

ASEAN QUALIFICATIONS REFERENCE FRAMEWORK



**A Practical Guide
and
All You Need to Know**



ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework

A Practical Guide and All You Need to Know

**The ASEAN Secretariat
Jakarta**

The Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) was established on 8 August 1967. The Member States of the Association are Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam. The ASEAN Secretariat is based in Jakarta, Indonesia.

For enquiries, contact:
The ASEAN Secretariat
Public Outreach and Civil Society Division
70A Jalan Sisingamangaraja
Jakarta 12110
Indonesia
Phone : (6221) 724-3372, 726-2991
Fax : (6221) 739-8234, 724-3504
E-mail : public@asean.org

Catalogue-in-Publication Data

ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework: A Practical Guide
Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat, December 2018

379.459
1. ASEAN – Education – Qualifications System
2. Informal Learning – Non-formal Learning

ISBN 978-602-5798-30-6

ISBN 978-602-5798-30-6



General information on ASEAN appears online at ASEAN website: www.asean.org

The text of this publication may be freely quoted or reprinted provided proper acknowledgement is given and a copy containing the reprinted material is sent to the Public Outreach and Civil Society Division of the ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta.

Copyright Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) 2018.
All rights reserved.

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms	5
List of Figures	6
FOREWORD	7
1. INTRODUCTION	8
2. ELEMENTS OF THE AQRF	10
2.1. Purpose	10
2.2. Scope	12
2.3. Principles	13
2.4. Quality Assurance	13
3. COMPONENTS OF THE AQRF	15
3.1. Learning Outcomes	15
3.2. Level Descriptors	16
3.3. Level Descriptors of the AQRF	18
4. REFERENCING	20
4.1. Linking NQF to the AQRF	20
4.2. The 11 AQRF Referencing Criteria	21
5. ASEAN COMMUNITY BUILDING AND LINKAGES AMONG ASEAN INITIATIVES	26
6. BENEFITS OF THE AQRF	28
STRUCTURE OF THE AQRF REFERENCING REPORT.....	29
GLOSSARY	30
BIBLIOGRAPHY	34

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AANZFTA	The Agreement Establishing the ASEAN-Australia New Zealand Free Trade Area
AEC	ASEAN Economic Community
AECSP	AANZFTA Economic Cooperation Support Programme
AEM	ASEAN Economic Ministers
ALMM	ASEAN Labour Ministers
AMS	ASEAN Member States
AQAF	ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework
AQAN	ASEAN Quality Assurance Network
AQRF	ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework
ASCC	ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
ASED	ASEAN Education Ministers
MOOC	Massive Open Online Course
MRA	Mutual Recognition Arrangement
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NQS	National Qualifications System
OEC	Open Education Consortium
QA	Quality Assurance
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training

List of Figures

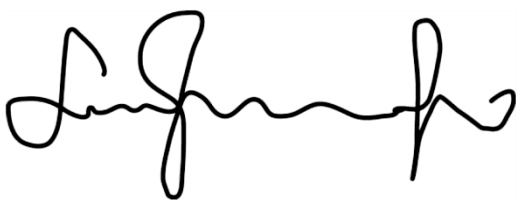
Figure 1	The AQRF Journey and Milestones	8
Figure 2	Six Objectives of the AQRF	10
Figure 3	Approaches to enhancing NQF and the quality of qualifications systems	11
Figure 4	Linkages between NQF and the AQRF	11
Figure 5	What are Informal and Non-formal Learning?	12
Figure 6	Principles and Standards of QA	13
Figure 7	A Hypothetical Example of an inclusive Supply-Push oriented NQF	16
Figure 8	The Two Domains of the AQRF	17
Figure 9	Concept of the AQRF's cumulative level descriptors	18
Figure 10	Roles of National and Regional Bodies in the Referencing Process	21
Figure 11	Linkages between ASEAN Initiatives	26
Figure 12	ASEAN Initiatives and their inter-related Functions	27

FOREWORD

The development and endorsement of the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) completed in 2015 was an important milestone in ASEAN Community building through facilitating movement of skilled labour within ASEAN. AQRF not only enables comparability of qualification systems across ASEAN Member States (AMS), but also supports and enhances the development of each AMS' national qualifications framework or qualifications systems, as well as promotes lifelong learning. For a diverse region like ASEAN where AMS are at different levels of development and varying qualifications systems, AQRF promotes trust through greater transparency and understanding of each other's education and training systems.

ASEAN is actively implementing the AQRF through the AQRF Committee established in 2017. The processes include referencing national qualifications framework and quality assurance systems against the AQRF have commenced in increasing number of AMS.

This Guidebook aims to introduce the AQRF to the general public in a comprehensive and practical manner, elaborating how it works and what meaningful impact it would make on the lives of people in ASEAN.

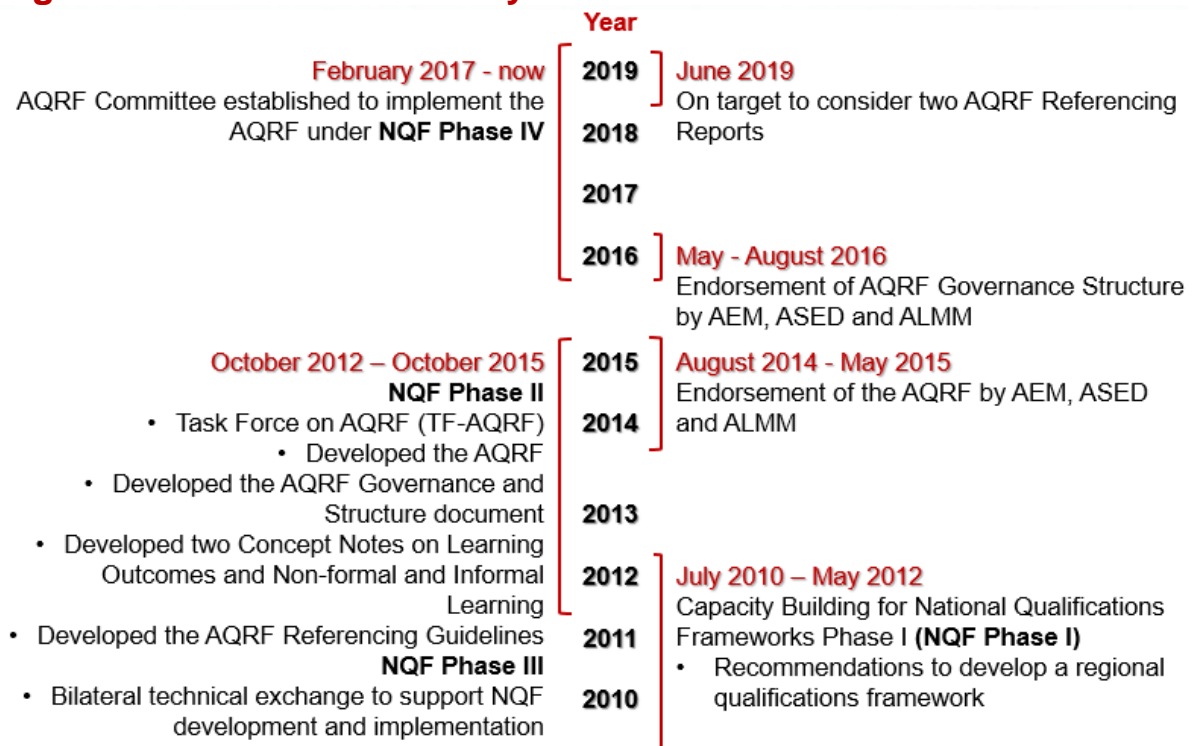


DATO' LIM JOCK HOI
Secretary-General of ASEAN

1. INTRODUCTION

The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) is a common regional reference framework (RQF) that enables comparisons of education qualifications across ASEAN Member States (AMS). The concept of a region-wide qualifications framework for ASEAN was conceived in 2010¹, and the AQRF was developed in 2014 by a task force (TF-AQRF) comprising officials and experts from ASEAN ministries of trade, labour and manpower development, education, as well as other relevant qualifications agencies. The AQRF was endorsed by the ASEAN Economic Ministers (AEM) and the ASEAN Education Ministers (ASED), respectively in 2014; and the ASEAN Labour Ministers (ALMM) *ad-referendum* in 2015.

Figure 1. The AQRF Journey and Milestones



Source: ASEAN Secretariat's elaboration.

¹ Since 2011, the Agreement Establishing the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area (AANZFTA) Economic Cooperation Support Programme (AECSP) has rendered continuous support to the AQRF initiative through the project on Education and Training Governance: Capacity Building for National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Phase I to IV. NQF Phase IV is scheduled to run until June 2019, and aims to support the referencing process of at least two AMS. Figure 1 indicates support of AECSP in the AQRF Journey and Milestones from 2010-2019.

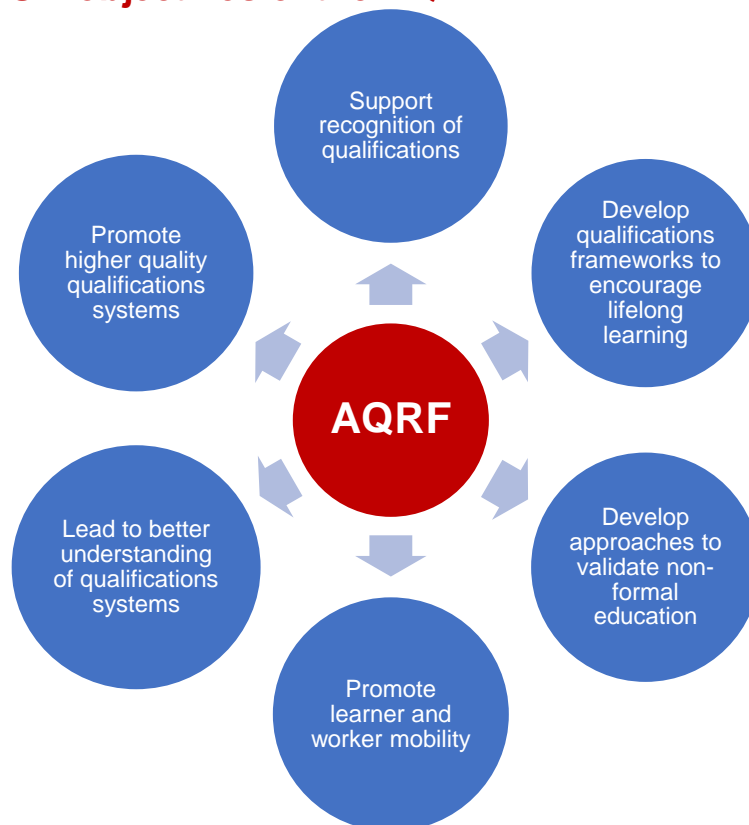
Following the endorsement, the TF-AQRF focused on developing an implementation plan to put the referencing process to the AQRF in motion. The outcome of the implementation plan was the AQRF Governance and Structure document that would become the basis of the establishment of an ASEAN body, **the AQRF Committee**, to oversee the implementation of the AQRF. The AQRF Governance and Structure document was endorsed by ALMM, ASED and AEM, respectively, in 2016. The AQRF Committee was established following the endorsement, and is responsible for considering the AQRF Referencing Reports submitted by participating AMS. The first AQRF Committee Meeting was convened in February 2017.

2. ELEMENTS OF THE AQRF

2.1. Purpose

One of the main drivers of the AQRF initiative is to create a strategic mechanism to complement the existing region-wide efforts to promote and facilitate mobility of the workers and learners. Along with it, the AQRF aims to achieve other equally important objectives to improve quality of education and training, to enhance the mechanism to validate non-formal and informal learning to promote life-long learning and to create more equitable opportunities to gainful employment for the people of ASEAN and to a more meaningful life experience.

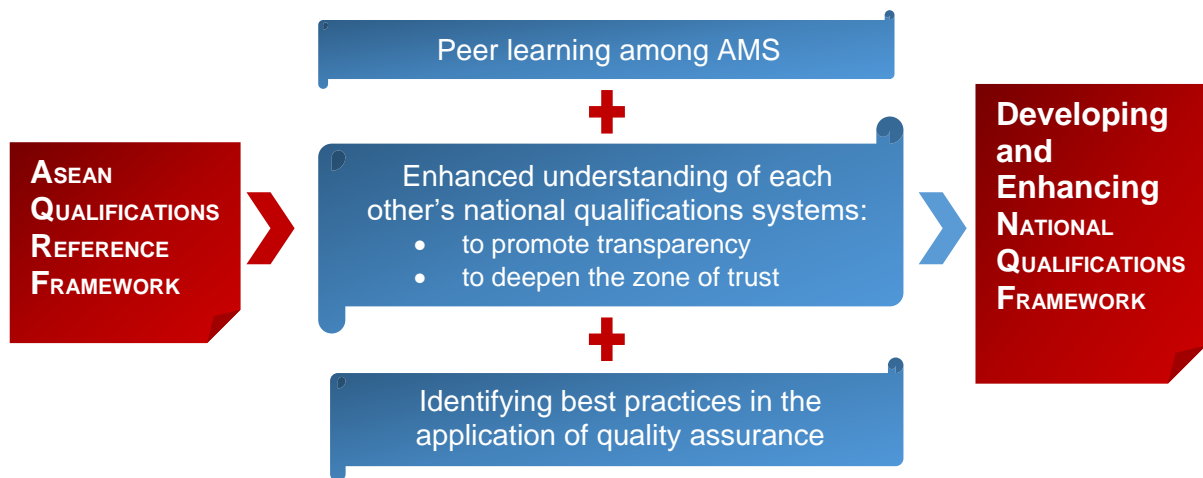
Figure 2. Six objectives of the AQRF



Source: ASEAN Secretariat's elaboration based on information extracted from Factsheet: The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework, 2015.

From a country-level's perspective, the development process of AQRF played an important role in supporting the development of a country's national qualifications framework (NQF) if it did not have one, as well as to enhance a country's existing qualifications system or framework.

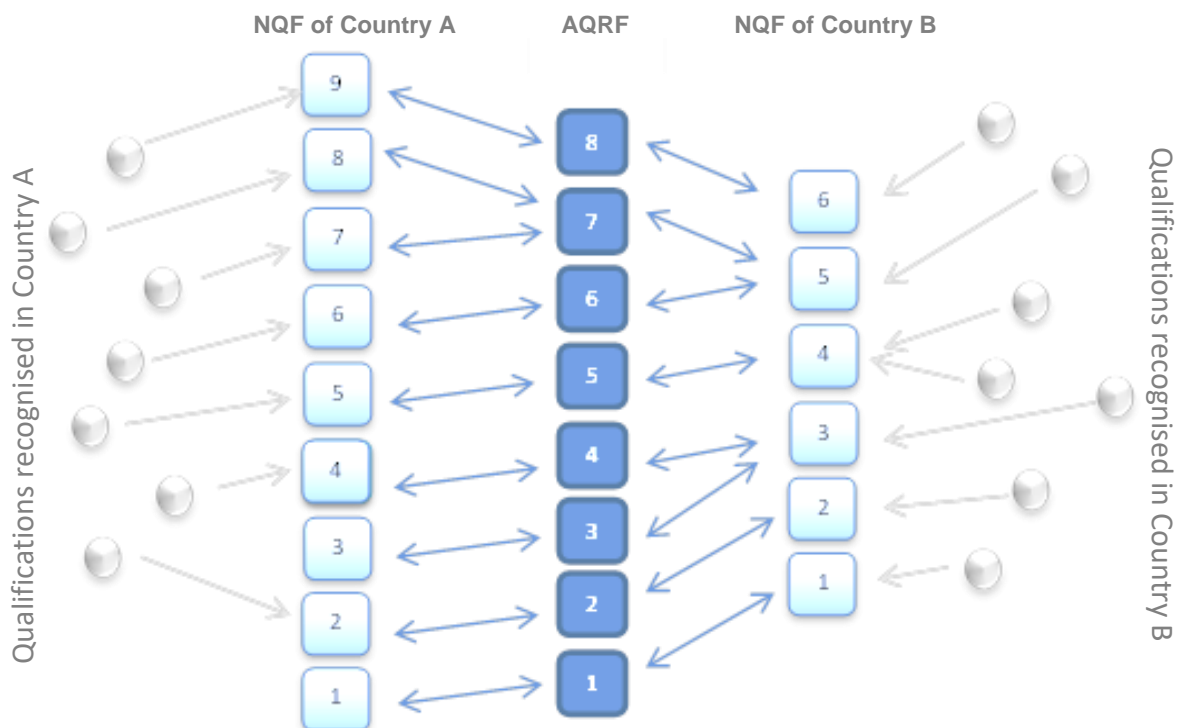
Figure 3. Approaches to enhancing NQF and the quality of qualifications systems



Source: ASEAN Secretariat's elaboration.

What makes the AQRF meaningful is its underlying function as a regional mechanism to compare qualifications across AMS, which outcomes would demonstrate the links between NQF of a country and the AQRF.

Figure 4. Linkages between NQF and the AQRF



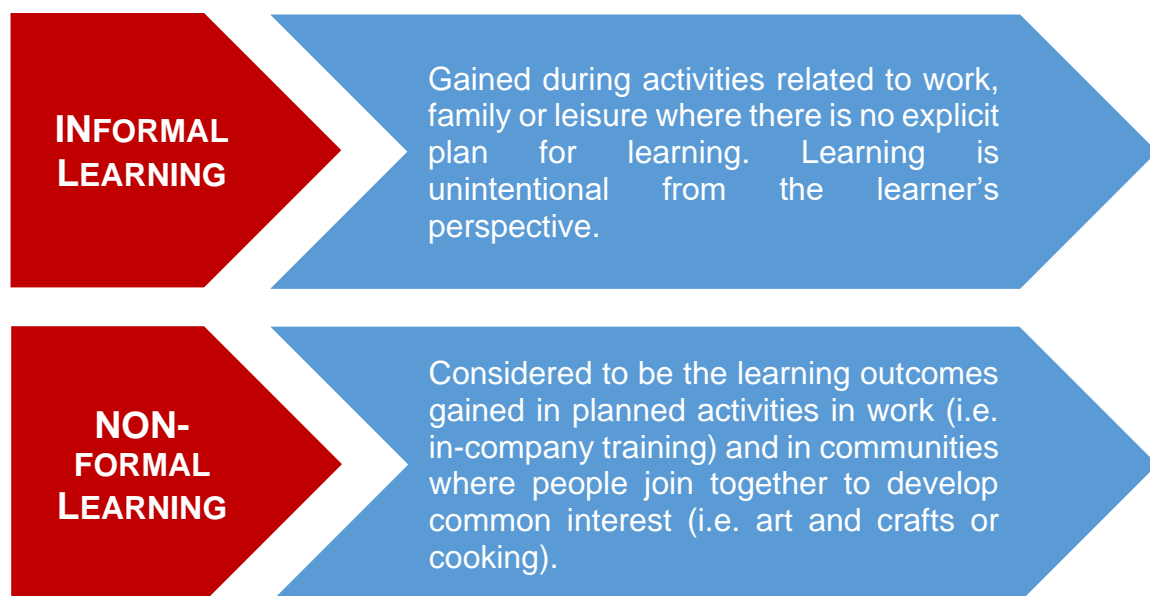
Source: ASEAN Secretariat's elaboration.

As the implementation progresses, the AQRF would also double as an ASEAN’s mechanism to support recognition of qualifications of other regional qualifications systems.

2.2. Scope

As a regional common qualifications reference framework, the AQRF is an enabling tool to allow comparisons of qualifications among AMS. The AQRF is an eight-level regional qualifications reference framework that aims to address all education and training sectors, from basic to the most advanced skill-level. To support life-long learning, the AQRF goes beyond formal learning² to cover informal and non-formal learning.

Figure 5. What are Informal and Non-formal Learning?



Source: ASEAN Secretariat’s elaboration based on definitions extracted from the AQRF Concept Note No. 1 – Non-formal and Informal Learning.

The AQRF encourages the use of learning outcomes as the basis of qualifications. Learning outcomes focus on the results of learning (i.e. knowledge, skills, competence, etc.) rather than inputs (i.e. length of study, number of credits, etc.). Learning outcomes support the transfer of qualifications, including credit transfer and recognition of non-formal and

² The coverage of formal learning is not limited to post-compulsory schooling, adult and community education, TVET and higher education.

informal learning. More detailed information on learning outcomes are provided in Section 3.1.

2.3. Principles

The AQRF is developed based on agreed understanding between AMS. The framework's nature of neutral influence on NQF or national qualifications systems (NQS) does not require a country to change or adjust its national qualifications systems. This also allows the AQRF to respects a country's specific structures and unique processes to ensures the country's responsiveness to national priorities.

Engagement to the AQRF is on voluntary basis, and a country can decide when to do so.

2.4. Quality Assurance

Quality assurance (QA) is a component of quality management to provide confidence that the quality requirements are fulfilled (ISO 9000: 2005, Clause 3.2.11). QA underpins the very foundation of the AQRF as a regional common qualifications reference framework to deepen the understanding, confidence and zone of trust in the NQF or NQS of countries across ASEAN.

To promote QA in education and training across the region, ASEAN developed a set of agreed principles and broad standards to support the AQRF.

Figure 6. Principles and Standards of QA

- Functions of the registering and accrediting agencies
- Systems for assessment of learning and issuance of qualifications
- Regulation of the issuance of certificates

Source: ASEAN Secretariat's elaboration based on information extracted from the endorsed AQRF.

Based on the AQRf, a country is required to refer to one or more established QA frameworks which would be used as the benchmark to evaluate the QA systems for the relevant education and training sectors.

3. COMPONENTS OF THE AQRF

3.1. Learning Outcomes

To keep up with the global shift, the AQRF uses learning outcomes as the basis to assess the qualifications attained. The AQRF uses learning outcomes approach to express to describe each of the eight hierarchical levels of qualifications complexity of learning. As such other measures based on input-approach (i.e. duration of programmes) are no longer a feasible option.

The other advantage of learning outcome is that it enhances the ability of the AQRF to address all education and training sectors (i.e. formal, informal and non-formal learning) by assessing the results of learning based on knowledge, skills and competences to ascertain the qualification levels. This approach, therefore, allows the AQRF to support recognition of prior learning (RPL), as well as to promote life-long learning.

In essence, learning outcomes are statements that describe significant and essential learning that learners have achieved, and can reliably demonstrate at the end of a course or programme. In other words, the learning outcomes approach identifies the scope and depth the learner will know and be able to apply by the end of a course or program.

A qualifications framework (QF) could be *supply-push* or *demand-driven*. A *supply-push* oriented QF elaborates the learning outcomes of an education system. Whereas a *demand-driven* oriented QF describes the qualifications level of certain professions, such as medical doctor, architect, accountant, engineer, etc.

Some countries have a *supply-push* type of NQF; some have *demand-driven* professional qualifications framework centred on qualifications of work skills; and some others have both as separate frameworks or as an integrated framework.

Figure 7. A Hypothetical Example of an Inclusive Supply-Push oriented NQF

Level	Formal Education			Non-formal/Informal Education
	Basic Education	TVET	Higher Education	
10			Doctoral	
9			Master	
8		Diploma 4	Bachelor	Open-learnings Self-directed learnings, MOOCS, OECs, trainings, work experiences, etc.
7		Vocation 3		
6		Diploma 2		
5		Diploma 1		
4	High School	Vocational HS		home-schooling
3	Secondary	Vocational SS		
2	Elementary			
1				

Source: ASEAN Secretariat's elaboration.

To reference to the AQRF, the NQF or NQS would have to define each level of qualifications using learning outcomes, to demonstrate the level linkages between the NQF and the AQRF. The AQRF welcomes countries whose NQF or NQS not based on learning outcomes to engage, however, it has to demonstrate clearly in the referencing process and report on the progress towards a learning outcomes based approach. In short, for all its benefits, the AQRF encourages the use of learning outcomes as the basis of qualifications.

3.2. Level Descriptors

The AQRF level descriptors provide a reference point for the levels in NQF and NQS. To facilitate the referencing process, the AQRF is based on broad description for each of the eight hierarchical levels of complexity of learning outcomes.

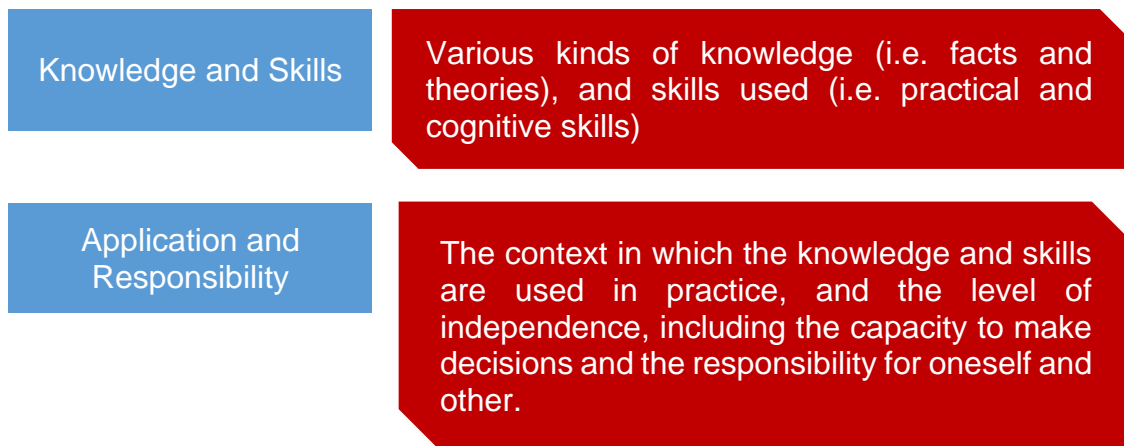
The level descriptors encompass the notion of competence³, which is the ability that extends beyond the possession of knowledge and skills. However, it is worth noting the value ASEAN holds in personal and ethical competence as measures to assess an individual's capacity to acquire and apply knowledge to act skilfully and work effectively in different

3 Based on the endorsed AQRF, the notion of competence includes (i) cognitive competence, (ii) functional competence, (iii) personal competence, and (iv) ethical competence.

settings and context, as well as to demonstrate responsibility and accountability. Considering the diversity of the region, attributes such as attentiveness, inter-cultural awareness, active tolerance and embracing diversity are highly appreciated.

The level descriptors of the AQRF include two domains: (i) Knowledge and Skills, and (ii) Application and Responsibilities.

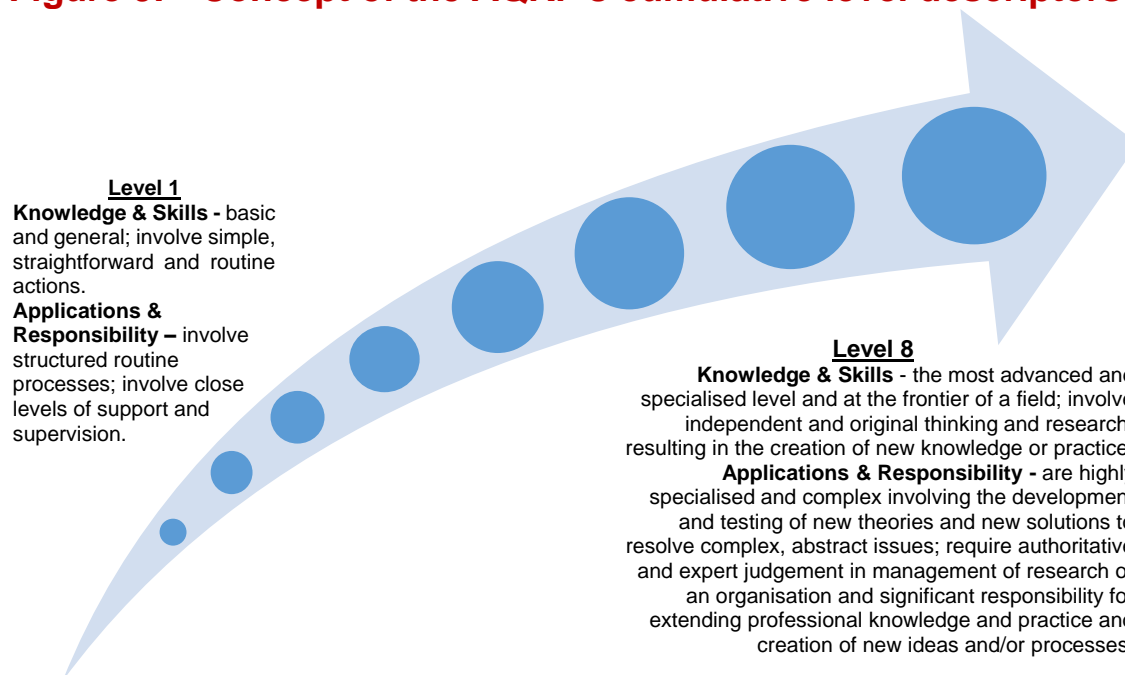
Figure 8. The Two Domains of the AQRF



Source: *ASEAN Secretariat's elaboration based on information extracted from the endorsed AQRF.*

The level descriptors of the learning outcomes are cumulative by level. That is, one level assumes that the knowledge, skills and conditions at one level include those at the lower levels. To get a true indication of the level, the domains would have to be read together.

Figure 9. Concept of the AQRF’s cumulative level descriptors



Source: ASEAN Secretariat’s elaboration based on information extracted from the endorsed AQRF.

3.3. Level Descriptors of the AQRF

Level	Knowledge and Skills	Application and Responsibility
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> is at the most advanced and specialised level and at the frontier of a field involve independent and original thinking and research, resulting in the creation of new knowledge or practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> are highly specialised and complex involving the development and testing of new theories and new solutions to resolve complex, abstract issues require authoritative and expert judgment in management of research or an organisation and significant responsibility for extending professional knowledge and practice and creation of new ideas and/or processes.
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> is at the forefront of a field and show mastery of a body of knowledge involve critical and independent thinking as the basis for research to extend or redefine knowledge or practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> are complex and unpredictable and involve the development and testing of innovative solutions to resolve issues require expert judgment and significant responsibility for professional knowledge, practice and management

Level	Knowledge and Skills	Application and Responsibility
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is specialised technical and theoretical within a specific field • involve critical and analytical thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are complex and changing • require initiative and adaptability as well as strategies to improve activities and to solve complex and abstract issues
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is detailed technical and theoretical knowledge of a general field • involve analytical thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are often subject to change • involve independent evaluation of activities to resolve complex and sometimes abstract issues
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is technical and theoretical with general coverage of a field • involve adapting processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are generally predictable but subject to change • involve broad guidance requiring some self- direction and coordination to resolve unfamiliar issues
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • includes general principles and some conceptual aspects • involve selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are stable with some aspects subject to change • involve general guidance and require judgment and planning to resolve some issues independently
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is general and factual • involve use of standard actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • involve structured processes • involve supervision and some discretion for judgment on resolving familiar issues
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is basic and general • involve simple, straightforward and routine actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • involve structured routine processes • involve close levels of support and supervision

Source: *Information extracted from the endorsed AQRF.*

4. REFERENCING

Referencing is a process that establishes the relationship between the eight levels on the AQRF and the levels on an NQF or NQS of individual AMS. The objectives of the referencing process are:

- to describe a common structure for linking NQFs to the AQRF
- to ensure that the linking process undertaken is robust and transparent
- to provide a common reporting structure for the referencing reports

Referencing to the AQRF will improve the understanding of the levels of a NQF or NQS, and the qualifications that are situated on these levels, across participating AMS. To undertake referencing to the AQRF, AMS are required to submit an AQRF Referencing Report⁴ responding to the 11 AQRF Referencing Criteria⁵ for the AQRF Committee's consideration.

4.1. Linking NQF to the AQRF

For **AMS with a NQF**, the AQRF referencing process identifies the best fit of levels of the NQF in a broad sense to that of the AQRF. For **AMS without a NQF**, referencing process identifies the best fit for national qualifications types or key qualifications to the level of AQRF. In both cases, the referencing process confirms whether the accrediting and registering agencies meet the agreed quality principles and broad standards underpinning the AQRF.

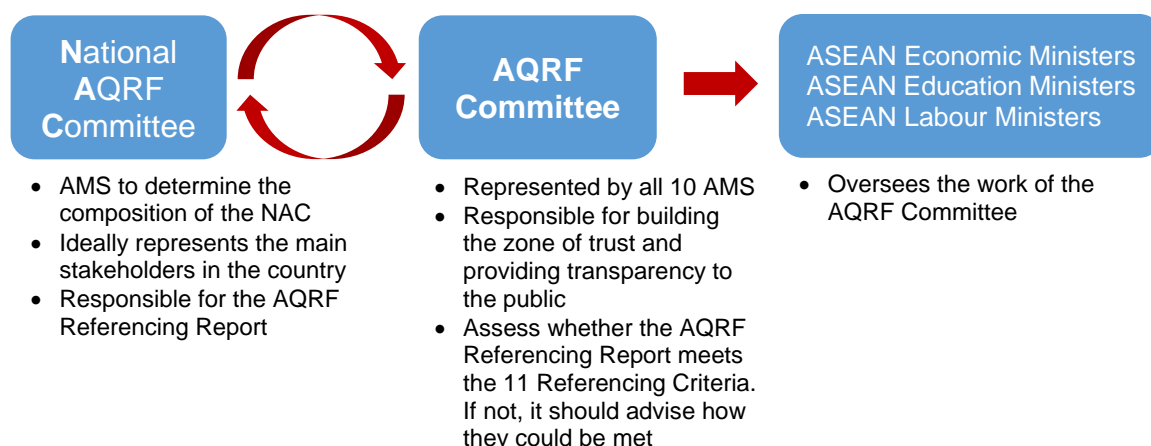
An AMS may also embark on a referencing process to the AQRF in a selective and staggered manner according to national priorities and resources. However, it is worth to note that the strength and usefulness of the AQRF depends on comprehensive trusted referencing processes.

The referencing process is embedded in a single report, that is the AQRF Referencing Report, in response to the 11 AQRF Referencing Criteria. The referencing process should ideally involve the relevant stakeholders, and the AQRF Referencing Report shall be approved by them before submitting to the AQRF Committee for consideration.

4 Refer to page 29 for the structure of the AQRF Referencing Report.

5 See Section 4.2 for more information on the 11 AQRF Referencing Criteria.

Figure 10. Roles of National and Regional Bodies in the Referencing Process



Source: ASEAN Secretariat's elaboration based on information extracted from endorsed AQRF Governance and Structure document.

4.2. The 11 AQRF Referencing Criteria

The consistency of referencing process carried out in different AMS is key to ensure the integrity of the AQRF. Transparent processes in each AMS are equally important for other AMS to understand and trust the outcomes of the referencing process. To optimise consistency and to ensure transparency in the referencing process, the AQRF sets out a set of 11 criteria to which an AQRF Referencing Report shall include and respond.

Criterion	Information Required
1 The structure of the education and training system is described.	The essential structure of the system covering ages, stages and pathways of education and training, including formal, non-formal and informal learning should be described in outline. Linkages between these pathways and major progressions should be clear. If possible some general statistics should be included.
2 The responsibilities and legal basis of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process are clearly determined and published by the main public authority responsible for the referencing process.	Different Member States have different institutional structures. It is necessary to take into account all of the bodies that have a legitimate role in the referencing process and to clarify (for international readers) their roles. Bodies with these types of functions are generally considered as having such legitimate role:

	Criterion	Information Required
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • those responsible for governing the processes through which nationally recognised qualifications are designed and awarded; • those bodies that support the labour market relevance of education and training; • those in charge of quality assurance in relation to design and award of nationally recognised qualifications; • those managing and maintaining a qualifications framework (if in existence); • those responsible for the recognition of foreign qualifications and providing information on national qualifications; and • representatives of institutions awarding qualifications; and representatives of those using qualifications (employers, learners).
3	<p>The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the NQF or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualifications system are transparent.</p>	<p>The qualifications that exist in the country are described in terms of the education provision in the country and how they are located in an NQF where one exists. Allocating specific qualifications to an NQF level brings meaning to the NQF level for citizens and, through the referencing process, to the AQRF level. It is therefore critically important for the referencing process that the way a qualification is located at an NQF level is described in full and examples are provided that illustrate how the rules governing the process are applied. The NQF level of all the major qualifications (or types) needs to be evident in the report.</p>
4	<p>There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the AQRF.</p>	<p>A clear statement of the agreed relationship between the national qualifications system and the AQRF levels is made. Where an NQF exists the levels in the national framework should be used. The procedure for matching of levels needs to be described in detail; this procedure should be robust and transparent, probably including a careful explanation of assumptions, approximations and professional judgements.</p>
5	<p>The basis in agreed standards of the national framework or qualifications system and its qualifications is described.</p>	<p>Where possible these standards should be based on the principle of learning outcomes. They should include achievement standards, credit arrangements and other methods of validation where these are available.</p>

Criterion	Information Required
<p>6 The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications framework or system are described. All of the bodies responsible for quality assurance state their unequivocal support for the referencing outcome.</p>	<p>Referencing reports need to explain the main national quality assurance systems that operate in the education, training and qualifications system. Other quality assurance measures that could be addressed include, for example, qualifications requirements for teachers and trainers, accreditation and external evaluation of providers or programmes, relationship between bodies responsible for quality assurance from different levels and with different functions.</p> <p>A range of competent quality assurance bodies are important to the referencing process, such as the following but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the government ministries; • qualifications bodies, particularly those with national oversight of the system or of the major sectors (general, vocational, higher education) but also those bodies that assess learning, validate non-formal and informal learning, issue awards and certificates; • quality assurance bodies such as those that set standards for learning in general, vocational and higher education and those that evaluate institutions or programmes; • bodies that set occupational, vocational and educational standards in a country or employment/education sector; • bodies that manage the development and implementation of NQFs, especially the NQFs that regulate standards in sectors and nationally; and • bodies that disburse public funds to learning institutions and require compliance with quality criteria. <p>Benchmarks for evaluating quality assurance processes for all education and training sectors may be based but not limited to the following quality assurance framework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • East Asia Summit Vocational Education and Training Quality Assurance Framework (includes the quality principles, agency quality standards and quality indicators) • International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE)

Criterion	Information Required
	<p>Guidelines of Good Practice for Quality Assurance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (AQAN) • ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework
<p>7 The process of referencing has been devised by the main public authority and has been endorsed by the main stakeholders in the qualifications system.</p>	<p>A statement describing the management process used to provide a valid, reliable and trusted outcome of referencing.</p>
<p>8 People from other countries who are experienced in the field of qualifications are involved in the referencing process and its reporting.</p>	<p>The referencing process should clarify the relationship between the AQRf and the national qualifications system for a person without particular understanding of the qualifications system concerned. To support this process a person or persons from another country is involved in the referencing process to act as an adviser and supporter of the referencing process. The advice of the foreign person should be given with a view to optimising the trust in use of the AQRf as an instrument for transparency.</p> <p>There is no obligation on the part of the host country to accept the advice of the foreign person.</p> <p>The referencing report should state who was involved and explain why these experts were invited and how they were involved in the process (roles, activities) and at what stage and how their feedback was taken into account.</p>
<p>9 One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing and the evidence supporting it shall be published by the competent national bodies and shall address separately and in order each of the referencing criteria.</p>	<p>Whatever the scope of the referencing process, this report should be written by the competent bodies in consultation with stakeholders and agreed by them. The single report should contain all relevant information on the results of the referencing of national qualifications levels to the AQRf and refer to further resources for evidence if necessary. There should be no supplementary or minority view reports</p>
<p>10 The outcome of referencing is published by the ASEAN Secretariat and by the main national public body.</p>	<p>In order to make public the process of referencing and its outcome.</p>

Criterion	Information Required
11 Following the referencing process all certification and awarding bodies are encouraged to indicate a clear reference to the appropriate AQRF level on new qualifications certificates, diplomas issued.	In order to show that the AQRF is a force for cooperation and mobility of direct relevance to citizens of ASEAN.

Source: *Information extracted from the endorsed AQRF.*

To facilitate mutual and ease of understanding, AMS are encouraged to use the relevant terms in the Glossary⁶ in preparing the AQRF Referencing Reports.

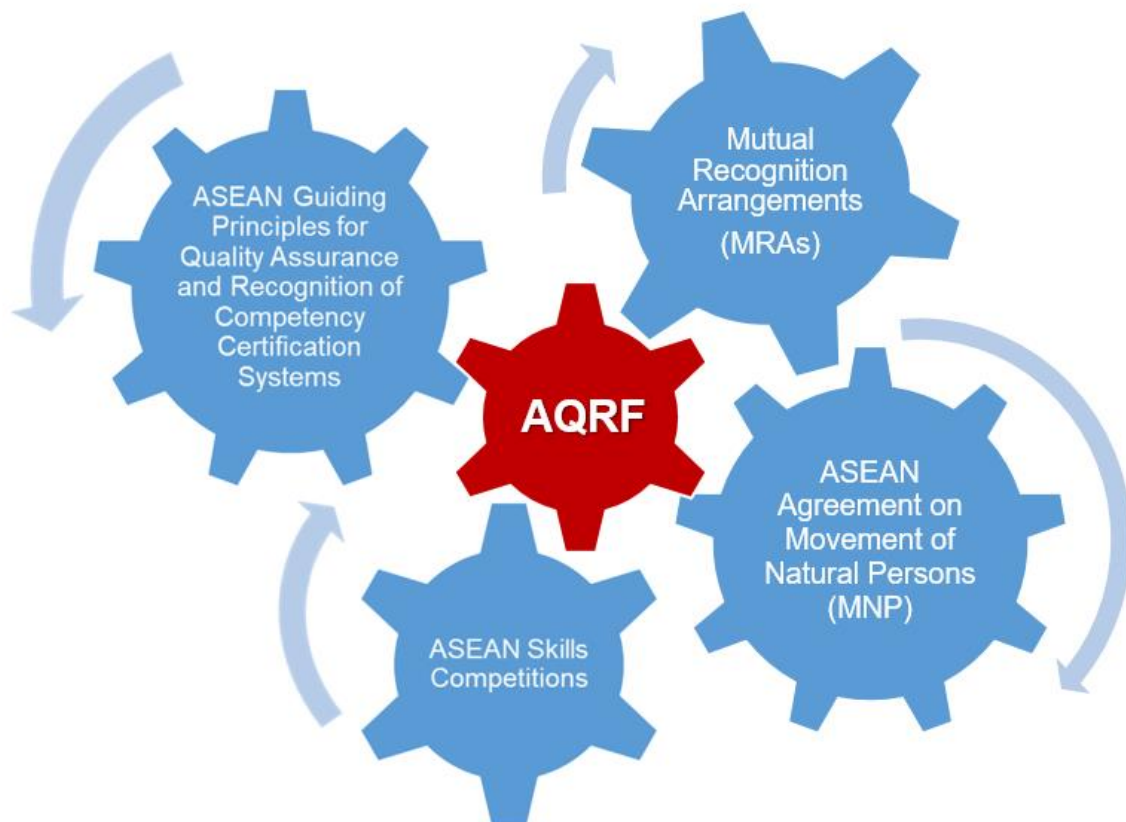
6 Refer to page 30 for Glossary.

5. ASEAN COMMUNITY BUILDING AND LINKAGES AMONG ASEAN INITIATIVES

The development of the AQRF aimed to support ASEAN Community building. The AQRF has contributed to the ASEAN Charter's objective to develop human resources through closer cooperation in education and life-long learning to empower the peoples of ASEAN and to strengthen the ASEAN Community in different ways.

Under the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), together with and complementing the eight ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRA)⁷ and the ASEAN Agreement on Movement of Natural Persons (MNP), the AQRF has played a role in supporting and facilitating mobility of skilled labour within the region to achieve the objective to realise freer flow of skilled labour of the AEC Blueprint 2015.

Figure 11. Linkages between ASEAN Initiatives

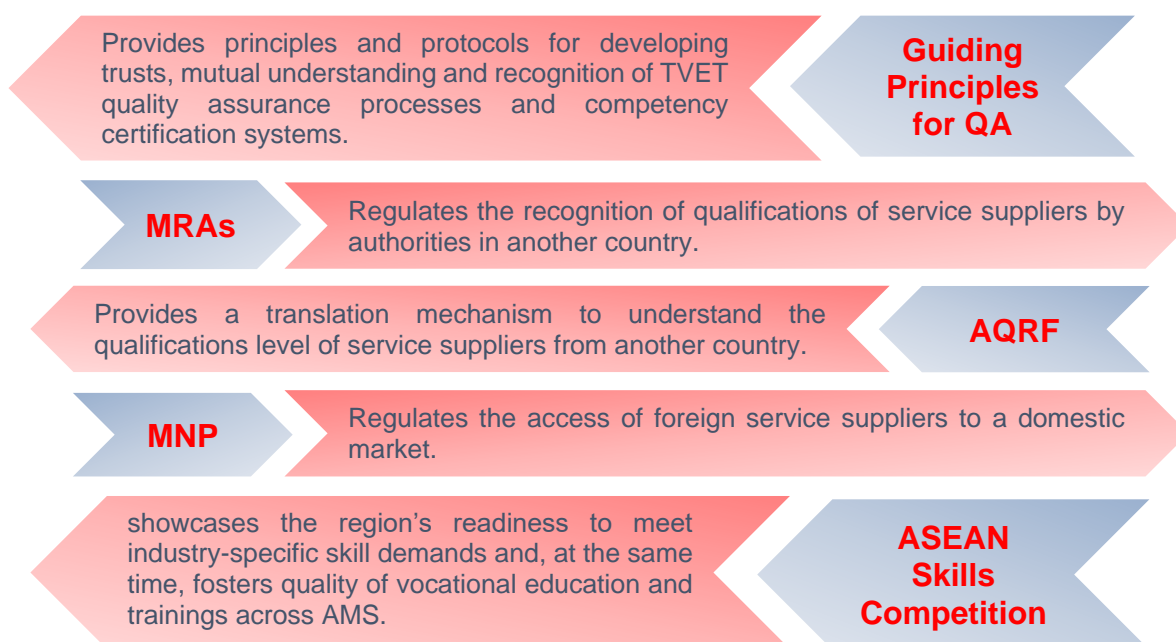


Source: ASEAN Secretariat's elaboration based on information extracted from the ASEAN Integration in Services (2015) and ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together (2015).

7 The eight MRAs are (i) Engineering Services, (ii) Architectural Services, (iii) Accountancy Services, (iv) Surveying Qualifications, (v) Nursing Services, (vi) Medical Practitioners, (vii) Dental Practitioners, and (viii) Tourism Professionals.

Under the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) pillar, the AQRF acted as one of the foundations “to establish national skills frameworks as an incremental approach towards an ASEAN skills recognition framework” as set out in the ASCC Blueprint 2015. Subsequently the ASEAN Guiding Principles for Quality Assurance and Recognition of Competency Certification Systems was developed and made references to the AQRF. These initiatives are in addition to the biannual ASEAN Skills Competition to promote ASEAN’s young talents to demonstrate excellence in vocational skills.

Figure 12. ASEAN Initiatives and their inter-related Functions



Source: *ASEAN Secretariat’s elaboration based on information extracted from the ASEAN Integration in Services (2015) and ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together (2015).*

With the launch of the AEC and ASCC Blueprints 2025, AQRF will continue to play an important role in facilitating the seamless movement of skilled labour within ASEAN towards a highly integrated and cohesive economy, and human capacity development.

6. BENEFITS OF THE AQRF



The AQRF acts as a communication platform to explain qualifications systems of AMS, which enhances the mutual support between the national qualifications systems in ASEAN and the Quality Assurance Framework. The AQRF has the ability to empower workers and students to facilitate their mobility within ASEAN and beyond.

It also helps to create and deepen an ASEAN zone of trust that facilitate mutual recognition of skills and qualifications that can enhance mobility of jobs and qualified workers in the ASEAN labour market.

The referencing of MQF to the AQRF offers great potential in strengthening the quality and profile of the Malaysian higher education system as it facilitates the interconnection and interoperability of the national system with other education systems on the basis of common regional understanding and trust.



STRUCTURE OF THE AQRF REFERENCING REPORT

1. Introduction

- Status of the referencing report (e.g. edition)
- Executive Summary
 - Summary of the level-to-level referencing process results and in meeting the 11 AQRF Referencing Criteria
 - Description on the preparation of the referencing report
 - Statement of endorsement of the referencing report by stakeholders involved in the process

2. Response to the 11 AQRF Referencing Criteria

3. Future Plans and Next Steps

- Describe plans and strategies in the development and implementation of NQF
- Highlight the expected challenges and strategies to address the challenges
- Expected impact of referencing to the AQRF on users of NQF

4. Annexes

- List of stakeholders involved in the referencing process and preparation
- Reviews from stakeholders and statement from international experts and observers from other AMS
- Mapping of NQF to the AQRF

5. Glossary

6. References

GLOSSARY

Accreditation	The official approval of achievement standards, including qualifications or unit(s) of a qualification, usually for a particular period of time, as being able to meet particular requirements defined by an accrediting agency.
Accredited qualifications	Qualifications which have been granted approval by an accrediting agency or organisation as having met specific requirements or standards of quality.
Accrediting agency	Accrediting agencies are those competent bodies (such as national qualifications agencies, national accreditation agencies, official review boards or other nationally approved bodies or agencies with the responsibility to approve qualifications) that manage program and qualifications accreditation under national legislation. Accrediting agencies function within a quality assurance system.
Achievement standards (in education and training)	<p>Statement approved and formalised by a competent body, which defines the rules to follow in a given context or the results to be achieved.</p> <p>A distinction can be made between competency, educational, occupational, assessment, validation or certification standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • competency standard refers to the knowledge, skills and/or competencies linked to practicing a job; • educational standard refers to statements of learning objectives, content of curricula, entry requirements and resources required to meet learning objectives • occupational standard refers to statements of activities and tasks related to a specific job and to its practice; • assessment standard refers to statements of learning outcomes to be assessed and methodology used; • validation standard refers to statements of level of achievement to be reached by the person assessed, and the methodology used; • certification standard refers to statements of rules applicable to obtaining a qualification (e.g. certificate or diploma) as well as the rights conferred (CEDEFOP, 2011: 174 - 175).
ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework	A common reference framework which functions as a device to enable comparisons of qualifications across ASEAN Member States (AMS).
Certifying and/or awarding body	Body issuing qualifications (e.g. certificates, diplomas or titles) formally recognising the achievement of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) of an individual, following an assessment and validation procedure (CEDFOP, 2011: 15).
Competence	Competence is an ability that extends beyond the possession of knowledge and skills. It includes: i) cognitive competence involving the use of theory and concepts, as well as informal tacit knowledge gained experientially; ii) functional competence (skills or know-how), those things that a person should be able to do when they work in a given area; iii) personal competence involving knowing how to conduct oneself in a

	specific situation; and iv) ethical competence involving the possession of certain personal and professional values (OECD, 2007: 23).
Credit	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 (OECD, 2007: 23).
Education Sectors	Main subgroups within education and training e.g., schools, technical and vocational education, and higher education.
Informal learning	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 (CEDEFOP, 2011: 85).
Learning outcomes	Clear statements of what a learner can be expected to know, understand and/or do as a result of a learning experience.
Level descriptor	A general statement that summarises the learning outcomes appropriate to a specific level in a qualifications framework. They are usually grouped in domains of learning.
Lifelong learning	All learning activity undertaken throughout life, which results in improving knowledge, know-how, skills, competences and/or qualifications for personal, social and/or professional reasons (CEDEFOP, 2011: 85).
National Qualifications Framework	Instrument for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria or criteria for levels of learning achieved. This set of criteria may be implicit in the qualifications descriptors themselves or made explicit in the form of a set of level descriptors. The scope of frameworks may be comprehensive of all learning achievement and pathways or may be confined to a particular sector, e.g., initial education, adult education and training, or an occupational area. Some frameworks may have more design elements and a tighter structure than others; some may have a legal basis whereas others represent a consensus of views of social partners (OECD, 2007: 22).
Non-formal learning	Learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view (CEDEFOP, 2011: 113).
Programme	The arrangements made for the teaching and learning of a body of knowledge, set of skills and of wider competences. A learning programme can lead to a qualification.
Provider	An organisation that plans and delivers education/training and assessment services that often leads to the award of qualifications or components of qualifications.
Qualification	A formal certificate issued by an official agency, 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 workplace experience and/or a program of study. A qualification confers official recognition of value in the labour market and in further education and training (OECD, 2007: 21-22).
Qualifications Framework	Instrument for development and classification of qualifications (at national or sectoral levels) according to a set of criteria (such as using descriptors) applicable to specified levels of learning outcomes (CEDFOP, 2011: 130).
Qualifications system	This includes all aspects of a country's activity that result in the recognition of learning. These systems include the means of developing and operationalising national or regional policy on qualifications, institutional arrangements, quality assurance processes, assessment and awarding processes, skills recognition and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. Qualifications systems may be more or less integrated and coherent. One feature of a qualifications system may be an explicit framework of qualifications (OECD, 2007: 22).
Quality assurance	<p>A component of quality management which is “focused on providing confidence that quality requirements will be fulfilled” (ISO 9000:2005, Clause 3.2.11).</p> <p>In relation to education and training services, it refers to planned and systematic processes that provide confidence in the design, delivery and award of qualifications within an education and training system. It ensures that stakeholders’ interests and investment in any accredited program are protected.</p>
Quality assurance framework	A set of principles, guidelines, tools and standards that act as a reference for guiding the consistent application of quality assurance activities.
Quality indicators	Formally recognised figures or ratios used as yardsticks to judge and assess quality performance (CEDEFOP, 2011: 141).
Quality principles	Overall intentions and direction of a quality framework or an organisation with regard to quality assurance.
Quality standards	Technical specifications which are measurable and have been drawn up by consensus and approved by an organisation recognised at regional, national or international levels. The purpose of quality standards is optimisation of input and/or output of learning (CEDEFOP, 2011: 153).
Quality assurance system	<p>This includes all aspects of a country's activity related to assuring the quality of education and training. These systems include the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear and measurable objectives and standards, guidelines for implementation, including stakeholder involvement, • appropriate resources, • consistent evaluation methods, associating self-assessment and external review, • feedback mechanisms and procedures for improvement, and • widely-accessible evaluation results.

Referencing	A process that results in the establishment of a relationship between the national qualifications framework and that of a regional qualifications framework.
Regional qualifications framework	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.
Registering agency	Competent bodies responsible for approving education and training providers, e.g., national qualifications agencies, official review boards or other nationally approved bodies or agencies. Registering agencies function within a quality assurance system.
Registration of providers	<p>Registration processes include formal acknowledgement by a registering agency that a provider meets relevant quality standards. Under NQFs it is usual for a provider to be registered in order to deliver and assess accredited programs and issue awards.</p> <p>Some agencies differentiate between the two processes, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • formal acknowledgement that the provider meets key generic standards • formal acknowledgement that the provider meets specific standards related to the provision of teaching, learning and assessment of a specific program. <p>For the purpose of the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework, registration of providers is the term used for both processes.</p>
Standard (in education and training)	Statement approved and formalised by a competent body, which defines the rules to be followed in a given context or the results to be achieved. Also refer to Achievement Standards.
Transparency	The degree to which a qualifications system can be understood by users. It depends on the clarity of the meaning of a qualification (outcomes, content, levels, standards, awards). It implies the exchange of information about qualifications in an accessible way within and outside the country of award. When transparency is achieved, it is possible to compare the value and content of qualifications at national and international level.
Validation of learning outcomes	Confirmation by a competent body that learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competencies) acquired 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 achievement standards, including qualifications or unit(s) of a qualification. Validation typically leads to certification (CDEDFOP, 2011: 201). This includes the notion of recognition of prior learning (RPL) or accreditation of prior learning.

Source: *Information extracted from the endorsed AQRF.*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

APEC (2009), "Mapping Qualifications Framework across APEC Economies", APEC Secretariat, Singapore, https://apec.org/-/media/APEC/Publications/2009/6/Mapping-Qualifications-Frameworks-across-APEC-Economies-June-2009/09_hrd_mappin_qualifn.pdf

ASEAN (2015), "ASEAN 2025: Forging Ahead Together", ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta, <https://www.asean.org/storage/2015/12/ASEAN-2025-Forging-Ahead-Together-final.pdf>

ASEAN (2007), "The ASEAN Charter," ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta, <https://asean.org/storage/images/archive/publications/ASEAN-Charter.pdf>

ASEAN (2008), "ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint", ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta, <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/archive/5187-10.pdf>

ASEAN (2016), "ASEAN Guiding Principles for Quality Assurance and Recognition of Competency Certification Systems", ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta <https://asean.org/storage/2012/05/Guiding-Principles-for-Quality-Assurance-and-Recognition-of-Competency-C...pdf>

ASEAN (2015), "ASEAN Integration in Services", ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta. [http://www.asean.org/storage/2015/12/ASEAN-Integration-in-Services-\(Dec%202015\).pdf](http://www.asean.org/storage/2015/12/ASEAN-Integration-in-Services-(Dec%202015).pdf)

ASEAN (n.d.), ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework, <https://asean.org/asean-economic-community/sectoral-bodies-under-the-purview-of-aem/services/asean-qualifications-reference-framework/>

ASEAN (2015), "ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework", --, <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/ED-02-ASEAN-Qualifications-Reference-Framework-January-2016.pdf>

ASEAN (2016), "ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework Governance and Structure Document," --, <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/ED-01-AQRF-Governance-and-Structure-document.pdf>

ASEAN (2017), "Briefing Paper No. 1 - Qualifications Frameworks and Quality Assurance Systems", *Briefing Paper*, No. 1, ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta, <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/AQRFC-2-23-BP-No.-1-on-QFs-and-QAS-for-publicationrev-26-June-2017.pdf>

ASEAN (2016), "Concept Note No. 1 - Non-formal and Informal Learning", *Concept Note*, No. 1, ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta, <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/DD-02-Concept-Note-1-on-AQRF-Non-formal-and-informal-learning-January-2016.pdf>

ASEAN (2016), "Concept Note No. 2 – Learning outcomes and qualifications frameworks", *Concept Note*, No. 2, ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta, <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/DD-03-Concept-Note-2-on-AQRF-learning-outcomes-January-2016.pdf>

ASEAN Secretariat (2015), "Factsheet: the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework," --, <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/00-Fact-Sheet-on-AQRF-May-2015.pdf>

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) (2011), "Glossary: Quality in education and training", CEDEFOP, Luxembourg, www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/4106

ISO (2005), "ISO 9000:2005 - Quality management systems - Fundamentals and vocabulary," ISO, Geneva, <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/#iso:std:iso:9000:ed-3:v1:en>

OECD (2007), "Qualifications Systems - Bridges to Lifelong Learning," OECD Publishing, Paris.

UNESCO (2015), "Level-setting and recognition of learning outcomes: The use of level descriptors in the twenty-first century", UNESCO, Paris, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002428/242887e.pdf>