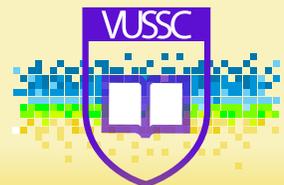


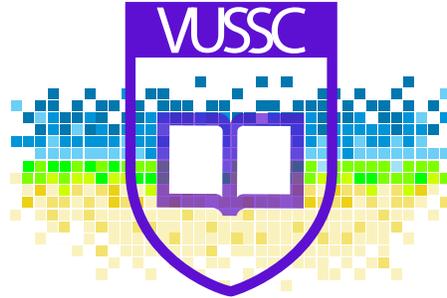


COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

Referencing Tool

Transnational Qualifications
Framework of the Virtual University
for Small States of
the Commonwealth





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June 2017

Referencing Tool for the Transnational Qualifications Framework of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Governments to encourage the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies.



Commonwealth of Learning, 2017

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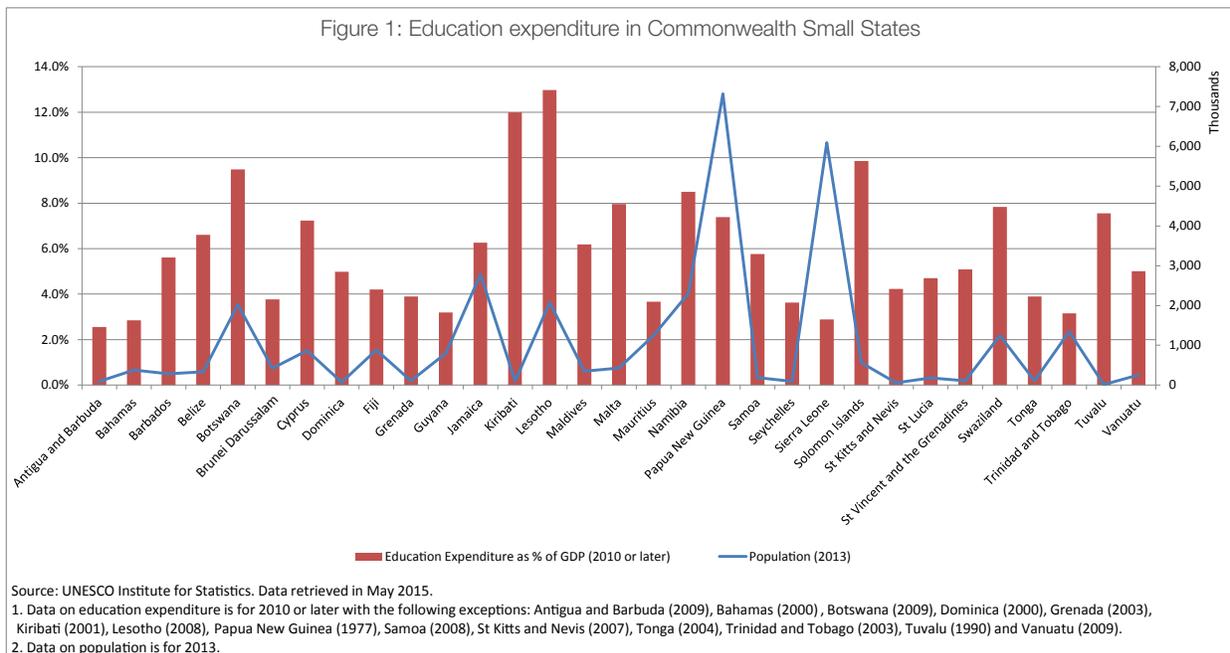
1 INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Establishment of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth

The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) was conceived by Education Ministers from small states during their triennial meeting in Halifax, Canada, in 2000 (COL & SAQA 2008:5). In 2003, after completing the preparatory work, the Ministers agreed on the establishment of the VUSSC, which was conceptualised as a network rather than an institution. The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) was tasked to oversee the VUSSC and to assist countries to collaborate and strengthen the capacity of existing national education institutions. The concept of sharing programmes

of study, based on the use of creative commons copyright licenses, was a fundamental principle from the start.

The VUSSC spans member states from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe and the Pacific regions. The member states are: Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Cyprus, Dominica, Fiji, The Gambia, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Kiribati, Lesotho, Maldives, Malta, Mauritius, Namibia, Papua New Guinea, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Swaziland, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The total population of the small states is about 32 million, with an average educational expenditure of 6% of GDP.



A Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF) was developed for the VUSSC in 2010. Importantly, the TQF was not developed to replace or review existing qualifications frameworks in the small states, but rather to serve in the main as a translation instrument between the national systems of the diverse countries making up the small states of the Commonwealth. The intention behind the development of the TQF as a translation instrument was to provide a means whereby qualification frameworks can be compared and related, thus creating an impetus for the transfer of courses, qualifications and learners between countries. According to COL (2015: 8) the TQF is:

...a translation instrument for the classification of VUSSC qualifications according to set criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, to improve credit transfer and promote common accreditation mechanisms between participating VUSSC states.

The TQF is an anomaly in that it is not a regional qualifications framework in the conventional sense. Regional developments in Europe and Southeast Asia in particular have resulted in meta-frameworks that contain none of their own qualifications, but are entirely reliant on the qualifications registered on the national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) of member states. The TQF, on the other hand, registers qualifications that are associated with the VUSSC and are captured on the TQF portal; in some, but not all, cases these qualifications are also registered on the NQFs of member states. Some small states do not have NQFs and view the TQF as a mechanism to enhance the credibility of

their qualifications. In this sense the VUSSC, with its Management Committee, acts as a proxy for the collaboration between the small states of the Commonwealth and the global community. Unlike Europe and Southeast Asia which rely on regional bodies such as the European Commission and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to play a collaborative role, the small states of the Commonwealth opted, with guidance from COL, to establish the VUSSC to fulfil this important function. A further complication, however, is that the small states of the Commonwealth are distributed across the globe and in some instances are also associated with a specific regional qualifications framework (RQF). This interrelationship between NQFs, RQFs and the TQF requires careful negotiation and is described through the referencing process, criteria and guidelines presented in this document.

As an example, national institutions from small states that wish to offer educational programmes that are co-branded with VUSSC have to have these programmes approved by the institution, the national qualifications authority and, where applicable, the regional qualifications body. Programmes of institutions in countries without qualifications authorities or agencies can also be considered for registration on the TQF on the condition that the qualifications are quality assured in the country of origin. Qualifications that meet these requirements are captured with their accreditation status on the TQF portal that is located on the VUSSC website.

Overview of the Transnational Qualifications Framework

The TQF consists of ten levels which are described by a set of level descriptors. Each level of the TQF specifies a minimum number of credits to be achieved and the qualification types that are registered.

Table 1: Overview of the TQF

Levels and descriptors		Minimum credit	Qualification types
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acquire and possess a systematic understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice. Be able to create and interpret new knowledge at a most advanced frontier of a field of work or study through original and advanced research of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline and merit publication. Possess the most advanced and specialised skills and techniques to be able to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge or to solve critical problems or to refute or redefine existing knowledge. Demonstrate authority, innovation, autonomy, integrity and personal responsibility for the production or development of innovative ideas or processes in the context of an academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice. 	360	Doctoral Degree
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have a logical understanding of a body of highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice, as a basis for original thought and/or the conduct of research and/or enquiry. Have a comprehensive understanding of the research skills and/or relevant established techniques applicable to their own research or to advanced scholarship that can be used to create and interpret knowledge. Demonstrate originality in the application of knowledge to solve problems, together with a practical understanding of how knowledge can be managed to transform work or study. Possess a conceptual understanding of how to analyse and critically evaluate current research in their academic discipline, field of study or work and to apply where appropriate to solve problems. 	240	Master's Degree
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have systematic, extensive and comparative knowledge of the key aspects of their academic discipline, field of study or work. Possess an ability to deploy accurately established analytical tools and/or techniques and enquiry within their academic discipline, field of study or work. Be able to use their knowledge, understanding and skills of a wide range of concepts, ideas and information to devise and sustain arguments and/or to solve problems. Display a critical understanding of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge and how it is developed. Possess the ability to manage their own learning and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (e.g. referred research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline). 	120	Postgraduate Certificate and Diploma; Bachelor Degree with Honours

Levels and descriptors		Minimum credit	Qualification types
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have advanced knowledge of a field of work or study involving a critical understanding of the well-established principles and including an understanding of some advanced aspect(s) of their area(s) of their field of work or study; where appropriate, the application of those principles in an employment context. • Have an understanding of the limits of that knowledge and how this influences analysis and interpretation based on that knowledge. • Possess advanced skills demonstrating mastery and innovation required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in their specialised field of work or study. • Be able to manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision making in unpredictable work or study contexts. 	360	Bachelor Degree; Graduate Certificate and Diploma
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possess an in-depth knowledge and critical understanding of the ideas, concepts and principles in their field of work or study. • Have knowledge of the methods of enquiry in the subject and use a range of techniques to initiate and undertake critical analysis of information, proposing solutions to problems arising from that analysis. • Demonstrate an ability to critically evaluate and apply the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems. • Apply those concepts and principles more widely, have an understanding of the limits of their knowledge and how this influences analyses and interpretations. • Effectively communicate information, arguments and analysis in a variety of forms to specialist and non-specialist audiences and deploy key techniques of the discipline effectively. • Have the qualities necessary for employment in situations requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and decision-making. 	240	Advanced/ Higher Diploma; Associate Degree/ Foundation Degree
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have broad knowledge and understanding of the main underlying ideas, concepts and principles in a field of work or study. • Be able to use their knowledge, understanding and skills to critically evaluate and determine appropriate methods and procedures to respond to a range of problems of a generally routine nature. • Display qualities and transferable knowledge and skills necessary for employment in situations requiring the exercise of some personal responsibility. • Communicate the result of their field of study or work accurately and reliably using a range of different modalities. • Identify and articulate their own learning needs within defined contexts and undertake guided further learning in new areas. 	240	Diploma
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a broad knowledge and understanding of the main underlying concepts and principles in a field of work or study. • Demonstrate a basic understanding of the major theories, principles, ideas and concepts of their particular area of study. • Be able to use different approaches to identify, evaluate and solve problems of a generally routine nature. • Be able to use their knowledge and understanding of a particular subject area to communicate accurately and reliably with structured and coherent arguments. • Use their knowledge, understanding and skills to undertake further learning within a structured and managed environment. • Possess the qualities and transferable skills needed for employment in situations requiring the exercise of some personal responsibility. 	120	Advanced Certificate

Levels and descriptors		Minimum credit	Qualification types
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate knowledge of basic concepts and principles in a field of work or study. • Have command of analytical interpretation of information. • Express informed judgment. • Be able to display a range of known responses to familiar problems. 	40	Certificate III
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate a narrow range of applied knowledge and basic comprehension in a field of work or study. • Display a narrow range of skills in a field of work or study. • Be able to use known solutions. 	40	Certificate II
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate basic literacy and numeracy skills. 	40	Certificate I

The Transnational Qualifications Framework as a translation device

In order to use the TQF as a translation device, small states are required to “reference” their NQFs to the TQF. Referencing is a methodology used to compare qualifications frameworks and, by implication, the level descriptors associated with each framework. Drawing on the methodology as employed in the European context, the following definition is used (CEDEFOP 2011: 6):

Referencing is the process that results in the establishment of a relationship between the levels of national qualifications, usually defined in terms of a national qualifications framework, and the levels of the EQF. Through this process, national authorities responsible for qualifications systems, in cooperation with stakeholders responsible for developing and using qualifications, define the correspondence between the national qualifications system and the eight levels of the EQF.

Fundamental to the referencing process is the principle of mutual trust, which entails both technical reliability and consensus amongst

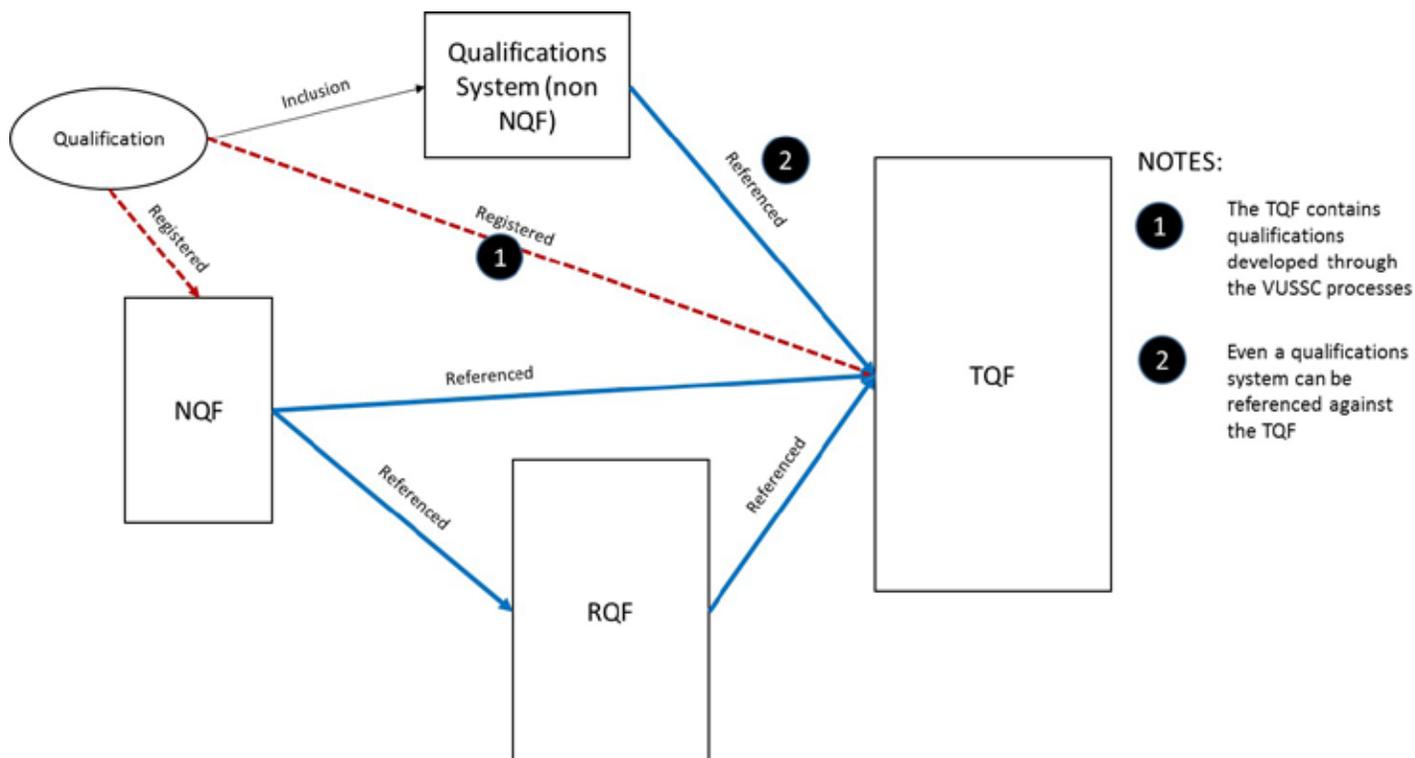
stakeholders and the way in which that consensus is rooted in custom and practice. The credibility of the consensus is based on agreement among role-players in charge of qualifications and certification processes and among those using the qualifications (employers and learners) (SADC 2017).

However, in many instances, small states do not have established NQFs; in such cases, the country can reference its national qualifications system to the TQF, or at the very least, participate in the development of VUSSC qualifications that are registered on the TQF. In this regard, the development of the TQF presents a second anomaly. The first anomaly of the TQF (mentioned above) is that it registers qualifications that are associated with the VUSSC and are captured on the TQF portal, whereas other transnational and regional qualifications frameworks contain none of their own qualifications, but act entirely as “meta-frameworks” that facilitate the comparison of qualifications and qualifications frameworks of member states and of member states and countries outside of the region. The second anomaly is that “referencing” is used in a broader sense than in the CEDEFOP (2011) definition above in that qualifications systems (i.e. non-NQF systems) can also be referenced against the TQF. Very specific

use of the terms “registration” and “referencing” is required to make these features of the TQF more explicit. These anomalies are further

elaborated in the referencing principles and criteria described in the following sections and illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 2: Referencing, registration and capturing within the TQF



Programmes that form the basis of qualifications to be registered on the TQF are developed by means of VUSSC “boot camps”. The programmes that are developed in this way are made available to member states. However, when these courses/programmes are to be offered to learners, quality assurance must be carried out by the relevant national quality assurance agency (NQAA) in the country in which the programme is offered.

The overall aim of referencing the NQFs of small states to the TQF is to increase the transparency of the education and training systems of all the VUSSC countries, support lifelong learning and promote qualification mobility. In this regard, the VUSSC countries agreed to create mechanisms to support credit transfer across and between the countries.

For referencing to be effective, each member state must be aware of and understand the overall process of referencing its NQF to the TQF. Referencing is, in essence, a consultative process involving a broad base of stakeholders with communication at its heart. The importance of communication as a basic and essential requirement for the success of any referencing process can never be over-emphasised. Where the expectations and processes are properly communicated, there are bound to be higher levels of understanding and trust. This is important, since mutual trust frames all of the principles set by the TQF, i.e. fairness, transparency, integrity, equity and access. Equally, mutual trust stems from agreement among all stakeholders who are benefiting or involved in the referencing process.

As indicated above, the TQF is a comprehensive framework which comprises ten levels (with concomitant level descriptors premised on a learning outcomes-based approach) spanning qualifications achieved at the end of compulsory education to those awarded at the highest level of academic, professional or vocational education, i.e. from Certificates to Doctoral Degrees. The TQF also includes a set of quality assurance guidelines that are intended to be flexible and to provide direction, as opposed to being prescriptive. The quality assurance guidelines are essentially premised on the systems of the various national quality assurance agencies, and/or recognised agencies with legitimate status in small states. The TQF guidelines for good practice in quality assurance are based on the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education's *Standards for Quality Assurance in the Higher Education Area* (ENQA 2005) as well as the UNESCO/OECD guidelines on *Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education* (OECD 2005).

The TQF referencing process entails member states referencing their qualifications frameworks firstly to the appropriate RQF (if one exists) and

secondly to the TQF. For example, the Jamaican NQF will first be referenced to the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) RQF and then to the TQF. Provision is made for the referencing to be validated directly by the Transnational Qualifications Framework Management Committee (TQFMC), although this provision is mainly for member states that are not linked to an established RQF.

The next section describes the referencing tool in more detail and consists of the following parts: The first part presents the principles on which the referencing is based. This is followed by the referencing criteria and guidelines. Two templates are provided to facilitate the registration of qualifications on the TQF and also the referencing of qualifications systems, NQFs or RQFs against the TQF. A brief glossary of key terms and a list of acronyms are included.

2 TRANSNATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK PRINCIPLES

Referencing

Referencing aims to establish a relationship between two or more qualifications frameworks. In the case of the TQF, referencing also includes establishing a relationship between a qualifications system and the TQF, even if that qualification system is not an NQF. Such a relationship is informed by comparing, amongst others, levels of the relevant frameworks, level descriptors, learning outcomes, credits, qualification titles and quality assurance mechanisms. Mutual trust is also an important element in the referencing process. In the case of the TQF, referencing results in the establishment of a relationship between the levels of the TQF and those of the member countries' NQFs or qualifications systems.

Translating qualifications to the TQF

The translation of a qualification system or NQF to the TQF occurs on three levels:

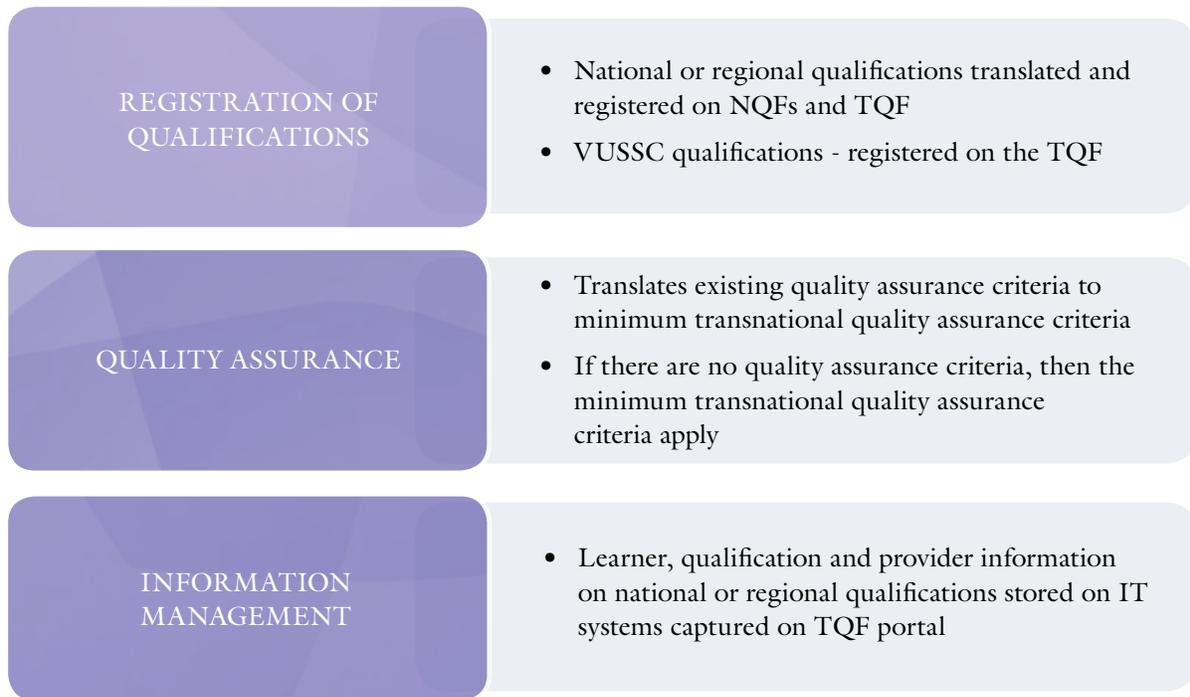
1. registration of qualifications;
2. quality assurance criteria; and
3. information management through the TQF portal.

In the case of the registration of qualifications, the TQF translates the existing level and description of the qualification offered on a national or regional basis (and registered on the relevant NQF or RQF) to the relevant TQF level and format. In a case in which the qualification is not offered nationally or regionally, but only through the VUSSC, the qualification is registered on the TQF and captured on the TQF portal. As indicated, the TQF differs in this regard from other regional qualifications frameworks that typically do not register their own qualifications.

With respect to quality assurance criteria, the TQF translates the existing quality assurance criteria implemented on a national or regional basis (and prescribed within the relevant NQF or RQF) to minimum transnational quality assurance criteria. In a case in which the qualification is not offered nationally or regionally, or where no quality assurance is undertaken, the minimum transnational quality assurance criteria apply.

With respect to the TQF portal, the information of learners, qualifications and providers on a national or regional basis (and located within the IT systems of the relevant NQF or RQF qualifications framework) is captured in the relevant TQF format. Figure 3 illustrates the three levels of the translation process.

Figure 3: Diagrammatic representation of the TQF translation process



Principles underlying the referencing process

Referencing of qualifications systems and NQFs from small states to the TQF is premised on agreed principles. The TQF states that the following elements form the basis for a sound and credible referencing process:

1. Mutual trust
2. Quality assurance
3. Learning outcomes
4. Level descriptors
5. Credits
6. Qualification types

Mutual trust

As already mentioned, mutual trust plays a vital role in the referencing process. The TQF thus takes into consideration issues of mutual

trust when evaluating qualifications for both referencing purposes and registration of qualifications on the TQF. The message behind this principle is stark and urgent. Mutual trust is embodied in the concept of the Commonwealth or “Commonwealth of Nations” which describes relationships between member nations and is premised on the ideals of freedom for all, democracy, equality, autonomy and sovereignty. In other words, mutual trust is what glues the Commonwealth together. In addition, it can be argued that absence of trust will negate the purpose of the TQF. Member states are thus expected to have a shared commitment to the building of mutual trust between national education and training systems. In Europe this found expression in the Bologna process (European Commission 2008).

Mutual trust among the education systems of the Commonwealth member states can be promoted by a commitment to transparency, the development of a shared understanding and working together. Mutual trust enhances and facilitates recognition of qualifications awarded

and courses studied in another national system. Without trust, the mobility of students and the portability of qualifications are constrained. Since the VUSSC relies on a “soft law” mechanism such as guidelines and not on laws per se, mutual trust is even more important.

In order to achieve transparency, the recognition of a wide range of qualifications in the drive towards lifelong learning must be accommodated in an easy-to-understand format. Shared understanding which makes it possible to place a qualification on a particular level based on available evidence is also required. This “best fit” principle entails building consensus among stakeholders on important and central elements of qualifications and their levels. Arguably, referencing, which is based on the best fit philosophy, assumes both technical and social dimensions.

Quality assurance

There is little doubt that quality assurance is a basic tenet of the referencing process. Quality assurance aims at providing confidence that quality requirements are fulfilled within the context of education and training. Quality assurance refers, in the main, to “planned and systematic processes that provide confidence in educational services provided by training providers under the remit of national authorities to ensure that set standards are met” (Bateman and Coles 2013: 5).

The TQF subscribes to the principles of quality assurance as a requirement for referencing and the TQFMC acknowledges the challenges faced by the member states in this regard (COL 2015). These challenges include the need to manage the increased mobility of highly skilled professionals as globalisation impacts also on small states, which are particularly prone to become “sending countries” that supply more developed and larger countries with skilled professionals. More transparent quality assurance mechanisms, specifically translated through referencing processes, potentially facilitate the recognition of the skills, knowledge and competences of these

professionals in the “receiving countries”. The quality assurance guidelines for the TQF have therefore been tailored to meet these challenges. Although the quality assurance approaches, processes and guidelines for the TQF resemble quality assurance guidelines that are already in existence at the national level, there are some distinct differences, more so since the TQF functions as a translation and linking device for existing systems.

The different types of links and the quality requirements relating to each are specified below.

- The linkages between NQAAs and an RQF, e.g. CARICOM, the Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF) and the SADC RQF via collaborative arrangements amongst countries in that region: such linkages should revolve around collective negotiations of quality assurance in each of the member countries.
- The linkages between NQAAs and the TQF via an RQF or directly: in the absence of an RQF, this linkage would be initially via consensus and negotiation amongst NQAAs and then between the NQAAs and the TQF; agreements would include benchmarks and guidelines for recognition. This relationship is, however, enabling and voluntary rather than prescriptive or regulatory.
- This type of linkage would include guidelines which have been arrived at through consensus and negotiation amongst RQFs, and between RQF and TQF management structures.

Learning outcomes

As a translation mechanism, the TQF promotes the use of learning outcomes as a key feature of qualifications. A learning outcome is defined as a statement of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which is defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence (CEDEFOP 2008) or as a set of knowledge, skills and/or competences an individual has acquired and/

or is able to demonstrate after completion of a learning process, formal, non-formal or informal (European Commission 2008). Learning outcomes not only indicate what a learner is expected to know and do but also give an indication of what is in a qualification so as to inform curricula, teaching, learning and assessment and are linked to professional competency requirements.

Level descriptors

Level descriptors are the outcome of a consultative process at national or regional level. During such consultation, consensus must be reached on some of the following challenges:

- The descriptors must capture how knowledge, skills and competencies increase in complexity, depth and breadth from one level to the next.
- The descriptors must reflect elements of employability.
- The need for and rationale behind the qualification and its socio-economic value for the nation must be clear.
- The descriptors must enable the qualifications framework to be both comprehensive and specific and cover all parts of an education system.
- The level descriptors must have the ability to act as agreed and credible reference points for all stakeholders.
- The descriptors must reflect the intrinsic role of quality assurance in the design of the qualification framework.

The TQF guidelines define level descriptors as “statements describing the characteristics of the generic outcomes of each of the ten levels in the TQF” (COL 2015: 16). These characteristics consist of the knowledge, skills, competences and attributes that participants should possess or be able to demonstrate on completion of a programme, course or module. The guidelines further mention a number of principles

underlying development of the level descriptors. Level descriptors should:

- be broad, generic statements;
- take into account all types and fields of learning;
- be flexible, not prescriptive;
- be linked to TQF levels and associated qualifications frameworks; and
- aid referencing.

Credits

As pointed out in the TQF guidelines,

Credit transfer is an important goal of the TQF. Credit transfer mechanisms are deemed to play an important part in support and development of the TQF[...]. A credit, also referred to as a metric for the amount of learning, is defined by the TQF as a “currency” providing a measure of learning outcomes achieved in notional hours at a given level. One credit represents ten notional hours of learning for the TQF. Credits are awarded for learning that has been achieved and verified through reliable and valid assessment. In the TQF system one credit equates 10 notional hours. Notional learning hours (NLHs) are a token estimate of the time it takes for an average learner to acquire the knowledge, skills and competence required by the qualification. It takes into account not only the guided learning hours (GLHs) but also the time spent by the learner in private study and practice of skills.

Whilst credits are useful to facilitate comparisons across countries, the use of credit as a sole criterion [is] discouraged. Credits alone do not capture the social elements of qualifications and should be read in conjunction with other criteria for the purpose of referencing (COL 2015: 32).

Qualification types

The TQF consists of the qualification types shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Qualification types in the TQF

TQF level	Qualification type	Minimum credits
10	Doctoral Degree	360
9	Master's Degree	240
8	Postgraduate Certificate and Diploma Bachelor Degree with Honours	120
7	Bachelor Degree Graduate Certificate and Diploma	360
6	Advanced/Higher Diploma Associate Degree/Foundation Degree	240
5	Diploma	240
4	Advanced Certificate	120
3	Certificate III	40
2	Certificate II	40
1	Certificate I	40

Source: COL 2015: 32

3 TRANSNATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK CRITERIA

Registering and referencing

The criteria presented in this section form the basis of the main functions of the TQF, namely to:

- *register* qualifications on the TQF that are associated with the VUSSC; and
- act as a translation device when qualifications systems, NQFs and/or RQFs are referenced against the TQF.

The criteria also cover qualifications that are registered on the NQFs of member states and for small states that do not have NQFs, the TQF acts as a proxy for collaboration between the small states of the Commonwealth and the global community.

According to a recent SADC report on the use of level descriptors (SADC 2017), the referencing of national qualifications to regional qualifications requires the support of a regional accrediting body that is recognised and respected by the affiliated countries. The process must also be transparent and consistent if member states are expected to buy into the process. In addition, establishing clear criteria that will help the referencing process will serve to establish the trust that is required to enable countries to follow through. In instances where referencing criteria may not suffice, alternative means such as considering the types of qualifications offered or the learning outcomes stipulated within a qualification level need to be prioritised.

The registration and referencing criteria listed below provide the basis for registering

qualifications on the TQF and for referencing qualifications systems and qualifications frameworks against the TQF.

Registration criteria

1. Only nationally quality assured qualifications shall be registered on the TQF.
2. Verification of the quality assured status is a function that rests with the NQAA or delegated authority.
3. The NQAA shall be responsible for submitting the application for registration of qualifications on the TQF.
4. Where there are no NQAAs, the bodies responsible for the RQF shall submit the application to the TQFMC.
5. Where relevant, all submissions for registration of qualifications should first be verified by the bodies responsible for the RQF.

Referencing criteria

1. There must be a clear and demonstrable link between the qualification system, NQF, and/or the RQF and the TQF in terms of levels and level descriptors.
2. The qualification system, NQF, and/or the RQF must be based on learning outcomes that validate all types of learning.

3. The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the qualification system, registration of qualifications on the NQF, including the placement and level of qualifications must be transparent.
4. The legal status and responsibilities/mandate of the NQAAs or competent public authority within the small states must be clearly determined and published by the competent public authorities.
5. The NQAA or competent public authority within the small states, in collaboration with the TQFMC, shall certify the referencing of the qualification system, NQF or RQF to the TQF.
6. The national quality assurance system must be consultative and public, and consistent with the TQF procedures and guidelines.
7. Qualifications are registered on the TQF by the TQFMC and recorded on the TQF portal. The TQFMC is also responsible for maintaining and publishing the register of qualifications.

4 TRANSNATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK GUIDELINES

Guidelines for education and training providers

1. Ensure that relevant, quality qualifications and services are delivered.
2. Develop, maintain or review current internal quality management systems so that full use of the competencies of stakeholders such as academic staff, administrators and students can be made and full responsibility for delivering education qualifications that are comparable to standards in the home country and across borders can be taken.
3. Cooperate with competent quality assurance and accreditation bodies.
4. Share good practices by participating in sector organisations and inter-institutional networks at national and international levels.
5. Where relevant, use codes of good practice, such as the TQF guidelines.
6. Provide accurate, reliable and easily accessible information on the criteria and procedures of external and internal quality assurance and the academic and professional recognition of qualifications delivered and provide complete descriptions of programmes and qualifications, preferably with descriptions of the knowledge, understanding and skills that a successful student should acquire.
7. Collaborate, especially with quality assurance and accreditation bodies, and with student bodies to facilitate the dissemination of information.
8. Ensure the transparency of the financial status of the education institution and/or educational programme offered.

Guidelines for quality assurance and accreditation bodies

1. Ensure that the quality assurance and accreditation arrangements include national, regional and TQF relationships. This means giving attention to assessment guidelines, ensuring that standards and processes are transparent, consistent and appropriate to take account of the shape and scope of the national education and training system, and adaptability to changes and developments in cross-border provision.
2. Sustain and strengthen the existing regional and international networks, or establish networks in regions that do not have one. These networks can serve as platforms to exchange information and good practice, disseminate knowledge, and increase the understanding of international developments and challenges as well as to improve the professional expertise of staff and quality assessors. These networks could also be used to improve awareness of disreputable providers.
3. Establish links to strengthen the collaboration between the quality assurance bodies of both sending and receiving countries and enhance the mutual understanding of different systems of quality assurance and accreditation.

4. Provide accurate and easily accessible information on the assessment standards, procedures, and effects of the quality assurance mechanisms on the funding of students, institutions or programmes where applicable, as well as the results of the assessment. Quality assurance and accreditation bodies should collaborate with other actors, especially education providers, academic staff, student bodies and academic recognition bodies to facilitate the dissemination of such information.
5. Apply the principles reflected in current international documents on cross border higher education such as the guidelines for the TQF, UNESCO, and the Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education used in the European context.
6. Reach mutual recognition agreements with other bodies on the basis of trust in an understanding of each other's professional practice, and also regularly undergo external evaluations, making full use of the competencies of stakeholders.
7. Consider adoption of procedures for the international composition of peer review panels, international benchmarking of standards, criteria and assessment procedures and undertake joint assessment projects to increase the comparability of evaluation activities of different quality assurance and accreditation bodies.

Guidelines for the TQFMC

1. The TQFMC shall peruse and approve the submissions for referencing of qualifications systems, NQFs and RQFs to the TQF.
2. The TQFMC shall peruse and approve the submissions for registration of qualifications on the TQF and approve their recording on the TQF portal.
3. Upon approval of the submission of a qualification, the TQFMC will allocate a unique registration number for each qualification.

5 CONCLUDING NOTE

In order to strengthen its processes and to ensure that the credibility and understanding of the referencing process of the TQF is trusted by stakeholders in all Commonwealth member states and other participating countries, the TQFMC developed procedures and guidelines for the VUSSC in 2008 (COL and SAQA 2008). In 2015 the procedures and guidelines for the VUSSC were reviewed and revised, based on international

benchmarks in the education sector (COL 2015). The referencing tool presented in the current document is an extension of the procedures and guidelines document, with a specific focus on the registration of qualifications on the TQF and the referencing of qualifications systems, NQFs and RQFs against the TQF.

6 TRANSNATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Qualification Information

- 1.1 Qualification Title _____
- 1.2 Date the Qualification was Registered _____
- 1.3 Review Date of the Qualification _____
- 1.4 Principal (Main) Subject Area _____
- 1.5 Country where Qualification is Registered _____

2. Qualification Type

Degree

- Doctoral
- Masters
- Professional Bachelors
- Bachelor Honours
- Bachelors

Diploma

- Postgraduate
- Advanced Diploma
- Further Diploma
- Higher Diploma
- Diploma
- Other

Certificate

- Postgraduate
- Advanced Certificate
- Further Certificate
- Higher Certificate
- Certificate
- Other

Skills Award: Title _____

Other: Title _____

3. Purpose of the Qualification

4. Learning Outcomes

Are the Learning Outcomes of the Qualification clearly stated?

If response is *NO*, please proceed to No. 5. If *YES*, please list the learning outcomes of the qualification.

YES NO

5. Fields of Study

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture and Nature Conservation | <input type="checkbox"/> Human and Social Studies |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business, Commerce and Management Studies | <input type="checkbox"/> Law, Military Science and Security |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communication Studies and Language | <input type="checkbox"/> Health Sciences and Social Services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Culture and Arts | <input type="checkbox"/> Physical, Mathematical and Computer Sciences |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education, Training and Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Physical Planning and Construction |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology | <input type="checkbox"/> Services and Life Sciences |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other, please specify _____ | |

6. Awarding Institution

6.1 Name of the Awarding Institution _____

6.2 Status of the Awarding Institution (Please tick)

- Accredited by national agency Accredited by international body
- Accredited by regional body
- Other: _____

6.3 Quality Assurance Status (Please tick). Period must be indicated for the selected status.

- Accredited: from _____ to _____
- Registered: from _____ to _____

Approved: from _____ to _____

Other: from _____ to _____

6.4 Country: _____

7. Quality Assurance Agency

Does the External QAA have a legal mandate?

If response is *NO*, please proceed to No. 8.

7.1 Name of the NQAA _____

7.2 Does the NQAA have a legal mandate? _____

7.3 Is stakeholder engagement a specific quality requirement? _____

Comments: _____

8. National Qualifications Framework

Is there an established National Qualifications Framework?

If response is *NO*, please proceed to No. 12.

YES NO

9. NQF Levels

Number of NQF Levels (*Please tick*)

1 2 3 4 5 6
 7 8 9 10 11 12

10. Level Descriptors

10.1 Domains used in the level descriptors _____

10.2 Please attach a copy of the level descriptors to this questionnaire.

11. NQF Credits

11.1 Qualification Title _____

11.2 Qualification Type _____

11.3 NQF Level _____

11.4 NQF Credit _____

12. Regional Qualifications Framework

- CARICOM RQF PQF SADC RQF
 EQF ASEAN RQF None
 Other _____

13. General Comments by Applicant

14. Submission

National Quality Assurance Agency	
Name _____	
Position _____	
Organisation _____	
Date _____	Signature _____

15. Summary of the Submission

	Items Completed	Checked	Comments
1	1.1 Qualification Title is clear, appropriate and not misleading.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	1.2 The qualification is valid and current.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	1.3 Review date of the qualification is indicated.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	1.4 The principal (main) subject areas are indicated and these correlate with the Field of Study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2	The Qualification Type is selected and it correlates with the Title and Level.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3	The Purpose Statement of the qualification is clear and elaborated.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4	Learning Outcomes and Component Outcomes are stated in detail to enable referencing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
5	The Field of Study is selected and relates appropriately to Items 1 and 4 above.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
6	Quality Assurance: 6.1 The name of the Awarding Institution is stated.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	6.2 The Awarding Institution is of good standing in the country of origin.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	6.3 The Awarding Institution is quality assured in the country of origin.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	6.4 The country of origin of the Awarding Institution is stated and correlates with response in Item 6.1 above.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
7	7.1 The NQAA's name is stated and it subscribes to the quality guidelines of the VUSSC TQF.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	7.2 The responsibility and/or legal competence of the NQAA and/or the National Coordination Point for referencing are clearly determined and published.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	7.3 Stakeholder engagement is determined.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
8	Existence and status of the NQF is determined.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
9	The appropriate number of levels is selected.	<input type="checkbox"/>	

10	The specific NQF Level and its Level Descriptors are selected.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
11	The Title, Type, Level and NQF Credits of the qualification are stated and checked for correlation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
12	A selection of either Yes or No is made to determine if the NQF is linked to an RQF.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
13	The relevant RQF for the referencing is identified.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
14	RQF Levels are indicated.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
15	A summary of general comments focusing on the social contexts and stakeholder consultation is provided for the Comments by Applicant.	<input type="checkbox"/>	
16	Dated Submission is signed off by a representative of the NQAA.	<input type="checkbox"/>	

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QUALIFICATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Requirements	Checked by:		COMMENTS Include explanatory comments and expand in covering letter if required.
	RQF Admin	TQFMC	
GENERAL			
There is a clear and justified purpose for the qualification.			
The content of the qualification aligns with the rationale and is consistent with the title.			
The contents of the document are internally coherent, make sense and are simply stated.			
Broad as well as specific outcomes are included.			
Language is clear and does not present potential barriers to access.			
SPECIFIC			
<i>1. Rationale</i>			
The purpose of the qualification is elaborated.			
There is evidence of stakeholder consultation.			
<i>2. Type of Qualification</i>			
The qualification fits the outcome, credit and level requirements for the relevant type of qualification on the NQF/RQF/TQF.			
<i>3. Qualification Structure</i>			
The total number of credits is shown.			

Requirements	Checked by:		COMMENTS Include explanatory comments and expand in covering letter if required.
	RQF Admin	TQFMC	
Credits are shown for each level.			
Credits by level are shown for each set (and strand).			
<i>4. Title</i>			
The title is concise, distinctive, appropriate and indicative of the content.			
The title indicates the qualification type.			
The title includes a classification category.			
<i>5. Outcomes</i>			
The outcome(s) represented by attainment of the whole qualification is stated clearly.			
The component outcomes that make up the qualification are stated.			
The component outcomes are expressed as specifically as possible.			
Details of component outcomes, not unit standards, are publicly accessible and include criteria for assessment decisions.			
<i>6. Purpose</i>			
The purpose statement is consistent with the rationale.			
Explanation for any strands or optional sets is provided.			
Significant relationships with other qualifications are identified.			
Entry restrictions are clear and the reason for restricted access given.			
Guidance to potential graduates is clear.			

Requirements	Checked by:		COMMENTS Include explanatory comments and expand in covering letter if required.
	RQF Admin	TQFMC	
7. Qualification Requirements			
The requirements for the award of the qualification are coherent and simply stated.			
Minimum number of credits and/or unit standards and/or outcomes is shown for each set.			
Other maximum and minimum credit or level requirements are shown.			
The qualification sets are shown in a sensible and logical order.			
8. Special Arrangements			
Special arrangements for assessment are given, and include arrangements for external quality assurance.			
Special arrangements for delivery of programmes are given.			
Special arrangements do not represent unreasonable barriers.			
9. Body Responsible			
Name shown is that recognised by respective RQF Administrator and TQFMC/ COL Administrator.			

Checked on behalf of RQF	Checked on behalf of VUSSC TQFMC
Name	Name
Position	Position
Date	Date

GLOSSARY OF RELEVANT TERMS¹

Accreditation

Process of quality assurance through which accredited status is granted to an education or training provider, showing it has been approved by the relevant legislative or professional authorities by having met predetermined standards.

Awarding body

Body issuing qualifications (certificates, diplomas or titles) formally recognises the learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) of an individual, following an assessment and validation procedure.

Learning outcome

Set of knowledge, skills and/or competences an individual has acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a learning process, formal, non-formal or informal.

Level of qualification

The term covers two aspects: a) the level of attainment in education and training recognised in a qualification system or in a qualification framework; b) the learning outcomes acquired through education and training, work experience or in informal/non-formal settings.

Programme

A structured learning programme may include a complete qualification or a cluster of components of a qualification or a component of a qualification.

Provider

A person or an organisation that plans and delivers education/training and assessment services that lead to the award of qualifications or components of qualifications.

Qualification

Qualification covers different aspects: (a) formal qualification: the formal outcome (certificate, diploma or title) of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards and/or possesses the necessary competence to do a job in a specific area of work. A qualification confers official recognition of the value of learning outcomes in the labour market and in education and training.

Qualification system

All activities related to recognition of learning outcomes and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. These activities include: definition of qualification policy, training design and implementation, institutional arrangements, funding and quality assurance.

Qualifications

Qualifications are a meaningful and coherent cluster of learning outcomes that match the specified qualification type descriptors, are capable of being assessed and are subject to external quality assurance processes.

1

Sources: CEDEFOP, 2008; Eurydice, 2007; European Commission, 2008; ETF, 2005; OECD, 2007; UNEVOC 2016.

Qualifications framework

A qualifications framework is a coherent structure that establishes clear relationships among all quality assured qualifications offered within an education and training system. A qualifications framework facilitates the pursuit of lifelong learning and provides a structure for establishing national and international equivalence and comparability of qualifications. Qualifications frameworks can exist on sectoral, national, regional and transnational levels.

Quality assurance in education and training

Activities involving planning, implementation, evaluation, reporting and quality improvement, implemented to ensure that education and training (content of programmes, curricula, assessment and validation of learning outcomes, etc.) meet the quality requirements expected by stakeholders.

Referencing

A process that results in the establishment of a relationship between the levels of a National Qualifications System (NQF), a Regional Qualifications System (RQF) or the Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF).

Registration

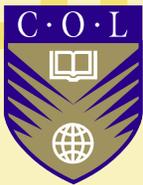
Registration of qualifications and components of qualifications pertains to the quality assurance processes undertaken by authorised bodies. A qualification can be registered on an NQF or on the TQF, but not on an RQF.

Standard

Statement approved and formalised by a recognised body, which defines the rules to follow in a given context or the results to be achieved.

ACRONYMS

AQRF	ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
COL	Commonwealth of Learning
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
GDP	Gross domestic product
NQAA	National Quality Assurance Agency
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PQF	Pacific Qualifications Framework
RQF	Regional Qualifications Framework
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
TQF	Transnational Qualifications Framework
TQFMC	Transnational Qualifications Framework Management Committee
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
VUSSC	Virtual University for the Small States of the Commonwealth



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