

The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework and its role in facilitating the movement of skilled labour and professionals

F A C T S H E E T
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The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) is a common reference framework that enables comparisons of education qualifications across ASEAN Member States.

The AQRF is based on agreed understanding between Member States and, by design, aims to be a neutral influence on national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) of ASEAN Member States. It invites voluntary engagement from countries and does not require changes to national qualifications systems. The AQRF respects the Member States' specific structures and processes which are responsive to national priorities.

Purpose of the AQRF

The purpose of the AQRF is to enable comparisons of qualifications across ASEAN Member States. In this regard, the objectives of the AQRF are depicted in the diagram below:



Supporting ASEAN Community Building

The AQRF aims to support community pillars of ASEAN specifically, the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint's goal of achieving the *free flow of skilled labour* (through harmonisation and standardisation) within the region and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint which seeks "to establish national skills frameworks as

an incremental approach towards an ASEAN skills recognition framework". This initiative is also in line with the ASEAN Charter's objective to develop human resources through closer cooperation in education and life-long learning, for the empowerment of the peoples of ASEAN and for the strengthening of the ASEAN Community.

A functional inter-pillar collaboration in the context of ASEAN Community-building, the AQRF has been endorsed by the ASEAN Economic Ministers Meeting (AEM), ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting (ASEM) and ASEAN Labour Ministers Meeting (ALMM) in August 2014, September 2014 and May 2015, respectively.

Support for the Development of the AQRF

The AANZFTA Economic Cooperation Support Program (AECSP) project on *Education and Training Governance: Capacity Building for National Qualifications Framework (NQF)* supported the development of the AQRF. In broad terms, the project has two main objectives:

- (i) to increase trade in services, particularly education services and the temporary movement of natural persons, through the development of mutually comparable national qualifications frameworks; and
- (ii) to strengthen education and training systems within each country and the development of a common reference framework to facilitate their harmonisation.

The project was implemented in several phases. Phase I (2010-2011) included: development of a policy concept paper; a regional forum to discuss the findings; and national consultation workshops. In 2012, the AANZFTA Joint Committee agreed to establish and provide technical support to the Task Force through AQRF Phase II (2012-2015). AQRF Phase II is focused on supporting meetings of the Task Force that lead to the development of the AQRF and will continue to assist in developing the implementation mechanism of the AQRF.

In parallel with the regional effort of the Task Force, AECSP is also providing planned, tailored and practical technical support under the Project's Phase III to some Parties. Phase III provides contextualised technical advice and transfer of knowledge through exchanges of officials and technical experts to share good practice in qualification framework development as well as quality assurance processes and systems. The pilot bilateral program between Thailand and New Zealand, which took place from 2013 to 2014, will be followed by a series of bilateral exchanges in 2015 including between a number of countries, such as Australia and Philippines, Australia and Viet Nam, New Zealand and Indonesia; and Malaysia and Myanmar; and Malaysia and Lao PDR.



PROJECT PHASES

Phase I (2010-2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> development of a policy concept paper regional forum and national consultation workshops
Phase II (2012-2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> development of AQRf and implementation arrangements TF-AQRf activities
Phase III (2013-2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> targeted support and hands-on policy and operational assistance through bilateral technical exchanges

Cross-Disciplinary Nature

Recognizing the coverage of a regional qualifications framework and its impact on various sectors, the Task Force on AQRf comprises representatives from ASEAN ministries of education, labour or manpower, qualification, accreditation and relevant agencies; with the rest of AANZFTA Parties - Australia and New Zealand as non-voting members.

The Task Force also coordinates with relevant ASEAN sectoral bodies, international organizations and related regional initiatives to create **synergy** and ensure **consistency** and **alignment** with internationally agreed frameworks, principles or standards in the development of the AQRf.

Supporting NQFs

ASEAN Member States are at different stages of development — some with established comprehensive NQFs, others with established sectoral frameworks, and others that have yet to develop or implement qualifications frameworks.

The AQRf will support and enhance each country's national qualifications framework or qualifications system while providing a mechanism to facilitate comparison, transparency and higher quality qualifications systems. It is underpinned by agreed quality assurance principles and standards, and requires countries to describe their education and training quality assurance systems.

Referencing

Referencing is a process that establishes the relationship between the eight levels on the AQRf with the levels on an NQF or qualifications system of individual ASEAN Member States. The AQRf will improve the understanding of the levels of an NQF or qualifications system, and the qualifications that are situated on these levels, across participating ASEAN countries. The AQRf is an information tool that can facilitate the recognition of qualifications. It is not meant to replace the decision making process (as it relates to individual qualifications recognition decisions) undertaken by competent authorities in each ASEAN Member State.

The AQRf can further serve as an overarching framework to support the recognition of its levels against other regional qualifications frameworks, therefore supporting inter-regional recognition. ASEAN countries can choose to begin referencing according to their readiness with the target to commence referencing by 2016 to 2018.

Complementing MRAs

ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) aim to facilitate the mobility of professionals within ASEAN through the recognition of qualifications, experience obtained, requirements met, or licenses or certifications granted by relevant authorities in home countries for mutual recognition by other ASEAN countries. The AQRf complements and supports this process by enabling a broad comparison of the levels on which qualifications are situated in the respective qualifications frameworks or qualifications systems of each country.

Next Steps

The Task Force on AQRf has agreed on a work program for the period up to the transitional period beyond the project's lifespan. The work program will include the development of the referencing guidelines, establishment of referencing panels and approaches to quality assurance principles, and recommendation of appropriate mechanisms for managing the process. The latter included the terms of reference for the proposed Advisory Committee which will be supported by a secretariat.

Read more:

<http://www.asean.org/news/asean-secretariat-news/item/asean-develops-framework-to-facilitate-movement-of-skilled-labour-and-professionals>

http://www.asean.org/news/item/asean-enhances-mobility-of-skilled-labour-through-qualifications-reference-framework?category_id=27



6th meeting of the task force on ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRf) Hanoi, Vietnam, 3-5 March 2015