

Fostering Regional Synergies Between Quality Assurance Frameworks

Building bridges across regional boundaries to strengthen higher education quality assurance through collaborative frameworks, shared expertise, and strategic partnerships that enhance student mobility and institutional recognition.

Dr Hazman Shah Abdullah,
Malaysia



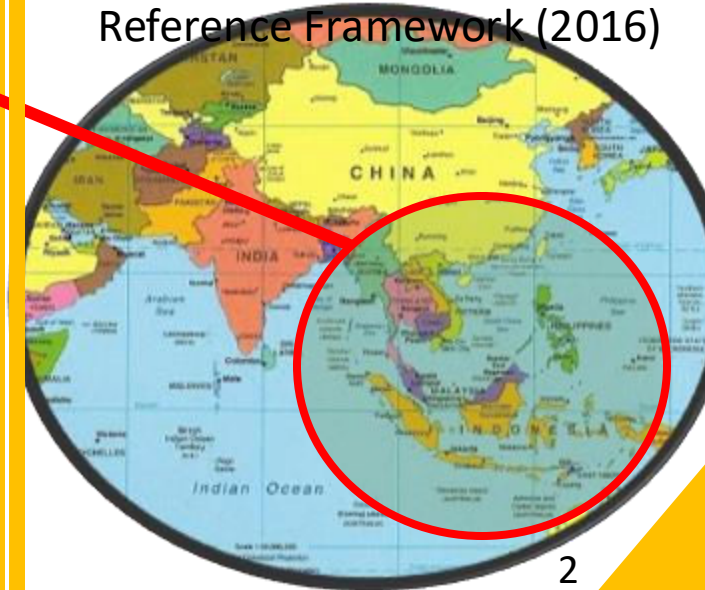
ASEAN

Association of Southeast Asian Nations

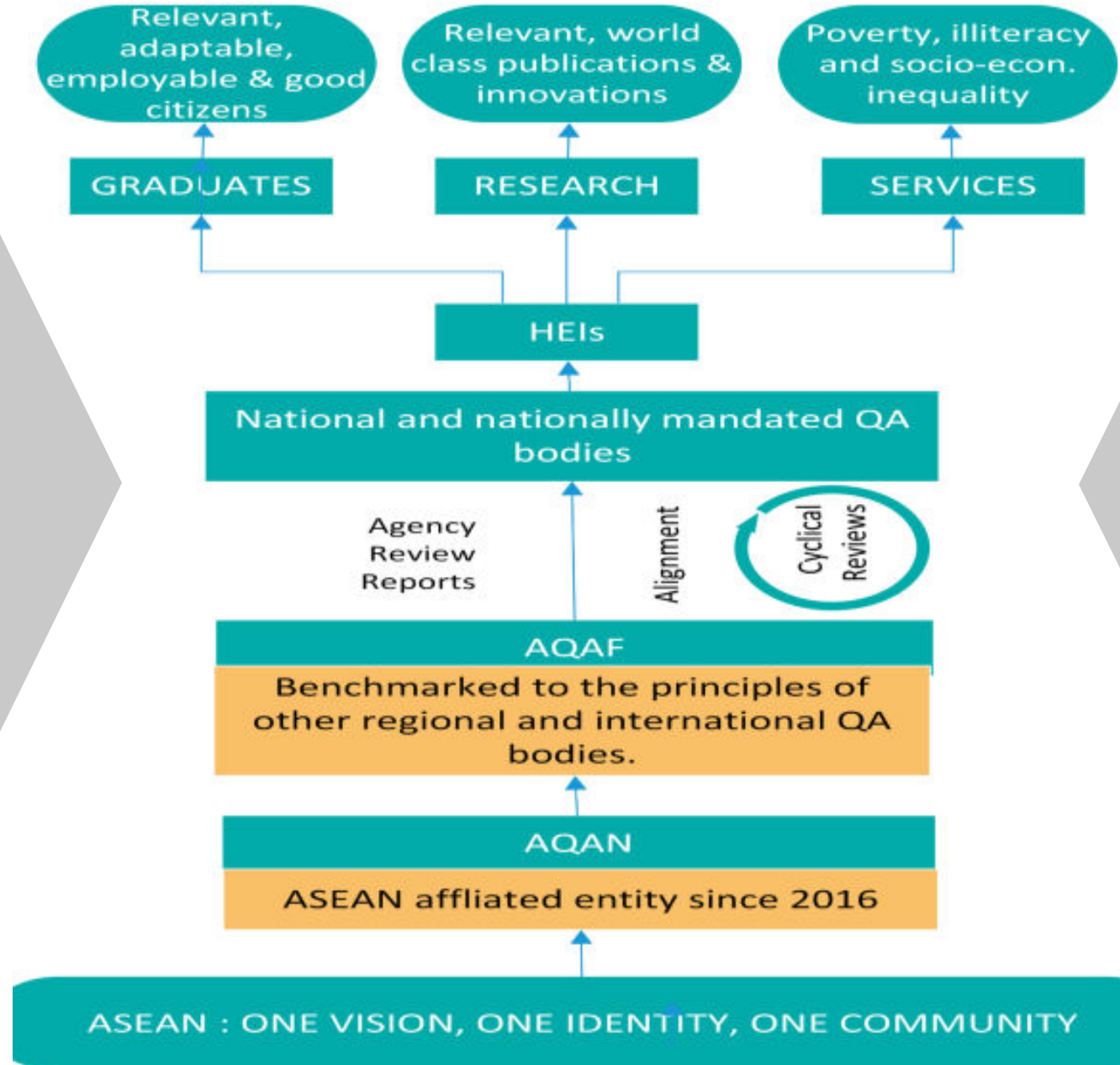


Basic Facts

- ASEAN established in 1967 as a Political and Economic Community
- ASEAN economy 3.7 trillion USD
- 660 mln population
- GER ranges from 15 to 80%
- 8000 HEIs. 9 HEIs in top 50 in QS World University, Asia
- 12 mln tertiary students
- ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework (2014)
- ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (2016)



AQAF, 2016



Regional integration requires harmonisation of HE policies and practices around a set of globally recognised principles to create a zone of trust to promote recognition of qualifications and mobility of students, staff and professionals.

Solutions: Strengthen the quality of the HEIs – governance, quality, innovation, agility and accountability

Problem: ASEAN HEIs are not performing to expectations. Differential performance within and between members.

Aspiration: HE which can support the social, cultural, economic and political aspirations of the ASEAN Community

Why is AQAF Important...2 – Intra-regional synergies?

Provides a **common set of QA core principles** that mirror good international practices and values to serve as benchmarks and neutral reference points for national quality assurance bodies and systems.

1

An **aspirational framework, development-oriented, inclusive,** and aimed at facilitating an incremental improvement in the EQAAs that are AQAN members.

2

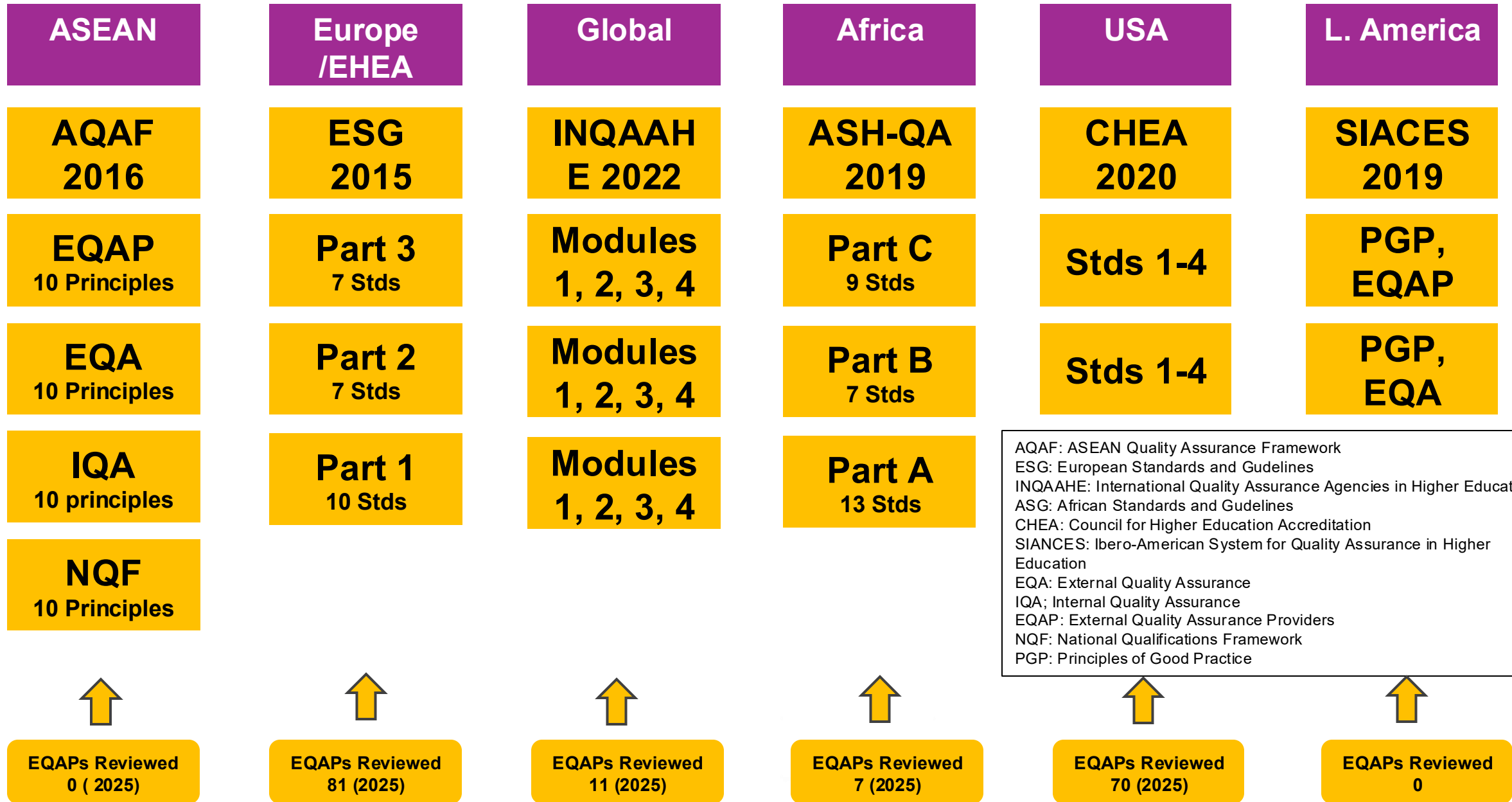
Guides the creation of new EQAAs or provides benchmarks for external reviews of EQAAs, be they organisational reviews for continuous quality improvement or external reviews for public accountability.

3

Tool to promote **harmonisation by establishing a common higher education space** in South East Asia.

4

Key Regional QA Frameworks – Ready for Synergistic Explorations?



How Inter-Regional Synergies of QA Frameworks are Fostered

Expertise Sharing

Cross-regional exchange of specialized knowledge and best practices in quality assurance methodologies

Framework Development

Collaborative design and refinement
refinement of quality standards that reflect diverse regional contexts

Experience Sharing

Learning from implementation challenges and successes across different educational systems

Enhanced Recognition

National qualifications gain broader acceptance through alignment with regional frameworks, facilitating student and professional mobility

Formal Collaboration

Structured partnerships through mutual recognition agreements that formalize quality assurance cooperation

Addressing Common Challenges

Unified approach to emerging issues in higher education, including digitalization and changing labor market demands

Research indicates that while a global QA model remains under debate (Uvalić-Trumbić & Martin, 2021), synergies are typically developed through quiet, strategic collaboration (Salmi, 2023).

Seeking Inter-Regional Synergies of QA Frameworks

AQAF Development Origins

Inter-regional synergies were both the foundation and driving force behind the development of the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework (AQAF). The framework explicitly acknowledges its inspiration from and influence on other regional quality assurance initiatives, creating a reciprocal relationship that strengthens global higher education standards.

Enhancing Regional Understanding

AQAF provides other regions with comprehensive insights into national QA frameworks within the 10-member ASEAN group, facilitating cross-regional learning and adaptation of best practices.

Strengthening Mobility Networks

The synergy between AQAF and its sister framework—the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (2016)—significantly enhances academic and professional mobility collaboration between ASEAN, Europe, and the broader Asia-Pacific region.

This interconnected approach creates pathways for students, faculty, and professionals to move seamlessly across regions while maintaining quality standards and recognition of their qualifications.



EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership Initiatives

2015-2022: EU-Share Program

Under the European Union Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region (EU-Share), synergies between AQAF and the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) were significantly enhanced. This collaboration brought extensive European experience to benefit AQAF deployment across ASEAN member states.

2024-2008: SCOPE-HE Program

The EU–ASEAN Sustainable Connectivity Package for Package for Higher Education (SCOPE-HE) funded a comprehensive comparative study of AQAF-AQAF-ESG relationships, explicitly preparing the foundation for the next level of strategic synergies synergies between the regions.

1

2

3

4

Expert Collaboration Framework

ENQA and ASEAN experts worked together systematically, developing deep understanding of regional idiosyncrasies to further strengthen inter-regional synergies. This collaborative approach respected cultural and educational differences while building common ground for better understanding of educational and qualification systems.

Expert Collaboration Framework

Commissioned key studies of quality assurance, qualifications, acceptance of recognition conventions to drive new synergies

These initiatives demonstrate the strategic importance of sustained, funded collaboration in building meaningful inter-meaningful inter-regional quality assurance partnerships.

AQAF-ESG Comparative Study Highlights

1 Shared Foundation

The frameworks demonstrate remarkable commonality in aspirations, roles, and approaches to quality assurance, indicating strong potential for continued collaboration and mutual learning.

2 Embracing Regional Differences

Differences between frameworks should be expected and accepted as reflections of unique regional contexts, cultural values, and educational traditions that enrich the global higher education landscape.

3 Implementation Focus Priority

For AQAF's continued enhancement, the priority should shift from further alignment efforts to robust implementation strategies that maximize the framework's impact across member institutions.

Learning from European Implementation

The European approach through the Bologna Process offers valuable lessons via established stakeholder groups including ENQA, including ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE (E4 Group) EQAR and BFUG.

01

Broader Stakeholder Engagement

Developing comprehensive stakeholder stakeholder support and active involvement across all levels of the framework implementation

02

National Endorsement Strategy

Securing more explicit national endorsement and formal recognition of the framework at governmental and institutional levels

03

Alignment Incentivization

Creating strategic incentives that encourage voluntary alignment while respecting institutional autonomy autonomy and regional diversity

Thank
you

