has informed the ACQF Governance Structure on the involved international experts, including:

- ACQF technical team
- SADC Secretariat representatives
- Experts from referencing countries (South Africa, Mauritius, Namibia)

7.4 Certification and Publication

Competent national bodies have certified the referencing to the ACQF and will publish this comprehensive, evidence-based referencing report, which addresses all referencing criteria.

The referencing outcome will be published by the Republic of Zimbabwe and the ACQF network upon its final validation by the ACQF Governance Structure, on the dedicated ACQF website.

7.5 Reference to ACQF in Qualifications Documents

Following the completion of referencing, all newly issued documents related to qualifications that are part of the ZNQF (e.g., certificates, diplomas, supplements) and qualifications registers issued by the competent national authorities will contain a clear reference to the appropriate ACQF level, based on national legislation and procedures.

8. ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Main Challenges

Challenge	Description	Proposed Mitigation
Fragmented Registers	Three separate qualification registers (EMIS, HEMIS)	Develop centralised ZNQF Qualifications and Credentials Portal with ACQF support
Digital Transformation	Limited digitalisation of qualification management	Invest in digital infrastructure; blockchain-based verification
Capacity Constraints	Limited capacity for QA, RPL, and qualification development	Capacity building programmes; technical assistance from ACQF
Centralised Coordination	No single qualifications authority	Accelerate establishment of ZNQA
Public Awareness	Limited public awareness of ZNQF and referencing	Communication strategy; stakeholder engagement

8.2 Opportunities

Opportunity	Description	Potential Benefits
Continental Integration	ACQF referencing supports AfCFTA implementation	Enhanced mobility of skilled labour; economic growth
Digital Credentialing	Blockchain-based verification systems	Reduced fraud; enhanced trust; efficiency

International Recognition	ACQF referencing facilitates global recognition	Increased student and worker mobility
Policy Harmonisation	Alignment with regional frameworks	Coherent education and training systems
Investment Attraction	Credible qualifications system	Increased investment in education and skills

8.3 Conclusions

The referencing exercise confirms that the Zimbabwe National Qualifications Framework (ZNQF) is fully compatible with the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) across all four referencing criteria:

1. **Level Descriptors and Learning Outcomes:** The ZNQF employs a 10-level structure with learning outcomes-based descriptors across Knowledge, Skills, and Autonomy and Responsibility domains, demonstrating strong alignment with ACQF level descriptors.
2. **Learning Outcomes, RPL, and Credit Systems:** The ZNQF is firmly grounded in learning outcomes principles, with comprehensive RPL mechanisms (including industrial trade testing since 1986) and a robust Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (10 notional hours = 1 credit).
3. **Transparent Procedures and Qualification Register:** Transparent registration procedures are enshrined in Statutory Instruments, with Minimum Bodies of Knowledge ensuring 70-80% comparability. Plans are in place for a centralised qualifications portal.
4. **Quality Assurance System:** The ZNQF incorporates comprehensive quality assurance mechanisms that address the full qualifications quality chain, with clearly defined roles for ZIMSEC, HEXCO, and ZIMCHE, and alignment with SADCQF and ACQF principles.

8.4 Recommendations

To the ACQF Technical Working Group:

1. Formally acknowledge the compatibility of the ZNQF with the ACQF.
2. Provide technical support for the development of a centralised ZNQF Qualifications and Credentials Portal.
3. Facilitate capacity building for quality assurance, RPL, and qualification development.

4. Support the digital transformation of qualification management and verification systems.

To the Zimbabwe National Referencing Committee:

- 1. Continue stakeholder engagement to maintain alignment with ACQF developments.
- 2. Accelerate the establishment of the Zimbabwe National Qualifications Authority (ZNQA).
- 3. Implement the digital transformation of qualification management systems.
- 4. Strengthen quality assurance capacity across all three regulatory authorities.
- 5. Develop and implement a communication strategy to raise public awareness of the ZNQF and referencing outcomes.

9. SOURCES

9.1 National Sources

Source	Description
Manpower Planning and Development Act [Chapter 28:02] (amended 2023)	Legal framework for TVET and ZIMDEF
ZIMCHE ZNQF Regulations (Statutory Instrument 135 of 2021)	Higher education qualification framework
HEXCO ZNQF Regulations (Statutory Instrument 136 of 2021)	TVET qualification framework
ZIMSEC ZNQF Regulations (Statutory Instrument 137 of 2021)	Basic education qualification framework
ZIMCHE Credit Accumulation and Transfer System Guidelines (2018)	CATS policy
HEXCO Industrial Training RPL Guidelines	RPL policy for TVET
National Development Strategy 1 (2021-2025)	National development framework
National Development Strategy 2 (2026-2030)	Current national development framework

MHTEISTD Achievements Booklet 2021-2026	Ministry achievements
Zimbabwe National Qualifications Framework Policy Document	ZNQF policy

9.2 Regional and Continental Sources

Source	Description
SADC Qualifications Framework (SADCQF) Policy and Guidelines	Regional qualifications framework
African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) Policy Documents	Continental framework
ACQF Referencing Guidelines	Referencing methodology
ACQF Thematic Briefs (RPL, Micro-Credentials, QA)	Continental guidance
African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA)	QA standards

9.3 International Sources

Source	Description
European Qualifications Framework (EQF)	International reference

UNESCO Guidelines for Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning	RPL guidance
International Labour Organization (ILO) RPL Resources	Skills recognition

Recommended / Not Recommended

Signed..... Date

Prof Norman Takaidza

Chief Director Human Capital Skills Planning and Development

Approved/ Not Approved

Signed..... Date

Prof Fanuel Tagwira

Permanent Secretary Higher and Tertiary Education Innovation Science and Technology Development

ANNEX 1: ACQF LEVEL DESCRIPTORS

Table A1: ACQF Level Descriptors

Level	Knowledge	Skills	Autonomy and Responsibility
1	Basic factual knowledge of a specific area	Basic cognitive and practical skills required to carry out simple tasks	Work or study under direct supervision in a structured context
2	Basic factual and theoretical knowledge of a specific area	Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems	Work or study under supervision with some autonomy
3	Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts in a specific area	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve straightforward problems	Take responsibility for completion of tasks; adapt own behaviour to circumstances
4	Broad factual and theoretical knowledge in a specific area	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems	Take responsibility for own outputs; work under general supervision

5	Comprehensive, specialised factual and theoretical knowledge in a specific area	A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems	Exercise management and supervision in work or study contexts
6	Advanced knowledge of a specialised area involving critical understanding of theories and principles	Advanced skills demonstrating mastery and innovation required to solve complex and unpredictable problems	Manage complex technical or professional activities; take responsibility for decision-making
7	Highly specialised knowledge at the forefront of a discipline; critical awareness of knowledge issues	Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation to develop new knowledge	Manage and transform work or study contexts; take responsibility for contributing to knowledge
8	Mastery of a complex body of knowledge at the forefront of a discipline/area	Skills mastery required to demonstrate originality and new insights in research and/or innovation	Highly specialised contexts demonstrating mastery in autonomy and responsibility
9	Substantial and original knowledge contribution that extends the forefront of a discipline/area	Expert skills and techniques that demonstrate innovation, interpretation and creation of new ideas	Emergent new contexts demonstrating expertise in management of new ideas
10	Mastery of a complex body of knowledge at the forefront of a discipline/area	Skills mastery required to demonstrate originality and new insights in research and/or innovation	Highly specialised contexts demonstrating mastery in autonomy and

ANNEX 2: ZNQF LEVEL DESCRIPTORS

Table A2: ZNQF Level Descriptors

ZNQF Level	Qualification Type	Knowledge	Skills	Autonomy and Responsibility
10	PhD	Cutting edge research and creation of new knowledge in the development of the study; advance new techniques, ideas or approaches	Expert skills and techniques demonstrating innovation; formulate and test theories	Autonomous in research conducted; management of new ideas
9	Master's	Mastery of knowledge in the field of study; analysis of complex issues; in-depth expert knowledge	Specialised skills based on systematic scrutiny of information	Participate in resource management and supervision of others; function with wide-ranging independence
8	Honours Degree	Methodical comprehension of strategic facets of area of specialty	Implement precise analysis and enquiry procedures; work out setbacks using methods in area of specialty	Work within wide-ranging self-sufficiency

7	General Degree	Comprehensive knowledge in the area of specialty	Apply recognised tenets to work out challenges in diverse settings	Manager/Supervisor
6	Higher National Diploma	Specialised knowledge in the area of specialty	Relate various and specific methods entailing elementary investigation	Work within wide-ranging self-sufficiency
5	National Diploma	Comprehensive knowledge in the area of specialty	Relate wide-ranging procedures to work out real problems in non-routine situations	Work under broad supervision
4	National Certificate	Operational knowledge in the area of specialty	Relate diverse techniques to address recognisable problems in moderately usual settings	Work under general supervision
3	Advanced Level Certificate	In-depth knowledge in specific subject areas	Relate series of techniques to resolve challenges in broad circumstances	Function under general supervision
2	Ordinary Level Certificate	Broad-based knowledge	Relate basic procedures and techniques	Work in controlled atmosphere under direct supervision

1	Primary Level Certificate	Rudimentary knowledge	Relate elementary techniques to mastery and mathematical ability
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ANNEX 3: LEVEL REFERENCING MAP

Table A3: ZNQF – ACQF Level Referencing Map

ACQF Level	ZNQF Level	ZNQF Qualification	ACQF Level Descriptor Summary
10	10	PhD	Substantial and original knowledge contribution; expert skills; expertise in management of new ideas
9	9	Master's	Mastery of complex knowledge at forefront; originality in research; highly specialised contexts
8	8	Honours Degree	Advanced knowledge; specialised skills; wide-ranging self-sufficiency
7	7	General Degree	Comprehensive knowledge; apply principles to diverse settings; manage/supervise
6	6	Higher National Diploma	Specialised knowledge; various methods; wide-ranging self-sufficiency
5	5	National Diploma	Comprehensive knowledge; wide-ranging procedures; broad supervision

4	4	National Certificate	Operational knowledge; diverse techniques; general supervision
3	3	Advanced Level	In-depth knowledge; series of techniques; general supervision
2	2	Ordinary Level	Broad-based knowledge; basic procedures; direct supervision
1	1	Primary Certificate	Rudimentary knowledge; elementary techniques; intermittent guidance

Graphical Representation:

