For information

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Legislative Council Panel on Manpower

**Latest Developments of
the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework**

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Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the latest developments of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF).

Background

2.   The HKQF defines clear and objective standards applicable to qualifications in the academic, vocational, professional, as well as continuing education sectors.   The primary objective of establishing the HKQF is to promote lifelong learning with a view to continuously enhancing the quality, professionalism, and competitiveness of our workforce in an increasingly globalised and knowledge-based economy. The latest developments of the HKQF are set out in the ensuing paragraphs.

(a)   Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs)

3.   We have set up 22 ITACs[1], covering industries with over 50% of the workforce in Hong Kong for the implementation of the HKQF.   We will continue to reach out to stakeholders of industries not yet covered by the HKQF, with a view to promoting further and wider adoption of the HKQF.

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[1]   Arboriculture and Horticulture, Automotive, Banking, Beauty and Hairdressing, Catering, Elderly Care Service,   Electrical and Mechanical Services,   Fashion,   Human Resource Management, Import and Export, Information and Communications Technology, Insurance, Jewellery, Logistics, Manufacturing Technology (Tooling, Metals and Plastics), Printing and   Publishing,   Property Management,   Retail,   Security Services, Testing, Inspection and Certification, Travel as well as Watch and Clock.

(b)   Specification of Competency Standards (SCS)

4.   The ITACs are tasked with drawing up SCS for the relevant sectors, which set out the skills, knowledge, and outcome standards required of employees in different functional areas of the respective sectors. The drawing up of SCS facilitates the formulation of training programmes for recognition under the HKQF.   21 out of the 22 ITACs have drawn up SCS for their respective industries, and the only remaining ITAC (i.e. Travel ITAC) will complete the drawing up of SCS by early 2022.   As at 30 September 2021, over 1 340 SCS-based courses have been developed by education and training providers.   We will continue to promote SCS to gain wider acceptance by employers as useful guides for the development of in-house training and human resources management, such as staff recruitment and performance assessment.

(c)   Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Mechanism

5.   The HKQF not only covers qualifications obtained from academic education and training, but also enables formal recognition of the skills, knowledge, and relevant experience acquired by practitioners in the workplace through the RPL mechanism which is based on the competency standards set out in SCS of various industries.   Practitioners may pursue further learning with their RPL qualifications as a starting point to acquire higher and broader qualifications.   At present, the RPL mechanism has been implemented in 17 industries[2].   As at 30 September 2021, about 37 800 applications from practitioners for assessment under the RPL mechanism, involving over 85 700 clusters of competencies, were processed or being processed by the assessment agencies concerned. Details are set out at **Annex A**.   Two industries, namely Security Services industry and Information and Communications Technology industry, launched their respective RPL mechanisms in July 2021, while Fashion industry will launch its RPL mechanism tentatively in Q1 of 2022.   We are working closely with other industries with a view to extending the RPL mechanism to more industries.

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[2]   Automotive, Beauty, Chinese Catering, Elderly Care Service, Electrical and Mechanical Services, Hairdressing, Import and Export, Information and Communications Technology, Jewellery, Logistics, Manufacturing Technology (Tooling, Metals and Plastics), Printing and Publishing, Property Management, Retail, Security Services, Testing, Inspection and Certification as well as Watch and Clock.

(d)   *Specification of Generic (Foundation) Competencies (SGC)*

6.   Generic (Foundation) Competencies are generic skills and knowledge that are shared across different industries and trades and are relevant to most people in the workplace. SGC covers four strands of foundation skills, namely English, Chinese, Numeracy, and Information Technology. As at 30 September 2021, about 130 SGC-based courses were developed by the education and training providers.

(e)   *Qualifications Register (QR)*

7.   QR, a web-based database containing information on qualifications and their respective learning programmes that have been quality assured and recognised under the HKQF, is available to the public free of charge. As at 30 September 2021, there were more than 8 300 academic and vocational qualifications, involving about 260 education and training providers, registered on the QR. As the statutory Accreditation Authority and QR Authority, the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) will continue to ensure the quality and standards of HKQF-recognised programmes. Statistical information on the qualifications registered on the QR is set out at **Annex B**.

(f)   *Award Titles Scheme (ATS) and the use of QF Credit*

8.   The ATS and the use of the QF credit were introduced in 2012. The ATS specifies the award titles that can be used for qualifications at various QF levels whereas the QF credit is a measurement of the volume or size of learning programmes recognised under the HKQF. Starting from 2016, the titles of all programmes registered on the QR have conformed to the ATS, and the QF credit values of all programmes at QF Levels 1 to 4 have been shown on the QR. Following the consultation with stakeholders in 2018, operators have been required to indicate the QF credit for their newly registered learning programmes at QF Levels 5 to 7 (except for research-based programmes) on the QR with effect from September 2020. Operators will be required to indicate the QF credit of all learning programmes at QF Levels 5 to 7 (except for research-based programmes) on the QR with effect from September 2022[3].

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[3]   Self-accrediting operators with their own established credit systems are voluntary to indicate the QF credits of their learning programmes at QF Levels 5 to 7 on the QR.   However, two types of programmes, namely full-time, four-year bachelor's degree programmes and full-time, one-year taught master's degree programmes, are given a remark indicating a range of QF credits on the QR starting from September 2020, if self-accrediting operators do not indicate the QF credits of such programmes on the QR.

(g)   Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)

9.   To promote learners' mobility and progression by minimising duplication of learning, the EDB promulgated in 2014 the policy and principles for CAT which apply to all programmes from QF Levels 1 to 7 as Phase 1 of the CAT project.   Subsequently, the *Policy, Principles and Operational Guidelines for CAT under the QF in Hong Kong* was promulgated in 2016 to facilitate the review of the existing CAT systems by providers or the establishment of a CAT system that suits their own circumstances.   The CAT centralised database was introduced on the QR in 2018 to set out the CAT information and articulation arrangements with a dedicated search function.   As at 30 September 2021, there were about 3 860 and 220 qualifications registered on the QR indicating CAT arrangements at the institutional and programme levels respectively, including about 30 qualifications which accept RPL qualifications for CAT arrangements.

(h)   Vocational Qualifications Pathway (VQP)

10.   VQP represents a roadmap for progression in learning and employment in an industry, along which learners and practitioners can progress at various levels through attainment or acquisition of the required occupation-based qualifications.   Specifically, VQP identifies the QF Level, scope of learning, SCS required, learning outcomes, and assessment criteria of the required occupation-based qualifications for each principal job role.   Major tasks, entry requirements, qualifications required, and employment pathway for each principal job role are also clearly set out. VQP is developed in consultation with the ITACs concerned to ensure that occupation-based qualifications developed under VQP best meet the needs of the industries and assure that the abilities of the qualifications holders could perform the occupations concerned well.   As a result, synergy between learning and employment can be further enhanced.

11.   The development of VQP for six industries (i.e. the Automotive, Banking, Property Management, Elderly Care Service, Printing and Publishing, as well as Insurance industries) has been completed.   At present, there are more than 60 VQP courses on the QR.   The development of VQP for the Human Resource Management and Security Services industries is underway.   We will continue to extend the development of VQP to other industries as appropriate and in phases, in consultation with the respective ITACs to ascertain the readiness in doing so.   The development of VQP will also be included in the process of drafting or revising SCS for industries to ensure the inclusion of competencies for key job roles in SCS.

(i)   Recognition of Professional Qualifications

12.   To widen the application of the HKQF, the EDB launched an initiative in 2018 for recognition of professional qualifications under the HKQF.   Professional qualifications recognised under the HKQF refer to qualifications granted by bona fide local organisations and underpinned by requisite academic qualifications, prescribed years of industry or professional experience, and robust assessments in written or practical formats.   Recognition of professional qualifications promotes a wider application of the HKQF and uplifts the professional image of vocational and professional education and training (VPET).

13.   Three bodies (i.e. the Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants, the Marine Department, and the Hong Kong Institute of Bankers) have been appointed as the assessment agencies for issuing designated professional qualifications recognised under the HKQF.

14.   The EDB will also collaborate with the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau to explore the development of professional qualification standards under the HKQF for the Fintech sector, so as to provide a clearer and recognised professional development pathway for employers and practitioners in the industry.

(j)   Co-operation with Other Places on QF

15.   The intention to develop the nation's QF was announced in the National 13th Five-Year Plan in 2016.   Over the years, the EDB and the QF Secretariat have shared our experience in developing and implementing the HKQF with various organisations and parties on the Mainland.   In 2019, the EDB signed a Letter of Intent on QF Co-operation between Hong Kong and Guangdong with the Department of Education of Guangdong Province to strengthen collaboration on QF between the two places.   The EDB, the QF Secretariat, and the HKCAAVQ will continue to cooperate with the relevant authorities in the Guangdong Province to foster collaboration between the two places on QF and to facilitate qualifications recognition in more industries.

16.   We have also been actively establishing a network with QF and quality assurance authorities of other places to facilitate qualification recognition, support mobility of learners and labour, and enhance opportunities for future cooperation between Hong Kong and other places. Referencing projects have been undertaken to provide a translation device to understand the corresponding levels of qualifications between the HKQF and the QF of other places.   We have completed referencing /

comparability projects with the European Qualifications Framework, Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, the Irish National Framework of Qualifications, and the New Zealand Qualifications Framework.

(k)   Support Measures

17.   Since 2014-15, the EDB allocates a recurrent funding of $10 million per year to support the ITACs to launch new initiatives to further enhance the knowledge and skills of workers in the industries as well as their competitiveness in the labour market.   These initiatives include –

> (a)   introducing the QF Award Scheme for Learning Experiences for outstanding practitioners to engage in learning activities in different places around the world;
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> (b)   designing SCS-based Training Packages that meet the needs of the industries; and
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> (c)   stepping up the promotion and publicity of the HKQF for its wider acceptance among all sectors.

Major developments of the above initiatives over the past year are set out at **Annex C**.

Qualifications Framework Fund

Establishment of the QF Fund

18.   Building on the success of the Qualifications Framework Support Schemes (QFSS) with time-limited funding approved in 2007 and recognising the importance of the HKQF in maintaining a quality workforce, the Government set up the QF Fund with an endowment of $1 billion in 2014 and injected another $1.2 billion in 2018 to provide a steady source of income to support the sustainable development and implementation of the HKQF.   The Steering Committee on QF Fund was set up in 2014 to advise the Secretary for Education on the policy, strategy, and administration of the QF Fund.

19.   To follow up on the recommendations of the Task Force on Promotion of VPET and to foster collaboration and create synergy between the promotion of VPET and QF, the Steering Committee on Promotion of VPET and QF was set up on 1 September 2020 to replace the Steering

Committee on QF Fund. The new Steering Committee advises the Secretary for Education on the promotion of VPET and QF through a coordinated approach and means of better utilising the QF as a tool to promote VPET, as well as the policy, strategy, and administration of the QF Fund. The terms of reference and membership of the Steering Committee on Promotion of VPET and QF are set out at **Annex D**.

Use of the QF Fund

20.   The QF Fund supports schemes/initiatives for the sustainable development and implementation of the HKQF, including but not limited to the following two areas –

   (a)   Designated Support Schemes for the QF (including the Accreditation Grant Scheme, RPL Support Scheme, Programme Development Grant Scheme, Support Scheme for Recognition of Professional Qualifications under the HKQF, and QR Subsidy Scheme)[4]; and

   (b)   Funding for ITACs, QF-related studies/projects and public education such as referencing projects with the QF in other places. Details of the projects being conducted are set out at **Annex E**.

21.   The total expenditure on various support schemes/initiatives under the QFSS and the QF Fund over the years amounts to $413 million.

Way Forward

22.   Over the last decade, the HKQF has built up solid infrastructure for a quality qualifications system that supports progression and fosters recognition. More and more organisations, institutions, and employers recognise the importance of the HKQF and adopt it in their recruitment, training, promotion, and student admission. Looking forward, the Government will further strengthen and drive the development of the HKQF to enhance recognition of qualifications for different industries and provide youngsters with quality-assured pathways for further studies and career development. In particular, the HKQF will continue to provide a

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[4]   Details of the Designated Support Schemes for the QF can be found on the HKQF website (https://www.hkqf.gov.hk/en/support/dss/index.html).

solid foundation to establish vocational and professional pathways with a view to enhancing the promotion and development of VPET in Hong Kong.

Education Bureau
October 2021

Recognition of Prior Learning mechanism
(as at 30 September 2021)

Industry	Current Appointed Assessment Agency	Launch Date	No. of applications processed/ being processed	No. of clusters of competencies	Success rate
Hairdressing	Vocational Training Council (VTC)	Jun 2008	1 062	5 374	98.7%
Printing & Publishing	VTC	Jun 2008	865	1 518	97.7%
Watch & Clock	VTC	Jun 2008	872	990	99.9%
Property Management	VTC	Mar 2011	11 487	17 457	99.1%
Automotive	VTC	Nov 2011	1 515	2 930	98.1%
Jewellery	VTC	Nov 2011	1 759	2 092	99.4%
Logistics	HKU School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE)	Mar 2012	2 431	3 586	99.5%
Chinese Catering	VTC	Jan 2013	4 075	5 199	99.7%
Beauty	Caritas Institute of Community Education	Jul 2014	4 269	25 341	99%
Retail	VTC	Dec 2014	6 210	8 329	100%
Import & Export	HKU SPACE	Sept 2015	166	255	100%
Elderly Care Service	Hong Kong Association of Gerontology	Sept 2015	2 479	11 053	99.9%
Testing, Inspection & Certification	School of Science and Technology of the Hong Kong Metropolitan University	Nov 2015	16	16	100%
Electrical & Mechanical Services	VTC	Dec 2015	414	1 378	99%
Manufacturing Technology (Tooling, Metals & Plastics)	Hong Kong Productivity Council	Mar 2017	160	160	100%
Information and Communications Technology (Operation and Support)	HKU SPACE	July 2021	0	0	N/A
Security Services	HKU SPACE	July 2021	23	46	N/A
		Total	**37 803**	**85 724**	**99.2%**

**Qualifications registered on the Qualifications Register
(as at 30 September 2021)**

Category		No. of qualifications
(1)	Qualifications offered by self-accrediting institutions	3 303
(2)	Qualifications offered by non-self-accrediting institutions	4 200
(3)	Qualifications offered under the Recognition of Prior Learning mechanism	804
(4)	Qualifications offered under the Recognition of Professional Qualifications	25
	Total:	**8 332**

**Major Developments of the Support Measures
on the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) in 2021**

QF Award Scheme for Learning Experiences (Award Scheme)

The Award Scheme aims to recognise outstanding or emerging practitioners who can serve as exemplars and role models for their respective industries and help attract the younger generation to pursue career in these fields. For the 2021-22 Award Scheme, a total of 68 practitioners have been selected by the respective Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs) for the award to engage in learning activities in or outside Hong Kong. Since 2013, a total of 561 practitioners have received the award.

Specification of Competency Standards (SCS)-based Training Packages

2.   SCS-based Training Packages, developed with reference to SCS of respective industries, aim to serve as a catalyst for the development of SCS-based training and assessment materials for wider adoption by enterprises and course providers to meet the needs of the industries. Training packages involving 31 job functions for 12 industries have been developed from 2013 to 2021.

Promotion and Publicity of the HKQF

3.   In 2021, we continued our promotion and publicity targeting three groups –

(i) *School sector:* Riding on the ITAC networks and the competency standards and progression pathways developed for the respective industries, we organised 16 school projects with the ITACs to promote the HKQF and the relevant industries to senior secondary school students in the 2020/21 academic year. Due to COVID-19 epidemic, some activities were conducted online. A total of 48 workshops were organised and approximately 2 200 students joined the activities. To enable teachers and school principals to understand how the HKQF can facilitate students' career and life planning, we organised online seminars for schools. More online briefings will be offered to secondary teachers on a regular basis, and will be published on the EDB Training Calendar. We also organised briefing for individual secondary schools on the benefits of developing school-based QF-recognised programmes to facilitate future studies and career planning

of students, and introduced the process of achieving QF recognition to encourage early planning.

(ii) *Industry sector:* In 2021, we organised/co-organised 22 activities and briefing sessions to promote the HKQF for various industries, and hosted a QF Partnerships Commendation Ceremony and QF In Action Launch Ceremony in March to recognise the support given by industry stakeholders in the implementation of HKQF and to encourage further use of HKQF in promoting lifelong learning.   17 government bureaux, departments and regulatory bodies were featured in a publication to showcase the success stories of their applications of HKQF.   These activities and events were attended by stakeholders from a wide array of industries, including employers, employees, and representatives from industry organisations.

(iii) *Community at large:* In 2021, we published more than 29 HKQF-related articles in newspapers as well as publications of professional bodies, trade unions, and trade associations to enhance stakeholders' understanding and awareness of the HKQF.   We have also secured the support of some post-secondary education and training institutions to publish information about HKQF on their websites so as to assist learners to gain a better understanding about QF-recognised qualifications.

**Steering Committee on Promotion of
Vocational and Professional Education and Training
and Qualifications Framework**

Terms of Reference

The Steering Committee on Promotion of Vocational and Professional Education and Training and Qualifications Framework (the Steering Committee) advises the Secretary for Education on the promotion of Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPET) and Qualifications Framework (QF) through a coordinated approach, including:

(a) the overall strategy to promote VPET;

(b) the ways to strengthen coordination and foster closer industrial partnership in the Government's VPET promotion measures;

(c) the promotion of VPET and related programmes in secondary schools;

(d) the development, implementation, and promotion of QF, in particular, to support a qualifications system for VPET, and the strategy for making use of the QF Fund including the scope and parameters of the schemes, initiatives, and activities to be covered by the QF Fund; and

(e) any other matters that may be referred to the Steering Committee by the Education Bureau concerning the promotion of VPET and QF, as well as the policy and administration of the QF Fund.

Where necessary, the Steering Committee also advises the Trustee of the Fund (i.e. the Permanent Secretary for Education) on the formulation of policies for and monitoring of the investment of the QF Fund.

In discharging its functions, the Steering Committee may set up sub-committees, conduct studies, engage professional services and co-opt members as and when necessary.

Membership

Chairperson:	Dr Daniel YIP Chung-yin
Vice-Chairperson:	Ms Caroline MAK Sui-king
Members:	Dr CHAN Cheuk-hay
	Dr Lawrence CHEUNG Chi-chong
	Ms Joanne CHONG Sze-pui
	Professor Ronald CHUNG Chi-kit
	Mr Eugene FONG Yick-jin
	Dr Alex KAI Sze-fai
	Mr LAM Chun-sing
	Mr Freddy LAW Wai-hung
	Dr Ringo LEE Yiu-pui
	Miss Pearl SO Ka-yu
	Mr Joseph TSANG Chi-to
	Miss TSOI Kuen-kuen
	Dr Vincent WONG Wai-lun
	Miss Winnie YING Fung-sau

Ex-officio Members: Executive Director, Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications or his/her representative

Executive Director, Vocational Training Council or his/her representative

Secretary for Education or his/her representative

**Projects funded by the Qualifications Framework (QF) Fund
that are being conducted**

The following projects funded by the QF Fund are being conducted –

(i) *Research Project on the Use of QF Languages in Recruitment Advertisements*:
In order to track the changes of the popularity of QF languages in recruitment
advertisements, the former Steering Committee on QF Fund approved in 2019
to conduct a series of research on recruitment advertisements with the use of QF
languages. The research on recruitment platforms and magazines are
conducted from 2019 to 2021 to identify the trends for using QF languages in
recruitment advertisements in different industries, and focus group discussions
and telephone/online surveys are carried out to evaluate the reasons behind and
the benefits received by stakeholders.

The Education Bureau also continues to feature QF language in its civil service
recruitment exercises with a view to raising public awareness of the QF. We
expect to extend the arrangement to more recruitment exercises and to
encourage application of the QF in training of other Government departments.

(ii) *Project on Development of Good Practices on Credit Accumulation and
Transfer (CAT) under the QF:* The Policy, Principles and Operational
Guidelines for CAT (the Guidelines for CAT) under the QF was promulgated in
2016 to provide an overarching framework that facilitates the articulation of
qualifications across different sectors at all QF Levels and the establishment of
progression pathways. At present, the Guidelines for CAT focus on the CAT
arrangements for qualifications obtained by completion of learning
programmes. In light of the expanded application of CAT beyond the
institutional and programme levels at the time of announcement of the policy in
2016, the former Steering Committee on QF Fund endorsed in 2020 to conduct
a project to develop a set of good practices on CAT in support of its application
across institutions, industries, and various levels of education and training, and
to update the Guidelines for CAT in view of the latest developments of the QF
and Vocational and Professional Education and Training in Hong Kong and
overseas. A draft set of good practices will be ready for consultation with
stakeholders in 2022.

(iii) *Development of the Qualifications Register (QR) mobile version:* The QR is a
web-based database providing information of qualifications and related learning
programmes recognised under the QF. The former Steering Committee on QF
Fund endorsed in 2020 the development of mobile version of the QR to facilitate

users of mobile devices. The QR mobile version was launched in February 2021. With the customised layout of information and incorporation of mobile features, the QR mobile version enables the public to search information of QF-recognised qualifications at the fingertip. Since its launch, the QR mobile version attracts an average of about 1 500 hits per month, which contributes to about 15% of the monthly hits on the QR.