UNESCO’s work in the recognition of qualifications and competences transnationally

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Global inventory of regional and national qualifications frameworks (1)

Context:

- Increased globalization of LM and education systems
- Need for readability of qualifications at national and international levels: supports international mobility and lifelong learning of workers and learners
- Only a handful of countries had NQFS before the 2000 More than 140 were working on/implementing NQFs by the end of 2012

What?

- An interagency initiative: ETF, Cedefop, UIL and UNESCO

Objective?

- To **monitor and map global and regional qualification reforms** and discuss key trends and policy issues emerging from qualifications framework reforms and development around the world
### Key findings of the 2019 edition:

- More than 150 countries developing NQFs.

- **Learning outcomes – common conceptual basis of almost all QFs** – a significant trend worldwide.

- Comprehensive frameworks – including all levels and types of qualifications are gaining grounds in Europe and elsewhere.

- NQFs provide visible structures and common standards **to support recognition and validation of non-formal learning**.

- NQFs **influence quality assurance and strengthen focus on learning outcomes**. Quality assurance may be integrated in NQFs or linked to them.

- **Several regional frameworks (RQF) at different stages of development and implementation**: EQF, SADCFQ, CARICOM, ASEAN, Commonwealth countries etc.

- Growing digitisation of education and credentials - digital technology is also expected to offer new credentialing methods and systems that can capture, recognise and validate a broader range of learning outcomes in the era of lifelong learning.
Overview of some of the RQFs currently being developed/implemented and covered by the global inventory

- The Association of Southeast Asian Nations Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) - ASEAN
- The CARICOM Qualifications Framework (CQF) - CARICOM
- The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) - European Union
- The Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF) - Pacific Community
- Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCFQF) - SADC
- Harmonizing the Economic community of west african states (Ecowas) qualifications systems - Ecowas
History
Stems from the ASEAN Charter and the ASEAN Economic Blueprint both signed in 2007. The AQRF was completed and the document containing its principles and structure was endorsed in 2016.

Coverage
ASEAN countries (10 Southeast Asian countries)

Objective
The AQRF is a common reference framework that enables comparisons of educational qualifications across the ASEAN countries and thus the mobility of workers/learners.

The AQRF aims to support and enhance NQFs.
In the long term, the AQRF is expected to serve as a meta-framework to support recognition of its levels against other regional qualifications frameworks as well as support inter-regional recognition.

TAXONOMY
The AQRF includes a set of regional level descriptors and will, in the future, allow ASEAN countries to link the levels of their NQFs to the ASEAN framework.
The 8 level descriptors cover two domains: knowledge and skills (demonstration of knowledge and skills); and application and responsibility (the contexts in which knowledge and skills are demonstrated).

Current state of implementation
Four ASEAN countries have completed the referencing of their NQF to AQRF (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand)

ASEAN countries are at different stages in the development of their NQF. The RQF aims to be a neutral influence on national qualifications frameworks although it seeks to promote higher quality qualification systems at the national level: the AQRF respects the Member States’ specific structures and processes that are responsive to national priorities
The CARICOM Qualifications Framework (CQF)

History
In 2012 Caricom developed a draft regional qualifications framework (CQF). The CQF was approved in Georgetown, Guyana in 2017.

Coverage
Caricom countries (20 Caribbean nations)

Objective
The CQF was designed as a ‘reference point’ to facilitate mobility of learners and recognition and accreditation of qualifications within the region. The CQF also aims to provide sufficient independent data to improve the transparency of qualifications, both regionally and internationally.

TAXONOMY
The CQF is informed by the principles of the ‘ideal Caribbean citizen’ as defined by Caricom and is based on 10 generic level descriptors. Five domains are used at each level:

a. knowledge and understanding;
b. application and practice;
c. communication, numeracy and ICT;
d. life skills;
and e. autonomy, accountability and working with others.

Current state of implementation
At present, several Caricom countries have established national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) while others are still in the initial stages of NQF development. Guidelines for NQF development have been produced by the Caricom Secretariat.

UNESCO organized a regional workshop on strengthening the capacities of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean for the development of National Qualifications Systems in 2019.
The European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

**History**
The European qualifications framework (EQF) came into force in 2008.

**Coverage**
EU Member States and neighbouring countries (39 countries)

**Objective**
Common reference point for comparing qualifications across national and institutional borders and making them easier to understand, both for study and working purposes.

**TAXONOMY**
**Eight learning-outcomes-based levels**, ranging from basic (level 1) to most advanced (level 8). Each level is defined in terms of knowledge, skills, and responsibility and autonomy

**Current state of implementation**
Ten EQF referencing criteria and procedures have been set up to help ensure that NQFs are linked to the EQF in a coherent and transparent way.

The EQF has acted as a catalyst for development of learning-outcomes-based NQFs and contributed to changes in the qualifications landscape in Europe. In the 39 countries currently cooperating on EQF implementation, 43 NQFs using explicit levels of learning outcomes have been established or are being developed.

Qualifications documents (certificates and diplomas, and/or Europass certificate and diploma supplements) have started to include EQF/NQF levels in 27 countries
The Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF)

History
Notion of a Pacific qualifications register was first mooted in 2001 at the Pacific Islands Ministers of Education Forum
Establishment of a dedicated unit within the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA) to champion the development of the Pacific qualifications register in 2009

Coverage
15 countries from the Pacific Community

Objective
Initial expectation of a Pacific qualifications framework (PQF) was to achieve a regional commitment to continually improving the quality of all forms of Pacific education and training
The PQF is a common reference framework that is linked to the Pacific register of qualifications and standards (PRQS). The PQF supports the current international move to outcomes-based learning. This is expected to shift the focus from teaching and delivery to learner achievement and learning outcomes.

TAXONOMY
The PQF includes a set of 10 level descriptors. The level descriptors include three domains: knowledge and skills; application (deconstructed to type and problem solving); and autonomy (deconstructed to level of support and degree of judgement).

Current state of implementation
Both the register and the framework are underpinned by a set of quality assurance standards for agencies as well as minimum standards for providers and programmes: the Pacific quality assurance framework (PQAF)

A number of countries have made progress in developing their own NQFs while some others have aligned theirs with other existing QFs (New Zealand’s) or adopted the PQF as theirs (Kiribati and Tuvalu notably).
The Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF)

**History**

After much preliminary work, the SADCQF was officially launched in 2017. It is a comprehensive regional qualifications framework for schooling, TVET and higher education.

**Coverage**

Southern Africa Development Community countries (16)

**Objective**

Ease mobility of learners and workers across the region and internationally. Member States have agreed to align their qualifications and QA mechanisms with those of the SADCQF.

All new qualification certificates, diplomas and other credentials issued by competent authorities throughout the region will need to include the SADCQF relevant level.

The implementation of the SADCQF includes 6 programmes, each being overseen by a distinct Member State: (1) development and alignment; (2) quality assurance; (3) verification; (4) communication and advocacy; (5) recognition of prior learning, credit accumulation and transfer, and articulation; and (6) governance

**TAXONOMY**

The SADCQF includes a set of **10 level descriptors**. The level descriptors include **three domains**: knowledge; skills; and autonomy and responsibility.

**Current state of implementation**

Regional QA and RPL guidelines were established to ensure consistency across SADC (respectively in 2008 and in 2016)

Countries are currently piloting the alignment of their national qualifications frameworks or national qualifications systems with the SADCQF. South Africa and Seychelles have completed the alignment of their respective NQFs to the SADCQF in 2019.
Harmonizing the Economic community of west african states (Ecowas) qualifications systems

History
Two reference documents were published in 2003 by Ecowas: the Protocol on education and training and its annex on the equivalence of certificates.

Coverage
Ecowas countries (15 West African States)

Objective
Assessment of knowledge, skills and competences and their recognition; for (re-)entering the formal education and training system and/or the labour market. This approach aims at facilitating geographical, occupational and social mobility.

Current state of implementation
There is already a set of arrangements and initiatives between neighbouring countries that aim to facilitate labour mobility and the recognition and use of qualifications between countries in the region.

The Ecowas Commission and UNESCO launched a new initiative to strengthen the capacities of its Member States in reforming qualifications systems while adopting a combined national and regional perspective in 2018. The initiative may lead to the development of a regional qualifications framework as adopted in other regions in the world.

In the context of this initiative, focal points from ECOWAS countries have so far met at three workshops organised by UNESCO.
The World Reference Levels (WRLs)

The WRL consists of three elements

ELEMENTS OF CAPABILITY OR COMPETENCE
1. Responsibilities
2. Working with others
3. Quality improvement
4. Skills and procedures
5. Communication
6. Accessing and using data
7. Knowledge and know-how
8. Context
9. Problems and issues
10. Values
11. Activities

STAGES OF PROGRESSION
Levels of achievement for each element (4 x 2 levels)

INDICATORS OF PROGRESSION
Definitions of 51 key terms
Background:

- The same qualifications from different countries can differ quite considerably with regard to the scope of the learning outcomes.
- No global skills recognition framework.
- Third International Congress on TVET, 2012: to consider a set of world reference levels (WRLs) to facilitate the international recognition of TVET qualifications.
- UNESCO has since then been engaged in leading the process of development of WRLs in collaboration with external partners. An expert group has been meeting regularly since 2014 (the latest meeting took place in April 2021).

Objective:

- To translate any outcomes-based qualification, credential, set of entry requirements, job specification or framework level into an internationally recognised form of description.
- The output is a concise report and a graphical profile in a format that contains key information on the qualifications or outcomes-based achievements, obtained, expected or required, using the WRL common language.

How?

Based on a conceptual analysis of NQFs, RQFs, sectoral frameworks, competence frameworks, job specifications, programme entry requirements etc.
World Reference Levels – the graphical profile

- The answers are used to create a **graphical WRL profile**: a graphical representation, element by element of the outcomes of a qualification/credential, entry/work role requirements, or a framework level.

- Throughout the process, users are also **asked to enter the evidence which supports the matching, and this is used to create a more detailed report.**

Excerpt from a graphical WRL profile created for the WorldSkills Occupational Standard for Electrical Installations.
The WRLs Digital Tool - breakdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8 STAGES</th>
<th>A1</th>
<th>A2</th>
<th>B1</th>
<th>B2</th>
<th>C1</th>
<th>C2</th>
<th>D1</th>
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- The WRL App uses **11 Elements of Capability**.
  Elements are descriptions of different kinds of individual capability described in outcome statements. They use the concepts which are commonly combined to define the levels in qualification and skills frameworks to create a description in WRL terms.

- Each element is described at **8 Stages of Progression**.
  Users are asked, element-by-element, to decide which stage is the best match for the outcomes of their qualification/credential, entry/work role requirements, or framework level.
  - **Level A**: essential demands of modern society, learning and work (basic studies and simple work roles).
  - **Level B**: end of compulsory education to entry to tertiary or higher education studies. In work terms - relatively independent, but routine, work roles to skilled work and supervisory roles.
  - **Level C**: first cycle of tertiary or higher education or the work roles of paraprofessionals, junior professionals, specialists and managers.
  - **Level D**: advanced intellectual and occupational capabilities. It includes outcomes associated with the second and third cycles of higher education, and the activities and responsibilities of independent specialists, technologists, analysts, and executives with extensive and/or strategic responsibilities.

The **WRL Directory** contains definitions and explanations of the **51 terms** which indicate changes of technical difficulty, scope or autonomy.
Evolution of the WRLs

First WRLs: paper form – piloted in 2017

Creation of the Digital Tool in 2019 (v2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>Flemish Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education, Qualifications and Study Allowances</td>
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<td>Latvia</td>
<td>Academic Information Centre</td>
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<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>Ad hoc team of expert and social partners</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT)</td>
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<td>Poland</td>
<td>Educational Research Institute</td>
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<td>South Africa</td>
<td>South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)</td>
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<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Swedish Council for Higher Education (UHR)</td>
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<td>Russia</td>
<td>WorldSkills Union of Young professionals</td>
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<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Vocational Qualifications Authority, Turkish Qualifications Framework (TQF)</td>
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<td>UK: Scotland</td>
<td>Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Partnership</td>
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<td>Global: Scotland</td>
<td>Offshore Petroleum Industry Training Organisation (OPITO)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Global</td>
<td>World Skills International (WSI)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In 2019, organisations from 10 countries piloted the Digital Tool with different types of qualifications and other credentials and outcome specifications.

Next steps and potential applications:
- Development of a v2.5 of the WRLs Digital Tool (currently v2.4) after further testing of the current one.
- Support the WHO Academy Quality, Standards and Credentialing team’s vision for a global credentialing framework for learning recognition within lifelong learning for/on health in the context of the development of the WHO Academy.
- Further test the WRL outcome analysis approach with bodies responsible for QFs.
Other activities undertaken to support the development of QFs

- Recent publications

  - The Mahe Process, an initiative geared towards strengthening TVET in Eastern Africa supported by the UNESCO Regional Office for Eastern Africa, since 2016. Among other things, the process aims to harmonize qualifications across countries (through a referencing process) and develop guidelines for quality assurance.

  - Upcoming publication: “Towards a universal definition of micro-credentials” - coming to a consensus on a universal definition: an attempt to distill what experts “agree that they agree on” so far about micro-credentials
Thank you

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