



International
Labour
Organization

Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries



Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries

**ILO DWT for South Asia and Country
Office for India**

Copyright © International Labour Organization 2021

First published 2021

Publications of the International Labour Office enjoy copyright under Protocol 2 of the Universal Copyright Convention. Nevertheless, short excerpts from them may be reproduced without authorization, on condition that the source is indicated. For rights of reproduction or translation, application should be made to ILO Publishing (Rights and Licensing), International Labour Office, CH-1211 Geneva 22, Switzerland, or by email: rights@ilo.org. The International Labour Office welcomes such applications.

Libraries, institutions and other users registered with a reproduction rights organization may make copies in accordance with the licences issued to them for this purpose. Visit www.ifrro.org to find the reproduction rights organization in your country.

ISBN: 9789220344897 (Web PDF)

The designations employed in ILO publications, which are in conformity with United Nations practice, and the presentation of material therein do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the International Labour Office concerning the legal status of any country, area or territory or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers.

The responsibility for opinions expressed in signed articles, studies and other contributions rests solely with their authors, and publication does not constitute an endorsement by the International Labour Office of the opinions expressed in them.

Reference to names of firms and commercial products and processes does not imply their endorsement by the International Labour Office, and any failure to mention a particular firm, commercial product or process is not a sign of disapproval.

Information on ILO publications and digital products can be found at: www.ilo.org/publns.



Preface

This feasibility study was commissioned by ILO Decent Work Technical Support Team for South Asia and was based on several of the national, regional and global discussions on labour migration, recommending the development of a regional framework to recognize qualifications across borders as a means to facilitate and improve outcomes of labour mobility.

The challenges to establishing a regional qualification framework include the time, cost and coordination required. The need for a regional qualification framework has come primarily from countries of origin. The expectation is to develop a comparative framework of the skills and qualifications of the existing and future migrant workers, aimed at bringing equal opportunities and fairness in the recruitment process and remunerations linked with it.

While the bilateral agreements between countries of origin and destination will continue to exist, the regional framework will further clarify the complexities of the different regional qualification structures and will also help foster and strengthen national skills and qualifications systems.

The framework will enable employers in countries of destination to compare qualifications of the workers across several countries of origin, and to implement evidence-based selection procedures. A regional framework will also contribute to a more level playing field that is based on the competency of the workers, and not their ability to pay high recruitment fees.

The study gauged the level of interest in a regional qualification framework in countries of South Asia including from different government agencies, industry representatives, workers' groups and other actors. It has recommended a qualification referencing framework for the region and set out an indicative road map with broad timeframe and milestones.

The study will be the basis for the development of the recommended mechanism that will enable the mobility of workers, contributing to ongoing initiatives to further strengthen good governance of labour migration. It also serves as an input to the UN Joint Programme implemented by ILO, IOM and UN Women called 'Governance of Labour Migration in South and South East Asia (GOALS)' to take forward with the stakeholders a South Asia regional qualification referencing framework and the corresponding mechanisms required to operationalize and implement it.

I believe this framework can play a significant role in refining labour migration governance, making it more fair and effective.

Ms Dagmar Walter

Director

ILO DWT South Asia and Country Office for India



Acknowledgments

The feasibility study was undertaken by Ms Andrea Bateman in cooperation with the South Asian national agencies involved in the implementation of National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs). We are also grateful for the extensive support by ILO country offices in arranging and facilitating country level online discussions as well as support in coming up with the current status of NQFs.

Technical inputs and guidance was provided by Mr Gabriel H. Bordado V, Skills Specialist for ILO DWT for South Asia.

Inputs to the report were also provided by Mr Shabarinath Nair, Migration Specialist for ILO DWT for South Asia and by Mr. Amish Karki, Technical Officer for GOALS programme.

Very helpful comments on draft version were received from colleagues from Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and UN Women.

We thank all the interview participants for their time and valuable technical inputs, which have resulted in drafting of this framework.

Among other colleagues, we thank Jyoti Gahlot and Nilesh Nikade for facilitating publishing of this report and thanks to, Facet Design for editing and designing layout.

The study is a contribution of ILO to the joint programme on Governance of Labour Migration in South and South-East Asia (GOALS).



Contents

List of Acronyms	8
Project Overview	9
Background	9
Methodology	10
Structure of this report	12
Part A: Overview of Regional Qualifications Frameworks	13
Overview of RQFs	13
Summary of RQFs	14
Referencing	16
Governance	17
Associated Quality Assurance Frameworks and Structures	17
Lessons Learnt	18
Part B: Current Status of South Asian States	21
Qualifications Frameworks	21
Quality Assurance in South Asia	26
Readiness for a South Asian Regional Qualifications Framework	32
Part C: Implementation of a Regional Qualifications Framework	34
Overview	34
Pre-conditions and Decision to Proceed	34
Roadmap	37
Considerations for Roadmap Implementation	39
Part D: Concept paper for the South Asian Qualifications Reference Framework (SAQRF)	43
Overview	43
Findings from Consultations on the Concept Paper	43
Appendix 1: Survey and Definitions	45
South Asia Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF) Survey	45
Questions	45
Responses	45
Appendix 2: Draft South Asian Qualifications Reference Framework	52
Level Descriptors	58
Referencing Criteria and Obligations	60
Referencing Criteria	60
Referencing Obligations	60
Quality Assurance Criteria	61
Glossary of Terms	62
References	65

- ▶ Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries

▶ 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
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PQF	Public Qualification Framework
QF	Qualifications Framework
RQF	Regional Qualifications Framework
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SAQRF	South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training

▶ Project Overview

Background

The project aims to explore the level of interest and feasibility of a Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF) amongst the South Asian countries¹. The objectives of the feasibility study include:

1. To gauge the level of interest in an RQF in countries of origin in South Asia and in countries of destination (primarily in Gulf Cooperation Council member countries), including from different government agencies, industry representatives, workers' groups and other actors.
2. To broadly assess the current status of national qualifications frameworks and collaboration in TVET in the areas of workers' mobility in countries of origin and destination by describing which are the responsible bodies, other key players and their interests and identifying strengths and weaknesses of each framework.
3. To identify 'champions' from among the government agencies of countries of origin and destination, as well as industry representatives/associations.
4. To propose the modalities for collaboration, e.g. nodal agencies and coordinating mechanisms/committees at national and regional levels; and the link between the RQF and the various regional processes (Colombo Plan, Abu Dhabi Dialogue, SAARC, etc.).
5. To estimate the level of financial investment required and potential sources of funding.
6. To set out an indicative roadmap with broad timeframe and milestones.
7. To indicate what the necessary conditions are to start the process, noting that it could be considered that it may not be appropriate to proceed with the RRF at present.

The scope of work is specified and includes:

- a. Conduct desktop reviews on experiences, best practices and lessons learnt of other regions in the development and implementation of regional qualifications frameworks and current state of NQF implementation in the South Asian countries.
- b. Produce a report on the assessment of the current state of NQF implementation within South Asia which describes the strengths, challenges, issues and problems, and recommendations for improvement of implementation.

¹ Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

► Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries

- c. Develop a brief concept paper using ILO format, and conduct consultation meetings via Skype (or another platform) with the participating South Asian countries, other stakeholders from the government and private sectors based on the objectives set in the assignment.
- d. Provide recommendations and a roadmap on how to proceed with the Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF) development process in consultation with key stakeholders.

Methodology

The research was effectively undertaken in three stages.

Stage 1

The stage included:

1. Desk review of Regional Qualifications Frameworks (RQFs) including lessons learnt.
2. Desk review of existing or proposed qualifications frameworks within the South Asian States .
3. A survey of the current status of qualifications frameworks within the country including strengths, challenges, issues and problems, and recommendations for improvement in implementation.

The survey was followed up by an interview (Round #1) to ensure a clear understanding of the responses. The questionnaires of this survey are included in Appendix 1, and was accompanied by a set of definitions to assist in the interpretation.

In Round #1 interviews were conducted with representatives from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. They included government officials, subject experts. The representatives included government officials, subject experts and consultants from these States representing at

- National level technical education planning and implementation bodies
- Skill development boards
- Universities
- UN and other International Development agencies

This stage culminated in a status report that was provided to the participating South Asian states' representatives.

Stage 2

4. A second paper was prepared outlying a roadmap for implementation and a draft concept paper.

The roadmap for implementation included:

- Roadmap with broad timelines and milestones.
- Identified synergies or connections within the region.

- ▶ Broad estimation of scope of work and costs.
- ▶ Pre-conditions to formulating and establishing a regional qualifications framework.

The draft concept paper for a new regional qualifications framework was accompanied by focus questions to elicit opinions from interviewees and interviews were again undertaken.

5. Information gained from the Round #2 of interviewees included:

- ▶ Whether it is appropriate to proceed at this stage with an RQF?
- ▶ If it is not considered appropriate to proceed, what conditions need to be met?
- ▶ If it is to proceed, what needs to be considered in a plan or roadmap, timeframes and milestones?
- ▶ A preliminary draft concept design for South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework.

Round #2 interviews aimed to seek responses from each South Asian member state and was to include quality assurance representatives from the qualifications systems, e.g.:

- ▶ Higher education
- ▶ TVET
- ▶ Skills
- ▶ Senior Schools

All representatives were to be invited to the same meeting to provide feedback on the questions posed. Each interview was for two hours. Consultations were arranged with: Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Both Bangladesh and Pakistan were able to include TVET (Skills) and Higher Education representatives in the interview sessions.

Engaging other member states in consultations, appeared problematic during this time owing to competing demands and restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic.

At some point in the project, all South Asian member states (except Bhutan) were included in the survey or interviews. However, the consultant considered that it was important that all education (schools and higher education) and TVET sector responsible bodies are included in the discussions from the earliest stages, to ensure buy-in and that the RQF reflects the education and training needs of all member states.

This stage culminated in a short progress report.

Stage 3

A final report was prepared which included a summary of the consultations and finalised roadmap and a draft SA Qualifications Reference Framework for the South Asia member states to take forward in their discussions.

► Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries

Structure of This Report

This report is in four parts:

Part A outlines an overview of regional qualifications frameworks.

Part B outlines a summary of the findings of the desk review, survey and initial interviews in relation to the current status of national qualifications frameworks and quality assurance in South Asian member states.

Part C outlines the findings of the second interviews including:

- Roadmap with broad timelines and milestones.
- Identified synergies or connections within the region.
- Broad estimation of scope of work and costs.
- Pre-conditions to formulating and establishing a regional qualifications framework.

Part D includes:

- Brief feedback from the interviewees in relation to the draft Concept Paper for the South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework (SAQRF).

Appendix 2 includes a draft of the SA Qualifications Reference Framework (SA QRF). This draft reflects changes as the result of the consultations, and reflects the current status of South Asia in terms of quality assurance and linkages with other regional frameworks. It provides the basis for establishing governance arrangements and focuses on key structures within the proposed SAQRF.

▶ Part A: Overview of Regional Qualifications Frameworks

Overview of RQFs

A regional qualifications framework is sometimes referred to as a common reference framework. These frameworks could be defined as ‘a means of enabling one framework of qualifications to relate to others and subsequently for one qualification to relate to others that are normally located in another framework’ (Commission of European Communities 2005, p. 13).

In most cases the core purpose of an RQF is to enable ‘NQFs and national qualifications systems to align with or “talk to” each other’ (Burke, Keating, Vickers, Fearnside and Bateman, 2009). These frameworks can:

- ▶ deepen integration and harmonisation
- ▶ create a common identity
- ▶ facilitate:
 - ▶ transparency of multiple complex systems
 - ▶ mobility of workers and students
 - ▶ recognition and credit transfer
- ▶ support economic imperatives such as removal of barriers to trade (Bateman and Coles, 2013).

Tuck (2007, p. 6) indicates that ‘a common reference framework respects well established national traditions’ while it provides a basis for recognition of a mobility of labour and will strengthen common understanding and cooperation.

RQFs, have grown out of communities of countries with an aim ‘to facilitate mutual trust in qualifications and promote student and worker mobility; therefore, they are linked to other initiatives related to mutual recognition of qualifications, of goods and of services’ (Bateman and Coles 2015, p. 19). Countries that have a regional, economic or social identity, or wish to see one develop, have cooperated in the development of regional qualifications frameworks (RQFs). Bateman and Coles (2013, p. 21) indicate that RQFs ‘are different from bilateral, trilateral and multilateral agreements between national qualifications agencies, professional bodies and education providers for qualifications standards and recognition. Regional qualifications frameworks do not replace or undermine these agreements, but should support and enhance them’.

Both Regional Qualifications Frameworks and National Qualifications Frameworks focus on the use of learning outcomes as the basis of the qualifications. Learning outcomes can be defined as what a learner should know and/or be able to do as a result of being involved in a learning process.

Regional Qualifications Frameworks should not be confused with National Qualifications Frameworks. The following table outlines the differences between a national qualifications framework and a regional qualifications framework.

► **Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries**

► **Table 1: Functions and Rationales of National and Regional Qualifications Frameworks**

Area of Comparison	Level of Qualifications Framework	
	National	Regional
Main function...	To act as a benchmark for the level of learning recognised in the national qualifications system.	To act as a translation device to enable comparison of levels of qualifications across member countries.
Developed by...	National governments, in many cases through national agencies set up for this purpose.	Countries in a region acting jointly, mostly facilitated by a regional body or regional association.
Sensitive to...	Local, national and regional priorities (e.g. levels of literacy and labour market needs).	Collective priorities across member countries (e.g. enabling mobility of learners and workers across borders).
Currency/value depends on...	The extent of regulatory compliance required; the level of buy-in from key role-players (such as industry, learning institutions and professional associations); the perceived or real value to the broad population.	The level of trust between member countries; the transparency of national quality assurance systems; mutually agreed regional priorities.
Quality is guaranteed by...	Adherence to nationally agreed quality assurance systems, exemplified in the practices of national bodies and learning institutions.	The common application of the referencing criteria and guidelines, as well as the robustness and transparency of the national referencing process, and national quality assurance systems.
Levels are defined by reference to...	National benchmarks which may be embedded in different learning contexts, e.g. school education, work or higher education.	General progression in learning across all contexts that is applicable to all countries.

Source: Coles, Keevy, Bateman and Keating (2014), adapted from Bjornavold and Coles, 2008

Summary of RQFs

The *Global Inventory of Regional and National Qualifications Frameworks 2019* Volume 1 (CEDEFOP, ETF, UNESCO and UIL 2019) indicates that the two regional qualifications frameworks (RQF) considered fully operational include:

- European Qualifications Framework.
- ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework.

The *Global Inventory* (CEDEFOP, ETF, UNESCO and UIL 2019) lists seven RQFs; including (in addition to the above):

- Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF).
- Transnational Qualifications Framework for the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (TQF-VUSSC).
- Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF).
- Economic Community of West African States Qualifications Systems (ECOWAS).
- Caribbean Community Qualifications Framework (CCQF).

There is considerable variation in the characteristics of regional qualifications frameworks, and they vary in their purposes, coverage of sectors, design and use (Keevy, Chakroun and Deij, 2010; Tuck, 2007). Some regional frameworks

act as a common reference framework (e.g. EQF, AQRF) where others are extended and include:

- ▶ Common achievement standards, be they qualifications or competency standards (e.g. Caribbean Community, Southern African Development Community (SADC)).
- ▶ Common quality standards for quality assurance agencies and providers (e.g. the Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards (PRQS)), regional/common qualifications, and a qualifications framework for small island states (African Union Commission Draft 2020, p. 36).

The table below summarises the critical aspects of each RQF.

▶ Table 2: Summary of RQFs						
RQF	Levels	Domains	Purpose	Scope	Associated Structures	Implementation
ASEAN QRF (2015)	8	Knowledge and Skills, Application and Responsibility	Common reference framework that enables comparisons of qualifications.	Non-specific	Referencing includes analysis against 1 of 3 regional or international quality assurance frameworks.	Operational
CCQF (2017)	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Knowledge and understanding ▶ Application and practice ▶ Communication, numeracy and ICT ▶ Life skills ▶ Autonomy, accountability and working with others 	Improve the transparency of qualifications.	Non-specific	Linked to the Caribbean Vocational Qualifications – 5 levels based on skills, autonomy and responsibility.	Emerging – based on CARICOM TVET RQF
ECOWAS	-	-	-	-	-	Design phase
EQF (2008)	8	Knowledge, skills, and responsibility and autonomy – previously competence	A translation tool that helps communication and comparison between qualifications systems in Europe.	Full spectrum from post compulsory	Referencing includes assessing country processes against quality assurance principles.	Operational and reviewed
PQF (2011)	10	Knowledge and skills, application, and autonomy	Common reference framework.	All forms of education and training	Links to a regional register and an agreed quality assurance framework.	Operational - limited
SADCQF (2011)	10	Knowledge, skills, and autonomy and responsibility	Ease mobility of learners and workers across the region and internationally.	School, TVET, HE	Underpinned by quality assurance principles.	Activating
TQF-VUSSC (2003)	10	Knowledge and understanding; skills; and wider personal and professional competences	Translation device for the classification of VUSSC qualifications.	Non-specific	Relies on quality assurance of participating countries. Guidelines for listing qualifications on the register.	Operational

Source: Global Inventory 2019, African Union Commission Draft 2020

► Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries

Referencing

The AQRF (ASEAN 2015, p. 17) defines referencing as being

A process that results in the establishment of a relationship between the national qualifications framework and that of a regional qualifications framework.

Referencing is a complex process and is not necessarily implemented across all the RQFs, for example:

- ▶ In the European Union (EU), the EQF referencing process requires participating member states to reference their qualifications levels or qualifications system to the EQF levels.
- ▶ With the AQRF, the participating member states are to reference their level descriptors to the AQRF levels, and also for those countries without a QF to be able to reference key qualifications to the AQRF.
- ▶ With the PQF, the process is limited to an alignment activity.

Both the EQF and the AQRF require an extensive report to be submitted with descriptions of the broader education and training system and more specifically, the qualifications system. These reports are reviewed by the member states and finally made public. The referencing activity includes:

- ▶ Responding to criteria and procedures, and responding to quality assurance principles (EQF).
- ▶ Responding to criteria and procedures, and responding to a recognised quality assurance framework (AQRF)².

Implementation of referencing or alignment activities have not been consistent noting:

- ▶ In the EU, as of April 2018, there were 35 countries who have undertaken formal referencing with some countries renewing their referencing report to reflect current changes in the national context. The EQF has also been open to countries outside Europe (i.e. Australia, Hong Kong and New Zealand).
- ▶ In ASEAN, currently, of the 10 member states, there are four member states that have reviewed their NQFs and quality assurance arrangements against the AQRF.
- ▶ In the Pacific, with 15 participating countries, six island nations have aligned their frameworks to the PQF.

To build capacity and support member states various RQFs have developed supporting materials including:

- ▶ The EQF has developed various tools to assist the transparency of the NQFs, including the eight-level framework based on learning outcomes, referencing criteria which includes not only an explanation of how the NQF levels align to the EQF levels, but explanations of the national quality assurance systems. The EU has also developed various

2 Including ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework, East Asia TVET Quality Assurance Framework, INQAAHE.

support documents outlining common understandings and learnings from implementation.

- ▶ The AQRf along with the agreed framework document, is supported by resources aimed at increasing understanding of quality assurance, learning outcomes and nonformal and informal learning, referencing guidelines, governance arrangements.
- ▶ The PQF has the agreed qualifications framework and regional quality assurance framework, and is linked to a register of standards and qualifications, but has limited support documentation or referencing/alignment guide.

Governance

As RQFs are based on mutual agreement they vary in terms of their establishment and governance reflecting the structure of its community of nations. For example:

- ▶ The EQF is based on a formal recommendation adopted by the European Parliament and the Council on April 23, 2008 (European Commission 2008), which was reviewed and strengthened in 2017 (European Commission 2017).
- ▶ The AQRf was endorsed by ASEAN Ministers in 2015 (ASEAN 2015). The AQRf Committee leads the process and is considered a high-level committee to engage with the complex policy and technical issues, including AQRf meetings and referencing report reviews. Providing oversight, are the three ministerial groups (economic, education and labour) from the member states (ASEAN 2017).
- ▶ In the Pacific, the member states include 15 Pacific island nations with the regional qualifications framework endorsed in 2010. The PQF is led by a secretariat working on behalf of the ministers of education and training in the island nations. The quality assurance agencies within the participating nations do not have a direct voice or representation on the regional committee.

Associated Quality Assurance Frameworks and Structures

Regional frameworks are often linked in some way with various quality assurance frameworks and complementary structures.

The EQF, being the most established framework, is linked to other structures, especially other quality assurance frameworks and to EU initiatives related to a European Education Area, such as:

- ▶ The Bologna Process is designed to promote the internationalisation of higher education in Europe through improving recognition of qualifications and streamlining quality assurance mechanisms.
- ▶ The development and use of mobility and recognition tools, such as the European Credit Transfer System and the Diploma Supplement, to increase transparency of outcomes.

► Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries

- ▶ Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.
- ▶ European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET.
- ▶ European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training which aims to make it easier for people to get recognition of work-related skills and knowledge acquired in different systems and countries and to make it more attractive to move between different countries and learning environments (African Union Commission Draft 2020, p. 118).

The AQRF is linked to the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework and an emerging project on credit transfer. In addition, for ASEAN there is a focus on an integrated economic community with aspirations of free flow of skills, labour and harmonisation of qualifications. Therefore, there is interest in developing common competency standards for various professions.

The PQF is linked to the regional quality assurance framework, and is linked to a register of standards and qualifications, but has limited supporting documentation or referencing/alignment guide. The qualifications framework was designed as a common reference framework but included additional aspects to provide the basis for a national qualifications framework for those island nations that did not have the capacity or relative size of a qualifications system to warrant developing a NQF. These add-ons have made the PQF appear more complex than what it was originally intended.

Lessons Learnt

The EQF could be considered the benchmark of regional qualifications frameworks, especially so in terms of reputation and with regard to other regional communities learning from the European experience. The AQRF, for example, has followed the EQF lead in terms of an 8-level framework and its referencing processes. The Pacific Qualifications Framework was in development at a similar time as the EQF and took its determination of levels from surrounding NQFs, e.g. Australia and New Zealand. It focuses on alignment of the levels rather than an extensive referencing process.

Experiences in the ASEAN, EU and Pacific indicate that the establishment of an RQF impacts on the further development of NQFs within participating countries even though some RQFs clearly state that the RQF aims to have a neutral influence on NQFs and that it respects national sovereignty. Influence includes:

- ▶ Countries with existing NQFs, prior to the establishment of an agreed RQF (such as Samoa and Malaysia), were motivated to review their NQFs.
- ▶ Countries without an NQF were motivated to develop an NQF (e.g. Laos, Myanmar, Solomon Islands) or develop an NQF that links sub-sector frameworks (e.g. Thailand). For these countries, the influence of the RQF in terms of the number of levels and domains in the level descriptors is in some instances clear in the development of the NQF (African Union Commission Draft 2020, p. 121).

The development and consultation process in the development of an RQF provides an excellent forum for:

- ▶ Countries with emerging qualifications systems and quality assurance systems to build their capacity through developing common understandings, as well as to strengthen their own qualifications systems through reforming quality assurance arrangements and structures.
- ▶ Meeting regularly, reinforcing commitment to the aims and purpose of the RQF, and to discuss issues of understanding, strategies to promote the referencing process more broadly, and strategies to strengthen stakeholder engagement and sustainability.

The referencing process itself requires participating countries to review referencing reports and seek clarity and to query anomalies, inaccuracies, or interpretation. This process is essential to building trust in participating countries' qualifications systems and in promoting other strategies that support the aims of the RQF, such as credit transfer processes and recognition for student or labour mobility purposes (African Union Commission Draft 2020, p. 121).

Both EQF and AQRF are linked to other strategies, structures and initiatives. Although the AQRF is operational, it is still early days for this framework and more work is needed to build the capacity of member states that are yet to confirm an NQF and to build trust across the region. Within the Pacific, the PQF is not linked to strong student or labour mobility initiatives. In addition, those island nations with emerging or stable qualifications systems generally face constraints such as inadequate capacity of providers, inadequate funding or funding that is not adequate. There are still island nations yet to confirm their own NQF or to have adopted the PQF as a national framework. In the Pacific, the lack of a direct voice for the quality assurance agencies, the secretariat functioning more as a quality assurance agency in its own right, and the board not necessarily having expertise in qualifications frameworks or quality assurance, have led to unease over national sovereignty and duplication of effort.

Only two RQFs are known to have been reviewed: the EQF and the Pacific Qualifications Framework. Findings from these reviews included recommendations related to strengthening awareness of the regional qualifications framework with stakeholders, supporting members to reference, reviewing and updating documentation, supporting member learning activities, strengthening recognition strategies and ensuring that there is a clear focus of the role of the governing body and access to substantial long-term funding.

RQFs appear to have more success in implementation when:

- ▶ There are strong legislative or governance arrangements that are agreed by the key stakeholders.
- ▶ That the bodies responsible for quality assurance have a strong presence in the governance arrangements, and that there is a strong 'buy-in' by all participating member states and sectors within the member states.

► Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries

- ▶ There are linkages to other regional quality assurance initiatives, labour and student mobility initiatives and other initiatives that facilitate recognition.
- ▶ The funding provides for a sustainable model and there is commitment by the funder for an extended period of time, e.g. 5–10 years.
- ▶ The level of maturity of the qualifications and quality assurance systems limits the level of engagement and in building trust.
- ▶ There is support and capacity development for member states that lack capacity at a local level and therefore cannot fully engage with and progress an NQF and related quality assurance.
- ▶ Support from member states with more mature qualifications and quality assurance systems is provided freely to assist other member states.

The strong influence of the EQF cannot be denied. The EQF has influenced not only other regional qualifications frameworks and their structures but has also influenced many NQFs both within and outside Europe. The process of referencing and making public referencing reports is a model that is accepted by member states to generate the level of trust required within a regional community. However, care must be taken in any South Asian level discussions that merely adopting another RQF model may not suit the situation in the region and may not generate the desired benefits.

▶ Part B: Current Status of South Asian States

This section of the report outlines:

1. Assessment of South Asian National Qualifications Framework (NQF) implementation.
2. Assessment of South Asian countries readiness and appetite for a regional qualifications framework.

The report is based on desk research but also a brief survey and in most instances an interview with one or more representatives from each participating country, except for Bhutan. Bhutan did not participate in this stage of the project, as the ILO does not provide support to this particular country.

Qualifications Frameworks

Overview of NQFs

The NQFs within South Asian states vary considerably in terms of structure and scope. In some instances, there is no unified NQF but a TVET and a Higher Education framework. As is expected, the level of implementation of the qualifications frameworks is mixed across member states and within member states.

The following table summarizes the most current information available when the report was drafted.

► Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries

► Table 4: Summary of South Asian States' Qualifications Frameworks

Country	Confirmed	Levels	Domains	Scope	Implementation*	Associated Structures
Afghanistan	Afghanistan National Qualifications Framework – Policy	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Knowledge and understanding ▶ Practice and skills, i.e. applied knowledge and understanding ▶ Attitudes and competences (generic cognitive skills, communication, ICT and numeracy, and autonomy, accountability and working with others) 	HE, TVET, Literacy and Basic, Islamic Education - Comprehensive	In place, early stages of implementation	-
Bangladesh (HE)	National Qualifications Framework for Bangladesh Higher Education – Draft	4	Fundamental, Social, Thinking, Personal	HE	In place, early stages of implementation - draft	Credit value 1 credit point = 40 hours
Bangladesh (TVET)	National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework – Policy - 2012	6 plus 2 pre-vocational	Knowledge, skills and responsibility	TVET	In place, early stages of implementation	Levels aligned to job classification Nominal hours attached to levels
Bhutan	Bhutan Qualifications Framework - Policy - 2012. Note that there is BVQF 2013.	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Depth, complexity and comprehension of knowledge ▶ Application of knowledge and skills ▶ Degree of autonomy and creativity in decision-making ▶ Communication skills ▶ Breadth and sophistication of practices 	HE, TVET, Basic, Monastic - Comprehensive	N/A	Credit and academic load Credit transfer Recognition of prior learning (Accreditation of Prior Learning) Formal education in Bhutan is recognized in India. Equivalence to BVQF 2013

Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries ◀

Country	Confirmed	Levels	Domains	Scope	Implementation*	Associated Structures
India	National Skills Qualifications Framework – Policy - 2013	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Professional knowledge: what the person must know at that level ▶ Professional skills: what the person should be able to do at that level ▶ Core skills: soft and interpersonal skills ▶ Responsibility: the degree of supervision the person needs while doing the job, or the degree of supervision that person is capable of exercising over others. 	TVET	In place for some time	National Higher Educational Qualifications Framework is under preparation.
Maldives	Maldives National Qualifications Framework – Policy – implemented 2011	10	<p>Based on Levels 3–12 Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Knowledge and understanding ▶ Practice: applied knowledge and understanding ▶ Cognitive skills ▶ Communication, ICT, and numeracy skills ▶ Autonomy, accountability and working with others 	Post-secondary school	In place for some time	<p>Qualification type descriptors</p> <p>Credit system</p>
Nepal	National Qualifications Framework Nepal - May 2020	8	No level descriptors confirmed at this point in time	HE, TVET, Basic	In development (consultation)	<p>Diagram only</p> <p>NVQ and NQ incorporated into the one framework</p>
Pakistan (HE)	National Qualifications Framework of Higher Education – Policy - 2015	8	<p>Based on EQF</p> <p>Knowledge, skill and competence</p>	HE	N/A	Credit value
Pakistan (TVET)	National Vocational Qualifications Framework – Policy - 2015	8	<p>Based on EQF</p> <p>Skills, knowledge, understanding and responsibilities</p>	TVET – 4 certificates, diploma, bachelor, master, doctorate	In place for some time	Credit value

► Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries

Country	Confirmed	Levels	Domains	Scope	Implementation*	Associated Structures
Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka Qualifications Framework - Regulation - 2012, updated 2015	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Knowledge: what the qualification holders know ▶ Skills: what the qualification holders can do ▶ Attitudes, Values, Professionalism and Vision for life: how the qualification holders think and behave ▶ Mindset and paradigm: how the qualification holders perceive the world 	1-2 senior secondary, 3-6 undergraduate, 7-12 postgraduate qualifications	In place for some time	Incorporates/ Aligns National Vocational Qualifications (levels 2 - 7) Credit system, 1 year = 1500 hours, 1 credit point = 50 notional hours Qualification type descriptors
Sri Lanka (TVET)	National Vocational Qualifications Framework -	7	Based on NZQF <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills (processes) • Knowledge (employing) • Applied (context) 	Occupations	In place for some time/in review	Documentation includes the CBT system and certification

Source: Global Inventory 2019, country notes, surveys/interviews.

Notes: *determination noted by survey/interviewee. Note that Bhutan was not involved in the survey and interviews, and there was no representative interviewed or surveyed in the higher education of Pakistan.

Structure

As in most NQFs or sectoral QFs, the structure should be what best reflects the needs of the qualifications system within each country.

Across the South Asian states, the structure of the NQFs or sector QFs vary from 4 to 12 levels. The variance reflects in most respects whether the QF is a sectoral one, e.g. Bangladesh (HE), India (TVET) or a comprehensive NQF, e.g. Maldives.

The domains that describe the levels also vary, from including knowledge, skills and application, to other dimensions such as:

- ▶ Responsibility
- ▶ Autonomy, accountability and working with others
- ▶ Generic skills such as communication, ICT, and numeracy skills

In some instances, the documentation indicates whether the structure (including the levels and the domains) has been 'borrowed' or adapted from another NQF (e.g. Scotland) or indeed a RQF (e.g. EQF). Where there are two qualifications frameworks within the country there are attempts to align or link them through either ongoing dialogue or mapping, e.g. Nepal.

Governance Arrangements of NQFs

Most of the South Asian states QFs are based on policy and endorsed by a nominated body, although there was one instance where the framework was stated to be in regulations (i.e. Sri Lanka).

Except in a few instances the body responsible for maintenance of the QF was the body partly or mostly responsible for the quality assurance arrangements. This appears to have led to QFs being developed on sectoral lines rather than as a comprehensive or shared NQFs. Most responsible bodies were government agencies.

One country has one agency responsible for a comprehensive NQF (e.g. Maldives) and one country (e.g. Afghanistan) is aiming to confirm such an agency.

Level of Implementation

As expected across many other regions, the level of implementation of the NQF or sectoral QF is varied within South Asia. Various scales to describe the level of implementation have been used in the range of research within the Asia Pacific. Bateman and Coles (2015) in research linked to the ASEAN members states in relation to the state of play of NQFs, used the following scale.

1. No intent
2. Desired but no progress made
3. Background planning underway
4. Initial development and design completed
5. Some structures and processes agreed and documented
6. Some structures and processes established and operational
7. Structures and processes established for five years
8. Review of structures and processes proposed or underway³

The survey respondents/interviewees were asked about the level of implementation of the NQF or sectoral QF within their country. A simpler scale was developed to ease the responses, and the survey respondents/interviewees were provided with the following scale:

- ▶ Not in place
- ▶ Early thinking
- ▶ In development (consultation)
- ▶ In place, early stages of implementation
- ▶ In place for some time
- ▶ In review

³ These categories were used in the initial research for the development of the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework, Bateman, Keating, Burke, Coles and Vickers (Vol. IV, 2012) based on a scale developed by James Keevy, Borhene Chakroun and Arjen Deij (2010).

► Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries

Maldives, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka indicated that their respective QFs or NQFs are in place and established within their countries, while Bangladesh and Afghanistan reported that their NQF was in place but in the early stages. Sri Lanka reported that their framework is in review.

Challenges

The survey respondents/interviewees were asked about the challenges implementing the QFs within their countries. All respondents saw sustainable funding as a challenge, and other major impediments included (in order of importance):

- Lack of capacity of the responsible agency
- Lack of capacity of providers
- Poor progress lessens engagement and commitment of stakeholders
- Resistance to change
- Scale of the sector
- Connections with other sectors
- Implications of learning outcomes
- Lack of trust

Other issues noted were:

- Unwillingness of higher authorities to support the implementation, waiting for the legislation, as well as financial and political support
- Industry awareness

Quality Assurance in South Asia

Overview and Governance

Bateman and Dyson (2018, p. 7) consider that there are 'essentially two ways of viewing how an NQF relates to quality assurance arrangements'. Some countries consider an NQF as incorporating quality assurance arrangements, whereas in other cases an 'NQF is simply seen as a catalogue or classifier of all qualifications in a country' with little or no reference to the quality assurance arrangements of these qualifications (Bateman and Coles 2016, p. 14).

Coles (2016, p. 25) expands on this notion and indicates that it is possible to view 'quality assurance processes and their governance as independent of the national framework' and that it is 'possible to conclude that a NQF can work to support quality assurance but is not necessarily central to it'. Coles (2017, p. 25) indicates that 'it is often the governance arrangements that bring the NQF and the quality assurance arrangements together, as a single body could be created to manage and promote the NQF and also to manage the quality assurance arrangements'.

Bateman and Coles (UNESCO 2017a) in their synthesis report of TVET quality assurance arrangements in the Asia-Pacific region identified five types of governance arrangements of quality assurance. The five types are listed below, with a focus on TVET as per the focus of the report.

- ▶ Type 1: All quality assurance of all education and training (including school, TVET and higher education qualifications) is directed by a single body, operating under national legislation or regulations.
- ▶ Type 2: All quality assurance of post-compulsory school qualifications (including TVET and higher education qualifications) is directed by a single body, operating under national legislation or regulations.
- ▶ Type 3: Quality assurance of TVET qualifications is seen as separate from the quality assurance of other education sector qualifications, and is directed by a single body, under national legislation or regulations.
- ▶ Type 4: The quality assurance of TVET qualifications is carried out by two or more bodies; each body directs operations across their fields of competence.
- ▶ Unassigned: Quality assurance processes are under development and it is not yet possible to classify them in terms of the other types.⁴

In the South Asia region the model of one body responsible for the NQF and for the quality assurance arrangements (of all sectors) is not a model that has been widely implemented at this stage. Currently, Maldives has a single agency, with Afghanistan aiming to confirm a single agency. In some South Asian states, given the scale of the sectors, one agency responsible for quality assurance is not feasible. However, the model of a shared NQF with different quality assurance agencies responsible for the quality assurance for their sector is also not a model that has been clearly implemented at this stage.

Level of Implementation

Bateman and Coles (2017b, UNESCO) in the *Guidelines for the Quality Assurance of TVET Qualifications in the Asia-Pacific Region* indicated that there are in essence five stages of implementation of quality assurance arrangements. These are listed in the text box below.

1. Emerging: Initial discussions for a systemic approach are underway.
2. Entry: An overarching vision of QA of qualifications has been agreed upon.
3. Intermediate: QA structures and processes have been agreed upon, communicated and are operational.
4. Advanced: QA structures and processes have been established for five years.
5. Mature: A review of QA structures and processes is underway.⁵

⁴ Minor adaptation from Bateman and Coles, UNESCO 2017a, p. 17.

⁵ Adapted from the categories used in the initial research for the development of the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (Bateman et al., 2012) based on a scale developed by Keevy, Chakroun and Deij (2010).

► Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries

The survey respondents/interviewees were offered an opportunity to comment on the level of implementation of the quality assurance arrangements within their respective sectors and/or across the sectors in their country. The scale provided to the survey respondents/interviewees was simpler than the one above to aid the ease of responses:

- ▶ Not in place
- ▶ Early thinking
- ▶ In development (consultation)
- ▶ In place, early stages of implementation
- ▶ In place for some time
- ▶ In review

Responses indicate that South Asian states are at different stages of planning and implementing quality assurance arrangements. In some cases, the quality assurance arrangements are of long standing and are linked to an established NQF, while in other member states the quality assurance arrangements are in development or being refined and not strongly linked to a recently-developed QF or NQF.

Links to QF or NQF

Bateman and Dyson (2018, pp. 16-17) stated in their research in ASEAN that the most obvious link between an NQF and quality assurance arrangements is in the area of programmes/qualifications design, approval and review. Often the process of programmes/qualifications accreditation, focusing on whether the design and structure of the programmes/qualifications meets the NQF are often less clear.

Bateman and Dyson (2018) note that:

- ▶ With mature NQFs and quality assurance arrangements the link is clear and demonstrable in quality standards, policy or guidelines.
- ▶ With recently developed NQFs or emerging NQFs the link is more tenuous. This may also be the case where the changes have occurred to the NQF or where governance and quality assurance are also in flux. For these systems, the regulatory frameworks and guidelines have not been documented or established.

Whether programmes/qualifications are required to be based on learning outcomes, or in the TVET on competency or occupational standards is also related to the quality assurance arrangements of programmes/qualifications.

Finally, how institutions are approved to be established and how institutions are approved to provide education and training services in specific programmes/qualifications is the other key area of quality assurance.

Other quality assurance strategies may include:

- ▶ The control, supervision or monitoring of assessment, certification and completion processes including issuance of certification.

- ▶ System wide evaluations, including evaluations by external agencies.
- ▶ The provision of public information (e.g. registers, reports on the performance of institutions, satisfaction reports).⁶

Survey respondents/interviewees were asked what quality assurance strategies were deployed, and how strong they considered the link between the QF and the relevant quality assurance arrangements. Responses included:

- ▶ Respondents (particularly in the TVET sector) were clear that their qualifications were based on competency standards or some other form of modular descriptions.
- ▶ All respondents clearly noted that there were processes in place for the approval of institutions, with less respondents confirming that there were processes in place for programmes/qualifications approval processes.
- ▶ Only half the respondents indicated that there was a register in place, but all indicated that it was publicly available.
- ▶ The links of the QF to the quality assurance arrangements, varied from no link to strong links, with Bangladesh (TVET), Sri Lanka and Maldives indicating that there were strong links.
- ▶ Most respondents indicated that implementation of quality assurance arrangements were either *In development (consultation)* or *In place for some time, with a small number indicating not in place.*

Table 5 below provides a brief summary of the quality assurance arrangements in each South Asian state. This list is not exhaustive in terms of quality assurance strategies.

6 Bateman, Keating, Gillis et al. (2012, pp. 9-10).

► Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries

► Table 5: Summary of South Asian States Quality Assurance

Country	Responsible Body	Core QA Actions	Implementation*	Linkages to QF*
Afghanistan	Afghanistan Qualifications Authority proposed – awaiting legislation [Ministry of Higher Education] [Ministry of Education – formal TVET] [Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled, TVET Commission]	-	Not in place	Weak link – Not linked
Bangladesh (HE)	Bangladesh Accreditation Council (formative stage) [University Grants Commission]	No register Nothing confirmed as yet.	In development (consultation)	Not linked
Bangladesh (TVET)	Bangladesh Technical Education Board	Competency standards – published through website Development and approval process defined Industry Skills Councils Registration of training organizations Accreditation of learning programmes Trainer, assessor and assessment and certification programmes register	In place, early stages of implementation	Strong links
Bhutan (Tertiary)	Bhutan Accreditation Council ⁷	Accreditation of tertiary providers is based on 8 standards Public register and audit reports	N/A	N/A
Bhutan (Skills/Labour)	Department of Occupational Standards Bhutan	Public register of courses and providers Certification system, including approved assessors Training provider regulations and code of practice Based on competencies	N/A	N/A
India	National Council for Vocational Education and Training (recently established and has subsumed National Skill Development Agency)	Qualifications based on occupational standards 17 ministries conduct TVET Industry Skills Councils NSDA Manuals have not been adopted (e.g. approval of qualifications providers and assessment bodies) Guidelines for awarding bodies – in consultation Register - public	In place, early stages of implementation	Limited at this stage - but will strengthen

⁷ Responsible for establishing the relationship between tertiary academic education, TVET and the school system. Reference is also made to a Department of Occupational Standards Bhutan (Global Inventory 2019).

Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries ◀

Country	Responsible Body	Core QA Actions	Implementation*	Linkages to QF*
Maldives	Maldives Qualifications Authority (since 2010)	System well documented and easily accessible on web – includes approval of qualifications, approval to deliver programmes leading to a qualification, approval of institutions Register is public	In place for some time	Strong links
Nepal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ NVQ – Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training ▶ HE – Ministry will move to the University Grants Commission <p>[NQF diagram refers to a proposed National Qualifications Authority]</p>	TVET based on competency standards, testing and certification system, manuals, register Guide focuses on institutional accreditation	In development (consultation) Early thinking	Strong links (will be) -
Pakistan (HE)	Higher Education Commission	Accreditation Councils (sector-based) Criteria for institution accreditation Evaluation of performance	N/A	N/A
Pakistan (TVET)	National Vocational and Technical Training Commission	Register Competency-based Approval of qualifications, delivery, assessment, management systems, monitoring and evaluation	In place for some time	Limited at this stage - but will strengthen
Sri Lanka (HE)	University Grants Commission	Register Codes of Practice, manuals of IQA, institutional review	In place for some time	Strong links
Sri Lanka (TVET)	Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission	Register Registration of institutions and accreditation of courses TVET qualifications based on competencies Certification system Sector Councils	In place for some time	Strong links

Source: Global Inventory 2019, country notes, surveys/interviews, websites.

Notes: *determination noted by survey/interviewee. Note that Bhutan was not involved in the survey and interviews, and there was no representative interviewed or surveyed in the higher education of Pakistan.

Challenges

The survey respondents/interviewees were asked about the challenges implementing the quality assurance arrangements within their countries. The respondents/interviewees considered the following as major impediments (in order of importance):

- ▶ Lack of capacity of providers
- ▶ Sustainable funding
- ▶ Lack of capacity of the responsible agency

► Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries

- ▶ Poor progress lessens engagement and commitment of stakeholders
- ▶ Resistance to change
- ▶ Lack of trust
- ▶ Scale of the sector

Other challenges noted including:

- ▶ No national responsible body to take the NQF and quality assurance forward
- ▶ Lack of trust of institutions of the proposed responsible body
- ▶ Industry awareness and buy in
- ▶ Implementing learning outcomes

Readiness for a South Asian Regional Qualifications Framework

Interest Level

The survey respondents/interviewees considered that there was a broad awareness of RQFs by policy makers and education and training sector. However, the survey respondents/interviewees had mixed views about the level of interest within the country for a regional qualifications framework. Most indicate that there was no support or some support, with only 22% indicating that there was strong support.

Champions

All survey respondents/interviewees were asked to identify any champions in-country that could assist in the lobbying and providing policy support. Nearly all nominated peak bodies (such as the Authority, Commission, Ministry) across the various education and TVET settings. None identified the potential of the private sector, such as professional associations, standard setting bodies (e.g. nurses, surgeons), regulators of utilities, and international companies or large corporations.

Proposed Aims

As with any RQF, the member states need to agree on a clear purpose or aims for the RQF and link the RQF to other regional strategies. The survey respondents/interviewees indicated which reasons were most important to them or their country.

- ▶ Improve recognition of qualifications (100%)
- ▶ Improved student mobility (100%)
- ▶ More jobs (100%)
- ▶ Improve transparency of qualifications (77%)
- ▶ Improve transparency of quality assurance arrangements (88%)
- ▶ Harmonize education/qualifications across the region (88%)

- ▶ Link to other regional initiatives (88%)
- ▶ Improved labour mobility (77%)
- ▶ Linking supply and demand across the region (77%)
- ▶ Strengthen regional identity (66%).

These proposed aims or purpose will inform the concept design of the proposed South Asia regional qualifications framework.

It is also important when developing an RQF that other international or regional initiatives are considered and also any relationships with other countries, including for the purpose of labour and student mobility.

Regional initiatives could include:

- ▶ Labour mobility agreements and common occupational standards
- ▶ Credit accumulation systems
- ▶ Regional quality assurance framework

Respondents and interviewees mainly indicated that they were sending countries in terms of student and labour mobility. Countries of interest included:

- ▶ The Gulf countries
- ▶ Those within South Asia
- ▶ Those within ASEAN including Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore
- ▶ USA, Europe, Australia, Canada and Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea, China, and Central Asia

Only one country indicated that it was also a receiving country with skilled labour, the sending countries were mainly from India and Pakistan.

Most survey respondents/interviewees indicated a strong connection to the Colombo Plan initiatives and interest in other RQFs, e.g. EQF and AQRf.

- ▶ **Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries**

▶ **Part C: Implementation of a Regional Qualifications Framework**

Overview

This section of the report considers:

- ▶ Whether it is appropriate to proceed at this stage with an RQF
- ▶ If it is not considered appropriate to proceed, what conditions need to be met
- ▶ If it is to proceed, what needs to be considered in a plan or roadmap, timeframes and milestones

The section deals directly with the following items in the Project Brief:

1. To indicate what the necessary conditions are to start the process, noting that it could be considered that it may not be appropriate to proceed with the RRF at present
2. To estimate the level of financial investment required and potential sources of funding
3. To set out an indicative roadmap with broad timeframe and milestones
4. To provide a final draft Concept Paper to take forward

Pre-conditions and Decision to Proceed

Consideration of pre-conditions can take two forms:

1. Pre-conditions to formulating and implementing an RQF
2. Pre-conditions to referencing.

Pre-conditions to Formulating and Implementing an RQF

There is limited research or documentation around what would be the pre-conditions for establishing an RQF. In many respects, pre-conditions could relate to the key purposes described in the proposed RQF. It could also depend on whether the RQF had purposes related to supporting member states to enhance NQFs or to supporting the quality of qualifications in member states.

However, experience has shown that pre-conditions to proceeding with the formulation of an RQF there needs to be:

- ▶ A strong and long-term commitment by member states to collaborate and implement an RQF for the betterment of their citizens, both within their country [i.e. across the education and training sectors] and across the region. This would include senior policy makers and key stakeholders [e.g. quality assurance bodies, education institutions, industry].

- ▶ An agreed view that the RQF is seen as:
 - ▶ As a catalyst for change of qualification systems within member states
 - ▶ An avenue to support member states in developing and implementing their own NQFs and quality assurance
 - ▶ An avenue to provide for learning and capacity development in NQFs, learning outcomes, quality assurance
 - ▶ An avenue to engender trust and enhance a regional identity
 - ▶ An avenue to link various labour mobility and lifelong learning strategies
- ▶ Strong and long-term commitment by donor partners to support a five to ten-year plan for implementation

Findings from the Consultation

In the final consultations, interviewees did not express any strong views in relation to pre-conditions to formulating and implementing an RQF in the South Asia region. However, some interviewees indicated that there is commitment within member states but the challenge would be to obtain commitment across the education and training sectors within the country.

It was noted by the consultant (and mentioned by a number of member states) that Bhutan was not involved in this initial phase of the RQF. The involvement of all member states is critical to the success and sustainability of the RQF.

Recommendation 1

It is recommended that any strategies to engage the member states must include contact and involvement by all member states (including Bhutan) and their education and training sectors, including TVET, Skills and Higher Education. Although there may be divergent views from different sectors within member states it is important for the strength of the future RQF that all sectors are engaged.

Recommendation 2

It is recommended that the member states consider these pre-conditions in the refinement of the South Asia QRF prior to endorsement. These pre-conditions are important for the long-term sustainability of the RQF, including strong governance, long-term commitment by the member states, and a clear view of the collective purpose of a South Asia QRF.

Recommendation 3

It is recommended that the ILO consider the long-term commitment to this initiative, as it takes time to build capacity within member states and also across the region.

► Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries

- Strong and clear governance arrangements in the management of the RQF, and for fostering collaborative approaches to engendering trust and mutual respect across the member states.

Pre-conditions to Referencing

The ASEAN QRF provides some guidance to the South Asia states in relation to preparedness to reference their NQFs to the RQF.

The AQRF Referencing Guidelines (ASEAN 2016)⁸ indicates that prior to any referencing activity that involves key stakeholders within the country, that the RQF:

- Is in the public domain
- Its key concepts are understood
- Key aspects are underway, e.g. implementing learning outcomes within qualifications within member states.

The AQRF Referencing Guidelines (2016, p. 13) also notes additional pre-conditions for each member state, including:

- That the RQF is seen within member states as an enhancement to regional cooperation.
- That there is a process underway to disseminate and examine perceptions and value (or otherwise) of the RQF.
- Capacity building is underway related to understanding and using the RQF, which would include the creation of an official portal and a level of consultation with various agencies and bodies.
- Governance and management structures are in place or being formulated. These structures include determining responsibility for referencing and the setting up of competent committees.
- Quality assurance in the qualifications system is effective. Member states should have reviewed their current quality assurance systems to include the use of learning outcomes and NQFs.
- Ensuring links with other contexts for quality assurance are clear, for example, considering how national quality assurance systems interface with the RQF's structure and principles.
- There is a raised awareness within member states of linked projects, such as mutual recognition agreements, development of regional competency standards, regional credit transfer system and other alignments.

AQRF Referencing Guidelines (ASEAN 2016) also notes that these pre-conditions may also be considered barriers to referencing and that member states should reflect on these before initiating a referencing process.

8 AQRF Referencing Guidelines September 2016, ASEAN.

Findings from the Consultation

Readiness to reference is critical to the success of a member state's referencing report and the acceptance of the other member states of the report. A number of interviewees indicated that national level member states were not ready to reference.

Recommendation 4

It is recommended that member states should only reference when they are ready and when they can see a clear benefit to its qualifications system and citizens. Member states should ensure that they have an NQF (or sector NQFs) in place and clear quality assurance arrangements to be able to effectively respond to the referencing criteria.

Decision to Proceed

As noted in the Background Report (Bateman 2020a) within South Asian states:

- ▶ There are some instances where there is no unified NQF but a TVET and a Higher Education framework.
- ▶ The level of implementation of the qualifications frameworks is mixed across member states and within member states.
- ▶ In addition, the quality assurance arrangements were at different stages of planning and implementation. In some cases, the quality assurance arrangements are of long standing and are linked to an established qualifications framework, while in other member states the quality assurance arrangements are in development or being refined and not strongly linked to a recently-developed qualifications framework.

The member states will ultimately decide whether it is an appropriate time to proceed with an RQF and whether if its key underpinning aims include providing a catalyst for change and for supporting qualifications systems. If this is the case, then establishing an RQF within the South Asia is timely.

Roadmap

The importance of the RQF may not be in the agreed document, but in the collective nature of the work undertaken, the consolidation of thinking, the capacity development, and the sharing of experiences. These benefits should not be forgotten when planning the activities and support for the implementation of the RQF.

► Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries

Findings from the Consultations

Most interviewees considered that the timelines proposed in the consultations were too short, however one interviewee considered that it was too long. This interviewee expressed concern that the initiative would languish and momentum needed to be maintained.

Recommendation 5

Implementing an RQF is not a short-term strategy and policy makers should consider a 5 to 10-year initial implementation plan. There is much work to be achieved, however it is recommended that the workplan for the 5 years should be reviewed each year to ensure that the needs of the Member States are met and can be adjusted to alter tasks and to shorten or lengthen timelines.

Recommendation 6

It is recommended that, the roadmap should focus on a number of key strategies that support capacity development within member states and at regional level. These strategies should include:

1. Formulating and finalizing the South Asia QRF and governance arrangements.
2. Formulating supporting documents to promote a common understanding across the member states, e.g. referencing guidelines, report template.
3. Formulating a regional quality assurance framework.
4. Capacity development of member states, focusing on learning outcomes, quality assurance, formulating an NQF.
5. Building a community of practice across the member states, to promote a common understanding of each other's education and training system including the quality assurance arrangements, NQFs, credit transfer, recognition of prior learning, implementing learning outcomes.
6. Establishing a communication strategy and structures, e.g. website, and inter-group communication portal. A public portal provides a public external face for the South Asia QRF. Other regional groups, such as ASEAN QRF and members of the EQF will closely watch the development and implementation of the RQF.
7. Preparing for referencing (1 -2 member states). Assume that the referencing activity will take about 1 year, including preparation of a draft report, review by the Technical Committee, revisions and final endorsement.

Considerations for Roadmap Implementation

Considerations for Costings

- ▶ Any costings should expect at least 2–4 gatherings per year. Ideally this would be face-to-face. However, with the COVID-19 situation it could conceivably be online gatherings (meetings/workshops) for at least the first year.
- ▶ If face-to-face gatherings, anticipate that these will be 2-day gatherings. Once the Technical Committee is confirmed ½ - 1 day should be devoted to Technical Committee business and planning [note that all member states' representatives can attend but only one representative per member state on the Technical Committee].
- ▶ It is suggested that the Technical Committee business is preceded by a capacity development/community of practice workshop on the same or similar topic. This allows the representatives to better understand the issue to be discussed in the Technical Committee. For example, when discussing governance, in the capacity development workshop a model could be proposed, and then groups discuss and formulate opinions against the model. The Technical Committee meeting then confirms the approach and a document is drafted for review by the consultant.
- ▶ Although each member state would have one voting representative but, given in many member states that the main education and training sectors include at least 4 sub-sectors (e.g. school, vocational, skills, higher education), it would be anticipated that up to 3 country members would be present at any meeting. Any funding partner would need to consider how many of these representatives will be funded for attending these meetings.
- ▶ Providing an expert consultant to guide the process, draft documents, and provide capacity development and lead community of practice.
- ▶ Capacity development may include bringing in additional experts for specific topics, e.g. writing-learning outcomes, quality assurance, building an NQF.
- ▶ Community of practice requires participating member states to share practice and ideas.
- ▶ Support for South Asia QRF Secretariat (2–3 staff).
- ▶ Travel, accommodation and per diems for identified representatives, expert consultant, additional experts, and South Asia QRF Secretariat.
- ▶ COVID-19 has meant that it is often difficult to engage participants and it may be that the timeline may need to be extended or other strategies put in place to promote engagement.

Finally, experience has shown that individual members states need NQF and QA support in-country throughout the early years. This level of support could be factored in as well, and would be dependent on the individual needs of each member state.

► Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries

Findings from the Consultations

Although there are limitations placed on the structure of future work in implementing an RQF in 2021 and beyond, one interviewee suggested that given international travel may be limited in 2021 and face-to-face meetings not be possible, then consideration should be given to more frequent Technical Committee meetings and capacity development/ community of practice workshops. The sessions could be shorter and more focused on specific items with clear outcomes at the end of each.

Recommendation 7

It is recommended that the ILO, contracted consultant and member states, consider other strategies to promote engagement and facilitate progress such as shorter more regular sessions. It is recommended that the workplan include more frequent meetings, that there are clear outcomes at the end of the meetings, and that the learnings are shared within the South Asian states.

Roadmap Summary

The table below outlines a five-year plan leading to a referencing activity.

It is proposed that key documents, e.g. South Asia QRF and governance arrangements will be confirmed by the end of Year 1, but this will depend on the capacity of member states to be able to prepare and discuss quite complex concepts.

It is proposed that a referencing activity will begin in Year 5. However depending on the capacity of member states to begin a referencing activity this may be earlier or be delayed to Year 6.

Long-term costings should assume a 5–10-year plan to see major in-roads into implementation of the South Asia QRF.

Note that the table below is not organized according to the number of meetings, but according to the tasks to be progressed. Tasks may require one or more meetings to resolve.

Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries ◀

Timeline and Tasks		Milestones
Year 1		
1	Discussion about five-year and annual workplan for the South Asia QRF	Confirmation of five-year and annual workplan for the South Asia QRF
2	Common understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ NQFs, RQFs ▶ Each other's qualifications systems, challenges and barriers 	Capacity development activity – NQFs vs RQFs Community of practice activity - each member states presents information
3	Discuss and draft governance arrangements, including terms of reference and protocols for the Technical Committee, reporting structure (e.g. who endorses?)	Governance arrangements finalized
4	Finalization of the South Asia QRF ready for endorsement	Structure and Glossary confirmed – and South Asia QRF endorsed
5	Development of national implementation plans	Member states develop implementation plans for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Implementing QFs/NQFs and quality assurance ▶ Community awareness of South Asia QRF ▶ Progress to referencing
6	Sustainability and Communication Strategy – discussed and developed	Capacity development activity – draft sustainability and communication strategy Technical Committee finalize Sustainability and Communication strategy
7	Establish internal portal, and external portal for communication internally and externally to the group	Website portal established
Year 2		
1	Review of 5-year plan and discussion on the annual workplan for the South Asia QRF	Confirmation of five-year and annual workplan for the South Asia QRF
2	Common understanding of quality assurance (QA): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Capacity development of QA and regional QA frameworks ▶ Community of practice – shared experience and developing understandings and commitment 	Capacity development activity – what is QA Community of practice activity – shared experiences in QA
3	Develop proposed Regional Quality Assurance Framework	Finalized South Asia Regional Quality Assurance Framework endorsed
4	Common understanding of learning outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Capacity Development ▶ Community of practice - Shared experiences of South Asian implementation of learning outcomes ▶ Develop common understanding 	Capacity development activity on writing-learning outcomes Community of practice activity – shared experiences Development of an agreed paper on learning outcomes
5	In-country NQF/RQF/QA workshop: Build awareness and capacity within each country	Online workshop on NQFs, South Asia QRF and quality assurance within each country
Year 3		
1	Review of 5-year plan and discussion on the annual workplan for the South Asia QRF	Confirmation of five-year and annual workplan for the South Asia QRF
2	Common understanding of how to link QA to NQFs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Capacity development workshop ▶ Community of practice – shared experiences 	Capacity development workshop – Linking NQFs to Quality Assurance Community of practice – member states explain how this occurs in-country

► Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries

Timeline and Tasks		Milestones
3	Draft Referencing Guidelines and Procedures, report template, response form	Finalize working draft of Referencing Guidelines and procedures, report template, response forms for trialling
4	Capacity Development Referencing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Capacity development (including process, selecting qualifications to support the link, challenges, processes) ▶ EQF or AQRf experiences ▶ Drafting the referencing report 	Capacity development activity on referencing
Year 4		
1	Review of 5-year plan and discussion on the annual workplan for the South Asia QRF	Confirmation of five-year and annual workplan for the South Asia QRF
2	Member states evaluate readiness against pre-conditions for referencing	Community of practice activity - Evaluation reports, and sharing these evaluations
3	In-country referencing workshop: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Build awareness and capacity within each country 	Online workshop on referencing NQFs to South Asia QRF within each country
4	Preparing for referencing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Two member states nominate to proceed to referencing – draft Criteria 1 ▶ Capacity development - Referencing activity 	Nomination from 2 member states Capacity Development Workshop – Reviewing two submissions - Criteria 1
Year 5		
<i>Two member states will start to prepare referencing report</i>		
1	Review of 5-year plan and discussion on the annual workplan for the South Asia QRF	Confirmation of five-year and annual workplan for the South Asia QRF
2	Validation of non-formal and informal learning – RPL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Capacity development workshop ▶ Community of practice – member states explain how this occurs in country 	Capacity development activity – RPL Community of practice activity – member states explain how this occurs in- country
3	Validation of formal learning – credit transfer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Capacity development workshop ▶ Community of practice – member states explain how this occurs in country 	Capacity development activity – Credit transfer Community of practice activity – member states explain how this occurs in- country
4	Member states review two draft referencing reports and provide feedback	Capacity development workshop
5	Technical Committee formally reviews drafts of two referencing reports	Formal meeting
6	Member states develop implementation and individual needs for next stage	Plans submitted and shared
7	Draft new 5-year plan	Confirmation of five-year plan

▶ Part D: Concept paper for the South Asian Qualifications Reference Framework (SAQRF)

Overview

This section of the report outlines the final stage of the consultations regarding a South Asian Qualifications Reference Framework (SAQRF). The culmination of these consultations is a draft South Asian Qualifications Reference Framework (SAQRF) that the group can take forward in the next stage of development. This draft South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework (SAQRF) is included in Appendix 2.

Findings from Consultations on the Concept Paper

The South Asian participating member states' representatives were provided with a draft Concept Paper accompanied by a Commentary that included the consultant's reasoning behind the inclusion and approach of each section within the Concept Paper and also the consultation questions which were posed to South Asian participating member states' representatives.

The key sections in the Concept Paper included:

- ▶ Background
- ▶ Purpose
- ▶ Scope
- ▶ Principles
- ▶ Structure
- ▶ Quality assurance
- ▶ Credit systems
- ▶ Governance arrangements
- ▶ Appendix 1: Glossary of terms
- ▶ Appendix 2: Level descriptors
- ▶ Appendix 3: Referencing criteria and obligations
- ▶ Appendix 4: Quality Assurance Criteria

► Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries

Findings from the Consultation

Interviewees confirmed many aspects of the Concept Paper and did not provide any major suggestions in terms of the structure of the Concept Paper. There were some suggested changes which included:

- ▶ Refinement of the purpose
- ▶ Consideration of any commitments made by the SAARC forum for the University Grants Commission
- ▶ Making it clear that the referencing activity culminates in a report
- ▶ That the Referencing Criteria should be similar to other RQFs
- ▶ Consideration of the South Asian country's representative on the national referencing activity be included in the Referencing Criteria as opposed to the overarching brief
- ▶ Consideration of developing a regional quality assurance framework for the referencing rather than Quality Assurance Criteria. Note that it is proposed that a regional quality assurance framework be developed in the workplan

Some comments provided by interviewees indicated that further capacity development on RQFs and their purpose and structures is needed.

Recommendation 8

It is recommended that the draft SAQRF included in Appendix be provided to the SAQRF member states as a starting point for further discussion in the next stage of the project. However, decisions made too early in the development process may be a danger to the overall structure and processes. Careful consideration by South Asian states is required to ensure international confidence in the framework, the processes and the decisions. Without building trust in South Asian states' qualifications the ground breaking work by the member states will be wasted.

▶ Appendix 1: Survey and Definitions

South Asia Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF) Survey

Questions	Responses
Name of respondent	
Organization's affiliation and title	
Email address	
Country	
NQF	
1. Do you have one or two National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs)? Tick appropriate boxes.	<input type="checkbox"/> One <input type="checkbox"/> Two
2. How comprehensive is your NQF? For example, what sectors does it address? Tick appropriate boxes.	<input type="checkbox"/> Higher Education <input type="checkbox"/> TVET <input type="checkbox"/> Schooling Comment: _____
3. How many levels does your NQF have? List separately for each NQF? Potential response 1-12	
4. What are the domains of the levels of your NQF/s. List separately for each NQF?	
5. What is the legal basis of your NQF? Tick appropriate boxes.	<input type="checkbox"/> Decree <input type="checkbox"/> Law <input type="checkbox"/> Regulation <input type="checkbox"/> Policy <input type="checkbox"/> Other – please specify: _____
6. Who is responsible for the oversight of the NQF? Tick appropriate boxes.	<input type="checkbox"/> Government Ministry <input type="checkbox"/> National Qualifications Authority <input type="checkbox"/> Other – please specify: _____
7. In which sectors are learning outcomes used in your country? Tick appropriate boxes.	<input type="checkbox"/> Higher Education <input type="checkbox"/> TVET <input type="checkbox"/> Schooling <input type="checkbox"/> None

► **Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries**

Questions	Responses
8. Are there one or more registers/databases linked to the NQF? <i>Tick appropriate boxes.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Comment: _____
9. Does the public have access to this register/database? <i>Tick appropriate boxes.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Comment: _____
Credit/Volume of Learning	
10. Does the NQF have a volume of learning measures for its qualifications? Only 1 response please.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Comment: _____
11. If yes, what measure is used? <i>Tick appropriate boxes.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Credit point <input type="checkbox"/> Duration <input type="checkbox"/> Hours <input type="checkbox"/> Other – please specify: ____
12. If yes, what is the measure definition? <i>Please explain.</i>	
Implementation	
13. At what stage of development is the NQF #1? <i>Only 1 response please.</i>	Name the NQF/Sector: ____ <input type="checkbox"/> Not in place <input type="checkbox"/> Early thinking <input type="checkbox"/> In development (consultation) <input type="checkbox"/> In place, early stages of implementation <input type="checkbox"/> In place for some time <input type="checkbox"/> In review
14. At what stage of development is the NQF #2? <i>Not relevant for those countries with only 1 NQF. Only 1 response please.</i>	Name the NQF/Sector: ____ <input type="checkbox"/> Not in place <input type="checkbox"/> Early thinking <input type="checkbox"/> In development (consultation) <input type="checkbox"/> In place, early stages of implementation <input type="checkbox"/> In place for some time <input type="checkbox"/> In review

Questions	Responses
<p>15. What have been the main challenges in implementing the NQF/s? <i>Tick appropriate boxes, or please provide brief summary or list of issues.</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Poor progress lessens engagement and commitment of stakeholders</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Connections with other sectors</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Lack of capacity of the responsible agency</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Lack of capacity of providers</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Implications of learning outcomes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Resistance to change</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Lack of trust</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Scale of the sector</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Sustainable funding</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other – please specify: _</p>
<p>16. Is there a mechanism to monitor the NQF? If yes please add explanation. <i>Only 1 response please.</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes –</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>Comment: _____</p>
<p>17. Has the NQF been referenced to another NQF or Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF)? <i>Only 1 response please.</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>Comment: _____</p>
Communication	
<p>18. What type of communication/information of NQFs takes place? <i>Tick appropriate boxes.</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Direct marketing</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Career guidance</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Engagement with professional associations (e.g. nursing, engineering)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Engagement industry associations (e.g. electrical regulator)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Support to training and education institutions</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other – please specify: _</p>
<p>19. Do you consider that the policy makers are familiar with the potential of an NQF? <i>Only 1 response please.</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>Comment: _ _____</p>
<p>20. Do you consider that the education and training sector and the public are familiar with the potential of an NQF? <i>Only 1 response please.</i></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>Comment: _____</p>

► Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries

Questions	Responses
Quality Assurance	
21. What quality assurance mechanisms are linked to the NQF? <i>Tick appropriate boxes.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Standards on which qualifications are based <input type="checkbox"/> Approval/Re-approval of qualifications to be entered onto a register <input type="checkbox"/> Approval/Re-approval of providers to be entered onto a register <input type="checkbox"/> Other – please specify: _____
22. How strong is the link between the NQF and its quality assurance mechanisms? <i>Only 1 response please.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Strong links <input type="checkbox"/> Limited at this stage but strengthening <input type="checkbox"/> Weak links <input type="checkbox"/> Not linked Comment: _____
23. At what stage of implementation is the quality assurance mechanisms for NQF #1? <i>Only 1 response please.</i>	Name the NQF/Sector: __ <input type="checkbox"/> Not in place <input type="checkbox"/> Early thinking <input type="checkbox"/> In development (consultation) <input type="checkbox"/> In place, early stages of implementation <input type="checkbox"/> In place for some time <input type="checkbox"/> In review
24. At what stage of implementation is the quality assurance mechanisms for NQF #2? <i>Only 1 response please.</i>	Name the NQF/Sector: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Not in place <input type="checkbox"/> Early thinking <input type="checkbox"/> In development (consultation) <input type="checkbox"/> In place, early stages of implementation <input type="checkbox"/> In place for some time <input type="checkbox"/> In review
25. What have been the main challenges in implementing the quality assurance arrangements? <i>Tick appropriate boxes, or please provide brief summary or list of issues.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of capacity of providers <input type="checkbox"/> Resistance to change <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of trust <input type="checkbox"/> Scale of the sector <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of capacity of the responsible agency <input type="checkbox"/> Poor progress lessens engagement and commitment of stakeholders <input type="checkbox"/> Sustainable funding <input type="checkbox"/> Other – please specify: _____

Questions	Responses
Mobility	
26. Is your country mainly a receiving country (i.e. on balance more foreigners enter the country than local citizens leave it) or a sending country (i.e. on balance more citizens leave the country than foreigners enter)? <i>Only 1 response please.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Receiving <input type="checkbox"/> Sending <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
27. As a receiving country, what are the three main countries? <i>Name the three countries.</i>	
28. As a sending country, what are the three main countries? <i>Name the three countries.</i>	
Regional Qualifications Framework	
29. Do you consider that the policy makers are familiar with the potential of an RQF in the South Asia region? <i>Only 1 response please.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Comment: _____
30. Do you consider that the education and training sector and the public are familiar with the potential of an RQF? <i>Only 1 response please.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Comment: _____
31. What should be the main purpose of a South Asia RQF? <i>Tick appropriate boxes.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Improve transparency of qualifications <input type="checkbox"/> Improve recognition of qualifications <input type="checkbox"/> Improve transparency of quality assurance arrangements <input type="checkbox"/> Harmonize education/qualifications across the region <input type="checkbox"/> Improved student mobility <input type="checkbox"/> Improved labour mobility <input type="checkbox"/> More jobs <input type="checkbox"/> Linking supply and demand across the region <input type="checkbox"/> Strengthen regional identity <input type="checkbox"/> Link to other regional initiatives. Please explain. <input type="checkbox"/> Other – please specify: _____
32. In your opinion, is there interest and support for a SARQF in your country? <i>Only 1 response please.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Strong support <input type="checkbox"/> Some support <input type="checkbox"/> No support Comment: _____

► **Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries**

Questions	Responses
33. What organizations would be champions in supporting a SARQF in your country? <i>Name the entities and any contacts and their details.</i>	
34. What other regional initiatives do you think a SARQF could or should link to? <i>Tick appropriate boxes. Explain your reasons.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Other South Asian initiatives <input type="checkbox"/> Columbo Plan <input type="checkbox"/> Abu Dhabi Dialogue <input type="checkbox"/> Gulf Cooperation Council <input type="checkbox"/> Other RQFs, such as European Qualifications Framework, ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework <input type="checkbox"/> None Explain your reasons:_____

Thank you for your responses.

Please attach any relevant documents. Attached? Yes No

Please provide any relevant websites: _____

Please indicate below the name and contact person for future communications for this project (if it is not the person named at the start of the survey).

Name of respondent	
Organization affiliation and title	
Email address	
Country	

Definitions for South Asia Survey

Term	Definition
Credit	<p>Credit describes the value of an amount of learning. It can be transferred to a qualification from learning achieved from formal, informal and non-formal settings. Credit can be allowed to accumulate to predetermined levels for the award of a qualification. The processes involved in valuing credit, transferring credit and accumulating credit are governed by rules in a credit framework.⁹</p> <p>Credit points are usually a numerical value assigned to notional hours, e.g. 1 credit point = 10 hours.</p>
Learning Outcomes	<p>Learning outcomes are statements regarding what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and responsibility and autonomy.¹⁰</p>
NQF	<p>An NQF is an instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims at integrating and coordinating national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society.¹¹</p>
Level descriptor (levels)	<p>A general statement that summarises the learning outcomes appropriate to a specific level in a qualifications framework. They are usually grouped into domains of learning, such as knowledge, skills and application.</p>
Standards on which qualifications are based (Question 21).	<p>Some quality assurance systems, specify quality assurances standards for the development and design of qualifications.</p> <p>These are often linked to Qualification Type Descriptors (or rules for different types of qualifications, e.g. first cycle, second cycle and third cycle).</p> <p>In addition, some quality assurance systems, specify the achievement standards (such as education, competency, assessment) on which the qualification is to be based.</p> <p>If you indicate this response, please add an explanation or comments.</p>
Referencing	<p>Referencing is a process that results in the establishment of a relationship between the national qualifications framework and that of a regional qualifications framework.</p>
Regional qualifications framework	<p>A broad structure of levels of learning outcomes that is agreed by countries in a geographical region. A means of enabling one national framework of qualifications to relate to another and, subsequently, for a qualification in one country to be compared to a qualification from another country.</p>
Volume of learning	<p>Volume of learning definitions vary from country to country. However, it may be defined as the estimated notional hours of learning needed for an average learner to demonstrate that all the specified learning outcomes have been achieved. It could be described in terms of hours, duration (months and years) or credit points.</p>

v. 1 September 2020

⁹ Coles and Werquin (2006), p. 23.

¹⁰ EQF 2017.

¹¹ EQF 2017.

- ▶ Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries

▶ Appendix 2: Draft South Asian Qualifications Reference Framework

1. 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: 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; to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region and to provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and to realize their full potentials
- ▶ To promote and strengthen collective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia
- ▶ To contribute to mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another's problems
- ▶ To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields
- ▶ To strengthen cooperation with other developing countries
- ▶ To strengthen cooperation among themselves in international forums on matters of common interests
- ▶ To 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, amongst others:

- ▶ Enhance the availability, accessibility and quality of secondary education
- ▶ Expanding opportunities for skill development including technical and vocational education and training
- ▶ Revitalize 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 of 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, amongst others:

- ▶ Improving learning outcomes and promoting quality education
- ▶ Promoting acquisition of skills for life and for work
- ▶ Improving education governance
- ▶ Ensuring lifelong learning opportunities
- ▶ Strengthening partnership and collaboration

The initial development of the South Asian 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).

The South Asian countries, acknowledge the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) as being benchmarks for the development of the South Asia Qualifications Reference Framework (SAARC QRF).

2. 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 member states' national qualifications framework or systems; focusing on referencing their qualification levels to the levels of the SAQRF.

► Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries

These comparisons of qualifications across the South Asian countries aim to:

- ▶ Improve the recognition of qualifications
- ▶ Improve student and labour 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
- ▶ Provide a link to other regional qualifications framework internationally.

3. Scope

The SAQRF is a common reference framework and functions as a device to enable comparisons of qualifications across the SA member states.

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

4. Principles

The SAQRF:

1. Is based on agreed understandings between member states
2. Aims to be a neutral influence on Qualifications Frameworks in member states
3. Does not replace or define Qualifications Frameworks in member states and does not describe specific qualifications; in addition, specific qualifications should only be referenced to the SAQRF by way of the relevant Qualifications Framework.
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 member state'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 citizens' qualifications.
6. Supports lifelong learning and the recognition of prior learning and credit transfer systems.
7. Allows for voluntary engagement and for its Member States 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.

8. As national qualifications framework and systems change over time, member states will revise their referencing reports through a new referencing activity.
9. Shall be reviewed and evaluated in consultation with member states and relevant regional stakeholders and if necessary, updated.

5. Structure

The main features of the SAQRF are 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 or 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)'.¹²

Context is defined as the types of task, problems or issues to be resolved in a field of work or study.

Application is defined as the ability of the learner to apply the knowledge and skills autonomously and with responsibility.¹³

These descriptors assume:

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

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

6. Referencing Criteria and Obligations

The aim of any referencing activity is to promote understanding and engender trust in a Member State's qualifications that are part of a national qualifications framework or system.

¹² EQF 2017, p. 20.

¹³ EQF 2017, p. 20.

► Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries

The referencing activity culminates in a member state referencing report. To provide for a consistent approach to referencing, the member states have agreed on the referencing criteria and the obligations of the member states and the SAQRF governing body, 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 member states' stakeholders and are readily accessible.

The Referencing Criteria and Obligations are outlined in Appendix 3.

The referencing process requires that each South Asian countries establish a National Referencing Committee 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 South Asian countries have agreed that this committee will include an observer from one of the other member states.

7. Quality Assurance

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 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'¹⁴.

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

The South Asian countries do not have a common agreement or set of principles for a quality assurance framework at a regional level. However, the SAARC QRF could support and link with such a regional quality assurance framework.

The referencing process requires the member states to not only reference their National Qualifications Framework, but also to describe the quality assurance processes linked to their qualifications framework. 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 member states to be considered in the referencing process is included in Appendix 2.

¹⁴ Bateman et al., 2009, p. 8.

8. Credit Systems

Credit systems assist learners to 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 operate at institution, national and regional level. The SAQRF does not include any structures related to credit or a credit system. However, it encourages member states to develop credit systems within their own context, and it supports a link with a future regional credit system.

9. Governance Arrangements

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

- ▶ Provide high level technical advice and engage with policy issues arising from the implementation of the SAQRF
- ▶ Foster collaboration amongst the member states
- ▶ Facilitate the resolution of issues with agreements on common approaches and understanding culminating in briefing papers and guidelines
- ▶ Provide for the consideration of referencing reports and confirming whether the submission meets the SAQRF Referencing Criteria
- ▶ Promote the SAQRF and quality assurance of education in all sectors within its member states
- ▶ Monitor the implementation of the SAQRF and of the Technical Committee's remit
- ▶ Facilitate capacity development of member states in terms of qualifications frameworks and quality assurance
- ▶ Promote the SAARC QRF to the international education and training community.

Representation shall be one member per South Asian country. Election and rotation of Chair shall be as per consensus of the representatives of the south asian countries. Decision-making processes shall be based on consensus. Members may draw on additional expertise for their deliberations. Member states may determine the number of observers.

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

The SAQRF Technical Committee is supported by a SAQRF secretariat.

► **Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries**

► **Level Descriptors**

Level	Knowledge and Skills	Context	Application (Responsibility and Autonomy)
8	Knowledge which is at the most advanced frontier or a field and at the interface between fields; with the 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 practice	Able 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, and a critical awareness of issues within a field and at the interface between different fields; with specialized problem-solving skills	To develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields in research or innovation	Able 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; with, advanced skills demonstrating mastery and innovation	To solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialized field	Able 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; with a comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills	To develop creative solutions to abstract problems	Able to exercise management and supervision in contexts where there is unpredictable change; and to review and develop performance of self and others
4	Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts; with, a broad range of cognitive and practical skills	To generate solutions to specific problems in a field	Able to exercise self-management within guidelines and in contexts that are usually predictable but subject to change

Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries ◀

3	Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts in a field; with, a range of cognitive and practical skills	To accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information	Able to take responsibility for completion of tasks, and to adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems
2	Basic factual knowledge of a field; with, basic cognitive and practical skills	To carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools	Under supervision with some autonomy
1	Basic general knowledge and skills	To carry out simple tasks	Under direct supervision in a structure context

Source: Adapted from EQF 2017.

► Referencing Criteria and Obligations

Referencing Criteria

1. The legitimacy and responsibilities of all relevant competent bodies involved in the referencing process are clear and transparent.
2. The structure and profile of the broader education and training system is described, including an overview of the national qualifications framework and system.
3. The quality assurance system for education and training is integral to the national qualifications framework and is consistent with the Quality Assurance Criteria in Appendix 3.
4. Qualifications are based on learning outcomes.
5. The process for inclusion of qualifications on the national qualifications framework and/or describing the place within the qualifications system are clear and transparent.
6. There is a clear and demonstrable link between the levels of the national qualifications framework and the levels of the SAQRF.
7. Recognition of all forms of learning and credit systems (where they exist) are an integral component of the national qualifications framework.

Referencing Obligations

1. The referencing report has been prepared with and endorsed by the member state's relevant competent bodies, such as quality assurance agencies.
2. The referencing process involves international expert/s to support and assist the development of trusted outcomes.
3. There is one comprehensive referencing report, setting out the response to each criterion and includes any supplementary information or evidence.
4. The report shall be readily available and published by the competent body and by the SAQRF secretariat.
5. Following the referencing process, the member states commit to a clear reference to the appropriate SAQRF level on new certification documentation issued within the national qualifications framework or system, e.g. qualifications, certificates, diplomas¹⁵.

¹⁵ Adapted from EQF 2017 and ASEAN 2015.

▶ Quality Assurance Criteria

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

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

Quality assurance of qualifications assigned a SAQRF level should:

1. Ensure that competent bodies operate with clear and transparent governance arrangements.
2. Be based on clear and transparent quality standards.
3. Address conception and formation of qualifications, the use of learning outcomes, recognition of all forms of learning and certification processes.
4. Ensure valid and reliable assessments against the agreed transparent learning outcomes, and that barriers to assessment, including for non-formal and informal learning, are minimized.
5. Address the evaluation of the provision of qualifications, including internal review and external review.
6. Involve key stakeholder groups across the key aspects of quality assurance practice.
7. Ensure that continuous improvement underpins quality assurance practice and that decisions are informed by data and research.
8. Require competent bodies to commit to internal evaluation and to cyclical external evaluation, as well as to making public the findings of external evaluations.
9. Ensure quality assurance practices are appropriately resourced, remain fit for purpose and are sustainable.
10. Ensure quality assurance practices are enhanced through national and international linkages and cooperation.¹⁶

¹⁶ Adapted from UNESCO 2017 and European Commission 2017.

► **Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries**

► **Glossary of Terms**

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’. ¹⁷
Competent body	<p>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:</p> <p>Agencies with the responsibility to approve qualifications against the NQF and which manages qualifications accreditation under national legislation.</p> <p>Agencies responsible for approving education and training providers and the provision of services related to approved qualifications.</p> <p>These agencies could be national qualifications agencies, quality assurance agencies, official review boards or other nationally approved bodies or agencies.</p>
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’. ¹⁸
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’. ¹⁹
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’. ²⁰ It may include but is not limited to the following processes known as cross-credit, advanced standing, block credit, specified credit, unspecified credit.
Formal learning	Learning that occurs in an organised 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. ²¹

17 EQF 2017, p. 20.

18 EQF 2017, p. 20.

19 EQF 2017, p. 21.

20 EQF 2017, p. 21.

21 CEDEFOP 2011, p. 75.

Informal learning	Informal learning is learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner’s perspective. ²²
Learning outcomes	Learning outcomes are statements regarding what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process. Within this RQF learning outcomes are defined in terms of knowledge, skills, context and application (responsibility and autonomy). ²³
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 improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society. ²⁴
Non-formal learning	Non formal learning is learning which 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. ²⁵
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 program 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. ²⁶
Qualifications System	Qualifications systems ‘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’ ²⁷ . 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’. ²⁸

22 CEDEFOP 2011, p. 85.

23 Adapted from EQF 2017.

24 Adapted from EQF 2017.

25 CEDEFOP 2011, p. 113.

26 Adapted from EQF 2017 and from ASEAN 2015.

27 Adapted from EQF 2017, p. 20

28 Bateman et al., 2009, p. 8.

► **Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries**

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 pre-defined 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. ²⁹
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 the 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.

²⁹ Adapted from EQF 2017, ASEAN 2015, CEDEFOP 2011, p. 125.

▶ References

African Union Commission draft 2020. *Mapping report: Towards the African Continental Qualifications Framework* Addis Ababa.

ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework. Endorsed by the ASEAN Economic Ministers in August 2014; the ASEAN Education Ministers in September 2014; and the ASEAN Labour Ministers through Ad-referendum from November 2014 to May 2015

ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) Referencing Guideline, August 2020.

ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework: Governance and Structure, 2017. Endorsed by the ASEAN Economic Ministers, the ASEAN Education Ministers, and the ASEAN Labour Ministers, accessed at <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/ED-01-AQRF-Governance-and-Structure-document.pdf>

Bateman, A. 2020a, *Feasibility Study on the Establishment of Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF): Report #1 Status in SAARC*, ILO.

Bateman, A. 2020b, *Concept Paper for the Establishment of Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF)*, ILO.

Bateman, A. 2020c, *Feasibility Study on the Establishment of the SAARC Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF) in SAARC: Final Report*, ILO.

Bateman, A, and Coles, M, 2017, *Guidelines for the Quality Assurance of TVET Qualifications in the Asia-Pacific Region*, UNESCO, Paris.

Bateman, A. & Coles, M. 2015. *ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework and National Qualifications Framework: State of Play Report*. Jakarta: DAAD, SHARE.

Bateman, A. & Coles, M. 2013. *Qualifications frameworks and quality assurance of education and training*. World Bank. https://olc.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/Qualifications%20frameworks%20and%20quality%20assurance%20of%20education%20and%20training_final.pdf

Bateman, A, Keating, J and Vickers, A (2009). *Quality Assurance Systems in Vocational Education and Training*, DEEWR, Canberra.

Burke, G., Keating, J., Vickers, A., Fearnside, R., Bateman, A. 2009. *Mapping Qualifications Frameworks across APEC Economies*. Jakarta: APEC Secretariat.

CEDEFOP, ETF, UNESCO, UIL. 2019b. *Global Inventory of Regional and National Qualifications Frameworks 2019. Volume II: National and regional cases*. Luxembourg: CEDEFOP.

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

► Feasibility study on the establishment of a regional qualifications framework in South Asian countries

Coles, M, Keevy, J, Bateman, A & Keating, J 2014, 'Flying Blind: Policy rationales for national qualifications frameworks and how they tend to evolve', *International Journal of Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning*, Vol. 7, Issue 1 (November 2014), Hong Kong.

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

European Commission. 2008. Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:111:0001:0007:EN:PDF>

European Commission. 2017. Council recommendation of 22 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and repealing the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ceed970-518f-11e7-a5ca-01aa75ed71a1>.

Keevy, J., Chakroun, B. & Deij, A. 2010. *Transnational qualifications frameworks*. Turin: ETF. https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/m/720E67F5F1CC3E1DC125791A0038E688_Transnational%20qualifications%20frameworks.pdf

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



International
Labour
Organization

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION

ILO DWT for South Asia and Country Office for India
Core 4B, 3rd Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road,
New Delhi 110 003, India
Tel: (+91-11) 24602101-03
www.ilo.org/india