



**AN EXPLORATORY BENCHMARKING REVIEW OF  
PROFESSIONAL BODIES IN NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS  
FRAMEWORK (NQF) SYSTEMS**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

This document provides an exploratory benchmarking review of professional bodies in National Qualifications Framework (NQF) systems. It explores the location/fit, if any, of professional bodies in National Qualifications Frameworks and whether and/or how they operate under the regulation of qualifications authorities. It should be noted that professional bodies are also normally referred to elsewhere as ‘professional associations’ and ‘professional societies’, amongst other terms. The literature review forms part of a larger project on the value/fit of professional bodies in the National Qualifications Framework system of South Africa.

## 1.1. SCOPE AND SAMPLING

This review focuses on National Qualifications Frameworks/systems of **27 countries** sampled from a total of 201 United Nations-listed countries. It uses the same sampling method and approach adopted for SAQA’s recent research on ‘*Selected Global Trends in Qualifications Frameworks*’ (2021) which included 27 detailed country reports and analyses.

The countries’ qualifications systems were sampled based on various criteria which are reflected in Table 1.

**Table 1: Sampling criteria**

• Sub-Regions	Africa North Africa South Asia East Asia South-East Asia West Australia and New Zealand Europe East Europe North Europe South Europe West.
• Population Size	Over 100m=4 50-100m=3 20-50m=2 Under 20m=1
• NQF Generation	Fully set up 1990-99=1 2000-2010=2 2011 to present=3 Partly established=4 Initial stages=5

About 136 of the 201 countries have NQFs at different phases of development. Of the 136 countries, 53 had qualifications authorities as the leading NQF implementation bodies, 17 countries had single or clustered Ministries, 36 countries had different NQF partnerships, and no sufficient information was available for 30 countries.

The count for countries where NQF generation was clear and identifiable was 103. **Generation 1** NQFs were established and operational by the 1990s; **Generation 2**, between 2000 and 2010, and **Generation 3** comprises those established on or after 2011. **Generation 4** included, irrespective of date, those countries that may have official NQF or related legislation in place but are not fully functional and not yet fully implementing their systems. **Generation 5** are those countries that have the idea of establishing a qualification framework and have started with initial steps such as stakeholder consultations, drafting of legislation, etc.

Twenty-seven (27) of the 103 countries were studied in detail. In these countries, ministries develop NQF policy – together with qualifications authorities – and sometimes oversee aspects of NQF policy implementation. Qualifications authorities play elaborate roles: (a) NQF policy development, (b) oversight of NQF policy implementation, (c) developing/ overseeing level descriptors and learning outcomes, (d) developing/ overseeing qualification standards, (e) developing and maintaining qualification registers (in a few instances ministries manage the registers), (f) the recognition of non-formal and informal learning – although this role is also often played by specialised entities, (g) coordinating stakeholder collaboration, communications with stakeholders and stakeholder support (this is the most frequently found role), (h) managing the NQF website and NQF advice (this is also a frequently found role), (i) evaluating foreign qualifications, maintaining links with other country framework and RQF initiatives, and serving as national coordinating points (NCPs) in this regard (in some instances ministries take up this role), and (j) conducting research, monitoring and evaluation towards NQF enhancement and deepened implementation.

In addition to the criteria identified earlier, the 27 countries were selected for detailed analysis because they have a high number of specialised NQF implementing bodies; varied NQF objectives; streamlined and responsive NQFs; insightful oversight arrangements; large roles for ministries; insightful distribution of responsibilities; fewer implementing partners; first-generation NQFs; multiple sub-frameworks; well-functioning NQFs; including qualifications developed in the labour market; and less/non-regulatory NQFs.

It should be noted that a 28<sup>th</sup> country, namely, England, was included in the exploratory benchmarking review of professional bodies in National Qualifications Framework (NQF) systems, following a request for its consideration from SAQA's Professional Body Committee. The inclusion of England did not include a detailed country study.

## **1.2. DATA SOURCES**

The data to establish the nature and role of professional bodies in NQF systems and whether they are regulated by qualifications authorities or other education-related institutions were sourced from NQF regional and global inventories published regularly by institutions such as the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), the European Training Foundation (ETF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) (ETF, 2019; Cedefop, 2017; UNESCO UIL, 2015 and UNESCO, 2013). Additional sources such as referencing reports, legislation, and

websites specific to each country's national qualifications system, were also consulted to supplement the data from inventories.

## **2. COUNTRY CASES: PROFESSIONAL BODIES IN NQFs**

Table 2 below covers 27 countries that were sampled based on sub/region, population size, NQF generation, and various reasons for selections as indicated per country. As mentioned earlier, England was the 28<sup>th</sup> country that was included in the professional body exploratory review. The column on the right summarises the NQFs of these countries and highlights the roles and functions of professional bodies and whether they reside within the NQF systems, and are regulated by organisations mandated to implement and further develop national qualifications frameworks.

**Table 2: Country Cases: Professional bodies in NQFs**

Sub-region	Country	Pop Size	QF Gen	Reason for selection	Professional Bodies/Associations/Societies in NQF systems/legislation and oversight/regulating authorities
Africa North	Tunisia	1	2	High numbers of specialised implementing bodies	<p>The Tunisian qualifications system involves numerous institutions with mandates of a different nature related to key functions, such as quality assurance, development of standards and learning programmes, recognition of qualifications, and management of different reforms with international assistance in key domains of the NQF. Key ministries (Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research, and Vocational Training and Employment) exercise functions of policy-shaping and decision-making in their respective sectors. In Vocational Education and Training (VET), other important players are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the National Centre of Teacher Training and Curriculum Development, operating under the umbrella of the Ministry of Vocational Training and Employment. It has a key role in developing competence standards and programmes for VET and other qualifications norms.</li> <li>the Tunisian Agency for Vocational Training, which is the main public provider of VET courses (initial and continuing) through its network of 130 VET centres. It coordinates public VET provision and delivers the qualifications in the name of the state and evaluates the training provision in the VET centres.</li> </ul> <p>In higher education, other key institutions are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the National Evaluation, Quality Assurance and Accreditation Authority (NEQAAA), overseeing quality assurance procedures and decisions, as described below. NEQAAA contributes to the maintenance and improvement of quality in higher education as well as to the compliance of the education system with internationally recognised standards;</li> <li>the Universities Council ensures that the strategic guidelines of the sector are applied; and</li> <li>higher education institutions playing their dedicated role.</li> </ul> <p>In addition to the above institutions, ‘social partners’, sector organisations, and companies play a role in developing standards of qualification, and in the APC (the latter in the expanded form being a French term denoting a competence-based approach in VET) (Global Inventory, 2019).</p>

Africa South	South Africa	3	1	Home country of researchers	<p>South Africa's National Qualifications Framework comprises three differentiated and articulated Sub-Frameworks, each overseen by a Quality Council as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework (GFETQSF), overseen by Umalusi: Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training.</li> <li>• Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF), overseen by the Council on Higher Education (CHE).</li> <li>• Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF), overseen by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO).</li> </ul> <p>There are six NQF partners in South Africa, each of which has a range of public and private stakeholders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET)</li> <li>• Department of Basic Education (DBE)</li> <li>• South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)</li> <li>• Umalusi: Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training</li> <li>• Council on Higher Education (CHE)</li> <li>• Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO).</li> </ul> <p>NQF stakeholders include the six NQF partners, the entities that report to the DHET, as well as private HEIs and colleges, public and private primary and secondary schools, skills development providers, quality development facilitators, development and assessment quality partners, <b>professional bodies</b>, organised business, organised labour, and learners.</p> <p>SAQA's mandate (RSA, 2008) includes, among other things, developing and implementing policy and criteria, after consultation with statutory and non-statutory <b>professional bodies</b>, for recognising a <b>professional body</b> and registering a <b>professional designation</b> in the context of the NQF Act (National Qualifications Framework [NQF] Act No. 67 of 2008; SAQA Policy and Criteria for Recognising a Professional Body and Registering a Professional Designation for the Purposes of the NQF Act, as Amended (SAQA, 2020).</p>
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Asia East	Hong Kong	1	2	Unusual NQF objectives (competitiveness, incentives)	<p>Among other functions, the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ defines the competency standards required of practitioners in different industries;</li> <li>▪ quality assures qualifications and enables citizens to obtain recognized qualifications (through education and training or RPL);</li> <li>▪ ensures that education and training providers, employers, and the public understand the range of qualifications available and appreciate that their (qualifications) can improve the skills of the workforce;</li> <li>▪ delineates the links between different types and levels of qualifications and clearly articulates the qualifications;</li> <li>▪ recognises practitioners' existing skills, knowledge, and work experience through RPL mechanisms developed for industries that have adopted Specification of Competency Standards;</li> <li>▪ simplifies and standardises the use of award titles through the Award Titles Scheme (ATS), which is applicable to qualifications at all HKQF levels; and</li> <li>▪ specifies the size/volume of learning by introducing a qualifications framework credit to enable learners to discern the time it will take to complete a learning programme - and facilitates credit accumulation and transfer (Global Inventory, 2019).</li> </ul> <p>The Education Bureau (EDB) launched Guidelines for Recognition of Professional Qualifications under the HKQF which mentions that organisations can apply <u>to become an assessment agency</u> for issuing Professional Qualifications. Target applicants include local organisations, statutory or non-statutory, profit-making, or non-profit making such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>professional bodies</b>, which administer professional certification for a discipline or a profession, or an industry or a branch of industry; and</li> <li>▪ regulatory bodies which issue licences through assessments, e.g., trade tests or licentiate examinations (Education Bureau, Hong Kong, 2018).</li> </ul> <p>In terms of the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance, the Secretary (who Heads the EDB) may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ appoint one or more assessment agencies for such term as the Secretary may specify to grant qualifications, in relation to an industry or a branch of industry, for the purposes of the HKQF;</li> <li>▪ re-appoint an appointed assessment agency, on or before the date of the expiry of its term, for such term as the Secretary may specify; and</li> <li>▪ impose conditions or restrictions in appointing or reappointing an assessment agency (Education Bureau of Hong Kong. n.d.).</li> </ul>
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					Policy, Principles, and Operational Guidelines for CAT under the HKQF encourage the adoption of this policy by institutions including any organisation that provides formal, non-formal, or informal learning, such as universities, education institutions, continuing education units, training providers, enterprises, companies, <b>professional bodies</b> , and labour unions, etc. (Ibid.).
Asia South East	Malaysia	2	2	Streamlined, responsive NQF	<p>For professional qualifications, the Malaysian Qualifications Authority (MQA) performs joint accreditation with <b>professional bodies</b> through joint technical committees to ensure the synchronisation of accreditation processes and results. The MQA is responsible for the accreditation of higher education and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) qualifications. It establishes joint accreditation with key <b>professional bodies</b> for the accreditation of professional programmes. The Department of Skills Development, Ministry of Human Resources in Malaysia, is responsible for the accreditation of skills qualifications (Global Inventory, 2019; Monitoring Shareholders Watch Group, Malaysia, n.d.).</p> <p>One of the objectives of the qualifications framework, according to the MQA Act, in Malaysia is “to promote, where applicable, the presentation of qualifications in forms that facilitate their evaluation by any person, including... accreditation bodies, <b>professional bodies</b>, examination bodies and employers...” (Government of Malaysia, MQA Act, 2007).</p>
	Thailand	3	2	High numbers of specialised implementing bodies	<p>Overall responsibility for implementing the NQF is in the hands of the Ministries of Education, Labour, and Industries, together with the Federation of Thai Industries and the Thai Chamber of Commerce and Board of Trade of Thailand. A national committee composed of qualified experts from educational institutions, workplaces, and <b>professional associations</b> oversees implementation of the NQF in accordance with the principles and guidelines approved by the Cabinet. Also involved are the Office for National Educational Standards and Quality Assessment, the Ministry of Education, and the National Institute of Education Testing Service (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. n.d.).</p> <p>The office of the Education Council is responsible for various NQF-related activities. It works closely with, for example, the Thailand Professional Qualifications Institute (TPQI) (Global Inventory, 2019).</p> <p>The Department of Skill Development (DSD), Ministry of Labour, TPQI, and industries and <b>professional associations</b> are responsible for setting occupational and competency standards (Korea-World Bank Partnership Facility, 2015).</p>

	Indonesia	4	3	Insightful oversight arrangements	<p>The Indonesian Qualifications Framework (IQF or KKNI) is overseen by three ministries: (1) Education and Culture, (2) Manpower, and (3) Research, Technology, and Higher Education. Education and training provision is devised by each sector based on the Decree of the Ministry of Manpower no 21/2014. Professional competence and skills training is managed by the National Office of Professional Certification under the auspices of the Ministry of Manpower. Workers or potential workers needing a professional certificate of competence may go to the <b>professional certification body/institution established in various higher education institutions and public workshops to take the exams and obtain the certificate</b>. The IQF/KKNI is the basis for the development of national standards of education and professional (vocational) competency standards. It is a point of reference for accreditation, assessment, and certification by bodies such as the National Accreditation Board and the National Professional Certification Board, as well as professional and occupational competence certification boards and private accreditation bodies (Global Inventory, 2019).</p> <p>As indicated above the key actors include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ministries of Education and Culture; Manpower; and Research, Technology, and Higher Education</li> <li>▪ National Office of Professional Certification</li> <li>▪ National Professional Certification Authority (BNSP) - has the duty to ensure competency and employment recognition in all sectors of the professional field in Indonesia through certification. As an independent authority, BNSP has the duty to conduct the certification of work competency and grant licences to <b>professional certification institutions</b> that are eligible to perform work competency certification. (Global Inventory, 2019; <i>Hadi Purwanto</i> Law Office [Indonesia Law Firm], 2018).</li> </ul>
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	Vietnam	3	4	A large role for the Ministry of Finance	<p>Under the Competition Law 2018, the competition authority of Vietnam has clear authority to deal with activities and transactions which have an impact on the Vietnam market. A new Law on Competition (Competition Law 2018) has taken effect on 1 July 2019 in Vietnam. The 2018 Law on Competition applies to any acts by foreign individuals or entities which have or may have the effect of restricting competition in Vietnam’s markets. It also expands the scope of entities caught under the law to include related foreign agencies, organisations and individuals, and public professional entities and <b>professional associations</b> operating in Vietnam. Various institutions and stakeholders are involved in the Vietnamese Qualifications Framework (VQF) implementation. The Ministry of Education and Training is responsible for hosting and coordinating with other ministries and related sectors. <b>professional associations</b>, training providers, and research institutes are involved to build up and approve learning outcomes and align evidence for each level, each area, and each major of higher education.</p> <p>The Global Inventory (2019) indicated that <b>professional associations</b> and representatives of manufacturing and service sectors are responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ researching and recommending competency profiles, requirements in knowledge and skills of job roles in the areas of expertise;</li> <li>▪ attending sector councils to suggest requirements for qualifications, learning outcomes, and evidence for each area and major;</li> <li>▪ taking part in the outcome-based and evidence-based assessment of training quality of areas and sectors; and</li> <li>▪ giving recommendations to state authorities and training providers on adjustment and supplementation to make learning outcomes and evidence relevant to each job role.</li> </ul> <p>In Vietnam, the participation of <b>professional associations</b> is much required in some specific professions, especially for the development of occupational standards.</p>
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Asia West	Turkey	3	3	High numbers of specialised implementing bodies	<p>The Turkish Qualifications Framework (TQF) has been prepared by the joint work of the Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA), the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), and the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) in cooperation with the different ministries, public authorities, <b>professional bodies</b>, trade unions, employer associations, student councils, and relevant social stakeholders. The TQF will initially include qualifications awarded by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) and the Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA) as well as higher education qualifications awarded under the coordination and supervision of the CoHE. In time, it will include other formal qualifications awarded by various responsible bodies such as ministries, public authorities, or <b>professional bodies</b>, together with vocational and professional qualifications, some of which are already available. Other qualifications that will be required in the Turkish labour market will be gradually included in the TQF.</p> <p>Almost 70% of the Authorised Certification Bodies (ACBs) are non-profit organisations such as <b>professional bodies</b>, the chamber of commerce and industry, lifelong learning centres in universities, employee unions, or employer associations (Turkey Qualifications Framework, 2016; European Training Foundation, 2021).</p>
	Cyprus	1	2	Insightful distribution of responsibilities	<p>In Cyprus, various entities are responsible for and share the implementation of the Cyprus Qualifications Framework (CyQF):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC)</li> <li>• The Council of CyQF was established to coordinate collaboration between stakeholders.</li> <li>• The National Qualifications Authority (NQA) provides quality assurance, monitoring, NQF levels, developing qualifications register, and strengthening legal aspects of the CyQF system.</li> <li>• The National Resource Development Authority (HRDA) is responsible for quality assurance in general in the system.</li> <li>• The Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation (CYQAA), recently established, provides quality assurance in higher education (Global Inventory, 2019).</li> </ul> <p>According to the CyQF Referencing Report, the Council of CyQF comprises “representatives of all relevant public services, employers’ organisations, trade unions, <b>professional associations</b>, and the academic community” (p. 89). The report also notes that “one of the main challenges is the communication of the [CyQF] to the outside world”.</p>

					The <b>professional bodies</b> , the industry, the students, and everybody that is involved in the [referencing] process” (Ministry of Education and Culture, Cyprus, 2020, p. 161).
	Georgia	1	2	Few implementing partners	<p>In Georgia, the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) is responsible for the management and implementation of the NQF. It leads quality assurance, maintains a register of occupational standards, registers accredited programmes, and facilitates social partner engagement such as the development of occupational standards (Global Inventory, 2019).</p> <p>There is no explicit mention of professional bodies/associations/societies in the NQF in Georgia. The Global Inventory (2019) however mentions Sector Councils, which identify components of vocational qualifications, modules, and the need for the development of frameworks/modules of vocational standards. These councils submit relevant proposals to the NCEQE. They have been established in the following disciplines/professions: humanities; business, administration, and law; engineering; industry and food processing; construction; information and communication technologies; agriculture, forestry, fishing, and veterinary science; and healthcare and social care (Global Inventory, 2019).</p>
<b>Australia and New Zealand</b>	New Zealand	1	1	Generation 1 NQF	<p>The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) is tasked with administering educational assessments and qualifications. It was established by the New Zealand Education Act (1989) and administers the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF). The NZQA is the entity tasked with administering educational assessment and qualifications through the NZQF. In terms of the New Zealand Education Act of 1989 (NZQA, 2016), the NZQA sets the overarching statutory rules for the quality assurance of qualifications and the tertiary education organisations that provide them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ NZQA maintains and quality assures New Zealand’s qualifications system for the non-university tertiary education sector.</li> <li>▪ Universities New Zealand (Universities NZ [formerly the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors’ Committee]) fulfils this function for the university sector two bodies oversee the quality assurance of universities: the Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP) and the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities (AQA) (NZQA, 2016).</li> </ul> <p>While NZQF does not mention ‘professional bodies’, multiple <b>professional bodies</b> are operating in New Zealand (ENZ website, n.d.).</p>

	Australia	2	1	Generation 1 NQF	<p>The management of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) is delivered through the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills, and Employment in consultation with the states and territories (Australian Qualifications Framework, n.d.).</p> <p>Other stakeholders include, among others, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and <b>industry professional accreditation bodies</b> with links to the higher education sector who have a mutual interest in maintaining and improving quality in the provision of Australian higher education.</p> <p>Stakeholders have agreed that the following principles should guide TEQSA's engagement with industry professional accreditation bodies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the development of a complementary approach to course accreditation processes and requirements;</li> <li>▪ the use of <b>professional bodies</b> as a source of expert advice;</li> <li>▪ the sharing of information with Professional Bodies to inform regulatory activity and to protect the interests of students and the higher education sector;</li> <li>▪ encouraging alignment of professional outcomes with learning outcome requirements of the AQF; and</li> <li>▪ fostering communication between TEQSA and <b>professional bodies</b> regarding each other's respective roles.</li> </ul> <p>TEQSA works with bodies responsible for regulating and/or accrediting TEQSA-accredited programs. The primary aim is to explore the complementarity and streamlining of accreditation processes. TEQSA continues to build relationships with a broad range of bodies that have a statutory responsibility for (1) regulating a profession and (2) accrediting related professional programs. For example, professional registration and accreditation bodies in medical or engineering fields (TEQSA, n.d.).</p> <p>The many AQF stakeholders include industry and its representative bodies, unions, <b>professional associations</b>, licensing authorities, and governments.</p>
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Europe East	Slovakia	1	2	Has four NQF Sub-Frameworks	<p>The Slovak NQF system consists of the National Qualifications Register (NQR) for qualifications standards and assessments, and the Slovak qualifications framework (SKKR) where qualifications are defined according to levels. The Ministry of Education is responsible for the development and implementation of the SKKR. Several other structures were involved in the development of the SKKR and the definition and approval of qualifications between 2013 and 2015. Examples of other structures include (Global Inventory, 2019):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The National Board for Education and Qualifications (NBEQ) is a supra-sectoral national authority composed of representatives of all sectoral ministries, <b>professional and employers' organisations</b>, state and regional administration, and associations of schools.</li> <li>▪ The National Group of Experts, comprising representatives of the Ministry of Education, other institutions involved in education policies, social partners, and sector councils. This group carried out its activities in several working groups, including one for the development of the NQF, comprising representatives of educational institutions and employers, who revised the SKKR and the national descriptors and worked on the levelling methodology.</li> <li>▪ Sector Councils are composed of representatives of all stakeholders (national and regional authorities, employers, representatives of trade unions, and educators).</li> </ul> <p>The governance structure of the SKKR was simplified in 2016 and now consists of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The State Vocational Education Institute, a European Qualifications Framework (EQF) national coordination point provides technical and methodological support for the further development of the system.</li> <li>▪ The Ministry of Education, the highest approval body for qualifications and the NQR.</li> <li>▪ Sector Councils with a key role in developing, monitoring, and updating national occupations and qualification standards and proposing their allocation to SKKR levels; developing and monitoring the national occupations register and the NQR, facilitating communication between the labour market and the world of education, and establishing partnerships for validating and recognising non-formal and informal learning (Global Inventory, 2019).</li> </ul>
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	Moldova	1	3	Insightful oversight arrangements	<p>The National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Moldova (NQFRM) for all levels and types of learning was established, through the Education Code (Republic of Moldova, 2014), by the Minister of Education, Culture, and Research (MECR).</p> <p>A national register for vocational education and training (VET) qualifications was approved by the government in 2018, and a register for higher education qualifications was developed in 2019. The following institutions manage and oversee the NQFRM:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ MECR manages the registers of qualifications, approves nomenclature for professional training fields, approves Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) methods, develops curriculum content standards and standards for competency, and plans and implements national educational development strategies.</li> <li>▪ The National Council for Qualifications is a consultative body of the Ministry (MECR) including representatives of all the Ministries involved and is responsible for the development and implementation of the NQFRM.</li> <li>▪ The National Agency for Quality Assurance in Professional Education (a) develops methods for evaluating and accrediting VET and HE providers; (b) evaluates curricula, learning processes, and outcomes for secondary VET; and (c) establishes criteria for qualifying exams whether for formal, non-formal and informal learning.</li> <li>▪ The National Council for Occupational Standards approves occupational skills standards before the Ministers of Education and Labour approve them (European Training Foundation, 2021b; Global Inventory (2019)).</li> </ul>
Europe North	Ireland	1	1	Generation 1 NQF; insightful governance	<p>In Ireland, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is responsible for developing, promoting, and maintaining the Irish NFQ. QQI also facilitates the recognition of foreign qualifications. The Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) is among the early-developed qualifications frameworks in Europe. The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) oversees the implementation of the qualifications framework, with the support of two main awarding bodies – the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) (Ireland Qualifications and Quality Assurance [Education and Training] Amendment Act, 2019).</p> <p>The QQI engages with many different organisations and agencies as part of a system that continues to develop and improve the quality of higher education and further education and training qualifications. Some of these organisations include <b>professional, statutory, and regulatory bodies (PSRBs)</b> (QQI, 2021).</p>



PSRBs involve communities of practice that are essential to the qualifications system, and this is of particular interest to QQI, as many higher education programmes must satisfy not only the accreditation processes of a PSRB but also the quality assurance processes of the provider institutions and QQI, the national quality assurance agency (QQI, 2021).

It is noted that, in 2019, QQI launched 'Finding Common Ground', an ongoing programme to promote a closer engagement with PSRBs. In consultation with **professional, statutory, and regulatory bodies** and higher education institutions, QQI has also developed principles for professional engagements with education providers, a set of high-level principles aimed at reducing the burden of accreditation and other related activities and creating greater opportunities for collaboration between higher education institutions, PSRBs and QQI. A communications hub has been established for QQI and PSRBs to share updates and good practices. The principles, which are not legally binding, are highlighted below.

- Encouraging all stakeholders including providers, PSRBs, and QQI, to work together as a community of practice with different perspectives, to listen to and exchange information on community development and challenges.
- Acknowledging/exploring the impact of professional accreditation on internal quality assurance and vice versa and highlighting the need for processes to be able to talk to one another where appropriate and any administrative burdens or duplication to be avoided.
- Promoting the benefits of and encouraging increased trust and confidence between all stakeholders.
- Stimulating a conversation between all stakeholders (PSRBs, HEIs, QQI) on the qualifications system.
- Highlight the benefits of accreditation/approval to learners, the profession, and the public.
- Promote a shared understanding between stakeholders including an understanding of the importance and added value of professional regulation.
- Acknowledging and reflecting the diversity in the roles and remit of the PSRBs and HEIs (QQI, 2021).

	Estonia	1	2	Well-functioning NQF	<p>There are various bodies responsible for implementing the NQF in Estonia, but the key bodies are reflected below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Ministry of Education and Research.</li> <li>▪ The Estonian Qualifications Authority (Kutsekoda)</li> <li>▪ A broad-based steering committee involving a wide range of stakeholders.</li> </ul> <p>The Estonian Qualifications Authority coordinates the 14 sector skills councils and provides technical support to the board of chairpersons of these councils. Sector skills councils comprise employers' organisations in the sector; trade unions in the sector; <b>professional associations in the sector</b>; education and training institutions; and responsible ministries. The authority cooperates with other institutions, disseminates information, and provides guidance and advice to various stakeholders on the application of the EstQF (Global Inventory, 2019).</p> <p>The Estonian Qualifications Authority is also responsible, among other things, for organising administrative supervision over the awarding bodies (Estonian Qualifications Authority. n.d.). This is also stated in the Estonian Professions Act: professional institutions (established by the Minister of Education and Research) “organise administrative supervision over the profession awarding activities of <b>professional councils and bodies</b> that award professions”. (<i>Riigi Teataja</i>, 2008).</p> <p>The referencing report indicates that the EstQF includes “occupational qualifications awarded by state-recognised awarding institutions (<b>professional associations</b> etc.)” (Estonian Qualifications Authority, 2016, p.7). These institutions are legal entities or authorities granted the right to award occupational qualifications in terms of the Professions Act.</p>
	Latvia	1	2	Well-functioning NQF	<p>With regard to the Latvian Qualifications Framework (LQF), the Latvian Ministry of Education and Science leads the development and implementation of the framework. The Academic Information Centre (AIC), which is a non-profit institution established by the Ministry of Education and Science, and the Institute of Mathematics and Computer Science at the University of Latvia, also play a critical role. The AIC's roles are reflected next.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Implementing the regulations relating to referencing higher education qualifications obtained earlier in Latvia to the IQF.</li> <li>▪ Providing information on <u>the recognition of professional qualifications in regulated professions</u>.</li> </ul>

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Serving as the Latvian coordination point for referencing the IQF to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) (Academic Information Centre [AIC] n.d.).</li> </ul> <p>The Latvian Republic regulates professional activity or regulates the professional conduct set by law on regulated professions and recognition of professional qualifications (International Labour Organisation [IOL]. 2001). In terms of this law, both <b>professional organisations</b> and cabinet ministers play a role in the regulation of professions.</p>
	Scotland, UK	1	2	<p>Generation 1 NQF; non-regulatory; insightful governance</p> <p>The Scottish framework was first proposed in the 1998 Government green paper, Opportunity Scotland, a paper on lifelong learning, and was introduced in 2001 through stakeholder agreement. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQFP), responsible for the development, quality assurance and promotion of the framework, was set up as a company (and charity) in 2006, aiming to do the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ensure that, where appropriate, all assessed learning and qualifications in Scotland are included on the SCQF;</li> <li>▪ extend recognition of informal and non-formal learning;</li> <li>▪ develop and promote the SCQF as a lifelong learning tool; and</li> <li>▪ develop relationships with other frameworks internationally.</li> </ul> <p>Being formally independent of national education and training authorities, the SCQFP has ensured active engagement with the framework of a broad group of stakeholders, including qualification authorities, quality assurance bodies, universities, colleges, as well as employers. Around 11 500 qualifications are currently included in the SCQF database and around 1 000 of these belong to social partners, trade unions, employers, and <b>professional bodies</b>. The SCQFP runs regular workshops aiming to help social partners, <b>professional bodies</b>, and employers to understand the requirements for developing qualifications and learning programmes that can be levelled and can have credit attached (credit rated). (Global Inventory, 2019).</p> <p>According to the referencing report of the SCQF to the EQF, Scottish universities approve, and quality assure their own qualifications, making use of the UK Quality Code, including subject benchmarks, and the Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland, which aligns fully with levels 7-12 of the SCQF. In some cases, qualifications must be endorsed by <b>professional bodies</b> to allow holders of the qualifications to become registered in the profession (teaching, nursing, medicine, law, etc.) (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, 2019).</p>

	Finland	1	3	Well-functioning NQF	<p>In Finland, the following are the main bodies responsible for the implementation of the qualifications framework, according to the Global Inventory (2019).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for the development of the FiNQF.</li> <li>▪ The Finnish National Agency for Qualifications (EDUFI) is responsible for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- developing education and training, lifelong learning, and promoting internationalisation;</li> <li>- supporting cooperation between stakeholders;</li> <li>- validating non-formal and informal learning providers;</li> <li>- disseminating information on the NQF; and</li> <li>- serving as a National Coordination Point (NCP) for the EQF, amongst others.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Other entities are the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) and the Finnish National Agency for Education.</li> </ul> <p>The Global Inventory (2019) makes no specific mention of professional bodies/associations in Finland. Nonetheless, there is evidence to suggest they do indeed exist. According to the Finnish National Agency for Education website (n.d.), a profession is regulated when according to Finnish legislation, a specific training, qualification, or the right to practice in a profession, is required. The website lists some professions that are regulated in Finland. For 'Teaching &amp; Early Childhood Education and Care', the competent authority is the National Agency for Education. For 'healthcare professions', the competent authority is the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health Valvira (National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health, n.d.).</p>
	Sweden	1	3	Includes qualifications developed in the labour market	<p>The National Agency for Higher Vocational Education plays a key role in the implementation of the Swedish Qualifications Framework (SeQF), and an 'advisory body' assists the agency in deciding the relevant level for a qualification based on particular criteria, including legitimacy/acceptance of a qualification in the relevant occupational areas, learning outcomes, and quality assurance (Global Inventory, 2029). Although no specific reference is made to professional bodies/associations, or societies, there exists an 'ambassador network' comprising a range of SeQF stakeholders (Global Inventory, 2019).</p>
	England, UK	3	2	Generation 1 NQF; non-regulatory;	<p>A new Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) was introduced, in 2015, for England (and Northern Ireland), replacing the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) which was formally launched in 2008. RQF covers all vocational and general education</p>

			<p>insightful governance</p>	<p>qualifications regulated by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) in England. The Framework Higher Education Qualifications covers higher education qualifications awarded by organisations with degree awarding powers (at levels 4 to 8). The RQF includes entry-level (subdivided into entries 1 to 3) and levels 1 to 8 (Global Inventory, 2019).</p> <p>The QCF had been jointly developed, tested, and implemented by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in England; the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) in Northern Ireland; and the Welsh Assembly Government in Wales. These regulatory bodies were responsible for regulating qualifications within the QCF and NQF. Now the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) has the main responsibility for qualifications and framework developments in England. Ofqual is also the regulator of qualifications, examinations, and assessments in England. Ofqual was, until 2016, also the regulator of vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland (Global Inventory, 2019).</p> <p>Awarding organisations (AOs) who want to offer regulated qualifications in England must be recognised by <i>Ofqual</i> and meet the regulators' general criteria for recognition. Once recognised, awarding organisations can submit qualifications that comply with the general conditions for recognition to <i>Ofqual</i>.</p> <p>According to the Referencing report (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education [QAA], CCEA and Ofqual, 2019), AOs vary in their origin and structures. Some are large bodies that offer qualifications across a wide range of occupational sectors and/or academic fields, across a number of levels and in all regions of the UK. Some AOs draw on close links to universities, <b>professional bodies</b>, etc. while others sit in between the extremes. There are three types of regulated AOs which are highlighted below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Shareholder-owned companies</li> <li>● Charitable institutions including not-for-profit companies such as <b>professional bodies</b> and Royal Charter Bodies</li> <li>● Industry bodies</li> </ul> <p>The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is responsible for the framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ) (Global Inventory, 2019). FHEQ contains levels at which qualifications can be awarded by degree AOs. The QAA manages Subject Benchmarking Statements that cover subject areas for awards. These statements are developed by QAA <u>in collaboration with</u> key stakeholders including academics,</p>
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				<p><b>professional bodies</b>, employers, and students (QAA, CCEA and Ofqual, 2019). The FHEQ, which applies to the whole of the UK, is an “important tool for <b>professional, statutory and regulatory bodies</b> (PSRBs) in defining and using qualifications in the context of their professional recognition and accreditation processes” (QAA, 2014).</p> <p>AOs <u>consult with</u>, for instance, individual employers, trade bodies, <b>professional associations</b>, employees, learners, and other stakeholders, in the design and development of vocational, technical, and professional qualifications.</p> <p>The referencing report (QAA, CCEA and Ofqual, 2019) also refers to ‘National Occupational Standards’ (NOS) that describe the standards of performance expected of individuals in the workplace. NOS are used in some sectors in England. ‘Professional bodies use them to signify what they require of a qualification for licence to practice purposes’. For example, the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), a professional body in England, collated the views of employers to develop a new NOS and AOs revised their relevant qualifications to meet the new requirements. Ofqual works with both CITB and AOs to ensure a common understanding and consistent interpretation of NOS.</p> <p>In the higher education sector, various stakeholders are involved in the development of curricula. Subject Benchmark Statements are developed by subject specialists from academic communities, employers, <b>professional bodies</b>, etc. as relevant to set out graduate outcomes for a subject. Regulatory Bodies such as the Nursing and Midwifery Council, the General Medical Council, and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, may also set these requirements (QAA, CCEA and Ofqual, 2019).</p>
Europe South	Croatia	1	3	<p>Insightful distribution of responsibilities</p> <p>In Croatia, the National Council for Development of Human Potential, comprising 25 stakeholder representatives, was appointed in 2014 as the strategic body for developing and implementing the Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF) (Cedefop, 2020).</p> <p>The Ministry of Science and Education, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Pension System, coordinates the development and implementation of the CROQF at a policy and technical level. The Ministry of Science and Education sets up and maintains the national CROQF register; establishes and coordinates the work of sectoral councils; provides procedures related to the standard of qualifications; develops a system of validation of non-formal learning; and informs the public about the CROQF (Cedefop, 2019).</p> <p>Twenty-five <u>sectoral councils</u> have been established as <b>advisory and professional bodies</b> working on the development of human potential in line with labour market needs</p>

				in their respective sectors. Each has a president and 10 members (representing the ministry of the respective sector, the Croatian employment service, the agency for quality assurance and sectoral experts), who are appointed by the Minister of Science and Education. Their role includes assessing proposals for occupational standards, qualifications standards and units of learning outcomes (Cedefop, 2020).
Greece	1	3	Communicative framework, few implementing partners	The National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP), which reports to the Ministry of Education, Research, and Religious Affairs, oversees the development and implementation of the Hellenic Qualifications Framework (HQF) in Greece. While no mention of professional bodies/associations/societies is made, there is a wide range of stakeholders that work with the EOPPEP. These include, for example, the Hellenic Authority for Higher Education, National Authority for Higher Education, Authority for Quality Assurance in Primary and Secondary Education, and other social partners (Global Inventory, 2019).
Serbia	1	4	Insightful institutional arrangements	<p>In Serbia, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technical Development (MoESTD) maintains the qualifications register and monitors the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework Serbia (NQFS). There is the <u>NQFS Council</u>, which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ is responsible for NQFS implementation, development and strategic management;</li> <li>▪ serves as an advisory body;</li> <li>▪ provides career and employment advice;</li> <li>▪ proposes and monitors Sector Councils;</li> <li>▪ proposes qualifications standards; and</li> <li>▪ advises on the self-evaluation of recognised public organisers of education (Global Inventory, 2019).</li> </ul> <p>Among other things, the <u>Qualifications Agency</u> (a) provides technical support to the NQFS Council; provides professional, administrative, and technical support for the development of qualifications; (c) quality assures and provides expert advice for the <b>Sector Councils</b>; (d) considers and provides advice regarding new qualifications; and (e) maintains qualifications register and <b>records of professional designations</b> for the MoESTD.</p> <p>The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) quality assures study programmes in higher education. The National Entity for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in higher education (NEAQA) quality assures Higher Education Institutions. The Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA) is a <b>professional body</b> that performs the accreditations for NEAQA (Global Inventory, 2019).</p>

Europe West	France	3	1	Generation 1 NQF	<p>In the case of France, the National Qualifications Framework does not mention the keywords "professional body", "professional association", or "professional society". However, the 'France Competences' – a public institution under the supervision of the Ministry for Employment and Professional Training – regulates the professional training market (including apprenticeships) to better identify the competences required and create better synergy between professional training stakeholders. The institution took the missions of four bodies, including those responsible for ensuring the quality of professional training and the National Professional Certification Commission, previously in charge of maintaining the two national directories of qualifications.</p> <p>The France Competences also replaced the national bodies responsible for supervising apprenticeships and absorbed the Joint fund for the Security of Professional Pathways which contributed to funding vocational training actions to <b>provide certification or recertification for employees and job seekers</b>. Furthermore, the <i>France Compétences</i> acts as a national coordination point for the quality of professional training and for implementing the EQF. There are two ways to register (qualifications) in the National Register of Professional Qualifications (RNCP): (1) registration by law for academic diplomas and qualifications supported by a ministerial order after receiving assent from consultative commissions representing ministries and the Professional Consultative Commissions; (2) second is registration on request, after examination by the France Competences certification board and the Professional Certification Commission (Referencing Report, French Republic 2021).</p> <p>The National Register of Professional Qualifications (RNCP) involves in its work social partners such as the consultative commissions representing ministries, Professional Consultative Commissions, and the National Professional Certification Commission.</p>
	Germany	3	2	Non-regulatory NQF	<p>The German Qualifications Framework (<i>Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen für lebenslanges Lernen</i> [DQR]) is the responsibility of the Bund Länder Coordination Office (<i>Bund-Länder Koordinierungsstelle</i>), set up by a joint initiative of the federal government and the Länder. The coordination office monitors the allocation of qualifications to ensure consistency in the overall qualification framework structure. The coordination office includes members from, for example, government ministries; stakeholders in the form of the DQR working group, which comprises representatives from schools, higher education, VET, social partners, and public institutions, all of which contribute to the development and implementation of the DQR (Global Inventory, 2019). No specific reference is made to professional bodies.</p>



	Netherlands	1	3	Includes regulated and non-regulated (labour market) qualifications	<p>In the Netherlands, a variety of entities are responsible for the development and implementation of the Netherlands Qualifications Framework (NLQF). These include the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the NLQF Secretariat, the Accreditation Organisation for the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO), and other structures. In addition, quality assurance in secondary education, VET, and higher education is performed by entities such as the Inspectorate of Education and NVAO (Global Inventory, 2019).</p>
	Switzerland	1	3	Prestigious vocational education, sought after in the labour market, two-thirds of school leavers opt for	<p>In Switzerland, the Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) is responsible for implementing the NQF. It coordinates and quality assures the entire process, and it is the main contact point for the National Qualifications Framework for Vocational and Professional Qualifications (NQF VPET). SERI provides information to awarding bodies and other stakeholders and assists in the assignment of qualifications. The Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (SFIVET) supports implementation with consistent checks and reviews of levels of qualifications in line with the methodology and guidelines.</p> <p>SERI <u>consults with</u> the Federal Commission for Vocational and Professional Education and Training (FCVPET) twice a year before the final decision on levelling is made. This commission <u>involves</u> cantons (political/administrative regions), <b>professional organisations</b>, and colleges of higher education in the implementation of the NQF-VPET (Global Inventory, 2019).</p> <p>The federal government approves the examination regulations for federal diplomas of higher education and advanced federal diplomas of higher education; these include regulating admission to examinations, legally protected titles, professional competences, and occupational profiles. A qualification profile is a basis for examination ordinances and guidelines, drawn up by <b>professional organisations</b> in cooperation with practitioners in the profession. It includes professional competences, an occupational profile and performance criteria (Cedefop, 2020b).</p>

### 3. ANALYSIS AND OBSERVATIONS

Twenty-eight (28) country cases were reviewed in this exploratory benchmarking review. Observations from the inventories and literature suggest that, in 18 of the 28 countries, national qualifications systems refer to the terms 'professional bodies', 'professional associations' or closely related terms and indicate some level of regulation either by the government through education and training departments or by a body/an authority mandated by the former or both. While there may be no clearly defined regulatory roles over professional bodies in some of the 18 countries, there is reference to activities such as 'consultation', 'cooperation', 'joint work', 'collaboration', and 'engagement', among other things, based mainly on principles between professional bodies and the organisations leading the implementation and development of NQFs. In relation to other countries (10 of the 28), the inventories and the literature consulted do not make reference to the keywords 'professional bodies', 'professional associations' or 'professional societies' or related terms although it is likely that there might be entities that perform functions normally undertaken by these entities.

An overview of the countries under review is provided next to illustrate how professional bodies fit into their respective education and training systems. The full details for all countries included in the review are provided in Table 2.

#### ***South Africa***

The implementation and further development of the **South African** National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is overseen by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). The NQF comprises three Sub-Frameworks: GFETQSF, HEQSF, and OQSF managed by Quality Councils. SAQA works with NQF partners such as the DHET, DBE, Quality Councils, and stakeholders such as HEIs and colleges, public and private primary and secondary schools, skills development providers, quality development facilitators, development and assessment quality partners, professional bodies (statutory and non-statutory), organised business, organised labour, and learners. The NQF Act and the SAQA policy and criteria for professional bodies provide for the roles and responsibilities of professional bodies. In this regard, SAQA recognises professional bodies and registers professional designations.

#### ***Hong Kong***

In **Hong Kong**, the Education Bureau launched guidelines for the recognition of professional qualifications under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework. These guidelines mention that organisations (such as statutory and non-statutory professional bodies) can apply to become assessment agencies for issuing professional qualifications. These assessment bodies can be appointed, re-appointed or 'de-recognised' (to borrow a South African term) by the Secretary. Professional bodies and many other types of organisations are also encouraged to adopt 'policy, principles, and Operational Guidelines for Credit Accumulation and Transfer' under the remit of the HKQF. As such, there seems to be some level of regulation of professional bodies in Hong Kong by the Education Bureau.

## ***Indonesia***

**Indonesia** has a National Office for Professional Certification under the auspices of the Ministry of Manpower. Indonesian Qualifications Framework (KKNI) is a reference point for accreditation, assessment, and certification. The National Professional Certification Authority (BNSP) conducts the certification of work competency and grants licences to Professional Certification Bodies/Institutions that are eligible to perform work competency certification (of professionals). Professional Certification Bodies/Institutions based in higher education institutions and public workshops administer examinations and certification of professionals. Therefore, like in Hong Kong, there is some level of regulation in Indonesia but by competent authority that operates under government departments.

## ***Malaysia***

In other qualifications frameworks, it is not clear who regulates professional bodies. However, professional bodies work together with the organisations mandated to lead the implementation of qualifications frameworks. For example, in **Malaysia**, the Malaysian Qualifications Authority (MQA) performs joint accreditation with professional bodies. Furthermore, the Act establishing MQA states that, one of the objectives of the framework in Malaysia is to promote, where applicable, the presentation of qualifications in forms that facilitate their evaluation by any person, including professional bodies.

## ***Thailand***

Like cooperation and collaboration identified in Malaysia, **Thailand** has national committees (reporting to government ministries) composed of qualified experts from educational institutions, workplaces, and professional associations – all in charge of implementing the NQF in accordance with the principles and guidelines approved by the cabinet. Professional associations are also involved, together with other parties, in setting occupational and competency standards.

## ***Vietnam***

Professional associations in **Vietnam** are involved in researching and recommending competency profiles, requirements in knowledge and skills of job roles in the expertise/profession; suggesting requirements for qualifications, learning outcomes, and evidence for each area or major; taking part in outcomes-based and evidence-based assessment of training providers of areas and sectors; and giving recommendations to state authorities and training providers on adjustment and supplementation to make learning outcomes and evidence relevant with each job title. The keywords underlined above suggest a collaborative, cooperative way professional bodies work with organisations tasked with the implementation and development of the NQF, although regulation is not explicitly stated.

## ***Turkey***

In **Turkey**, the Turkish Qualifications Framework was jointly developed by the Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA), the Ministry of Education, and the Council of Higher Education. It is envisaged that it will include other formal qualifications

awarded by various responsible bodies such as ministries, public authorities, or professional bodies. Authorised Certification Bodies in Turkey are made up of 70% of non-profit organisations such as professional bodies.

### **Cyprus**

In **Cyprus**, the Council of Cyprus Qualifications Framework (CyQF) was established to coordinate collaboration between stakeholders. This council comprises “representatives of all relevant public services, employers’ organisations, trade unions, professional associations and the academic community”, which were involved in the referencing process.

### **Australia**

**Australian** Qualifications Framework (AQF) is implemented by the government department of Education, Skills, and Employment in consultation with the states and territories. Other stakeholders include Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and industry professional accreditation bodies with links to the higher education sector. Stakeholders recently agreed on principles to guide TEQSA’s engagement with industry accreditation bodies. For example, to use professional bodies as a source of expert advice; share information with professional bodies to inform regulatory activity and protect the interest of students and the higher education sector; and foster communication between TEQSA and professional bodies regarding each other’s respective roles.

### **Slovakia**

In **Slovakia**, the development and implementation of the Slovak NQF system is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. Other entities put in place to implement the NQF include the National Board for Education and Qualifications (NBEQ) – a supra-sectoral national authority composed of representatives of all sectoral ministries, professional and employers’ organisations, state and regional administration, and associations of schools.

### **Ireland**

In **Ireland**, there Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), which is responsible for developing, promoting, and maintaining the Irish NQF, engages with many different organisations and agencies to maintain quality of the higher education and further education and training qualifications. Some of these organisations/agencies include professional, statutory, and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). QQI developed principles for professional engagements and collaboration between higher education institutions, and PSRBs.

### **France**

The **French** NQF does not refer to the keywords professional body, association, or societies. However, the France Compétences – an institution operating under the Ministry of Employment and Professional Training – plays the role of providing certification or recertification for employees and job seekers. For qualifications to be registered on the National Register of Professional Qualifications, a request can be

made after examination by the France Compétences Certification Board and the Professional Certification Commission.

### ***Estonia***

In **Estonia**, the Estonian Qualifications Authority (EQA) coordinates sector skills councils and provides technical support to the board of chairpersons of these councils. These councils comprise various entities including trade unions and professional associations that provide guidance and advice on the implementation of the EstQF. The EQA also organises administrative supervision over the awarding activities of professional councils and bodies that award professions. The EstQF includes occupational qualifications awarded by state-recognised awarding institutions including professional bodies.

### ***Latvia***

In **Latvia**, the government regulates professional activities and professional conduct set by law on 'regulated professions and recognition of professional qualifications'. In terms of this law, both professional organisations and the cabinet play a role in the regulation of professions.

### ***Scotland***

The **Scottish** Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) is managed by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQFP) established in 2006. It ensures active engagement with the framework by a range of stakeholders including qualifications authorities, quality assurance bodies, universities, colleges, and employers. The SCQF database includes qualifications that belong to, among others, trade unions, employers, and professional bodies. The SCQFP provides workshops to its partners including professional bodies, to understand the requirements for developing qualifications and learning programmes. Among other things, professional bodies play a role in endorsing qualifications to allow holders to be registered in a profession and practice.

### ***England***

In **England**, Ofqual oversees the new Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) and is responsible for the development of qualifications. Ofqual also regulates qualifications, examinations, and assessments. It recognises and oversees 'Awarding Organisations' (AOs) that offer regulated qualifications. Some AOs have links with universities, employers, and professional bodies. In the higher education sector, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), in collaboration with key stakeholders, including professional bodies, Subject Benchmarking Statements. The FHEQ, which is applicable to all UK countries, is an important tool for professional bodies in defining and using qualifications in the context of their professional recognition and accreditation processes. The AOs also consult with, among others, professional associations in the design and development of vocational, technical, and professional qualifications.

## ***Croatia***

In **Croatia**, the National Council for Development of Human Potential is the strategic body that develops and implements the Croatian Qualifications Framework, with government departments playing an overarching coordination role. There are 'sectoral councils' that have been established as advisory and professional bodies that serve the labour market needs in their respective sectors. The roles of these councils include assessing proposals for occupational standards, qualifications standards, and unit of learning outcomes.

## ***Switzerland***

The Secretariat for Education, Research, and Innovation (SERI) in **Switzerland** is responsible for the implementation of the NQF. In implementing the NQF, SERI consults with the Federal Commission for Vocational and Professional Education and Training (FCVPET). This commission comprises, and involves, in the implementation processes, cantons (political/administrative regions), professional organisations and colleges of higher education.

## ***Finland***

The global and regional NQF inventories make no reference to professional bodies in the **Finnish** Qualifications Framework. However, the Finnish National Agency for Education (website) states that a profession is regulated when according to Finnish legislation, a qualification, specific training, or right to practice is required.

## ***New Zealand***

While the **New Zealand** Qualifications Framework does not mention the keywords professional bodies, associations, or societies in its official NQF documents, multiple professional bodies are operational in the country.

## ***Other countries***

There is no specific reference, in the inventories and literature consulted, to the terms 'professional bodies', 'professional associations', or 'societies' in the NQF systems in **Georgia, Moldova, Sweden, Greece, Germany, Sweden, Greece**, and the **Netherlands**. However, further research may reveal that these country systems do regulate professions and have bodies, which can be understood to be professional bodies/associations/societies.

## **Overall insights**

It is evident from the data gathered (Table 2) and the analysis and observations, that professional bodies play a valuable role in the education and training systems of the countries under review. Furthermore, the number of NQF implementing bodies varies across country systems, with professional bodies fitting into education and training systems in different ways. For many country systems, professional bodies are amongst the key stakeholders that are included in engagements, consultation, collaboration, and joint work in relation to qualification systems, and similar practices are evident in South Africa.

Within South Africa, the country's qualification authority (SAQA) plays a key role in relation to both statutory and non-statutory professional bodies by **recognising** their status as professional bodies and **registering their professional designations**. SAQA discharges this duty as specified in the NQF Act and implements its role through its national policy and criteria for professional bodies. Qualification authorities in other country systems do not appear to have as 'authoritative' a role (e.g., legislation, policies and criteria) in relation to professional bodies as is evident in South Africa. Nonetheless, it appears that all the country systems under review recognise the value and contribution of professional bodies in the education and training landscape.

#### **4. CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD**

This document provides an exploratory benchmarking review of professional bodies in National Qualifications Framework (NQF) systems. It explores the location/fit, if any, of professional bodies in NQFs and whether and/or how they operate under the regulation of qualifications authorities. Various observations are provided. Some of the analyses and observations were presented to SAQA's Professional Body Committee on 1 March 2022. Further benchmarking research, where needed, may reveal additional insights.

A recent online engagement with NQF entities (SAQA, DHET and the Quality Councils) about the value and fit of professional bodies in the South African NQF system resulted in robust discussions which yielded various views and positions on the matter, and demonstrated some convergences and differences<sup>1</sup>.

Overall, the insights from both the benchmarking review and the entity engagement may enable SAQA to strengthen its understanding of the value and fit of professional bodies in the South African NQF system.

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<sup>1</sup> Once all entity inputs are received, SAQA will produce a short report on the discussions.

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