

# **ASEAN Guiding Principles for Quality Assurance and Recognition of Competency Certification Systems**

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## Acronyms

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AMS	ASEAN Member States
AQRF	ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework
EAS TVET QAF	East Asia Summit Technical and Vocational Education and Training Quality Assurance Framework
HRD	Human Resource Development
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
QF	Qualifications Framework

## Glossary of key terms

The following key terms are those agreed by the ASEAN Members states. The terms marked with a [\*] are those specifically agreed to in the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework.

Term	Definition
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	<p>Statements approved and formalised by a competent body, which define 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 or certification standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competency standard refers to the knowledge, skills and/or competencies linked to practising a job;</li> <li>• Educational standard refers to statements of learning objectives, content of curricula, entry requirements and resources required to meet learning objectives;</li> <li>• Assessment standard refers to statements of learning outcomes to be assessed and methodology used;</li> <li>• Occupational standard refers to statements of activities and tasks related to a specific job and to its practise; and,</li> <li>• Certification standard refers to statements of rules applicable to obtaining a qualification (e.g. certificate or diploma) as well as the rights conferred.<sup>1</sup></li> </ul>
ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework*	The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework, a common reference framework, functions as a device to enable comparisons of qualifications across ASEAN member states.
Certification	The process of issuing a certificate, diploma or title of learning outcomes formally attesting that a set of learning outcomes (knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences) acquired by an

<sup>1</sup> Cedefop (2011), p. 109.

Term	Definition
	individual have been assessed and validated by a competent body against a predefined standard. <sup>2</sup>
Certification schemes	Certification schemes are competence and other requirements related to specific occupational categories. <sup>3</sup> Certification schemes may result in a certificate indicating that the person has fulfilled requirements, or be included in a qualification.
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. <sup>4</sup>
Competence*	Competence is an ability that extends beyond the possession of knowledge and skills. It includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cognitive competence involving the use of theory and concepts, as well as informal tacit knowledge gained experientially;</li> <li>• Functional competence (skills or know-how), those things that a person should be able to do when they work in a given area;</li> <li>• Personal competence involving knowing how to conduct oneself in a specific situation; and,</li> <li>• Ethical competence involving the possession of certain personal and professional values.<sup>5</sup></li> </ul>
Competency standard*	Statement approved and formalised by a competent body, which defines the rules to follow in a given context or the results to be achieved.  Competency standard refers to the knowledge, skills and/or competencies linked to practising a job. <sup>6</sup>
Occupational standard*	Statement approved and formalised by a competent body, which defines the rules to follow in a given context or the results to be achieved.  Occupational standard refers to statements of activities and tasks related to a specific job and to its practice. <sup>7</sup>
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*	Qualification is 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

<sup>2</sup> Cedefop (2011), p. 16

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from ISO/IEC 17024:2012

<sup>4</sup> Cedefop (2011), p. 10 & 11

<sup>5</sup> Coles & Werquin (2006), p. 23

<sup>6</sup> Cedefop (2011), p. 109

<sup>7</sup> Cedefop (2011), p. 109

Term	Definition
	official recognition of value in the labour market and in further education and training <sup>8</sup> .
Qualifications framework*	An instrument for the development and classification of qualifications (e.g. at national or sectoral level) according to a set of criteria (e.g. using descriptors) applicable to specified levels of learning outcomes. <sup>9</sup>
Qualifications systems*	Qualifications system 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 <sup>10</sup> .
Quality assurance*	Quality assurance is a component of quality management and is 'focused on providing confidence that quality requirements will be fulfilled'. <sup>11</sup>  In relation to education and training services, quality assurance refers to planned and systematic processes that provide confidence in the design, delivery and award of qualifications within an education and training system. Quality assurance ensures stakeholders' interests and investment in any accredited program are protected.
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. <sup>12</sup>
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. <sup>13</sup>
Quality assurance system*	Quality assurance system includes all aspects of a country's activity related to assuring the quality of education and training. These systems include the following elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear and measurable objectives and standards, guidelines for implementation, including stakeholder involvement;</li> <li>• Appropriate resources;</li> </ul>

<sup>8</sup> Coles & Werquin (2006) p. 21 & 22

<sup>9</sup> Cedefop (2011), p. 82

<sup>10</sup> Coles & Werquin (2006), p. 22

<sup>11</sup> AS/NZS ISO 9000:2006, p. 9

<sup>12</sup> Cedefop Glossary (2011), p. 88

<sup>13</sup> Cedefop Glossary (2011), p. 96

Term	Definition
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent evaluation methods, associating self-assessment and external review;</li> <li>• Feedback mechanisms and procedures for improvement; and,</li> <li>• Widely accessible evaluation results.</li> </ul>
Recognition	<p>Formal recognition is the process of granting official learning outcomes status to skills and competences either through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awarding of qualifications (certificates, diploma or titles) as a result of assessment, or</li> <li>• Granting of equivalence, credit units or waivers, validation of gained skills and/or competences.</li> </ul> <p>Social recognition is the acknowledgement of the value of skills and/or competences by economic and social stakeholders.<sup>14</sup></p>
Referencing*	Referencing is 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*	Registering agencies are those 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"> <li>• Formal acknowledgement that the provider meets key generic standards</li> <li>• Formal acknowledgement that the provider meets specific standards related to the provision of teaching, learning and assessment of a specific program.</li> </ul> <p>For the purpose of the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework, registration of providers is the term used for both processes.</p>

<sup>14</sup> Adapted from Cedefop (2011), p. 97



## **Introduction**

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The ASEAN Charter, which was signed by the ten ASEAN Leaders in Singapore on 20 November 2007, aims to: “create a single market and production base which is stable, prosperous, highly competitive and economically integrated with effective facilitation for trade and investment in which there is free flow of goods, services and investment; facilitated movement of business persons, professionals, talents and labour; and free flow of capital” and to “develop human resources through closer cooperation in education and life-long learning and in science and technology, for the empowerment of the peoples of ASEAN and for the strengthening of the ASEAN Community”.<sup>15</sup>

In 2007, the ASEAN Member States (AMS)<sup>16</sup> adopted the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Blueprint (ASEAN 2007). It called for cooperation, including the recognition of professional qualifications. In addition to Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) in Engineering and Nursing signed in 2005 and 2006 respectively, five MRAs were concluded between 2007 and 2009 in the fields of architecture, surveying, medical and dental practitioners and accountancy. Another important component of the AEC Blueprint was the creation of the free flow of skilled labour through “harmonisation and standardisation” (ASEAN 2007:18), particularly in preparation for the AEC in 2015.

For the ASEAN Economic Community, human resource development (HRD) related activities will play a significant role on the economic growth in each ASEAN economy that brings significant contribution to the regional development at large. As known, the success of all HRD activities depends highly upon a sustainable and continuous process of life-long learning, training, and employability. Since there will be an intensive mobility and an exchange of labour within the ASEAN market, one of the key success factors is the recognition of people’s competence and skills. The real problem faced by each economy in recognising individual competence and skills is the absence of guidelines that can be used as a reference for such cross-acknowledgement needs. Without the existence of such guidelines and certification system, it is anticipated that there will be many issues potentially encountered by all economies related to HRD activities such as: (i) human resource recruitment; (ii) project requirements; (iii) qualification compliancy; (iv) competence/skill standard.

Presently, each ASEAN Member State (AMS) has its own national framework with regards to its HRD activities. One of the functions of such frameworks is as a reference for recognising various types of human resource qualifications and skills within cross industrial territory. There are 10 (ten) different frameworks within ASEAN Economic Community that have their own unique characteristics. Upon the integration of one ASEAN market, all of these ten frameworks will be used simultaneously by the economies as the infrastructure in HRD activities.

These Guidelines provide the basis for developing trust and understanding of these competency certification systems, and aim to provide principles and protocols for developing processes for recognition of these systems.

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<sup>15</sup> Charter of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (2007), Chapter 1, Article 1, paras 5 and 10

<sup>16</sup> Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam

The guidelines include:

- Overview of National Qualification's Frameworks of AMS (Section 1)
- Overview of competency certification systems of AMS (Section 2)
- Discussion of key aspects of quality assurance (Section 3)
- Agreed guiding principles and protocols for quality assurance as it relates to competent bodies and to providers of assessment services (Section 4)
- Agreed guiding principles and protocols for recognition of competency certification systems (Section 5)
- Overview of the AQRF and how competent bodies could participate in national referencing activities (Section 6).

The guidelines also include agreed regional terminology for facilitating discussion between AMS.

As ASEAN Member States (AMS) implement their quality assurance system for TVET using different approaches and with different levels of implementation it is difficult to assumptions about the type of organisation that is responsible for competency certification schemes. The following definitions outline the two key terms used within the guidelines plus the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework agreed definition for awarding or certifying body:<sup>17</sup>

- **Competent body.** A competent body is ultimately responsible for all or some aspects of the competency certification system. A competent body may be a qualifications authority, a body responsible for occupational standards development/endorsement, an awarding body or a competency certification body.
- **Providers of assessment services.** Providers are those that provide assessment services (and possibly training services) and may also be an awarding body or competency certification body.
- **Awarding/Certifying 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.<sup>18</sup>

The guidelines use the term *competent body* in preference to *competency certification body* as in some certification systems the certifying body may also be the provider of assessment services and is not responsible for the overall quality assurance of the competency certification system or scheme.

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<sup>17</sup> The two key terms have been brought forward from Section 4 to ensure a common understanding from the start of the guidelines. The third definition is an agreed AQRF term taken from the existing glossary in these guidelines.

<sup>18</sup> Cedefop (2011), p. 10 & 11

## Section 1: Overview of the National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) of ASEAN Member States

Cedefop (2011, p. 82) defines a qualifications framework as:

*An instrument for the development and classification of qualifications (e.g. at national or sectoral level) according to a set of criteria (e.g. using descriptors) applicable to specified levels of learning outcomes*

Across the ASEAN Member States, there is no uniform level of development or implementation of NQFs. Each country is at different stages of planning or implementation of either a sector QF or a NQF; and there may be no explicit or national systematic intention to develop an NQF. The development of an NQF can be grouped according to the following general categories:

1. No intent
2. Desired but no progress made
3. Background planning underway
4. Initial development and design completed
5. Some structures and processes agreed and documented
6. Some structures and processes established and operational
7. Structures and processes established for 5 years
8. Review of structures and processes proposed or underway.<sup>19</sup>

The table below outlines the level of establishment of NQFs in the region.

**Table 1: NQF summary**

Country	Level of establishment	Stage
Brunei Darussalam	Inaugurated 2013, implemented	6
Cambodia	Established 2012, initial stages of implementation	5
Indonesia	Established 2012, initial stages of implementation	5
Lao PDR	Planned	3
Malaysia	Established 2007, fully implemented and at review stage	8
Myanmar	Planned	3
Philippines	Established 2012, initial stages of implementation	5
Singapore	Sector QF – Workforce Skills Qualifications system, Inaugurated 2005	7
Thailand	Established 2014, initial stages of implementation, 3 established sub frameworks	4
Vietnam	Planned	3

<sup>19</sup> These categories were used in the initial research for the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework

Source: Bateman & Coles 2015

Of the QFs currently developed and those in the planning all vary in terms of:

- Governance arrangements
- Purpose
- Structure (levels, domains, credit point application).

Across the AMS, QFs are established through various processes which may include legislation or legislative instruments specifically related to the framework or to a responsible agency. Within the ASEAN region, three frameworks are directly linked to a responsible agency (Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Singapore<sup>20</sup>); two frameworks were established through a legislative instrument that was directly related to the framework (e.g. Cambodia and Indonesia). Thailand's meta framework was approved by Cabinet; in the Philippines, it was established through an Executive Order.

The governance arrangements of the QF are often linked to the legislative basis of the framework and a responsible body is identified. However, in some countries, such as Cambodia and Indonesia, no clear lines of responsibility exist for the management and monitoring of the NQF at a national level.

Coles et al (2014) indicate that the main function of a National Qualifications Framework is 'to act as a benchmark for the level of learning recognised in the national qualifications system' (p. 22). Across the frameworks documented in ASEAN the purposes vary; however, there are some common themes, such as the ordering and specification of qualifications, the promotion of multiple pathways for learners, and for international recognition.

The table below outlines the key features of current and proposed NQFs.

**Table 2: Summary of NQF structure**

Country	Levels	Domains	Credit-based
Brunei Darussalam	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge and skills (the types of knowledge and skills involved);</li> <li>• Practice: Applied Knowledge and Understanding (the context in which the knowledge and skills are applied);</li> <li>• Generic Cognitive Skills;</li> <li>• Communications, ICT and Numeracy Skills;</li> <li>• Autonomy, Accountability and Working with others (the level of independence).</li> </ul>	<p>H Ed – 40 hours of national learning = 1</p> <p>TVET – 10 hours of national learning = 1</p>
Cambodia	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge;</li> <li>• Cognitive skills;</li> <li>• Psychomotor skills;</li> <li>• Interpersonal skills and responsibility;</li> <li>• Communication, information technology and numerical skills.</li> </ul>	Varies depending on methodology

<sup>20</sup> Education sector QF

Country	Levels	Domains	Credit-based
Indonesia	9	<p>Consists of 2 parts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General – characteristics, personalities, working attitudes, ethics and morality</li> <li>• Specific: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Skills in fulfilling the job and competence;</li> <li>2. Science/knowledge;</li> <li>3. Methods and level of competence in applying science/knowledge;</li> <li>4. Management skills#</li> </ol> </li> </ul>	Yes – in Higher Education+
Lao PDR*	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge;</li> <li>• Skills;</li> <li>• Application;</li> <li>• Social skills.</li> </ul>	-
Malaysia	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge;</li> <li>• Practical skills;</li> <li>• Social skills and responsibilities, values, attitudes and professionalism;</li> <li>• Communication, leadership and team skills;</li> <li>• Problem solving and scientific skills;</li> <li>• Information management and lifelong learning skills;</li> <li>• Managerial and entrepreneurial skills.</li> </ul>	40 hours = 1 credit point
Myanmar*	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge and skills;</li> <li>• Application and competence;</li> <li>• Responsibility.</li> </ul>	-
Philippines	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge, skills and values;</li> <li>• Application;</li> <li>• Degree of independence (autonomy and responsibility)</li> </ul>	-
Singapore	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of knowledge and skills involved;</li> <li>• Level of application of the knowledge and skills;</li> <li>• Level of accountability, independence, self organisation or organisation of others that is required to solve problems or complete tasks;</li> <li>• Cognisant of the occupational levels and range, and depth of the knowledge and skills required of the jobs which the qualifications relates to.</li> </ul>	1 WSQ credit value (cv) is equivalent to 10 recommended learning hours. (RLH), (1 cv = 10 RLH). <sup>^</sup>

Country	Levels	Domains	Credit-based
Thailand	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge;</li> <li>• Skills;</li> <li>• Attributes.</li> </ul>	Yes
Vietnam*	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge;</li> <li>• Skills;</li> <li>• Autonomy and responsibility.</li> </ul>	1 = 30 hours of notional learning.

Note: \* = proposed, # = Directorate General of Higher Education 2012, + = not included in decree  
 ^Recommended Learning Hours (RLH) is defined as the number of hours which a typical trainee is expected to undergo, on average, in order to accomplish the specified learning outcomes of a competency unit, regardless of the methods of training and assessment adopted.  
 Source: Bateman & Coles 2015.

Much of the activity of NQF development within the region is the direct result of the interest in the creation of the free flow of skilled labour through “harmonisation and standardisation” (ASEAN 2007, p. 18) and in particular in preparation for the ASEAN Economic Community 2015. Along with these developments has been the endorsement of the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) implemented from 2016; this also has created an impetus to AMS to either develop NQFs or review their NQFs.

The AQRF is a common reference framework that functions as a device to enable comparisons of qualifications across ASEAN member states. It addresses education and training sectors<sup>21</sup> and the wider objective of promoting lifelong learning.

The AQRF requires AMS to reference their qualifications systems to the AQRF. The referencing process is an autonomous national process where the relevant national stakeholders and authorities agree on a link between each national qualifications level and a level in the AQRF. This link between the national qualifications level and the AQRF level is outcome of the referencing process and enables further linkage, through the AQRF, to the qualifications levels in other AMS.

To build trust in qualifications issued across the region, the framework is underpinned by a set of agreed quality assurance principles and broad standards related to:

- The functions of the responsible approving agencies
- Systems for the assessment of learning and the issuing of qualifications
- Regulation of the issuance of certificates.

The AQRF requires countries to refer to one or more established quality assurance frameworks as the basis for the agreed quality assurance principles and broad standards. These frameworks are to be used as the benchmark for evaluating the quality assurance systems for the relevant education and training sectors. The referencing process also requires that Member States describe their education and training quality assurance systems.

As of the beginning of 2016, no AMS has undertaken a formal referencing process although

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<sup>21</sup> Education and training incorporates informal, non-formal and formal learning. Formal learning includes, but is not limited to, post compulsory schooling, adult and community education, TVET and higher education.

some may have undertaken informal referencing, including benchmarking their quality assurance system.

## **Section 2: Overview of competency certification systems of ASEAN Member States**

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Cedefop (2011, p. 16) defines certification as the “process of issuing a certificate, diploma or title of learning outcomes formally attesting that a set of learning outcomes (knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences) acquired by an individual have been assessed and validated by a competent body against a predefined standard”.

One of the most common types of certification systems related to human resource development is where a person is certified as being able to undertake specific job tasks related to an occupation. Certification is generally based on an assessment, which generally includes a test, a performance assessment and/or a portfolio. Certification may include evidence of workplace experience prior to assessment. Some certification systems include a valid period of recognition and therefore require re-certification, whereas others certify for a lifetime upon completing all certification requirements. Certification does not necessarily refer to being legally able to practice in a specific profession; this is generally termed licensing. Usually licensing is based on a legislative instrument, is a requirement of government, involves protection of public safety, and is administered by a regulatory body.

In some cases, competency certification systems fall outside the remit of an NQF or a formal qualifications system regardless of whether it has been established by government, by professional bodies or by enterprises. There may be more than one type of competency certification system (i.e. government, professional body, private enterprise) established within countries. In some instances, competency certification systems may not result in the issuance of a qualification or an occupational outcome, that is, they are limited to a declaration of competencies achieved.

These guidelines relate specifically to competency certification systems that have been developed through a legislative instrument such as law, decree, or regulation, and are administered by a government agency or quasi autonomous non-government organisation. Competency certification systems related to professional bodies or private enterprise could use these guidelines to inform their practice.

### **Overview of competency certification systems**

Competency certification systems across the AMS are focused on the development and acquisition of competence. Competency certification systems across the region generally focus on lower to middle skill levels but may also relate to higher levels or occupations, for example, professional qualifications framework in Thailand.

Across the AMS states competency certification systems generally fall under the remit of the ministry responsible for labour development. However, more recent examples are competency certification systems that have been established by government and are governed by entities with some level of independence, for example, Thailand Professional Qualification Institute (TPQI) and Badan Nasional Sertifikasi Profesi (BNSP) in Indonesia.



### *Alignment of competency certification system to the qualifications system*

In many instances competency certification systems have preceded the development and formalisation of a NQF. In some instances, this has caused tensions between a system that has documented levels of competence and that of the proposed level descriptors of a NQF. Finding common ground or harmonising the two frameworks is often a key barrier to agreement and implementation of a NQF.

Newer NQFs have often focused on integrating existing competency certification systems within the NQF. A NQF providing a meta framework structure is not new. In South Africa, there is one responsible agency for the NQF. For each of the three education and training sectors there are three sub-frameworks managed by their own Quality Councils who are also responsible for quality assurance. A similar approach has been taken by Thailand, which has established a meta framework to link existing frameworks and disparate systems. The table below outlines the alignment.

**Table 3: Thailand National Qualifications Framework**

Education Qualifications			NQF Level	Competency /Skill Standard	
Basic	TVET	Higher		TPQI	DSD
		Doctoral	9		
		M. +Cert.	8		
		Master	7	7	
		B. +Cert	6	6	
	Bachelor	Bachelor	5	5	3*
	Diploma	Associate	4	4	2
	Certificate		3	3	1
Upper Sec.			2	2	
Lower Sec.			1	1	

Source: Thailand country overview draft 2014.

\*Note: Confirmed Ad-Hoc Task Force meeting (February 2016). Thailand representative indicated there are 4 levels but only 3 levels have been fully implemented.

### *Certification levels*

In some countries the competency certification system has established levels of competence and developed level descriptors. In some instances, these are precursors to NQFs or separate from the NQF. The table below outlines five AMS examples of levels of competence embedded within a competency certification system.

**Table 4: Skills levels**

Country	Skills levels
Laos	4 (+basic)
Malaysia	5
Myanmar	4
Philippines	5
Thailand	
• Skills	4*
• Professional	7
Vietnam	5

Source: Confirmed at Ad-Hoc Task Force meeting February 2015.

Note: \* there are 4 levels but only 3 levels have been fully implemented.

The competency certification system descriptors of the level of skills and knowledge also vary across countries. As NQF's become further embedded in the AMS it may be that these level descriptors are incorporated or subsumed within the NQF level descriptors.

The following sample from Vietnam outlines the five level descriptors and the relationship to a national certificate.

**Table 5: Vietnam national skills qualification levels**

	National skills qualification levels	
Levels	Requirements	Certification
Level 1	a) Competent in performing simple tasks and repetitive tasks within one occupation; b) Understands and has basic knowledge in a narrow range of operations of an occupation of some areas; can apply some specific knowledge when carrying out the task; c) Be able to receive, take note and transfer information as required, takes limited responsibility for outcome, output of self.	Certificate 1
Level 2	a) Competent in performing simple tasks, repetitive tasks and some complicated tasks in a defined range of situations under guidance; b) Understands and has some basic knowledge of operations of an occupation; can apply some professional knowledge and be able to come up with some solutions to solve normal issues in their work; c) Be able to consider, predict and explain information; can work in team, can work independently in some cases and take most of the responsibility for outcome, output of self.	Certificate 2
Level 3	a) Competent in performing different tasks, most of which are complex and major in a range of options, can work independently without guidance; b) Understands and has knowledge of basic theoretical concepts, professional knowledge of the occupation; can apply professional knowledge and be able to identify to apply knowledge to deal, solve normal issues in a variety of contexts;	Certificate 3

	National skills qualification levels	
Levels	Requirements	Certification
	c) Can identify, classify, analyse and evaluate information from different sources; be able to give direction for others in the working team or group; take responsibility for output of self with specified quality standards and can take limited responsibility for output of others in the working team or group.	
Level 4	<p>a) Competent in performing a broad range of varied tasks, most of which are complex and major in a range of different options, can work independently without supervision and guidance;</p> <p>b) Understands and possesses broad knowledge of basic theoretical concepts and have deep professional knowledge in different areas of the occupation; be able to transfer and apply creative knowledge and skills to deal with complex technical issues in a variety of contexts;</p> <p>c) Can analyse, evaluate information and can use analysis to come up with ideas, recommendations serving for the sake of research and management; be able to manage and run the working team or group when performing the work; take responsibility for outcome, output of self with specified quality standards and take limited responsibility for outcome, output of the working team or group.</p>	Certificate 4
Level 5	<p>a) Competent in performing all varied tasks of the occupation fluently and skillfully; work with high independence, great self-control;</p> <p>b) Has broad knowledge of basic theoretical concepts and has deep professional knowledge in many areas of the occupation; has techniques for analysing, forecasting, designing, considering to solve both technical and management problems in a wide scope;</p> <p>c) Can analyse, evaluate and generalisation information to come up with opinions and initiatives; manage and run the working team or group when performing the work; take responsibility for outcome, output of self with specified standard quality and take responsibility for output of the working team or group in accordance with specified standards and specifications.</p>	Certificate 5

Source: National Skills Standards, General Department of Vocational Training, Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs.

### *Definition of competence*

Recent research (World Bank Group draft 2015) indicates that many definitions of competence exist in vocational and education literature and that often the approach taken to competence affects how competencies are documented and assessed. This finding reflects the various definitions existing across the AMS. The table below summarises each country's definition of competence.

Table 6: Definition of competence

Country	Definition
Cambodia#	The skills standard 'required for effective performance in the workplace. It goes beyond specifying knowledge, skills and attitude requirements into defining the performance levels the workers in a particular job must achieve'
Indonesia	Competence is the knowledge, skills and attitude to be applied in the workplace.
Lao PDR	Competence is the relevant knowledge, skills and attitude applied to the standards of the performance expected in the workplace. Competence described the job tasks within a specific job role.
Malaysia	Competence is noted as an acquired and practised ability to competently carry out a task or job.
Myanmar	Knowledge, skills and ability
Philippines	Competence is noted as 'capability or proficiency, and refers to the application of knowledge, skills and attitude required to complete a work activity in a range of context and environment to the standard expected in the workplace' (TESDA).
Singapore	Competency is a measurable set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that drives an individual's performance to perform at his/her job effectively.
Thailand	Vocational and Skills sectors: Competence is the required expected or accepted level of quality of processes or product of an individual presenting, or/and problem solving, hands-on demonstrating his capacity after learning/working experiences'.
	Professional skills sector: Competence is the application of knowledge and experience to work.
Vietnam	Competence is the essential knowledge, skills and attitude to performance the tasks of one occupation.

Source: Adapted from World Bank Group draft 2015.

More recently the AMS have confirmed through the AQRF that the agreed regional term is defined as:

*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.<sup>22</sup>*

This agreement does not mean that AMS need to change their own country definitions, but that in regional dialogue and initiatives this definition applies.

<sup>22</sup> Coles & Werquin (2006), p. 23.

## Quality assurance of certification<sup>23</sup>

Across the region each AMS undertakes the following key quality assurance processes in various ways:

1. Development of competency standards
2. Assessor competence
3. Provider capability
4. Assessment
5. Confidence in assessment decisions.

### 1. *Development and format of competency standards*

Most AMS are developing competency or occupational standards within the TVET sector; although, in most instances countries use the terms competency standards and occupational standards interchangeably. The process for development of competency standards in most AMS follows similar processes. Countries are documenting processes either in formal directives or guidelines, and in all instances a government entity is responsible for the development of the competency standards. All AMS use private sector industry representation in some form (e.g. technical working groups, industry sector endorsement meetings, employer groups, labour groups) and often used trainers or training organisations. The process for development includes a mix of DACUM, and functional analysis and job task analysis plus international research and reliance on existing training programs. Final endorsement is generally confirmed by the commissioning government agency, but in some instances final endorsement is a committee that includes industry sector representation (e.g. Laos).<sup>24</sup>

In general, the format for standards in the broader vocational education and training sector follow a similar format. In general, most ASEAN countries tend to align their competency or occupational standards format with the ILO regional model competency standards<sup>25</sup>. The format of the competency standard generally includes:

- Occupational background information
- Unit code and title
- Unit descriptor
- Unit of Competence
  - Elements and performance criteria
  - Variables and Range statement
  - Evidence guide.

Across most ASEAN countries, the standards are divided into core and elective, covering technical competencies and generic competencies.

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<sup>23</sup> The information in this section is based on recent unpublished World Bank Group research (draft 2015).

<sup>24</sup> World Bank Group draft 2015

<sup>25</sup> Updated guidelines for development of Regional Model Competency Standards, 2016

In competency certification schemes,<sup>26</sup> the outcomes may or may not result in a qualification. However, in both instances, clusters of competency or occupational standards are grouped into occupational roles or qualifications. Countries use various terms for these clusters of standards and completion rules which are often supported by additional information, such as:

- Competency framework (Brunei Darussalam)
- Training regulations (Philippines)
- Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) frameworks (Singapore).

## **2. Assessors**

Although competency certification systems can include both training and assessment, some are purely assessment only systems. The requirements for assessors across the AMS are generally articulated in quality standards (e.g. Singapore and Indonesia) or policies and guidelines (e.g. Philippines, Malaysia). Although specific requirements may vary in their details, generally the minimum requirement is for both trainers and/or assessors to have at least the level of competence in the vocational content and skills as well as a qualification in teaching pedagogy and, in some cases, workplace experience. In some instances, assessors required a specific set of competencies related to competency based assessment. In some countries trainer/assessor requirements are relatively new and not fully implemented.

In some countries there are national registers for trainers (Philippines being an example of a national TVET register, and also in Thailand [OVEC]), and where assessment was centrally controlled there are registers of qualified assessors (e.g. Philippines TVET and the Indonesian competency certification system). In both Philippines and in the Indonesian competency certification system there was a monitoring process for assessors.

## **3. Provider capability**

Across the AMS, the quality assurance of providers<sup>27</sup> generally rests with either one or two ministries, for example, ministries responsible for education or labour. The quality assurance arrangements may vary and not necessarily be applied consistently across all TVET provider types. Approval process could be:

- Not mandatory for specific cohorts of providers, but may be required by particular cohorts of providers with particular target groups
- Assumed for particular providers, for example, government providers
- Mandatory for all providers to provide recognised qualifications under the NQF.

In most AMS the requirements for approval of providers are documented in legislation or government regulations, or in some instances in quality standards.

The level of implementation of monitoring providers and provider outcomes may not be well established across AMS competency certification systems. Not all AMS responsible agencies have public registers of providers accompanied by qualifications that they are approved to deliver or assess.

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<sup>26</sup> Certification schemes are competence and other requirements related to specific occupational categories. Certification schemes may result in a certificate indicating that the person has fulfilled requirements, or be included in a qualification.

<sup>27</sup> Training providers, training and assessment providers, assessment only providers

#### 4. **Assessment**

Competence can be gained through:

- Training
- Work experience
- Life experience.

Assessment is used to confirm competence. Assessment can occur within a training and assessment provider or with an assessment only provider. In some AMS, the separation of training provision from assessment provision is considered an essential element to a robust competency certification system. This approach is in part due to some certification bodies adhering to *ISO/EC 17024:2012 Conformity assessment – General requirements for bodies operating certification of persons*. This Standard emphasises the need for impartiality of certification activities; separating training from assessment is considered a demonstration of this requirement.

Across the AMS, assessment only services are not generally viewed as a recognition of prior learning assessment, although technically they are one and the same. Both involve the assessment of an individual's competence without the assessor being involved in individual's learning (regardless as to whether the learning was achieved through formal, non-formal or informal means).

#### 5. **Promoting confidence in assessment decisions**

It is generally accepted that assessment decisions are to be valid and reliable.

*In general, validity is concerned with the appropriateness of the inferences, use and consequences that result from the assessment. In simple terms, it is concerned with the extent to which an assessment decision about a candidate (e.g., competent/not yet competent, a grade and/or a mark), based on the evidence of performance by the candidate, is justified.*

*In general, reliability is an estimate of how accurate or precise the task is as a measurement instrument. Reliability is concerned with how much error is included in the evidence.*

Source: Gillis & Bateman 2015, p. 26

Across the AMS, how confidence in the assessment decisions is promoted varies in terms of approach and level of implementation. Strategies included:

- Approving assessment instruments or tools (e.g. Department of Skills Development in Malaysia)
- Auditing and use of external verification (e.g. Badan Nasional Sertifikasi Profesi [BNSP] – National Professional Certification Agency in Indonesia)
- Approving and monitoring assessors (e.g. Technical Education and Skills Development Authority [TESDA] in the Philippines)
- Using industry or enterprise representatives in the assessment or in post assessment review.

In many instances, the quality assurance of assessment decisions is one of the biggest challenges for AMS competency certification schemes.

## International or regional initiatives

For many AMS the pressures of labour and student mobility have emphasised the need for recognition of international qualifications, including facilitating the recognition of their own citizens in other countries.

Strategies that can facilitate recognition include:

- The recent development of the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) has put an emphasis on NQFs and the potential benefits resulting from referencing. However, for many AMS it is early days for referencing their NQF to other country NQFs or to the AQRF.<sup>28</sup>
- AMS have focused on mutual recognition agreements (e.g. engineering and nursing, architecture, surveying, medical practitioners, dental practitioners, accountancy, and tourism professional
- Individual countries have reached agreement with other countries on referencing or MOUs negotiated
- In terms of incoming individuals wanting qualifications assessed not all countries have a documented process for these instances, and in many instances have been undertaken on a case-by-case basis.

In addition, there are a number of regional initiatives that aim to facilitate recognition of individual and/or systems.

- The *Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education 2011* (UNESCO 2012) aims to “ensure that studies, diplomas, and degrees in higher education are recognised as widely as possible, considering the great diversity of educational systems in the Asia-Pacific region and the richness of its cultural, social, political, religious, and economic backgrounds”.<sup>29</sup> The Convention relates to higher education which is defined as ‘post-secondary education, training or research that is recognised by the relevant authorities of a Party as belonging to its higher education system’.<sup>30</sup> The Convention can cover TVET and higher education (or university level programs) depending on each country’s approach to implementing the Convention. The Convention focuses on establishing basic principles for the provision of information and the implementation of the convention. Article III outlines the processes for assessment and recognition of qualifications.<sup>31</sup>
- Trans Pacific Partnership which aims to: establish a regional agreement that promotes economic integration; bring economic growth and social benefits; create new opportunities for workers and businesses; contribute to raising living standards; benefit consumers; reduce poverty; and, promote sustainable growth.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Refer to Section 6 of these Guidelines for further details.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.unescobkk.org/education/higher-education/promotion-of-academic-mobility/asia-pacific-regional-convention-on-the-recognition-of-qualifications-in-higher-education-an-overview/>

<sup>30</sup> UNESCO 2012, p. 3

<sup>31</sup> UNESCO 2012

<sup>32</sup> ASEAN countries that are part of this agreement include: Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam; <http://dfat.gov.au/trade/agreements/tpp/official-documents/Documents/preamble.pdf>



## Section 3: Key Aspects of Quality Assurance

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The certification process includes issuing a certificate, diploma or list of learning outcomes testifying that the candidate has been assessed and validated by a competent body against a pre-defined standard. Assumed within this process is that a candidate has undertaken learning, either through formal learning or through less formal contexts such as work or personal activities. Critical to this definition is that:

- The individual's knowledge, skills and wider competences has been judged against criteria such as learning outcomes or standards of competence;
- The certificate is issued by an agency which has public trust and competence; and,
- The certificate is recognised and trusted by other parties in the labour market and/or further education and training sector.

The basis of trust with awards issued rests with the quality assurance arrangements put in place by a competent body.

### Principles of quality assurance

Quality assurance systems may have explicit or implicit principles which inform the processes deployed by policy makers and/or competent bodies.

The EAS TVET Quality Assurance Framework (EAS TVET QAF, 2012) indicates that any considerations of principles for quality assurance of a TVET system should reflect on the following principles.

- *Transparency and accountability:*  
Transparency and accountability are two key principles of good governance. Accountability refers to legal and reporting requirements whereas transparency relates to timely, reliable, clear and relevant public reporting of processes and performance.
- *Comparability:*  
Comparability refers to the acknowledgement that quality assurance measures may vary across countries and internally to a country's system. However, these measures need to be based upon comparable standards and expectations.
- *Flexibility and responsiveness:*  
Flexibility and responsiveness refer to quality assurance measures being flexible enough to foster innovation and flexibility of provision, and not built solely on a compliance or punitive model.
- *Balance and integration:*  
Balance and integration refer to quality assurance systems balancing set standards and the protection of the interests of stakeholders, with encouraging continuous improvement and innovation.
- *Continuity and consistency:*  
Continuity and consistency refer to providing continuity to maintain the confidence of stakeholders and being consistent in application.
- *Minimum standards:*  
This refers to TVET systems using set standards for both inputs and outputs.

- *Assurance and improvement:*  
Assurance and improvement refer to quality systems providing assurance of standards and promote improvement in delivery and outcomes.
- *Independence:*  
Good governance also includes independence of decisions and actions and avoiding conflicts of interest.
- *Subsidiarity:*  
Subsidiarity refers to quality assurance activities and judgements being made close to the delivery of TVET.

However, it is the responsibility of each AMS to identify the key underpinning principles that will inform the quality assurance of their competency certification system. Outlining principles in vision and mission statements for competent bodies, making public policy statements and decisions, and ensuring engagement by key stakeholders in policy directions will assist in promulgating and communicating these principles.

## **Elements of quality assurance**

Countries have different experiences and different approaches to quality assurance. However, the EAS TVET QAF (2012) notes that the elements for quality assuring TVET generally include:

1. The TVET product through the approval of standards (such as educational and/or competency standards as well as for certification of a qualification)
2. The training and/or assessment providers through approval<sup>33</sup> processes based upon provider infrastructure, financial probity, staff qualifications and experience, management systems, delivery and assessment systems, and student support systems
3. The TVET processes through the auditing of provider processes and outcomes, including student learning and employment outcomes and student and user satisfaction levels
4. The TVET outcomes through control, supervision or monitoring of assessment and graduation procedures and outcomes
5. Provider or system-wide evaluations of TVET quality, including evaluations by external agencies
6. Provision of public information on the performance of provider, such as program and unit completions, student and employer satisfaction.

It is not always the case that all these aspects fall to the responsibility of one competent body within a country; however, the majority of functions listed above will be the responsibility of each competent body. Relevant competent bodies for various elements should be able to demonstrate that there is in place:

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<sup>33</sup> Across some regions the processes of endorsement of the probity, capacities and processes of training providers is referred to as 'registration' or 'accreditation'. This approval processes also assumes the notion of ongoing review and approval.

- Strong governance arrangements. Governance can be defined as: "...the set of responsibilities and practices, policies and procedures, exercised by an agency's executive, to provide strategic direction, ensure objectives are achieved, manage risks and use resources responsibly and with accountability".<sup>34</sup>
- Quality management system that applies to all of its functions, for example, approval of qualifications or competency certification schemes, approval of assessment providers.
- A means for addressing stakeholder complaints.

Competent bodies within AMS need to consider how their quality assurance system demonstrates the six elements listed above, or how these elements are incorporated into new developed or re-designed quality assurance systems for TVET or competency certification systems.

### **1. Development of the TVET product**

Within any TVET system, there are multiple options for the construction of TVET achievement standards, including:

- Competency standards are statements of knowledge, skills and/or competence linked to a job.
- Occupational standards are statements of activities and tasks related to a specific job and its practice.
- Assessment standards are statements of learning outcomes to be assessed and the methodology to be used.
- Certification standards are rules for obtaining an award and the rights conferred.
- Educational standards which are statements of learning objectives, content to be addressed, entry requirements and resources required.

A country's TVET system may use a mix of these standards or focus on one or two, for example, competency or occupational standards. The developers of these standards may be responsible for single or multiple sets of standards and include:

- Public providers
- A single agency or multiple agencies
- Multiple industry enterprises or agencies.

For those competent bodies who adhere to *ISO/IEC 17024:2012 Conformity assessment – General requirements for bodies operating certification or persons*, certification standards are termed "certification schemes". Under this ISO Standard, a certification scheme includes scope of certification, job and task description, required competence, and prerequisites. In addition, this ISO Standard requires the development of the certification scheme to include appropriate experts, prerequisites, job analysis, assessment guidance and examination content, and any re-certification requirements. This final requirement is an intrinsic difference between qualifications systems and that of competency certification systems adhering to *ISO/IEC 17024:2012 Conformity assessment – General requirements for bodies operating certification or persons*. For ISO adherents, there is a requirement for re-certification, whereas this requirement is often the responsibility of licensing bodies and/or

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<sup>34</sup> Australia Government 2007, p. 1.

professional associations or bodies, rather than a qualifications system. For those competent bodies complying with *ISO/IEC 17024:2012 Conformity assessment – General requirements for bodies operating certification or persons*, consideration needs to be given to the balance between the assessment and reassessment burden and that of perceived outcomes for a national cohort.

The key focus of developing standards is ensuring that they are relevant and current for industry. Regardless of the standard used, within the TVET system developers use private sector industry representation in the development of the standards, document these standards in a consistent format, and include an endorsement stage in the process.

## **2. Approval of training and/or assessment providers**

The approval of training and/or assessment providers is one of the key functions of competent bodies. However, approval processes could be voluntary or compulsory and limited to:

- Private providers, especially if approval of public providers is assumed
- Assessment providers only, with training providers being an open market.

Approval requirements can be documented in guidelines, legislation or regulations, or quality standards. Approval processes could include submission of key evidence and/or audit or panel review.

In addition, there are some instances within qualifications systems or competency certification systems whereby assessment services are further approved to parties at a third level, for example, to individual organisations or individual sites. This application is variously termed auspice, franchising or outsourcing arrangements.<sup>35</sup>

For some countries that allow these arrangements, requirements can be noted in guidelines regulations, or quality standards. For example, in Australia this requirement has been written into the TVET quality standards since their inception, and is currently documented in legislation.

For those competent bodies that adhere to *ISO/IEC 17024:2012 Conformity assessment – General requirements for bodies operating certification or persons*, outsourcing processes are to include a legally enforceable agreement and the certification agency is to:

- Take responsibility for all outsourced work
- Ensure that the body conducting the outsourced work is competent and complies with requirements
- Assess and monitor the performance of these bodies conducting the outsourced work
- Maintain records to demonstrate that the bodies conducting the outsourced work meet all requirements
- Maintain a list of bodies conducting the outsourced work.

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<sup>35</sup> ISO/IEC 17024:2012

### ***3. Monitoring of TVET processes and provision***

Monitoring of TVET processes and provision can include evaluation of quality indicator data (such as gender ratio, student teacher ratio, outcomes through reviews of student assessments as well as qualification progression and completion rates, employment outcomes, user satisfaction, continuation of further study) and audit or review methodologies of the provider's management system and implementation. Audit reviews could be conducted on a cyclical basis, with the option of different cycles for different categories of providers. Audits can be scheduled in different ways, for example, as a one-off major review or undertaken at short notice.

Competent bodies would need to have clear guidelines on:

- Data to be collected, including a data standard
- Quality criteria or standards for providers of assessment services (which may include training services) that are auditable
- Monitoring arrangements, and registers of actions taken against poor performing providers, for example, sanctions and closures.

### ***4. TVET outcomes through control, supervision or monitoring of assessment and graduation procedures and outcomes***

Quality assurance of assessment can take a variety of approaches and each AMS country may implement these approaches in various ways, including:

- Controlling assessment:
  - Centrally developed assessment instruments and centralised administered assessments
  - Centrally developed assessment instruments, RTO administered assessments but externally judged
  - Combination of externally developed and administered assessment with RTO developed and administered assessments
- Monitoring assessment decisions:
  - Centralised collection of assessments and assessment decisions
  - Providers self-monitor and report
- Managing assessors:
  - Criteria for suitability and professional development of assessors
  - Register of assessors
  - Re-certification of assessors.

Finally, protocols for awarding certificates or qualifications can vary:

- Awarding/certifying bodies issue certificates or qualifications
- Awarding/certifying body approves providers to issue on their behalf; with student outcomes retained at the provider or at the awarding body
- Awarding/certifying bodies approve providers to issue certificates or qualifications.

For those bodies that adhere to *ISO/IEC 17024:2012 Conformity assessment – General requirements for bodies operating certification or persons*, the standard requires:

- Documented assessment methods and mechanisms, accommodate special needs, ensure assessment adheres to principles of validity and reliability
- Established requirements for assessors and approval and monitoring processes of assessor performance
- Responsibility for issuing certificates and ensuring that evidence is sufficient to grant the relevant certificate.<sup>36</sup>

Competent bodies would need to have clear documented protocols for processes related to monitoring arrangements, assessment and issue of awards.

### **5. Evaluations of TVET quality**

In any TVET system there are competing demands and allegiances, and agencies should be able to objectively review and reflect on the system, identifying and reporting inefficiencies. Some countries have established an agency to advise senior ministers on national issues (or concerns) regarding the country's training system.

Evaluations require the ability to request or retain quality indicator data, provide reports and information to relevant ministries and to other agencies. The evaluation of TVET quality at a system level provides stakeholders with information as to whether TVET policy is meeting national or sectoral targets or needs. Evaluations could be undertaken using external agencies.

Competent bodies should have the ability to produce summary reports outlining the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments.

### **6. Provision of public information**

For a competent body, transparency is a key principle of good governance. The provision of public information on both the body's performance and that of the provider performance should provide confidence in the quality assurance systems.

Competent bodies may report activity through various strategies, such as annual reports, registers of actions taken against providers, and website updates. In addition, for those that adhere to *ISO/IEC 17024:2012 Conformity assessment – General requirements for bodies operating certification or persons*, the standard requires the provision of public information related to the certification process, scope of certification schemes, and requirements for entry to certification schemes.

### **Quality indicator data**

The quality assurance of TVET depends to a large extent upon the availability, validity, reliability of data about the practice and outcomes of TVET (EAS TVET QAF 2012). To be able to monitor performance and provide evaluative reports relies heavily on the system having strong data collection and data standard.

Generally speaking, indicators of quality tend to be classified according to inputs and outputs. The EAS TVET QAF (2012) notes that input indicators include:

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<sup>36</sup> This is known as traceability.

- 'endorsement by industry, professional and occupational groups of the relevance and levels of TVET achievement standards;
- endorsement by providers of the quality and utility of TVET achievement standards;
- information on the capacity and experience of provider staff, the effectiveness of financial and management systems, and the quality and relevance of provider facilities and equipment;
- information on the content, style and quality of delivery of TVET providers;
- information on provider student support services, facilities and systems;
- information on enrolment entry requirements and procedures;
- patterns of student enrolments in relation to policy objectives;
- investment by TVET providers and staff in professional development, facilities upgrades, quality assurance systems, and other innovations;
- enrolment levels and patterns for providers;
- the comprehensiveness, relevance and accessibility of information systems; and,
- mechanisms to identify areas and types of skill needed by industry.' (p. 18–19)

Output indicators were noted as:

- 'assessment outcomes, and assessment audit outcomes for units and qualifications;
- records of program delivery, student activity and student assessments;
- student completion rates, satisfaction levels, and destinations – including employment rates, and rates for different social and occupational/industry groups;
- information on the use of skills within the workplace;
- employer and other user satisfaction with graduate outcomes; and,
- evidence of the accuracy of information systems, systems to identify skill needs and the identification of the needs of vulnerable and/or other social groups' (p. 19).

Competent bodies should have a strategy in place for data collection according to an agreed data standard to enable it to perform evaluation and reporting functions.

## **International frameworks**

The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework requires AMS when referencing to describe the national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications framework or system. It proposes three quality assurance frameworks that can be used as benchmarks for the referencing process:

- ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework
- East Asia Summit Technical Vocational Education and Training Quality Assurance Framework (EAS TVET QAF)
- INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice in Quality Assurance.

The ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework will serve as a common reference point for quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions as they strive towards harmonisation amidst the diversity of higher education systems, cultures and traditions within the region. The Framework uses generic principles and statements of good practice.

The East Asia Summit Technical Vocational Education and Training Quality Assurance Framework (EAS TVET QAF) provides a basis to assist member economies in reviewing or establishing a robust quality assurance system. This framework has a self-assessment tool that also includes a stepped process for developing an action plan.

INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice in Quality Assurance aim to promote good practice for internal and/or external quality assurance. The Guidelines are designed to be used by all quality assurance agencies, whatever their stage of development.

Further information about these three frameworks is included in the Appendix.

## **International exchange**

As in any system, providing transparent and clear information about the quality assurance processes of competent bodies to others, both nationally and internationally, is critical to promoting understanding and trust in AMS TVET systems.

The scope of the information that AMS competent bodies should consider being included on their websites, in both the national language and in English<sup>37</sup>:

- Legislation pertaining to the certification agency and its role; any legislation or regulations, guidelines related to key processes
- Skills framework and its link to the NQF (if applicable)
- Certification schemes (or qualifications frameworks), related training standards and any re-certification requirements
- Quality assurance strategies documented in guidelines or overviews, including development and approval processes for certification schemes, approval processes for providers of training and/or assessment, monitoring arrangements
- Registers of providers to training and/or assessment, additional outsourced assessment venues, and assessors (if applicable)
- Data and activity reports, including sanctions or closures
- TVET system evaluation reports.

In addition, links to labour market data and recognition processes for international labour or student mobility could be included in public information.

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<sup>37</sup> Being the official language of ASEAN.



## Section 4: Guiding Principles and Protocols for Quality Assurance

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ASEAN Member States (AMS) will implement their quality assurance system for TVET using different approaches and with different levels of implementation. To facilitate mutual understanding and trust in each ASEAN Member State's TVET quality assurance approaches a common set of Principles and protocols have been agreed for:

- **Competent body.** A competent body is ultimately responsible for all or some aspects of the competency certification system. A competent body may be a qualifications authority, a body responsible for occupational standards development/endorsement, an awarding body or a competency certification body.
- **Providers of assessment services.** Providers are those that provide assessment services (and possibly training services) and may also be an awarding body or competency certification body.

### Competent bodies

#### 1. Guiding principles for competent bodies

The following principles underpin quality assurance and quality review processes used individually and collectively by each competent body.

##### **Governance**

Competent bodies have clearly documented governance arrangements that set out the responsibilities and practices, policies and procedures, exercised by an agency's executive, to provide strategic direction, to ensure objectives are achieved, to manage risks and to use resources responsibly.

##### **Accountability**

Competent bodies have a legal or reporting framework to evaluate its practices and performance against set criteria. Competent bodies should ensure that results of quality assurance and quality review activities are publicly reported at least annually.

##### **Transparency**

Competent bodies provide accurate and clear information in relation to their key functions, including processes, standards and performance.

##### **Independence**

Competent bodies have a mandate, guidelines, processes and practices that ensure independence of different elements of the quality assurance system, avoidance of conflict of interests, and independence of decision making.

##### **Confidence and standards**

Competent bodies have processes and practices to provide stakeholders with confidence that standards (both inputs and outputs) have been met.

##### **Continuous improvement**

Competent bodies' quality assurance approaches ensure the use of a balance of strategies that enhance the provision of services to meet the changing and future needs of stakeholder groups.

##### **Proportionality**

Competent bodies have quality assurance and quality review approaches that are fit for purpose and reflect the context and diversity of the AMS.

### **Flexibility of services**

Competent bodies ensure that protocols are in place nationally to facilitate assessment services or recognition processes for national or international applicants.

### **Collaboration**

Competent bodies collaborate with other competent bodies, nationally and internationally.

## ***2. Guiding protocols for competent bodies***

The competent body observes the following protocols in managing its quality assurance and quality review activities.

1. A competent body documents and implements a quality management system to address all of its functions, including:
  - Approval and monitoring of achievement standards that includes industry sector participation
  - Approval, monitoring<sup>38</sup> and evaluation of providers of training and/or assessment services based on criteria or standards
  - Monitoring of assessment outcomes
  - Issuing of certificates
  - Records management including a data standard
  - Data security
  - Outsourcing<sup>39</sup>
  - Addressing complaints
  - Reporting obligations
  - Continuous improvement and internal review.
2. A competent body makes public its quality assurance processes, in both its national language and in English.
3. A competent body manages the performance of providers of assessment services through mechanisms such as explicit incentives and sanctions.
4. A competent body maintains public registers for approved providers of training and/or assessment services, and for achievement standards such as competency certification schemes or qualifications.
5. A competent body establishes protocols for international exchange, including commitment to maintaining communication with competent agencies nationally and internationally, as well as participating in international forums, capacity development exchanges and benchmarking activities.
6. A competent body commits to an external review of its performance on a cyclical basis and makes public the findings of the review.

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<sup>38</sup> Monitoring could include: reporting of student outcomes and/or stakeholder feedback data collection and analysis; surveillance; auditing etc.

<sup>39</sup> Qualifications systems or competency certification schemes whereby assessment services are further approved to parties at a third level, e.g. to individual organisations or individual sites. This application is variously termed auspice, franchising or outsourcing arrangements.

## Providers of assessment services

### 1. Guiding principles for providers

The following principles underpin quality assurance and quality review processes used by each provider of assessment services, for example, an assessment provider, or a training and assessment provider.

#### **Governance**

Providers have clearly documented goals and objectives, governance arrangements and probity measures to meet the relevant competent body's requirements and legislation. They should have the financial resources necessary for its operation.

#### **Accountability**

Providers monitor and evaluate their practices and performance against the competent body's set requirements and using client stakeholder feedback. Providers should ensure that results of quality assurance and quality review activities are publicly reported.

#### **Transparency**

Providers have accurate and clear information in relation to their assessment and support services for clients.

#### **Independence**

Providers ensure that they conduct their services (e.g. assessment) with impartiality, with avoidance of conflict of interests and ensuring independence of decision making, especially assessment outcome decisions.

#### **Confidence and standards**

Providers have processes and practices that ensure that services conducted by themselves or on their behalf meet the required standards and expectations. Provider processes and practices should provide the competent body and its stakeholders with assurance that individual achievement standards have been met.

#### **Continuous improvement**

Provider processes and practices balance compliance requirements and continuous improvement processes to ensure that their services meet stakeholder and client needs.

#### **Proportionality**

Provider quality assurance and quality review approaches are fit-for-purpose and focused on ensuring quality outcomes.

#### **Flexibility of services**

Providers ensure that barriers to assessment services for national or international applicants are minimised.

### 2. Guiding protocols for providers

The provider observes the following protocols in managing its quality assurance and quality review activities.

1. A provider documents and implements a quality management system to ensure that it provides quality assessment services, including:
  - Ensuring appropriate assessment resources, physical resources are suitable for the competency certification schemes or programs
  - Ensuring appropriate levels of competent staff for its assessment services, including professional development

- Ensuring appropriate assessee support services
  - Monitoring services through client and stakeholder feedback
  - Valid and reliable assessment outcomes
  - Issuing of qualifications or certificates (if applicable)
  - Records management
  - Data security
  - Outsourcing arrangements
  - Addressing client complaints
  - Reporting obligations
  - Continuous improvement and internal review.
2. A provider takes responsibility for all assessment services undertaken on its behalf. Provider maintains a public register of its campuses, assessment centres or venues and provides public information on the performance of these sites.
  3. A provider implements access and equity strategies in the provision of services, including, inclusive entry requirements, support for clients with disabilities in the learning and/or assessment, recognition of prior learning,<sup>40</sup> and acknowledges assessments undertaken by other quality assured service providers or competent bodies.
  4. A provider implements processes and practices to ensure that decisions made are impartial and free of conflicts of interest or undue influence.
  5. A provider implements procedures to minimise barriers to assessment services including providing assessments at regular intervals, that the fee is reasonable and transparent and does not restrict access to, or the supply of, the service.
  6. A provider establishes protocols for maintaining communication with the competent body and other providers, as well as participating in benchmarking activities and/or assessment moderation.
  7. A provider takes responsibility for the maintenance of its compliance with the quality standards. Provider takes a continuous improvement approach to its assessment services. Provider is subject to external review of its performance, the findings of which are made public.

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<sup>40</sup> This may also be termed recognition of current competence.

## Section 5: Guiding Principles and Protocols for Recognition of Competency Certification Systems amongst ASEAN Member States

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How competent bodies quality assure TVET varies enormously from country to country. There are the increasing pressures of labour and student mobility, of ASEAN involvement in Free Trade Area including calls for extending mutual recognition agreements, and for facilitating recognition of students and skilled workers across traditional borders. These pressures have led to a need for competent bodies to broaden their understanding of how countries' quality assure TVET, for achieving some comparability of expectation, for liaising with other AMS' competent bodies, and for recognising the other AMS' competent bodies.

Currently, some AMS competent bodies have sought MOUs with other bodies and have worked towards increasing the dialogue across the AMS. As a group the AMS aims to provide for a common structure and some consistency in application recognising competency certification systems, and in turn the competent bodies. This does not mean, however, that specific competency certification schemes are automatically recognised or that individuals assessed and certified by one competent body will be automatically recognised by another competent body. What it may mean is that the assessments or work undertaken by one competent body will be acknowledged and individuals may need to seek additional assessment for formal recognition, licensing or professional purposes.

### Guiding principles for recognition

The following principles underpin the recognition of competency certification systems.

#### **Sovereignty**

Member states respect each country's specific quality assurance structures and processes which are responsive to national priorities.

#### **Comparability**

Member states use benchmarks to determine comparability of quality assurance systems rather than seeking or assuming sameness of structures and processes. Quality assurance systems should flexibly adapt to national and global development and should be consistent in application overtime to enable comparisons and enhance confidence.

#### **Transparency**

Member states promote transparency of their standards and measures of quality, as well as outcomes of benchmarking or referencing processes.

#### **Accountability**

Member states encourage the evaluation and reporting of competent body performance against agreed international benchmarks.<sup>41</sup> Evaluations include consultation with partners and stakeholders, resulting in a public report.

#### **Continuous Improvement**

Member states respect the degree of implementation of a country's quality assurance system with the understanding that these systems are based on a continuous improvement approach.

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<sup>41</sup> INQAHE guidelines, EAS TVET QAF, ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework

## **Guiding protocols for recognition**

To ensure that the recognition process of competency certification systems is carried out effectively, transparently and in a way that is consistent and coherent across the AMS, the following protocols have been agreed.

1. Each participating AMS competent body agrees to the benchmark for evaluating an AMS competency certification system.
2. The structure of the competency certification system in each AMS is described against the agreed benchmark.
3. The legal basis and responsibilities of each relevant competent body is outlined. If there is more than one competent body within an AMS the relationship is explained.
4. For each of the relevant competency certification schemes a clear and demonstrable link is made with the level descriptors (if applicable) of the participating AMS competency certification system. The links to the NQF (if applicable) and the AQRF level descriptors are explained.
5. The quality assurance approaches of each of the relevant competent bodies are benchmarked against agreed criteria. The criteria as outlined in the agreed benchmark will be the basis of the activity. For example:
  - For each competent body, the procedures for approval of competency certification schemes and approval and monitoring of training and/or assessment providers are outlined.
  - Management and monitoring of assessors and assessment decisions.
6. The activity is undertaken collectively and includes independent participants experienced in quality assurance of competency certification schemes.
7. The process results in a single agreed report, including:
  - Setting out the process undertaken, the findings of the recognition activity, identified level of comparability, and the agreed level of recognition
  - Actions for seeking enhanced comparability between the participating AMS competency certification systems are documented and mutually agreed.
  - If the recognition activity results in a high level of comparability, each competent body commits to publicly acknowledging the recognition.
8. The recognition report is made public in each participating AMS. Updated reports are provided as required.

## **Section 6: Participating in National Referencing Activities**

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### **Background**

The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) is a regional common reference framework. The AQRF functions as a device to enable comparisons of qualifications across ASEAN Member States.

The referencing process is an autonomous national process where the relevant national stakeholders and authorities agree on a link between each national qualifications level and a level in the AQRF. This link between the national qualifications level and the AQRF level is an outcome of the referencing process and enables further linkage, through the AQRF, to the qualifications levels in other AMS. For example, it will be possible to see all the national levels that relate to a specific AQRF level and this will enable comparisons of the qualifications from different countries that all link to the same AQRF level.

Specifically, the referencing process is expected to include consulting stakeholders on the proposed links between NQF levels and AQRF levels in each Member State, reporting national referencing outcomes to the proposed AQRF Committee, engaging in peer review with the Committee and finally reporting a single official linkage of a Member State's NQF with the AQRF. This process is potentially complex and involves technical work with a significant socio-political dimension.

To ensure that the process is carried out effectively, transparently and in a way that is consistent and coherent across the ASEAN community, the AQRF includes eleven criteria that have been agreed to promote a common process. These are listed below.

1. The structure of the education and training system is described.
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.
3. The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualifications system are transparent.
4. 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.
5. The basis in agreed standards of the national framework or qualifications system and its qualifications is described.
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.
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.
8. People from other countries who are experienced in the field of qualifications are involved in the referencing process and its reporting.
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.

10. The outcome of referencing is published by the ASEAN Secretariat and by the main national public body.
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, and diplomas issued.

The AQRF does provide for a common language to be used for the referencing process and for mutually understanding each other's qualification and competency certification systems. Competent bodies will need to provide the link between the terms that are used within their competency certification systems and that of the AQRF as they participate in the referencing process.

## **Context**

AMS competency certification systems are linked to or included in each AMS' respective national qualifications framework and qualifications systems. Although the AMS competency certification systems in these Guidelines relate specifically to public sector structures, this does not preclude private sector structures (e.g. enterprises) from being involved in recognition processes.

For AMS without a national qualifications framework, it is acknowledged that these competency certification systems have an explicit role in the human resource development of each AMS. For these systems, key contextual requirements need to be in place to be able to participate in the referencing processes, such as:

- For the skills framework, are there level descriptors outlining the complexity of skills and knowledge?
- Are the certification schemes based on learning outcomes?
- Is there one competent body overseeing the competency certification system, or more? If there is more than one competent body, who will lead the process?
- Is there a clearly documented and implemented quality assurance system that is understood by stakeholders?
- Can a link be established between the skills framework and the NQF?

The AQRF Referencing Guidelines (draft 2015) indicate some important preconditions that need to be considered by each Member State prior to conducting formal referencing, including:

- The AQRF is seen in the country as an enhancement to regional cooperation; there is a process underway to disseminate and examine perceptions and value (or otherwise) of the AQRF.
- Capacity building is underway with regard to understanding and using the AQRF, including creation of an official portal and a level of consultation with various agencies and bodies.
- Governance and management structures are in place or being formulated; this includes determining responsibility for referencing and setting up competent committees.
- Quality assurance in the qualifications system is effective, reviewing current quality assurance systems to include the use of learning outcomes and NQFs.



- Ensuring links with other contexts for quality assurance are clear; considering how national quality assurance systems, for example, for standards for program design, interface with the AQRF structure and principles.
- There is a raised awareness of linked projects, for example, MRAs and other alignments plus understanding the interdependence of the AQRF with relevant projects, which need to be scoped and understood.

Competent bodies will need to consider how they are included in the formal referencing process to provide for the greatest level of recognition and benefit for their clients.

### **How do these Guidelines link to the AQRF and harmonisation?**

A country or a region uses a range of strategies to facilitate recognition of skills for labour and student mobility. It is the mix of these strategies that provides confidence in decisions made by providers of assessment services.

1. The AQRF, referencing activities and national reports provide the initial steps in building trust with AMS. An AMS referencing report includes information about the country's NQF or education sector QF, the link of the levels of the NQF to the AQRF levels, and provides an overview of the quality assurance arrangements against an agreed benchmark. Interested competent bodies, institutions and employers can use this information to better inform their recognition practices.
2. The AMS are also developing mutual recognition agreements for various occupations and skills. These agreements include regional occupational standards for AMS to use as a reference point for developing competency standards and qualifications. The MRAs provide for comparability of competency standards used in each AMS and related learning programs (e.g. qualification).
3. These Guidelines form the basis of an understanding of quality assurance by competent bodies. They outline principles and protocols for competent agencies and for providers of assessment services. These Guidelines require AMS competent bodies to undertake internal and external evaluation and to quality assure the provision of assessment services through their providers.

With these strategies in place and information being made public, competent bodies, institutions and employers will have greater confidence in recognition decisions made.

## Appendix: International Quality Assurance Frameworks

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The AQRF referencing criteria 6 indicates that the national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications framework or system described. Referencing reports need to explain the main national quality assurance systems that operate in the education, training and qualifications system. The AQRF proposes three quality assurance frameworks that can be used as benchmarks for the referencing process:

- INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice in Quality Assurance
- East Asia Summit TVET Quality Assurance Framework
- ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework.

### *INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice in Quality Assurance*

The INQAAHE Guidelines aim to promote good practice for internal and/or external quality assurance. It is designed to be used by all quality assurance agencies. The INQAAHE Guidelines focus on the role of external quality assurance agencies (EQAAs). It addresses the following areas:

- EQAA: accountability, transparency, and resources
  - Governance
  - Resources
  - QA of EQAA
  - Reporting public information.
- Institutions of higher education and the EQAA: relationship, standards, and internal reviews
  - Relationship Between the EQAA and Higher Education Institutions
  - EQAA's Requirements for Institutional/Program Performance
  - EQAA's Requirements Institutional Self-Evaluation and Reporting to the EQAA
- EQAA review of institutions: evaluation, decision, and appeals
  - EQAA's Evaluation of the Institution and/or Program
  - Decisions
  - Appeals
  - External activities: collaboration with other agencies and transnational/cross-border education
  - Collaboration
  - Transnational/Cross-Border Higher Education.

### ***East Asia Summit TVET Quality Assurance Framework***

EAS TVET Quality Assurance Framework functions as a common reference quality assurance framework. It does not replace or attempt to define national quality assurance systems, instead it aims to support and guide initiatives in relation to quality assurance at the national agency level.

The EAS TVET QAF is underpinned by the following five key principles.

- Transparency
- Accountability
- Continuous Improvement Approach
- Flexibility and Responsiveness
- Comparability.

The EAS TVET Quality Assurance Framework's quality standards operate at two levels and include agency requirements and suggested provider requirements. The framework includes:

- Quality assurance standards for agencies
- Exemplar quality assurance standards for providers.

Both the agency quality standards and the provider quality standards are described in terms of:

- Governance;
- Approval and monitoring of providers; and
- Approval and monitoring of achievement standards, for example, qualifications, certification schemes.

The framework also includes quality indicators to support the evaluation and continuous improvement processes of agencies and providers. The indicators can be used to evaluate the performance of a country's TVET sector at both national and provider level.

The EAS TVET QAF provides the following requirements for quality indicators.

Table 7: Quality indicators, EAS TVET QAF

	Aspects			
Themes	Context	Input	Process	Output/Product
	C.1 Learner Characteristics	I.1 Learning resources and support	P.1 Training and Assessment	o.1 Learner Progress and Attainment
	C.2 Provider characteristics	I.2 Program design and curriculum development		o.2 Comparability of achievement standards
	C.3 Learner Pathways	I.3 Quality of Teaching Staff		o.3 Graduate destinations
	C.4 Recognition of prior learning in all contexts			o.4 Stakeholder satisfaction
	C.5 Labour market influences			

Source: EAS TVET QAF 2012

### *ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework*

The ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework will serve as a common reference point for quality assurance agencies and institutions as they strive towards harmonisation amidst the diversity of quality assurance systems, cultures and traditions within the region.

The framework uses generic principles and statements of good practice. The framework is not prescriptive; its purpose is to promote good practices of internal and external quality assurance.

The framework is based on four quadrants:

1. External Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAA)
2. External Quality Assurance (EQA) Processes
3. Institutional Quality Assurance
4. National Qualifications Framework'

These quadrants are then further detailed in criteria.

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## ASEAN Member States Competent Bodies

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### *Brunei Darussalam*

Ministry of Education – <http://moe.gov.bn/bdnac>

### *Cambodia*

National Training Board – Website: XXXX

### *Indonesia*

Indonesian Professional Certification Authority/Badan Nasional Sertifikasi Profesi (BNSP)

[www.bnsp.go.id](http://www.bnsp.go.id)

Ministry of Manpower (coordination of national competency standards development)

[www.naker.go.id](http://www.naker.go.id)

### *Lao PDR*

Name: – Website: XXXX

### *Malaysia*

Name: – Website: XXXX

### *Myanmar*

National Skills Standards Authority – Website: XXXX

### *Philippines*

Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) –

<http://www.tesda.gov.ph/>

### *Singapore*

Name: – Website: XXXX

### *Thailand*

Name: – Website: XXXX

Name: – Website: XXXX

### *Vietnam*

Skills Development Department, General Directorate of Vocational Training, Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs – <http://www.molisa.gov.vn/en/Pages/Home.aspx>