

Development of an Independent Regulatory Council for the International Qualification Framework: International Universities Strength and Conditioning Association Position Statement

Andrew Langford MSc, aISCP, mISCP¹, Aden Flannagan MSc, aISCP, mISCP¹, Stephen P. Bird PhD, CSCS, RSCC*E, mISCP^{1,2}, Paulo H. Marchetti PhD, CSCS*D³, Timothy J. Piper, Ed. D., CSCS*D⁴ and David Morley PhD⁵

¹International Universities Strength and Conditioning Association, Leeds, UK, ²School of Health and Medical Sciences, University of Southern Queensland, QLD Australia, ³California State University-Northridge, California, USA, ⁴McDonough District Hospital, Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation, Illinois USA, ⁵MET Sport Consultancy, Perth, Australia

Corresponding Author: a.langford@iusca.org

INTRODUCTION

The establishment of the International Qualification Framework (IQF)¹ represented a seminal advancement towards standardising education and certification levels in the profession of strength and conditioning (S&C). By providing a standardised and internationally unified structure, the IQF directly addresses the long-standing disparities and inconsistencies noted in education and qualification recognition globally.² However, the credibility and effectiveness of such a global qualification framework depends upon robust policies and detailed independent regulatory oversight.³ The IQF Independent Regulatory Council (IQF-IRC) has therefore been established as an autonomous body, specifically designed to oversee the IQF including its education, accreditation, and certification processes.

This position statement outlines the governance structure, core responsibilities, professional relevance, and strategic objectives of the IQF-IRC. It will also discuss the benefits of voluntary alignment by global S&C organisations, ultimately fostering a cohesive and universally accepted education and accreditation system that can be presented to the wider industry and public.⁴

Role of Regulatory Councils in Qualification Frameworks

Independent regulatory oversight within national and regional qualification frameworks is well established across various national sectors. Examples such as Ofqual (UK),⁴ the European Qualifications Framework (EQF),⁵ and Australia's Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA),⁶ illustrate effective models of educational

alignment and independent regulation, designed to maintain credibility, standardisation, and ongoing quality assurance. The duties of regulatory bodies typically include the validation of policies and procedures, the enforcement of compliance with set standards, and the safeguarding of professional integrity.^{2,3} The IQF-IRC, will therefore be tasked with integrating these established principles and for tailoring them to specifically address the unique demands and complexities of the global S&C profession. In conjunction with the International Qualification Framework,¹ this will contribute to an unbiased oversight and the creation of internationally benchmarked criteria regarding standard operating procedures, curriculum structure, faculty qualifications, assessments, and ethical governance.⁷⁻¹⁰

STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE OF THE IQF-INDEPENDENT REGULATORY COUNCIL

Legal Framework and Independence

The IQF-IRC is legally established as a not-for-profit entity under the jurisdiction of England and Wales, ensuring compliance with international regulatory best practices. The IQF-IRC will maintain full autonomy, ensuring unbiased oversight of all education, accreditation and certification activities within the IQF.¹

Governance Composition

The initial governance structure of the IQF-IRC prioritises impartiality and expertise, consisting of:

- a. *Council:* Consists of a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, and Secretary, responsible for operational governance, accreditation evaluations, and policy implementation. All appointments are based solely on expertise in industry domains, education, and regulatory affairs.
- b. *Committees:* Will be established ad-hoc as required to carry out specific duties and tasks as determined by the council. These will incorporate where appropriate, external experts to ensure impartiality in specialised regulatory tasks.

FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The mission of the IQF-IRC is to develop, preserve and uphold the integrity, transparency, and

international recognition of the IQF. Whilst the IQF-IRC is an independent organisation, its approach is based around the employment of a co-production ideology¹⁷, seeking to recognise and understand the needs of the organisation throughout the process. Functions and responsibilities will include:

- a. *Continued IQF Development:* Continuously reviewing, adapting, and further enhancing the details and content of the IQF Levels 1-8 to ensure that they are fit for purpose.
- b. *Validation of Accreditation Bodies:* Ensuring accreditation bodies meet the highest standards and align with IQF levels for education programmes and assessment criteria.¹⁻³
- c. *Certification Oversight:* Assessing, reviewing and validating certifications against the defined competency benchmarks mapped to IQF Levels 1–8.¹
- d. *Compliance Monitoring:* Conducting periodic audits and reviews of accredited organisations to ensure ongoing adherence to established standards and advising on best-practice implementation.^{2,10}
- e. *Ethical Governance:* Implementing robust ethical guidelines, including regarding conflict-of-interest, transparency measures, and professional conduct standards.⁷
- f. *Dispute Resolution:* Mediating accreditation-related disputes transparently and objectively.

PROFESSIONAL RELEVANCE AND IMPACT

The establishment of the IQF-IRC provides an essential step towards the professionalisation of the S&C sector.^{3,11,12} By standardising and validating educational standards and certification bodies, there will be a significant enhancement in the credibility of the industry.¹³ This will facilitate greater international mobility and career progression for practitioners by providing universally recognised and independently validated certifications.^{14,15} The IQF-IRC will contribute significantly to ethical compliance by implementing robust governance mechanisms that reinforce professional integrity, benefiting practitioners, employers, and educational institutions alike.⁷ Finally, by encouraging voluntary adoption of the regulatory standards, the IQF-IRC will help promote global collaboration among international S&C and Sport Science organisations. This will foster a unified, internationally respected education and accreditation ecosystem, thereby enhancing coherence and trust across the global community.¹⁶

INVITATION FOR VOLUNTARY ALIGNMENT

The IQF-IRC invites global S&C organisations, certification bodies, and academic institutions to voluntarily adopt this regulatory framework. Widespread participation will enhance professional credibility and contribute significantly towards a harmonised international system of qualification validation and occupational standards.¹ Though initially voluntary, alignment with the IQF-IRC framework is anticipated to become increasingly influential in determining global recognition and employability.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The IQF-IRC is committed to continual development, which will be dictated by the changing demands and growth of the S&C industry. Initial key strategic initiatives will include:

1. *International Educational and Professional Competencies/Standards (General)*: The Levels of the IQF (1-8) will be detailed in greater depth, clarifying exactly what each level means for knowledge, skills and competencies. This 'general' band will be universally applicable.
2. *International Educational and Professional Competencies/Standards (Specific)*: This will build upon the 'general' standards, applying detailed industry specific criteria (e.g. S&C).
3. *International Occupational Standards*: Defining job roles (e.g., Assistant Coach, Lead Practitioner) that are clearly aligned with IQF levels to standardise professional competencies.
4. *Remuneration Guidelines*: Establishing recommended global salary guidelines linked directly to the IQF Levels 1-8 to encourage fair compensation across nations and industries.
5. *Regional Expansion*: Engaging with key stakeholders within the Asia-Pacific, South America, and Africa regions to further enhance and develop the IQF's global validity and potential for integration.
6. *Certification and Accreditation Mapping*: Collaborating with established certification entities to integrate existing courses and certification within the IQF structure, promoting broad adoption and a unified industry presence.

CONCLUSION

The establishment of the IQF-IRC signifies an important milestone in the global standardisation and professionalisation of the S&C and Sport Science industry. Through independent oversight, structured governance, and rigorous compliance protocols, the IQF-IRC safeguards the credibility of the IQF, empowering practitioners, educators, and institutions worldwide. Through collaboration and continued development, the success of the IQF-IRC will depend upon the collective engagement of the international S&C and Sport Science community. Through the promotion and advocacy of voluntary alignment and strategic partnerships, the profession can facilitate the development of a cohesive and internationally recognised system of education, certification, and accreditation that meets the evolving demands of a rapidly advancing field.

REFERENCES

1. Langford A, Flannagan A, Marchetti PH, Bird SP. Development of an International Qualification Framework for the strength and conditioning profession: International Universities Strength and Conditioning Association Position Statement. *Int J Strength Cond*. 2024;4(1):e1-5.
2. United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization. Global Inventory of National and Regional Qualifications Frameworks Vol 1 Thematic chapters 2024; <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/latest-global-inventory-national-and-regional-qualifications-frameworks-published>. Accessed Mac 31, 2025.
3. Altiner BML, Dixon MA, Nite C, Stock MS. Toward professionalization of the strength and conditioning field. *Strength Cond J*. 2023;45(6):733-744.
4. United Kingdom Government. Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual): About us. nd; <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual/about>. Accessed Apr 13, 2025.
5. European Union. Recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework. *Official Journal of the European Union*. 2017;C189(12):15–28.
6. Australian Government - Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). About us: TEQSA overview. 2022; <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/about-us/teqsa-overview>. Accessed Apr 13, 2025.
7. Council for Higher Education Accreditation. The CIQG International Quality Principles: Towards a Shared Understanding of Quality. 2016; https://www.chea.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Principles_Papers_Complete_web.pdf Accessed Apr 4, 2024.
8. European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training. European qualifications framework (EQF). n.d; <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/>

- europa-qualifications-framework-eqf. Accessed Apr 4, 2024.
9. Benson J. Explaining the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF). 2015; <https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/2015/10/01/explaining-the-rqf/>. Accessed Apr 4, 2024.
 10. Australian Qualifications Framework Council. Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) 2013; <https://www.aqf.edu.au>. Accessed Apr 4, 2024.
 11. Bird SP, Mitchell J. Current issues affecting strength and conditioning coaches: Professional standards, coaching structures, mentorships, and remuneration guidelines. *J Aust Strength Cond*. 2019;27(5):33-37.
 12. Australian Institute of Sport. Australian sport commits to national standard for sport science. 2017; https://www.sportaus.gov.au/media-centre/news/previous-news-items/australian_sport_commits_to_national_standard_for_sport_science#:~:text=The%20ASC%20and%20its%20high,over%20the%20next%2012%20months. Accessed Apr 23, 2024.
 13. Hancu-Budui A, Zorio-Grima A, Blanco-Vega J. The quest for legitimacy: The European Court of Auditors' work on fraud. *Financial Accountability and Management*. 2024;40(2):154-172.
 14. European Court of Auditors. Special report 10/2024: The recognition of professional qualifications in the EU – An essential mechanism, but used sparsely and inconsistently. 2024; <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/publications/sr-2024-10>. Accessed Apr 24, 2024.
 15. United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization. Qualifications recognition: A door to collective progress. 2023; <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/qualifications-recognition-door-collective-progress#:~:text=In%20the%20past%2C%20academic%20mobility,in%20a%20less%20globalised%20world>. Accessed Apr 31, 2025.
 16. International Council of Coaching Excellence, Association of Summer Olympic International Federations, Leeds Beckett University. International Sport Coaching Framework. Vol Version 1.2. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics; 2013.
 17. Smith B, Williams O, Bone L, & Collective, T M S W C P. (2023). Co-production: A resource to guide co-producing research in the sport, exercise, and health sciences. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 15(2), 159-187.