



ASEAN QUALIFICATIONS REFERENCE FRAMEWORK

Concept Note No. 1— Non-formal and Informal Learning



one vision
one identity
one community

This concept note¹ is the first in the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQR) Series. This note documents the agreed understanding of the AMS on:

- The role the AQR to encourage the quality assurance of all learning achievements
- The importance of recognising non-formal and informal learning
- The need to encourage the development of national approaches to validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Non-formal and Informal Learning

The basis of the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQR) is that it is comprehensive in its capacity to accommodate quality assured learning achievements (including qualifications) gained in the ASEAN Member States (AMS). Therefore one of the principles of the AQR is that it should encourage the development of national approaches to validating learning gained outside formal education and training including learning gained in work and learning gained unintentionally in everyday life. These areas of learning are often referred to as non-formal and informal learning.

Non-formal learning can be considered to be the learning outcomes gained in planned activities in work (such as in-company training) and in communities where people join together to develop common interests (such as art and crafts or cooking).

Informal learning is gained during activities related to work, family or leisure where there is no explicit plan for learning and learning is unintentional from the learner perspective. Examples of learning outcomes acquired through informal learning are languages learned during a stay in another country or through activities at home such as taking care of a child or elderly person.

Validation is the process where the assessment of learning gained in non-formal and informal settings is checked against a set of standards (e.g. occupational standards or educational standards). If the assessed learning is confirmed as meeting these standards the person can make them visible in a CV or seek to have them recognised in a programme, qualification or certificate.

During the development process of the AQR all of the AMS made it clear that the validation of non-formal and informal learning within their country is a priority development either in one education and training sector or across all sectors. In most countries the validation of non-formal and informal learning was regarded as underdeveloped and a challenging innovation. Whilst some countries have well-established systems working in TVET and higher education, and some countries have systems in place based on competency standards, other AMS are starting the development validation policy and practice. Some AMS have established assessment centres and other countries have firm plans to do so. The assessment centres work to validate learning based on, for example, educational and occupational standards.

Countries have different priority groups of stakeholders that would benefit from better validation of non-formal and informal learning. These groups include dropouts from school and work, people being given a second chance to complete their basic schooling, people who have skills but are not formally qualified and finally people who are engaging in work based training.

¹ Draft prepared by Mike Coles and Andrea Bateman (2015) with support from ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand FTA Economic Cooperation Support Programme (AECSP).

Principles for validation of non-formal and informal learning in ASEAN Countries

The AMS have discussed and agreed on a set of principles that forms the basis of validation of non-formal and informal learning that is linked to the AQRF.

Principles	The process for validation...
Fully integrated	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• is a component part of a coherent qualifications system
Open access	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• is independent of the route to learning; focusses on only achievement of learning outcomes• is available to all individuals and is affordable• includes adequate support to applicants to identify and document evidence• is supported by information for individuals, employers, voluntary organisations and learning providers.
Fairness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• includes adequate support to applicants for identifying and documenting evidence• support recognition including certification
Standards based	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• is based on the same expectations in terms of the learning outcomes that are used by formal qualifications system.
Quality Assured	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• requires assessment to be transparent and support valid and reliable judgements• is incorporated into quality assurance processes

These principles underpin the AMS commitment to making the AQRF support work towards recognition of a wide range of learning from any setting for that learning: formal, non-formal, informal. Thus the principles are intended to support a national practical approach that would be a response to the AQRF principle of broad recognition of learning. The AQRF could provide a focus for the exchange of effective arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Referencing NQFs to the ARQF

The AMS, in the process of referencing, will need to explain how all quality assured learning can be linked to AQRF levels. Thus the AMS will explain how the national developments in non-formal and informal learning can, or will in the future, lead to qualifications that will, through the NQF, be linked to AQRF levels.

Each AMS' referencing report will explain the standards that are used for validating non-formal learning such as occupational standards, programme standards and assessment standards. The report will also explain the strategies used to encourage the validation of non-formal and informal learning and how assessment of non-formal and informal learning is carried out and the quality assurance arrangements that are used to promote valid and reliable judgements.

NQFs are effective tools

Generally speaking qualifications frameworks classify achievements in learning gained in formal settings (e.g. colleges, universities, training centres). However, a lot of learning is gained outside these formal settings, for example in work, in leisure activities, in life generally. Often the knowledge and skills gained in these non-formal and informal settings has relevance to the content of learning programmes and to what is needed in work. For example:

- someone who has spent some years caring for an elderly parent may have skills that are valued in clinics and hospitals;
- someone who has run a successful small business may have knowledge and skills that are part of a business administration degree;

- someone who has renovated small boats in their spare time may have gained marine engine expertise that would be valued in a boat repair yard.

Qualifications frameworks need not be limited to formal education and training and can help to make learning gained outside formal settings more visible. There are several ways frameworks help with this.

NQFs define learning levels and these are independent of routes to learning or pathways. This means that if non-formal and informal learning can be assessed and validated it can be formally recognised.

The most important aspect of frameworks for making all learning visible is encouraging the use of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes can make it much easier for a person to:

- (i) appreciate that they have learning that could be useful to them if it were made more visible (in a qualification, in a curriculum vitae).
- (ii) express their learning in ways which are conducive to matching standards used in work and education;
- (iii) have their learning assessed;
- (iv) have their achievements recognised in a partial or full qualification.

Thus it is through NQFs that the AQRF can encourage the greater use of validation of non-formal and informal learning.