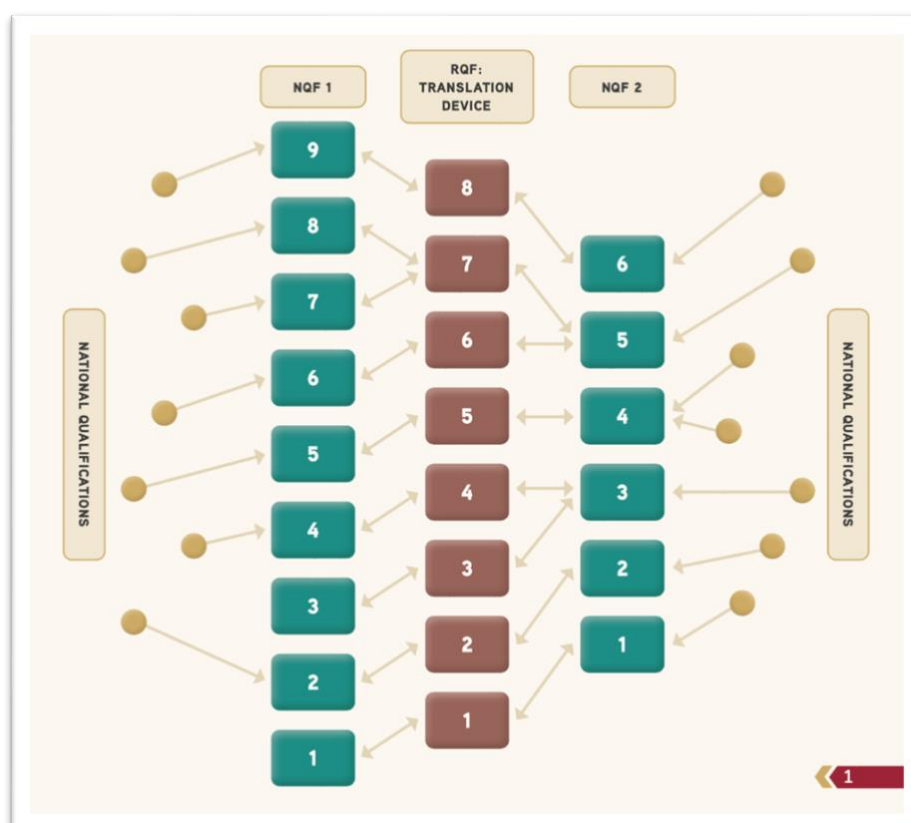


National and Regional Qualifications Frameworks Interactions and Governance Models

Technical overview for Training Programme



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Acronyms

ACQF	African Continental Qualifications Framework
ANEP	Autoridade Nacional de Educação Profissional
ANQEP	Agência Nacional para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AQRF	ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework
AQVN	African Qualifications Verification Network
BQA	Bahrain Education and Training Quality Authority
BTVET	Business Technical Vocational Education and Training
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CNAQ	Conselho Nacional de Avaliação da Qualidade do Ensino Superior
CNCP	Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle
CNQ	Catálogo Nacional de Qualificações
COTVET	Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training
EAQFHE	East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education
ENIC	European Network of Information Centres in the European Region
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ETF	European Training Foundation
FQAI	foreign qualification awarding institution
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
KNQA	Kenya National Qualifications Authority
MQA	Mauritius Qualifications Authority
NAC	NQF Advisory Committee
NAQAAE	National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation
NAQMIS	National Qualifications Management Information System
NARIC	National Academic Recognition Information Centres of the European Union
NBTE	National Board for Technical Education
NCP	national coordination point
NLRD	National Learners' Records Database
NQA	Namibian Qualifications Authority
NQAI	national qualifications awarding institution
NQF	national qualifications framework
NQS	national qualifications system
QA	quality assurance
QF-EHEA	Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area
QQI	Quality Qualifications Ireland

REQF	Rwanda Education Qualifications Framework
RNCP	Répertoire national des certifications professionnelles
RPL	recognition of prior learning
RQF	regional qualifications framework
RVCC	recognition, validation and certification of competences
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADCQF	Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework
SANQF	South African National Qualifications Framework
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SOLO	Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome
SQA	Seychelles Qualifications Authority
SQC	Sectoral Qualification Council
TCCA	Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation
TQF	transnational qualifications framework
TVET	technical and vocational education and training
UC-SNQ	Unidade de Coordenação-Sistema Nacional de Qualificações
UIL	UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UVQF	Uganda Vocational Qualifications Framework
VAE	Validation des acquis de l'expérience
VET	vocational education and training
VUSSC	Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth
ZQA	Zambia Qualifications Authority

Context

This Technical Overview is a contribution to the training programme of Cinterfor, carried out in the context of the development of a regional qualifications framework (webinar of 29/07/2021). The Overview builds on reports and analyses undertaken in the context of the project “Developing the African Qualifications Framework”, and on the Benchmarking of NQF Governance Models carried out by ETF in 2021 jointly with the Moroccan NQF Permanent Commission. The author of this Overview is author and co-author of the indicated ACQF source reports and analyses; and coordinated the NQF benchmarking project with Morocco and drafted the benchmarking report.

1. Qualifications frameworks

The development and implementation of national, regional and even transnational qualifications frameworks has been ongoing worldwide since the late 1980s. Interpreted broadly as tools for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria relating to the learning levels achieved, qualifications frameworks have evolved over many iterations over the last four decades, and although they are contested, steady progress has been made. At the time this report is being prepared, there are at least 150 countries worldwide that have established national qualifications frameworks (NQFs).

1.1 Key definitions

Literature on qualifications frameworks may sometimes be confusing, given the range and variety of qualifications and even the terminology used as these initiatives evolve. Qualifications frameworks are an aspect of a nation’s qualifications system, which in turn is part of the larger education and training system. Qualifications systems can be defined as including all structures and activities leading to the award of a qualification, including the implementation of qualification policy, institutional arrangements, quality assurance processes, evaluation and award processes.

National qualifications framework

[European Qualifications Framework Recommendation of 2017](#) defines NQF as ‘A policy and instrument for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims at integrating and coordinating national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society.

[https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H0615\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H0615(01)&from=EN)

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 – clear statements of what the learner must know or be able to do, whether learned in a classroom, on the job, or less formally. The qualifications framework indicates the comparability of different qualifications and 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).

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/@ifp_skills/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms_103623.pdf

Qualifications system

This includes all aspects of a country’s activity that lead to the recognition of apprenticeships. These systems include the means used to develop and operationalise national or regional qualifications policy, institutional arrangements, quality assurance processes, assessment and award processes, recognition of skills and other mechanisms linking education and training to the

labour market and civil society. Qualifications systems can be more or less integrated and coherent. One of the features of a qualifications system can be an explicit qualifications framework (OECD 2006).

Regional qualifications framework

Definitions of a regional qualifications framework (RQF) tend to focus on what they do, rather than what they are. However, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Qualifications Reference Framework (ASEAN 2015: 17) offers the following definition of an RQF:

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

1.2 Scope of qualifications frameworks

In general, a qualifications framework serves as a mechanism for classifying qualifications according to a hierarchy of levels of complexity and, in many cases, it also includes a volume of learning measures.

The scope of frameworks may be **inclusive and comprehensive** (all levels and subsectors of qualifications, learning outcomes and pathways) or may be limited to specific sectors of education – for example, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), known as **sectoral qualifications frameworks**.

Over the last four decades, qualifications frameworks have also been developed at sectoral levels, sometimes within a country, and in other cases between countries but limited to one sector, and at transnational levels. However, the most frequent cases were observed at national and regional levels.

The *Global inventory of regional and national qualifications frameworks* (2017) estimates that at that time there were over 150 NQFs worldwide being developed or implemented. The *Global inventory of regional and national qualifications frameworks* (CEDEFOP, ETF and UNESCO 2019) does not indicate an increase in the number of NQFs, but it does reveal that the ‘numbers of frameworks, national and regional, remain stable, while implementation of most frameworks has deepened and widened since 2017’ (CEDEFOP, ETF and UNESCO 2019: 8).

The *Global inventory of regional and national qualifications frameworks* recognises ‘seven world regions qualifications frameworks’ (CEDEFOP, ETF and UNESCO 2019: 10), with the more recent comparative study of regional qualifications initiatives (ETF 2021) recognising fifteen regional initiatives in addition to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA).

1.3 NQFs and quality assurance

The link with quality assurance processes makes the NQF effective. There are two ways of considering NQFs and related quality assurance schemes. The first is that in some cases a NQF incorporates quality assurance provisions. Secondly, a NQF is simply considered to be a repository or classifier of all qualifications in a country, with little reference to the quality assurance provisions of these qualifications. Quality assurance processes and their governance can be seen as independent from the national framework. In this role, the NQF can be seen as merely establishing the levels and level descriptors to be met by qualifications. The design, assessment and certification arrangements for these qualifications are all independent of the NQF and may be subject to quality assurance independently of a NQF.

1.3.1 Quality assurance of qualifications

[Getting organised for better qualifications](#) – a European Training Foundation (ETF) Toolkit

We focus on four main components of the approach:

- A. Quality qualifications: concepts and characteristics, quality cycle
- B. Minimum criteria for the quality of qualifications
- C. Quality assurance elements from a qualification system perspective: qualification standards, assessment and certification
- D. Qualifications quality chain: the interplay of all phases and outputs towards acquisition of the qualification.

The toolkit compares and distinguishes key characteristics of quality assurance (QA) of providers, compared with quality assurance of awarding qualifications.

A. Quality qualifications: Concepts and characteristics, quality cycle

Comparing key features of QA of providers with QA of qualifications:

Quality assurance of providers	Quality assurance of qualifications
QA measures are focused on institutions	QA measures are focused on the candidates
Making sure the providers are capable of delivering training programmes based on educational standards	Making sure standards behind qualifications are relevant, based on identified needs, validated by stakeholders
Providers are focused on delivering outcomes (getting people to a qualification, getting people into employment)	Making sure everybody who is assessed and will be certified meets the learning outcomes in the standard
QA is focused on the planning, implementation, feedback and improvement within institutions, combined with external verification	QA is focused on assessment and certification, including the assessors, who issues the certificate and who externally regulates/provides QA of awarding bodies
QA is based on the assumption that 'good' learning processes lead to good results	QA is based on actual measurement of what has been learned by the candidate

B. Minimum criteria for the quality of a qualification

How to understand and use the proposed minimum criteria for the quality of qualifications (Figure 1)

1. Relevance for the labour market and individuals

- Involvement of labour market actors in defining needs for a qualification
- Justification that the sector and the occupation has a relevance for a country

2. Standards behind a qualification

- All standards are (learning) outcome-based
- All standards behind a (vocational education and training – VET) qualification should relate to skills and competence requirements for an occupation or a group of occupations
- Involvement of labour market actors in defining the standards of a qualification

3. The learning process

- The learning outcomes relate to the standards behind a qualification (skills and competence requirements for an occupation or a group of occupations)
- The learning process has a substantial practical component for students to acquire skills and competences and not only theoretical knowledge

4. Assessment for certification

- Assessment is based on the standards behind a qualification (skills and competence requirements for an occupation or a group of occupations)
- Assessment has a substantial practical component for students to acquire skills and competences and not only theoretical knowledge
- Trained professionals are involved in assessment of skills and competences

5. Certification

- A numerical level is allocated to the qualification in order to compare the level with related qualifications from other countries
- The certification has national value and is awarded by a competent body (ministry, federation, etc.)
- The qualification allows for progression to further education or training

Figure 1: Key areas: Minimum criteria for the quality of a qualification



C. Focus on the quality assurance elements from a qualification system perspective: Qualification standards, assessment and certification

Focus on certification

The place of certification in the QA of qualifications is not always explicit, holistic and articulated in many qualifications systems. **Certification must be clearly included in QA of qualifications.**

Referring to the findings and recommendation of a study by CEDEFOP:

- The process of certification is defined as ‘the multiple (and sometimes overlapping) processes of assessment and verification of learning that lead to the awarding of a qualification or part thereof. The ultimate goal of a certification process is to ensure that the learner has acquired the required learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competence), which is then certified by the awarding of a qualification’ (2015: 101).
- ‘To strengthen trust in certification, results across the system based on the same qualification standards must be comparable. Comparability of results ensures that holders of the same qualification have actually achieved the learning outcomes required for it and therefore qualifications can be trusted.’

The ETF toolkit endorses the conclusions of CEDEFOP (2015) study, in particular the following important **recommendations on certification**:

1. Clearly articulate certification in VET policies
2. Define and use learning-outcome-based standards appropriately
3. Strengthen involvement of labour market stakeholders in certification and relevant quality assurance processes
4. Support a common understanding of certification requirements among stakeholders
5. Ensure that assessors are competent and trained
6. Share responsibility for quality assurance of certification at all levels
7. Strengthen evaluation and review of certification
8. Consider the possibility of a handbook to apply quality assurance principles in a coherent and holistic way.

D. **Qualifications quality chain: The interplay of all phases and outputs towards acquisition of the qualification**

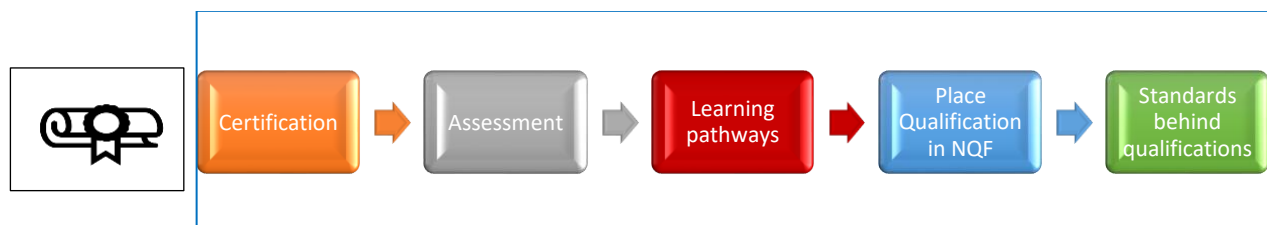
Quality assurance for quality qualifications consists of two broad processes:

1. ensuring that qualifications are relevant and have value; and
2. ensuring that the people who are certificated meet the conditions of the qualification.

The processes, or steps, in the ‘qualifications quality chain’ target these aspects more closely. When building their legal and institutional infrastructure, countries must ensure that quality assurance is not addressed separately but should be an integrated part of developing or reforming that infrastructure, so as not to risk it becoming an afterthought.

Using back-chaining, starting with the intended ultimate (awarded qualification), the ETF toolkit proposes the following chain:

Figure 2: Back-chaining from the final outcome to the start of the process



1.4 Regional qualifications frameworks: Systemic view

Regional qualifications frameworks (RQF) are sometime known as transnational qualifications frameworks, meta frameworks or common reference frameworks. This sub-chapter is based on a new Orientation Note drafted in the context of development of the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ETF. 2021a).

RQFs are developed in communities of countries mainly to facilitate mutual trust in qualifications and to make qualifications systems more understandable. In doing so, they aim to enhance learner and worker mobility and to support other shared initiatives such as credit transfer systems or free trade agreements related to goods and services. For most of the RQFs the basis of these arrangements is within a geographical region (such as the EQF or the Southern African Development Community – SADC) while others are arrangement not in a geographical region (such as the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth Transnational Qualifications Framework – VUSSC TQF).

RQFs that are common reference frameworks or meta frameworks have very different functions to that of NQFs.

NQFs generally aim to make a country's qualifications system more transparent and coherent, either reflecting the current status or taking a reform and transformational function (CEDEFOP 2010). CEDEFOP (2010: 5) also acknowledges that 'designing and implementing an NQF implies something more than agreeing on a set of technical features, for example a hierarchy of levels of learning or a register of certificates and diploma. Setting up an NQF is about creating a platform for dialogue involving as broad a group of stakeholders as possible.'

While qualifications frameworks are mainly known for their national applications, and hence NQFs, RQFs come from communities of countries, with the aim of facilitating mutual trust in qualifications and promoting student and worker mobility. Therefore, they are linked to other initiatives related to the mutual recognition of qualifications, mobility and free trade of goods and services.

ETF (2021) groups the objectives of RQFs into three partially interlinked areas:

- mobility (of workers and learners);
- quality/quality assurance; and
- harmonisation towards comparability and transparency.

Continental integration, free trade, free movement of people and businesses and valorisation of multiple ways and paths to learning and acquisition of skills of qualifications are the major drivers for the development of the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF).

RQFs are seen more as a translation device by which countries can compare their qualifications (Bateman and Coles 2015: 15). They aim to develop a common understanding and strengthen transparency of member country qualifications, seek commonalities and build mutual trust across the community of countries. Countries that have a regional, economic or social identity, or wish to see one develop, have cooperated in the development of RQFs.

RQF characteristics vary considerably in their objectives, sector coverage, design and use. Some RQFs act as a common reference framework (for example, the EQF and the ASEAN Qualification Reference Framework – AQR), while others are extended and aim to establish common standards, be they qualifications or skills standards (for example, the Caribbean Community, CARICOM, and SADC, a Quality Assurance Area and the Quality Assurance Area), which includes quality assurance and quality standards.

The relationship and interplay between NQFs and RQFs is shaped by the objectives, mutually advantageous benefits and governance modalities in place. It is important to note:

- RQFs do not replace NQFs or reduce in anyway the scope of the national approach, nor do they diminish the sovereignty of the individual members within the community of countries;
- RQFs respect well-established national traditions while providing a clear basis for mutual recognition and labour mobility;
- RQFs have a coordinating effect and this is often due to the guidance offered to countries on the commonalities and differences between the national approach and the approaches in other countries;
- one of the main objectives of a RQF is to 'enable NQFs and national qualifications systems to align or "talk" to each other'; and
- many countries have a long-established qualifications system (not necessarily qualifications frameworks), others are engaged in reform processes, and a common reference framework will strengthen common understanding and cooperation.

An RQF could be defined as a means of enabling a qualifications framework to be linked to others and, subsequently, to a qualification to be linked to others that are normally in another framework, or as a broad structure of levels of learning outcomes that is agreed by the countries of a geographical region.

All RQFs aim to have some transformational influence on NQFs or systems. Most RQFs aim to promote lifelong learning, a learning-outcomes approach to qualifications, to improve the quality of qualifications and encourage harmonisation. However, it is possible that RQFs may wish to influence aspects of qualifications frameworks within member countries and in turn the qualifications formulated. Regardless, the aim to transform NQFs or systems is by mutual agreement and articulated in the design of the RQF.

Table 1 provides a summary of the different functions and justifications of regional and national qualifications frameworks.

Table 1: Functions and justifications of national and regional qualifications frameworks

Feature for comparison	Qualifications framework type	
	National	Regional
Principal function	Serve as a reference for the level of learning recognised in the national qualifications system	Serve as a translation facility for comparing qualifications levels between member states
Developed by	National governments, in many cases through national agencies set up for this purpose	Countries in a region acting jointly, mostly with the help of a regional body or a regional association
Sensitive to	Local, national and regional priorities (for example, literacy levels and labour market needs)	Collective priorities in member countries (for example, enabling mobility of learners and workers across borders)
Value depends on	Degree of regulatory compliance required; the degree of ownership of key actors (such as industry, educational institutions and professional associations); the perceived or actual value for the whole population	Level of trust between member countries; transparency of national quality assurance systems; mutually agreed regional priorities
Quality guaranteed by	Adherence to nationally agreed quality assurance systems, as illustrated by the practices of national bodies and educational institutions	The common application of referencing criteria and guidelines, as well as the robustness and transparency of the national referencing process and of national quality assurance systems
Levels defined by reference to	National benchmarks, which can be integrated in different learning contexts, such as school education, work or higher education	General progress in learning in all contexts, applicable to all countries

1.5 Understanding level descriptors

Level descriptors: The 'glue' in qualifications frameworks?

In NQFs and RQFs, each of the levels is described by a set of *descriptors*, which indicate the learner acquisitions (not the years of study). *Level descriptors* are formulated on the basis of horizontal logic

(through the domains of learning) and vertical logic (progression from lower to higher levels). Level descriptors of NQFs and RQFs translate the nature and scope of the qualifications framework.

In the document *Level Descriptors for the South African National Qualifications Framework* (SAQA 2012), the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) states that the purpose of level descriptors (levels 1 to 10) is to ensure coherence in learning achievement in the allocation of qualifications and part qualifications to particular levels, and to facilitate the assessment of the national and international comparability of qualifications and part qualifications.

SAQA (2012) defines *level descriptors* as follows:

‘Level descriptor’ means that statement describing learning achievement at a particular level of the NQF that provides a broad indication of the types of learning outcomes and assessment criteria that are appropriate to a qualification at that level (SAQA 2012: 4).

In addition, SAQA (2012) notes:

- there is one common set of level descriptors for the NQF to be used in different contexts;
- the NQF level descriptors are designed to meet the needs of academic as well as occupational qualifications;
- level descriptors are descriptive and not prescriptive; and
- level descriptors do not describe years of study.

The AQRF notes that learning outcomes are:

A general statement that summarises the learning outcomes appropriate to a specific level in a qualifications framework. They are usually grouped in domains of learning (2018: 31).

Level descriptors are formulated as learning outcomes, which are statements of what the learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to do at completion of a process and period of learning.

1.5.1 Uses and formulation of level descriptors

Level descriptors are fundamental elements of the technical-conceptual design of qualifications frameworks.

Level descriptors are designed to act as a guide and a starting point for, inter alia:

- pegging a qualification at an appropriate level on the NQF, used together with purpose statements, outcomes and assessment criteria;
- writing learning outcomes and associated assessment criteria for qualifications and part qualifications;
- validation of acquired skills, knowledge and competence against a particular level for an award; and
- assisting learners to gain admission through RPL at an appropriate level on the NQF (SAQA 2012: 4–5).

The General Directorate of National Qualifications Framework of the Kingdom of Bahrain (n.d.) published a guidance note, [Using the NQF level descriptors](#), clarifying how the role of level descriptors can be optimised in the real work of qualifications developers and assessors, noting their possibilities and limitations. A few suggestions from Bahrain’s guidance note:

NQF level descriptors are used along with other sources of information to place qualifications on the NQF. Other sources, which will become more widely available as qualifications, are placed on

the NQF, include subject benchmarks, qualifications at the same level, and comparable qualifications on other frameworks.

NQF level descriptors are not qualification specifications. On the contrary, while level descriptors confirm learning outcomes for a series of predefined characteristics, qualification specifications (descriptors) set out:

- What the learner is expected to do on successful completion of the qualification on the qualification structure i.e. level and number of units
- The minimum number and level of credits required at each level.

The NQF level descriptors are generic and equally applicable to academic, vocational and work-based qualifications. There will be qualifications with units that comprise learning outcomes at different levels, and it may also be that one or more of the sub-strands does not appear in particular units. A best-fit approach is used to determine the level of the units of a qualification on the NQF.

Professional judgement can be assisted by reading and becoming familiar with the level descriptors in order to make an informed determination as to where a qualification sits and to provide supporting rationales that can be understood by others who may not be expert in the subject/discipline area.

Although level descriptors can act as a useful guide when designing qualifications, it is not recommended that the design of a qualification be based solely on these descriptors. It is important that qualifications are designed to meet the needs of learners and other stakeholders such as employers, universities and training institutions.

To help with interpretation of the level descriptors, the Bahrain Qualifications Authority developed a glossary of words and terms in which the meaning is provided specifically in relation to the NQF. To become familiar with the progressive nature of the language being used, it can be useful to consider and compare key words used within the level descriptors.

The Bahrain Qualifications Authority provides guidance on the formulation of progression between levels. An example:

At Level 4, learners would not cover all the theories of the subject/discipline, only some of them, with a decision on the eventual number being covered left to those designing the qualification. At Level 5, learners would cover more of the main theories. Theories are not directly referenced in Level 6, being already covered in Levels 4 and 5, but this does not prevent the continuance of activity relating to core theories at Level 6. At Level 7, learners would study more in-depth theories that are central to the subject/discipline.

1.5.2 Level descriptors: An overview from African qualifications frameworks

This section provides a synthetic mapping on level descriptors of 22 NQFs and 2 RQFs in Africa, based on the ACQF mapping study collection, and original country and regional sources (refer to Sources).

Domains of level descriptors

Many qualifications frameworks specify the meaning of their domains of learning:

- South African National Qualifications Framework (SANQF)
- France NQF
- Lesotho NQF
- EQF
- AQRf.

Table 2: Definitions of domains of level descriptors – examples

NQFs

	Domain
SANQF	<p>The philosophical underpinning of the NQF and the level descriptors is ‘applied competence’, which is in line with the outcomes-based theoretical framework. Ten categories are used in the level descriptors to define ‘applied competencies’ across the ten levels of the NQF:</p> <p>1) Scope of knowledge; 2) knowledge literacy; 3) method and procedure; 4) problem solving; 5) ethics and professional practice; 6) accessing, processing and managing information; 7) producing and communicating of information; 8) context and systems; 9) management of learning; and 10) accountability.</p> <p>‘Applied competence’ has three constituent elements: a) foundational competence (intellectual/academic skills of knowledge, together with analysis, synthesis and evaluation); b) practical competence (operational context); c) reflexive competence (learner autonomy).</p>

France NQF	<p><u>Knowledge</u></p> <p>The descriptor refers to the progression of knowledge to carry out the professional activities of the level (processes, materials, terminology relating to one or more fields as well as theoretical knowledge)</p>	<p><u>Expertise</u></p> <p>The descriptor is about progression on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The complexity and technicality of a task, an activity in a process - The level of mastery of professional activity - Mobilising a range of cognitive and practical skills - Expertise in the field of communication and interpersonal relations, in the professional context - The ability to pass on know-how 	<p><u>Responsibility and autonomy</u></p> <p>The descriptor relates to progress in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The organisation of work - Reaction to contingency - Understanding the complexity of the environment - Understanding interactions in activities in other professional fields, allowing you to organise your own work, correct it or give directions to supervised staff - Participation in collective work - The level of supervision
Lesotho NQF	<p><u>Knowledge</u></p> <p>Areas: Depth, breadth and complexity</p> <p>This NQF applies notions of depth that operate on a continuum from general to specialised; breadth (single topic to multidisciplinary areas of knowledge); kinds of knowledge (concrete – abstract and segmented to accumulative); and lastly, complexity (combinations of kinds of depth and breadth of knowledge), as the criteria and lens of inquiry</p>	<p><u>Skills</u></p> <p>Nature: covering competencies of graduates</p>	<p><u>Agency and context</u></p> <p>Personal and professional attributes expected to be displayed by graduates</p>

RQFs

EQF	<p><u>Knowledge</u></p> <p>Knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual</p>	<p><u>Skills</u></p> <p>Skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments)</p>	<p><u>Responsibility and autonomy</u></p> <p>Responsibility and autonomy are described as the ability of the learner to apply knowledge and skills autonomously and with responsibility</p>
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AQRF	Knowledge and skills	Application and responsibility
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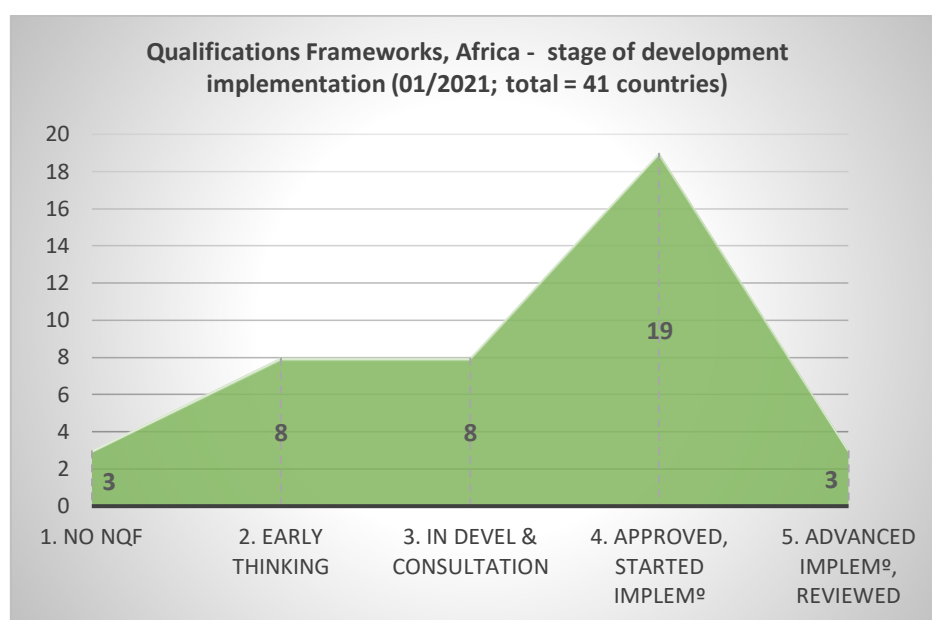
In the AQRF the level descriptors include the notion of competence as the ability to extend beyond the possession of knowledge and skills. It includes:

- cognitive competence: involving the use of theory and concepts, as well as informal tacit knowledge gained experientially;
- functional competence (skills or know-how); those things that a person should be able to do when they work in a given area;
- personal competence: involving knowing how to conduct oneself in a specific situation; and
- ethical competence: involving the possession of certain personal and professional values.

Overview of levels and level descriptors in a selection of African NQFs

The roots of the ACQF are the African NQFs – national and regional, with their diversity and multiple points of intersection. NQFs in Africa are at different stages of development and implementation (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Overview: Distribution of qualifications frameworks by stages of development and implementation in Africa (2021)



Source: Dataset of ACQF mapping study (ACQF 2021a)

A summarised comparison of levels and level descriptors in African NQFs and RQFs (Table 3) provides a general view of important commonalities, as well as differences, which matter for the development of ACQF levels and descriptors.

It is worth noting the predominance of NQFs of ten levels and of the domains Knowledge-skills-competence and Knowledge-skills-autonomy and responsibility.

Table 3: Overview of levels and domains of level descriptors in a selection of 24 African qualifications frameworks (national comprehensive; sectoral – TVET and higher education; regional)

Key: K (Knowledge); S (Skills); AR or RA (Autonomy, responsibility); C (Competence); A (Attitude)

Country	Type of qualifications framework	Number of levels of the qualification framework	Domains of level descriptors
Qualifications framework lead body			

Angola UTG-PNFQ	National, comprehensive. In approval process	10	K-S-AR
Botswana Botswana Qualifications Authority	Botswana National Credit and Qualifications Framework – comprehensive	10	K-S-C
Cape Verde Unidade de Coordenação-Sistema Nacional de Qualificações (UC-SNQ)	National, comprehensive. In 2018 was reviewed legislation on the NQS and in 2020 on the NQF and National Catalogue of Qualifications.	8	K-S-Attitudes (Responsibility and Autonomy)
Egypt National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation (NAQAAE)	National, comprehensive. In approval process	8	K and Understanding-S-C
eSwatini Higher Education Council	National, comprehensive	10	K-S-Personal attitudes
Ethiopia	a) TVET QF b) National, comprehensive NQF	5 8	a) Problem solving capability/information processing; level of accountability, responsibility and autonomy; level of knowledge and skills; level of tasks/operational environment b) K-S-A
Ghana COTVET (Council for TVET)	National TVET Qualifications Framework	8	Knowledge; requirements (skills and attitudes)
Kenya Kenya National Qualifications Authority (KNQA)	National, comprehensive	10	K-S-C
Lesotho Lesotho Qualifications and Quality Council	National, comprehensive	10	Areas of knowledge (depth, breadth, complexity); nature of skills (covering competencies of graduates); agency and context
Malawi	a) TVET QF - TQF (since 2004) b) Higher education QF (draft) c) Comprehensive NQF (in development)	8 5 10	Level descriptors higher education qualifications framework and comprehensive NQF – in development
Mauritius Mauritius Qualifications Authority (MQA)	National, comprehensive	10	Learning demand – processes
Morocco NQF Instance - Ministry National Education Vocational Training Higher Educations and Scientific Research	National, comprehensive. In development process	8	Knowledge, skills, complexity, autonomy-responsibility, adaptability, communication

Mozambique Conselho Nacional da Avaliação de Qualidade do Ensino Superior (CNAQ) Autoridade Nacional da Educação Profissional (ANEP) – TVET	a) Comprehensive NQF (in consultation) b) Higher education: QUANCES c) TVET: QNQP	10 3 5	a) Integrated NQF: K-S-AR; b) Higher education QF: K-S-C; c) TVET QF: K-S-AR
Nigeria National Board for Technical Education (NBTE)	TVET: National Skills Framework	6	Competence, skills, autonomy
Rwanda	a) Rwanda NQF – comprehensive b) Rwanda Education Qualifications Framework (REQF) – in review, development	8 10	Knowledge and understanding; practice; applied knowledge and understanding; generic cognitive skills; communication, ICT and numeracy skills; autonomy, responsibility and working with other
Seychelles Seychelles Qualifications Authority (SQA)	National, comprehensive	10	Degree of complexity; reasoning & problem solving; knowledge; AR
South Africa SAQA	National, comprehensive	10	Applied competencies: scope of knowledge; knowledge literacy; method and procedure; problem solving; ethics and professional practice; accessing, processing and managing information; producing and communicating information; context and systems; management of learning; accountability
Tanzania Tanzania Commission for Universities	Higher education	5 (6 to 10)	Complexity, autonomy, responsibility, adaptability, knowledge and behaviour
Tunisia Ministry of Vocational Training and Labour	National, comprehensive	7	Complexity, autonomy, responsibility, adaptability, knowledge and behaviour
Uganda BTJET	TVET: Uganda Vocational Qualifications Framework (UVQF)	5 + 1 entry level	Domains not segregated, and include: knowledge, skills, autonomy, control
Zambia Zambia Qualifications Authority (ZQA)	National, comprehensive	10	Foundational competence; practical competence; reflexive competence
Zimbabwe National Alignment Committee	National, comprehensive	10	Domains not segregated and include: knowledge, skills, autonomy, control
SADCQF SADC Secretariat, TCCA	Regional, comprehensive	10	K-S-AR
East Africa Community EAQFHE	Regional, comprehensive – higher education part in implementation.	8	Development of knowledge and understanding; cognitive and intellectual skills; key transferable skills; practical skills

Consultation of the original legal and policy texts defining the qualifications frameworks of the indicated African countries is useful to stimulate reflection on differences and similarities in addressing the role and place of level descriptors, and their linkage with the objectives and components of the qualifications frameworks.

A number of issues need to be considered in further development and design of ACQF level descriptors. Firstly, the underlying theories in writing learning outcomes should be clearly identified – namely, the result-oriented behaviouristic approach and the process-oriented constructivist one – and their assumptions regarding learner acquisition. Their interplay in describing levels of learning outcomes is key as learning acquisitions increase and accumulate. The supposed tension between the two theories occurs in the case of an approach that opposes one to the other, instead of complementing one another, in engineering the hierarchy in levels' progression.

1.6 Learning outcomes

The use of learning outcomes has become pervasive at international level. Many definitions of learning outcomes can be found, but what is common to most of them is the focus on describing learning in specific fields on continents:

- Africa: End products of contextually demonstrated learning processes that include knowledge, skills and values ([NQFpedia](#))
- Asia: The AQR is a hierarchy of levels of complexity of learning that uses learning outcomes as the metric system of the hierarchy (AQR 2018)
- Europe: Statements by what a learner knows, understands and is able to do after completing his/her learning (CEDEFOP 2016, 2017)

An important distinction is also made between the description of the intended learning and the description of the learning achieved. This distinction is illustrated by the application of learning outcomes in level descriptors, qualifications, qualification profiles, professional standards and increasingly also in curricula, courses and curricula (see Table 2). There are also future considerations. All forms of learning (formal, non-formal and informal) could be taken into account through learning outcomes, but application beyond the formal system is limited to forms of validation of learning outcomes / recognition of prior learning, which are mostly small and complex to implement. As stated in the recent report of the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) on the adoption of a culture of lifelong learning:

Education provision must include providers that increase social and individual demand for a wider range of knowledge and skills and multiply potential learning pathways. This includes micro-education offers and digital, mobile and blended learning activities (UIL 2020: 22).

At the most abstract level, learning outcomes are used in level descriptors that provide general indications on levels (vertical progression) and areas (horizontal differentiation) of learning to guide the development of qualifications in a sector, country or region. In turn, qualifications provide a hierarchy for school and learning curricula to be developed in a more coherent and comparable way. The vertical dimension, often between eight and ten levels, is guided by the use of taxonomies, while the horizontal dimension is mainly classified into three and five learning areas. These dimensions are described in detail below and form the basis for a more structured and conceptually coherent formulation of learning outcomes in these applications. Although areas vary, the concept has been used in most level descriptors. The vertical hierarchy, using taxonomies, is less well used, mainly through intuition rather than science. In section 3, we apply taxonomies to a selected group of level descriptors and qualifications to demonstrate this point. A key discovery is the need for a high degree of validity and reliability of these methods of analysis. The

shift towards more and more automation and interoperability and the use of machine learning are certainly promising for the future.

Before moving to the categorical harmonisation presented below, it is important to take into account the strong influences of the underlying philosophical approaches that influence the formulation of learning outcomes. Again, this is something that is often ignored, or at best, implicitly done. The two main theories that influence the formulation of learning outcomes are behaviorism and constructivism. The first focuses on what can be observed, while the second focuses more on the process and structure. Most qualifications frameworks have been strongly influenced by the behaviorism paradigm and this can be made more apparent, and to some extent more balanced, by the use of taxonomies with an underlying constructive approach, such as the taxonomy of the Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome (SOLO). The same problem arises in the use of the terms competency and aptitude and should not be seen as a mere linguistic preference.

Learning outcomes are the common currency and are used at all levels to describe demonstrable end-learning products in their context. Level descriptors are also described through learning outcomes and provide the hierarchy of qualifications to be structured at levels defined within a qualifications framework. Learning programmes are developed at the level of education and training providers who add specific evaluation and content dimensions, guide the designer of the course and curriculum, and ultimately also the learner who completes the learning. At the most detailed level, a study programme provides information on a very contextual content and may include specific manuals and duties. At the highest level, a skills title is a combination of the different types of learning a person acquires during his or her life and includes formal, non-formal and informal learning. Examples include curriculum vitae, professional designations (linked to obtaining a licence) and, increasingly, digital passports.

1.7 NQFs and RQFs in a world in transformation

The landscape of jobs, as well as their accompanying skills requirements and competences, is rapidly changing. The transformation of tasks, occupations and the organisation of work is creating a demand for new sets of skills, displacing existing jobs as well as giving rise to wholly new ones. Strategies for empowering job transitions from declining to emerging roles are being devised (WEF 2020a), modelling the opportunities for job transitions to new professions on the basis of skills similarity (adjacency) between a worker's current and future roles, as well as the reskilling investment. A shift to a skill-based hiring system focused on lifelong learning requires more flexible modalities of learning, of recognition of learning and certification. Countries are grappling with the need for more effective skills intelligence providing real-time insights for skills-development policies and practices, and for more responsive lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Qualifications are changing, and education and training institutions must open up to new types of learning, be learner-centred, and recognise learning outcomes from non-formal and informal contexts. New concepts and instruments, such as micro-credentials, and digital technologies to recognise learning (digital certificates) are gradually becoming part of the mainstream reality of our education and training systems.

Qualifications frameworks contributing to transition and transformation of learning

The 'Top Skills for 2025' (WEF 2020b) are changing, with new top skills moving up the list, as highlighted earlier in this report.

The twin green and digital transitions have strong skills dimensions, which every skills development and qualifications system must recognise and address.

Debates linked with the ACQF peer-learning webinars in 2020 included a discussion of the role of NQFs in the context of the great transformations of our time. In one of the debates, John O'Connor (Quality and

Qualifications, Ireland) shared a useful contribution, which we want to highlight here. There are features of NQFs that may be of assistance as countries plan their recovery, particularly job-recovery strategies. Recognition of prior learning (RPL) may well attract increased attention. So too the prospect of qualifications frameworks opening up to non-formal qualifications, including micro-credentials, which seem to be appearing everywhere. Many labour market policy responses are looking at fast, flexible skill solutions, not always suited to the slower pace of NQFs.

Inequality and the associated digital divide is a major issue – qualifications and their delivery are going to have to be more accessible for everyone if online delivery continues to play a significant part in TVET and higher education qualifications.

Quality assurance matters as the shift to more remote delivery of qualifications poses questions about academic integrity and standards. The learning outcomes approach (agnostic on location) may have been helpful in facilitating the shift to online assessment, though it is too early to tell.

The role of NQFs in the context of Covid-19 might usefully be unpacked under these three headings:

- recognition (individual learning achievements and newer forms of certification);
- accessibility (NQFs could do more to insist on access as a principle for qualifications to be included); and
- quality assurance of NQFs and constituent qualifications, so that Covid-19 does not present a threat to the quality, reputation or recognition status.

Principles underpinning NQFs may come to be just as important as technical features – fairness, transparency, quality, equality and relevance.

Most important is that NQFs, or rather their design, implementation and use by stakeholders, don't make things worse for citizens. NQFs as policy instruments are only one of many that policymakers will need to employ in a coherent response to these wide issues.

NQFs and RQFs must respond through their ability to embrace the twin transition (green and digital), to foster inclusion by valuing all forms of learning, to be a catalyst for better qualifications systems and frameworks across the continent and to contribute to transparency and credibility of education and qualifications globally.

2. Peer sharing: Virtual travel in six countries — six NQFs

2.1 Mutual learning in policymaking

An effective way of reviewing our own system or context is to look at it from an external point of view, or through normally unused angles. Comparison with other experiences, based on selected criteria and features, provides a pragmatic and affordable approach to identify significant similarities and differences, to highlight trends and transformation and to understand the factors and conditions underlying certain features of a system such as qualification frameworks. The ETF organised a benchmarking and peer-learning programme with six countries and Morocco, in December 2020 and January 2021.¹

Any decision-maker responsible for developing, setting up and equipping an NQF must promote a process of dialogue with the stakeholders and institutions of the ecosystem in which the NQF will operate, and is faced with choices about what will be the centre of gravity of the NQF's action, its role and its contribution to change and they must also address any challenges. In such reflection processes, learning with countries/institutions rich in their (short or long) NQF history is an invaluable source of references and guidance. Useful questions are:

- How are NQFs emerging in different country contexts?
- How do they relate to the wider education and training system?
- How do NQFs in different countries differ in terms of objectives, functions and position in the ecosystem?
- How are NQFs working on performance, changing the education/training system?
- How are NQFs governed, managed, operationalised and funded?

Three main criteria underscored the selection of countries for comparison (Table 4):

1. The NQF is at an advanced operational stage;
2. Diversity of NQF governance structures models; and
3. International links (RQFs).

Table 4: Selection criteria for the six countries/NQFs

Country	RQF at advanced stage of implementation	NQF governance model	Regions/countries of interest
France	Long experience (since 1972), 3th NQF generation	Directorate for Professional Certification — within France Skills	Referenced to the EQF
Bahrain	Recent experience: Royal Decree No. 83 of 2013, operational since 2014	Directorate-General for the NQF and Examination — Directorate of the NQF: BQA	Member of the Arab Regional Framework (AQF) Referenced to the Scottish NQF
Namibia	Long experience: Law 1996, Regulations 2006	Namibian Qualifications Authority (NQA)	Member of SADCQF (Southern Africa)
Ireland	Long experience: Law 1999	Quality Qualifications Ireland QQI	Referenced to the EQF
Kenya	Recent experience: Act of 2014, Regulations of 2018	Kenya National Qualifications Authority (KNQA), established in 2015	Member of the East African Qualifications Framework (EAQFHE)

¹ Detailed information on this benchmarking, including all reports and presentations: <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/nqfs-learning-materials/6-nqfs-governance-models>

Portugal	Long experience: NQF created in 2007, regulation in 2009, in force since 2010	ANQEP IP : Decree-Law No. 36/2012	Referenced to the EQF
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Benchmarking topics

- The NQF in the ecosystem
 - o Objectives and functions
 - o Concepts, principles
 - o Role in the qualifications system
- Implementation of the NQF
 - o NQF level levels and descriptors
 - o Status, organisation, management and financing of the NQF Panel
 - o Partners
 - o Communication
- NQF processes
 - o Registration and directories
 - o Quality assurance
 - o Analysis and research

2.2 Overview of the main features of the NQF

NQF in the ecosystem

The six NQFs presented were designed for different contexts: Europe, Africa and the Middle East. They share similar traits, and at the same time feature a number of distinguishing characteristics.

Two of these NQFs have a young story (created and implemented around 2014: Kenya and Bahrain), while three of them have a history of operationalisation and refinements of more than two decades (France, Ireland and Namibia). Portugal's NQF emerged in 2007 with the adoption of the legal text of the NQF, but the effective implementation and reform path started in 2010.

Objectives

NQFs are associated with a series of strategic and political objectives, which can be grouped according to whether they relate to:

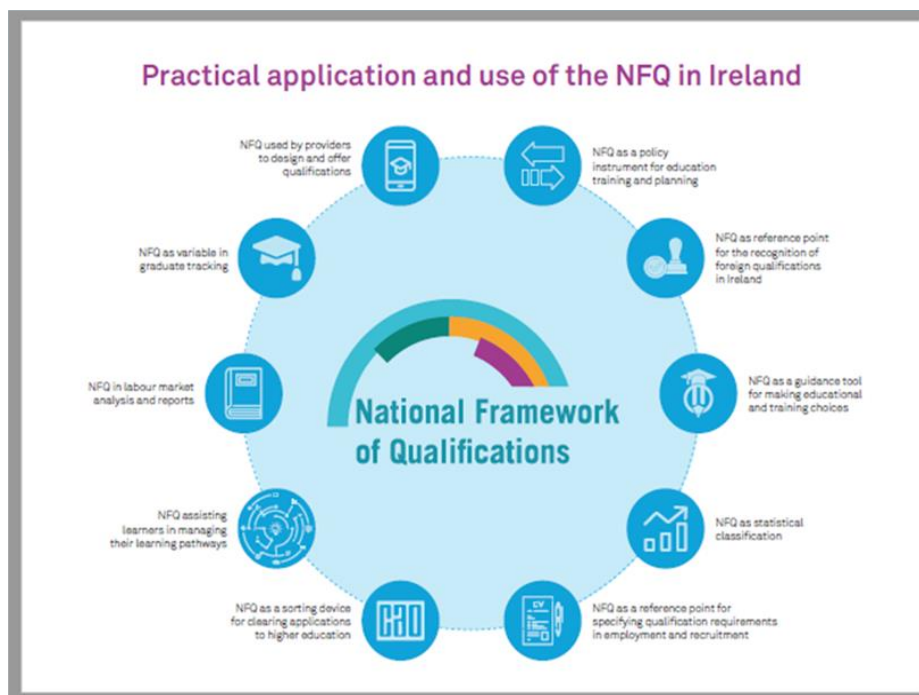
- Improving transparency, comparability and transferability of qualifications;
- Integration, coherence and permeability between learning outcomes and sub-systems' qualifications; link to systems of accumulation and transfer of credits;
- Quality, credibility, greater visibility and end-user confidence: Introducing approaches based on learning outcomes, stakeholder involvement in the development and approval of qualifications, and accessibility to information by users through digital and online instruments;
- The clarity of the overview of the country's qualifications: value and significance of the various qualifications, diplomas, certificates and their relationship;
- The parity of the judgement and the value of learning in different contexts and subsystems: academic, professional, formal and non-formal;
- Inclusion: Qualifications can be obtained through validation of non-formal learning, recognition of work experience and life, accessible to people with little schooling;
- Comparability and regional and global recognition of diplomas and certificates; mobility and portability of skills/qualifications (complete or partial) between countries; and

- Wider societal and economic objectives, in particular: increasing the pool of skilled labour, improving the employability of qualification holders, enhancing the competitiveness and productivity of economic sectors, aligning the qualifications system with demand and changing skill needs.

Some NQFs have a strategic orientation towards employment and lifelong learning (France), while others aim to help raise the educational and skills levels of the population (Portugal). In some cases, the NQF has a strong orientation towards internationalisation of education, in particular higher education (Ireland, Kenya and also Bahrain).

A visualisation of the Irish NQF provides a broad overview of the applications and functions of the NQF in society (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Practical use of the Irish NQF



Source: Presentation of 21/01/2021, CNC Morocco

Concepts and principles

- The primacy of the learning outcomes approach is a fundamental common principle of all NQFs.
- Learning outcomes are the link/bridge between the language of occupations and jobs and that of education and training, and also the link between benchmarks – training programmes – assessment of learning outcomes.
- Some NQFs are explicitly designed as pillars of the qualifications system (Portugal) and work in complementarity with other components: (i) the qualifications repository, (ii) the system for validating the acquired experience, (iii) the quality assurance of qualifications, and (iv) the system for anticipating skills/qualifications needs. This holistic view of the qualifications system promotes a positive role and integration of the NQF in relation to the ecosystem.
- Governance: The nature of any NQF requires the involvement of a broad base of partners from different sectors of education and training, employment, economy and society. France, Portugal and Kenya provide examples and practices on the involvement of partners and stakeholders in

governance, the development of qualifications and decisions on positioning in relation to the NQF/Repertoire.

- Increasing focus on beneficiaries and users is part of the functions of NQF management bodies (and partners): Communication, online services/digital channels, technical and methodological guides, information brochures and videos on the benefits and opportunities offered by the NQF for different target groups, labour market recognition of NQF levels (job vacancies), among others.

2.3 Architecture of NQFs

The level structure of NQFs varies, depending on their scope and the underlying education system. The Scottish NQF has 12 levels, while those in Ireland and Slovenia have 10 levels, but the majority of NQFs in Europe have a structure at 8 levels. On the African continent, the majority of operational NQFs have 10 levels (Southern and East Africa), while in West Africa there are 8-level NQFs. The Australian NQF, one of the oldest, has been reviewed and restructured from 10 to 8 levels.

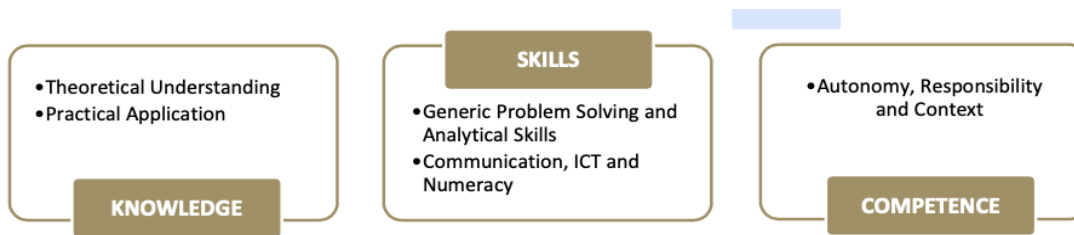
In the benchmarking sample, all NQFs are exhaustive and inclusive (all sub-systems and levels). Their level structures and level descriptors differ (Table 5).

Table 5: Architecture of the six NQFs

	Levels	Level descriptors (domains)	The place of recognition of learning in non-formal and informal contexts
France	8	Knowledge, skills, responsibility and autonomy	VAE – an integral part and requirement of the registration of qualifications in the Repertoire. Any registered qualification must be obtainable via VAE
Bahrain	10	Knowledge, skills, competence	Recognised, developing
Namibia	10	The learning skills used when learning. The type of knowledge acquired in learning. How the learning would normally be described. The situations in which learning would normally be described. The degree of supervision required when acquired knowledge and abilities are recognised. The responsibility for own actions when a learner demonstrates abilities acquired through learning. The responsibility to be taken for and over others as a result of learning.	Recognised, in application
Ireland	10	Knowledge, skills, competence	Recognised but poorly developed
Kenya	10	Knowledge, skills, competence	Recognised and in strong development
Portugal	8	Knowledge, skills, attitude	RVCC – well developed; RVCC benchmarks included in the National Catalogue of Certifications; Network of Qualifica Centres; ‘Qualifica’ passport

The definition of each area of level descriptors is fundamental to comparing NQFs from different countries and structures. The following examples (NQF Bahrain and NQF France) explain the concept and content of each of the domains.

Figure 5: Bahrain NQF – the components of the three domains of learning of level descriptors



Source: Referencing report of the Scottish NQF and the Bahrain NQF, 2018

<https://www.bqa.gov.bh/En/Publications/DocLib/BQA-NQF%20SCQF%20Referencing%20Report%20October%202018-%20for%20publishing.pdf>

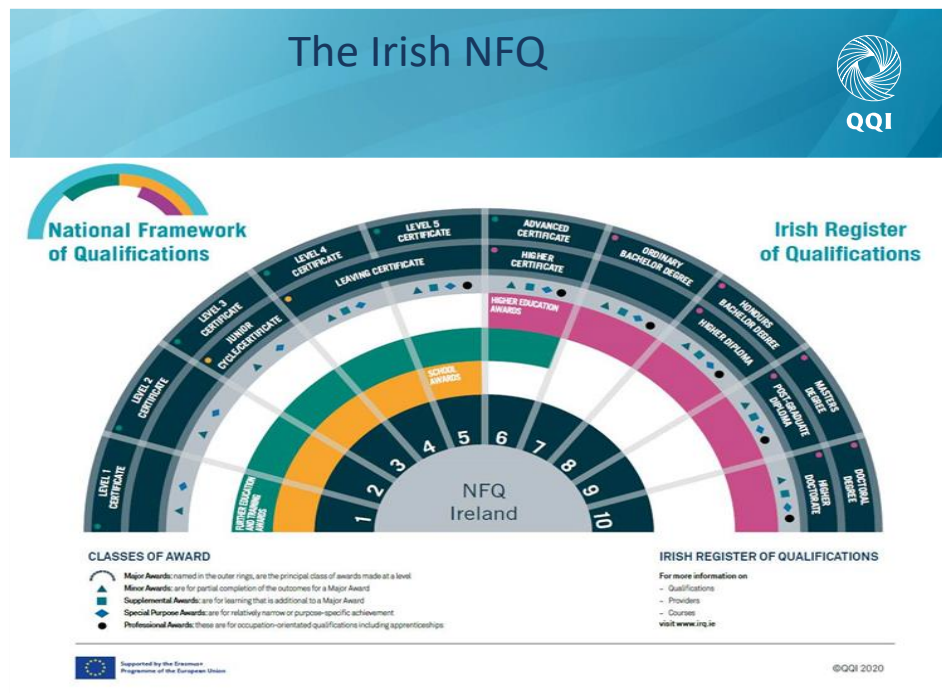
Table 6: France — National Framework for Professional Qualifications (2019): Levels and descriptors

Note that descriptors must be read both vertically and horizontally: In terms of progression of the same descriptor (*vertical progression*), in terms of consistency between descriptors on the same line (*overall consistency of the level*).

Level	Knowledge	Skills	Responsibility and autonomy
	The descriptor concerns progress in knowledge to carry out professional activities at the level (processes, materials, terminology relating to one or more fields as well as theoretical knowledge)	The descriptor concerns progress: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The complexity and technicality of a task, an activity in a process - Level of proficiency in professional activity - Mobilisation of a range of cognitive and practical skills - Know-how in the field of communication and interpersonal relations, in the professional context - The ability to transmit know-how 	The descriptor concerns progress in the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organisation of work - Reaction to random - Understanding the complexity of the environment - Understanding interactions in activities in other fields of work, enabling them to organise their own work, correct it or give guidance to managers - Participation in collective work - Management level
1			
2	Basic general knowledge and general knowledge specific to a field of activity	Carry out simple activities and solve common problems using simple rules and tools by mobilising some professional know-how in a structural context	Work under supervision, with a limited degree of autonomy Report on its contribution to the working group
3	Knowledge covering general facts, principles, processes and concepts in a given field of activity	Carry out activities and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information, in a known context	Organise work in a generally stable environment Adapt the means of implementation and its behaviour to the circumstances Assess its contribution to the working group
4	Wide range of practical and theoretical knowledge related to a given field of work.	Carry out activities requiring the mobilisation of a wide range of skills Be able to adapt existing solutions to specific problems	Organise his/her work autonomously in contexts that are generally predictable but likely to change Take into account interactions with related activities Participate in the evaluation of activities
5	Expert and in-depth knowledge, regularly updated	Mastering know-how in a field of activity, the limits of which are known, in order to develop solutions to new problems Analyse and interpret information, using concepts Transfer know-how and methods	Take initiatives to manage projects or carry out activities in an unforeseen context Mentoring a team Manage a unit Self-assessment of his/her own performance
6	Advanced knowledge in a professional field Critical understanding of theories and principles	Analyse and solve unforeseen complex problems in a specific area Identify solutions and argue them Collaborate with experts	Organise work in complex and changing environments Design and organise work processes Developing the individual and collective skills of his/her team
7	Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in one field and at the interface of several areas of work	Develop alternative strategies for business development Lead working groups in interdisciplinary or specialised areas, where appropriate in a multicultural context	Organise and develop activities by integrating scientific, societal and ethical issues Initiate and conduct professional collaborations Supervise the work of others

			Managing the transformation of complex professional contexts Assess the risks and consequences of his/her activity
8	Knowledge at the forefront of a field of work or study and interface between several fields	Identify and solve complex and new problems involving a variety of fields, mobilising the most advanced knowledge and know-how Design and steer research and innovation projects and processes Make innovative contributions in high-level exchanges and in international contexts	Manage and steer organisations or groups in complex or interdisciplinary activities Manage complex situations leading to significant changes in organisations Assess and anticipate possible consequences in the fields impacted

Figure 6: Ireland: The structure and qualifications of the NQF (classes and types)



Source: Presentation of 21/01/2021, CNC Morocco

2.4 Qualifications management information systems

International practice indicates that the establishment of databases or registers of qualifications contributes to making NQFs operational, improving transparency, dissemination and use by the public.

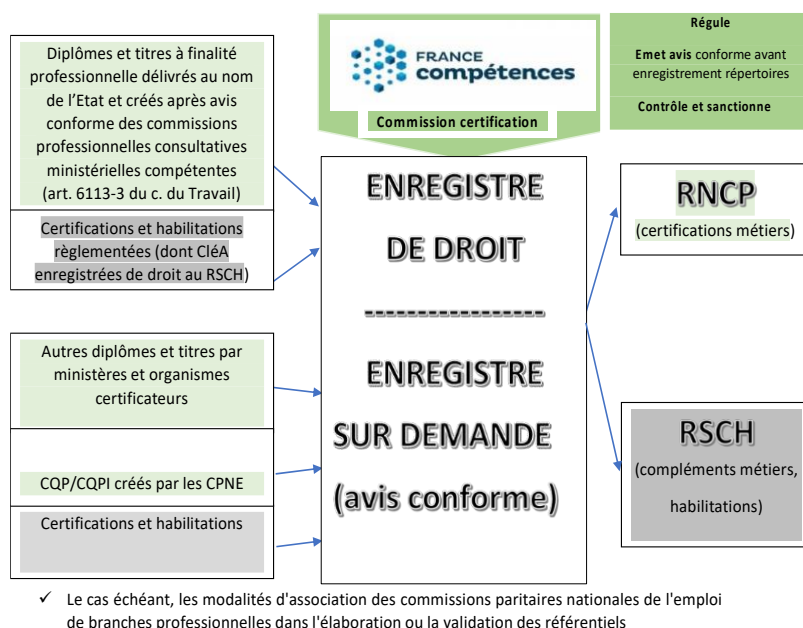
The databases and registers of qualifications cannot be disconnected from taxonomies and classifications. The relationship with various related classifications is different. Not all countries link qualifications to fields of education of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), but many countries link them to national occupational classifications.

The six benchmarked NQFs operate registers/databases of qualifications, which include quality assured qualifications linked to the NQF), accessible online, in particular via the NQF institution's website.

France

The Professional Certification Directorate is responsible for two qualifications registers (Répertoires): (i) the national register of professional certification (Répertoire national des certifications professionnelles – RNCP) and (ii) Specific Répertoire (RSCH).

Figure 7: Scope and management of the RNCP and RSCH



Source: Presentation of 22/12/2020, Webinar of NQF Benchmarking

The reform of vocational training has profoundly transformed the vocational certification system. From now on, individuals have increased resources to **individualise their skills development path** and **build their professional project** in line with market needs. Access to the Personal Training Account is therefore restricted to certified training. The aim is to enable people to build up skills **through qualifications recognised in the labour market**.

Professional qualifications are classified by level of qualification and field of activity. They are also made up of “Competence blocks”, homogeneous and comprising sets of skills that contribute to the independent exercise of a professional activity and can be assessed and validated.

Portugal

Two qualifications catalogues are available:

- The National Catalogue of Qualifications (Catálogo Nacional de Qualificações – CNQ), managed by ANQEP: It currently contains 391 qualifications in 47 fields of education and training (NQF levels 1, 2, 4 and 5): <http://www.catalogo.anqep.gov.pt/>
- Higher education qualifications database: https://www.dges.gov.pt/pt/pesquisa_cursos_instituicoes?plid=372

The **NQF** is a tool for strategic management of national dual qualifications (non-higher education) that fosters the effective link between the skills needed for the social and economic development of the country and the qualifications developed within the NQF. It facilitates access to certification, by promoting flexibility in obtaining qualifications.

The NQF gradually integrates qualifications based on learning outcomes by identifying for each qualification a competence standard and a training standard in its technological component.

- The catalogue standards (benchmarks) are used in initial vocational training, continuing vocational training and RVCC. The standards used in RVCC are equivalent to the training standards used in formal education.

- The catalogue also incorporates short-term training modules (25h/50h) which can be evaluated, certified and capitalised autonomously and which can be transferable between the qualification pathways (common modules).
- The catalogue is linked to the EQF and each qualification is referenced to the NQF.

Kenya

The KNQA is finalising the development of the National Qualifications Management Information System (NAQMIS), which will bring together qualification institutions, qualifications and learners.

Another example is the well-developed [SAQA](#) (South Africa) National Learners' Records Database (NLRD), which includes all qualifications from all sub-frameworks and levels and partial qualifications, but also data on qualifications awarded at all levels and through RPL.

3 Governance of regional and national qualifications frameworks

This section explores different models of NQF governance, with an emphasis on the role of legislation, institutions, stakeholders, quality assurance and operational tools. Effective NQF governance needs to take account of the wider qualifications ecosystem.

3.1 Governance of regional qualifications frameworks

What do RQFs do?

RQFs are meta-frameworks, which support approximation and trust-building between NQFs, contributing to the wider and strategic objectives of regional cooperation – notably, good quality qualifications, mobility of learners and workers and integration.

RQFs do not supersede the NQFs (or national qualifications systems – NQs – as they are sometimes known). Instead, RQFs work on the basis of common principles geared towards enhanced transparency and portability of qualifications. RQFs build on shared concepts, emphasise quality assurance, support sharing of information and data among countries and the application of common instruments (such as qualifications databases and common guidelines on key processes of recognition and transparency). RQFs also act as catalysts for the development of NQFs.

Referencing/alignment of NQFs/NQs to an RQF is a major milestone in the implementation of RQFs. Referencing is based on agreed criteria and procedures, which are essential for transparency, credibility and quality of the process and outcomes. The use of RQF levels on qualifications documents and databases of the referenced NQFs/NQs is a major step towards portability and mobility of learners and workers.

RQF implementation requires governance based on participation of the relevant stakeholders, technical expertise and analytical capacity, a set of instruments supporting transparency and quality of RQF processes, communication and an efficient information system within a rapidly changing policy environment. Besides their essential regional mandate and goals, RQFs also play a fundamental role of communication and cooperation with other RQFs and with NQFs/NQs in other regions/continents. Cooperation and comparison between RQFs contribute to paving the way to global transparency of qualifications and qualifications frameworks, and ultimately to facilitating recognition of qualifications. This process, when fully implemented, will play a critical role in harmonising qualifications in Africa and internationalising African qualifications.

State of play of implementation of RQFs

The history of RQFs has been made in the last fifteen to twenty years, with the starting reflections and steps taken on different continents: in Africa (SADCQF) and Europe (EQF). Table 7 summarises key features of three operational and influential RQFs.

Table 7: Summary of main features of the RQFs included in this comparison

Feature	SADCQF	ASEAN QRF (AQR)	EQF
Region/ community	Southern African Development Community 16 countries	Association of Southeast Asian Nations 10 countries	European Union and other countries with specific status of cooperation 38 countries
Establishment	Established: 2011 Operations: from 2017	Endorsed 2014 by ministers of economy, education and labour	Council Communication: 2008 Revised in 2017

Referencing criteria and procedures	10 criteria	11 criteria	10 criteria
Countries that referenced/ aligned NQFs to RQF	2 (South Africa, Seychelles); 1 submitted report for adjudication (Mauritius)	AQRF Referencing Reports of ASEAN Member States: Malaysia Philippines Thailand Indonesia	36 countries referenced and these reports are published
RQF scope and levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Comprehensive; inclusive of all subsectors ● 10 levels ● Descriptors: knowledge, skills, autonomy and responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Comprehensive; inclusive of all subsectors ● 8 levels ● Descriptors: knowledge and skills; application and responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Comprehensive; inclusive of all subsectors ● 8 levels ● Descriptors: knowledge, skills, responsibility and autonomy

Source: ACQF. 2021c. Thematic brief 4.1. Regional Qualifications Frameworks.

These RQFs share a number of common features and maintain a degree of cooperation with one another. However, currently this cooperation is ad hoc and is not supported by formalised agreements.

Governance/implementation of these RQFs is based on shared responsibilities and a participatory approach (Table 13). Governmental bodies have a dominant role and place in the governance set-up, which is a corollary of the fact that NQFs are part of public policy and most national qualifications are awarded in the name of the state/authorised public bodies. In some cases (for example, the EQF) the membership of the EQF Advisory Group includes systematic representation of regional students' organisations, civil society organisations, business associations, trade unions and organisations from the higher education and TVET sectors.

The role of implementation management, coordination and the secretariat is fundamental, given the number of countries and institutions involved, the range of key activities and the gradual development approach required for progress.

In the case of SADCQF, the Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA) gathers the member states and since the implementation unit is not yet established, the SADC Secretariat supports and organises activities, with the support of a group of member states.

The EQF implementation is coordinated and steered by the European Commission, working in close cooperation with the EQF Advisory Group. Funding to support EQF Advisory Group activities, research and peer learning is provided by the European Union budget, within the relevant programme.

Table 8: Overview of governance settings of the RQFs

	SADCQF	AQRF	EQF
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 16 countries ● SADC Council of Ministers ● SADC ministers of education ● TCCA – Executive Committee; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ With thematic working groups ● SADC Secretariat (to be supported by implementation unit) ● Funding: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 10 countries ● ASEAN ministerial meetings: economic, education and labour ● AQRF Committee – supported by the AQRF Secretariat ● National AQRF committees ● Funding: external sources in first phase; ASEAN for regional coordination and AQRF Committee; countries: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 38 countries ● EU level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ EQF Advisory Group: all countries; European associations: business, youth, students, volunteering ○ Chair: European Commission director general ○ Employment; provides also: secretariat and coordination function

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SADC for regional coordination, some capacity development activities ○ Countries: all costs of participation in SADCQF meetings; NQF 	all costs of participation in AQRF meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sub-groups thematic (ad hoc, temporary) ● National level: national coordination points (NCPs) ● Technical/research support: Cedefop, ETF ● Funding: EU budget
Main instruments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cooperation: African Qualifications Verification Network (AQVN) ● Guidelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● AQRF website ● Guidelines and handbooks ● Cooperation with other ASEAN platforms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Europass: the EU-wide platform supporting skills and qualifications, EQF, skills intelligence, digital credentials, careers. ● EQF technical notes, EQF annexes, guidelines, validation of non-formal and informal learning ● Peer-learning activities ● Cooperation ENIC-NARIC² network (recognition of qualifications)
Monitoring and evaluation, review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In the context of regular TCCA meetings, countries leading the SADCQF implementation programmes report on progress, challenges and plans ● In TCCA meetings member countries report on their national initiatives and progress ● Systematic way of evaluating progress has not yet evolved 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Obligation to evaluate the implementation and outcomes of EQF is defined the EQF Recommendation ● Two major evaluations of the EQF Recommendation 2008 conducted ● Evaluation of the EQF Recommendation 2017 is in preparation - to be started by end 2021

3.2 National qualifications frameworks

NQF governance and management bodies are evolving and adapting to new demands and challenges. In France, the Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle (CNCP), responsible for the implementation of the CNC/Répertoire des Certifications for a long period, evolved in 2019 — including the new institution France Skills. In Ireland, the first National Certification Agency (2001–2012) was restructured and merged in 2012 with the quality assurance function into a new agency, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). Also in Portugal, the original agency (Agence Nationale des Qualifications) has seen the scope of its mandate and remit widen by integrating the management and implementation of education and vocational training policies — resulting from the restructuring of ANQ into ANQEP in 2012.

The two national certification authorities in the sample of our benchmarking exercise (Namibia and Kenya) are responsible for a very wide range of functions and responsibilities. Their role goes beyond the development of qualifications benchmarks, the analysis and registration of qualifications and the management of the repository and also includes the accreditation of education and training providers.

In Africa, with regard to the governance of NQFs, the most advanced NQFs tend to be supervised by certification agencies (authorities, coordination units), but also, to a large extent, by quality assurance agencies and specialised committees. Overall, the trend is towards national agencies rather than sectoral agencies. In cases where sectoral agencies in TVET, higher education and general education are well

² ENIC: European Network of Information Centres in the European Region; NARIC: National Academic Recognition Information Centres of the European Union.

established, national ministries are more responsible for coordination and supervision. Ministries still play a key role in the governance of NQFs and often act as incubators for subsequent national and/or sectoral agencies. There is a real risk of a diversity of ministries and agencies with overlapping mandates, especially in countries with limited resources. Some countries are reorienting their institutional structure for education and training, with a view to optimising resources, roles and outcomes.

Figure 8: The six NQF entities: Benchmarking sample

Country	NQF entity	Scope of functions of NQF entity
France	<u>Department of Professional Qualifications</u> : one of 5 operational departments of ‘France Compétences’. NQF: 8 levels History: since 1972; Decree 2019 (new NQF)	<u>Department Prof Qualifications manages</u> : - National qualifications registers: RNCP and RSCH - Updated list of emerging or highly evolving professions <u>Commission of Qualifications</u> : decision-making on registration of new qualifications (upon request). Autonomous decision-making.
Bahrain	General Directorate of NQF and Examinations (GDQ) , within the Education and Training Authority (BQA) Independent institution NQF: 10 levels	2 functions (Directions): - Directorate of Examinations - Directorate of NQF Operations
Namibia	Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA) NQA Act: 1996; NQF Regulation: 2006 Combined funding: state budget, service income, projects NQF: 10 levels	- Development of standards, qualifications, registration of qualifications. - Accreditation of training providers and programmes - Evaluation and validation of qualifications
Ireland	1. National Qualifications Authority (2001-2012) 2. QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) – since 2012 Law of 2012 (Qualifications and QA) NQF (‘NFQ’): 10 levels Combined funding: 11 millions EUR annually (State budget, service revenues – 50/50)	“Swiss army knife” – many functions: - Quality Assurance (post-secondary non-tertiary) - NQF – registration, integrity, referencing; impact analysis and NQF review - Recognition of diplomas, certifications - Promotion of qualifications Ireland
Kenya	Kenya National Qualifications Authority (KNQA) KNQA Act 2014 + NQF Regulation 2018 Combined funding: state budget, service income, projects NQF: 10 levels	Five main services: - Verification, recognition of qualifications - Registration of qualifications - Recognition of prior learning - Equivalency certificate of foreign qualifications - Credit accumulation and transfer
Portugal	ANQ (National Qualifications Agency): 1 st format ANQEP (National Agency of Qualifications and Vocational Education) – since 2012 NQF: 8 levels	- National Catalogue of Qualifications (CNQ) - online: update, integrity, development - RVCC (RPL): develop and manage, coordinate Qualifica Centres - Monitoring, evaluation, regulation of the offer of VET courses for youth and adults - Design of courses, standards, methodologies

The summary of the governance models of the six benchmarking countries is presented below.

France

The role of France Competences: <https://www.francecompetences.fr/la-formation-professionnelle/le-role-de-france-competences/>

- National Governance Authority for Vocational Training and Apprenticeships

- Created on 1 January 2019, by the [Law on the freedom to choose one's professional future of 5 September 2018](#). Remit: to ensure the financing, regulation and improvement of the vocational training and apprenticeship system.
- France Competences is the only national governance body for vocational training and apprenticeships. It is set up as a public administrative institution with legal personality and financial autonomy, under the supervision of the ministry responsible for vocational training. Its strategic guidelines are determined by a four-party governance made up of the state, the regions, representative national and inter-professional trade unions and employers, and qualified personalities.

Organisation de France Competences: <https://www.francecompetences.fr/fiche/les-directions-de-france-competences/>

The Directorate-General

- In particular, its mission is to ensure the implementation of the three-year objective and performance agreement and to implement the decisions taken by the management board. It prepares and controls the institution's budget and manages its staff. It also publishes an updated list of professional qualifications registered in the National Register of Professional Qualifications and the Specific Register of Qualifications and Authorisations. Finally, it reports on its management to the board of directors, the minister for Vocational Training and the Parliament.

Five operational directorates

- **The Directorate for Financial Policies** distributes funds to the various actors and institutions.
- **The Directorate for Regulation** defines and monitors the costs and rules for covering training activities.
- The **Professional Certification Directorate** ensures the processing of registration files (for analysis and decision by the Professional Certification Commission), the management of national registers (RNCP/National Register of Professional Qualifications and RS/Specific Directory) and the list of emerging or rapidly evolving professions.
- The **Directorate for Territories and Partnerships** organises professional development advice for employed persons and coordinates the regional inter-branch joint committees.
- The **Directorate for Observation and Evaluation** prepares studies, evaluations and observations in order to contribute to the public debate and to support the recommendations made by France's skills.

Two operational support directorates

- **The Directorate for Legal Affairs** ensures the security of legal affairs in France. It provides advice, expertise and assistance to the directorates of France and leads the purchasing function.
- **The Directorate for Communication** defines and implements the communication strategy.

Functional support directorate

- **The Directorate for Financial Affairs, Accounting, Human Resources and SI** leads the management of the budget, human resources and information services.

The Professional Certification Directorate has a simple structure comprising:

- Director of Certification, and Deputy
- Policy officers: prepare/process registration dossiers; analysis of emerging occupations

The profiles and competences of staff members are diverse and their working relationship with the directorate also varies, including contractual frameworks.

The Committee on Professional Certification

This committee, hosted by France Competences and set up in 2019, aims to adapt the certification system to a rapidly changing environment and to ensure that skills meet economic and social needs.

It is composed of 18 members (state, regions and social partners).

Role and tasks (defined by the French Labour Code):

- issue opinions on requests for entry in the national registers (RNCP and RSCH);
- define the list of professions considered to be ‘emerging’ or particularly rapidly evolving;
- send applications to ministries and certification bodies to establish full or partial correspondence between the professional qualification for which they are responsible and the equivalent professional qualifications or those at the same level of qualification and their blocks of competence;
- examine draft recommendations (content and method of development);
- contribute to the harmonisation of the terminology used for the professional qualifications, the activities they cover and the skills they certify;
- ensure the quality of information for individuals and businesses; and
- contribute to international work on the quality of qualifications.

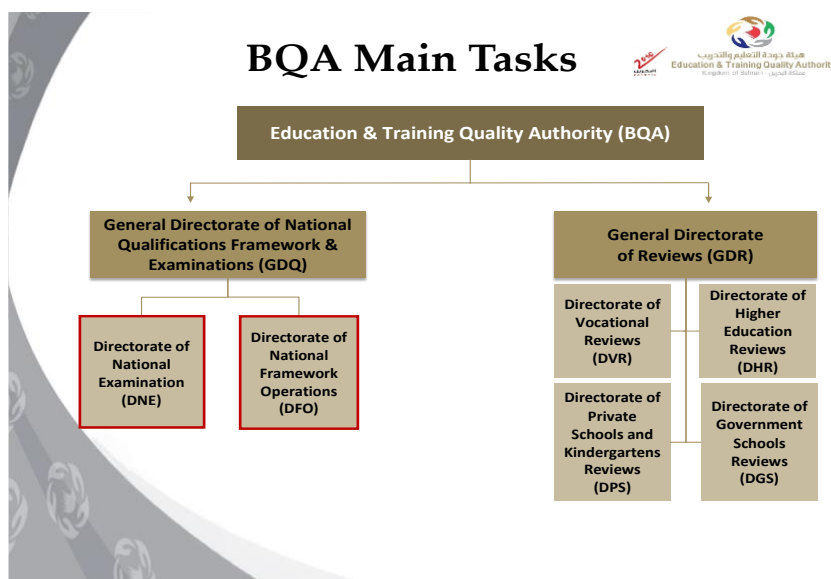
The Commission is hosted by France Competences, but has a special status defined by a specific text. The head of the Commission is external to France Competences and is appointed by order of the Ministry of Labour. The Board of Directors of France has no power over the Professional Certification Commission. The Commission analyses the files of applications for registration and issues opinions on them: The director of France shall sign (assent) or may refuse, but under no circumstances may such decisions be amended.

Bahrain

The development of the NQF has been structured in three phases: Design phase (2010–2011), installation phase (2012–2014) and implementation phase (from 2014 onwards).

The education and training authority (the BQA) is an independent body that exercises its mandate under the direction of its board of directors. It is a matter for the Cabinet. The main objective of the Education Reform Project is to fundamentally improve the services provided in the education and vocational training sectors in the Kingdom of Bahrain, which in turn will ensure the professional advancement of Bahrain’s human capital. The BQA aims to be a leader in ‘promoting sustainable quality improvement for the world class education and training sectors in the Kingdom of Bahrain’.

Figure 9: The BQA’s organisation and place of NQF operations



The BQA has created two directorates-general, the Directorate-General of Reviews (GDR) and the Directorate-General for the National Qualifications Framework and Examinations (GDQ). The NQF Advisory Committee (NAC) was set up by Cabinet Resolution 52 of 2013.

The NAC is chaired by the Executive Director of the BQA and includes representatives of the Ministry of Education, the Council for Higher Education, the Civil Service Bureau, the MLSD, government universities, private universities, private institutes and the private sector. The NAC supervises all the activities of the NQF, in particular the recommendation of policies relating to the institutional list and the placement of qualifications; quality is assured by an internal academic committee. The resulting policies and recommended operations are presented to the BQA board for approval and then approved by the Cabinet.

NQF operations focus on institutional listing and the placement/positioning of qualifications. The eligibility criteria for qualifications are checked by the General Directorate of NQF (GDQ).

Figure 10: NQF operations

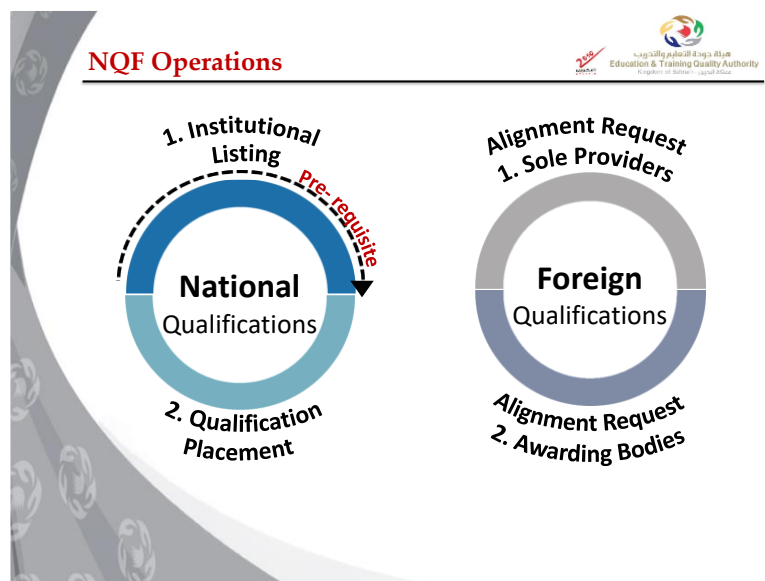
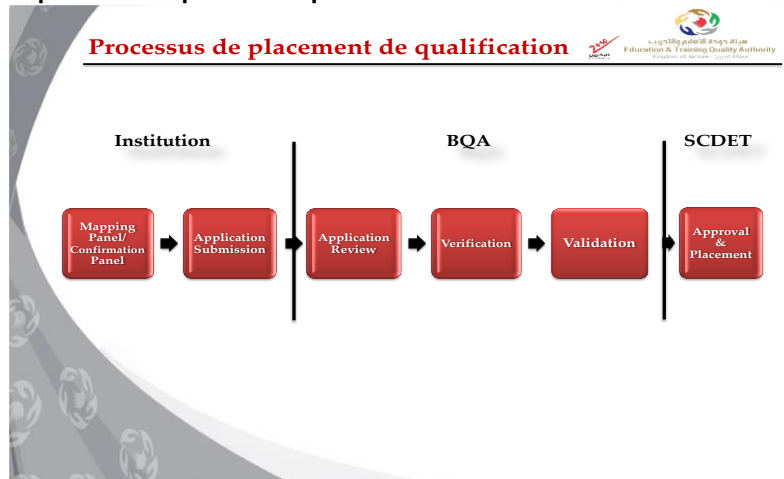


Figure 11: The NQF eligibility criteria

Eligibility Criteria	
Institutions	Qualifications
Valid licence/approval issued by a regulatory body	Valid qualification approval
Offers National Qualification	Have assessments (achievement certificate)
Internally quality assured within the institution	Have appropriate structures and expressed in units
Passed BQA (GDR) review, where applicable	Comprise at least ten notional learning hours
Offers qualifications that meet NQF requirements	

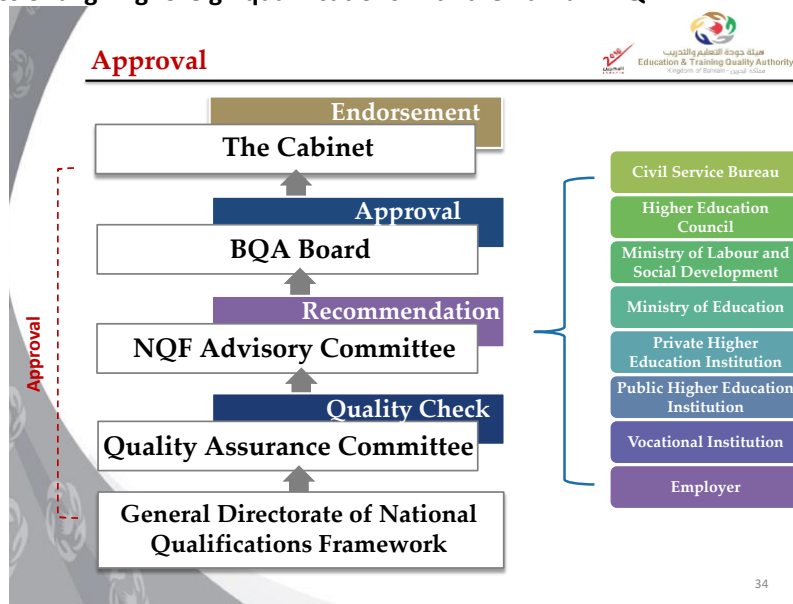
Source: Presentation of 21/12/2020, NQF Benchmarking

Figure 12: National qualification placement process



Source: Presentation of 21/12/2020, NQF Benchmarking.

Figure 13: Process of aligning foreign qualifications with the Bahrain NQF



Source: Presentation of 21/12/2020, NQF Benchamrking

Namibia

Political and legal background of the NQF

Education and training are governed by:

- The Constitution
- Education Act
- NQA Act
- Vocational Education and Training Act
- Higher Education Act
- Namibian Open Education College Law
- University Act

- University's State Science and Technology Act

The authority responsible for the management, integrity and development of the NQF is the **Namibian Qualifications Authority (NQA)**.

- Body set up by the Namibia Qualifications Authority Act (Act 29 of 1996)
- Statutory body and state-owned enterprise

The vision of the NQA

- Global authority and trustworthy – empowering people
- Maintain a dynamic national framework that ensures quality qualifications through the recognition of apprenticeships

Objectives/attributions of the NQA:

- setting up and administering an NQF;
- be a forum for qualification issues;
- establish professional standards for any profession or position in any career structure;
- establish the curriculum standards required to achieve professional standards;
- promote the development and analysis of benchmarks of acceptable performance standards for any profession, or job;
- accredit individuals, institutions and organisations providing education and training courses to meet certain requirements;
- assess and recognise skills learned outside formal education;
- establish facilities for the collection and dissemination of information on qualifications;
- examine whether qualifications meet national standards; and
- advising on qualification issues

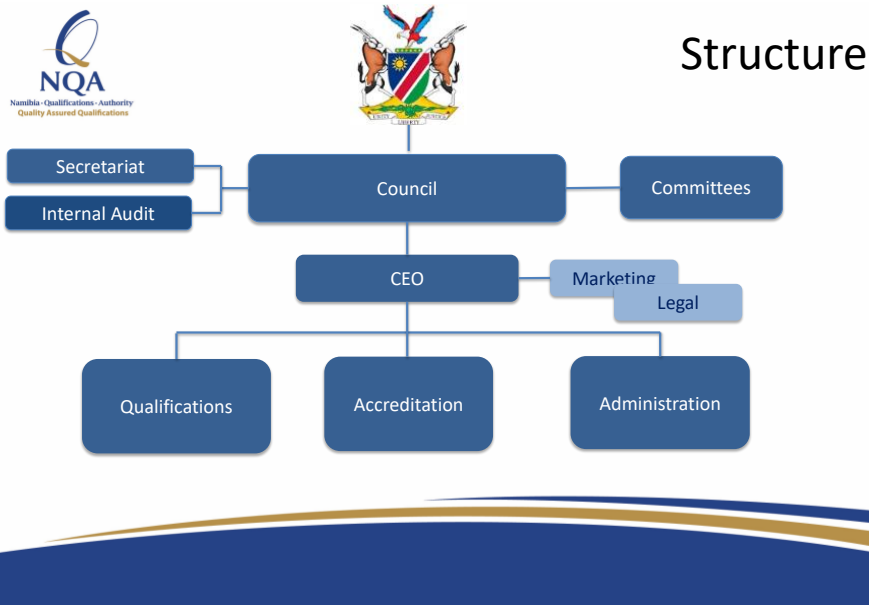
Responsibility of the NQA Council

- A body established by the Namibia Qualifications Authority Act (Act 29 of 1996)
- Statutory body and state-owned enterprise
- Governance (size, accountability, reporting, resources, independence)
- Administered by a secretariat (credible, expert, etc.)

The NQA Council Committees:

- Executive Board
- Qualification Committee
- Accreditation, Assessment and Verification Committee
- Human Resources Committee
- Finance Committee
- Risk and Audit Committee

Figure 14: Structure of the NQA



Source: Presentation of 21/02/2021 — NQF Benchamking

Ireland

Quality Qualifications Ireland (QQI) has been the institution responsible for the management and integrity of the NQF since 2012.

Figure 15: The main functions of QQI on qualifications



Source: Presentation of 21/01/2021, NQF Benchamking

The original NQF, the National Certification Authority, operated in the period 2001–2012:

- Statutory body
- Representative Council – 14 members
- Obligation to consult on policymaking
- Focus on development work
- Staff: 27 executives, government annual budget around 4 million.

- Organisational structure – development and implementation of the NFQ; recognition of qualifications; corporation.

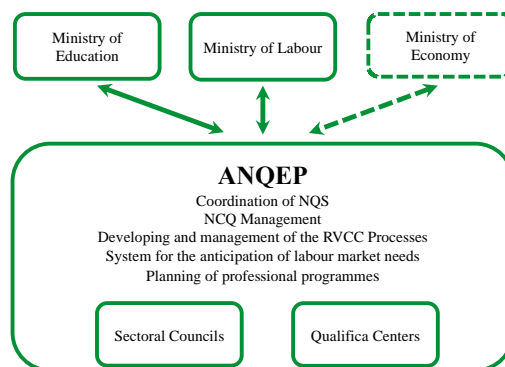
QQI was established in 2012.

- Non-representative board of 10 members, with the exception of representatives of learners and foreign representatives
- Accountable to the government
- Has a ‘consultative’ function for ministers
- ‘Subject to that law, the Authority shall be independent in the performance of its duties’
- Annual budget EUR 11 million (50/50 budget and fees)
- Specific NQF governance agreements evolving
- European level governance?

Portugal

Figure 16: The governance of the NQF

The Portuguese Qualifications Framework
NQF implementation: Who does what (main institutions)?



Source: Presentation of 28/01/2021, NQF Benchmarking

ANQEP (Agence Nationale pour la Qualification et l’Education Professionnelle I.P.) is a public institute integrated into the indirect administration of the State, with administrative, financial and pedagogical autonomy.

ANQEP I.P. has a superintendence and joint supervision of the ministries of Education, Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, in coordination with the Ministry of the Economy and Digital Transition.

The mission of the ANQEP is to contribute to the improvement of the qualification levels of young people and adults in Portugal, by promoting an increasing demand for qualifications, studies and professionals (double certification), at the non-tertiary level, or a range of initial and lifelong learning that is highly attractive, of high quality and relevant to the labour market. ([Decreto-Lei No 36/2012, de 15 de fevereiro](#)).

ANQEP legal texts:

- [Decreto-Lei No. 36/2012](#) of 15 February laid down the mission and tasks of the National Agency for Qualifications and Vocational Education, I.P.
- In drawing up that Decree-Law, [Order No. 294/2012 \(Portaria\)](#) of 28 September approved the articles of association of ANQEP, I.P., defining their internal organisation.
- The revised statute of ANQEP published by [Portaria 168/2019](#) revokes Order No. 294/2012 and strengthens the functional organisation of the agency.

ANQEP's functional organisation is based on three departments:

- Youth Qualification Department
- Department of Adult Qualifications
- Department of the national catalogue of certifications (CNQ)

In addition, by deliberation of the governing board, flexible units (divisions) may be created and modified. ANQEP's financial, administrative and asset management is carried out by a flexible organic unit.

ANQEP – main responsibilities

- promote the design and continuous updating of the national qualifications catalogue (NQF);
- develop and manage the academic and/or professional VAE (RVCC) system and coordinate the Qualifica Centres Network;
- ensure monitoring, evaluation and regulation of VET provision for young people and adults;
- coordinate and promote the design of pathways, curriculum development and specific methodologies and materials for VET (both for young people and adults);
- cooperate with other public or private, national or international stakeholders to foster the development of quality lifelong learning; and
- participate in the development of initial and continuing training standards for teachers, trainers and other professionals working in VET, as well as in the RVCC system, in full cooperation with the higher education institution

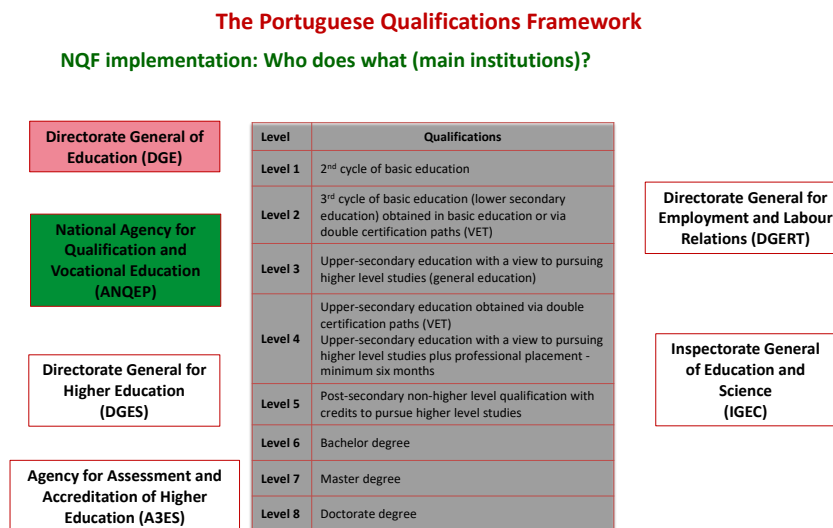
ANQEP National Qualifications Catalogue Department: Competences and responsibilities

The National Qualifications Catalogue Department, is responsible for:

- developing the national qualifications catalogue (NQF) as a strategic tool for regulating non-higher qualifications.
- designing the qualifications benchmarks integrated into the NQF, identifying, for each, the benchmarks of skills, training and recognition, validation and certification of skills.
- promoting the identification and anticipation of skills and competences needs in line with the dynamics of the socio-economic development and personal and social development of individuals.
- updating the NQF by including, excluding or changing qualifications.
- stimulating the functioning of the Sectoral Qualification Councils (SQCs), to support and technically support the work of the elements that integrate them;
- ensuring the public and online availability of the NQF through a technological platform.
- promoting the dissemination of the NQF and the communication of available qualifications in order to improve the appreciation of these qualifications as well as the readability and diversity of offers.
- promoting the NQF among education and training providers, young people and adults, employers and education and guidance professionals.

- ensuring the quality of qualification benchmarks, in particular by defining methodologies and supporting the design of such benchmarks.
- mobilising for the development of the NQF and the continuous updating of qualifications: education and training institutions, the scientific community, the business community, the social partners and local and regional communities.
- ensuring that the CNQ is linked to the rules governing access to and pursuit of professions and professional activities.
- liaising with bodies at European and international level to promote transparency, mutual recognition and comparability of qualifications in the labour market and vocational education and training systems for young people and adults.
- ensuring the adoption of European and international recommendations and guidelines in the NQF's field of activity.
- developing and linking the CNQ technology platform with other information systems to support the NQS; and
- fostering cooperative relations with different actors and entities with responsibilities within the NQF.

Figure 17: The institutions of the NQF ecosystem



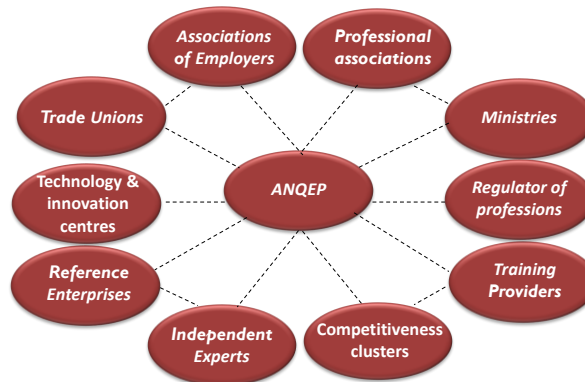
Source: Presentation of 28/01/2021, NQF benchmarking

The effective involvement of the social partners and the business community in the governance of the NQF is reflected in the role and responsibilities of **the Sectoral Qualifications Councils (SQCs)**, made up of business representatives, employers' associations, trade unions, ministries, training operators, independent experts and ANQEP.

Figure 18: Structured involvement of partners – sectoral qualification councils (SQCs)

The Portuguese Qualifications Framework

Who are the main partners and stakeholders involved?



18 sector councils for qualifications

https://www.anqep.gov.pt/np4/indicadores_n3



Source: Presentation of 28/01/2021, NQF benchmarking

- The SQCs work as a platform for updating/revising the national catalogue of qualifications and bring together the worlds of education and training and of work by joining stakeholders from both worlds. They seek to ensure a sectoral representation of the national economic activity and they are an example of a bottom-up approach in the design of qualifications.
- The SQCs are involved in defining qualifications and competences, including new qualifications in the NQF and updating existing ones.
- No qualification is integrated in the national catalogue of qualifications without being submitted to the respective SQC for analysis and approval by consensus.

Kenya

The [KNQA](#) is the body with administrative and financial autonomy in charge of the implementation and consolidation of the NQF and its tools. The scope of the KNQA's remit is wide.

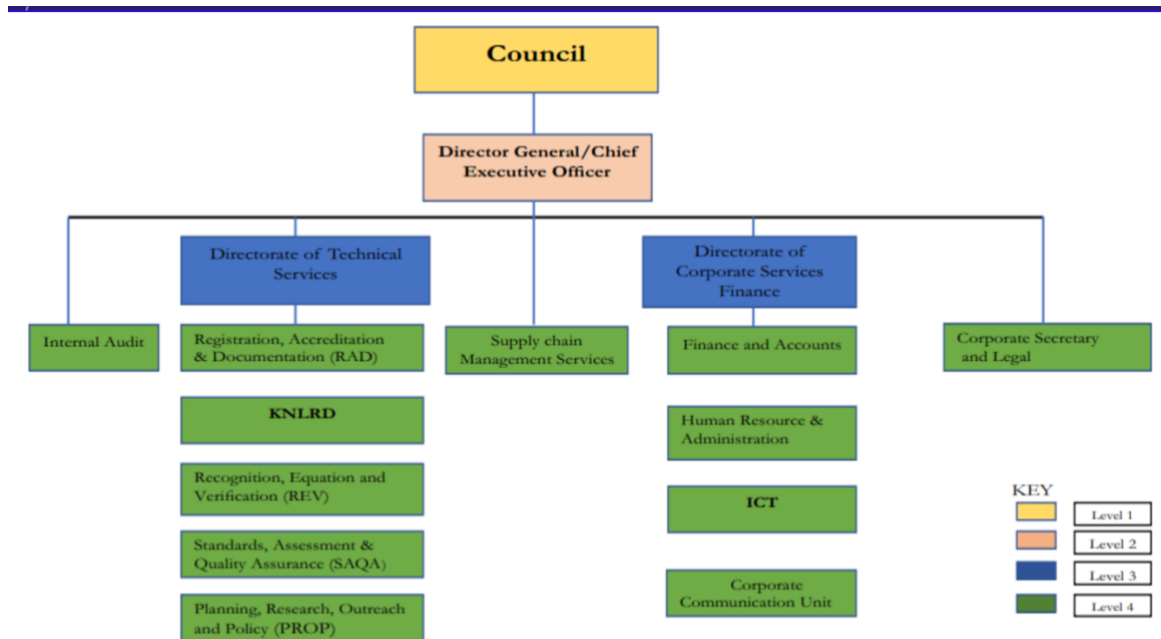
The mandate of the KNQA:

- establish and maintain the KNQF;
- registration institutions:
 - national qualifications awarding institutions (NQAIs);
 - foreign qualification awarding institutions (FQAIs);
 - recognise and work with professional bodies;
- registration of qualifications;
- certificates of qualification equivalence;
- learner register;
- policies on recognition of prior learning;
- credit accumulation and transfer systems; and
- recognition, equation and verification of local and foreign qualifications.

KNQA's main [services](#):

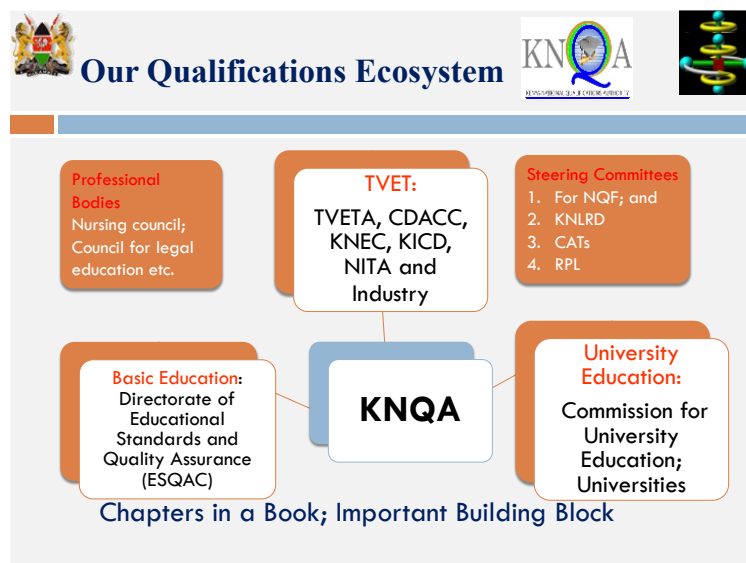
- alignment of foreign qualifications;
- registration of qualifications;
- recognition of prior learning (RPL);
- certificates of recognition/equivalence of qualifications; and
- accumulation and transfer of appropriations.

Figure 19: The organisation chart of the KNQA



Source: Presentation of 28/01/2021, NQF Benchmarking

Figure 20: KNQA ecosystem institutions



Source: Presentation of 28/01/2021, NQF Benchmarking

4 Some conclusions and suggestions

A. NQF: sustainable and effective operations require a combination of components:

1. **Strategic policy framework:** ‘why’ – what objectives and benefits, scope of the NQF, structure (levels and descriptors), beneficiaries, users
2. **Legal framework:** different types of texts – laws, decrees, regulations, decisions
3. **Management framework:** body responsible for the planning, execution of activities and services specific to the NQF; trained staff; governance – stakeholders, partners; financing
4. **Framework of implementation tools:** (a) Register(s)/Repertoire/Catalogue of Digital/Online Qualifications; (b) Information system for – requests; (b) guides, methodologies
5. **Communication framework:** for different groups and audiences
6. **Analytical, monitoring and evaluation framework:** data, research, analyses, scoreboards, impact assessment, feedback (for example, stakeholders, users)

B. Governance and management – different ‘models’ of organisation

1. **Model 1:** National Certifications Authority/NQF (Namibia, Kenya)
2. **Model 2:** National Certificate Agency and other function (Ireland, Portugal)
3. **Model 3:** Directorate of the NQF within an institution independent of the education and training sector (France, Bahrain)

Some features common to the three models:

1. Status: Entities with autonomy (administrative, decision, financial)
 - Not in the structure of ministries (no example of our sample)
 - **Combined** sources of funding: State budget allocations; revenues from user services; projects
2. Specific competencies in the thematic areas of responsibility: own staff, experts contracted for defined tasks
3. Associated stakeholders: sectoral councils, chambers, professional associations
 - Consultation; approval of standards and reference qualification documents; members of decision-making support bodies (for example, Certification Commission, France)
4. Well-organised and up-to-date websites, making all the information publicly available: organisation, various legal texts, reports and analyses, methodologies, directories, news, tools for users’ self-services.

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