

DEVELOPING THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (ACQF)



TRAINING MODULE ONE

01

LEARNING OUTCOMES – IN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS AND SYSTEMS

DEVELOPING THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (ACQF)

TRAINING MODULE ONE:

LEARNING OUTCOMES IN THE CONTEXT OF ACQF

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ACRONYMS

ACQF	African Continental Qualifications Framework
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AQRF	ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AU	African Union
AUMS	AU Member States
CAT	Credit Accumulation and Transfer
CESA	Continental Education Strategy for Africa
EAQFHE	East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (EAQFHE)
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ETF	European Training Foundation
EXCO	Executive Committee
HE	Higher education
MS	Member States
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NQS	National Qualifications System
QA	Quality assurance
QF	Qualifications Framework
REC	Regional Economic Community
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RQF	Regional Qualifications Framework
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADCQF	Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework
TCCA	Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training

1 GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE TRAINING MODULE

The African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) is a policy initiative of the African Union, underpinned by continental cooperation and integration policies ranging from education to free movement of persons and free trade. Development of the ACQF is underway (2019–2022), and includes analysis and research, elaboration of the ACQF policy and guidelines, networking and stakeholders' outreach, and the capacity development programme. The [ACQF website](#) contains information on all components, activities, and outputs of the ACQF development project.

1.1 Overview

Objective and scope

The package of 10 ACQF training modules supports the dissemination and application of the 10 ACQF guidelines, and addresses the same themes relevant to qualifications and qualifications frameworks. The list of training modules is as follows:

- Training Module 1: Learning Outcomes
- Training Module 2: Level descriptors
- Training Module 3: Referencing national qualifications frameworks or systems to ACQF
- Training Module 4: Validation of learning
- Training Module 5: Quality assurance in the context of ACQF
- Training Module 6: Registers / databases of qualifications
- Training Module 7: Monitoring and evaluation in the context of qualifications frameworks or systems
- Training Module 8: Communication and outreach
- Training Module 9: Innovation and technology in the context of qualifications frameworks or systems
- Training Module 10: Qualification and qualifications frameworks – the systemic view.

This training module expands the content of the ACQF Guideline 3: Referencing in the context of the ACQF.

Utilisation of the Training Module

The training modules are designed for:

- Self-paced learning (individual)
- Teacher / trainer / facilitator directed learning, which may include group learning
- A combination of the above.

The training modules are freely accessible in several formats for flexible adaptation to different contexts and to learners' needs and possibilities such as PDF files which can be downloaded from the ACQF website and disseminated, or as digital content accessible via the ACQF digital learning management system, accessible online or offline, including via an app for mobile phones.

Interested users such as learners, teachers / trainers or organisations may use the full set of modules, or focus on just a few.

The ACQF training modules can be used in a variety of situations, e.g.:

- Ministries and departments dealing with qualifications framework development and coordination, especially in early stages of the development process, or when operationalisation starts and more staff, stakeholders, and technical resource persons are involved

- For the staff, members, and technical resource employees of quality councils or quality assurance agencies
- Technical projects designing or reviewing national qualifications frameworks with national taskforces and working groups
- Education and training providers such as for optional or regular training modules on the themes and issues related to qualifications frameworks and systems: teacher training institutes, higher education institutions (departments of education), training centres for staff of public sector institutions, training centres of employers' associations and professional bodies, and sector skills councils involved in development of qualifications
- International organisations' training centres and capacity development activities.

Concept and structure

The training modules:

- Are based on the content elaborated in the technical guideline, and expand on the literature, recent research, and experiences
- Raise questions and issues in debate that could not be expressed in the technical guideline
- Provide examples and cases illustrating the main concepts, issues, and application of the approaches and methods
- Use examples and cases taken from relevant practices and developments worldwide, with a focus on frameworks and systems with substantial and relevant experience for the different themes.

The training modules include the following:

- Reflective questions that could be addressed as an individual or as a group (e.g. workshop group, work group)
- Learning activities that could be addressed as an individual or as a group (e.g. class/lecture group, work group)
- Access to case studies or examples, readings, disparate views (if relevant)
- Assessment tasks.

2 OVERVIEW OF TRAINING MODULE 1: LEARNING OUTCOMES

2.1 Abstract

The ACQF level descriptors are described as a hierarchy of learning complexity, based on learning outcomes. The learning outcome composition allows countries to link or reference their qualification levels to the ACQF levels, and referencing will be possible because countries will use learning outcomes approaches to describe their level descriptors and their qualifications, and classify these qualifications in the national qualifications framework or system.

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.

Most importantly, learning outcomes are at the core of the criteria for referencing national qualifications frameworks or systems to ACQF. The second referencing criterion, as proposed in the ACQF Guideline 3 stipulates: *“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”*.

The referencing process itself will promote the strengthening of learning outcomes approaches across the continent.

2.2 Expected learning outcomes

At the end of this training modules, the learner will be able to:

1. Identify the various ways that learning outcomes are used in a country
2. Differentiate between intended learning outcomes and achieved learning outcomes
3. Identify the support needed to ease the use of learning outcomes
4. Show how learning outcomes principles are applied in level descriptors and registered qualifications
5. Propose a draft action plan for responding to the ACQF Referencing Criterion 2 that deals with learning outcomes.

2.3 Key definitions

For the purposes of this training manual, the following concepts are important:

› **Learning outcomes:**

- o Results of what a learner knows, understands and is capable of upon completion of a learning process. *Source: Addis Convention*
- o Statements of what a learner knows, understands and is capable of on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills, and competence.

› **Level descriptor:**

- o A statement describing a learning achievement at a particular level of a qualifications framework that provides a broad indication of the types of learning outcomes and assessment criteria that are appropriate to a qualification at that level.

› **National Qualifications Framework:**

- o 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 to integrate and coordinate national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression, and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society.
- o An instrument for the development, classification, and recognition of skills, knowledge, and competencies along a continuum of agreed levels. It is a way of structuring existing and new qualifications, which are defined by learning outcomes which are clear statements of what the learner must know or be able to do, whether learned in a classroom, on the job, or in general. The qualifications framework indicates the comparability of different qualifications and line of progression (how one can progress) from one level to another, within and across occupations or industrial sectors (and even across vocational and academic fields if the NQF is designed to include both vocational and academic qualifications in a single framework).

› **Qualification:**

- o 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
- o The formal result of an evaluation and validation process obtained when the learning results are achieved according to previously defined requirements

- o A registered national qualification consisting of a planned combination of learning outcomes which has a defined purpose or purposes, intended to provide qualifying learners with applied competence and a basis for further learning. This has been assessed in terms of exit level outcomes, registered on the NQF, and certified and awarded by a recognised body.
- o Planned combination of learning outcomes with a defined purpose or purposes, including defined, applied, and demonstrated competence, and a basis for further learning.
- » **Regional Qualifications Framework:**
 - o A broad structure of levels of learning outcomes that is agreed by countries in a defined and agreed geographical location. 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.

3 UNDERSTANDING LEARNING OUTCOMES CONTEXTS

The ACQF is a meta-framework based on learning outcomes and, by its very nature, encourages a learning outcomes orientation in its community of countries. Learning outcomes indicate what a learner should know, understand, and implement after a process of learning. This focus on learning outcomes is launched at a time where African policy-makers and stakeholders broadly agree on the usefulness of learning outcomes approaches in recognition of learning on the continent. Learning outcomes approaches contribute to learner-centred education and training, and to the lifelong learning objective of the ACQF.

Qualifications frameworks of any type need the support of learning outcomes approaches. The 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 identify, document, and recognise or certify learning outcomes irrespective of the context of the learning and acquisition of the learning outcome (formal, non-formal, informal; hybrid, online, and distance learning).

A key message of this guideline is that describing and formulating learning outcomes must be followed by implementation i.e. there must be an alignment between statements of learning outcomes, the teaching and learning activity, assessment, and certification. This alignment 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.

This training manual elaborates on a learning outcomes approach and its relevance in the ACQF context. A significant amount of learning outcomes guidance materials has already been written, notably by Cedefop (2013–2021), and this training manual draws on those materials.

3.1 Purpose and benefit of learning outcomes

Learning outcomes are explicit statements about the results of learning: what a learner is expected to know, understand, and accomplish after a learning process. 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.

They 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.

Learning outcomes are defined and described for application in various contexts. These contexts are important as they will affect the way the learning outcomes are formulated:

- ▶ In the education and training context they are applied at different levels and for various purposes:
 - o Level descriptors of qualifications frameworks
 - o Qualification descriptors and qualification standards
 - o Diplomas (and diploma supplements), certificates (and certificate supplements)
 - o Classification and registration of qualifications in the national qualifications framework
 - o Quality assurance of education and training programmes and related qualifications
 - o Improvement of coherence between curricula, modules, subjects, assessment, certification
 - o Credit accumulation and transfer arrangements
 - o Identification, documentation, assessment, and certification in the context of recognition of prior learning (RPL)
 - o Evaluation and recognition of foreign qualifications
 - o Career guidance (information about learning opportunities and choices, occupations and jobs, and skills adjacency for career progression).
- ▶ In the work context, outcomes (skills, competencies) are expressed in occupational/ professional standards, recruitment and job advertisements, job descriptions, and performance appraisals
- ▶ In a personal context, they are expressed in learning outcomes in qualifications levels, descriptions of experience and competence, curricula vitae, and individuals' portfolios for RPL.

Along with other useful processes and tools, a learning outcomes approach forms the basis of trust and transparency by encouraging a learner-centred approach to education and training, clarifying the orientation of qualifications and allowing for greater comparability of learning outcomes of qualifications.

A move towards a learning outcomes approach presents a shift from the question “what did the graduate do to get this qualification?” to “What can the graduate do now that they have this qualification?” The focus is on achievement rather than merely focussing on the content of what has been taught. A learning outcomes approach is one which signals a shift:

- ▶ From a teacher-centred approach to a learner centred approach, clarifies the intention of teaching and learning and what is expected from the learner
- ▶ From input and duration of learning to output and actual knowledge, skills and competency acquired through the learning process.

Learning outcomes promote overall transparency and assist in clarifying the intentions of learning. However, learning outcomes do not entirely replace considerations on inputs to the learning process but rather add value, supplements, enhances, and complements the existing input-oriented approaches.

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

- ▶ A move towards a learning outcomes approach presents a shift from the question “What did the graduate do to get this qualification?” to “What can the graduate do now that s/he has this qualification?”
 1. What do we want to see when we are looking for what a graduate can do?
 2. What ways can we make this visible?

3.2 Expected outcomes and achieved outcomes

Cedefop (2013–2021) distinguishes between expected outcomes and achieved outcomes:

- ▶ Expected learning outcomes reflect the desired targets shown in definitions and descriptions used in qualifications frameworks and qualifications profiles. They are desired targets, not outcomes.
- ▶ Achieved outcomes can only be obtained following learning through assessment and demonstration.

Learning outcomes can be expressed as a loop (Cedefop, 2017) describing the interaction between the expected learning outcomes and the learning outcomes that have been achieved. The reflection of the effectiveness of the achieved outcome feeds into a continuous improvement process (see Figure 1) and requires consistent dialogue to improve expected outcomes.

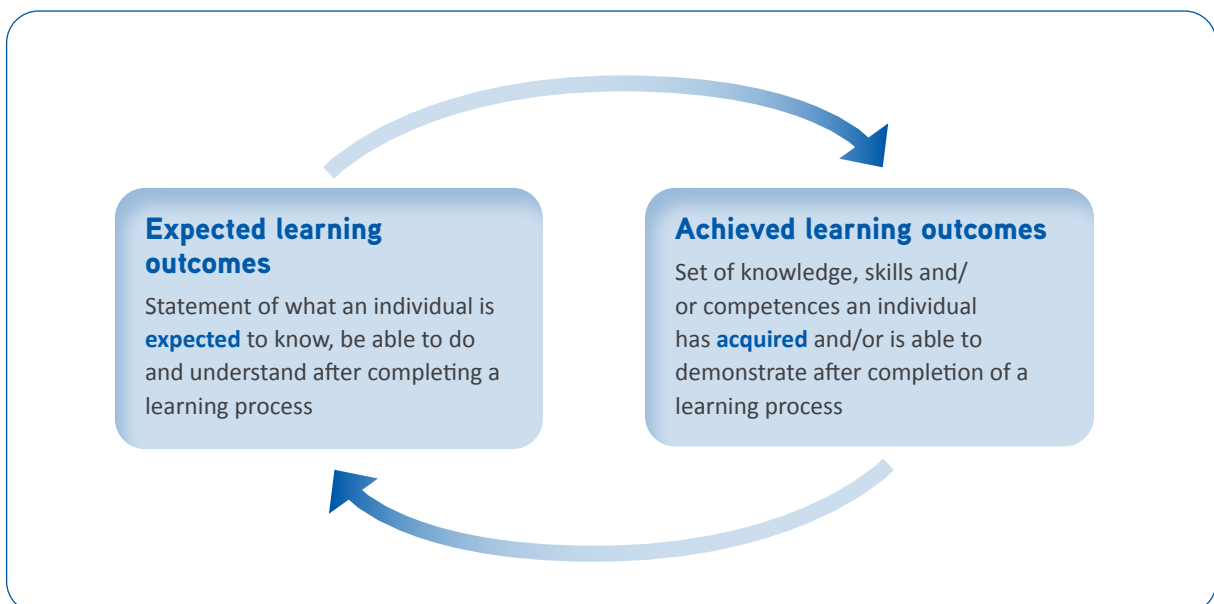


Figure 1: Relationship (loop) between expected and achieved learning outcomes

Adapted from Cedefop, 2017, p.29

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

1. How do learning outcomes differentiate between the intended learning outcomes and achieved learning outcomes?

3.3 Learning outcomes application and roles

Learning outcomes have applications in various dimensions of qualifications and recognition: qualifications frameworks, different sectors (higher education, general education, and TVET), qualifications and part qualifications, quality assurance systems, credit and credit systems, prior learning (including non-formal and informal experiential learning), and recognition of foreign qualifications. Because learning outcomes are used in so many different contexts, there is no single correct way of approaching them.

3.3.1 *Learning outcomes-based level descriptors (international and national) in qualifications frameworks*

Learning outcomes in qualifications frameworks (regional or national) indicate the generic learning outcomes at the level of a qualifications framework. At this most generic level, a hierarchy of learning outcomes is used to describe the cumulative nature of level descriptors of RQF and NQF. They provide an indication of the horizontal (areas/domains of learning) and vertical dimensions (increase in complexity) of the qualifications framework levels.

They provide a common language and general reference point to enable differentiation of learning achievement across countries and across levels in a country. Regional and national level descriptors are often referred to as levels of learning progression and give an indication of the generic complexity associated with that level of the framework.

Learning outcomes-based level descriptors then serve as external, generic reference points to guide the formulation of more specific learning outcomes, to ensure coherence and comparability with the overarching learning outcomes. They are formulated as regional or national generic learning outcomes statements that describe the characteristics that are important to a region or nation.

At regional level, they function as international, meta-framework descriptors that act as an external reference for referencing qualifications frameworks and qualifications levels.

At a national level, learning outcomes-based level descriptors:

- ▶ Are often linked to features of existing qualifications and are designed to provide a shared understanding of the complexity of each NQF level.
- ▶ Provide the generic complexities that should be developed by all qualifications at all levels. The positioning of two or more qualification types on the same NQF level indicates that the qualifications are broadly comparable in terms of generic complexity at that level of the NQF, regardless of where or how the qualification was obtained. This means that all sub-sectors of a country may use the level descriptors as a scaffold for the qualifications in their context, and one qualification type may straddle more than one level.

Generic learning outcome statements are used to describe learning outcomes at an overarching level such as those used to describe level descriptors of an RQF or NQF. In cases where there are no generic level descriptors or no qualifications levels, the specific learning outcomes statements of qualification types can provide some generic aspects.

The ability of the learning outcomes in the level descriptors to increase transparency and support recognition depends on how they align with learning outcomes in qualification standards, curricula, and assessment arrangements.



EXAMPLES FROM AFRICAN EXPERIENCES

Example of learning outcomes - Level descriptors in National Qualifications Frameworks: Cape Verde NQF, level 5. Source: [ACQF Inventory](#)

- **Knowledge:** Comprehensive, specialised, factual, and theoretical knowledge within a field of study or work, and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge, which includes abstract technical understanding and capacity to search additional information and knowledge to improve the execution of functions.
- **Skills:** A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems in routine situations and new contexts and activities. Capacity to select and apply equipment and methods, explain the alternatives, and ensure the technical support to solve more specific problems in known routines.
- **Responsibility and autonomy:** Manage and supervise in contexts of study and work susceptible to unpredictable change. Revise and develop performance of self and others, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. Work independently when decisions or initiatives at an intermediate level are required. Organise the work for self and the team, according to the objectives and goals of the organisation and support others to effectively manage time.

Example of learning outcomes - Level descriptors in Regional Qualifications Frameworks: Southern African Development Community Qualifications Frameworks (SADCQF). Level 6. Source: [ACQF Inventory](#).

- **Knowledge:** Demonstrate specialist knowledge in more than one area and ability to collate, analyse, and synthesise a wide range of technical information.
- **Skills:** Demonstrate ability to apply specialist knowledge and skills in highly variable contexts and formulate responses to concrete and abstract problems
- **Autonomy and responsibility:** Manage processes and works with complete accountability for personal and group outcomes.

3.3.2 Learning outcomes approach to qualification profiles and/or standards

Learning outcomes encourage a more systematic design of qualifications where they:

- Provide a common language for describing qualifications and help to make these qualifications clearer to potential learners, other institutions, employers, and credential evaluators
- Have a technical purpose and provide an understanding of what is to be learned and what is the best way to achieve it

- Set the expectations and guide the teaching, learning process, and assessment. This approach may:
 - Enable learners to be clearer about the learning expectations and encourage them to take initiative and responsibility for managing their own learning
 - Allow stakeholders who are not experts in education, training, and pedagogy to have a better understanding of what to expect from a qualification holder.
- Promote mobility and recognition:
 - Achievement (through formal, non-formal, and informal pathways) of assessed learning outcomes signals that an individual has achieved certain learning outcomes, and usually culminate in a qualification award.

Learning outcomes position credits that can only be obtained after successful completion of learning and appropriate assessment. In this way, they promote lifelong learning by using credit systems to create flexible ways for individuals to gain access to qualifications. This flexibility enhances the recognition that different pathways can lead to comparable outcomes that can be more easily recognised as entry into another qualification or as parts that can be accumulated and transferred into another qualification.

Learning outcomes improve the transparency of qualifications and play a role in ensuring a mutual understanding of qualifications.

National qualification descriptors

Learning outcomes play a role in the generic description of outcomes of nationally recognised types of qualifications, for example a Bachelor's degree or diploma.

These learning outcomes statements are usually produced at a national level and will include the abilities (including transversal skills) of a typical qualification holder. National qualification descriptors are usually linked to national level descriptors and can indicate, in its description, several level descriptors to show the progression in complexity, if the qualification straddles more than one NQF level.

National qualification descriptors generally describe the learning achieved on completion of the qualification and act as an external reference for developing individual qualifications.

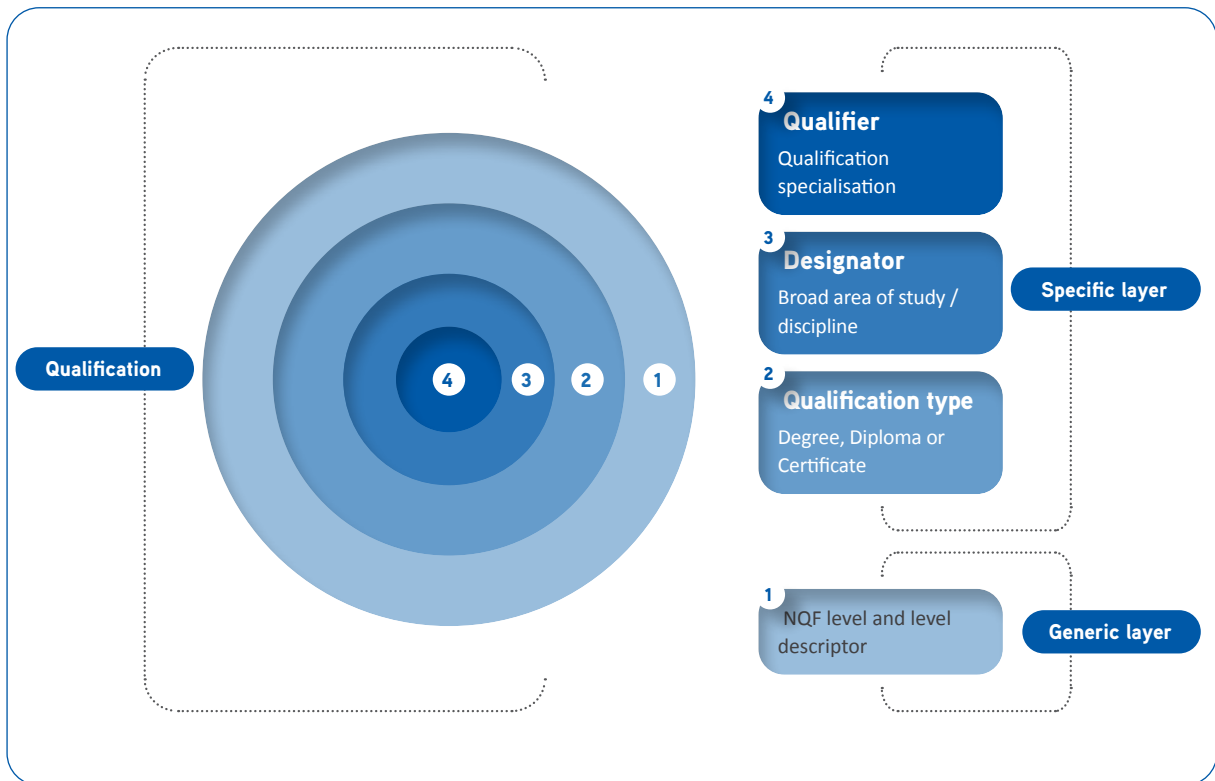


Figure 2: Nested learning outcomes approach to designing qualifications.

Source: SADC (2019) p.37

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Click on the [link](#) to see a 2014 publication on national qualifications descriptors of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework in South Africa. Study Clauses 17- 24 on pages 14 and 15 in the link which describes the nested learning outcomes approach (Figure 2 above).

Link 1: https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201410/38116gon819.pdf

1. Reflect on your own NQF/ NQS and national descriptors. How similar or different is your approach?

National subject benchmark statements

Learning outcome statements make explicit the nature of study and general subject-specific academic features and standards expected of graduates in specific subject areas, and what they are expected to know at the end of their studies. They are written by subject specialists and function as subject-specific external reference points for designing, delivering, and reviewing academic programmes. They provide guidance but are not intended to prescribe approaches or curriculum. This learning outcomes application has been developed and used extensively by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (QAA, 2020).



Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Click on the [link](#) to see an example of the subject benchmark statements for graduates of social work developed by QAA.

Link: https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/subject-benchmark-statements/subject-benchmark-statement-social-work.pdf?%20sfvrsn=5c35c881_6#:~:text=This%20is%20the%20Subject%20Benchmark,the%20nature%20of%20the%20subject.

1. Do you think subject benchmark statements such as these are useful or not?
2. Reflecting on your own NQF, and according to your knowledge, are there (benchmark) statements (they may be called something else in your country) available for any of the study areas in your country? If yes, what are they called? Can you provide links to these documents?

Tuning and Degree profiles

The Tuning Project explored subject-specific and general competences, and distinguished between learning outcomes and competences:

- ▶ Expected learning outcomes are formulated by facilitators of learning, based on insights gained from inputs by other stakeholders (which may include inputs from learners). Learning outcomes are specific to what a learner must be able to demonstrate after a process of learning. They can refer to learning outcomes in subjects, modules, part or full qualifications, and at all framework levels, and specify the award of credit.
- ▶ Competencies are developed by the learner, through the process of learning and are assessed at various stages. Competences relate to both subject-specific competences and generic/transversal competences. Transversal competences are becoming increasingly important to equip learners to prepare for their future roles in society. Examples of generic/transversal competences are ability to work in a team, ability to communicate in a second language, ability to plan and manage time, etc. Cedefop (2017:31) defines competence as achieved learning outcomes that have been validated through the ability of the learner to apply knowledge and skills.

The Tuning Africa project (Africa-EU, 2016) developed degree programme profiles with identified learning outcomes and competence blocks that need to be achieved to obtain the degree.

- A popular publication is the Guide for Formulating Degree Programme Profiles, including Programme Competences and Programme Learning Outcomes. http://tuningacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/A-Guide-to-Formulating-DPP_EN.pdf
- The Tuning Academy published the Reference points for the design and delivery of degree programmes in a wide range of disciplines, developed in Tuning projects across different continents: <http://tuningacademy.org/reference-points>

The Tuning Project covered more than 100 diverse universities from the five sub-regions of Africa, in the following subject areas: agricultural sciences, applied geology, civil engineering, economics, mechanical engineering, medicine, and teacher education. The project also assisted in the development of curricula that were suitable and matched with labour market / societal requirements in each of the subject areas.

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Click on the [link](#) to see an example of an earlier (2013) Tuning Report for psychology. The example shows learning outcomes of a two-year degree in psychology alongside learning outcomes of a BA degree in psychology to demonstrate the difference in complexity

Link: https://www.mhec.org/sites/default/files/resources/2013mhec_tuning_comp_sloschart.pdf

1. Do you think this kind of differentiation is useful or not?
2. Has your country developed any similar documents on degree profiles? If yes, can you provide links to these documents?

Individual qualifications descriptors

Individual qualifications descriptors reflect the learning outcomes that describe and express individual subject-specific qualifications. They are specific to a qualification and the institution offering it. They can include subject-specific and general transversal skills. They are be guided by the appropriate national qualifications descriptors.

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Access a learning institution's website (higher education, TVET, other), preferably in your country.

1. Access one or more qualifications offered by that institution, and then find an example of learning outcomes in individual qualifications descriptors.
2. Is this a good example or not? What is the reason for your response?

Associated assessment criteria / standards and modules

Learning outcomes can be used to express assessment criteria that relate to the performance of individuals. They are very specific and indicate what must be done to demonstrate that learning has been successfully achieved. The assessment standards and criteria are more detailed and describe precisely what is required of the learner. They support summative and formative assessments that take place throughout learning. For assessment, learning outcomes need to be written as threshold (minimum requirements) statements but do not prevent learners from going beyond these thresholds. Some of the criticisms against learning outcomes are linked to this point (Cedefop, 2017). Learning outcomes statements in assessment should not restrict learning in any way, and should not be too rigid or too narrow.

Learning outcomes of modules are specific to what a learner must know, understand, and do. These are linked directly to design, delivery, and assessment.

Occupational standards

Occupational standards differ from qualifications standards. Although they are set outside the education and training system, they have relevance for the definition and description of learning outcomes. Since these standards indicate what learners must be able to do in employment, they serve as the ideal link (feedback loop) between education and training and the labour market.



Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Think about the learning outcomes in your country (in general terms or in a specific sub-sector of education and training) and what they are linked to, and indicate yes, no or not sure

Are learning outcomes linked to:	Yes	Not sure	No
– Design and description of qualifications in the country			
– Credits for qualifications			
– Professional / occupational standards			
– The curriculum and subjects			
– Assessment			
– Comparison of qualifications achieved in other countries			
– Recognition of non-formal and informal learning / RPL			
– Any other additions (add description)			



EXAMPLES FROM AFRICAN EXPERIENCES

Example of a registered qualification: Mozambique – Auto mechanics, Level 5. Learning outcomes combine knowledge, transversal and technical skills. Reference: Q-EPI-04-5-13-19 at [Car mechanics CV5](#).

Use English for social, personal and professional purposes
Communicate work-related information
Read and respond to written materials
Produce written materials
Solve logarithmic growth issues
Solve optimization issues using boundaries and derivatives
Participate in a debate as a speaker and as a key player
Interpret and produce informative and explanatory texts
Know pneumatic and hydraulic circuits applied to the automotive
Know sensors and floats
Make the calculations and know the characteristic curves of engines
Know the Automotive Multiplexing
Diagnose and repair information and communication systems
Diagnose and repair comfort and safety system
Diagnose and repair vehicle braking systems with anti-lock braking systems (ABS)
Diagnose and repair systems and steering geometry
Diagnose and repair light and heavy vehicle assisted suspension systems
Diagnose and repair automatic transmission systems
Diagnose and repair overfeeding system
Diagnose and repair breakdowns in gasoline and diesel engines
Diagnose and repair malfunctions of electronic ignition and injection systems of gasoline engines
Diagnose and repair diesel electronic injection system malfunctions
Know the constitution and operation of the converter equipment for natura gas
Analyze exhaust gases and opacity
Know the workshop management
Know how to budget, give guarantees and customer loyalty
Stimulating the use of entrepreneurship, research and innovation techniques

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Study the above example of a registered Level 5 qualification in auto mechanics in Mozambique (NQF Professional).

Choose one of the listed learning outcomes

1. *How would you assess the learning outcome? One method*
2. *How would you teach towards the learning outcome? One method*

EXAMPLE OF A REGISTERED QUALIFICATION:

Cape Verde – Accounting management, Level 5. Learning outcomes defined from the broad definition of the qualification to the assessment criteria.

- **Qualification level 5: AGE001_5: Accounting management.**
- **Qualification registered in the National Qualifications Catalogue: [AGE001_5](#)**
- **Broad short definition of the qualification:** Carry out accounting, tax, financial, and treasury control management in organisations and prepare administrative processes for presentation to public institutions, handling specific information and information management applications.

Units of competency:

- Carry out accounting and tax management
- Carry out financial management
- Carry out treasury management and control
- Organise administrative processes for presentation to public entities
- Handle office computer applications.
- Each “unit of competency” is defined through a range of four to seven more granular “elements of competency”, which in turn are specified in greater detail by “assessment criteria”. This approach to describing the learning outcomes of the qualification cascades from the broad definition of the qualification to the granular outcomes applied as criteria in the context of assessment.
- A similar approach is applied in the context of the competency-based approach (Approche par Competences) implemented with some variation in TVET systems of several countries in Africa, e.g.: Cape Verde, Cameroon, Kenya, Morocco, and Mozambique.

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Study the above example of a registered Level 5 qualification in Accounting Management in Cape Verde

Choose one of the listed learning outcomes

1. How would you assess the learning outcome? One method
2. How would you teach towards the learning outcome? One method

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Click on this [link](#) to access the thematic brief on different descriptions of level descriptors on the continent.

Link: https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/thematic-briefs/acqf-thematic-brief-3-1-level-descriptors/@@display-file/file/ACQF_Thematic%20Brief_3.1_level%20descriptors_WEB.pdf

1. Access the description of your country's level descriptors

Reflecting on what you know about your country's level descriptors and NQF, see whether you can answer the following questions:

2. What is the link between how qualifications are classified in your country's NQF and the learning outcomes of the qualification? If there is no NQF, what is the process for linking qualifications to the NQS?

3.3.3 Using a learning outcomes approach to recognise prior learning

National qualifications frameworks reflect and support the recognition of learning outcomes acquired in all settings: formal, non-formal, and informal.

Learning outcomes-based qualifications contribute to social inclusion by facilitating access of people with limited formal qualifications, and recognising the value of their learning outcomes gained in different settings (work experiences, volunteering, and other social activities).

A learning outcomes orientation contributes to enhance recognition of prior learning (RPL), and validation of learning outcomes from non-formal and informal contexts to achieve a part or full qualification or further study. Learning outcomes allows for flexibility because they provide a platform that shows how different learning pathways can lead to comparable outcomes, which can then be recognised.

Learning outcomes are then an ideal platform to promote RPL. When individuals do not have the actual qualification but they have the prior knowledge, skills, and experience, this prior learning can be assessed against the learning outcomes of a relevant qualification. Once the individual can demonstrate that the relevant learning outcomes are met, prior learning can be validated and recognised.



EXAMPLE FROM AFRICAN EXPERIENCES

Cape Verde: Interconnection of Learning outcomes, recognition of prior learning and national qualifications framework. Source: ACQF Mapping Study Cape Verde, 2020 at: [ACQF Mapping Study](#).

The national system of recognition, validation, and certification of competencies (RVCC – RPL) acquired in different contexts of life and work is one of the statutory components of the national qualifications system and is organically linked with:

The application of the learning outcomes approach in the design and description of qualifications is one of the key objectives of the NQF, as defined in Article 4 of the NQF legal Act ([Joint Portaria Nr 10/2020](#)). Further, Article 4 specifies that the application of the learning outcomes approach is necessary to promote validation of non-formal and informal learning, thereby offering citizens in situations of vulnerability the possibility to access lifelong learning and to enter the labour market.

Learning outcomes appear to play a manifold role, namely, in conceptual and technical design of units of competence of professional profiles and in training modules, which together structure qualifications, and in making the access to qualifications socially-minded and inclusive for citizens with a limited schooling history but tangible life and work experience.

The Decree-Law Nr 54/2014 of 22 September, on RVCC (RPL), pronounced the policy and conceptual underpinnings of this promotion of validation of competences acquired in all contexts of learning. Social and labour market inclusion, economic productivity, enhancement of all types of learning and reinforcement of flexible lifelong learning paths of citizens are the benefits expected from effective implementation of this policy.

“People acquire, with their life experience, namely in professional activities, knowledge and competences relevant for the exercise of many activities. Those competences can and shall be formally certified, and, if necessary, complemented with training adjusted to individual needs, thereby promoting access to higher levels of qualification.”

3.3.4 Using a learning outcomes approach to transform recognition of foreign qualifications

A foreign qualification must meet the same requirements as a local qualification to be considered for admission to further study and/or for employment, and learning outcomes are increasingly being used to recognise foreign qualifications and periods of study. Learning outcomes provide transparency and availability of information, which in turn eases comparison and facilitates recognition.

Since learning outcomes are being used to develop and describe qualifications, they are becoming the key element in recognition of foreign qualifications (UNESCO (2020; 2014); ENIC-NARIC, 2014; Adam, 2015). Learning outcomes relate to and reflect all the other elements of qualifications as they are directly linked to the qualifications level and profile, and are subjected to the quality assurance of the country, institution, and qualification.

If learning outcomes are considered in the evaluation of a foreign qualification, recognition is more focused on the outcomes and individual competence, instead of only relying on the inputs of the qualification.

Using learning outcomes in recognition is dependent on the availability and quality of the description of learning outcomes. The difficulty is that not all countries have fully embedded learning outcomes into their approaches, and there are countries that have outcomes-based frameworks but they are not being applied consistently.

It is essential, for improved recognition, that learning outcomes approaches be strengthened i.e. linked to level descriptors and quality-assurance. Further, recognition processes will be improved if qualifications are accompanied by detailed documentation that clearly describes the qualification in terms of learning outcomes, content, and structure of the system within which it was issued.

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Click on the [link](#) to access the European Area Recognition (EAR) Manual. Chapter 9 focuses on using learning outcomes to recognise foreign qualifications

Link: <http://ear.enic-naric.net/emanual/Chapter9/default.aspx>

1. Study Chapter 9: learning outcomes
2. From your own understanding, how easy/ complicated is it to compare qualifications based on learning outcomes?
3. What needs to be put in place to ease the comparison using learning outcomes?

3.4 Quality assurance of learning outcomes

Learning outcomes inform practice and practice informs learning outcomes. Feedback between various players on the effectiveness of learning outcomes can provide important input to identify new skills for new qualifications or to review existing qualifications based on insights gained. For example: a feedback loop (based on learning outcomes) helps to provide information on:

- ▶ What the industry/ labour market/ employers require, what the qualification offers, and what is assessed to achieve the qualification
- ▶ How industry/ labour market/ employers perceive the learning outcomes achieved by qualification holders.

Learning outcomes-based feedback loops help to improve relevance and profiles of qualifications, and provide important information for nations, qualifications developers, and providers. Feedback loops (see Figure 2) provide important platforms for continuous dialogue and for improving expected learning outcomes based on the achieved learning outcomes:

- ▶ At Stage 1 the expected learning outcomes are jointly written by the relevant stakeholders. These learning outcomes are used to inform the teaching, learning, and assessment that takes place in Stage 2
- ▶ At Stage 2 the learning outcomes intentions are interpreted by teachers, trainers, and facilitators who will facilitate the teaching, learning, and assessment
- ▶ At Stage 3, after assessment, the achieved learning outcomes will be made visible
- ▶ At Stage 4 the employers and qualification holders will relate their experience of the achieved learning outcomes. The reflections will be used to inform the learning outcomes and will assist with review and renewal.

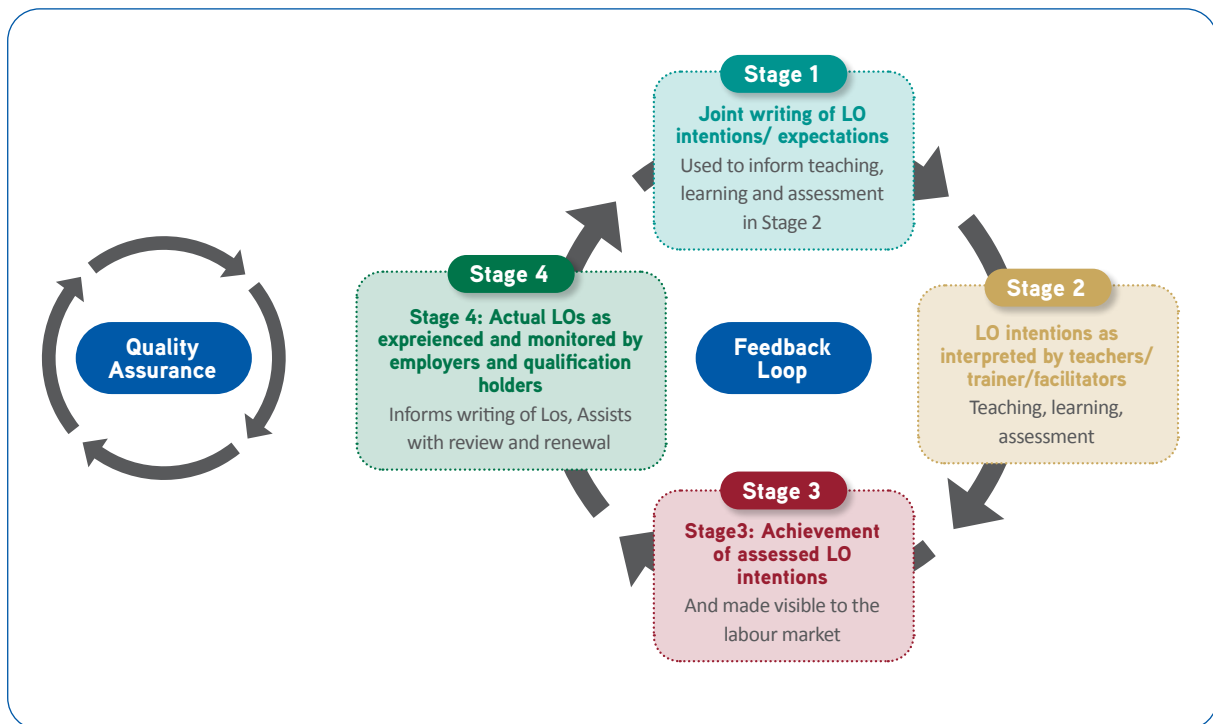


Figure 3: Learning outcomes feedback loop

Adapted from Cedefop, 2021, p.25

As qualifications systems in Africa are evolving towards a learning outcomes approach, it is essential that quality assurance systems also move towards ensuring expected learning outcomes and that they:

- Are considered when learning contexts and when assessment procedures are designed
- Are met when a qualification is awarded.

The shift to outcomes means a move away from considering only the traditional quality of inputs such as teacher qualifications and teaching methods to considering the quality of:

- Planning, implementing, reviewing, and improving learning outcomes
- Considering the context, inputs, process, and output dimensions while giving special emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes
- Assessment and certification must be clearly included in quality assurance of qualifications.

The use of learning outcomes approaches requires significant capacity for implementation. Learning outcomes approaches must be supported by good implementation tools:

- Good technical and methodological tools, handbooks, web resources, training
- Research to identify gaps, challenges, new developments, and approaches
- Involvement of labour market players/ sectoral councils.

Quality assurance and accreditation agencies often require that learning institutions publish information on their qualifications offerings on their respective websites. This transparency and publication of the expected learning outcomes supports improvement in learning outcomes approaches. The interest of the public (including learners, employers, and other interested parties) encourages institutions to ensure that the learning outcomes are visible and understandable.

Learning outcomes as a common method in the ACQF environment will assist the further development of and increased confidence in quality assurance standards within the AU.

For more information, consult the ACQF Guideline 5 on Quality Assurance in the context of ACQF.



EXAMPLES FROM AFRICAN EXPERIENCES

The African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA)¹ define standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance of higher education institutions and for internal quality assurance for quality assurance agencies.

Standard 7 of Part 1 of ASG-QA: Internal quality assurance (“Design, approval, monitoring and evaluation of study programmes”) stipulates that *“The (higher education) institution shall have policies and systems that ensure the design and development, monitoring and evaluation of quality, relevant study programmes that are learning-outcomes based and aligned with the needs of stakeholders: and that contribute to the achievement of its mission, and are commensurate with national, regional and international standards”*. (ASG-QA: 19).

Several guidelines underpinning Standard 7 concerns the learning outcomes approach and alignment with the national or regional qualifications framework, e.g.:

Guideline A: the institution has policies, procedures and processes for introducing new programmes with learning outcomes which are competence-based (...)

Guideline E: the institution has policies requiring formulated learning outcomes to be defined and documented for all programmes and courses, and ensures that the programme specifications are accessible to learners (or stakeholders).

Guideline I: the institution ensures that formulated learning outcomes are benchmarked against level descriptors of national or regional qualifications frameworks, as applicable.



Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Study the extract from Standard 7 of the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA) Guideline I.

1. From your own understanding, how do institutions ensure that formulated learning outcomes are benchmarked against level descriptors of national or regional qualifications frameworks?

1. African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA). <https://haqaa2.obsglob.org/african-standards-and-guidelines-for-quality-assurance-in-higher-education-asg-qa/>

3.5 Theoretical underpinnings of learning outcomes

Bloom's taxonomy is one of the main theoretical influences on learning outcomes (Cedefop, 2017). Bloom's taxonomy is a set of three hierarchical models used to classify learning into levels of complexity. It was revised in 2001 by changing the nouns to verb form, e.g., remember, understand, apply, analyse, evaluate, and create (rather than synthesize). It covers the learning objectives in the revised cognitive domain, the psychomotor domain, and the affective domain. The cognitive domain is most popular and is often used to structure learning outcomes, activities, and assessments.

The learning outcomes orientation has both constructivist and behavioural underpinnings (Cedefop, *ibid*).

Constructivist

Constructivists emphasise the need for learning outcomes to be open-ended and process-oriented. Constructivists understand learning as a situational activity linked with agency, relationships, and social values. This theory focuses on a learner-centred approach where the learner is actively involved in the learning and not just a passive receiver. This theory's influence on describing learning outcomes means that the approach is context-oriented and avoids definitions that are too rigid. The challenge with this approach is reduced measurability.

Two taxonomies, with roots in constructivist theories, are Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) and Structure of Observed Learning Outcomes (SOLO) (1982). The Dreyfus taxonomy is one of skills acquisitions that depict individual progression through five levels, from novice to expert: novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert. The SOLO taxonomy is one which describes how an individual's performance and understanding grows in complexity. The focus is on quality rather than quantity of information. Performance levels include: pre-structural, unistructural, multi-structural, relational, extended abstract.

Behaviourist

Behaviourists emphasise the need for learning outcomes to be objectively measurable and observable. This theory focuses on the external change in behaviour and supports the scientific management and measurement of human behaviour. This theory's influence on describing learning outcomes means that the approach is full-ended, specific, quantifiable, and measurable.

Theorists opposing the behaviourist approach criticise this over-simplistic, reductionist process where only observable, measurable outcomes count. Later, it is suggested that, in writing learning outcomes, verb use be unambiguous. However, some theorists believe that, at an advanced level, higher order learning outcomes require open-ended tasks and appropriate verbs describing these learning outcomes could include "hypothesise" and "reflect" (Cedefop, *ibid*).

3.6 Guiding principles

3.6.1 Principles for developing common profiles for learning outcomes-based qualifications

Differences in description of existing learning outcomes approaches can make understanding and comparison difficult.

It would be beneficial to the ACQF if a common set of principles were agreed that would make it easier for learning outcomes to be understood.

Cedefop (2017: 63) suggest common principles for presenting learning outcomes-based qualifications to be used in qualifications databases and in supplementary documents to qualifications (qualification supplements), to support end-users. Common principles include that they should be used voluntarily; they should not replace existing learning outcomes but assist national relevant bodies to present qualifications profiles in a comparable way.

Cedefop (ibid) also propose certain technical requirements to ensure that national qualifications descriptions are comparable. For example the summary/ extract should be short (500 to 1500 characters), follow a predefined structure, and be supported by standardised terminology, including a list of action verbs. Figure 3 shows two tables from the Cedefop publication.

In the ACQF context, a similar methodology could be developed to make it easier to present, understand and compare qualifications, even those not covered by the NQF.

Principles supporting the presentation of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes description should be 500 to 1500 characters and be written considering the following element			
It should present the qualification from the perspective of the learner and what he/she is expected to know, be able to do and understand.	It should use action verbs to signal the level of learning expected, normally with an (explicit or implicit) reference to the levels of the national qualifications framework and/or the EQF.	It should indicate the object and scope of the expected learning outcomes. This description should capture the main orientation of the qualification and the depth/breadth of the expected accomplishment. It can, if deemed appropriate, use domains as defined by NQFs/EQF.	It should clarify the occupational and/or social content in which the qualification operates.

Illustrates how the structure could be used in practice.

The Learner	The verb	The object and scope	The content
A master of occupational therapy science...	- has insight into	- the organisation of health care	at regional, national and international level
	- can critically test	- these insights in the field	
	- can give advice	- on policy for the organisation and progress of occupational therapy	from the perspective of the principles of management and quality assurance of therapeutic interventions
He/She...	- is able to take responsibility		
To be presented in summary (414 characters)			
A master of occupational therapy science has insight into the organisation of health care at regional, national and international level and can critically test these insights in the field and give advice on policy.			
He/she is able to take responsibility for the organisation and progress of occupational therapy from the perspective of the principles of management and quality assurance of therapeutic interventions.			

Figure 4: Presenting profiles of learning

Source: Cedefop, 2017: 64

3.6.2 Principles for writing learning outcomes

Due to the varied contexts in which learning outcomes are used, there is no single correct way of approaching the writing of learning outcomes. The way in which the learning outcomes will be used affects the way it will be formulated. Some principles (Cedefop, 2017; Bjornavold, 2021) for writing learning outcomes are shown here.

Scaffolding learning outcomes

While learning outcomes approaches differ across and within countries, increased efforts should be made to develop and strengthen learning outcomes approaches. If the country has a qualifications framework, it is best to use a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches. The level descriptors / qualifications levels can assist to cascade and scaffold the qualifications learning outcomes to be coherent with the level descriptor outcomes to ensure that the learning outcomes are pitched at the correct qualifications level.

Verb use in learning outcomes

Learning outcome statements are verb-driven, specific learner actions. The correct verbs must be used to ensure synergy between the level descriptors and the learning outcomes of the qualification. When writing a learning outcome, it is always useful to start with an action verb followed by the object of that verb, followed by a phrase that provides the context.

The use of measurable, action-oriented verbs means that the resulting outcome statements can be assessed more effectively and consistently.

The best way to prepare for writing learning outcomes is to prepare a list of measurable, action-oriented verbs linked to levels of achievement. Bloom's taxonomy offers a ready-made list of verbs, though this is by no means an exhaustive list. The key to verb use is knowing what verbs are not suitable for example, vague/ ambiguous verbs that are open to different interpretations and are not easily measurable. Examples of vague verbs include *appreciate, know, understand, learn, be familiar with, be aware of, be exposed to*, etc. Precise verbs are more helpful, action-oriented and measurable. Examples are *analyse, adjust, apply, choose, define, describe, demonstrate, distinguish between, evaluate, identify, list, solve* etc. Perspectives on ambiguous verbs differ according to different schools of thought.

Work backwards from what the learner is required to achieve

The best way to write learning outcome statements is to work backwards from what learners are required to achieve. Once the outcomes have been determined, different categories of verbs can be matched to each outcome. When crafting the outcome statements, the verbs can be selected from the list of verbs that has been prepared.

Links between outcomes, teaching and learning, and assessment

Learning outcomes must be observable, measurable, and assessable. Describing and formulating learning outcomes must be followed by implementation i.e. there must be an alignment between statements of learning outcomes, the teaching and learning activity, and assessment. The key intention of this alignment is to support the movement from statements of expected learning outcomes to achieved outcomes.

The language and context should be indicative of the level at which the learning outcomes will be assessed. For every verb-driven learning outcome statement, teaching / learning activities and different examples of assessments should flow logically from the verb of the statement.

Language clarity in learning outcomes

To ease clarity of the learning outcomes, sentences must be short. For example, only one sentence (with one verb) should be used to describe each learning outcome. Complicated, double-barrelled sentences should rather be split into more than one sentence to ensure clarity. When writing learning outcomes for qualifications modules, it is preferable to not exceed six well-written learning outcome statements per module.

Simple, unambiguous terms must be used so that learning outcomes are clearly understood by learners, facilitators and employers. Jargon must be avoided to keep learning outcomes simple.

Fit-for purpose and achievable learning outcomes

Learning outcomes must be fit for purpose and must be achievable within the time and the resources available.

Table 1: Sample list of verbs

Descriptions of verb modes and contexts	Verbs
Acquire and prepare: - materials, texts, tools (including digital)	Access, acquire, accumulate, collect, extract, gather, locate, obtain, retrieve
Certify: - information, materials, texts, etc.	Cite, document, record, reference, source (verb form)
Characterise: - objects of knowledge/ materials of performance, production	Categorise, classify, define, describe, determine, frame, identify, prioritise, specify
Process: - Data and information	Calculate, determine, estimate, manipulate, measure, solve, test
Format: - data, information, materials	Arrange, assemble, collate, organise, sort
Explain: - position, creation, observations, text	Articulate, clarify, explicate, illustrate, interpret, outline, translate, elaborate
Analyse	Compare, contrast, differentiate, distinguish, formulate, map, match
Inquire	Examine, experiment, explore, hypothesise, investigate, research, test
Combine: - ideas, materials, observations	Assimilate, consolidate, merge, connect, integrate, link, synthesise, summarise
Make	Build, compose, construct, craft, create, design, develop, generate, model, shape, simulate
Use learning materials	Apply, carry out, conduct, demonstrate, employ, implement, perform, produce, use
Perform: - functions	Operate, administer, control, coordinate, engage, lead, maintain, manage, navigate, optimize, plan

Descriptions of verb modes and contexts	Verbs
Engage in: - activities	Argue, challenge, debate, defend, justify, resolve, dispute, advocate, persuade
Value: - objects, experiences, texts, productions, etc.	Audit, appraise, assess, evaluate, judge, rank
Engage in: - communication	Report, edit, encode/decode, map, display, draw
Engage in: - Group communication	Collaborate, contribute, negotiate, feed back
Rethink; reconstruct	Accommodate, adapt, adjust, improve, modify, refine, reflect, review

Adapted from Adelman, C. 2015, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED555528.pdf>

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Study the sample list of verbs in Table 1

1. Is there any verb you would like to change/ remove/ add?
2. How can such a list of verbs be useful in your context?

3.7 Limitations and challenges

Learning outcomes facilitate change but do not necessarily bring about change.

The learning outcomes approach is not yet fully embedded in all countries and may take years to implement. There are many outcome-based frameworks that are not being applied consistently so it is difficult to gauge the true nature of these frameworks.

There are multiple understandings of learning outcomes and competencies within countries, between countries, and across borders. This complicates national and international recognition.

The writing of learning outcomes must be fit for purpose and are therefore not always understood by users. For example, the ACQF level descriptors are generalised and brief so that they can be applied across a wide range of countries. The NQFs will have generalised but more detailed level descriptors to guide the allocation of new qualifications or place existing ones.

Learning outcome statements:

- Must assist teaching and learning, and need to be written in a way that allows for adaptation and interpretation
- Must be aligned with assessment.

Learning outcomes on their own cannot capture the full learning process delivered through qualifications.

The implementation of learning outcomes approaches presents with continuing tensions and challenges in terms of behaviourist and constructivist approaches. Learning outcomes should not restrict learning or prevent learners from going beyond expectations. Where learning outcomes are too detailed and specific, they can inhibit the learning process and make it difficult to accommodate innovation and the unexpected.

There needs to be a balance between the prescriptive and descriptive nature of learning outcomes.

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Study the limitations and challenges (Section 2.8)

1. *What is your comment on the limitations and challenges?*
2. *What support will you need to ease the use of learning outcomes?*

4 LEARNING OUTCOMES USE IN THE ACQF AS A POLICY INSTRUMENT

4.1 A learning outcomes oriented ACQF

The ACQF promotes and strengthens learning outcomes approaches across the continent.

Developing, describing, and using learning outcomes are fundamental building blocks of the ACQF vision and objectives. The ACQF level descriptors are based on learning outcomes, and to ease the comparison and referencing between national qualifications systems and the ACQF, countries are encouraged to use learning outcomes approaches to describe their qualifications and related standards. In this way, the referencing process itself will promote the strengthening of learning outcomes approaches across the continent and facilitate qualifications reform in Africa.

The realisation of the learning outcomes orientation of the ACQF requires policy makers and practitioners to embed learning outcomes in national systems to make them effective recognition and transparency tools. The learning outcomes principles are implemented differently in different countries and in different contexts. However, the different reports and thematic briefs developed in the ACQF development phase (ACQF 2021, A to F) shows that a learning outcomes approach is being applied in the AU environment.

The African commitment to learning outcomes approaches was reinforced in the Addis Convention (UNESCO, 2014) which was adopted in 2014, and came into force on 15 December 2019, after ratification by more than ten countries. The Addis Convention encourages AU member states to use learning outcomes approaches in recognition of qualifications. This is in line with the pervasive use of learning outcomes on the African continent and in other international contexts.

To improve transparency and recognition of qualifications, the learning outcomes approach must be fully embedded i.e. qualifications need to be expressed in terms of learning outcomes, linked to NQF level descriptors/ qualifications levels, and be fully quality assured.

4.2 Learning outcomes embedded in referencing to the ACQF

Guideline 3 provides information on the referencing criteria for linking NQFs/ NQF levels in Africa to the ACQF.

Referencing Criterion 1 states that: *“There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the ACQF”*. The purpose of this criterion is to compare and demonstrate the compatibility, and define the link between the ACQF level descriptors and each level of the NQF, or qualifications level. The referencing will be possible because countries will be able to explain their own qualifications in terms of learning outcomes. After successful referencing, all newly issued qualifications documents that are part of the NQF or system will contain a clear reference to the relevant ACQF level. To enhance information sharing on referencing outcomes, AU member states will be encouraged to publish their qualifications information on the ACQF Qualifications Platform.

The ACQF support for learning outcomes, RPL and credit systems are strengthened in Referencing Criterion 2 that deals specifically with learning outcomes, RPL and credit: *“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”*. Countries referencing to the ACQF will demonstrate the extent to which learning outcomes approaches are used in the different sub-sectors of the education and training system, and that learning outcomes are linked with qualifications design, assessment, non-formal and informal learning, and credit systems.

Further details are available in Guideline 3 (Referencing to ACQF).

4.3 Learning outcomes use in the development of common qualifications profiles or standards

In line with priorities of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and other AU policies, common continental qualifications profiles will be developed.

These qualifications profiles / standards will be developed by multi-country teams using an agreed methodology and quality assurance to ensure relevance and endorsement across countries in Africa. The profiles will focus on the high labour market, societal and technological value for the continent, and will be free for countries to use to design national education and training. The related full qualifications will be awarded by the countries' competent bodies.

4.4 In support of NQF development

The learning outcomes approach is oriented to application at both national and regional level and aims to address the perspectives and needs of both NQF / NQS and the continental ACQF level. The emphasis on learning outcomes will contribute to a common understanding of the ACQF learning outcomes orientation and better application across countries and regions to ease the implementation of the ACQF.

The Learning Outcomes Training Manual will remain a living document and will evolve and be enriched to reflect new developments, experiences, and needs related with the transformation of learning.

5 SUMMARY

Learning outcomes are used in many contexts such as in level descriptors, the development of common qualifications profiles, and subject benchmarks. Given the multiple contexts, there is no single way to approach the writing of learning outcomes though there are principles that guide the definition, formulation, and presentation. There are numerous challenges and limitations to consider when using learning outcomes approaches, however, these should be used to assist countries to identify what support they require to ease learning outcomes use.

Referencing Criterion 3 refers specifically to learning outcomes. The successful application of the learning outcomes approach will enhance transparency of qualifications and enable referencing of qualifications levels to the ACQF.

6 GUIDANCE FOR TRAINERS AND LEARNERS

At the end of this training module, the learner will be able to:

1. Identify the various ways that learning outcomes are used in a country
2. Differentiate between intended learning outcomes and achieved learning outcomes
3. Identify the support needed to ease the use of learning outcomes
4. Show how learning outcomes principles are applied in level descriptors and registered qualifications
5. Propose a draft action plan for responding to the ACQF Referencing Criterion 2 that deals with learning outcomes

The following guide is provided to trainers and learners in terms of the demands of the learning programme.

Area of guidance	Notes
Recommended Pre-requisite	<p>There are no pre-requisites to undertake this training module. However, given the technical nature of the material, learners should have the following background:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General knowledge and understanding of qualifications - Practical experience in learning and/ or teaching.
Notional time to complete the module	<p>Training Module 1 scopes a wide range of information pertaining to how learning outcomes are used in countries, and includes a range of reflective questions and activities.</p> <p>Given the complexity of the learning outcomes concept, the exercises are best undertaken in a group, however, individuals may attempt the exercises.</p> <p>It is anticipated that if this training module is undertaken on an individual basis or as a group, it should take approximately eight hours of learning and four hours of assessment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading: 5–6 hours - Face-to-face: 4 hours - Assessment: 4 hours

Area of guidance	Notes
Materials	<p>Most of the materials are included in this training module.</p> <p>However, it is important that learners/ users have access to the internet to access links to the examples of learning outcomes uses.</p> <p>The full links are included in each of the exercises where appropriate.</p>
Organisation	<p>If delivered within a group, it is suggested that groups be restricted to about 4–6 people to encourage participation of each member.</p> <p>It is suggested that each group, for each task, allocates a note taker and speaker. Views should be shared across all groups and prompt further discussion and revelations.</p>
Assessment	<p>The assessments can be undertaken as an individual or as a group.</p> <p>If the training programme becomes a part of an accredited component (e.g. module, subject) then the assessments need to be adjusted to ensure that individual performance can be demonstrated.</p>

7 ASSESSMENT

7.1 Approach

The assessments in Training Module 1 are designed to encourage debate and develop confidence in using learning outcomes in various contexts.

Since learning outcomes are the basis for level descriptor development and for referencing qualifications levels to the ACQF, the content of this training manual (TM) provides some preparatory exercises for the content in TM2: Level Descriptors, and TM3: Referencing. Trainers and learners should see the preparatory exercises covered in this TM, not as duplication, but as complementary exercises that have a purpose to increase user confidence in discussing and applying learning outcomes approaches and participating in referencing processes.

The assessment approach includes:

- Numerous formative exercises spread throughout the TM
- Two summative assessments.

7.2 Formative exercises (collation)

There are numerous formative exercises in the relevant sections in this TM. The full list is attached here, for easier reference:

Assessment/ reflection Exercises: TM1- Learning outcomes

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

- o A move towards a learning outcomes approach presents a shift from the question, “What did the graduate do to get this qualification?” to “What can the graduate do now that they have this qualification?”

1. *What do we want to see when we are looking for what a graduate can do?*
2. *What ways can we make this visible?*

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

1. *How do learning outcomes differentiate between the intended learning outcomes and achieved learning outcomes?*

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Click on the [link](#) to see a 2014 publication on national qualifications descriptors of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework in South Africa. Study Clauses 17- 24 on pages 14 and 15 in the link which describes the nested learning outcomes approach (Figure 2 above).

Link 1: https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201410/38116gon819.pdf

1. *Reflect on your own NQF/ NQS and national descriptors. How similar or different is your approach?*

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Click on the [link](#) to see an example of the subject benchmark statements for graduates of social work developed by QAA.

Link: https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/subject-benchmark-statements/subject-benchmark-statement-social-work.pdf?%20sfvrsn=5c35c881_6#:~:text=This%20is%20the%20Subject%20Benchmark,the%20nature%20of%20the%20subject.

1. *Do you think subject benchmark statements such as these are useful or not?*
2. *Reflecting on your own NQF and according to your knowledge, are there (benchmark) statements (they may be called something else in your country) available for any of the study areas in your country? If yes, what are they called? Can you provide links to these documents?*



Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Click on the [link](#) to see an example of an earlier (2013) Tuning Report for psychology. The example shows learning outcomes of a two-year degree in psychology alongside learning outcomes of a BA degree in psychology to demonstrate the difference in complexity

Link: https://www.mhec.org/sites/default/files/resources/2013mhec_tuning_comp_sloschart.pdf

1. Do you think this kind of differentiation is useful or not?
2. Has your country developed any similar documents on degree profiles? If yes, can you provide links to these documents?



Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Access a learning institution's website (higher education, TVET, other), preferably in your country.

1. Access one or more qualifications offered by that institution, and then find an example of learning outcomes in individual qualifications descriptors.
2. Is this a good example or not? What is the reason for your response?



Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Think about the learning outcomes in your country (in general terms or in a specific sub-sector of education and training) and what they are linked to, and indicate yes, no or not sure

Are learning outcomes linked to:	Yes	Not sure	No
- Design and description of qualifications in the country			
- Credits for qualifications			
- Professional/ occupational standards			
- The curriculum and subjects			
- Assessment			
- Comparison of qualifications achieved in other countries			
- Recognition of non-formal and informal learning/ RPL			
- Any other additions (add description)			



Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Study the above example of a registered Level 5 qualification in auto mechanics in Mozambique (NQF Professional)

Choose one of the listed learning outcomes

1. *How would you assess the learning outcome? One method*
2. *How would you teach towards the learning outcome? One method*

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Study the above example of a registered Level 5 qualification in Accounting Management in Cape Verde

Choose one of the listed learning outcomes

1. *How would you assess the learning outcome? One method*
2. *How would you teach towards the learning outcome? One method*

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Click on this [link](#) to access the thematic brief on different descriptions of level descriptors on the continent.

Link: https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/thematic-briefs/acqf-thematic-brief-3-1-level-descriptors/@@display-file/file/ACQF_Thematic%20Brief_3.1_level%20descriptors_WEB.pdf

1. *Access the description of your country's level descriptors*

Reflecting on what you know about your country's level descriptors and NQF, see whether you can answer the following questions:


2. *What is the link between how qualifications are classified in your country's NQF and the learning outcomes of the qualification? If there is no NQF, what is the process for linking qualifications to the NQS?*

Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Click on the [link](#) to access the European Area Recognition (EAR) Manual. Chapter 9 focuses on using learning outcomes to recognise foreign qualifications

Link: <http://ear.enic-naric.net/emanual/Chapter9/default.aspx>


1. *Study Chapter 9: learning outcomes*
2. *From your own understanding, how easy/complicated is it to compare qualifications based on learning outcomes?*
3. *What needs to be put in place to ease the comparison using learning outcomes?*



Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Study the extract from Standard 7 of the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA) Guideline I.


1. *From your own understanding, how do institutions ensure that formulated learning outcomes are benchmarked against level descriptors of national or regional qualifications frameworks?*



Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Study the sample list of verbs in Table 1 above

1. *Is there any verb you would like to change/ remove/ add?*
2. *How can such a list of verbs be useful in your context?*



Reflective Exercise: can be undertaken as an individual or as a group discussion

Study the limitations and challenges (Section 3.7)

1. *What is your comment on the limitations and challenges?*
2. *What support will you need to ease the use of learning outcomes?*

7.3 Summative exercises

7.3.1 Task One



Exercise:

Study the self-assessment exercise for Criterion Two.

1. Think of your own country's NQF/ NQS.
2. Work through the twelve sub-criteria.
3. Draft a response (self-assessment), namely is the sub-criterion fully met, partly met, or not met.
4. Where it is fully met, indicate where evidence can be found.
5. Where it is partly met or not met, propose the action that is required, who should be responsible for the action, and propose an estimate of the timeframe

ACQF Criterion Two:

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

Self-assessment	Yes, fully: indicate evidence	Partly: indicate evidence	No: Comments
Learning outcomes (LOs)			
1. The LO approach is enabled by legislation			
2. The LO approach is agreed and applied in all sub-sectors			
3. The key features of the LO approach are clear and understood			
4. There are links between learning outcomes and classification of qualifications levels			
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)			
5. RPL is related to the NQF			
6. RPL is defined and agreed at policy level			
7. Assessment of LOs apply to formal, non-formal and informal learning			
8. RPL is applied in all sub-sectors of education and training			

Self-assessment	Yes, fully: indicate evidence	Partly: indicate evidence	No: Comments
Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)			
9. CAT is related to the NQF			
10. CAT is defined and agreed at policy level			
11. CAT is applied in all sub-sectors			
Studies/ research/ analyses			
12. There are studies/ research/ analyses to support this criterion			
<p>Main sources of information you can refer to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning outcomes (LOs): legislation, agreement, application, features, platforms, supporting tools - RPL: legislation, application, assessment - CAT: legislation and application - Studies/ research/ analyses 			

Draft proposal for roadmap and action plan to achieve Criterion 2

No	Action	By whom	Timeframe
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR CRITERION TWO

Learning outcomes approach

Responses to this sub-criterion may be guided by:

1. Legislation
2. Agreement and application
3. Features of the LO approach
4. Links between learning outcomes and qualifications levels.

Legislation:

- Is the LO approach included in relevant legislation?
- Is the LO approach enabled by relevant legislation?

Agreement and application

Is the LO approach specific to the particular needs of each sub-sector of education and training? Is it:

- Agreed in all or some sub-sectors? Which ones?
- Agreed in all or some qualifications? Which ones?
- Applied in all or some sub-sectors? Which ones?
- Being practised in all or some qualifications? Which ones?

Features of the LO approach in the country and application of assessment for formal, non-formal and informal learning, for example are they linked to:

- Design and description of qualifications in the country
- Credits for qualifications
- Professional standards
- The curriculum and subjects
- Assessment
- Comparison of qualifications achieved in other countries
- Recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

How does the learning outcomes approach:

- Promote lifelong learning
- Approximate with labour market, industry needs, societal needs
- Facilitate mobility (learners and labour).

How is the learning outcomes approach supported by:

- Technical and methodological tools, handbooks, web resources, debates, training
- Research (gaps, challenges, new developments and approaches)
- Involvement of labour market players/ sector councils?

Links between learning outcomes and classification of qualifications levels

- How do learning outcomes differentiate between the intended learning outcomes and achieved learning outcomes?
- How are the country's national level descriptors and underpinning domains related to the learning outcomes approach in the country?
- What is the link between how qualifications are classified in the NQF and the learning outcomes of the qualification? If there is no NQF, what is the process for linking qualifications to the NQS?

Recognition of prior learning

Responses to this sub-criterion may be guided by:

1. Legislation
2. Assessment
3. Application.

Legislation

- How is the recognition of non-formal and informal learning related to the NQF/NQS?
- Is the recognition of non-formal and informal learning defined and agreed at policy level?

Assessment

- Does the assessment of learning outcomes differ for formal, non-formal, and informal learning? If the answer is "Yes", describe the similarities and differences.

Application

- Is the recognition of non-formal and informal learning applied in all sectors? Which sectors are excluded?
- Can all qualifications in the NQF be acquired through RPL processes? If not, what qualifications can be acquired through RPL?

Credit accumulation and transfer

Response to this sub-criterion may be guided by:

1. Legislation
2. Application.

Legislation

- Does the country have a national credit accumulation and transfer system? Is it enabled by legislation?
- How is the credit accumulation and transfer system related to the NQF/NQS?
- How is the credit accumulation and transfer system related to the learning outcomes approach?

Application

- Is the national credit accumulation and transfer system being implemented in all sectors? Which sectors are excluded?

7.3.2 Task Two

In the table below:

- Column 1 shows the Cape Verde NQF Level 5 level descriptors
- Column 2 shows an extract from a Cape Verde NQF Level 5 registered qualification.

Using the information in the guiding principles (Section 3.6):

- Critique the information in the Table below (from Cape Verde Level 5)
- Present your findings in a PowerPoint presentation.

<p>Level descriptors in National Qualifications Frameworks: Cape Verde NQF, level 5. Source: ACQF Inventory</p>	<p>Qualification level 5: AGE001_5: Accounting management. Qualification registered in the National Qualifications Catalogue: AGE001_5</p>
<p>Knowledge: Comprehensive, specialised, factual, and theoretical knowledge within a field of study or work and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge, which includes abstract technical understanding and capacity to search additional information and knowledge to improve the execution of functions.</p> <p>Skills: A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems in routine situations and new contexts and activities. Capacity to select and apply equipment and methods, explain the alternatives, and ensure the technical support to solve more specific problems in known routines.</p> <p>Responsibility and autonomy: Manage and supervise in contexts of study and work susceptible to unpredictable change. Revise and develop performance of self and others, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. Work independently when decisions or initiatives at intermediate level are required. Be able to organise the work for self and the team, according to the objectives and goals of the organisation, and support others to effectively manage time.</p>	<p>Broad short definition of the qualification: Carry out accounting, tax, financial, and treasury control management in organisations and prepare administrative processes for presentation to public institutions, handling specific information and information management applications.</p> <p>Units of competency:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out accounting and tax management • Carry out financial management • Carry out treasury management and control • Organise administrative processes for presentation to public entities • Handle office computer applications. <p>Each “unit of competency” is defined through a range of four to seven more granular “elements of competency”, which in turn are specified in greater detail by “assessment criteria”. This approach to describing the learning outcomes of the qualification cascades from the broad definition of the qualification to the granular outcomes applied as criteria in the context of assessment.</p> <p>A similar approach is applied in the context of the Competency-Based Approach (Approche par Competences) implemented with some variation in TVET systems of several countries in Africa, e.g.: Cape Verde, Cameroon, Kenya, Morocco, and Mozambique.</p>

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