Specifications for

The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework

Background

The basis for an ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework goes back to the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services (AFAS) of 1995 that was agreed to by ASEAN economic ministers. AFAS was aimed at substantially eliminating restrictions to trades in services among ASEAN. Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) for qualifications in major professional services were initiated to enable the qualifications of professional service suppliers to be mutually recognised by signatory Member States.

In 2007, the ASEAN Economic Blueprint (ASEAN 2007) was signed by member countries. It called for areas of cooperation, including the recognition of professional qualifications (ASEAN 2007). In addition to MRAs in Engineering and Nursing that had been completed in 2005 and 2006 respectively, five additional MRAs were concluded between 2007 and 2009 in the fields of architecture, surveying, medical practitioners, dental practitioners and accountancy. Another important component of the blueprint was the creation of the free flow of skilled labour through 'harmonisation and standardisation' (ASEAN 2007:18).

ASEAN is also linked to the Asia – Pacific region through cross membership of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN). As well, several ASEAN countries that participated in an APEC Mapping of Qualifications Frameworks (Burke et al, 2009) indicated in principle support for the concept of a regional qualifications framework.

The initial draft of the concept proposal for the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework was developed through the Project on Education and Training Governance: Capacity Building for National Qualifications Frameworks (AANZ-0007) which was part of the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area (AANZFTA) Economic Cooperation Work Programme (ECWP), specifically under ECWP's services component. This draft concept proposal was considered during the 1st AANZFTA Joint Committee Meeting in May 2010 in Manila and approved inter-sessionally in July 2010.

The draft concept proposal of the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework was provided to ASEAN participating countries prior the AANZFTA Qualifications Reference Framework Forum held in late April 2011. The feasibility of a regional common reference framework was discussed in a broad sense, but no decisions were made by the participants regarding the preferred construction or features of the regional common reference framework or what might be the clear purposes for a framework. The draft version of the concept proposal was enhanced and refined following discussions with the participating countries at the AANZFTA Forum and at in country workshops.

In October 2012, a workshop was convened as well as a taskforce meeting to facilitate discussion of design options within the scope of the concept paper for the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework and make it possible to agree to a final design by participating members. Further refinements to the model were undertaken as a result of this workshop and taskforce meeting.

In March 2013, another workshop was convened as well as a taskforce meeting to facilitate discussion of design options within the scope of the concept paper for the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework and make it possible to agree to a final design by participating members. Members discussed the model ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework and requested refinements prior to in country consultations.

This draft version (April 2013) outlines the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework for the purposes of discussion within country and across participating countries, in preparation of final design.

Regional context

ASEAN countries[1] have a combined population of almost 600 million. There are considerable differences in the population levels, sizes of economies and levels of per capita income across member countries. While there are labour flows between member countries they are not as great as those of some other regions. Nevertheless ASEAN is a robust entity and has been active in building mutual economic and social cooperation between member countries.

The ASEAN region is typical of other global regions in the patterns of NQF development across countries. Some countries have established comprehensive National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs), while others have a well established sectoral framework, and others are yet to develop or implement qualifications frameworks.

Within this context the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework aims to accommodate different types of NQFs that are at different stages of development, ranging from those that are initial conceptual proposals to those that are fully developed, functioning NQFs.

Scope

The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework, a common reference framework, will function as a translation device to enable comparisons of qualifications across participating ASEAN countries.

The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework addresses education and training sectors[2] and the wider objective of promoting lifelong learning.

Purpose

The purpose of the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework is to enable comparisons of qualifications across countries that will:

- Support recognition of qualifications
- Facilitate lifelong learning
- Promote and encourage credit transfer and learner mobility
- Promote worker mobility
- Lead to better understood and higher quality qualifications systems.

The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework will support and enhance each country's national qualifications framework or qualifications system while providing a mechanism to facilitate comparison and transparency.

The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework will link the participating ASEAN NQFs or qualification systems and become the ASEAN's mechanism for recognition of its qualifications against other regional and international qualifications systems.

[1] Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam.

[2] Education and training incorporates informal, non formal and formal learning. Formal learning includes but is not limited to post compulsory schooling, adult and community education, TVET and higher education.

The Framework aims to encourage the recognition of non formal and informal learning.

Principles and processes

The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework is based on agreed understandings between member countries and invites voluntary engagement from countries. Therefore it is not regulatory and binding on countries.

The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework by design aims to be a neutral influence on national qualifications frameworks of participating ASEAN countries.

The process for endorsing the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework shall be by mutual agreement by the participating countries.

Countries will be able to determine when they will undertake the processes of referencing their qualification framework, system or qualification types and quality assurance systems against the framework.

Quality assurance

Quality assurance is a component of quality management and is 'focused on providing confidence that quality requirements will be fulfilled'[3]. In relation to training and educational services, 'quality assurance refers to planned and systematic processes that provide confidence in educational services provided by training providers under the remit of relevant authorities or bodies'. Quality assurance activities are established by the 'relevant authorities or bodies to ensure that educational services satisfy customer requirements in a systematic, reliable fashion'[4].

To promote quality assurance of education and training across the region, the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework is underpinned by a set of agreed quality assurance principles and broad standards related to:

- The functions of the registering and accrediting agencies
- Systems for the assessment of learning and the issuing of qualifications
- Regulation of the issuance of certificates.

The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework utilises the East Asia Summit Vocational Education and Training Quality Assurance Framework quality principles, agency quality standards and quality indicators as the basis for the agreed quality assurance standards. The East Asia TVET Quality Assurance Framework is to be used as the benchmark for evaluating the quality assurance processes (for all education and training sectors).

The referencing process will include member countries referencing their education and training quality assurance systems against the East Asia Summit Vocational Education and Training Quality Assurance Framework.

Refer to Consultation Paper, Appendix 1: East Asia Summit Vocational Education and Training Quality Assurance Framework.

---

[3] AS/NZS ISO 9000:2006: Quality management systems—Fundamentals and vocabulary, p. 9.

[4] Bateman et al 2009, p. 8.

Structure of the framework

Learning outcomes

Globally there has been a shift to learning outcomes being the basis of national qualification frameworks and regional common reference frameworks. Learning outcomes emphasise 'the results of learning rather than focusing on inputs such as length of study' (EQF 2008), and support the transfer of qualifications, including credit transfer and recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

To promote the use of learning outcomes as a key feature of qualifications, the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework is based on descriptors of levels of complexity of learning outcomes. These descriptors aim to facilitate comparisons of and links between qualifications and qualifications systems across the member countries.

In order to facilitate linking national qualifications framework levels against the levels in the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework, national qualifications frameworks or qualifications systems should have qualifications 'demonstrably based on learning outcomes'. For national qualifications frameworks that are not based on learning outcomes, the referencing process and report should demonstrate progress towards a learning outcomes based approach.

Level descriptors

The level descriptors of the common reference framework aim to support the development of national qualifications frameworks and the recognition of informal and non-formal learning that could lead to credit towards qualifications.

To facilitate the referencing processing the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework is based on broad level descriptors. The Framework includes eight levels of complexity of learning outcomes, expressed as descriptors. Refer to Appendix 1.

The level descriptors are based on the notion of competence which is the ability that extends 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
- Ethical competence involving the possession of certain personal and professional values[5].

The level descriptors include three domains:

- Knowledge and skills
- Application
- Responsibility and accountability

The Knowledge and Skills domain includes the various kinds of knowledge such as facts and theories as well as the skills used, such as practical and cognitive skills.

---

[5] Coles & Werquin (2006), p. 23.

The Application domain incudes the context in which the knowledge and skills are used in practice; for example study and work.

The Responsibility and accountability domain includes the level of independence for example the capacity to make decisions and the responsibility for oneself and others.

The level descriptors are focused on the three domains and do not make explicit reference to personal competence or ethical competence such as attentiveness, intercultural awareness, active tolerance and acceptance of diversity, as well as democratic patterns of behaviour and socially responsible behaviour. These attributes are considered to contribute to the capacity of people to know things, act skillfully and show responsibility and accountability.

Credit or amount of learning

There is no specification for credit or amount of learning defined in the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework. It is considered that defining a metric for the amount of learning would complicate the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework, confuse its role, and lead to unnecessary pressure on national qualifications frameworks to provide a metric for volume of learning.

This is not to deny the usefulness of developing a metric for amount of learning. Such a measure could facilitate comparisons across countries that is complementary with the goals of regional qualifications frameworks. Countries could develop a credit or amount of learning measure within their own National Qualifications Framework and utilise this measure for comparison purposes.

Referencing

Referencing is a process that results in the establishment of a relationship between the levels of the common reference framework (in this case the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework) and those of the country's qualifications framework (NQF) or system.

The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework referencing process will:

- For those countries with a NQF, identify in a broad sense the best fit of levels of the national frameworks to that of the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework
- For those countries without a NQF, identify for national qualification types or for key qualifications, the best fit to the level of the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework
- Include confirmation that the accrediting and registering agencies meet agreed quality principles and broad standards.

To facilitate mutual trust, the referencing report undertaken by each participating ASEAN country will confirm that its quality assurance systems and implementation of quality assurance strategies meet the agreed quality assurance principles and standards, or if this confirmation is not possible, the referencing process and report should demonstrate progress towards a meeting these principles and standards.

The referencing process requires that each country sets up a referencing panel of key stakeholders. This panel is to include at least one international representative[6], plus an additional observer from one of the other ASEAN countries.

---

[6] The international expert could be external to the ASEAN member countries or internal to the ASEAN member countries but the international expert should not be a representative of the referencing country or the observer's country.

The referencing process includes a single report that is approved by major stakeholders. To facilitate mutual understanding referencing reports will utilise the relevant terms in the Glossary.

The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework includes detailed referencing guidelines to inform and support the referencing process. Refer to Appendix 2.

The deadline placed on member countries to finalise the referencing process is the end of 2018.

Participating member countries are expected to adopt measures, as appropriate, so that, by 2018, all new qualification certificates and related documents issued by the relevant authorities contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications systems, to the appropriate ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework level.

Participating member countries are also encouraged to provide access to information and guidance to stakeholders on how national qualifications and systems relate to the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework.

Governance

A board or managing committee is to be established by the ASEAN Secretariat for the maintenance, use, evaluation and review of the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework, including a mechanism for assessing whether the Framework is providing the enabling function for member countries. The board or managing committee responsible for the ongoing management of the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework is to be made up of national representatives (from a NQF or responsible body) in each country and an independent expert.

The board or managing committee shall also be tasked with providing a central repository for member country referencing documents, and with providing access to information and guidance to other countries external to the ASEAN region on the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework.

Glossary

Accreditation	The official approval of achievement standards, including qualification or unit(s) of a qualification, usually for a particular period of time, as being able to meet particular requirements defined by an accrediting agency that functions within a quality assurance system.
Accredited qualifications	Qualifications which have been granted approval by an accrediting agency or organisation as having met specific requirements or standards of quality.
Accrediting agency	Accrediting agencies are those competent bodies (such as national qualifications agencies, national accreditation agencies, official review boards or other nationally approved bodies or agencies with the responsibility to approve qualifications) that manage program and qualification accreditation under national legislation.
Achievement standards (in education and training)	Statement approved and formalised by a recognised body, which defines the rules to follow in a given context or the results to be achieved. A distinction can be made between competency, educational, occupational, assessment, validation or certification standards: • competency standard refers to the knowledge, skills and/or competencies linked to practising a job; • educational standard refers to statements of learning objectives, content of curricula, entry requirements and resources required to meet learning objectives • occupational standard refers to statements of activities and tasks related to a specific job and to its practise; • assessment standard refers to statements of learning outcomes to be assessed and methodology used; • validation standard refers to statements of level of achievement to be reached by the person assessed, and the methodology used; • certification standard refers to statements of rules applicable to obtaining a qualification (e.g. certificate or diploma) as well as the rights conferred[7].
ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework	The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework, a common reference framework, will function as a translation device to enable comparisons of qualifications across participating ASEAN countries.
Awarding body	Body issuing qualifications (e.g. certificates, diplomas or titles) formally recognising the achievement of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or

---

[7] CEDEFOP 2011, p. 109.

	competences) of an individual, following an assessment and validation procedure[8].
Competence	Competence is an ability that extends beyond the possession of knowledge and skills. It includes: i) <u>cognitive competence</u> involving the use of theory and concepts, as well as informal tacit knowledge gained experientially; ii) <u>functional competence</u> (skills or know-how), those things that a person should be able to do when they work in a given area; iii) <u>personal competence</u> involving knowing how to conduct oneself in a specific situation; and iv) <u>ethical competence</u> involving the possession of certain personal and professional values[9].
Continuing vocational education and training	Education or training after initial education and training – or after entry into working life aimed at helping individuals to: • improve or update their knowledge and/or skills; • acquire new skills for a career move or retraining; • continue their personal or professional development[10].
Credit	Credit describes the value of an amount of learning. It can be transferred to a qualification other than the one in which it was gained. Credit can be allowed to accumulate to predetermined levels for the award of a qualification. The processes involved in valuing credit, transferring credit and accumulating credit are governed by rules in a credit framework[11].
Education Sectors	Education Sectors refer to the main subgroups within education and training e.g. schools, TVET and higher education.
Informal learning	Learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective[12].
Initial education and training	General or vocational education and training and training carried out in the initial education system, usually before entering working life[13].
Learning outcomes	Learning outcomes are clear statements of what a learner can be expected to know, understand and/or do as a result of a learning experience.

---

[8] CEDEFOP (2011), p. 10 & 11.

[9] Coles & Werquin (2006), p. 23.

[10] CEDEFOP 2011, p. 26-26.

[11] Coles & Werquin (2006), p. 23.

[12] CEDEFOP 2011, p. 54.

[13] CEDEFOP 2011, p. 55.

Level descriptor	A general statement that summarises the learning outcomes appropriate to a specific level in a qualifications framework. Level descriptors are usually grouped in domains of learning.
Lifelong learning	All learning activity undertaken throughout life, which results in improving knowledge, knowhow, skills, competences and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons[14].
National Qualifications Framework	National qualifications framework[15] (NQF) is an instrument for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria or criteria for levels of learning achieved. This set of criteria may be implicit in the qualifications descriptors themselves or made explicit in the form of a set of level descriptors. The scope of frameworks may be comprehensive of all learning achievement and pathways or may be confined to a particular sector, for example initial education, adult education and training or an occupational area. Some frameworks may have more design elements and a tighter structure than others; some may have a legal basis whereas others represent a consensus of views of social partners.
Non formal learning	Learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view[16].
Program	The arrangements made for the teaching and learning of a body of knowledge, set of skills and of wider competences. A learning program can lead to a qualification.
Provider	An organisation that plans and delivers education/training and assessment services that often leads to the award of qualifications or components of qualifications.
Qualification	Qualification is a formal certificate issued by an official agency, in recognition that an individual has been assessed as achieving learning outcomes or competencies to the standard specified for the qualification title, usually a type of certificate, diploma or degree. Learning and assessment for a qualification can take place through workplace experience and/or a program of study. A qualification confers official recognition of value in the labour market and in further education and training[17].
Qualifications system	Qualifications system includes all aspects of a country's activity that result in the recognition of learning. These systems include the means of developing and operationalising national or regional policy on qualifications, institutional arrangements, quality assurance processes, assessment and

---

[14] CEDEFOP Glossary (2011) p. 67.

[15] Coles & Werquin (2006) p. 22.

[16] CEDEFOP Glossary (2011) p.71.

[17] Coles & Werquin (2006) p. 21 & 22.

	awarding processes, skills recognition and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. Qualifications systems may be more or less integrated and coherent. One feature of a qualifications system may be an explicit framework of qualifications[18].
Quality assurance	Quality assurance is a component of quality management and is 'focused on providing confidence that quality requirements will be fulfilled'[19]. In relation to education and training services, quality assurance refers to planned and systematic processes that provide confidence in the design, delivery and award of qualifications within an education and training system. Quality assurance ensures stakeholders interests and investment in any accredited program are protected.
Quality indicators	Formally recognised figures or ratios used as yardsticks to judge and assess quality performance[20].
Quality principles	Overall intentions and direction of a quality framework or an organisation with regard to quality assurance.
Quality standards	Technical specifications which are measurable and have been drawn up by consensus and approved by an organisation recognised at regional, national or international levels. The purpose of quality standards is optimisation of input and/or output of learning[21].
Recognition Tool	A Recognition Tool is a means of improving the information conveyed in a certificate or diploma. One form of tool is the Diploma Supplement. E.g. from the University of Nottingham: 'This Diploma Supplement follows the model developed by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES. The purpose of the Supplement is to provide sufficient independent data to improve the international "transparency" and fair academic and professional recognition of qualifications (diplomas, degrees, certificates, etc.)'.
Referencing	Referencing is a process that results in the establishment of a relationship between the national qualifications framework and that of a regional qualifications framework.
Regional qualifications framework	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 others that are located in another country.

---

[18] Coles & Werquin (2006), p. 22.

[19] AS/NZS ISO 9000:2006: Quality management systems—Fundamentals and vocabulary, p. 9.

[20] CEDEFOP Glossary (2011) p. 88.

[21] CEDEFOP Glossary (2011) p. 96

Registering agency	Registering agencies are those competent bodies responsible for approving education and training providers e.g. national qualifications agencies, official review boards or other nationally approved bodies or agencies. Registering agencies are subject to ongoing monitoring and periodic review of their performance against standards.
Registration of providers	Registration processes include formal acknowledgement by a registering agency that a provider meets relevant quality standards. Under NQFs it is usual for a provider to be registered in order to deliver and assess accredited programs and issue awards. Some agencies differentiate between the two processes, e.g.: • Formal acknowledgement that the provider meets key generic standards • Formal acknowledgement that the provider meets specific standards related to the provision of teaching, learning and assessment of a specific program. For the purpose of the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework, registration of providers is the term used for both processes.
Standard (in education and training)	Statement approved and formalised by a recognised body, which defines the rules to follow in a given context or the results to be achieved. Also refer to Achievement Standards.
Transparency	The degree to which a qualifications system can be understood by users. It depends on the clarity of the meaning of a qualification (outcomes, content, levels, standards, awards). It implies the exchange of information about qualifications in an accessible way within and outside the country of award. When transparency is achieved, it is possible to compare the value and content of qualifications at national and international level.
Unit	The smallest component of a qualification; also known as subjects, modules, courses, papers, competencies, components. This is the smallest part of a qualification or program that can be separately assessed and certified.
Validation of learning outcomes	Confirmation by a competent body that learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) acquired by an individual in a formal, non-formal or informal setting have been assessed against predefined criteria and are compliant with the requirements of a standard for curriculum or occupations. Validation typically leads to certification[22]. This includes the notion of recognition of prior learning or accreditation of prior learning.

---

[22] CEDEFOP (2011), p. 125.

Appendix 1: Level descriptors

	Knowledge and skills	Application	Responsibility
	Demonstration of knowledge and skills that:	*Applied in contexts that:*	*Where there is:*
Level 8	are at the most advanced and specialised level and at the frontier of a field; involving independent and original thinking and research, resulting in the creation of new knowledge or practice	are highly specialised and complex involve the development and testing of new theories to resolve complex, abstract and emergent issues	demonstrated high level initiative, adaptability, and self direction and leadership to others authoritative and expert judgement, with sustained commitment to management of research and significant responsibility for extending professional knowledge and practice and creation of new ideas and or processes
Level 7	involve mastery of a body of knowledge at the forefront of a field, involving critical and independent thinking as the basis for research to extend or redefine knowledge or practice	are complex and unpredictable involve the development and testing of innovative solutions to resolve abstract and emergent issues	demonstrated substantial initiative, adaptability, self direction and guidance to others expert judgement, with significant responsibility for professional knowledge and practice; management, evaluation and improvement of activities
Level 6	are specialised technical and theoretical, involving critical and analytical thinking	are complex and changing involve the development of solutions to resolve complex and abstract issues	minimal guidance and demonstrated initiative, adaptability and self direction defensible judgement and significant planning, coordination, evaluation and improvement of activities
Level 5	are comprehensive and specialised, technical and theoretical	are subject to change involve resolving complex and sometimes abstract issues	minimal guidance and demonstrated self direction defensible judgement and planning, coordination and evaluation of activities
Level 4	are factual, theoretical and technical	are usually predictable but subject to change involve resolving unfamiliar issues	broad guidance with some demonstration of self direction defensible judgement and planning and coordination
Level 3	are factual, technical and with some theoretical aspects	are stable with some aspects subject to change involve resolving routine issues	general guidance judgement and planning
Level 2	are factual and based on standard techniques	are structured involve resolving familiar issues	routine supervision some discretion or judgement
Level 1	are basic, general and manual	are highly structured and familiar involve straightforward and everyday processes	close support and supervision limited discretion or judgement

Appendix 2: Referencing procedure

The Referencing procedure aims to:

- To describe a common structure for linking NQFs to the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF)
- To ensure that the linking process undertaken is robust and transparent way.
- To provide a common reporting structure for the referencing reports.

Using criteria to reference to the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework

The main part of any referencing process is the description of how each national qualifications framework or qualification system[23] links to the level structure of the AQRF. The consistency of this process as it is carried out in different countries is critically important for the integrity of the AQRF. The transparency of the process in each country is also critically important for the way people in other countries to understand and trust the outcomes of the referencing process. To help optimise consistency and to make the process of referencing transparent it a set of criteria have been agreed by the ASEAN countries.

The criteria cover areas that are important for consistency and trust.

---

[23] Not all countries have a defined and explicit qualifications framework, some countries have NQFs that cover some of the education sectors (general school education, Vocational Education and Training – Initial VET and Continuing VET, Higher Education, Adult Education) but not others. Where there is no framework covering important qualifications it is necessary to show how these qualifications link to a specific level of the AQRF.

Referencing criteria

	Criterion	Additional information
1	The structure of the education and training system is described.	The essential structure of the system covering ages, stages and pathways of education provision. Education sectors such as school education, initial vocational education and tertiary and continuing vocational training and higher education and general adult education should be described in outline. Linkages between education and training provision should be clear. If possible some general statistics relating to the education and training system should be included.
2	The responsibilities and legal basis of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process are clearly determined and published by the main public authority responsible for the referencing process	Different countries have different institutional structures. It is necessary to take into account all of the bodies that have a legitimate role in the referencing process and to clarify (for international readers) their roles. Bodies with these types of functions are generally considered as having such legitimate role: • those responsible for governing the processes through which nationally recognised qualifications are designed and awarded; • those bodies that support the labour market relevance of education and training. • those in charge of quality assurance in relation to design and award of nationally recognised qualifications; • those managing and maintaining a qualifications framework (if in existence); • those responsible for the recognition of foreign qualifications and providing information on national qualifications; • representatives of institutions awarding qualifications; and • representatives of those using qualifications (employers, learners).
3	The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualification system are transparent	The qualifications that exist in the country are described in terms of the education provision in the country and how they are located in an NQF where one exists. Allocating specific qualifications to an NQF level brings meaning to the NQF level for citizens and, through the referencing process, to the AQRF level. It is therefore critically important for the referencing process that the way a qualification is located at an NQF level is described in full and examples are provided that illustrate how the rules governing the process are applied. The NQF level of all the major qualifications (or types) needs to be evident in the report.
4	There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the AQRF.	A clear statement of the agreed relationship between the national qualifications system and the AQRF levels is made. Where an NQF exists the levels in the national framework should be used. The procedure for matching of levels needs to be described in detail: this procedure should be robust and transparent, probably including a careful explanation of assumptions, approximations and professional judgements.
5	The basis in agreed standards of the national framework or qualifications system and its qualifications is described.	Where possible these standards should be based on the principle of learning outcomes. They should include the standards that form the curriculum, the standards used in assessment, credit arrangements and other methods of validation where these are available

	Criterion	Additional information
6	The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications framework or system and are described and all of the bodies responsible for quality assurance state their unequivocal support for the referencing outcome.	Referencing reports need to explain the main national quality assurance systems that operate in the education, training and qualification system. Other quality assurance measures that could be addressed include, for example, qualification requirements for teachers and trainers, accreditation and external evaluation of providers or programmes, relationship between bodies responsible for quality assurance from different levels and with different functions. The following range of quality assurance bodies are important to the referencing process: • the government ministries, particularly the education and labour ministries; • qualifications bodies, particularly those with national oversight of the system or of the major sectors (general, vocational, higher education) but also those bodies that assess learning, issue awards and certificates; • independent quality assurance bodies such as those that set standards for learning in general, vocational and higher education and those that evaluate institutions; • bodies that set occupational, vocational and educational standards in a country or employment/education sector; • bodies that manage the development and implementation of NQFs, especially the NQFs that regulate standards in sectors and nationally; and • bodies that disburse public funds to learning institutions and require compliance with quality criteria. The East Asia TVET Quality Assurance Framework is to be used as the benchmark for evaluating the quality assurance processes (for all education and training sectors).
7	The process of referencing has been devised by the main public authority and has been endorsed by the min stakeholders in the qualifications system	A statement describing the management process used to provide a valid, reliable and trusted outcome of referencing.
8	People from other countries who are experienced in the field of qualifications are involved in the referencing process and its reporting.	The referencing process should clarify the relationship between the AQRF and the national qualifications system for a person without particular understanding of the qualifications system concerned. To support this process a person or persons from another country is involved in the referencing process to act as an adviser and supporter of the referencing process. The advice of the foreign person should be given with a view to optimising the trust in use of the AQRF as an instrument for transparency. There is no obligation on the part of the host country to accept the advice of the foreign person. The referencing report should state who was involved and explain why these experts were invited and how they were involved in the process (roles, activities) and at what stage and how their feedback was taken into account.
9	One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing and the evidence supporting it shall be published by the	Whatever the scope of the referencing process this report should be written in consultation with stakeholders and agreed by them. The single report should contain all relevant

	Criterion	Additional information
	competent national bodies and shall address separately and in order each of the referencing criteria	information on the results of the referencing of national qualifications levels to the AQRF and refer to further resources for evidence if necessary. There should be no supplementary or minority view reports
10	The outcome of referencing is published by the ASEAN Secretariat and by the main national public body	This makes public the process of referencing and its outcome.
11	Following the referencing process all new qualification certificates, diplomas issued by the national certification bodies contain a clear reference to the appropriate AQRF level.	This makes the AQRF a force for cooperation and mobility of direct relevance to citizens

Structure of the referencing report

The report shall include:

1. Information on the state of the report – a short statement that specifies the basis for the report (for example, is it a first version or an up-dated one) or how long it will be valid.
2. Executive summary – a short overview of the results of the referencing process and, in particular, a summary of the information related to the ten criteria and procedures.
3. Description of the national qualifications system and the NQF – a short presentation of the national qualifications system (including quality assurance, pathways, access to programs, etc.) and the NQF (design features, aims and functions, stage of the development process) – the description should focus on information relevant for understanding the answers to the ten criteria and procedures.
4. Background information – a short description of the process for preparing the report (referencing process).
5. The eleven criteria and procedures for referencing national qualifications levels to the AQRF – the main part of the report: addressing each criterion separately
6. Further information – a short presentation of, for example, plans, intentions and next steps regarding the NQF development and implementation, challenges expected or already met in this process, the expected impact of the AQRF implementation (What will change on a national level?), any intentions for evaluating and revising the decisions presented in the referencing report.
7. Annexes - for example, list of institutions or experts involved in the preparation of the report, examples of qualifications (that will also be presented at the AQRF portal), statements from national stakeholders and/or international experts, relevant legal texts[24].

---

[24] EQF 2011, EQF-Ref project, accessed www.EQF-Ref.eu on 7/10/2012, p 40.

ACRONYMS

AANZFTA – ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area

AFAS - ASEAN Framework on Services

APEC – Asia Pacific Economic Community

APQN - Asian Pacific Quality Network

AQF – Australian Qualifications Framework

ASEAN - Association of South East Asian Nations

CVET – Continuing Vocational Education and Training

EAS – East Asia Summit

EQF - European Qualifications Framework

IVET – Initial Vocational Education and Training

NQF – National Qualifications Framework

TVET – Technical and Vocational Education and Training

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allais Stephanie (2010) *The implementation and impact of National Qualifications Frameworks: Report of a study in 16 countries*, International Labour Office, Geneva.

ASEAN (2007) ASEAN Economic Blueprint, accessed via worldwide web, www.aseansec.org/21083.pdf

AS/NZS ISO 9000:2006: Quality management systems—Fundamentals and vocabulary, June 2006

Australian Qualifications Framework Council 2011, *Australian Qualifications Framework*, South Australia.

Bateman, A, Keating, J and Vickers, A (2009) *Quality assurance systems in vocational education and training*, DEEWR, Canberra.

Bateman, A, Keating, J, Burke, J, Coles, M, & Vickers, A (January 2012) *Concept Design: ASEAN Regional Qualifications Framework*, Education and Training Governance: Capacity Building for National Qualifications Frameworks (AANZ-0007), ASEAN Secretariat.

Bjørnåvold, Jens and Grm, Slava Pevec (October 2011) *The development of national qualifications frameworks in Europe*, Working paper No 12, CEDEFOP.

Burke, G, Keating, J, Vickers, A, Fearnside, R, Bateman, A (2009) *Mapping Qualifications Frameworks across APEC Economies*, APEC Secretariat, sourced from www.apecknowledgebank.org/file.aspx?id=2029

CEDEFOP (2011) *Glossary: Quality in education and training*, Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Coles, Mike; Ulicna, Daniela; Andersen, Tine; Mernagh, Edwin and Luomi-Messerer, Karin (2011) *Referencing qualifications levels to the EQF*, European Qualifications Framework Series: Note 3, European Union, Luxembourg.

Coles, M and Werquin, P 2006, *Qualification system: Bridges to lifelong learning*, OECD, Paris.

Commission of European Communities (2005) *Commission Staff Document: Towards a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning*, p 13.

European Communities (2008) *The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF), Belgium*

European Qualifications Framework (2010) *The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning*, accessed via the worldwide web March 2011 ec.europa.eu/education/pub/pdf/general/eqf/leaflet_en.pdf

European Qualifications Framework (2009) *Criteria and procedures for referencing national qualifications levels to the EQF*

European Qualifications Framework (2011) EQF-Ref project, accessed www.EQF-Ref.eu on 7/10/2012

Keevy James, Chakroun Borhene & Deij Arjen (2010) *Transnational Qualifications Frameworks*, European Training Foundation.

Tuck Ron (2007) *An Introductory Guide to National Qualifications Frameworks: Conceptual and Practical Issues for Policy Makers*, International Labour Office.