



International
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► Development of South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework

Technical Meeting #3



► Development of the South Asia regional qualifications framework:

Technical Meeting #3

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Under the auspices of the GOALS programme, the ILO is assisting the South Asian member states (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka), through a consultative process, with developing and implementing a regional qualifications framework. As part of this process, the Second Regional Technical Meeting of the initiative was held virtually on 26 and 27 September 2022. This report is a documentation of the proceedings and outcomes of the Third 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. Publishing support was provided by Ms Akriti Paracer and Mr Karun Gopinath from ILO DWT/CO – New Delhi.

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List of acronyms

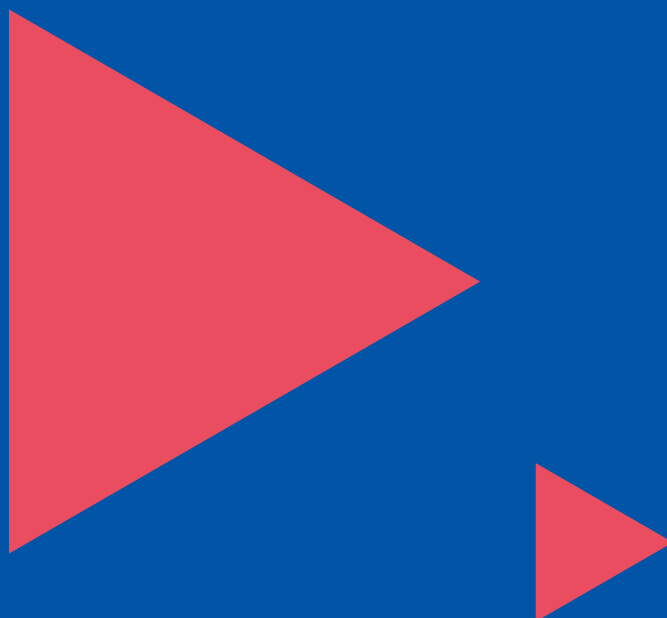
AQRF	ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework
AQAF	ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
EU	European Union
HE	Higher Education
ILO	International Labour Organization
MS	Member States
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NQS	National Qualifications System
NSQF	National Skills Qualification Framework
QF	Qualifications Framework
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



Background

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

Technical Meeting #3 is part of a series of five technical meetings conducted over approximately 18 months to develop and refine a regional qualifications framework that is ready for endorsement.



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 #3

► Purpose

The main objectives of the meeting were to:

- allow member states (MS) to present an overview of their self-assessment of their ability (with documentation) to prepare a referencing report;
- discuss the referencing process;
- discuss the governance arrangements of the Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF);
- consider the draft RQF policy instrument;
- secure nominations of 2 or more MS to prepare a partial referencing report for Criterion 1;
- discuss the option of having a 2.5-hour in-country workshop on the RQFs and the draft RQF policy instrument; and
- brief the MS on their obligations to provide written comments on 2 or more partial referencing reports before the next Technical Meeting in 2023.

The meeting was held (virtually) on 26 and 27 September 2022, with a 3.5-hour session on each day. The agenda is included in Appendix 1.

Attendance

The Technical Meeting had strong attendance across all participating MS and International Labour Organization (ILO) representatives. In total, there were 34 participants on Day 1 and 28 participants on Day 2. The representatives from the MS were mainly from technical, vocational and educational training (TVET) and higher education competent bodies (e.g., quality assurance agencies, peak policy, or funding bodies). There is still a need to raise awareness in other agencies within the MS, e.g., in agencies responsible for migration or labour.

► Summary of Day 1

Opening session

The Technical Meeting was opened by Col Gunjan Chowdhary, Director, National Council for Vocational Education and Training, India. Col Gunjan Chowdhary welcomed all the participants and noted the importance of developing an RQF that would be recognized worldwide.

Mr Amish Karki outlined the agenda for the two days and welcomed the participants.

Referencing overview

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 South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework (SAQRF) and the National Qualification Framework or System (NQF/NQS); and

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

- She also indicated that there are pre-conditions that need to be considered in each MS, including:

- that the regional framework is seen as an enhancement to cooperation and capacity-building is underway;

- governance and management structures are in place to manage the referencing activity; and

the links between the NQF and quality assurance are clear.



She then introduced the self-assessment to evaluate the preparedness of the MS to reference. She indicated that the self-assessment was not developed to evaluate whether the criteria are met or not met, but to assess whether the MS had sufficient information or evidence to be able to respond to the referencing criteria.

The following MS representatives provided an overview of the self-assessment undertaken within each state:

► **Bangladesh:** Mr S M Shahjahan, Deputy Director, Bangladesh Technical Education Board

- **Bhutan:** Ms Sangye Choden, Chief Programme Officer, Ministry of Education
- **India:** Ms Ojasvi Goyal, Consultant, National Centre for Vocational Education and Training
- **Nepal:** Mr Tek Bahadur Malla, Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTVET), National Skills Training Board
- **Pakistan:** Ms Ambeena Bakhtiar, Director, National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC)
- **Sri Lanka:** Dr Ajith Palwatte, Director (NVQ), Technical and Vocational Education Commission.



Member States	Notes
Bangladesh	Bangladesh indicated that the self-assessment related to the TVET sector but some aspects related to the whole system. The findings indicated: • Criteria 1: There is sufficient information regarding the Bangladesh National Qualifications Framework (BNQF), but there are gaps relating to TVET, skills qualifications in relation to the BNQF [which is a 10-level framework for both TVET and higher education] and equivalences of schools and the Madrasah system. The actions to be taken include the introduction of a credit system and a bridging system. • Criteria 2: There is sufficient information in relation to the quality assurance system across sectors. Specific actions to be taken include the completion of the quality audit system by the Bangladesh Technical Education Board. • Criteria 3: The TVET system is based on learning outcomes; however, there is no credit system, and information in relation to RPL is not clear. The actions to be taken include the design of a credit transfer system and a bridging system. • Criteria 4: Pathways are horizontal between the school and the TVET qualifications and between the Madrasah and higher education qualifications. There is no explanation as to how qualifications are located on the BNQF or what information is available. Actions to be taken include the alignment of qualifications across sectors. Bangladesh indicated that there are some gaps in the system, especially with regard to the information available to respond to the criteria.
Bhutan	Bhutan indicated that the self-assessment was undertaken across the country, including for the TVET and higher education sectors. • Criteria 1: Partial information was available across all sectors within a range of agencies. The actions to be taken include consulting and finalizing the revised Bhutan Qualifications Framework and establishing a National Information Centre that would serve as a single point for information. • Criteria 2: Partial information is available as there is no legal framework for implementing the BQF and no national register to provide information on qualifications. The actions to be taken include drafting a bill for the BQF and developing a national register with accredited qualifications and approved institutions. • Criteria 3: Partial information is available as there is no credit system. Whether there is sufficient information available in relation to RPL or credit transfer was unclear. The actions include strengthening credit transfer processes. • Criteria 4: Partial information is available as the decision to locate a qualification on a specific level is not outlined, and there is no list of accredited qualifications in higher education. The roles and responsibilities of agencies are not clear. The actions to be undertaken include developing a national register for accredited qualifications and approved institutions and developing guidelines for locating a qualification on the BQF.

Member States	Notes
India	- Criteria 1: India has developed the National Credit Framework (NCrF), a comprehensive framework. The actions to be taken include raising awareness of the NCrF. - Criteria 2: The National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) organizes the TVET qualifications into a series of 8 levels. The speaker indicated that information pertaining to quality assurance arrangements is available in the skills sector but did not indicate if similar information is available for other sectors. - Criteria 3: The NCrF recognizes all forms of learning. Qualifications are based on national occupational standards. All frameworks (higher education, school education and skills education) are integrated into the NCrF. - Criteria 4: The National Higher Education Qualifications Framework and the NSQF are integrated under the NCrF. There was no information as to how qualifications are aligned to a level on the framework or if this information is available. The actions to be taken include the integration of the system. Questions to India included clarification of the NCrF and whether it is a qualifications framework and/or a credit framework. India noted that all sector qualifications frameworks are linked to sector quality assurance frameworks. India offered to provide a presentation on the NCrF to the MS.
Maldives	Although there was no presentation by the Maldives, the self-assessment provided to the ILO team between sessions indicated that there were no issues with accessing relevant information in order to be able to respond to the criteria.
Nepal	- Criteria 1: Partial information is available. The NQF is a new initiative and provides the structure for pathways, but there is a different understanding across sectors about the linkages between TVET and general education pathways. The actions to be taken include the elaboration of the NQF, a legal mandate to implement it and the establishment of a responsible agency. It was not made clear if other information regarding various education and training systems is available. - Criteria 2: Partial information is available. Gaps present in the information include an integrated quality assurance system and defined quality assurance criteria. The actions to be taken include establishing a technical taskforce to develop a quality assurance manual for all sectors. - Criteria 3: There was insufficient information to support a response to this criterion. There is no credit system and there was no information pertaining to RPL. The actions to be taken include developing a credit transfer system through stakeholder consultation. - Criteria 4: Partial information is available. There was no information as to how a qualification aligned with the NQF. The actions to be taken include developing an expert team. Nepal confirmed that there are two pillars (general and TVET) within the one qualifications framework.

Member States	Notes
Pakistan	- Criteria 1: Sufficient information is available across all sectors. The National Vocational Qualifications Framework (NVQF) provides structure and pathways for the vocational sector. Lack of awareness was noted as a gap, and the actions to be taken include undertaking awareness-raising activities. - Criteria 2: Information related to quality assurance is complete in the TVET system. - Criteria 3: Information is available in relation to the credit system in TVET. It is unclear as to whether information is available in relation to RPL or implementation of learning and to the other sectors. - Criteria 4: Information is available for key aspects of the NVQF, but it was not made clear how qualifications are located on the NVQF. There was no indication as to whether information is available in other sectors. Questions sought clarity as to whether the response was specific to the NVQF sector and not related to the higher education qualifications framework. The National Higher Education Qualifications Framework (NHEQF) was developed in 2016 (levels 5, 6, 7 and 8), and, hopefully, there will be a unified qualifications framework in the future.
Sri Lanka	- Criteria 1: There is sufficient information in relation to the NVQF (for TVET). There is also the Sri Lankan Qualifications Framework; however, the system is not fully implemented. It was not made clear if there is sufficient information related to the broader education and training system. It was noted that nano-qualifications have been awarded for units of competency in the TVET sector. - Criteria 2: For TVET, there is sufficient information in relation to quality assurance. - Criteria 3: In TVET, units of competency are based on learning outcomes, and there is recognition of prior learning. Recognition of formal learning is achieved through nano-qualifications, but there is no information in relation to recognition for credit transfer purposes. The NVQF is a credit-based system. - Criteria 4: In TVET, qualifications are demand driven and are made up of units of competency. There was no elaboration as to how the decision is made to align or include a qualification at a specific level.

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 MS that will review referencing reports, including:

- ▶ referencing guidelines;
- ▶ referencing procedure (refer to Appendix 2) to be included in the referencing guidelines;
- ▶ referencing report template; and
- ▶ referencing report review template.

She introduced a referencing procedure for discussion, noting that this procedure was specific to the submission of the referencing report. This process will be trialled in the pilot stage of the project.

Mr Amish Karki, Technical Officer – GOALS, ILO South Asia, closed the meeting by thanking all participants.

► Summary of Day 2

Day 2 was opened by Mr Amish Karki, Technical Officer – GOALS, ILO South Asia, who noted that the focus of the day would be on the draft SAQRF and governance arrangements.

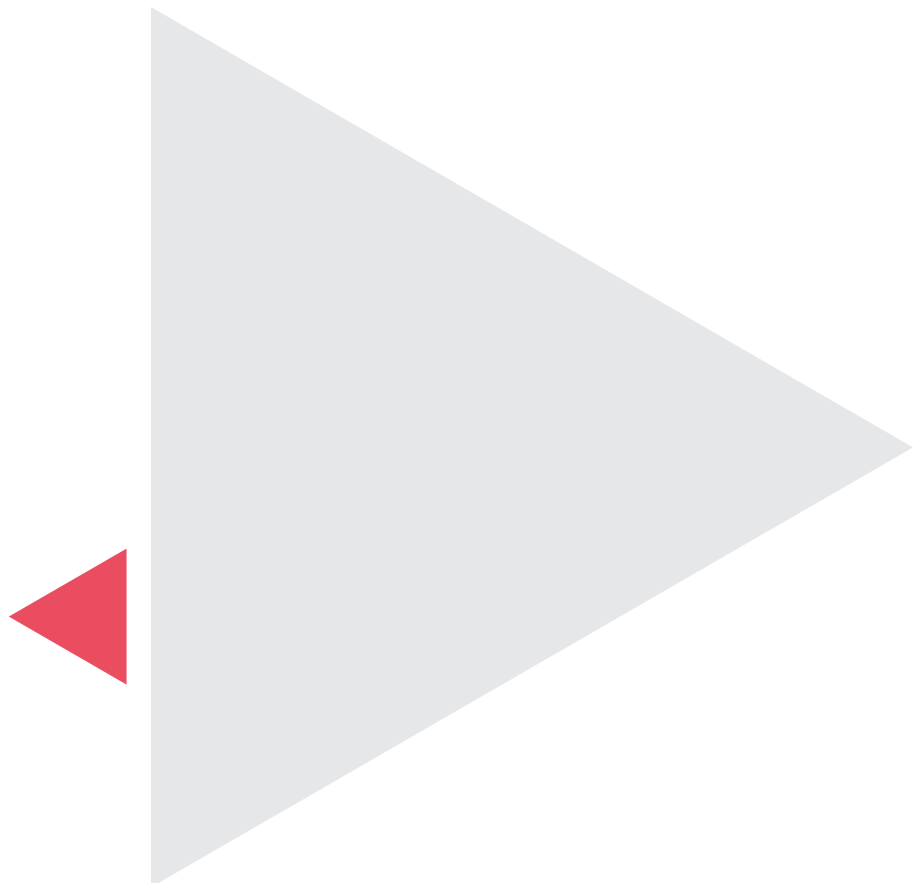
Draft South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework (SAQRF)

Ms Andrea Bateman, Project Consultant, indicated that the focus of discussion would be on the SAQRF policy document:

- domains of the levels;
- referencing criteria and obligations;
- quality criteria; and
- governance.

Participants were provided with an updated draft SAQRF policy document (Appendix 3), and the Project Consultant focused the discussion on the level descriptor domains, the referencing criteria and obligations, as well as the quality criteria.

The Project Consultant provided a summary and the intent of each referencing criterion. She also further explained the process of locating or aligning a qualification to the NQF in the qualification development and approval process, which is directly related to Criterion 4. She noted that presentations on Day 1 did not include strong explanations as to how qualifications are located on/included in/aligned to the BNQF. She also indicated that the lack of information for this criterion is common in many countries.



In relation to governance arrangements (refer to Appendix 4), the Project Consultant presented the following four proposed options.

Option 1: SAARC	Option 2: Collaborative	Option 3: Collaborative – extended	Option 4: Collaborative approach – extended, international agency
Sit under SAARC Charter	MS are responsible for hosting on a rotational basis	Collaborative model supported by the Columbo Process	Collaborative model with interim support from an international agency
Advantages: - SAARC protocols and support would apply - Long-term sustainability - Small secretariat - Clear identity	Advantages: - MS can manage the approach in line with an agreement - Rotational hosting with rotation of the chair	Advantages: - MS can manage the approach in line with an agreement - Rotational hosting with the rotation of the chair - Provides a support mechanism	Advantages: - MS can manage the approach in line with an agreement - Rotational hosting with rotation of the 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: - MS bear the costs of the Secretariat and web hosting - Requires a high level of cooperation - Requires "heads of agreement" or a "constitution"	Issues: - The Columbo Process may affect membership - Would the Columbo Process support initiatives that not all members have access to, or, are members of another RQF?	Issues: - Requires a high level of cooperation - Requires "heads of agreement" or a "constitution"

A series of informal polls were held (across 12 respondents), and the following was noted:

- ▶ Location of the problem-solving domain: There was support for placing the problem-solving domain in the skills domain (58%) rather than the application domain (42 per cent). A discussion indicated that the stem leading to the application domain could potentially be changed to better align with the intent. The Project Consultant indicated that this consideration would be taken up with the Task Force.
- ▶ International experts: There was greater support for the presence of two international experts (58%) rather than one international expert (42%).
- ▶ MS observer: 75% of the participants supported the requirement of including an MS observer in the referencing process, with the remaining 25% not supporting the requirement.

The Project Consultant asked each MS their opinion on the options. Almost all considered the SAARC as the best option, with one MS indicating a collaborative approach (Option 2) as the best option. Bhutan indicated that the SAARC areas of cooperation that were likely to be most relevant were education, security and culture.

The Project Consultant encouraged MS to internally discuss the SAQRF and start identifying who will need to endorse the SAQRF policy document and the protocols that would need to be followed.

General business

The Project Consultant discussed the following actions:

- ▶ Pilot referencing: A call for volunteers was made for at least 2 MS to undertake a pilot referencing activity against at least Criterion 1, with the report due in January 2023 in readiness for Technical Meeting #4 in February 2023. Representatives from Bhutan, Bangladesh, the Maldives and Pakistan volunteered, and all MS were asked to confirm their participation within two weeks of the meeting. Mr Amish Karki indicated that there would be an email sent out to confirm the volunteers.
- ▶ Assistance to referencing MS: A targeted workshop will be provided to go through the support materials and prepare the MS to undertake a referencing activity, along with one-to-one support from the Project Consultant.
- ▶ In-country consultant assistance: The Project Consultant and ILO representatives would provide support for in-country consultations on the SAQRF. One MS suggested that it would be good to have clean copies of all relevant documentation, e.g., the SAQRF policy document, the governance paper and a set of standardized PPTs.

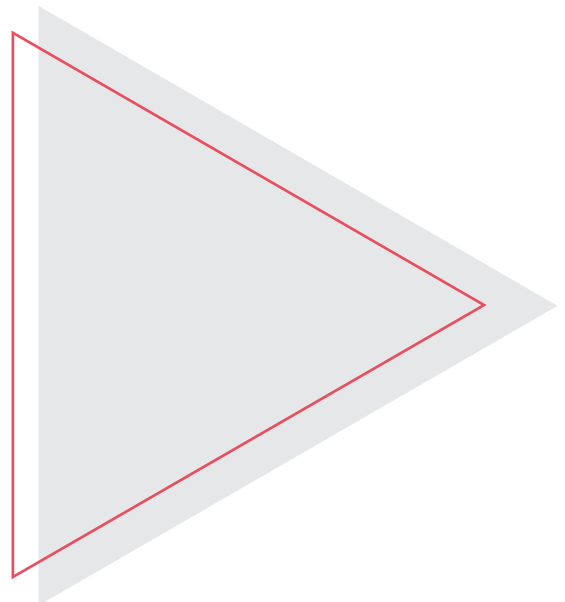
Interim activities

The final session addressed the interim activities to be led by the Task Force, including future Task Force meetings. The following was noted:

- ▶ Referencing MS will have to complete Criterion 1 six weeks prior to Technical Meeting #4 in February 2023. The Project Consultant indicated that the deadline of six weeks may be reduced to four weeks as there are limited criteria being addressed.
- ▶ Other MS are required to be ready to provide a written review of the draft reports within one week of receipt and be prepared to discuss them at the next Technical Meeting #4.
- ▶ Task Force meetings: The Project Consultant indicated that there needs to be a third meeting before the end of 2022 and another meeting in early 2023 with the aim of finalizing the level descriptors and quality criteria.

Closing session

Dr. Abdul Hannan Waheed from the Maldives closed the meeting, indicating that these meetings are a process of learning and coming to an agreement on a regional initiative. He thanked all the participants and acknowledged the input provided over the two days.



► Outcomes

Technical Meeting #3 provided a valuable basis for collaboration among the MS, and there was support for continuing the development of the SAQRF. The SAQRF policy document is gradually improving each time as it moves closer to finalization.

MS responses to the self-assessment indicated that further scrutiny of the draft criteria would be required to ensure that the intent of each criterion is clear. In addition, some MS were unable to provide a comprehensive response regarding their qualifications system, and further in-country work would be required to strengthen the links and relationships between sectors and enable whole-of-government referencing activities in the future.

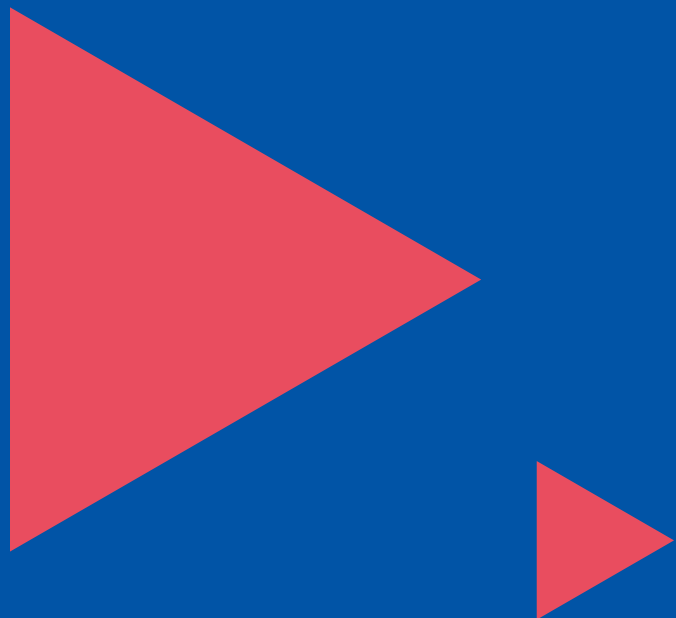
► Comments for future meetings

It is suggested that the ILO and MS continue to push for a whole-of-government approach to ensure that all the relevant parties within an MS are involved. This will smoothen acceptance of the framework, especially at the endorsement stage. The ILO and MS should continue to encourage quality assurance/qualifications authorities to include additional staff in the technical meetings as a form of professional development for them.





Appendices



Appendix 1: Agenda

► Meeting Agenda for Technical Meeting #3

South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework (SAQRF)

26 –27 September 2022

09:30 am – 13:00 pm (IST)

Description	Technical Meeting #3: Developing an internationally robust regional qualifications framework for South Asia
Objective	1. MS present an overview of their self-assessment, addressing their ability (and documentation) to be able to prepare a referencing report 2. Discuss the referencing process 3. Discuss governance arrangements of the RQF 4. Consider the draft RQF policy instrument 5. Achieve nominations of 2 or more MS to prepare a partial referencing report for Criterion 1. 6. Discuss the option of having a 2.5 hour in-country workshop on the RQFs and the draft RQF policy instrument. 7. Brief MS on obligations to provide a written comment on the 2 or more partial referencing reports prior to the next Technical Meeting.
Participants	South Asia member representatives, including those NQF (or sector) technical experts, those involved in the quality assurance of qualifications systems (or sub systems), and those involved in bilateral or regional labour or student migration or trade agreements.
Link	Zoom Meeting Link – https://ilo-org.zoom.us/j/93889197783?pwd=cZZoMIR5UG5MalZLeIYybWtQekludz09 Meeting ID: 938 8919 7783 Passcode: 881639
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 September 2022

DATE/TIME (IST time)	SESSION	SPEAKERS	CHAIR
09:30 – 09:40	Opening session: - Welcome message	MS representative	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 - Activities - Outcome – report	ILO RQF Project Consultant Andrea Bateman	Mr Shahzad Ahmed
10:00 – 10:45	Session 2: Self-assessment of readiness - MS to provide an overview of the status of/progress in implementing learning outcomes, recognition of nonformal and informal learning and credit transfer [3 AMS]	MS representatives	Mr Shahzad Ahmed
10:45 – 10:55	Q&A	ALL	Mr Shahzad Ahmed
10:55 – 11:05	Break 10 minutes		
11:05 – 12:05	Session 2: cont'd - [4 AMS]	MS representatives	Mr Shabarinath Nair
12:05 – 12:15	Q&A	ALL	Mr Shabarinath Nair
12:15 – 12:25	Session 3: Referencing process in the SAQRF - Overview of the process - Presentation of the report template - Presentation of the review template	ILO RQF Project Consultant Andrea Bateman	Mr Gabriel Bordado
12:25 – 12:55	Open discussion – each MS nominated offers comments	ALL	Mr Gabriel Bordado
Closing			
12:55 – 13:00	- Summary up of outcomes of Day 1 and preparation for Day 2	ILO RQF Project Consultant Andrea Bateman	Mr Shabarinath Nair

Day 2: 27 September 2022

DATE/TIME (IST time)	SESSION	SPEAKERS	CHAIR
09:30-09:50	Opening session: - Welcome and focus for today		Mr Amish Karkia
09:50 – 10:50	Session 4: Draft SAQRF and guiding questions - Updated presentation of the draft SAQRF – discussion on critical aspects: using the guiding questions focussing on Referencing Criteria and obligations and QA Criteria.	ILO RQF Project Consultant Andrea Bateman	Mr Gabriel Bordado
10:50 – 11:00	Q&A	ALL	Mr Gabriel Bordado
11:00 – 11:10	Break 10 minutes		
11:10 – 11:40	Session 4: Draft SAQRF and guiding questions (continued)	ILO RQF Project Consultant Andrea Bateman	Mr Gabriel Bordado
11:40 – 11:50	Q&A	ALL	Mr Gabriel Bordado
11:50 – 12:10	Session 5: General business - Referencing activity nominations - Opportunity to assist with in-country consultations	ILO RQF Project Consultant Andrea Bateman	Mr Gabriel Bordado
12:10 – 12:20	Q&A	ALL	Mr Gabriel Bordado
Closing			
12:25 – 12:30	Session 6: Interim activities for MS Documents for in-country consultations: Draft SAQRF policy document Governance paper Draft referencing process Interim tasks and plans for the next Technical Meeting: - Referencing MS to complete Criterion 1 – six weeks before the Technical Meeting - Other MS ready to provide a written review of the draft reports within 1 week from receipt and be prepared to discuss them at the next Technical Meeting - Task Force Meetings (#2 plus)	Mr Gabriel Bordado	Mr Amish Karkia
12:50 – 12:55	- Summarization of outcomes of Day 2	ILO RQF Project Consultant Andrea Bateman	Mr Amish Karkia
12:55 – 13:00	- Closing comments and remarks from the MS representative and ILO representative	Ms Sangye Choden, Bhutan, ILO representatives	Mr Amish Karkia

Appendix 2:

SAQRF referencing report submission process (draft)

As presented to the participants at the technical meeting.

SAQRF Referencing Report Submission Process (draft)

V 19/09/2022

Note: This procedure is for post-endorsement of the SAQRF, e.g., post-June 2023. Referencing pilot will test the process.

► Purpose

The purpose of this document is to explain the steps involved in the submission, review and endorsement of an MS'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.

► Procedure

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

Question:

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

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:

- A 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: Submission of 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 **SAQRF Secretariat** 6 weeks before a SAQRF Technical Committee meeting. A presentation by the referencing MS and a discussion on the report will be scheduled for the meeting.

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

² 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.

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

The SAQRF Technical Committee schedules sufficient time to include a presentation from the referencing MS and the ensuing discussion. Actions will be determined here and agreed upon by the Committee. The structure of this session is included in Annex 1 (TBD).

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

Question:

- 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 MS receives the feedback and any noted actions (i.e., recommendations and suggestions).

The referencing MS 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 MS shall return to follow the procedure in Stage 2. Refer to Stage 5 if minor changes were required and agreed upon at the meeting.

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.³

³ 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: Endorsement by XXX

Upon the SAQRF Technical Committee recommendation, the **SAQRF Secretariat** shall be endorsed by **XXX Ministers/Senior Officials** from each of the MS.

NOTE: This stage will be dependent on governance arrangements. There may be no endorsement if required.

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

► Post initial referencing

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

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

Appendix 3: Draft

South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework

As presented to the participants at the technical meeting.

Draft South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework

V 19/09/2022

► 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, the 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 improve their quality of life; accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region, and provide all individuals with 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; and
- 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 a *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; and
- ▶ 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 achieve 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 to ensure education for all and 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 the acquisition of skills for life and 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 zero-draft of the Global Compact on Migration (February 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 (December 2020, Bateman 2020c).

Insert here a chronological timeline for development and endorsement.

The SAARC QRF was endorsed by the XXXX.

The SA 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 above-mentioned political and legal context and the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, the SAQRF

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

1. Is the title of the RQF appropriate?
2. Other options:
 - ▶ South Asia Regional Qualifications Framework
 - ▶ South Asia Qualifications Framework
 - ▶ SAARC Qualifications Framework
 - ▶ SAARC Qualifications Reference Framework

▶ Purpose

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

These comparisons of qualifications across the SA MS aim to:

- ▶ improve the recognition of qualifications;
- ▶ improve student and labour mobility;
- ▶ improve the 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 frameworks internationally.

3. Are these purposes appropriate? Any more to add or delete?
4. 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 SA MS.

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

5. Is the scope appropriate?
6. Should the scope refer to linkages with other South Asia regional developments in qualifications recognition and common skills standards?

▶ Principles

The SAQRF:

1. is based on agreed understandings between MS;
2. aims to be a neutral influence on qualifications frameworks in MS;
3. 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 qualifications system);

4. 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 MS's education and training system and serve as a translation device to better understand different qualifications systems and their qualifications;
5. supports the transparency, comparability and transportability of its people's qualifications;
6. supports lifelong learning and the recognition of prior learning and credit transfer processes or systems;
7. 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 MS's laws and practices;
8. allows for MS to revise and update their referencing reports through a new referencing activity as their national qualifications frameworks (or systems) change over time; and
9. shall be reviewed and evaluated in consultation with MS, and if necessary, updated.

7. Are these principles appropriate? Is the order of these principles appropriate?
8. Is it clear that the Regional Qualifications Framework aims to NOT impinge upon national QFs/systems? Refer to Principle 2.
9. Is it clear that those MS 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; and
- 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 SAARC QRF, 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)”.⁴

Application is defined in terms of

- the types of tasks, 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 responsibility.⁵

These descriptors assume that the

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

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:

- to bring MS’s qualifications systems together; and
- to link with other RQFs (or NQFs) external to the community (e.g., EQF, AQRF as being the main two RQFs – both 8-level frameworks);
- Or both 1 & 2?

10. Three domains are being used (Knowledge, Skills, Application (Problem Solving and Responsibility and Autonomy). Should Problem Solving be incorporated into the Skills domain or remain under the Application domain? For the greatest portability, should the domains be similar to, and align with, the EQF and AQRF? Note that the EQF has 3 domains and the AQRF has 2 domains – and they align.
11. Are the definitions for the current three domains suitable?

4 EQF 2017, p. 20.

5 EQF 2017, p. 20.

► Referencing Criteria and Obligations

Any referencing activity aims to promote understanding and engender trust in an MS's qualifications that are part of a national qualifications framework or system.

The referencing activity culminates in an MS 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 Annex 2.

The referencing process requires that each SA MS establish a National SAQRF Committee (NSC) of key stakeholders to coordinate the referencing process. To strengthen the referencing process, to provide for capacity development, and to 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.

12. Should any Referencing Obligations be moved to a Referencing Criteria?

13. How will we treat Referencing Obligation 3? Referencing Obligation 3 logically appears as an obligation in the first cycle of referencing, but it would be more appropriate as Referencing Criteria in subsequent referencing cycles.

14. How many international experts should be involved in the referencing process? The EQF requires two and the AQRF requires one. However, the AQRF also requires an observer from one of the other MS for strengthening understanding and capability building.

15. Should there be a Referencing Obligation to provide an overview of the referencing activity, e.g., consultations with key stakeholders? Could this be included in Referencing Obligation #1?

► Quality Assurance

Trust in a MS's qualifications that are part of a NQF 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 qualifications through education and training providers, are 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”.⁶

Quality assurance of qualifications is an MS’s responsibility and should provide for transparency of processes and outcomes.

The SA 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 (or system) but also to describe the quality assurance processes 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 to 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. The 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.

16. Are these criteria clear?

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

► Credit Systems

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

Credit systems operate at the institutional, national and regional levels. The SAQRF does not include any structures related to credit 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 transfer system.

18. 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 they 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.

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

20. Are there any other terms that required explanation within a qualifications system?

⁶ Bateman et al., 2009, p. 8.

► 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. provide for the consideration of referencing reports and confirmation of whether the submission meets the SAQRF Referencing Criteria;
5. promote the SAQRF and quality assurance of education in all sectors within its MS;
6. monitor the implementation of the SAQRF and of the Technical Committee's remit;
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.

Representation shall be one member per SA MS. The election of Chair and Vice Chair shall be determined on an alphabetical basis. They will be appointed for one year, with the Vice Chair continuing as the Chair for one year. Decision-making processes shall be based on consensus. Members may draw on additional expertise for their deliberations. MS may determine the number of observers present from their MS.

Further governance arrangements 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.

1. Is there anything that needs to be added? Changed?
2. Should there be a "terms of reference" developed and added to this document? Or can it be a different document? Is the "terms of reference", as documented here, sufficient?

National representation shall be through a National SAQRF Committee (NSC) acting as the interface between the SAQRF Technical Committee and the MS. Membership shall be determined by the MS, but it should include nominated representatives of the relevant competent bodies responsible for the national qualifications framework (or system) (NQF/NQS) and other main stakeholder bodies in the country. The NSC should have expertise in the NQF/NQS and related policy positions of the MS 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 National SAQRF Committee (NSC).

3. Is there sufficient information here in the terms of reference?
4. Is there anything that needs to 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:	Learning outcomes involve:
8	Knowledge that is at the most advanced frontier of a field or at the interface between fields	Most advanced and specialized skills and techniques including synthesis and evaluation	To solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practices	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	To 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	To 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 the 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:	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 and practical skills	To 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	To 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	To accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying known methods, tools, materials and information	Ability to take responsibility for the 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	To carry out tasks and solve routine problems using simple rules and tools	Supervision with some autonomy
1	Basic general knowledge and skills	Basic general skills	To carry out basic, everyday 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 are described, including an overview of the national qualifications system and its national qualifications framework (NQF) (if relevant).
2. Quality assurance practices for education and training are integrated with the NQF (or qualifications system) and are consistent with the Quality Assurance Criteria in Annexure 3.
3. Qualifications are based on learning outcomes principles, which inform the recognition of all forms of learning⁷ and credit systems (where they exist) within the NQF (or qualifications system).
4. The process for inclusion of qualifications in the NQF (or describing their 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 referencing report has been prepared with and endorsed by the MS'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. The legitimacy and responsibilities of all relevant competent bodies involved in the referencing process are clear and transparent.

7. The referencing activity involves international experts who will support and assist in the development of trusted outcomes. The referencing report shall include written statements from international experts from two different countries internal or external to the region.⁸

► Post-referencing Obligations

1. Following the referencing activity, the MS commits to a clear reference to the appropriate SAQRF level on new certification documents issued within the NQF (or system), e.g., qualifications, certificates, and diplomas.⁹
2. There is one comprehensive referencing report setting out the response to each criterion and includes any supplementary information or evidence.
3. The report shall be readily available and published by the competent body within the MS and by the XXX.¹⁰

7 Non-formal, informal and formal

8 Note that the AQRF requires 1 expert (plus an observer from within the AMS), EQF requires 2 experts.

9 Adapted from EQF 2017 and ASEAN 2015.

10 The body/entity that ultimately is responsible for the SAQRF. To be determined.

Annexure 3:

Quality Assurance Criteria

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

In consideration of national contexts 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 or rules;
3. address the design of qualifications and the application of learning outcomes;
4. promote the recognition of all forms of learning,¹¹ including minimising barriers;
5. ensure valid and reliable assessments against the agreed and transparent learning outcomes and address certification processes;
6. address the evaluation of the quality of the provider providing qualifications, including internal review and external review and make public the evaluation findings;
7. involve key stakeholder groups in all key aspects of quality assurance;
8. be underpinned by a continuous improvement approach driven by 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 cyclical external evaluation and make public the evaluation findings;
10. be fit for purpose, appropriately resourced and sustainable; and
11. be enhanced through national and international linkages and cooperation.¹²

¹¹ Non-formal, informal and formal

¹² 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.” ¹³
Competent body	A competent body is any organization that has the legally delegated or invested authority, capacity or power to undertake a specific function. Within qualifications systems that could include: • agencies with the responsibility to approve qualifications against the NQF and which manage qualifications accreditation under national legislation; • agencies responsible for approving education and training providers and the provision of services related 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.” ¹⁴
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.” ¹⁵
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.” ¹⁶ It may include but is not limited to the following processes known as cross-credit, advanced standing, block credit, specified credit, and unspecified credit.
Formal learning	Learning that 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. It typically leads to certification. ¹⁷
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. ¹⁸

13 EQF 2017, p. 20.

14 EQF 2017, p. 20.

15 EQF 2017, p. 21.

16 EQF 2017, p. 21.

17 CEDEFOP 2011, p. 75.

18 CEDEFOP 2011, p. 85.

Learning outcomes	Learning outcomes are statements regarding what a learner knows, understands and is able to do upon completion of a learning process. Within this, RQF learning outcomes are defined in terms of knowledge, skills, context and application (responsibility and autonomy). ¹⁹
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. National qualification frameworks 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. ²⁰
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 which contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically does not lead to certification. ²¹
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 further education and training. ²²
Qualifications system	Qualifications system means "all aspects of a MS'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." ²³ A national qualifications system may be composed of several subsystems and may or may not include an explicit national qualifications framework.
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." ²⁴
Formal recognition of learning outcomes	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 criteria and are compliant with the requirements of standards, including a qualification or component/s of a qualification. Recognition of learning outcomes includes the notion of valid and reliable assessment with a formal setting, recognition of prior learning/assessment of prior learning, and also of credit transfer processes or credit transfer systems. ²⁵
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. It will include the assessment of skills and knowledge obtained through non-formal or informal learning, but it may also involve the evaluation of formal learning previously undertaken.

¹⁹ Adapted from EQF 2017.

²⁰ Adapted from EQF 2017.

²¹ CEDEFOP 2011, p. 113.

²² Adapted from EQF 2017 and from ASEAN 2015.

²³ Adapted from EQF 2017, p. 20

²⁴ Bateman et al., 2009, p. 8.

²⁵ Adapted from EQF 2017, ASEAN 2015, CEDEFOP 2011, p. 125.



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Appendix 4:

Governance discussion paper

As presented to the participants at the technical meeting.

Governance of the SAQRF: Discussion paper

Draft 19/09/2022

► Preamble

The purpose of this paper is to provide the starting point for a discussion 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 MS; and
2. National SAQRF Committee – which is the national link between the MS and the SAQRF Technical Committee and is under the remit of each MS.

The third level relates to overall governance of the SARQF, that is:

- Who will have oversight and sign-off as a representative of the MS on the SAQRF and associated high-level governance papers, e.g., education, labour, economic?²⁶
- 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 the public for international access be maintained?

²⁶ Refer to AQRF as an example of high level governance paper. Refer to endorsed papers, <https://asean.org/our-communities/economic-community/services/> Note that multiple ministers in-country were identified and each had to 'sign off'.

Additional concerns include:

- ▶ 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.

▶ Options

There are several potential models that could be applied.

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 the Chair and Vice Chair of the Technical Committee, voting protocols;
- ▶ a small Secretariat (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; and
- ▶ provides for a long-term base for the SAQRF.

Issues:

- ▶ How can SAARC be brought into the discussion and provide a platform for support for the SAQRF?

Option 2: Collaborative approach

This approach would mean that the SA MS²⁷ take control of the RQF and its associated functions/structures, e.g., website and support team. For example, an MS will host the website and the support team (Secretariat) for potentially 2 years, and it could be aligned to the Chair terms of sitting.²⁸

This model is similar to that used for APQN (<https://apqn.org/>), noting that the APQN is an incorporated company, and there is a constitution and a board (members are elected), <https://apqn.org/constitution/governance-and-constitution>.

Advantages:

- ▶ MS can manage this approach in line with an agreement
- ▶ The rotation of hosting is in line with the Chair

Issues:

- ▶ Costs of the website and support team are borne by the host MS
- ▶ Requires a high level of cooperation
- ▶ Requires additional documentation similar to a “heads of agreement” or “constitution” (whatever is allowed at this level of engagement within each MS) and would require specialist input to design the agreement
- ▶ May require incorporations as a company with a constitution and a board and would require specialist input to set up

27 SAARC MS

28 Currently the terms include 1 year as Chair. Advice is sought how other technical committees under SAARC are determined.

Option 3: Collaborative approach – extended, Colombo Process

There is the potential that a collaborative model can be supported through the Colombo Process.²⁹

Advantages:

- ▶ MS can manage this approach in line with an agreement
- ▶ The rotation of hosting is in line with the Chair
- ▶ Provides a support mechanism for a collaborative model, whereby the Colombo Process infrastructure (website) could be used and human resources could be housed

Issues:

- ▶ Would using the Colombo Process affect the membership of the SAQRF? Membership of the SAQRF through the Colombo Process is less clear. For example:
 - Colombo Process membership goes beyond South Asia
 - Bhutan and Maldives are not MS of the Colombo Process
 - Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam and Malaysia (an observer) are members of the AQR
 - Italy (an observer) is a member of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)
- ▶ Consideration as to whether the Colombo Process would support an RQF that does not include all of its MS and includes additional members who are not members of the Colombo Process, which would need to be resolved

- ▶ The Colombo Process is labour mobility focused and may marginalise schools and higher education sectors (if not others, e.g., monastic) from supporting the South Asia RQF which may limit its strength
- ▶ Requires a high level of cooperation
- ▶ Requires 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

Option 4: Collaborative approach – extended, international agency

This model is similar to Option 3 but 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
- ▶ The 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

Issues:

- ▶ Requires a high level of cooperation
- ▶ Requires 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

²⁹ Member States include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. The eight Observer States include Bahrain, Italy, Kuwait, Malaysia, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates.

► Sustainability

Discussions will also need to be had around long-term sustainability. Although the above discussion only addresses a website and a support team, there is a significant amount of work to be undertaken, including referencing activities and meetings held 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 among the MS
3. Facilitate the resolution of issues with agreements on common approaches and understanding culminating in briefing papers and guidelines
4. Provide for the consideration of referencing reports and confirming whether the submission meets the SAQRF Referencing Criteria
5. Promote the SAQRF and quality assurance of education in all sectors within its MS
6. Monitor the implementation of the SAQRF and of the Technical Committee's remit
7. Facilitate capacity development of MS in terms of qualifications frameworks and quality assurance
8. Promote the SAQRF to the international education and training community.

Representation shall be one member per SA MS. Election of Chair and Vice Chair shall be determined on an alphabetical basis, appointed for one year, with the Vice Chair continuing as the Chair for one year. Decision-making processes shall be based on consensus. Members may draw on additional expertise for their deliberations. MS may determine the number of observers present from their MS.

Further governance arrangements 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*

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

- ▶ Is there anything that needs to be added? Changed?
- ▶ Should there be a terms of reference developed and added in this document? Or can it be a different document? Is the terms of reference, as documented here, sufficient?

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

The NSC is responsible for

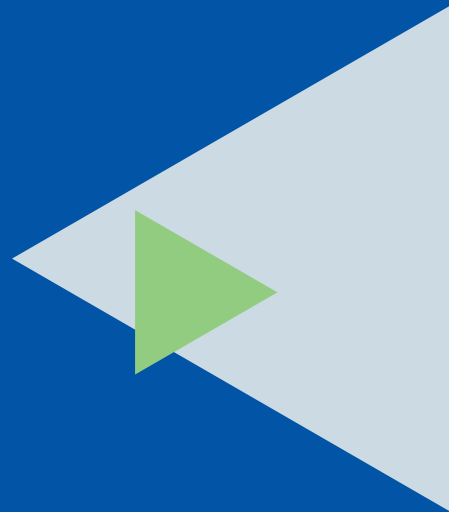
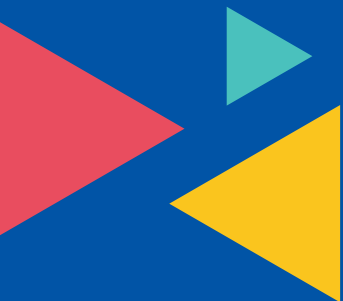
- ▶ Updating and reporting to the National SAQRF Committee (NSC) on changes and progress in qualifications systems within its own country
- ▶ Developing a nationally agreed roadmap for referencing
- ▶ Steering and guiding the referencing process
- ▶ Ensuring the quality of the referencing milestones and outcomes and producing a validated report

There are multiple levels of governance:

- ▶ *Overall governance (and 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**

This section outlines the key roles of the National SAQRF Committee (NSC).

- ▶ Is there sufficient information here in the terms of reference?
- ▶ Is there anything that needs to be added? Changed?



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