



International
Labour
Organization



► South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework

Technical Meeting 4A and 4B



► **South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework**

Technical Meeting #4A and 4B

31 July 2023

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List of acronyms

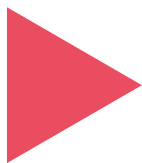
AQRF	ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework
AQAF	ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
EU	European Union
ILO	International Labour Organization
MS	Member States
NQF	national qualifications framework
NQS	national qualifications system
NSQF	National Skills Qualification Framework
NSC	National SAQRF Committee
RPL	recognition of prior learning
RQF	regional qualifications framework
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SAQRF	South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework
TVET	technical and vocational education and training

Acknowledgement

This report is being produced as part of the Governance of Labour Migration in South and South - East Asia (GOALS) Programme, which is implemented as a UN Joint Programme by the International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

Under the auspices of the GOALS programme, the ILO is assisting the South Asian member states (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka), through a consultative process, with developing a Regional Qualifications Framework. As part of this process, two separate meetings (4A and 4B) as part of the fourth technical meeting were held on 29 and 30 May 2023 (virtually) and on 26 and 27 June 2023 (hybrid from Colombo). This report is a documentation of the proceedings and outcomes of the Fourth Technical Meeting.

This report was prepared by Ms Andrea Bateman, ILO Consultant and education expert. Ms Bateman is assisting the South Asian member states with the development of the regional qualifications framework. Technical inputs and contributions to the report were made by ILO officials, Mr Gabriel Bordado, Skills and Employability Specialist for South Asia, and Mr Amish Karki, Technical Officer, GOALS programme.



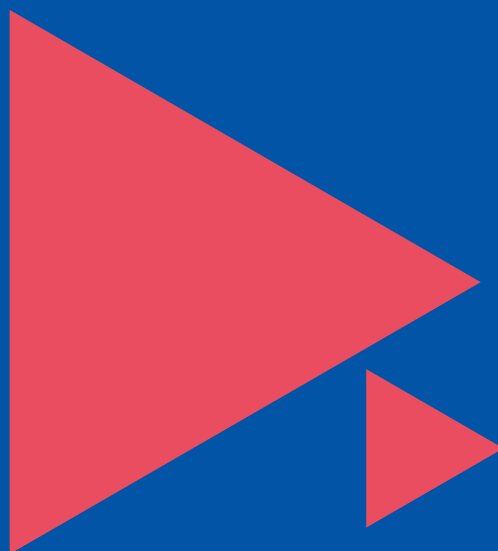
Background

The project aims to develop a regional qualifications framework (RQF), sometimes referred to as a common reference framework, for South Asian countries.¹ It is envisaged that the framework will provide the basis for recognition of qualifications for mobility of labour and strengthen common understanding and cooperation in the region.

The Technical Meetings #4A and #4B are part of a series of five technical meetings conducted over approximately 18 months to develop and refine an RQF that is ready for endorsement.

This technical meeting was separated into two meetings:

- ▶ Technical Meeting #4A, held virtually on 29 and 30 May 2023
- ▶ Technical Meeting #4B, a hybrid meeting in Sri Lanka and online on 26 and 27 June 2023.



¹ Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Given the current situation in Afghanistan, there were no invitees or attendees.

Technical Meeting #4A

► Purpose

The main objectives of the meeting were to:

- model the referencing process as a group and review and provide feedback for two or more partial referencing reports;
- reflect on the referencing process, protocols and templates;
- consider the draft RQF document;
- discuss proposed governance options of the RQF; and
- brief Member States (MS) on Meeting #4B and the finalization and endorsement of the draft RQF document.

The meeting was held virtually on 29 and 30 May, with a 3.5-hour session on each day. The agenda is included in Appendix 1.

Attendance

The technical meeting was well attended across all participating MS and International Labour Organization (ILO) representatives. In total, there were 24 participants across days 1 and 2. The representatives from the MS were from technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and/or higher education competent bodies (for example, quality assurance agencies, peak policy, or funding bodies). There is still a need to raise awareness among other agencies within MS – for example, those agencies responsible for migration, labour or civil society.

► Summary of Day 1

Opening session

Mr Amish Karki welcomed the participants, provided an update of progress on a South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework (SAQRF) and outlined the agenda for the two days. He noted the successes, including the submission of a draft response to Criterion 1 by the MS.

The technical meeting was opened by Mr Tek Bahadur Malla, Director, Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT), NSTB, Nepal. Mr Malla welcomed the participants on behalf of Nepal and noted the learning experiences that these meetings offer.

Referencing overview and feedback to draft referencing reports

Ms Andrea Bateman, Project Consultant, provided an overview of the referencing process, noting that:

- referencing is an activity that results in the establishment of a relationship between the levels of the SAQRF and that of the national

qualifications framework (NQF)/national qualifications system (NQS); and

- preparedness to reference is not dependent on whether there is an explicit NQF, the quality assurance is fully implemented, or the NQS is “perfect”.

Ms Bateman explained that this meeting aimed to model the process of presentation of the draft reference report to the MS and informed the participants that the format for the process over the next two days was as follows:

- Project Consultant invited to summarize the collated MS feedback;
- offer for any MS to provide additional comments;
- offer for the referencing MS to comment; and
- final comment from the Chair or Vice-Chair.



She indicated that Bangladesh and Bhutan were to undertake the roles of Chair and Vice-Chair, but because Bangladesh had other commitments, Bhutan would undertake the role of the Chair of the referencing sessions. Mr Tandin Dorji from Bhutan kindly agreed to undertake the role of Chair. The Project Consultant agreed to step into the role of Chair for Bhutan's session on their referencing report.

The Project Consultant congratulated all MS that had submitted a draft referencing report

against Criteria 1, noting that one MS was progressing a response, but it was not ready to be submitted for this meeting. The Project Consultant also thanked the reviewing MS for the comments and time commitment. Feedback on draft referencing reports was received from Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka and augmented by the comments of the Project Consultant.

The following table summarizes the comments received by the reviewing MS and additional comments by the Project Consultant.

Table 1: Comments of reviewing MS

Member States	Notes
Bangladesh	- The first draft report has provided a strong basis for further development to Criterion 1, but further organization and elaboration are required. - The response included: - an extensive list of references and glossary of terms; - an outline of the development of the Bangladesh National Qualifications Framework, which is the culmination of harmonizing the TVET and skills and higher education sector frameworks; - information on a credit accumulation and transfer system, which appeared to be limited to higher education; and - a pathways diagram. - The response needs: - systems diagram; - consistent data across all sectors; - clarity of scope and level of implementation of BNQF; and - how recognition of formal (credit transfer) and non-formal and informal learning (recognition of prior learning (RPL)) is addressed.
Bhutan	- The first draft report provides a strong basis for finalization against Criterion 1. - Submission included: - a glossary and list of acronyms; and - a concise overview of the structure of the education and training system, addressing each sector systematically. - The response needs: - systems diagram; - enhanced data to cover all sectors; and - additional information of reforms.

Member States	Notes
Maldives	- The response provides the preliminary basis for a response to Criterion 1. - The response included: - an extensive overview of the Maldives National Qualifications Framework; and - a systems diagram that required enhancement. - The response needs further work to include: - overview of all sectors, noting their scope and size; - overview as to how formal (credit transfer) and non-formal and informal learning (RPL) are addressed; - level of implementation of MNQF, noting that it is under review; and - overview of new developments.
Pakistan	- The response provides the preliminary basis for a response to Criterion 1. - The response included: - list of references and acronyms; and - systems diagram. - The response needs: - consistent text with the systems diagram; - NQF and National Vocational Qualifications Framework – explanation of the relationship and overview of the descriptors; - clarity of how formal (credit transfer), non-formal and informal learning are addressed; - level of implementation of QFs; and - planned reforms for other sectors (other than TVET, which was provided); - glossary of terms relevant to the MS.
Sri Lanka	- The response provides a firm basis for further development to Criterion 1. - The response included: - glossary and list of references; - information on the two qualifications frameworks (NVQF and Sri Lanka Qualifications Framework); and - a pathways diagram, which could be enhanced with accompanying text. - Needs: - reorganization of information; - systems diagram and alignment to sector information; - clarity as to the relationship between SLQF and NVQF; - how formal (credit transfer), non-formal and informal learning (RPL) are addressed; and - reforms for any other sectors (other than higher education and TVET).

All MS presented their reports, indicated the progress of the response, and noted any issues facing their state. Each MS was invited to provide comments on other MS's referencing reports, and they sought clarity regarding various aspects of the qualifications systems.

The Project Consultant opened the discussion following the sessions on the referencing reports, seeking feedback from participating MS as to what worked well when drafting the report and what could have been improved. The following points were noted:

- ▶ Bhutan indicated that the response was discussed together with relevant parties, and the process was made easier given that the responsibility for overseeing higher education and TVET had now been brought under one organization. It was important when accessing data that specific people in ministries in each sector were contacted to obtain the relevant data.
- ▶ Pakistan explained the process by which it developed its response, noting that the report was prepared by two people and then sent to focal points to obtain additional information and for comments.
- ▶ Sri Lanka appointed a committee to bring “all actors” to one table, and multiple versions of the report were drafted, and it was made ready for submission.

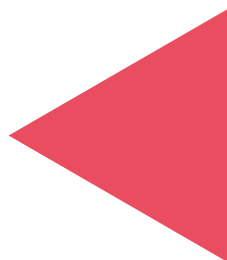
The Project Consultant then invited the MS that reviewed the other MS’s responses to provide comments on issues they faced when responding to reports. She noted that two weeks were allocated to review one criterion from the MS. The following points were noted:

- ▶ Bhutan was of the opinion that there was sufficient time to respond to reports.
- ▶ Nepal said that there were no major difficulties in responding to reports, but there may be difficulties in providing a coordinated response when reviewing MS reports. It indicated that the model response provided by the Project Consultant to all MS could be an example of the level of detail required for each criterion.

- ▶ Sri Lanka was of the view that there were no difficulties given that each MS addressed only one criterion.

The Project Consultant indicated that national committees need to plan their timelines to draft a referencing report and obtain permission to release the report for review by other MS. She also indicated that some MS may require permission to release their feedback to an MS’s referencing report and that this needs to be considered when undertaking a referencing activity. Finally, she noted that collating MS feedback to a referencing report was useful from the perspective of obtaining an overview of the reports.

Mr Amish Karki, ILO South Asia, closed the meeting, thanking all participants for their efforts towards trialling the referencing process.



► Summary of Day 2

Day 2 was opened by Mr Amish Karki, who, noted that the focus of the day would be the draft referencing report, the submission process, the draft SAQRF and governance arrangements in preparation for Meeting #4B.

Endorsement process and letter

The Project Consultant provided background information regarding the endorsement of the SAQRF, noting that the items to address in the session included:

- the endorsement letter;
- the ministries to be identified, especially since it was necessary to keep relevant ministries to a minimum; and
- the recipient of the signed endorsement letters.

The Project Consultant alerted the MS to the draft endorsement letter and asked them to consider who would endorse the SAQRF. She indicated that the MS were given response forms to provide updates on the endorsement process between the current meeting and Technical Meeting #4. She reminded the MS to complete the form regarding SAQRF signatories by 2 June 2023 and noted that the end process for endorsement – signing – was scheduled for November 2023.

The MS were invited to comment on which ministries would be required to endorse the SAQRF. The following points were noted:

- Bhutan and Nepal indicated that the ministry for education and training would be responsible.
- India indicated that there were two responsible ministries (education and skills development).
- Pakistan indicated that it would more than likely be the ministry responsible for education and professional training.

- Sri Lanka indicated that two ministries would be involved – those responsible for education and labour. Several MS indicated that prior to endorsement, several other ministries would need to be informed and agreement sought – for example, the ministry responsible for foreign affairs.

Mr Amish Karki noted that all MS needed to inform (at least) the ministry responsible for foreign affairs and that every MS should assign the endorsement to the ministry/ministries responsible for education, training and skills. There were also discussions on whether to include the ministry responsible for labour. He noted that in terms of the ILO and the importance of labour mobility, the ministry responsible for labour is an end user and will provide an economic perspective on the benefits of the SAQRF.

The Project Consultant prompted the MS to discuss who would receive the endorsement letters. Mr Amish Karki introduced the issue noting that the decision depended on governance arrangements in the short-to-medium term.

Given that the discussion relates to SAARC's capacity to take on the SAQRF, Mr Karki provided an update on discussions with SAARC. He indicated that the ILO has had at least two rounds of discussions with SAARC, with the exiting and incumbent Secretary Generals. He noted that they and other SAARC representatives were positive about the framework and with how MS were working towards the completion of the SAQRF. He indicated that SAARC had not committed to taking on board the SAQRF, but if the MS agreed that SAARC is the best "home" for the SAQRF, then it would be happy to house it. However, there were complexities around whether the Charter required amendment and how it would sit within SAARC. As a next step,

the ILO planned another meeting with SAARC (in June 2023) to discuss the SAQRF again and how it would fit within SAARC. However, on the matter of endorsement, it is envisaged that SAARC will not be in a position to house the SAQRF immediately, but it did not exclude “housing” the SAQRF in the long term. He noted that if MS sought assistance from the ILO to support the SAQRF, the ILO would consider the request.

The Project Consultant indicated that the governance arrangements and the Secretariat are not necessarily connected to donor funding. The SAQRF may be housed in one institution, but it may be funded by a donor not connected to that institution. She noted that the Secretariat is supporting the Technical Committee but could be funded by a donor.

MS indicated that in relation to the letter:

- ▶ Bhutan noted that decisions needed to be made regarding the governance arrangements.
- ▶ India indicated that the ILO would be the best fit to receive the letters given the situation.
- ▶ Nepal noted that if SAARC can take responsibility, then it should be the body receiving the letter.
- ▶ Pakistan noted that the ILO should take the lead here and could retain these endorsement letters for the future.
- ▶ Sri Lanka preferred a separate entity to manage the SAQRF, noting that there were pros and cons.

With regard to the letter of endorsement, the MS were invited to comment on the draft letter of endorsement. The draft letter to be presented at the next meeting (Meeting #4B) is included in Appendix 6.

Referencing process

The Project Consultant presented further information regarding the referencing process, noting that there will be a range of documents

to support referencing MS and those that will review referencing reports, including the:

- ▶ referencing guide and procedure to be included in the SAQRF Guidelines;
- ▶ referencing report template; and
- ▶ referencing report review template.

The Project Consultant explained the referencing procedure, noting that this procedure was specific to the submission of the referencing report. She referred the MS to the draft SAQRF Guidelines, specifically Appendices 1 and 2 of the Guidelines. She noted that the Guidelines were still to be completed and indicated that they would be endorsed by the Technical Committee once the endorsement of the SAQRF had occurred and the Technical Committee was established. For Appendix 1, the Project Consultant noted that additional edits had been made given a review of other similar committees and international conventions.

She then invited the MS to provide comments on the procedure or reflections on the trial review process for any future changes and additions.

The version of the Guidelines presented at this meeting is included in Appendix 5.

Draft South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework

Ms Andrea Bateman, the Project Consultant, presented the SAQRF as the draft for final consultations in each MS. She indicated that the MS had been provided with a tracked and clean copy with highlighted areas that may need further scrutiny.

The Project Consultant invited MS to comment and reminded them that they needed to provide written comments after a process of critical thinking as well as their acceptance prior to Meeting #4B. The draft SAQRF is included in Appendix 3. There were no significant changes to this document.

SAQRF overarching governance arrangements

In relation to governance arrangements (refer to Appendix 4), the Project Consultant referred to the two proposed revised options

considered the feedback from the previous meeting that supported SAARC as the best option but noted the concerns with SAARC's ability to take on the remit of the SAQRF in the immediate-to-near future. The summary is presented in the following table.

Table 2: Governance options

Option 1: SAARC	Option 2: Collaborative approach – extended, international agency
Sit under SAARC and Charter	Collaborative model with interim support by an international agency
Advantages: • SAARC protocols and support would apply • Long term sustainability • Small secretariat • Clear identity	Advantages: • MS can manage approach in line with an agreement • Rotation hosting with rotation of Chair • Provides a support mechanism, whereby the international agency's infrastructure (website) could be used and human resources could be housed
Issues: • SAARC engagement • SAARC membership	Issues: • Requires a high level of cooperation • Requires 'heads of agreement' or 'constitution'

General business and interim activities

The Project Consultant briefed the MS on the proposed interim activities to be undertaken prior to Technical Meeting #4B. She noted that MS are to come to the next meeting with final requests for changes to the SAQRF and a position on the governance arrangements for final resolution. She reminded MS to consider which responsible minister(s) would be required to endorse the SAQRF and respond in writing by 2 June 2023.

Closing session

Mr Sana Ullah Memon, Deputy Director, Pakistan Higher Education Commission, closed the meeting. He thanked all the participants and acknowledged the input provided over the two days and the progress towards a finalized SAQRF.

► Outcomes

Technical Meeting #4A provided a valuable basis for collaboration among the MS, and there was support to continue the development of the SAQRF. The SAQRF policy document is improving each time as it moves closer to finalization at Technical Meeting #4B, to be held in Sri Lanka. Further clarity was provided on the future governance of the SAQRF and the endorsement process.

Technical Meeting #4B

► Purpose

The main purpose of the meeting was to:

- further develop and refine the draft SAQRF policy document and facilitate discussions on governance arrangements and process for endorsement;
- discuss an implementation and sustainability plan for SAQRF; and
- lead preliminary discussions for common guidance on mutual recognition of skills and qualifications.

The meeting was held as a hybrid meeting, with participants gathering in Sri Lanka and online on 26 and 27 June. The agenda is included in Appendix 2. A key focus of the meeting was to achieve an agreed final draft of the SAQRF and the endorsement letter and determine a way forward for the overarching governance arrangements.

Attendance

The attendance at the technical meeting across all participating MS and ILO representatives was high. On Day 1, there were 40 in-person participants and four online participants. On Day 2, there were 33 in-person participants and 3 online participants.

The representatives from the MS were mainly from TVET and higher education competent bodies (for example, quality assurance agencies, peak policy or funding bodies). In addition, there were representatives of employer groups, trade unions and civil society from India, the Maldives and Sri Lanka.

► Summary of Day 1

Technical Meeting #4B was formally opened by:

- Ms Simrin Singh, Country Director, ILO Country Office for Sri Lanka and the Maldives;
- Mr Benil Thavarasa, Regional Advisor, South and South-East Asia Section Migration and Forced Displacement, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC); and
- Mr M. N. Ranasinghe, Secretary, Ministry of Education, Government of Sri Lanka.

Ms Simrin Singh welcomed the other dignitaries and the government officials from all participating MS as well as employers, unions from the region and thematic experts. She noted that the GOALS project relates to governance of labour migration in South and South-East Asia and focuses on qualifications recognition as a means to facilitate better outcomes for labour mobility, including the availability of decent work. She provided an overview of the background to the development of the SAQRF and noted that this RQF does not

replace NQFs but encourages recognition of students and workers skills and qualifications and helps “level the playing field”. She thanked the Swiss Agency for their present support in the region as well as their support in the future. She welcomed all participants and wished them well in their deliberations.

Mr Benil Thavarasa welcomed the dignitaries and participants, including those joining virtually. He recalled the 18th SAARC Summit in relation to developing an RQF. He noted that there are two approaches to recognition – bilateral agreements and regional frameworks – and each approach has its own benefits. He noted that bilateral and multilateral agreements are not mutually exclusive, with an ILO feasibility study indicating that there was interest in an RQF. He thanked the task force members and social partners as well as all relevant stakeholders who had expressed an interest in working together.



Mr M. N. Ranasinghe welcomed distinguished delegates and participants to the meeting. He expressed appreciation to those hosting the meeting and invited all to work together to ensure that the qualifications systems are responsive to the needs of the citizens. He noted that this meeting was an excellent platform for sharing knowledge and shaping a framework to facilitate qualifications recognition within the region. He acknowledged the work of the task force members and their expertise and noted that all participants were here to support lifelong learning. He acknowledged the support of the ILO in this region and, specifically, its support for this initiative. He encouraged participants to share knowledge and information regarding best practices and create a framework that would lay the foundation for better outcomes for students and the workforce.

Following the formal opening of the meeting, Mr Amish Karki noted that there have been four regional meetings prior to Meeting #4B and that the aims of this meeting are to:

- ▶ look at the draft SAQRF and arrive at a consensus on a final draft;
- ▶ study the governance structure, such as where it will be housed and anchored; and
- ▶ finalize the endorsement process and letter.

Mr Gabriel Bordado opened the session for Day 1 and asked MS to introduce themselves. He then asked ILO representatives, support agency representatives and other social partners to introduce themselves.

Following these introductions, the Project Consultant provided a brief overview of terms that would be important to the ensuing discussions, including:

- ▶ qualifications system;
- ▶ qualifications framework;
- ▶ quality assurance, including the various aspects (for example, the formulation and approval of qualifications in line with the NQF, approval of providers who are able to provide

an approved qualification, monitoring of providers, monitoring of assessment and certification, system-wide evaluations and provision of public information);

- ▶ RQFs and how they function and promote recognition of qualifications; and
- ▶ referencing process.

Mr Bordado, ILO, indicated that the review of the SAQRF would go line by line. He noted that Session 1 would focus on Sections 2, 3, 4 and 5, notably the purpose, scope, principles and structure. The participants provided in-depth, meaningful comments throughout these sections, with edits that increased succinctness and clarity. Of interest to MS were the definitions of knowledge, skills and application in relation to the level descriptors and the improved clarity of the text in Section 5. The Project Consultant edited the text as the meeting progressed.

Session 2, also chaired by Mr Bordado, focused on the referencing criteria and obligations (Section 6), with extensive comments from MS. Again, MS provided comments and suggestions for the text and came to an agreement. The Project Consultant highlighted the inclusion of an observer with a requirement to include two international experts in the referencing process. She asked the MS to reconsider this inclusion of an observer as it overly complicated the referencing process. It was agreed that this requirement would be excluded.

Session 3 was chaired by Ms Ligaya Dumaoang, ILO, and addressed the text in relation to quality assurance. Then, the participants moved to Annexure 2, referencing criteria and obligations, and Annexure 3, quality assurance criteria. Section 8, credit systems, was also addressed prior to the end of Day 1.

At the end of the day, the Project Consultant agreed to clean up areas of the text to present these changes at the beginning of Day 2. She also requested an out-of-session discussion with MS to consider changes to the level descriptors prior to Day 2.

► Summary of Day 2

Mr Bordado opened Day 2 and welcomed all participants. The Project Consultant presented the revised text from Day 1, including options for alternate text for the MS to consider, especially in relation to the definition of quality assurance and the use of “educational services” as a general term to encompass higher education and TVET and skills sectors.

The MS also commented on Annexures 2 and 3, noting changes to referencing obligations focused on ensuring clarity among MS; they were to implement these obligations as they saw fit. The Project Consultant drew the attention of the MS to quality assurance Criterion 9 in relation to making public reports of reviews of responsible bodies and asked the MS to consider the impact of this requirement.

Session 4 was chaired by Mr Bordado and focused on the level descriptors and proposed changes to text given the discussions and review against other RQFs. Key areas of interest were level 8 and the requirement for research in the application domain, the use of the term “mastery” in level 6 of the skills domain and the need for the inclusion of “creation” in the knowledge domain at level 8. Edits were undertaken throughout these sessions.

Session 5 was chaired by Mr Bordado and began with the discussion on governance arrangements (Section 10 of the SAQRF). The Project Consultant referred the participants to the draft SAQRF Guidelines and indicated that some of the text is now included there and has been deleted from the SAQRF document itself.

Session 6 was chaired by Mr Karki and focused on the glossary. The Project Consultant emphasized that the glossary would be used to assist in understanding MS’s own terms and would not impinge on national terms and understandings.

Session 7 was chaired by Mr Bordado and focused on the endorsement process and

the draft endorsement letter. After extensive discussions, changes and reductions in text were made to the endorsement letter.

In relation to the signatories, after much discussion, it was agreed that each MS would have the ministries responsible for education/TVET/skills endorse the SAQRF and would include any additional ministries as designated by each MS’s national structures and context.

The final session reviewed options for governance arrangements (refer to Appendix 4). The Project Consultant noted that there were two options:

- Option 1: SAARC
- Option 2: Collaborative approach supported by an international agency until it can be supported by SAARC.

The Project Consultant affirmed that the participants had been asked to consult within their respective countries and to provide a preference on the day as to where the SAQRF and SAQRF Secretariat would be housed. The MS indicated the following:

- ▶ Bangladesh preferred option 2;
- ▶ Bhutan preferred option 1, but in the interim, option 2;
- ▶ India indicated that they had previously offered to house the SAQRF Secretariat;
- ▶ The Maldives indicated option 2 given the underlying issues with SAARC;
- ▶ Nepal preferred option 2;
- ▶ Pakistan indicated that if SAARC is not possible in the immediate future, then they would prefer option 2; and
- ▶ Sri Lanka indicated that option 2 was preferred, but this would need to be confirmed by the ministry.

The MS were also asked what institution would provide support if option 2 was the preferred model until the framework could be supported by SAARC. The following options were indicated:

- ▶ Bangladesh noted that the ILO would be an appropriate institution to support the framework in the interim;
- ▶ Bhutan noted that a decision needs to be made so as not to delay progress and proposed that the MS needed to make a decision and inform the ILO;
- ▶ India indicated that it would need to consult responsible bodies in the country and seek clarity;
- ▶ Maldives acknowledged that UNESCO has a lot of experts in education and a strong approach in terms of collaboration and may therefore be a worthwhile option;
- ▶ Nepal suggested UNESCO or the ILO as options;
- ▶ Pakistan indicated that it preferred option 2, with ILO being the supporting institution; and

- ▶ Sri Lanka indicated that the ILO could provide support given that it had done so up to that point in time.

MS agreed that SAARC is the ideal model to accommodate the SAQRF, but that in the interim, an international agency should support the SAQRF and the Secretariat. The international agencies proposed were the ILO and UNESCO. Mr Karki requested that India provide advice following consultation, and India committed to providing advice within the next 24 hours. Mr Karki indicated that if ILO undertook the support, the Secretariat was more than likely to be located in the ILO offices in New Delhi.

The final draft of the SAQRF sent to the ILO editors as a result of the participant input during and after this meeting is included in Appendix 7.

Session 11 focused on interim activities before the final meeting in August 2023. The interim documents included the SAQRF in brief, with provisions for final comments. In addition, they included the implementation plan and SAQRF Guidelines and templates.



It was proposed that the next virtual meeting would be on the 21 and 22 August. Mr Karki noted that the aim was to seek endorsement by the end of November 2023.

Comments were sought from employers, unions and civil society participants. MS participants were also invited to provide final comments prior to closing a very successful meeting.

Given the time constraints, the following sessions (8 and 9) were not undertaken:

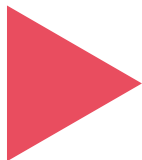
- ▶ discussion of an implementation and sustainability plan for SAQRF; and
- ▶ preliminary discussions for common guidance on mutual recognition of skills and qualifications.

▶ Outcomes

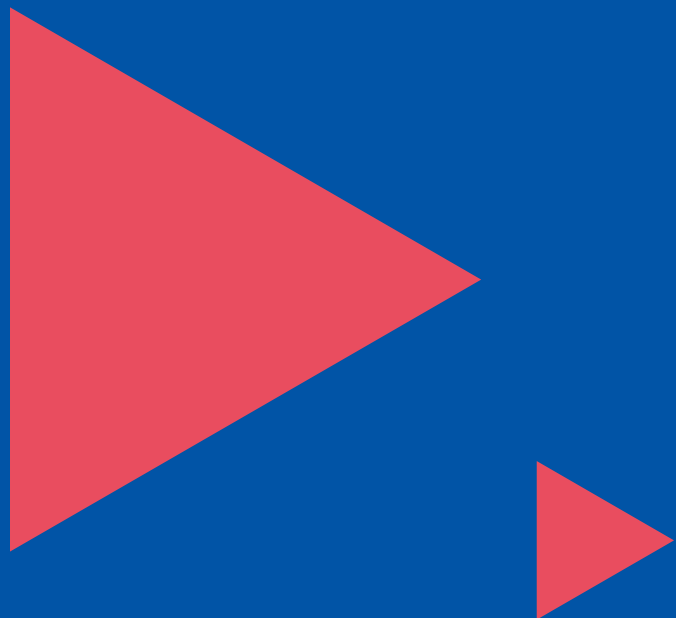
The hybrid meeting proved to be a successful approach for sharing knowledge and arriving at a resolution on the SAQRF design. The outcomes included:

- ▶ an agreement on the SAQRF document;
- ▶ an agreed upon endorsement letter; and
- ▶ proposed governance arrangements in the interim period.

All MS should be congratulated on their extensive efforts and inputs towards the progress of the SAQRF.



Appendices



Appendix 1:

Agenda

► Meeting Agenda for Technical Meeting #4a

South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework (SAQRF)

29 - 30 May 2023

09:30 am - 01:00 pm IST (Kindly consider the time Zones)

Description	Technical Meeting # 4A
Objective	1. Model the referencing process by as a group, reviewing and providing feedback for 2 or more partial referencing reports 2. Reflect on the referencing process, protocols, and templates 3. Consider the draft RQF document 4. Discuss proposed governance options of the RQF 5. Brief MS on Meeting #4B and finalisation of draft RQF document, and endorsement of the RQF document.
Participants	South Asia member representatives including those NQF (or sector) technical experts, those involved in the quality assurance of qualifications systems (or sub systems), those involved in bilateral or regional labour or student migration or trade agreements.
Link	Zoom Meeting Link – Topic: Technical Meeting#4A: SAQRF Join Zoom Meeting https://ilo-org.zoom.us/j/93889197783?pwd=cZZoMlR5UG5MaZLeIYbWtQekIudz09 Meeting ID: 938 8919 7783 Passcode: 881639
Time zones	Maldives and Pakistan 9.00am India and Sri Lanka 9.30am Nepal 9.45am Bhutan and Bangladesh 10.00am

NB: This Agenda assumes 5 referencing reports.

Day 1: 29 May 2023

DATE/TIME (IST time)	SESSION	SPEAKERS	CHAIR
09:30 – 09:40	Opening session: - Welcome message	Nepal - TBA	Mr Amish Karki
09:40 – 09:45	- Outline of the Technical Meeting	ILO RQF Project Consultant Andrea Bateman	Mr Amish Karki
09:45 – 10:00	Session 1: Referencing overview - Purpose - Overview of process	ILO RQF Project Consultant Andrea Bateman	ILO RQF Project Consultant Andrea Bateman
10:00 – 10:30	Session 2: MS comment on Ref Report #1 - Maldives - Consultant provide summary of feedback - Each MS to provide feedback - Comments from referencing MS - Decision to accept report or require adjustments	MS Chair and Vice-Chair (Bangladesh and Bhutan)	ILO RQF Project Consultant Andrea Bateman
10:30 – 11:00	Session 3: MS comment on Ref Report #2 - Pakistan - Consultant provide summary of feedback - Each MS to provide feedback - Comments from referencing MS - Decision to accept report or require adjustments	MS Chair and Vice-Chair (Bangladesh and Bhutan)	ILO RQF Project Consultant Andrea Bateman
11:00 – 11:15	Break 15 minutes		
11:15 – 11:45	Session 4: MS comment on Ref Report #3 - Sri Lanka - Consultant provide summary of feedback - Each MS to provide feedback - Comments from referencing MS - Decision to accept report or require adjustments	MS Chair and Vice-Chair (Bangladesh and Bhutan)	ILO RQF Project Consultant Andrea Bateman
11:45 – 12:15	Session 5: MS comment on Ref Report #4 - Bangladesh - Consultant provide summary of feedback - Each MS to provide feedback - Comments from referencing MS - Decision to accept report or require adjustments	MS Vice-Chair (Bhutan)	ILO RQF Project Consultant Andrea Bateman
12:15 – 12:45	Open discussion – each MS offer comments on referencing process	ALL	Mr Gabriel Bordado
<i>Closing</i>			
12:45 – 13:00	- summary of outcomes of Day 1, and preparation for Day 2	ILO RQF Project Consultant Andrea Bateman	Mr Amish Karki

Day 2: 30 May 2023

DATE/TIME (IST time)	SESSION	SPEAKERS	CHAIR
09:30 – 09:35	Opening session: - Welcome and focus for today	Mr Amish Karki	Mr Gabriel Bordado
9.35 – 10.05	Session 6: MS comment on Ref Report #5 - Bhutan - Consultant provide summary of feedback - Each MS to provide feedback - Comments from referencing MS - Decision to accept report or require adjustments	MS Chair (Bangladesh)	ILO RQF Project Consultant Andrea Bateman
10.05 – 11.15	Session 7: Draft Referencing process, templates and protocols - Updated presentation of the referencing documentation.	ILO RQF Project Consultant Andrea Bateman	Mr Shahzad Ahmed
11.15 – 11.35	- Group to reflect on yesterday's process and provide comments/suggestions for: • draft procedure and protocols • draft templates.	ILO RQF Project Consultant Andrea Bateman	Mr Shahzad Ahmed
11:35 – 11:45	Break 10 minutes		
11.45 – 12.10	Session 8: Draft SAQRF document & governance proposals - Documents for in-country final consultations: • Draft SAQRF document • Governance paper	ILO RQF Project Consultant Andrea Bateman	Mr Gabriel Bordado
12:10 – 12:35	Q&A and feedback for finalisation of consultation version	ALL	Mr Gabriel Bordado
12:35 – 12:45	Session 9: General Business - ILO to present on outcomes of SAARC meeting - Interim tasks and plans for next Technical Meeting #4B: • MS to come to next meeting with final requests for change to SQARF and a position on the governance arrangements for final resolution	Mr Amish Karki ILO RQF Project Consultant Andrea Bateman	Mr Gabriel Bordado
12:45 – 12:50	Q&A	ALL	Mr Gabriel Bordado
Closing			
12:50 – 12:55	- Summary up of outcomes of Day 2	ILO RQF Project Consultant Andrea Bateman	Mr Amish Karki
12:55 – 13:00	- Closing comments and remarks from MS representative and ILO representatives	Pakistan - TBA ILO representatives	Mr Amish Karki

Appendix 2:

Agenda Technical Meeting #4B

► Meeting Agenda For Hybrid Technical Experts Meeting On

South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework (SAQRF)

26 - 27 June 2023
09.30 - 17.30 (SL)

Description	Technical Meeting: Developing an internationally robust regional qualifications framework for South Asia
Objective	1. Further develop and refine the draft SAQRF policy document and facilitate discussions on governance arrangements and process for endorsement 1. Discuss an implementation and sustainability plan for SAQRF 1. Lead preliminary discussions for common guidance on mutual recognition of skills and qualifications.
Participants	South Asia member representatives including those NQF (or sector) technical experts, those involved in the quality assurance of qualifications systems (or sub systems), those involved in bilateral or regional labour or student migration or trade agreements.
Venue	Hotel Cinnamon Lakeside, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Link	Zoom Meeting Link –
Time zones	Maldives and Pakistan: 09:00 am India and Sri Lanka: 09:30 am Nepal: 09:45 am Bhutan and Bangladesh: 10:00 am

Day 1: 26 June 2023

DATE/TIME (SL Time)	SESSION	SPEAKERS
09:30 – 10:00	Opening session Welcome remarks	Mr M.N. Ranasinghe, Secretary, Ministry of Education, Government of Sri Lanka Mr Benil Thavarasa, Regional Advisor, South and South-Asia Section Migration and Forced Displacement, Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development Ms Simrin Singh, Country Director, International Labour Organisation, Country Office for Sri Lanka and the Maldives
10:00 – 10:15	Outline and purpose of the Technical Meeting	Amish Karki, ILO
10:15 – 10:30	Group Photo	
10:30 – 10:45	Break	
10:45 – 11:45	Session 1: Review of SAQRF purpose, scope, principles, structure - Whole group review	Moderator: Gabriel Bordado, ILO Speaker: Andrea Bateman, RQF Project Consultant
11:45 – 12:00	Q&A	ALL
12:00 – 13:00	Session 2: Review of SAQRF Refencing Criteria and obligations - Whole group review	Moderator: Gabriel Bordado, ILO Speaker: Andrea Bateman, RQF Project Consultant
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch	
14:00 – 15:00	Session 3: Review of SAQRF Quality assurance criteria - Whole group review	Moderator: Ligaya Dumaoang, ILO Speaker: Andrea Bateman, RQF Project Consultant
15:00 – 15:15	Tea	
15:15 – 16:15	Session 4: Review of SAQRF level descriptors - Whole group review	Moderator: Gabriel Bordado, ILO Speaker: Andrea Bateman, RQF Project Consultant
16:15 – 17:00	Open discussion – each Member State and Social Partners offer comments	ALL
17:00 – 17:10	Summary of outcomes of Day 1, and preparation for Day 2	Amish Karki and Andrea Bateman

Day 2: 27 June 2023

DATE/TIME (SL time)	SESSION	SPEAKERS
09:30 – 09:45	Opening session: - Welcome and focus for today	Amish Karki, ILO
09:45 – 10:45	Session 5: Review of SAQRF governance - Whole group review	Moderator: Gabriel Bordado, ILO Speaker: Andrea Bateman, RQF Project Consultant
10:45 – 11:00	Q&A	
11:00 – 11:15	Break	
11:15 – 12:15	Session 6: Review of SAQRF Glossary - Whole group review	Moderator: Amish Karki, ILO Speaker: Andrea Bateman, RQF Project Consultant
12:15 – 12:45	Session 7: SAQRF endorsement process and signatories - Discussion and resolution as to endorsement process - Discussion and resolution as to signatories across the MS	Moderator: Gabriel Bordado, ILO Speakers: Amish Karki, ILO Andrea Bateman, RQF Project Consultant
12:45 – 13:00	Q&A	
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch	
14:00 – 15:00	Session 8: SAQRF implementation and sustainability plan Discussion to: - Proposed overarching governance arrangements post endorsement - Identify key areas of concern and issues relating to implementing the SAQRF	Moderator: Dino Corell, ILO Speaker: Andrea Bateman, RQF Project Consultant
15:00 – 15:15	Break	
15:15 – 16:15	Session 9: Mutual recognition Discussion in Plenary: - Identify key areas for common guidance on mutual recognition of skills and qualifications - Identify how the regional referencing framework can be used in the mutual recognition processes	Moderator and Speaker: Gabriel Bordado
16:15 – 16:45	Session 10: Interim activities for MS Documents for final in-country consultations with identified signatories: - Draft SAQRF document - Governance arrangements Additional documents for broader in-country consultations: - Referencing process - Report template - Review template - Implementation plan. These to be confirmed at the last Taskforce meeting.	ILO RQF Project Consultant Andrea Bateman
16:45 – 17:00	Summary of outcomes of Day 2	Amish Karki and Andrea Bateman
17:00 – 17:30	Closing comments and remarks	MS representative [alphabetical order and rotational basis] Representative of Employers Organisation Representative of Workers Organisation ILO

Appendix 3:

Draft South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework

- ▶ **As presented to the participants at the Technical Meeting #4A**
-

**Draft South Asia Qualifications Reference
Framework**

31/05/2023

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► Background

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established with the signing of the SAARC Charter in Dhaka on 8 December 1985. SAARC comprises of eight Member States (MS): Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The Secretariat of the Association was set up in Kathmandu on 17 January 1987.

The objectives of the Association outlined in the SAARC Charter are to:

- promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and to improve their quality of life; accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region, and provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and to realize their full potentials;
- promote and strengthen collective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia
- contribute to mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another's problems;
- promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields;
- strengthen cooperation with other developing countries;
- strengthen cooperation among themselves in international forums on matters of common interests;
- cooperate with international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes.

The New Delhi Declaration on Education (31 October 2014) resolved to foster quality education and expand the scope of cooperation, which would involve the formulation of the *SAARC Framework for Action for Education 2030*. The Declaration resolved to focus on, among others, the following:

- enhancing the availability, accessibility and quality of secondary education

- expanding opportunities for skill development including technical and vocational education and training
- revitalizing higher education, including facilitating mutual recognition of qualification and mobility of students.

In the Heads of State or Government 18th Meeting (Kathmandu, November 2014), the leaders expressed their strong determination to deepen regional integration for peace, stability and prosperity in South Asia by intensifying cooperation. The leaders also renewed their commitment to achieving a South Asian Economic Union (SAEU) in a phased and planned manner through a Free Trade Area, a Customs Union, a Common Market, and a Common Economic and Monetary Union. The leaders also expressed their resolve of achieving education for all and ensuring quality education. The leaders also agreed to "collaborate and cooperate on safe, orderly and responsible management of labour migration from South Asia to ensure safety, security and well-being of their migrant workers in the destination countries outside the region."

The *SAARC Plan of Action for Cooperation on Matters Related to Migration* (adopted in Kathmandu, May 2016) endorses the development of a South Asian Qualifications Reference Framework:

Developing a South Asian qualifications reference framework... would facilitate harmonization of skills qualifications at the regional level and also facilitate enhanced recognition of skills of migrant workers from South Asia in the destination countries.

The *SAARC Framework for Action for Education 2030* was endorsed in September 2016 at the Third Technical Meeting of senior officials on education in South Asia. The senior officials

identified 12 priority areas which included, among others, the following:

- ▶ improving learning outcomes and promoting quality education;
- ▶ promoting acquisition of skills for life and for work;
- ▶ improving education governance;
- ▶ ensuring lifelong learning opportunities; and
- ▶ strengthening partnership and collaboration.

At the ILO-MSDE Inter-regional Expert Forum on Skills and Migration in the South Asia–Middle East Corridor in New Delhi (July 2017), one of the key recommendations was to

“Work with the SAARC Secretariat, and through the existing SAARC frameworks on education and on migration, to endorse the development of a South Asian Qualification Reference Framework. The Framework would function as a mechanism to enable comparisons of qualifications across SAARC Member States, also facilitate enhanced recognition of skills of migrant workers from South Asia in countries of destination.”

The Abu Dhabi Dialogue (ADD) has identified skills recognition as one of four priority areas. In the strategy proposed for cooperating on skills certification in the Asia–GCC migration corridors (June 2017), the ADD puts forward two important steps that countries of origin can take:

“Countries without a qualifications framework which maps to international standards should accelerate the development of the framework without which MoUs of mutual recognition of skills cannot happen.”

“Countries of origin that have a qualifications framework in place may want to proactively engage in MoUs with GCC countries to

recognize equivalences (and other third party countries). The recognized mapping of their qualifications framework to third party countries can then be shared with GCC countries transparently so GCC countries can consider recognizing the same mapping through their existing partners.”

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (2018) contains a dedicated section on skills:

“We commit to invest in innovative solutions that facilitate recognition of skills, qualifications and competences of migrant workers at all skills levels, and promote skills development for the full employability of migrants in labour markets of countries of origin and destination.”

The initial development of the South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework (SAQRF) was supported by the ILO and began in mid to late 2020 with a survey and interviews of representatives culminating in a background report (Bateman 2020a). The report was followed by consultations on a concept proposal (Bateman 2020b), with a final draft concept design for the regional qualifications framework and a roadmap for finalization/endorsement and implementation (Bateman 2020c).

Insert here a brief chronological timeline for development and endorsement.

The SAQRF was endorsed by the XXXX.

The MS acknowledge the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRf) as being benchmarks for the development of the SAQRF.

Taking into account the afore-mentioned political and legal context and the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, the SAQRF has been established as a policy instrument

of regional scope to deliver on the objectives of enhancing transparency of qualifications and establishing mutual trust between qualifications frameworks and systems for lifelong learning in South Asia. It supports and supplements activities of MS and should be implemented in accordance with national law and practice.

► Purpose

The main purpose of the SAQRF is to enable the referencing of national qualifications frameworks (NQF, and therefore enable comparisons of all types and levels of qualifications within participating MS' NQF; focusing on referencing their qualification levels to the levels of the SAQRF.

These comparisons of qualifications across the MS aim to:

- improve the recognition of qualifications;
- improve worker and student mobility;
- improve transparency of qualifications, qualification systems and quality assurance arrangements;
- improve recognition of learning achieved outside formal education;
- support national qualifications frameworks that facilitate lifelong learning;
- strengthen regional identity and support other regional initiatives; and
- provide a link to other regional qualifications framework internationally.

1. *Are these purposes appropriate?
Any more to add, or to delete?*

2. *Is the order appropriate?*

► Scope

The SAQRF is a common reference framework and functions as a translation device to enable comparisons of qualifications across the MS.

The SAQRF acknowledges all forms of learning (non-formal, informal, and formal) across all education and training sectors.

3. *Is the scope appropriate?*

► Principles

The SAQRF:

is based on agreed understandings between MS;

aims to be a neutral influence on qualifications frameworks in MS;

does not replace or define qualifications frameworks in MS and does not describe specific qualifications. In addition, specific qualifications should only be referenced to the SAQRF by way of the relevant qualifications framework (or system).

is based on a hierarchy of learning outcomes with increasing levels of complexity and proficiency. These learning outcomes will contribute to the shift to learning outcomes in each member state's education and training system, and serve as a translation device to better understand different qualifications systems and their qualifications;

supports the transparency, comparability, and transportability of its people's qualifications;

supports lifelong learning and the recognition of prior learning and credit transfer processes or systems;

allows for voluntary engagement and for its MS to determine when they will undertake the referencing process. The SAQRF and referencing

process should be implemented in accordance with each member state's laws and practices.

allows for MS to revise and update their referencing reports through a new referencing activity as their national qualifications framework (or systems) change over time; and

shall be reviewed and evaluated in consultation with MS and other relevant regional stakeholders, if necessary, updated.

4. *Are these principles appropriate? Anything to add or delete? Is the order of these principles appropriate?*
5. *Is it clear that those Member States without a sectoral QF or NQF can still reference key qualification types? Refer to Principle 3. Would the last part of this statement be best included in the Referencing section?*

► Structure

The main features of the SAQRF include its learning outcomes approach, the specification of the eight level descriptors and the referencing criteria.

The level descriptors are based on the notion of competence, using the following:

- knowledge and skills;
- context;
- application (incorporating responsibility and autonomy).

Knowledge is defined as the body of facts, principles, theories and practices related to a field of work or study. Within the SAQRF, knowledge is described as theoretical, factual or technical.

Skills is defined as the 'ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems'. In the context of the SAQRF, 'skills are described as cognitive

(involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments)' (EQF 2017, p. 20).

Application is defined in terms of:

- the types of tasks, problems, or issues to be resolved in a field of work or study
- the ability of the learner to apply the knowledge and skills autonomously and with responsibility (EQF 2017, p. 20).

These descriptors assume that the:

- level of learning outcomes incorporates those in the lower levels.
- domains at one level should be interpreted together to provide an understanding of the level of learning complexity.

The level descriptors are included in Annexure 1, and were adapted from the EQF level descriptors.

Knowing that the primary aim of an RQF affects the decision of the number of levels and domains in an RQF, the primary aim of the SAQRF may be to:

- bring MS's qualifications systems together;
- 6. *link with other RQFs (or NQFs) external to the community (e.g. EQF, AQRf as being the main two RQFs – both 8 level frameworks). Three domains are being used (Knowledge, Skills, Application (Problem Solving, and, Responsibility and Autonomy). For greatest portability, should the domains be similar to, and align with, the EQF, and AQRf. Note that EQF has 3 domains and AQRf has 2 domains. The development of these SAQRF levels aims to ensure alignment.*
- 7. *Are the definitions for the three domains suitable?*

► Referencing criteria and obligations

The aim of any referencing process is to promote understanding and engender trust in a member state's qualifications that are part of a national qualifications framework (or system).

The referencing process culminates in a member state referencing report. To provide for a consistent approach to referencing, the MS have agreed on the referencing criteria and the obligations of the MS and the SAQRF Technical Committee, refer to Governance.

The referencing process also requires some key conditions to be met in terms of process and ensuring that the outcomes of the referencing process are shared with MS' stakeholders and are readily accessible.

The referencing criteria and obligations are outlined in Annexure 2.

The referencing process requires that each member state establish a National SAQRF Committee (NSC) of key stakeholders to coordinate the referencing process. To strengthen the referencing process, provide for capacity development, and engender trust in the process, the MS have agreed that the referencing process will include an observer from one of the other MS.

EQF has 10 referencing criteria and AQRf has 11. To minimize the referencing burden, it is proposed that some items are treated as obligations, and do not need a written response, but may need to be included in the report as annexures.

8. *Should any Referencing Obligations be moved to a Referencing Criteria?*
9. *How will we treat Referencing Obligation 1? Referencing Obligation 1 logically appears as an obligation in the first cycle of referencing, but would be more appropriate as Referencing Criteria in subsequent referencing cycles.*

10. *Should there be a Referencing Criteria to provide an overview of the referencing process, e.g., how and when key stakeholders were consulted? Could this be addressed when responding to Referencing Criterion #6, i.e., included as a question in the template?*

11. *Inclusion of MS observer (highlighted above). Should this statement be a requirement, made optional or deleted? Note that there is an agreement that two international experts will be involved in the referencing process.*

► Quality assurance

Trust in a member state's qualifications that are part of a NQF is essential for supporting the mobility of learners and workers within the region and external to the region. Quality assurance of qualifications, and the provision of the qualifications through education and training providers, is critical to engendering trust.

Quality assurance is "focused on providing confidence that quality requirements will be fulfilled". 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. It is a set of activities established by these relevant authorities or bodies to ensure that educational services satisfy customer requirements in a systematic, reliable fashion" (Bateman et al., 2009, p. 8).

Quality assurance of qualifications is a member state's responsibility and should provide for the transparency of processes and outcomes.

The South Asia region does not have a common agreement or set of principles for a quality assurance framework at a regional level. However, the SAQRF could support and link with such a regional quality assurance framework.

The referencing process requires the MS to not only reference their NQF, but also to describe the quality assurance mechanisms linked to their qualifications. In the absence of a regional quality assurance framework or principles, the SAQRF draws on the experience of the EQF and has agreed to a set of quality assurance criteria.

The quality assurance criteria, agreed upon by MS, to be considered in the referencing process, is included in Annexure 2.

The EQF uses quality assurance criteria similar to that included in Annexure 2. AQRf uses international or regional quality assurance frameworks as its basis for comparability. South Asia does not have an agreed regional quality assurance framework, and therefore criteria are used in Annexure 3.

12. Are these criteria clear?

13. Is there anything more that needs to be added? Or deleted?

► Credit systems

Credit systems help learners progress in their learning and assist in transfer across qualifications, qualifications systems, and countries. Credit systems allow learners to accumulate and transfer credit related to learning outcomes.

Credit systems may operate at the institutional, national, and regional levels. The SAQRF does not include any structures related to credits or a credit system. However, it encourages MS to develop credit systems within their own context, and it supports a link with a future regional credit system.

14. Are these credit transfer statements sufficient at this stage in the development of regional initiatives? And do they accommodate the possibility that the region will implement a regional credit transfer system?

► Glossary

The agreed terms and understandings are included in Annexure 4.

The agreed terms and understandings do not impinge on agreed terms and understandings within the qualifications system of MS, but are used to assist in a common understanding of practices.

The terms included in the Glossary are not mandatory but assist with explaining the qualifications system and its quality assurance arrangements. Terms vary across MS and internationally. These terms can assist in drafting referencing reports.

15. Are these terms sufficiently broad to accommodate understandings in MS?

16. Are there any other terms that required explaining within a qualifications system?

► Governance

The oversight of the SAQRF will be managed by the SAQRF Technical Committee. This committee shall:

1. provide high-level technical advice and engage with policy issues arising from the implementation of the SAQRF;
2. foster collaboration amongst the MS;
3. facilitate the resolution of issues with agreements on common approaches and understanding culminating in briefing papers and guidelines;
4. promote the SAQRF and quality assurance of education in all sectors within its MS;
5. monitor the implementation of the SAQRF and of the Technical Committee's remit;
6. provide for the consideration of referencing reports and confirming whether the

submission meets the SAQRF referencing criteria;

7. facilitate capacity development of MS in terms of qualifications frameworks and quality assurance; and
8. promote the SAQRF to the international education and training community.

Membership shall be one representative per member state. Each member state shall nominate their representative. MS may draw on additional expertise as observers for their deliberations. MS may determine the number of additional observers present at meetings.

The Technical Committee may invite or determine the number of additional observers present at meetings.

The Chair and Vice-Chair shall be determined on a member state alphabetical basis, rotated every two years, with the Vice-Chair continuing as the Chair for the following two years. The Vice-Chair shall assist the Chair and assume the role of Chair in the case of Chair's absence. In the case of the next member state in line to assume either role, the member state can forgo its turn.

Decision-making processes shall be based on consensus.

Further governance arrangements and protocols are stipulated in the decisions made by the Technical Committee.

There are multiple levels of governance:

- ▶ Overall governance ('home' and secretariat support) for the SAQRF – to be determined at a later date
- ▶ Operational governance – through a committee that has responsibility for its management
- ▶ National level linkages.

The operational governance is through a SAQRF Technical Committee. Broad roles and responsibilities are included here.

9. *Is there anything that needs to be added? Changed?*

10. *Is the 'terms of reference', as documented here, sufficient OR too much detail? More extensive information is included in the Guidelines and supplementary protocols. Is there sufficient flexibility for the future?*

11. *Is two years appropriate for Chair and Vice Chair? SAARC chairpersonship is 2 years.*

National representation shall be through a National SAQRF Committee (NSC) acting as the interface between the SAQRF Technical Committee and the member state. Membership shall be determined by the member state, but should include nominated representatives of the relevant competent bodies responsible for the NQF and quality assurance and other main stakeholder bodies in the country. The NSC should have expertise in the NQF and quality assurance and related policy positions of the member state it represents.

The NSC is responsible for

- ▶ updating and reporting to the SAQRF Technical Committee on changes and progress in qualifications systems within its own country;
- ▶ developing a nationally agreed roadmap for referencing;
- ▶ steering and guiding the referencing process; and
- ▶ ensuring the quality of the referencing milestones and outcomes and producing an endorsed report.

There are multiple levels of governance:

- ▶ Overall governance (home and secretariat support) for the SAQRF – to be determined at a later date
- ▶ Operational governance – through a committee that is responsible for its management
- ▶ National level linkages.

This section outlines the key roles of the NSC.

12. Is there sufficient information here in the terms of reference? Is there sufficient flexibility for the future?

13. Is there anything that needs to be added? Changed?

Annexure 1:

Level descriptors for formal, non-formal and informal learning

Level	Knowledge	Skills	Application	
			Problem solving	Responsibility and autonomy
	Learning outcomes include:	Learning outcomes include:	Learning outcomes include the ability to:	Learning outcomes involve:
8	Knowledge that is at the most advanced frontier or field and at the interface between fields	Most advanced and specialized skills and techniques including synthesis and evaluation	Solve critical problems in research and/or innovation, and extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice	Ability to demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity, and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of a context including research
7	Highly specialized knowledge (some of which is at the forefront of a field) as the basis for original thinking and/or research; a critical awareness of issues within a field and at the interface between different fields	Specialized skills required in research and/or innovation	Develop new knowledge and procedures to solve highly complex problems, and to integrate knowledge from different fields in research or innovation	Ability to manage and transform contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches; and to take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of others
6	Advanced knowledge in a field involving a critical understanding of theories and principles	Advanced skills demonstrating mastery and innovation	Solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialized field	Ability to manage complex technical or professional activities or projects; taking responsibility for: - decision-making in unpredictable contexts - managing professional development of individuals or groups
5	Comprehensive and specialized, factual, and theoretical knowledge within a field, and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge	A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills	Develop creative solutions to abstract problems	Ability to exercise management and supervision in contexts where there is unpredictable change; and to review and develop the performance of self and others
4	Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts	A broad range of cognitive and practical skills	Generate solutions to specific problems in a field	Ability to exercise self-management within guidelines and in contexts that are usually predictable but subject to change
3	Knowledge of facts, principles, processes, and general concepts in a field	A range of cognitive and practical skills	Accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying known methods, tools, materials, and information	Ability to take responsibility for completion of tasks, and to adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems
2	Basic factual knowledge of a field	Basic cognitive and practical skills	Carry out tasks and solve routine problems using simple rules and tools	Broad supervision with some autonomy
1	Basic general knowledge	Basic general skills	Carry out basic, simple tasks	Direct supervision in a structured context

Source: Adapted from EQF 2017.

Annexure 2:

Referencing criteria and obligations

► Referencing criteria

1. The structure and profile of the broader education and training system is described, including an overview of the national qualifications system (NQS) and its national qualifications framework (NQF).
2. The quality assurance mechanisms for education and training are integral to the NQF, and are consistent with the quality assurance criteria in Annexure 3.
3. Qualifications are based on the principles of learning outcomes, which inform the recognition of all forms of learning² and credit systems (where they exist) within the NQF.
4. The process for inclusion of qualifications in the NQF (or describing the place within the qualifications system) is clear and transparent.
5. There is a clear and demonstrable link between the levels of the NQF (or implicit within the qualifications system) and the levels of the SAQRF.
6. The legitimacy and responsibilities of all relevant competent bodies involved in the referencing process are clear and transparent. The referencing report has been prepared with and endorsed by the member state's National SAQRF Committee (NSC). In addition, it has been endorsed by relevant legitimate competent bodies, such as NQF agencies and quality assurance agencies, as being an accurate representation of the relevant quality assurance arrangements, provisions, and

practices. The referencing report shall include these endorsements.

7. The referencing process involves two international experts from two different countries (internal or external to the region) to support and assist the development of trusted outcomes. The referencing report shall include a written statement from each of the international experts.

► Referencing obligations

1. There is one comprehensive referencing report that sets out the response to each criterion and includes any supplementary information or evidence.
2. Following the referencing process, the member state commits to a clear reference to the appropriate SAQRF level on new certification documents issued within the NQF/NQS (such as qualifications, certificates, diplomas, certificates, and diploma supplements) and /or national qualifications registers managed by relevant competent bodies.
3. The report shall be readily available and published by the competent body within the member state and by the SAQRF Secretariat³ within 6 months of having referenced or updated the referencing report and being accepted by the MS.

² Non-formal, informal and formal learning

³ The body/entity that ultimately is responsible for the SAQRF and its Secretariat are to be determined.

Annexure 3:

Quality assurance criteria

All qualifications should be quality assured to enhance trust in their conception, formulation and provision, and in the SAQRF level assigned.

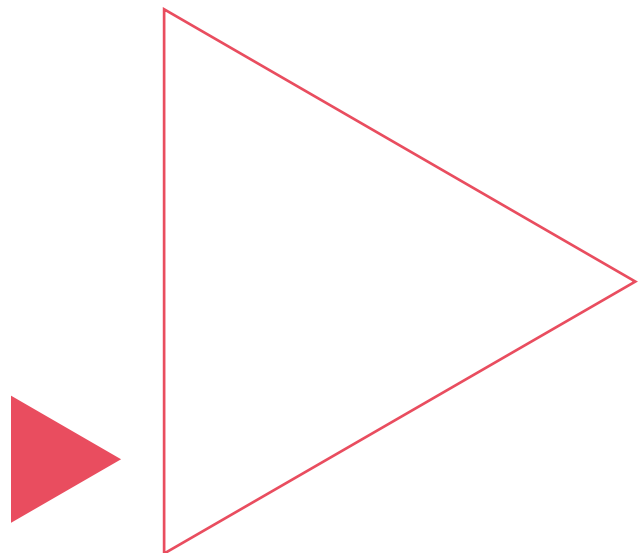
In consideration of the national context and circumstances these quality assurance criteria apply to the various sectors of education and training within the qualifications system.

Quality assurance of qualifications assigned a SAQRF level should:

1. involve competent bodies that operate with clear and transparent governance arrangements;
2. be based on clear, transparent and measurable objectives, quality standards, rules, or guidelines;
3. address the design of qualifications and the application of learning outcomes approach;
4. promote the recognition of all forms of learning⁴, including minimising any barriers⁵;
5. ensure valid and reliable assessments against the agreed and transparent learning outcomes, and address certification processes;
6. address the quality of the provider and their provision of qualifications, including internal review and external review; making public the findings of external reviews;
7. involve relevant stakeholder groups in key aspects of quality assurance;
8. be underpinned by a continuous improvement approach involving decisions

that are informed by feedback, data, and research;

9. require competent bodies and those who issue qualifications linked to the SAQRF to commit to their own internal evaluation and periodic external evaluation, making public the findings of external reviews;
10. be fit for purpose, appropriately resourced, and sustainable;
11. be enhanced through national and international linkages and cooperation.⁶



4 Non-formal, informal and formal learning

5 Barriers may relate to access and equity for vulnerable groups, such as gender, age, disability, or geographic location.

6 Adapted from UNESCO 2017 and European Commission 2017.

Annexure 4:

Glossary of terms

For the purposes of the SAQRF the following definitions apply.

Competence	Competence is the “proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development”. ⁷
Competent body	A competent body is any organization that has the legal authority, capability, or power to undertake a specific function. Within qualifications systems, that could include: agencies responsible for approving qualifications under the NQF and managing qualifications accreditation under national legislation; agencies responsible for approving education and training providers and monitoring the provision of programmes that lead to approved qualifications. These agencies could be national qualifications agencies, quality assurance agencies, official review boards, or other nationally approved bodies or agencies.
Credit	Credit “means confirmation that a part of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of learning outcomes has been assessed and validated by a competent authority, according to an agreed standard; credit is awarded by competent authorities when the individual has achieved the defined learning outcomes, evidenced by appropriate assessments and can be expressed in a quantitative value (e.g. credits or credit points) demonstrating the estimated workload an individual typically needs for achieving related learning outcomes”. ⁸
Credit systems	Credit systems are a “transparency tool for facilitating the recognition of credit(s). These systems can comprise, inter alia, equivalence, exemptions, units/modules that can be accumulated and transferred, the autonomy of providers who can individualise pathways, and the validation of non-formal and informal learning”. ⁹
Credit transfer	Credit transfer means “the process of allowing individuals who have accumulated credit on one context to have it valued and recognised in another context”. ¹⁰ It may include but is not limited to the following processes known as cross-credit, advanced standing, block credit, specified credit and unspecified credit.
Evaluation	Evaluation incorporates a review or assessment of performance of an initiative, a policy, or organisational practices. It generally involves the evaluation as a systematic investigation to determine the work or merit of the programme or policy. ¹¹ In the SAQRF, internal evaluation may include a self-assessment or internal audit. External evaluation may include an external (or independent) audit.

⁷ European Commission 2017, p. 20.

⁸ European Commission 2017, p. 20.

⁹ European Commission 2017, p. 21.

¹⁰ European Commission 2017, p. 21.

¹¹ Adapted from CEDEFOP 2011, p. 71.

Formal learning	Formal learning occurs in an organized and structured environment (such as in an education or training institution or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or resources). Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view and it typically leads to certification. ¹²
Informal learning	Informal learning is learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organized or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective. ¹³
Learning outcomes	Learning outcomes are statements regarding what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process. Within the SAQRF, learning outcomes are described in terms of knowledge, skills, and application (responsibility and autonomy). ¹⁴
National qualifications frameworks	National qualifications frameworks are instruments for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved. They aim at integrating and coordinating national qualifications subsystems and improving the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society. ¹⁵
Non-formal learning	Non-formal learning is learning that is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support), but contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically does not lead to certification. ¹⁶
Programme	The arrangements developed by a provider for the teaching, learning and assessment of a body of knowledge, set of skills and of wider competences. A programme can lead to the award of a qualification. ¹⁷
Provider	An organisation that organises and delivers programmes that can lead to the award of a qualification. Providers may be colleges, institutes, universities or similar.
Qualifications	A qualification is the formal outcome of an assessment 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 various means, such as workplace experience, or a programme of study, or a blend of both. A qualification is issued by a competent agency, which confers official recognition of value in the labour market and in further education and training. ¹⁸
Qualifications system	Qualifications system means "all aspects of a member state's activity related to the recognition of learning and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. That includes the development and implementation of institutional arrangements and processes relating to quality assurance, assessment and the award of qualifications". ¹⁹ A national qualifications system may be composed of several subsystems and may or may not include an explicit national qualifications framework.

¹² CEDEFOP 2011, p. 75.

¹³ CEDEFOP 2011, p. 85.

¹⁴ Adapted from European Commission 2017.

¹⁵ Adapted from European Commission 2017.

¹⁶ CEDEFOP 2011, p. 113.

¹⁷ Adapted from EQAP, 2015

¹⁸ Adapted from European Commission 2017 and from ASEAN 2015.

¹⁹ Adapted from European Commission 2017, p. 20

Quality assurance	Quality assurance is a component of quality management and is “focused on providing confidence that quality requirements will be fulfilled”. 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. It is a set of activities established by these relevant authorities or bodies to ensure that educational services satisfy customer requirements in a systematic, reliable fashion”.²⁰
Recognition of learning outcomes	Recognition of learning outcomes means the confirmation by a competent body that learning outcomes gained by an individual in a formal, non-formal or informal setting have been assessed against predefined learning outcomes and are compliant with the requirements of a standard, such as a qualification or component/s of a qualification. Formal recognition involves the process of granting official status by a competent body to acquired learning outcomes. Formal recognition of learning outcomes includes the notion of assessment within a formal setting, recognition of prior learning, and of credit transfer processes or credit transfer systems.²¹
Recognition of prior learning	Recognition of prior learning relates to recognizing learning gained and currently held, regardless of how, when or where the learning occurred. It involves the assessment of an individual to make a judgement against specified learning outcomes. The process by a competent body consists of the following four distinct phases: identification through dialogue of particular experiences of an individual, documentation to make visible the individual’s experiences, a formal assessment of those experiences and certification of the results of the assessment which may lead to a partial or full qualification.²² Recognition of prior learning may be termed assessment of prior learning.

²⁰ Bateman et al., 2009, p. 8.

²¹ Adapted from European Commission 2017, ASEAN 2015, CEDEFOP 2011, p. 125.

²² Adapted from European Commission 2017



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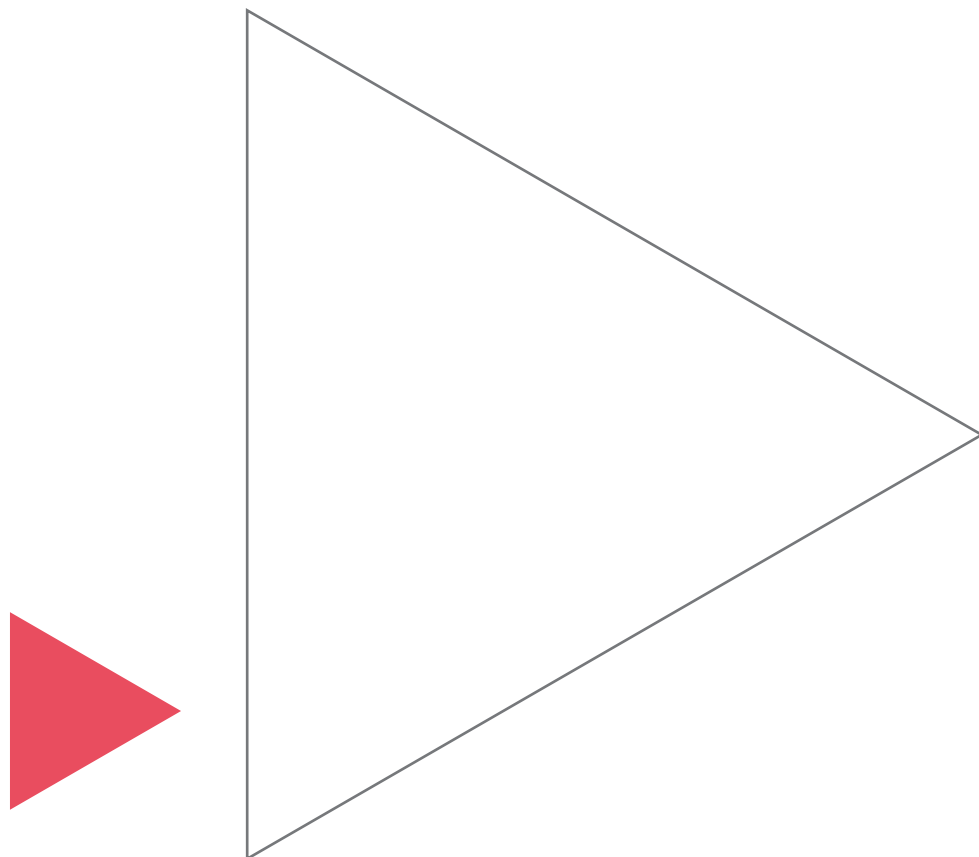
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Appendix 4:

Governance discussion paper

- ▶ **As presented to the participants at Technical Meetings #4A and #4B.**
-

Governance of the SAQRF: options paper

Draft 05/05/2023

▶ Preamble

The purpose of this paper is to outline the most likely two options on the overarching governance arrangements of the proposed regional qualifications framework (RQF) currently referred to as the South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework (SAQRF).

There are 3 levels of governance related to the SAQRF. Two levels are proposed within the SAQRF policy instrument:

1. SAQRF Technical Committee – which has representation from each member state
2. National SAQRF Committee – which is the national link between the member state and the SAQRF Technical Committee, and is under the remit of each member state.

The third level relates to the overall governance of the SAQRF:

- ▶ Who will have oversight; and sign off as a representative of the member state on the

SAQRF and associated high level governance papers e.g. education, labour, economic?²³

- ▶ Where will it be housed?
- ▶ How will it be supported by a small secretariat?
- ▶ How will a dedicated website for Member States (MS) and sections for public for international access be maintained?

Additional concerns include:

1. How will implementation be funded and planned for long term sustainability?

The third level of governance cannot be divorced from that proposed in the SAQRF. This governance information is included in Appendix 1, which also needs to be finalised as part of the SAQRF.

²³ Refer to AQRF as an example of high level governance paper. Refer to endorsed papers, Note that multiple ministers in-country were identified and each had to 'sign off'.

► Options

The two most likely models that could be applied are outlined below.

Option 1: SAARC

The SAQRF initiative could sit under the SAARC and the SAARC Charter.

The advantages of this approach include:

- SAARC protocols could be applied, e.g. time period of chair and vice chair of the Technical Committee, voting protocols
- A small SAQRF secretariat (support team) could sit within SAARC Secretariat under one of the areas of cooperation
- Provides for the uniqueness of the MS and seen as a SAARC initiative
- Provides for a long-term base for the SAQRF.

Issues:

- What area of cooperation could it under?
- How can SAARC be brought into the discussion and provide a platform for support for the SAQRF?
- MS need to be mindful of the financial implications that each country may have to bear if an independent secretariat needs to be established. While each MS seeks political clearance at the later stage, it is imperative to provide a cost-benefit analysis for joining such a forum.

Proposal 1:

It is proposed that the MS work towards the SAQRF being under the remit of SAARC, potentially the education, security and culture.

Potentially, the ILO could undertake discussions regarding the SAQRF with the SAARC Secretariat in Nepal, seek their advice

on the matter and possibly draw up a MoU or MoA to take it forward. As per precedence, if agreeable, the secretariat would then circulate it among the MS for their official concurrence, and views and comments, if any.

It is proposed that:

- That SAARC and the MS seek funding for 5 to 10 years from a suitable donor, potentially with the support of the ILO.
- Endorsement of the SAQRF is sufficient to launch and implement the SAQRF initiative.
- Technical Committee shall endorse any further documentation, e.g., guidelines.

Option 2: Collaborative approach – extended, international agency

This model allows for a collaborative approach with the final intent for the SAQRF being a part SAARC initiatives. Given the issues currently associated with SAARC, an international agency could provide interim support to the implementation of the SAQRF. For example, UNESCO, ILO, ETF, GIZ. This support would be on the basis that it will be moved to SAARC whenever possible.

Advantages:

- MS can manage this approach in line with an agreement
- Rotation of hosting is in line with the chair
- Provides a support mechanism for a collaborative model, whereby the international agency's infrastructure (website) could be used and human resources could be housed.
- Costs of website and support team (SAQRF secretariat) is borne by the host international agency

Issues:

- ▶ Requires a high level of cooperation.
- ▶ May require additional documentation similar to a 'heads of agreement' or 'constitution' (whatever is allowed at this level of engagement within the MS) and would require specialist input to design the agreement.
- ▶ Plan to transition under SAARC needs to be drafted and implemented.

Proposal 2:

It is proposed that the:

- ▶ ILO take on the role of the host international agency
- ▶ ILO and MS seek funding for 5 to 10 years from a suitable donor
- ▶ Endorsement of the SAQRF is sufficient to launch and implement the SAQRF initiative.
- ▶ Technical Committee shall endorse any further documentation, e.g., guidelines.

▶ Sustainability

Discussions will also need to be had about long-term sustainability. Although the above discussion only addresses a website and a SAQRF support team, there is a significant amount of work to be undertaken, referencing activities and meetings throughout the life of a long-term project such as this.

▶ Appendix 1: Extract from SAQRF – Governance (draft)

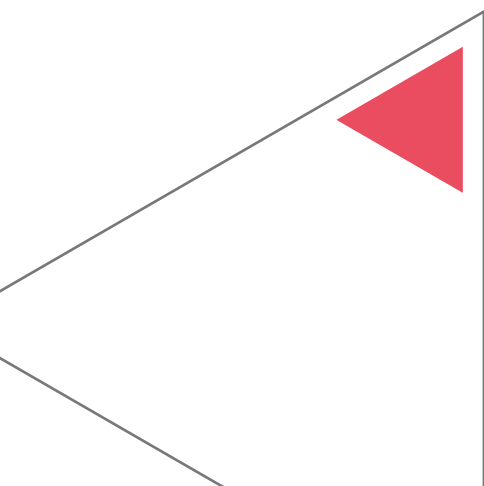
The oversight of the SAQRF will be managed by the SAQRF Technical Committee. This committee shall:

1. provide high-level technical advice and engage with policy issues arising from the implementation of the SAQRF;
2. foster collaboration amongst the MS;
3. facilitate the resolution of issues with agreements on common approaches and understanding culminating in briefing papers and guidelines;
4. promote the SAQRF and quality assurance of education in all sectors within its MS;
5. monitor the implementation of the SAQRF and of the Technical Committee's remit;
6. provide for the consideration of referencing reports and confirming whether the submission meets the SAQRF referencing criteria;
7. facilitate capacity development of MS in terms of qualifications frameworks and quality assurance; and
8. promote the SAQRF to the international education and training community.

Membership shall be one representative per member state. Each member state shall nominate their representative. MS may draw on additional expertise as observers for their deliberations. MS may determine the number of additional observers present at meetings.

The Technical Committee may invite or determine the number of additional observers present at meetings.

The chair and vice-chair shall be determined on a member state alphabetical basis, rotated every two years, with the vice-chair continuing as the chair for the following two years. The vice-chair shall assist the chair and assume the



role of chair in the case of chair's absence. In the case of the next member state in line to assume either role, the member state can forgo its turn.

Decision-making processes shall be based on consensus.

Further governance arrangements and protocols are stipulated in the decisions made by the Technical Committee.

There are multiple levels of governance:

- ▶ *Overall governance ('home' and secretariat support) for the SAQRF – to be determined at a later date*
- ▶ **Operational governance – through a committee that has responsibility for its management**
- ▶ *National level linkages.*

The operational governance is through a SAQRF Technical Committee. Broad roles and responsibilities are included here

9. *Is there anything that needs to added? Changed?*
10. *Is the 'terms of reference', as documented here, sufficient OR too much detail? More extensive information can be included in the Guidelines and supplementary protocols. Is there sufficient flexibility for the future?*
11. *Is two years appropriate for chair and vice chair? SAARC chairpersonship is 2 years.*

National representation shall be through a National SAQRF Committee (NSC) acting as the interface between the SAQRF Technical Committee and the member state. Membership shall be determined by the member state, but should include nominated representatives of the relevant competent bodies responsible for the NQF and quality assurance and other main

stakeholder bodies in the country. The NSC should have expertise in the NQF and quality assurance and related policy positions of the member state it represents.

The NSC is responsible for

1. updating and reporting to the SAQRF Technical Committee on changes and progress in qualifications systems within its own country;
2. developing a nationally agreed roadmap for referencing;
3. steering and guiding the referencing process; and
4. ensuring the quality of the referencing milestones and outcomes and producing a validated report.

There are multiple levels of governance:

- ▶ *Overall governance (home and secretariat support) for the SAQRF – to be determined at a later date*
- ▶ *Operational governance – through a committee that is responsible for its management*
- ▶ **National level linkages.**

This section outlines the key roles of the NSC.

5. *Is there sufficient information here in the terms of reference? Is there sufficient flexibility for the future?*
6. *Is there anything that needs to added? Changed?*

Appendix 5:

SAQRF Guidelines (draft)

- ▶ **As presented to the participants at the Technical Meeting #4A.**
-

Draft SAQRF Guidelines

V 31/05/2023

This document provides background information for MS. The document is envisaged not to be public. It also provides a link to the two referencing templates.

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This section is to be completed after June Technical Meeting 4B.

Refer to Appendix 1 and 2 for review.

► Purpose of the Guidelines

► Background

► Technical Committee

Overview and refer to protocols – Appendix 1.

► Referencing to the SAQRF

Approach to referencing

Summary of approach. Purpose of referencing, engaging stakeholders

SAQRF criteria and obligations

List criteria and obligations and logic for separation

Overview of criteria – intent & and any additional information

SAQRF quality assurance criteria

List criteria and how to use in the referencing process

Overview of criteria - intent

SAQRF referencing process

Simple overview, and refer to Appendix 2 for submission process.

Refer to templates (for report and response)

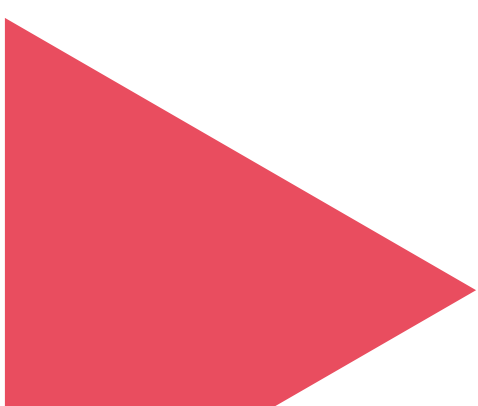




► Appendix 1: Technical Committee: Terms of reference, structure, and protocols

Note: Appendix 1 will be discussed and endorsed by the SAQRF Technical Committee at the inaugural meeting, after the endorsement of the SAQRF.

► Purpose and role

- 1.1 The purpose of the SAQRF Technical Committee is to provide oversight of the SAQRF and its implementation.
 - 1.2 This committee shall:
 - provide high-level technical advice and engage with policy issues arising from the implementation of the SAQRF;
 - foster collaboration amongst the MS;
 - facilitate the resolution of issues with agreements on common approaches and understanding culminating in briefing papers and guidelines;
 - promote the SAQRF and quality assurance of education in all sectors within its MS;
 - monitor the implementation of the SAQRF and of the Technical Committee's remit;
 - provide for the consideration of referencing reports and confirming whether the submission meets the SAQRF referencing criteria;
- 

- ▶ facilitate capacity development of MS in terms of qualifications frameworks and quality assurance; and
- ▶ promote the SAQRF to the international education and training community.²⁴

▶ Membership

- 2.1 Membership shall be one representative per member state. Each member state shall nominate their representative. MS may draw on additional expertise as observers for their deliberations. MS may determine the number of additional observers present at meetings.
- 2.2 The Technical Committee may invite or determine the number of additional observers present at meetings.²⁵
- 2.3 Any MS having denounced the agreement to the SAQRF shall cease to be a member of the Technical Committee from such time as their denouncement shall become effective.
- 2.4 The chair and vice-chair shall be determined on a member state alphabetical basis, rotated every two years, with the vice-chair continuing as the chair for the following two years. The vice-chair shall assist the chair and assume the role of chair in the case of chair's absence. In the case of the next member state in line to assume either role, the member state can forgo its turn.

▶ Meetings

- 3.1 The meetings shall: be chaired by the chair and supported by the vice chair.
in the case of the committee deliberations of a referencing report, if either the chair or vice

²⁴ This section is a copy of the SAQRF.

²⁵ This section above is a copy of the SAQRF.

chair represents one of the referencing MS, then the next member state in alphabetical order will take on the role of vice chair for the component of the meeting where the MS referencing report is being considered.

- ▶ in the absence of the chair, the vice chair will assume the role of chair and the next member state in alphabetical order will take on the role of vice chair.

▶ Meeting schedule

- 4.1 The Technical Committee aims to meet at least 4 times per year, and may convene additional meetings to address specific issues or requests for referencing reports to be considered.
- 4.2 The secretariat, on behalf of the chair, will convene meetings via email or telephone advice.
- 4.3 The chair can request that an extraordinary meeting be held, in addition to regularly scheduled meetings, if an immediate response is required for an urgent matter.
- 4.4 Any member of the Technical Committee may invite the committee to hold a meeting on its territory. The secretariat of the committee shall inform the members of the committee of any invitation of this kind. The secretariat and the chair and vice chair shall decide upon such invitations.

Question:

1. Who will be the secretariat?

- ▶ Nominated person/s from the chair MS?
- ▶ Nominated person/s from the governing body, e.g. SAARC Secretariat or NGO body?
- ▶ Nominated person/s from another MS on a rotational basis?

► Meeting protocols

5.1 Agenda

5.1.1 The draft of the inaugural meeting shall be drawn up by the secretariat of the Technical and the approved by the member to take the position of the inaugural chair.

5.1.2 The draft agenda of ordinary and extraordinary sessions shall be drawn up by the secretariat in consultation with the chair and vice chair.

5.1.3 The chair approves the final agenda.

5.1.4 MS may request the inclusion of agenda items

5.1.5 For ordinary meetings, the secretariat will distribute the agenda and agenda papers to MS at least 4 weeks prior to the meeting.

5.1.6 For extraordinary meetings, the secretariat will include only those items for whose consideration the session has been convened, shall be communicated to members of the Technical Committee at least ten days in advance.

5.1.7 The committee shall adopt its agenda at the beginning of each session.

5.1.8 During an ordinary session the committee may change the order of items on the agenda and add or delete items.

5.2 Role of the Chair

5.2.1 The role of the Chair includes:

a. confirming proper notice has been given of the meeting and Agenda

b. confirming agenda

c. conducting meetings:

► ensuring that the meeting gets through its business in the allocated time

► dealing with the order of business

► keeping order and facilitating discussion, ensuring that each MS has the opportunity to comment or present their case

► receiving motions, putting to the vote any decisions of the Technical Committee, confirming the decision made

► approve minutes of meetings

► admission of any invited observers at the meeting

► declaring the meeting closed.

5.3 Quorum

5.3.1 A majority of MS at the meeting shall constitute a quorum.

5.3.1 All MS should be represented or be provided the opportunity (prior to the meeting) to address items on the agenda.

5.4 Decisions and voting

5.4.1 A decision arising at the meeting must be decided by consensus by all MS, with the MS representative presiding at the meeting announcing their decision at the time.²⁶

5.4.2 Each member state shall have one vote. Voting shall generally be through a show of hands or verbal comment (given in alphabetical order).

5.4.3 Decisions cannot be ratified without consensus by all MS, either at the meeting or within 1 week of the meeting.

5.4.4 Decisions made by a member state outside of the meeting must be provided in writing within the 1-week timeframe.

5.4.5 Where a decision cannot be reached by consensus, the matter will be deferred to the next meeting.

5.4.6 If at the next meeting a decision is not reached, the Technical Committee may commit to further discussion.

²⁶ MS provide verbally their agreement or not with the motion; and can provide their reasoning.

5.4.7 Should the approval or a decision of the Technical Committee be required for measures of exceptional urgency and importance while the Technical Committee is not in session, the secretariat - or the chair, through the secretariat - may consult the members by correspondence. The proposed measures shall be adopted if it is approved by two-thirds of the members of the Technical Committee.

5.5 Disclosure of interest in matter being considered

5.5.1 This section relates to whether a member state (or its representative) has a personal interest in the decision being made

5.5.2 The member state (or its representative) must disclose to other MS as soon as the relevant facts become known to the MS's knowledge:

- a. the nature and the extent of the interest
- b. how the interest relates to the matter being considered.

5.5.3 A member state (or its representative) has a personal interest in the matter if:

- a. the member has direct or indirect financial interest in the matter, or
- b. has a personal, professional, commercial, or other relationship with the person and the nature of the relationship is likely to, or may reasonably be regarded as likely to, inhibit or prevent the member from exercising independent judgement about the matter.

5.5.4 If a member state (or its representative) has a personal interest in the matter, the member state (or its representative) must not take part in any deliberation or decision on the matter

5.5.5 The disclosure must be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

5.6 Observers

5.6.1 Observers specifically invited by the Technical Committee shall be able to

express their opinions and positions at the meetings of the committee during the discussions of general issues, to the exclusion of items which, by their nature are to be dealt with only by the Members of the committee. They shall also be able in these cases to put forward informal suggestions.

5.6.2 Expert observers supporting the member state representative can only express their views through the representative, or at the invitation of the chair or vice chair.

5.7 Publicity

5.7.1 Unless otherwise decided by the Technical Committee or by the body in question, all sessions of the Technical Committee and of its subsidiary bodies shall be held in closed sessions.

5.8 Subsidiary bodies

5.8.1 The committee shall establish any subsidiary body it may deem necessary in order to consider the items on its agenda.

5.8.2 These rules and protocols shall apply to the subsidiary bodies, if applicable.

5.9 Working language

5.9.1 The working language of the Technical Committee is English.

5.9.2 Speakers may, however, use any other language, on condition that they make their own arrangements for interpretation of their speeches into the working language, and provided that it is technically possible.

5.9.3 In view of the provisions of paragraph 1 above, the working documents of the Technical Committee shall be issued in English.

5.9.4 The Technical Committee will consider and approve translations of the SAQRF.

5.10 Records of meetings

5.10.1 The Technical Committee must record detailed and accurate minutes of the

meetings, including a record of all its decisions.

5.10.2 Minutes of all meetings must be recorded by the secretariat.

5.10.3 At each of its meetings, the Technical Committee shall adopt its report in the form of a list of its decisions, including the text of the conclusions and recommendations it has adopted.

5.10.4 Draft minutes must be circulated to all MS for comment prior to the next meeting.

5.10.5 Minutes of the previous meeting must be approved at the next meeting.

5.10.6 Minutes of meetings are not made public.

► Secretariat of the Technical Committee

6.1 The secretariat is responsible for:

- a. drafting the agenda for the meeting and sending to the chair for finalisation and approval
- b. distributing agenda papers to members at least 5 working days prior to the meeting
- c. making meeting arrangements
- d. recording the minutes of the meeting and sending draft minutes to the chair for consideration
- e. compiling Technical Committee recommendations and monitoring actions emanating (if relevant)
- f. maintaining the SAQRF website and SAQRF related documents.

Appendix 2:

SAQRF referencing report submission process

V 26/04/2023

Note: This procedure will be discussed and endorsed by the SAQRF Technical Committee after the endorsement of the SAQRF.

► Purpose

The purpose of this document is to explain the steps involved in the submission, review, and endorsement of a member state's referencing report. The referencing report is the culmination of the MS referencing activity, involving drafting a report, consulting with stakeholders and endorsement by relevant bodies.

► Principles

Critical to the success of the referencing activity and the information provided to other MS through the report, the following principles apply.

1. The referencing MS will provide an accurate and up-to-date status of their qualifications system including the level of implementation of the NQF and the quality assurance arrangements that apply.
2. The reviewing MS will review the referencing report with a focus on providing constructive feedback and providing clear suggestions or recommendations for improvement to the report.
3. The referencing MS may submit either an informal partial referencing report or a

formal complete referencing report against all criteria.

Question:

1. Will the committee only formally accept full referencing reports, or allow for an informal submission, e.g. Criterion 1 first? What are the benefits of or issues with partial submissions?

► Procedure

The Procedure outlines five key steps in the process of submitting a referencing report.

Stage 1: Notice of intent to submit a SAQRF referencing report

The purpose of the Notice of Intent to submit a SAQRF referencing report is to notify the SAQRF Technical Committee of the impending submission. This notification will enable the committee to plan its workload, ensure availability to review the report, and organise a SAQRF Technical Committee meeting.

The Notice of Intent is a brief paper that outlines:

- Brief summary of the referencing activity
- Any issues encountered in the referencing activity
- Completeness of the report (refer to Question 1 above)

- Indicative date for submission of the referencing report.

Stage 2: Submit the referencing report

The referencing report is submitted once the referencing activity and consultations as well

as all endorsements have been achieved at the national level. Referencing reports will need to be submitted to the secretariat 6 weeks prior to a SAQRF Technical Committee meeting. A presentation by the referencing member state and discussion on the report will be scheduled into the meeting.

Step	Detail	Timeline
1. Referencing member state submits report	Report is submitted to the secretariat for distribution to the SAQRF Technical Committee and the Project Consultant.	
2. SAQRF Committee members receive draft referencing report	Report is provided by secretariat to SAQRF Technical Committee members.	Within 1 day of receiving the report.
3. Members review the report	Members individually review the report, documenting preliminary responses using the review template. Members may draw on expertise within the MS, but 1 consolidated preliminary response is required from each member state.	+ 1 week
4. Members provide draft comments to Project Consultant	Members provide preliminary responses to the Project Consultant.	+ 2 week
5. Project Consultant collates responses	Project Consultant collates responses and highlights areas for discussion.	+ 3 weeks
6. Members provided with collated responses	Collation is provided to SAQRF Technical Committee members.	+ 3 weeks
7. SAQRF Technical Committee meets to discuss collated response	SAQRF Technical Committee meets to discuss response, and prepare for the discussion ²⁷ with the referencing member state to clarify the report. Questions are prepared.	+ 4 weeks
8. Referencing member state is provided with information in preparation for meeting	Project Consultant provides draft collated response and questions to referencing member state in preparation for the SAQRF Technical Committee meeting.	+ 5 weeks

Stage 3: Presenting report at SAQRF Technical Committee meeting and follow up

The SAQRF Technical Committee meeting schedules sufficient time to include a presentation from the referencing member state and for the ensuing discussion.

Actions will be determined here and agreed by the committee. The structure of this session is included in Annex 1.

²⁷ Purpose of the interview/discussion is to seek clarity in the member state's response to promote the provision of an informed final response by the Committee.

Responsibilities	Detail	Timeline
1. SAQRF Technical Committee meeting with member state	Presentation by the referencing member state. Discussion is designed to seek clarity on aspects of the report and to provide verbal feedback.	+ 6 weeks
2. Project Consultant completes draft response	Project Consultant completes consolidated response with any amendments/actions for comment by SAQRF Technical Committee.	+ 7 weeks
3. Comments provided	SAQRF Technical Committee members provide comments on the consolidated response and its amendments/actions.	+8 weeks
4. Finalised response sent	Finalised consolidated response is sent by Project Consultant, to the secretariat to provide to referencing member state	+ 9 weeks
5. Referencing member state	Referencing member state progresses towards amended submission.	

In relation to referencing reports, the Technical Committee shall consider the referencing report, confirm acceptance of the report, or alternatively provide feedback in the form of constructive suggestions or recommendations.

Question:

1. *The SAQRF processes need to be sustainable and there may not be a Project Consultant. What alternatives do we have?*

Stage 4: Amending the SAQRF referencing report

The referencing member state receives the feedback and any noted actions (i.e. recommendations and suggestions).

The member state is to consider the suggestions and recommendations in future drafts for submission to the Technical Committee. The referencing member state is required to address all recommendations in the manner that it sees fit. Suggestions for improvement are suggestions only.

Once the revised or amended SAQRF Referencing Report is ready for re-submission and consideration, the referencing member state shall return to follow the procedure

in Stage 2 until acceptance by the Technical Committee is confirmed.

Stage 5: Endorsement by the SAQRF Technical Committee

Endorsement by the SAQRF Technical Committee may occur at the next SAQRF Technical Committee meeting or through an out-of-session meeting.²⁸

Endorsement is an acknowledgement that the report is an accurate reflection of the current status of the qualifications system, and that the referencing of the NQF levels to the SAQRF is accurate, unambiguous, and reflects the opinions of the members state's stakeholders.

Question:

There are options here.

1. *Does the report need to be:*
2. *accepted by Technical Committee*
3. *endorsed by Technical Committee?*

Refer to next question as well.

²⁸ Out of session meetings (i.e. by email) are to be used as a method of last resort and/or for when urgent matters are required for decision/input and it is not feasible for a meeting (face-to-face, or teleconference, or videoconference) to be convened.

Stage 6: Acceptance by XXX

Upon the SAQRF Technical Committee recommendation, the ministers/senior officials responsible for XXX from each of the MS, shall accept the referencing report.

NOTE: this stage will be dependent on the governance arrangements. Could it be 'the recommendation is provided to the ministers/senior officials responsible for XXX for noting'.

Question:

There are options here.

- ▶ accepted by Ministers/Senior Officials
- ▶ endorsed by Ministers/Senior Officials, or should the
- ▶ submitted for noting at the SAARC (or other) Ministers/Senior Officials meetings regionally and nationally?

The referencing report will be included on the SAQRF website, at XXXXX

▶ Post initial referencing

To ensure that the referencing member state's qualifications systems remain transparent and relevant, the concerned member state shall provide an update on the changes, if any, and implementation progress in specific areas identified in its SAQRF Referencing Reports to the SAQRF Technical Committee on a regular basis as determined by the SAQRF Technical Committee.

At an agreed point in time, the referencing member state will update the referencing report according to the then current procedure.

Appendix 6: Endorsement Letter (draft)

- ▶ 31 May 2023 – version reviewed at Technical Meeting #4A and as presented at Technical Meeting #4B.
-

Letter of Endorsement – South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework

V 31 May 2023

The first technical meeting on South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework (SAQRF) was held virtually on 15 – 16 February 2022 with the participation of Member State representatives from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, India, Pakistan, Maldives, and Sri Lanka, establishing the following objectives for the SAQRF –

- ▶ To increase trade in services, particularly education services and labour mobility through transparency and trust in National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs).
- ▶ To strengthen education and training systems within each country through the development of policy frameworks for NQFs to improve the quality and effectiveness of qualifications systems and promote regional cooperation.

The Member State acknowledged the existing bilateral and multilateral agreements between Member States for the mutual recognition of qualifications and common occupational/skill standards.

Furthermore, the Member State–

acknowledged the need for a common qualifications reference framework to support cross-country recognition of qualifications and skills to facilitate learner, worker and professional mobility.

recognised the need to improve understanding of other Member States' national qualifications system and associated quality assurance strategies.

affirmed that the qualifications reference framework should be enabling and voluntary and not impinge upon Member States' qualification systems and frameworks.

recognised that the regional qualifications framework be developed in parallel with processes for strengthening national qualification frameworks and qualifications systems through processes of peer dialogue and review between Member States.

In addition, the Member State–

acknowledge that a renewed impetus is needed to achieve shared goals and to commit to enduring and sustainable collaboration, to improve the mobility of workers and students, graduates, and education and training institutions, and to drive education and training quality by establishing best practices in the South Asia region

commit to regional collaboration and cooperation in the field of education and training, and in the implementation of the SAQRF

acknowledge that the SAQRF can serve as a focal point for renewed impetus and change in the quality of education and training and recognition of qualifications

commit to a strategy for implementing the SAQRF and to seek solutions for financial support

commit to endorse the SAQRF.

The Member States have collaborated through additional technical and taskforce meetings.

Furthermore, each Member State has undertaken consultation within their own country. The Member State now presents the SAQRF document for endorsement.

The undersigned representative(s) from XXX (add name of MS),²⁹ being duly authorised, have signed as an endorsement of the SAQRF attached in Appendix 1.

For the XXX (add name of MS) Add name of signatory, job title, and ministry name date	Add here signature
For the XXX (add name of MS) Add name of signatory, job title, and ministry name date	



²⁹ This assumes one letter signed from each MS.

Appendix 7:

SAQRF (final draft after Meeting #4B and sent to editor)

► **South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework**

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► Background

- 1.1 The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established with the signing of the SAARC Charter in Dhaka on 8 December 1985. SAARC comprises of eight Member States (MS): Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The Secretariat of the Association was set up in Kathmandu on 17 January 1987.
- 1.2 The objectives of the Association outlined in the SAARC Charter are to:
 - a. promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and to improve their quality of life; accelerate: economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region, and provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and to realize their full potentials;
 - b. promote and strengthen collective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia
 - c. contribute to mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another's problems;
 - d. promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields;
 - e. strengthen cooperation with other developing countries;
 - f. strengthen cooperation among themselves in international forums on matters of common interests;
 - g. cooperate with international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes.
- 1.3 The New Delhi Declaration on Education (31 October 2014) resolved to foster quality education and expand the scope of cooperation, which would involve the formulation of the SAARC Framework for Action for Education 2030. The Declaration resolved to focus on, among others, the following:
 - a. enhancing the availability, accessibility and quality of secondary education
 - b. expanding opportunities for skill development including technical and vocational education and training
 - c. revitalizing higher education, including facilitating mutual recognition of qualification and mobility of students.
- 1.4 In the Heads of State or Government 18th Meeting (Kathmandu, November 2014), the leaders expressed their strong determination to deepen regional integration for peace, stability and prosperity in South Asia by intensifying cooperation. The leaders also renewed their commitment to achieving a South Asian Economic Union (SAEU) in a phased and planned manner through a free trade area, a customs union, a common market, and a common economic and monetary union. The leaders also expressed their resolve of achieving education for all and ensuring quality education. The leaders also agreed to "collaborate and cooperate on safe, orderly and responsible management of labour migration from South Asia to ensure safety, security and well-being of their migrant workers in the destination countries outside the region."
- 1.5 The SAARC Plan of Action for Cooperation on Matters Related to Migration (adopted in Kathmandu, May 2016) endorses the development of a South Asian Qualifications Reference Framework:

Developing a South Asian qualifications reference framework... would facilitate harmonization of skills qualifications at the regional level and also facilitate enhanced recognition of skills of migrant workers from South Asia in the destination countries.
- 1.6 The SAARC Framework for Action for Education 2030 was endorsed in September 2016 at the Third Technical Meeting of senior officials on education in

South Asia. The senior officials identified 12 priority areas which included, among others, the following:

- a. improving learning outcomes and promoting quality education;
- b. promoting acquisition of skills for life and for work;
- c. improving education governance;
- d. ensuring lifelong learning opportunities; and
- e. strengthening partnership and collaboration.

- 1.7 At the ILO-MSDE Inter-regional Expert Forum on Skills and Migration in the South Asia–Middle East Corridor in New Delhi (July 2017), one of the key recommendations was to

“Work with the SAARC Secretariat, and through the existing SAARC frameworks on education and on migration, to endorse the development of a South Asian Qualification Reference Framework. The Framework would function as a mechanism to enable comparisons of qualifications across SAARC Member States, also facilitate enhanced recognition of skills of migrant workers from South Asia in countries of destination.”

- 1.8 The Abu Dhabi Dialogue (ADD) has identified skills recognition as one of four priority areas. In the strategy proposed for cooperating on skills certification in the Asia–GCC migration corridors (June 2017), the ADD puts forward two important steps that countries of origin can take:

“Countries without a qualifications framework which maps to international standards should accelerate the development of the framework without which MoUs of mutual recognition of skills cannot happen.”

“Countries of origin that have a qualifications framework in place

may want to proactively engage in MoUs with GCC countries to recognize equivalences (and other third party countries). The recognized mapping of their qualifications framework to third party countries can then be shared with GCC countries transparently so GCC countries can consider recognizing the same mapping through their existing partners.”

- 1.9 The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (2018) contains a dedicated section on skills:

“We commit to invest in innovative solutions that facilitate recognition of skills, qualifications and competences of migrant workers at all skills levels, and promote skills development for the full employability of migrants in labour markets of countries of origin and destination.”

- 1.10 The initial development of the South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework (SAQRF) was supported by the ILO and began in mid to late 2020 with a survey and interviews of representatives culminating in a background report (Bateman 2020a). The report was followed by consultations on a concept proposal (Bateman 2020b), with a final draft concept design for the regional qualifications framework and a roadmap for finalization/endorsement and implementation (Bateman 2020c).
- 1.11 The first Technical Meeting on the South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework (SAQRF) was held virtually on 15 – 16 February 2022 with the participation of Member State³⁰ representatives from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. A further three virtual technical meetings were held, and the fifth technical experts

³⁰ Note to editor - Technical Experts requested that Member State be capitalized.

meeting was held in-person on 26th and 27th June 2023 in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

- 1.12 The SAQRF was endorsed by the ministry responsible for education and training in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka³¹. Each Member State also identified additional ministries for endorsement of the SAQRF, according to their own context.
- 1.13 The MS acknowledge the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) as being benchmarks for the development of the SAQRF.
- 1.14 Taking into account the aforementioned political and legal context and the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, the SAQRF has been established as a policy instrument of regional scope to deliver on the objectives of enhancing transparency of qualifications and establishing mutual trust between qualifications frameworks and systems for lifelong learning in South Asia. It supports and supplements activities of MS and should be implemented in accordance with national laws and practices.

► Purpose

- 2.1 The SAQRF is a common reference framework which aims to enhance regional understandings of South Asia MS' qualifications frameworks or systems.
- 2.2 The purpose of the SAQRF is to:
- a.** promote the recognition of qualifications;
 - b.** promote mobility of learners and workers;

³¹ Afghanistan was not included in these consultations given the political situation at this time.

- c.** promote transparency of qualifications frameworks or systems and associated quality assurance mechanisms;
- d.** promote recognition of all forms of learning;
- e.** encourage and facilitate lifelong learning through the support of national qualifications frameworks;
- f.** strengthen regional identity and facilitate other regional initiatives; and
- g.** provide a link to other regional qualifications frameworks internationally.

► Scope

3.1 The SAQRF:

- a.** acts as a common reference framework, and functions as a translation instrument to enable comparisons of qualifications frameworks and systems across the South Asia MS;
- b.** aims to be a neutral influence on qualifications frameworks and systems in MS, that does not impinge on national sovereignty; and
- c.** acknowledges all forms of learning, including formal, non-formal and informal, across all educational services.

► Principles

4.1 The SAQRF:

- a.** is based on common understandings amongst MS;
- b.** does not replace or define qualifications frameworks or systems in MS, nor does it describe specific qualifications. Instead, specific qualifications should only be referenced to the SAQRF by way of the relevant qualifications framework or system.

- c. is based on a hierarchy of learning outcomes with increasing levels of learning complexity, to facilitate a better understanding of different qualifications frameworks or systems and their qualifications;
- d. promotes the transparency, comparability, and transferability of qualifications;
- e. encourages lifelong learning, the recognition of prior learning, and credit transfer processes or systems;
- f. allows for voluntary engagement of MS to determine when they will undertake the referencing process (refer to Section 6). The SAQRF and referencing process should be implemented in accordance with each Member State's laws, policies, and practices.
- g. allows MS to revise and update their referencing reports as their national qualifications frameworks or systems may change over time.³²
- h. shall be reviewed and evaluated in consultation with MS and other relevant regional stakeholders, and updated, if necessary.

► Structure

- 5.1 The structure of the SAQRF include its learning outcomes approach, the eight level descriptors (refer to Annexure 1), and the referencing criteria and obligations (refer to Annexure 2).

5.1 Level descriptors

- 5.1.1 The level descriptors are based on the notion of competence, using the following domains:

- a. knowledge;
- b. skills; and
- c. application.

³² Note to editor. Items 7 and 8 are not related. The request from the Technical Experts is that there should be no 'and' here.

- 5.1.2 Knowledge is defined as the body of facts, principles, theories, and practices related to a field of work or study. In the context of the SAQRF, knowledge is described as theoretical, factual, or technical³³.

- 5.1.3 Skills is defined as the 'ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems'. In the context of the SAQRF, 'skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments)'³⁴.

- 5.1.4 Application is defined in terms of the problems or issues to be resolved in a field of work or study, and the ability of the learner to apply the knowledge and skills autonomously and with responsibility³⁵.

- 5.1.5 The level descriptors assume that the:

- a. level of learning outcomes incorporates those in the lower levels; and
- b. domains at one level should be interpreted together to provide an understanding of the level of learning complexity.

- 5.1.6 The level descriptors are included in Annexure 1, and were adapted from the EQF and AQR level descriptors.

5.2 Referencing criteria and obligations

- 5.2.1 The aim of any referencing process is to promote understanding and engender trust in a Member State's qualifications within a national qualifications framework or system. To provide a consistent approach to referencing, the MS have agreed to the following:

- a. the referencing process culminates in a referencing report;

³³ EQF 2017, p. 20

³⁴ EQF 2017, p. 20

³⁵ EQF 2017, p. 20

- b. the Member State's referencing report provides a response against each referencing criterion; and
- c. the referencing obligations clarify key processes and outcomes following the completion of the referencing process, ensuring that referencing reports are shared with MS' stakeholders and are readily accessible.

5.2.2 The referencing criteria and obligations are outlined in Annexure 2.

5.2.3 In addition, the Member States have agreed to the role of the SAQRF Technical Committee and the National SAQRF Committee in the referencing process. The referencing process requires that each Member State form a National SAQRF Committee (NSC) of key stakeholders to coordinate the referencing process. Refer to Section 10 Governance.

► Quality assurance

- 6.1 Trust in a Member State's qualifications that are part of a national qualifications framework or system is essential for supporting the mobility of learners and workers within the region and external to the region. Quality assurance of qualifications, and the provision of the qualifications through educational service providers, is critical to engendering trust.
- 6.2 Quality assurance, in relation to educational services, is a set of mechanisms established by competent bodies to assure the quality of qualifications and provision of these qualifications to provide confidence to stakeholders. The MS are responsible for setting the quality requirements and outcomes for the quality assurance.³⁶

6.3 The referencing process requires the MS to not only reference their national qualifications framework/s or system, but also to describe the quality assurance mechanisms linked to their qualifications. The MS have agreed to a set of quality assurance criteria.

6.4 The quality assurance criteria to be considered in the referencing process are included in Annexure 3.

► Credit systems

- 7.1 Credit systems help learners progress in their learning and assist in transfer across qualifications, qualifications systems, and countries. Credit systems allow learners to accumulate and transfer credit related to learning outcomes.
- 7.2 The SAQRF encourages MS to develop credit systems within their own context, and it supports a link with a future regional credit system.

► Glossary

- 8.1 The agreed terms and understandings are included in Annexure 4.
- 8.2 The agreed terms and understandings do not impinge on agreed terms and understandings within the qualifications system of MS, but are used to assist in a common understanding of practices.

³⁶ Adapted from CEDEFOP 2011, p. 134.

► Governance

9.1 There are two committees recognised by the SAQRF:

- a.** the SAQRF Technical Committee; and
- b.** the National SAQRF Committee (NSC).

9.2 The oversight of the SAQRF is managed by the SAQRF Technical Committee. This committee shall:

- a.** provide high-level technical advice and engage with policy issues arising from the implementation of the SAQRF;
- b.** foster collaboration amongst the MS;
- c.** facilitate the resolution of issues with agreements on common approaches and understanding culminating in briefing papers and guidelines;
- d.** promote the SAQRF and quality assurance of educational services within its MS;
- e.** monitor the implementation of the SAQRF;
- f.** provide for the consideration of referencing reports and confirming whether the report meets the SAQRF referencing criteria;
- g.** facilitate capacity development of MS in terms of qualifications frameworks and quality assurance; and
- h.** promote the SAQRF to the international education and training community.

9.3 Each Member State shall have one vote. Each Member State shall nominate their representative. The chair and vice-chair shall be determined on a Member State alphabetical basis, rotated every two years, with the vice-chair continuing as the chair for the following two years. Decision-making processes shall be based on consensus. Further arrangements and protocols are stipulated in the decisions made by the Technical Committee.

9.4 The National SAQRF Committee (NSC) acts as the interface between the SAQRF Technical Committee and the Member State. Membership is determined by the Member State. The NSC is responsible for

- a.** updating and reporting to the SAQRF Technical Committee on changes and progress in qualifications systems within its own country;
- b.** developing a nationally agreed roadmap for referencing;
- c.** steering and guiding the referencing process; and
- d.** ensuring the quality of the referencing milestones and outcomes and producing an endorsed report.

9.5 The role of the SAQRF secretariat is to support the functions of the SAQRF Technical Committee.

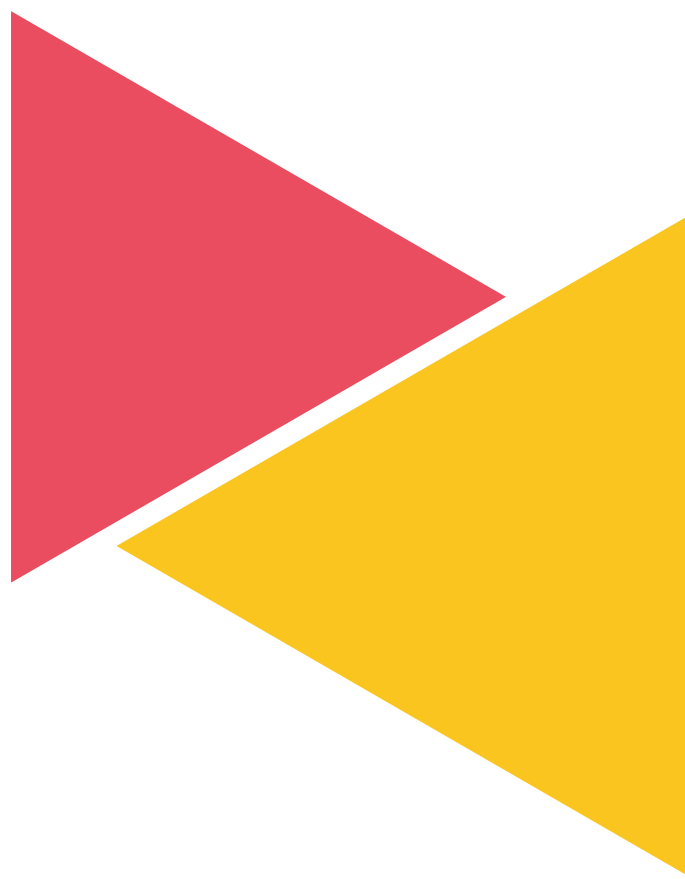
Annexure 1:

Level descriptors

Level	Knowledge	Skills	Application	
			Problem solving	Responsibility and autonomy
	Learning outcomes include:	Learning outcomes include:	Learning outcomes include the ability to:	Learning outcomes involve:
8	Knowledge that is at the most advanced frontier or field and at the interface between fields Creation of new knowledge or practice	Most advanced and specialized skills and techniques including synthesis and evaluation	Solve critical problems in research and/or innovation, and to extend and redefine knowledge or professional practice	Ability to demonstrate: - substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity - sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of a context, including research
7	Highly specialized knowledge (some of which is at the forefront of a field) as the basis for original thinking and/or research A critical awareness of issues within a field and at the interface between different fields	Specialized skills demonstrating mastery in research and/or innovation	Develop new knowledge and processes to solve highly complex problems, and to integrate knowledge from different fields in research or innovation	Ability to: - manage and transform contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches - take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of others
6	Advanced knowledge in a field involving a critical understanding of theories and principles	Advanced skills demonstrating proficiency and innovation	Solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialized field	Ability to: - manage complex technical or professional activities or projects - take responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable contexts, and for managing professional development of individuals or groups

Level	Knowledge	Skills	Application	
			Problem solving	Responsibility and autonomy
	Learning outcomes include:	Learning outcomes include:	Learning outcomes include the ability to:	Learning outcomes involve:
5	Comprehensive and specialized, factual, and theoretical knowledge within a field, and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge	A comprehensive range of cognitive, analytical, and practical skills	Develop creative solutions to abstract problems	Ability to: - exercise management and supervision in contexts where there are some aspects of unpredictable change - review and develop the performance of self and others
4	Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts	A broad range of cognitive and practical skills	Generate solutions to specific problems in a field	Ability to exercise self-management within guidelines and in contexts that are usually predictable but subject to change
3	Knowledge of facts, principles, processes, and general concepts in a field	A range of cognitive and practical skills	Accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying known methods, tools, materials, and information	Ability to take responsibility for completion of tasks, and to adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems
2	Basic factual knowledge of a field	Basic cognitive and practical skills	Carry out tasks and solve routine problems using simple rules and tools	Broad supervision with some autonomy
1	basic general knowledge	basic general skills	Carry out basic, simple tasks	Direct supervision in a structured context

Source: Adapted from EQF 2017 and AQRF 2020.



Annexure 2:

Referencing criteria and obligations

► Referencing criteria

1. The structure and profile of the broader education and training system is described, including an overview of the national qualifications system and its national qualifications framework/s).
2. The quality assurance mechanisms for educational services are integral to the national qualifications framework/s or system, and are consistent with the quality assurance criteria in Annexure 3.
3. Qualifications are based on the principles of learning outcomes, which inform the recognition of all forms of learning³⁷ and credit systems (where they exist) within the national qualifications framework/s or system.
4. The process for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework/s (or describing the place of qualifications within the qualifications system) is clear and transparent.
5. There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualification levels of the national qualifications framework/s or system and the level descriptors of the SAQRF.
6. The legitimacy and responsibilities of all relevant competent bodies involved in the referencing process are clear and transparent. The referencing report has been prepared and endorsed by the Member State's National SAQRF Committee (NSC), and any relevant legitimate competent bodies. It is endorsed as being

an accurate representation of the relevant quality assurance mechanisms, provisions, and practices. The referencing report shall include these endorsements.

7. The referencing process involves two international experts from two different countries (internal or external to the region) to support and assist the development of trusted outcomes. The referencing report shall include a written statement from each of the international experts.

► Referencing obligations

1. There is one comprehensive referencing report that sets out the response to each criterion and includes any supplementary information or evidence.
2. Following the referencing process, the Member State is encouraged to commit to a clear reference to the appropriate SAQRF level on new qualifications and certification documents issued within the qualifications system and/or in qualifications registers managed by relevant competent bodies. This commitment is implemented according to MS legislation and practices, and may change from time to time.
3. The report shall be readily available and published by the competent body within the Member State and by the SAQRF secretariat within 6 months of having referenced or updated the referencing report and being accepted by the MS.

³⁷ Formal, non-formal, and informal learning

Annexure 3:

Quality assurance criteria

All qualifications should be quality assured to build trust in their design, development, and provision. In consideration of the MS context and circumstances these quality assurance criteria apply to educational services within the MS's qualifications system.

Quality assurance criteria

Quality assurance of qualifications should:

1. involve competent bodies that operate with clear and transparent governance arrangements;
2. be based on clear, transparent, and measurable objectives, quality standards, rules, or guidelines;
3. address the design of qualifications and the application of learning outcomes approach;
4. promote the recognition of all forms of learning³⁸, including minimising any barriers³⁹;
5. provide for fair and valid assessments of the learning outcomes, including certification;
6. address the quality of the provider and their provision of qualifications, including internal and external review; making the findings of external reviews public;
7. involve relevant stakeholder groups in key aspects of quality assurance;
8. be underpinned by a continuous improvement approach involving decisions that are informed by feedback, data, and research;
9. involve competent bodies carrying out their own internal and external evaluations, as they deem fit;
10. be fit for purpose, appropriately resourced, and sustainable; and
11. be enhanced through national and international linkages and cooperation.⁴⁰

38 Formal, non-formal, and informal learning.

39 Barriers may relate to access and equity for vulnerable groups, such as gender, age, disability, or geographic location.

40 These criteria have been adapted from UNESCO 2017 and European Commission 2017.

Annexure 4:

Glossary of terms

For the purposes of the SAQRF the following definitions apply.

Competence	Competence is the “proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development”. ⁴¹
Competent body	A competent body is an organization that has the legal authority, capability, or power to undertake a specific function. Within qualifications systems, that could include: • agencies responsible for approving and managing qualifications under the NQF/s; • agencies responsible for approving and monitoring educational service providers and the provision of programmes that lead to approved qualifications. These agencies could be qualifications agencies, quality assurance agencies, official review boards, or other approved bodies or agencies.
Credit	Credit “means confirmation that a part of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of learning outcomes has been assessed and validated by a competent authority, according to an agreed standard; credit is awarded by competent authorities when the individual has achieved the defined learning outcomes, evidenced by appropriate assessments and can be expressed in a quantitative value (e.g. credits or credit points) demonstrating the estimated workload an individual typically needs for achieving related learning outcomes”. ⁴²
Credit systems	Credit systems are a “transparency tool for facilitating the recognition of credit(s). These systems can comprise, inter alia, equivalence, exemptions, units/modules that can be accumulated and transferred, the autonomy of providers who can individualise pathways, and the validation of non-formal and informal learning”. ⁴³
Credit transfer	Credit transfer means “the process of allowing individuals who have accumulated credit on one context to have it valued and recognised in another context”. ⁴⁴ It may include but is not limited to the following processes known as cross-credit, advanced standing, block credit, specified credit and unspecified credit.
Educational services	In relation to the SAQRF, educational services refer to all relevant education and training sectors within a Member State’s qualifications system, such as higher education, TVET or skills.
Evaluation	Evaluation incorporates a review or assessment of performance of an initiative, a policy, or organisational practices. It generally involves the evaluation as a systematic investigation to determine the work or merit of the programme or policy.⁴⁵ In relation to the SAQRF, internal evaluation may include a self-assessment or internal audit. External evaluation may include an external (or independent) audit.

⁴¹ European Commission 2017, p. 20.

⁴² European Commission 2017, p. 20.

⁴³ European Commission 2017, p. 21.

⁴⁴ European Commission 2017, p. 21.

⁴⁵ Adapted from CEDEFOP 2011, p. 71.

Formal learning	Formal learning occurs in an organized and structured environment (such as in an education or training institution or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or resources). Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view and it typically leads to certification. ⁴⁶
Informal learning	Informal learning is learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organized or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective. ⁴⁷
Learning outcomes	Learning outcomes are statements regarding what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process. Within the SAQRF, learning outcomes are described in terms of knowledge, skills, and application (responsibility and autonomy). ⁴⁸
National qualifications frameworks	National qualifications frameworks are instruments for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved. They aim at integrating and coordinating national qualifications subsystems and improving the transparency, access, progression, and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society. ⁴⁹
Non-formal learning	Non-formal learning is learning that is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support), but contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically does not lead to certification. ⁵⁰
Programme	A programme is the arrangements developed by a provider for the teaching, learning and assessment of a body of knowledge, set of skills, and of wider competences. A programme may lead to the award of a qualification. ⁵¹
Provider	A provider is an institution that is approved to organise and deliver programmes that lead to a qualification. Providers may be assessment centres, colleges, institutes, universities or similar.
Qualifications	A qualification is the formal outcome of an assessment 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 various means, such as workplace experience, or a programme of study, or a blend of both. A qualification is issued by a competent agency, which confers official recognition of value in the labour market and in further education and training. ⁵²
Qualifications system	Qualifications system means "all aspects of a member state's activity related to the recognition of learning and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. That includes the development and implementation of institutional arrangements and processes relating to quality assurance, assessment and the award of qualifications". A national qualifications system may be composed of several subsystems and may or may not include an explicit national qualifications framework. ⁵³

46 CEDEFOP 2011, p. 75.

47 CEDEFOP 2011, p. 85.

48 Adapted from European Commission 2017.

49 Adapted from European Commission 2017.

50 CEDEFOP 2011, p. 113.

51 Adapted from CEDEFOP 2011, p. 127 & 128, and EQAP 2015

52 Adapted from European Commission 2017 and from ASEAN 2015.

53 Adapted from European Commission 2017, p. 20.

Quality assurance	Quality assurance, in relation to educational services, is a set of mechanisms established by competent bodies to assure the quality of qualifications and provision of these qualifications to provide confidence to stakeholders. The MS are responsible for setting the quality requirements and outcomes for the quality assurance. ⁵⁴
Recognition of learning outcomes	Recognition of learning outcomes means the confirmation by a competent body that learning outcomes gained by an individual in a formal, non-formal or informal setting have been assessed against predefined learning outcomes and are compliant with the requirements of a standard, such as a qualification or component/s of a qualification. Formal recognition of learning outcomes includes assessment of an individual within a formal setting, recognition of prior learning, and credit transfer processes or credit transfer systems. ⁵⁵
Recognition of prior learning	Recognition of prior learning relates to recognizing learning gained and currently held, regardless of how, when or where the learning occurred. It involves the assessment of an individual to make a decision against specified learning outcomes. The recognition of prior learning process by a competent body consists of the following four distinct phases: identification through dialogue of particular experiences of an individual, documentation to make visible the individual's experiences, a formal assessment of those experiences, and certification of the results of the assessment which may lead to a partial or full qualification.⁵⁶ Recognition of prior learning may be termed assessment of prior learning.

⁵⁴ Adapted from CEDEFOP 2011, p. 134.

⁵⁵ Adapted from European Commission 2017, ASEAN 2015, CEDEFOP 2011, p. 125.

⁵⁶ Adapted from European Commission 2017.

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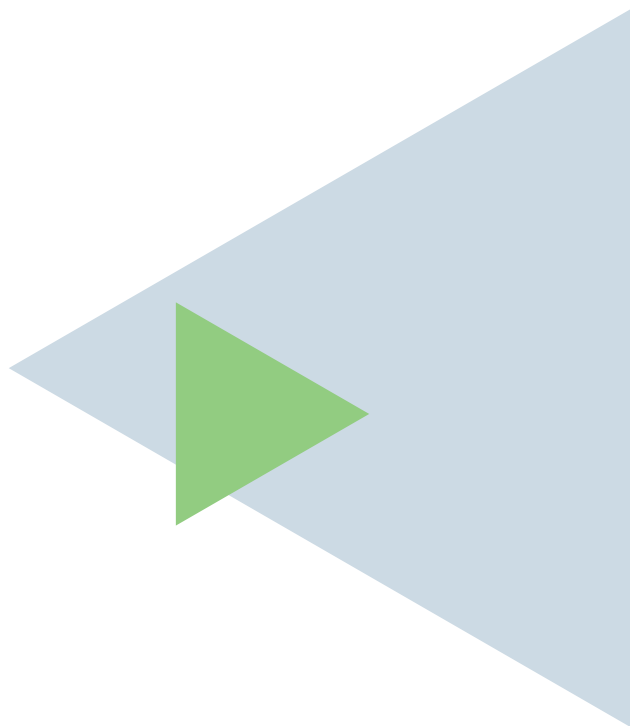
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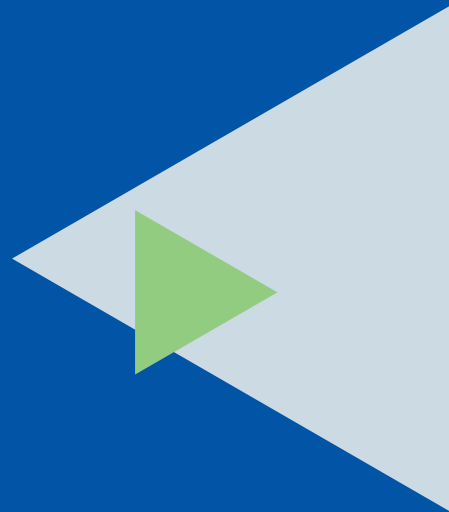
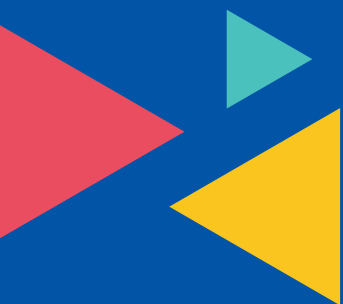
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