



# ACQF

African Continental  
Qualifications Framework

## Demystifying the Concept of Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS)



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Facilitator: James Mwewa

# ACQF “Letting the ‘CATS’ out of the bag...”

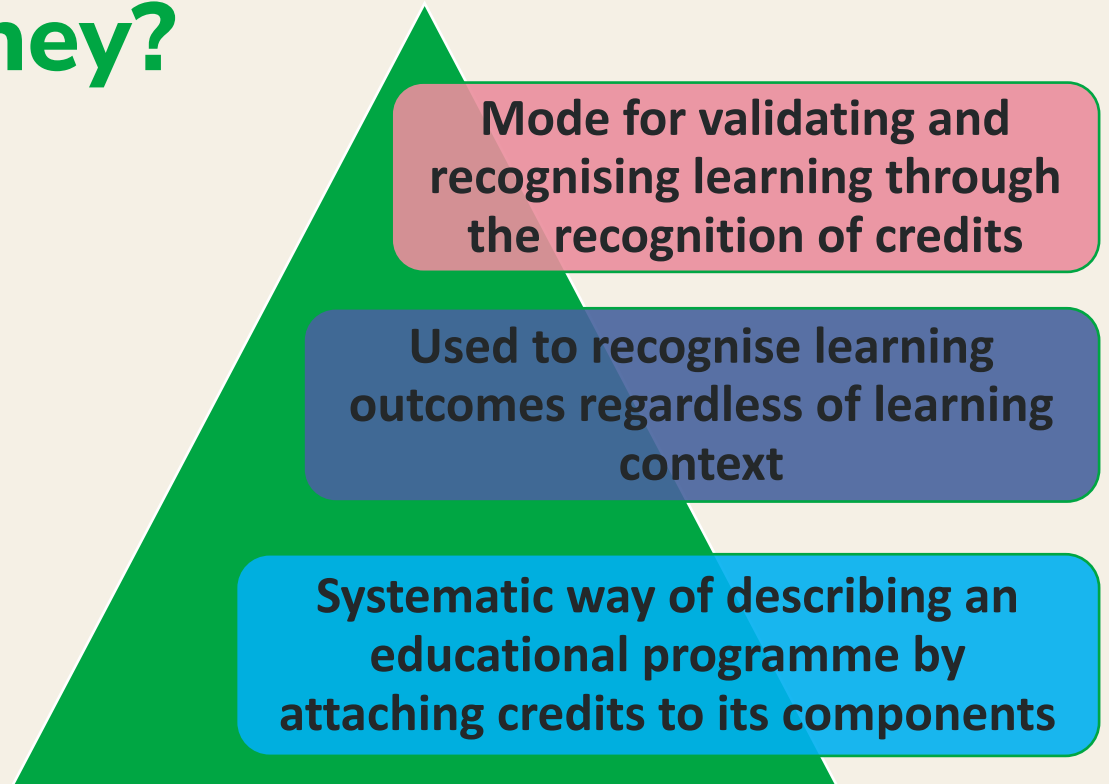
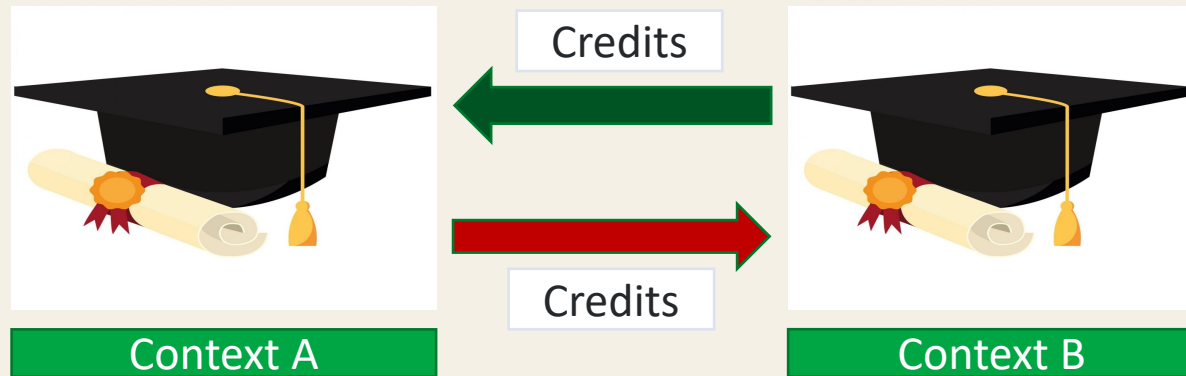


- In 2007, a gigantic, decisive and game-changing step was taken towards ensuring the continued relevance, quality, recognition and international comparability of Seychelles' qualifications through the development of the SNQF.
- This was a right decision for posterity; the nation chose to stand on the right side of history.
- Now, for the SNQF to be an effective quality assurance, articulation, mobility and progression tool that it is desired to be, it requires more than just a qualification map and level descriptors.
- Like all NQFs, it demands for accompaniments and catalysts in the form of standards, policies and systems for its optimal performance.
- **One such system is the Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS).**

# CAT Systems – what are they?

‘Credit systems’ means a transparency tool for facilitating the recognition of credit(s). These systems can comprise, inter alia, equivalences, exemptions, units/modules that can be accumulated and transferred, the autonomy of providers who can individualise pathways, and the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

[EQF Recommendation \(2017\)](#)



**It is a form of currency used to exchange acquired learning outcomes for a qualification**

# Some Definitions related to CATS...cont'd

SADC-CATS Guideline, 2021

## SADC-CATS Guideline (2021)

- **Credit**: The amount of learning contained in a qualification or part-qualification whereby one (1) credit is equated to ten (10) notional hours of learning. Credits are generally expressed in whole numbers.
- **Credit accumulation**: The totalling of relevant credits required to complete a qualification or a part-qualification.
- **Credit transfer**: The vertical, horizontal or diagonal relocation of credits towards a qualification or part-qualification on the same or a different level, usually between different programmes, departments or institutions. **Credit transfer is the key to successful study mobility**. Education and training institutions may make agreements which **guarantee automatic recognition and transfer of credits**.

South Africa, SAQA

- 'Credits' means the amount of learning contained in a qualification or part-qualification whereby one (1) credit is equated to ten (10) notional hours of learning. (SAQA, 2021).
- 'Credit transfer' means the vertical, horizontal or diagonal relocation of credits towards a qualification or part-qualification on the same or different level, usually between different programmes, departments or institutions. (SAQA, 2021)
- *Source of these definitions: SAQA. 2021. Policy and Criteria for Credit Accumulation and Transfer within the National Qualifications Framework. (as Amended, 2021).*  
<https://www.saga.org.za/sites/default/files/2021-04/Policy%20and%20Criteria%20for%20Credit%20Accumulation%20and%20Transfer%20within%20NQF-2021.pdf>

# Some Definitions related to CATS...cont'd

## Credit (EQF Recommendation)

- 'Credit' means confirmation that a part of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of learning outcomes has been assessed and validated by a competent authority, according to an agreed standard; credit is awarded by competent authorities when the individual has achieved the defined learning outcomes, evidenced by appropriate assessments and can be expressed in a quantitative value (e.g. credits or credit points) demonstrating the estimated workload an individual typically needs for achieving related learning outcomes. (EQF, 2017).
- 'Credit transfer' means the process of allowing individuals who have accumulated credit in one context to have it valued and recognised in another context. (EQF, 2017)

• Source of these definitions: EQF Recommendation 2017.  
[https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32017H0615\(01\)&from=EN#d1e32-20-1](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32017H0615(01)&from=EN#d1e32-20-1)

## Credit (ECTS)

- ECTS credits express the volume of learning based on the defined **learning outcomes** and their **associated workload**.
- 60 ECTS credits are allocated to the learning outcomes and associated workload of a full-time academic year or its equivalent, which normally comprises a number of educational components to which credits (on the basis of the learning outcomes and workload) are allocated. ECTS credits are generally expressed in whole numbers.
- *ECTS users' guide 2015*, Publications Office, 2017, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/87192>

# More about ECTS

**ECTS is a learner-centred system for credit accumulation and transfer**, based on the principle of transparency of the learning, teaching and assessment processes. Its objective is to facilitate the planning, delivery and evaluation of study programmes and student mobility by **recognising learning achievements, qualifications and periods of learning**.

- **Main uses of ECTS:**
  1. Transferring between universities
  2. Studying abroad (e.g. an exchange semester at a different university)
  3. Applying for further study (like a Master's or PhD)
- **ECTS Key Features:** ✓ learning outcomes ✓ Workload ✓ Allocation of credits ✓ Awarding credits ✓ Accumulation of credits ✓ Transfer of credits ✓
- **ECTS documentation** ✓ The use of ECTS credits is facilitated and quality enhanced by the supporting documents: **Course Catalogue, Learning Agreement, Transcript of Records, and Work Placement**
- **Certificate** ✓ ECTS also contributes to transparency in other documents such as the Diploma Supplement.

## CATS or RPL?

- In some jurisdictions, RPL is strictly associated with recognition of learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal settings.
- In such jurisdictions, CATS is viewed as an independent recognition mode (away from RPL) for learning outcomes obtained via formal learning contexts.
- However, some countries consider RPL as a mode for recognising learning outcomes regardless of the learning context – formal, non-formal and informal.
- In this case, CATS is viewed as a part/ subset of RPL.

# Credit hour approach Vs notional hour approach

## CREDIT HOUR APPROACH

- The credit hour approach is based on the number of “contact hours” per week and per semester. This should include any time that the lecturer spends with students such as lecture time and laboratory time.
- A credit hour is normally based on the number of contact hours per week.
- As there are normally 15 weeks in a semester, a module that is allocated one (1) contact hour per week per semester is referred to as a one credit module. Similarly, a 3 credit module represents three hours of contact time per week for 15 weeks; and a 4 credit module represents 4 hours of contact time per week for 15 weeks.
- It should be noted that in this approach the time for private study, research, and the writing of assignments and examinations, etc. is **not included** in the calculation.
- Mostly used in USA.

## NOTIONAL HOUR APPROACH

- Notional study hours (also referred to as “learning hours”) represent an estimate of the time spent by an average full time equivalent student to master a unit of learning.
- In countries such as Namibia, South Africa, Kenya, Zambia and the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) it has been stipulated that 10 notional study hours are worth one credit. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has also used this approach in discussing credit accumulation and transfer systems (Tuck, 2007).
- In this approach, the hours referred to here include **all the learning activities of the student**, inclusive of contact time (lecture time, tutorials, labs), private study, research, assignment writing, examinations, etc.
- The following assumptions are made: The average student accumulates 8 study hours per day. This amounts to a 40 hours/ week. Undergraduate programmes are generally based on a 30-week full-time academic year. At 40 hours per week this amounts to 1200 hours per year.
- 10 notional hours to 1 credit is minimum - to be met by all institutions. Maximum to be informed by workload.



# CATS in the context of ACQF: Guideline 4 – Validation and Recognition of Learning

## Objectives of ACQF Guideline 4

**Facilitate  
Recognition of  
qualifications  
among African  
States**

**Facilitate Systematic  
exchange of  
information between  
ACQF, NQFs and  
recognition  
structures (ARC)**



**Facilitate RPL  
within and  
among African  
States**

**Facilitate  
Implementation  
of CATS in  
Africa**

## ACQF Guideline/ Training Module 4 – CATS Principles:



# Benefits of CATS



Facilitates easy mobility of learners and workers, also knowledge and skills transfer, global citizenship



Promotes lifelong learning through flexible learning pathways



**Duplication of learning**

**QUALITY**  
**QUALIFICATIONS**

# The Deming Cycle/ Wheel of Quality Management Approach to CATS Development and Implementation



## PLAN:

- Why CATS? Objectives?
- Enabling Legislation in place?
- NQF/ NQS elaborated?
- Governance structures?
- Scope of CATS – define?
- Who are the key stakeholders?
- QA arrangements in place?

## DO:

- Constitute a Technical Working Group
- Define ToRs for the TWG
- Develop CATS Policy
- Implement CATS – Guidelines and Procedures

## ACT:

- Take corrective action – amend, revise or replace policy, guidelines or procedures if deviations from objectives are observed
- Sustain policy, guidelines or procedures if CATS objectives are constantly met

**CHECK:** (against objectives)  
Assess effectiveness of policy/ guidelines/ procedures – at registration/ accreditation of learning programmes and compliance audits

# Types of Credit Systems

**System 1: SADC CATS  
(Widely used in Africa)**

1 Credit = 10 notional  
hours, 120 Credits per  
Year

**System 2: ECTS  
(Europe)**

1 ECTS Credit = 25 –  
30 hours, 60 ECTS  
Credits per Year

**System 3: AUCS  
(America)**

1 Semester Credit  
Hour = 15 – 16  
Contact Hours, 30  
Semester Credit  
Hours per Year

## Credit Systems in Selected African Countries

- Botswana, Mauritius, Kenya, South Africa, Lesotho, Eswatini, Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe; 1 credit = 10 notional hours.
- Tunisia, Uganda and Algeria; 1 credit = 25 – 30 hours.
- Mozambique; 1 credit = 10 notional hours (for professional education) and 1 credit = 25 to 30 notional hours (for higher education).

## Important notes:

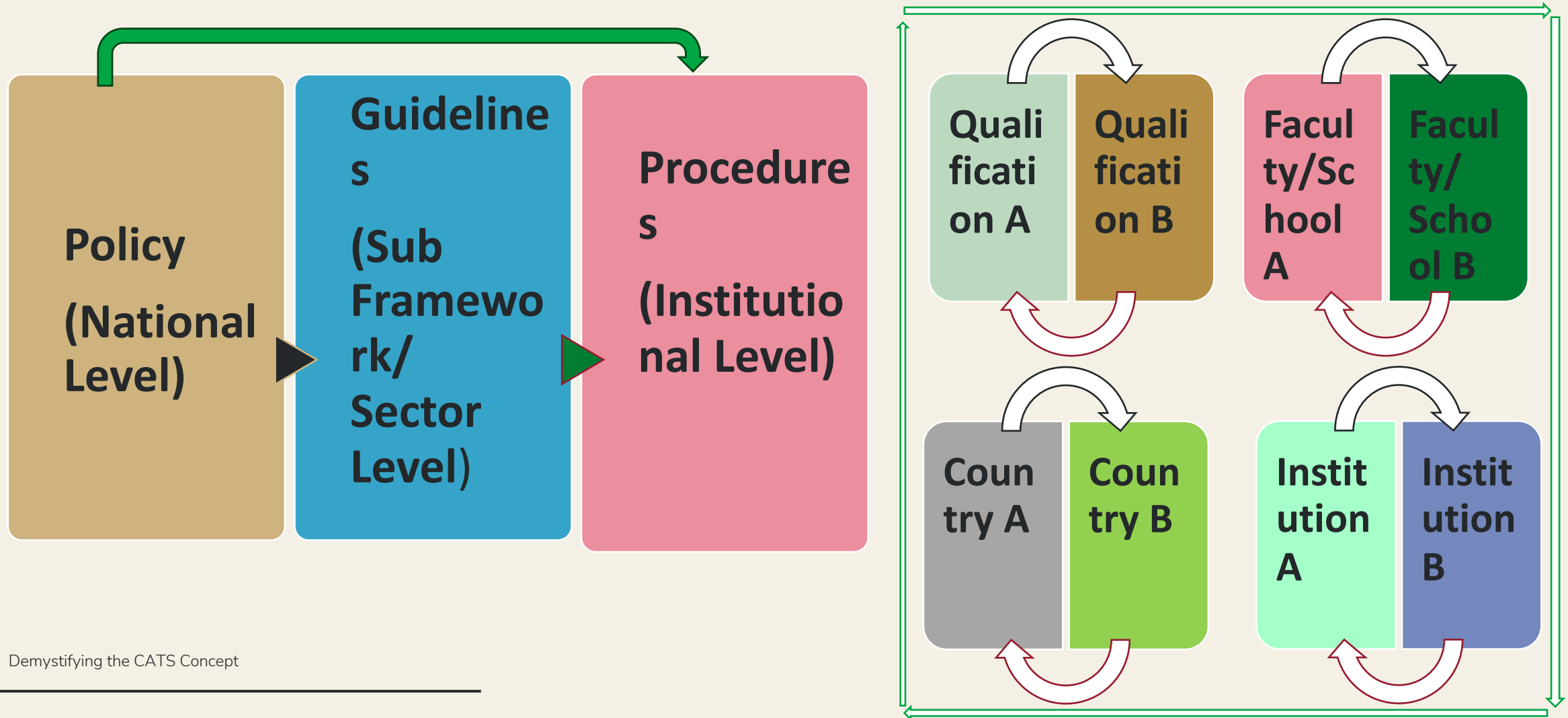
- Typically, credits comprise all the learning activities of the student, inclusive of contact time, private study, research, assignment writing, industrial visits and attachments, assessment, etc.
- It is possible for qualifications to be placed at the same NQF level; however, this does not mean that they are equivalent awards. The difference will be the number of credits allocated and the mode of delivery
- It is common practice for institutions to accept the transfer of credit from other institutions up to a ceiling of 50% of the total credits required for the award of a qualification.
- It is also not uncommon for institutions to attach a shelf life (expiry date) to credits.

## Important notes:...

- \***Types of credit transfers: vertical, horizontal and diagonal.**
- **Block Credit Transfer:** entails reducing the total credit of the receiving programme by the amount of credits from the completed programme.
- **Course Exemption:** An individual may be exempted from taking a specific course or module of a programme based on the learning achieved in previous studies. This is applicable to both completed and uncompleted programmes.



# CATS Implementation Approaches



# CATS Implementation Stages – ACQF Guideline 4

Stage 1: Establishing an administrative structure for the CATS

Stage 2: Providing information to learners

Stage 3: Processing applications for credit transfer

Stage 4: Decision making and approval of applications

Stage 5: Documentation and record keeping

# Challenges to CATS Implementation

Different education and qualifications systems

Lack of trust among education and training institutions

Differences in structure and content of learning programmes – lack of harmonisation, including of duration and credits

Absence of clear procedures and QA systems, lack of transparency

Learning outcomes approach: differences in understanding and application

Limited capacity in the development of institutional CAT systems and procedures by education and training institutions

Resistance to change by stakeholders

# Some Solutions to Counter the Challenges

- CATS to be enabled by legislation.
- Structures for CATS implementation to be put in place.
- CATS policy/ guidelines/ procedures a must.
- CATS should be linked to the NQF – determine applicability of CATS to NQF Levels/ Sub frameworks, also NQS as applicable.
- Harmonisation of learning programmes is a key enabler of CATS.
- Stakeholder involvement key to the success of CATS.
- CATS should not be too prescriptive – institutional autonomy to be respected.
- Synergies between HEIs to be encouraged.
- Quality assurance should form an integral part of CATS. CAT should only be applicable to accredited/ recognised institutions.
- Promotion of learner mobility and life-long learning should always be at the heart of any CATS.

**THANK  
YOU!**

