Towards ACQF Level Descriptors

Session 4
11th Peer Learning Webinar
Thursday 23 September 2021
Coleen Jaftha
Presentation overview

- Context of the level descriptors (LDs) guideline
- Overview of concepts and learning from LDs of other RQFs
- Brief overview of LDs on the continent and options for ACQF
- Some survey results
- Challenges
Principles
- **Inclusive**: all types of learning and levels of qualifications (all sub-systems of education and training);
- **Open**: learners’ & stakeholders’ needs, policy learning & lessons from other QFs
- **Innovation-ready**: transformation of skills and learning: digitalisation, greening & beyond Covid-19 reconstruction.

Vision for the ACQF
- Enhance comparability, quality and transparency of qualifications from all sub-sectors and levels of education and training and support people’s lifelong learning outcomes;
- Facilitate recognition of diplomas and certificates, and mobility of learners and workers;
- Work in complementarity with national and regional qualifications frameworks, and support the creation of a common African education space;
- Promote cooperation and alignment between qualifications frameworks (national, regional) in Africa and worldwide.

Key features of an RQF

Functions:
- Overarching framework against which national and regional frameworks and level descriptors - can be calibrated
- Referencing qualifications framework:
  - NQF-RQF
  - comparison with other international frameworks
- Hub, catalyst for development of NQFs and their instruments

Recap

Purpose, principles and scope influence the decision around number of levels and domains of level descriptors

A set of level descriptors

Specified linkages to quality assurance criteria or arrangements

Governance arrangements
Each of the ten guidelines comprise 3 documents:
* Technical guideline
* Synthesis guideline
* Training module

Testing and fine-tuning

Finalised, tested and disseminated ACQF documents

Guideline trio pack

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Synthesis guideline  (2-3 pages)</th>
<th>Technical guideline  (10-25 pages + annexes)</th>
<th>Training module</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Concept (s)</td>
<td>• Comprehensive presentation of the topic</td>
<td>• Purpose of the module</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Users</td>
<td>• Recommendations on application in ACQF context</td>
<td>• Typical users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recommendations related with the ACQF guidelines</td>
<td>• Links with other ACQF guidelines</td>
<td>• Learning outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Links with other ACQF guidelines</td>
<td>• Literature</td>
<td>• Description of topic/ theme and its importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Annexes</td>
<td>• Method of implementation</td>
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<td>• Cases</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Self-assessment</td>
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<td>• Sources</td>
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</table>
Ten generic themes in referencing criteria

1. Legal competence of bodies involved in referencing, including communication
2. Linking levels of the NQF/ NQS with the overarching framework
3. Learning outcomes, validation of prior learning, credit systems
4. Transparency regarding procedures for classifying a qualification in an NQF/NQS
5. Consistency of national Quality Assurance (QA) systems
6. Referencing endorsement by QA institutions
7. Review by key players
8. Endorsement and publication of referencing report
9. Maintenance of referencing report register
10. Referencing visibility on qualification documents

Guideline 2: ACQF levels and level descriptors

Guideline 8: Revised and improved referencing criteria for the ACQF

Guideline 7: Monitoring and evaluation in the context of NQFs/ NQSs and ACQF

Guideline 10: Integrative

Guideline 2 fits here
Developing LDs

Some concepts

Learning outcomes based

Learning from other RQFs: domains, principles

Development on two dimensions/logic

Purposes

Source: Addis Convention
Level descriptors are the "glue" in NQFs

- Formulated as learning outcomes related to a specific level

Level descriptors are one of the main communication tools between NQFs and RQFs

Level descriptors enable countries to link their national descriptors/qualifications levels to the ACQF levels
Learning outcomes (LO) based level descriptors (LDs)

- Reflect nature and scope of the NQF
- LDs formulated as national LO statements that describe the complexity of learning of qualifications types
- Shift from input to output: Set of descriptors indicate learner acquisitions not years of study
- Statements Indicate the location of a particular qualification on a specific level

Adapted from SADCQF workshop, 8 June 2017, SA
Purpose of RQF as translation device between QFs/ qualifications levels

Example: EQF (8-level)
• Level descriptors described as regional/ European learning outcome statements

Purpose of EQF: Translation device between QFs (regardless of level)
• Links to level descriptors/ qualifications levels
• No links to qualifications/ qualification types

Source: Slava Pevec Grm, senior expert Cedefop
Level descriptor development on two dimensions of logic

**Horizontal dimension: Domains and sub-domains of learning**

NQF:
- reflects what is NB to a nation and should be reflected in the qualifications
- Universally described as: Knowledge, Skills
- More contentious domain: application, competence, autonomy, responsibility

RQF: Horizontal
- LDs need to be generic/ broad statements of outcomes of complexity to accommodate all forms of learning (formal, non-formal, informal)
  - DESIRABLE: Clarity; Define domains and sub-domains; Include what is reasonable
  - NOT DESIRABLE: Too much detail/ too many domains/ over-complicated framework

**Vertical dimension: Levels of learning complexity**

NQF:
- Hierarchical, from lower to higher levels, with enough detail to differentiate one level from the next
- Describes the levels of learning complexity of qualifications or qualification types; often referred to as levels of learning progression

RQF: Vertical
- DESIRABLE: Clarity; Understanding and agreement on levels of complexity/ degree of comparability across the domains
Some learnings from other RQFs (contd.)

**Association of South East Asian Nation (ASEAN) Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF)**

- **8 levels, 2 domains**
  1. Knowledge and Skills,
  2. Application and Responsibility

**European Qualifications Framework (EQF)**

- **8 levels, 3 domains**
  1. Knowledge,
  2. Skills,
  3. Responsibility and Autonomy

**Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF) of the Virtual University of the Small States of the Commonwealth (TQF VUSSC)**

- **10 levels, 2 domains**
  1. Knowledge and understanding,
  2. Skills and wider personal and professional competencies

**Southern African Development Community (SADC) Qualifications Framework (SADCQF)**

- **10 levels, 3 domains**
  1. Knowledge,
  2. Skills,
  3. Autonomy and Responsibility

**Typical considerations for level descriptor development:**

Purpose, principles and scope influence determination of levels and domains.

RQF LDs are generic and applicable across all education and training sectors.

- LOs may reflect some or all domains of participating NQFs or
- include aspects that RQFs wish to encourage in NQFs of member countries.

**Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards (PRQS)/ Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF)**

- **10 levels, 3 domains**
  1. Knowledge and Skills,
  2. Application,
  3. Autonomy
Learnings from other RQFs:
Underpinning principles for drafting ACQF LDs

ACQF LDs will play a role in referencing between RQFs and NQFs and encompass all components of transparency:
• Learning outcomes approach
• Validation of learning from non-formal and informal contexts
• Placement of qualifications in NQF levels and registers
• Quality assurance of qualifications and NQFs
• Stakeholder participation and endorsement/ agreed and credible reference point

All forms of learning outcomes are covered, irrespective of the learning context or institutional context:
• Generic and applicable to academic, vocational and work-based qualifications
• Neutral:
  --does not require changes to NQFs/NQSs;
  --does not identify learning or workplace context
• General in scope but explicit in defining domains
• Common language and independent reference point/ Deliberately uses general language (does not capture complexities of an NQF/NQS)
• Does not exclude specific learner groups through the use of language or implied contexts/ Not sector specific/ Content free
• Future-oriented
Learnings from other RQFs:
Underpinning principles for drafting ACQF LDs contd.

**Conceptual and technical clarity and consistency:**
- Each domain and sub-domain is conceptually determined with clear definitions
- As simple, brief and general as possible to facilitate clarity of the concept of the level
- Only positive, clear, specific statements are made
- Jargon-free, non-technical language/ transparent for the non-expert reader
- Concrete and definite in nature and avoid the use of words such as narrow and good, or cross references such as narrower, broader or appropriate

**Developmental:**
- Each successive level implies a higher level of complexity of learning:
- Adequate distinction is made between the descriptors of lower and higher levels
- Repetition is avoided, i.e. each level should build on the lower levels and encompass all the previous levels
- Clear taxonomy of learning outcomes/ fit-for-purpose
African NQF snapshot

Table 1: qualifications frameworks in Africa - by stage of development and implementation - overview (end 2020). Highlighted: countries with qualifications framework of sectoral scope (mostly focused on qualifications of TVET systems)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of NQF development and implementation</th>
<th>Countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. No NQF</td>
<td>Chad, Republic of Congo, São Tomé e Príncipe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. NQF in early thinking</td>
<td>Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Union of Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Guiné-Bissau, Mali, Togo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. NQF in development and consultation</td>
<td>Angola, Burundi, Côte d’Ivoire, Egypt, Madagascar, Morocco, Sierra Leone, Somalia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. NQF in advanced implementation and reviewed</td>
<td>Cape Verde, Mauritius, South Africa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: dataset of ACOF Mapping study

Figure 1: Overview – distribution of qualifications frameworks by stages of development and implementation

Source: dataset of ACOF Mapping study

** Mapping study
** Feasibility study
** Thematic briefs
** PLWs
etc
Options for ACQF LDs- levels and domains

### Possible ACQF levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QFs levels</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Countries/ regions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NQFs: 10 levels</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11 in SADC (Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe) + Kenya =12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NQFs: 8 levels</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Cape Verde, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Morocco, Rwanda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NQFs: 7 levels</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tunisia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sector QF: 6 levels</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nigeria, Uganda (TVET)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sector QF: 5 levels</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Senegal (TVET), Tanzania (HE)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RQFs**

| RQFs: 10 levels | 1 | SADCQF |
| RQFs: 8 levels | 1 | EAQFHE (HE) |
| **TOTAL** | **25** | |

### Possible ACQF domains

- **Agency**
- **Attitudes**
- **Attributes**
- **Autonomy**
- **Autonomy and Responsibility**
- **Competence**
- **Creativity**
- **Independence**
- **Knowledge**
- **Responsibility**
- **Skills**
- **Values**

### Innovation- role and place of new skills (green, digital, social, others)

- May be related with new types of qualifications and wider opening up to RPL

### Learning from EQF: included innovation under skills domain,

- From L4 onwards develops creative thinking
- L5 explicit
- L6 mentions innovation
- L7: mentions “new, .. innovation”
- L8: not explicit

Notion of creativity also blended through other EQF domains e.g. K &RA

### Knowledge-

- L7: “original thinking”

### Responsibility and autonomy

- L7: “new” and
- L8: “new ideas or processes”
### Some survey results

#### Which category applies best in your work?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NQF</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NQS</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Agreement and use of learning outcomes and level descriptors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use/apply level descriptors</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree level descriptors</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use/apply learning outcomes</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree learning outcomes</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar patterns in agreement and use/application of learning outcomes and level descriptors:
- TVET sector most popular
Some survey results (contd.)

Similar results:
- Scope of NQF/NQS
- Process of classifying qualification in NQF/ NQS

### Classification in NQF/ NQS applied consistently

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Levels of Qualifications</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Types of Qualifications</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Qualifications</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifications from Other Countries</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micro-Credentials</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only Quality-Assured Qualifications</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Scope of NQF/ NQS

- **Micro-Credentials**: 5
- **Qualifications from Other Countries**: 11
- **Part-Qualifications**: 12
- **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)**: 20
- **Only Quality-Assured Qualifications**: 17
- **All Types of Qualifications**: 20
- **All Levels of Qualifications**: 22
Some survey results (contd.)

**Process of classification in NQF/NQS**

- Based on comparison of NQF LDs with qualifications LOs: 20
- Legislated/policy: 19
- Transparent: 19
- Quality assured process: 17
- Agreed by all stakeholders: 16
- Only quality-assured qualifications: 15

**Bodies involved in classification process**

- Quality Assurance Agencies: 17
- National Qualifications Authorities: 16
- Certification bodies: 16
- Inter-ministerial organs: 14
- Education Ministries/Depts: 13
- Professional bodies: 13
- Labour Ministries/Depts: 10
- Sectoral ministries in qualification field: 10
- Sectoral councils: 6

Least involvement:
- Labour and sectoral bodies
DEVELOPMENTAL BASIS FOR PEGGING QUALIFICATION VERTICALLY AND HORIZONTALLY COHERENT AGREED BY SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS APPLIED IN PRACTICE DOES NOT EXCLUDE SPECIFIC LEARNERS WRITTEN IN POSTITIVE TERMS PRACTISED LDS IS SAME AS NQF AVOIDS REPETITION EASILY UNDERSTOOD CLEAR/ UNAMBIGUOUS

Some survey results (contd.)

Majority:
- Logic (vertical and horizontal)
- Basis for pegging qualification on NQF

Minority
- Mostly clarity/language aspects
- Also at the low end: the LDS used in practice are the same as those of the NQF
Some survey results (contd.)

Features of learning outcomes

- **Low end:**
  - Supported by research and tools
  - Contributes to societal/ labour/ industry needs
  - Linked to assessment

- **High end:**
  - Learner mobility
  - Guides design, description and recognition of qualifications
  - Specific to sub-sector
  - Cascades from LDs
  - Lifelong learning
Some survey results (contd.)

Benefits of referencing

This variable was added to check expectation:
- Referencing **does not imply automatic recognition**
- Minority response in line with above

Most popular response:
- Internationalisation
Results of survey (domains and levels)

Ranking domains of learning (3 top ranks - 13 domains)

**Ranking of domains:**
1. Knowledge (21)
2. Skills (18)
3. Competence (17)
4. Autonomy and responsibility (11)/Responsibility (11)
5. Independence (10)
6. Autonomy (7)/Attitudes (7)
7. Adaptability (6)
8. Agency (4)/Attributes (4)
9. Creativity (3)/Values (3)

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**ACQF levels**

- 64% 10 levels
- 36% 8 levels

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**Inclusion of innovation**

- 27% Sub-domain
- 36% Does not have to be explicit
- 37% Separate domain
Challenges

Bearing in mind the objectives and vision of the ACQF, and its wide scope:

• What indispensable elements of the conceptual-technical design should be agreed so that the ACQF plays its role and benefits the continent?

• How to develop good definition of levels and descriptors of an inclusive and future oriented RQF (the task of this Guideline)

• Learning outcomes (LO) approach and LO in different contexts of learning (standards-programmes-assessment-certification) and in renewal of qualifications / adaptation to new demands and technologies

• Transparency in management of qualifications: registers, databases

• Quality assurance principles and mechanisms

• Validation of learning, including RPL
Questions, discussions, inputs

Thank you