

For information

Legislative Council Panel on Manpower

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

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. The latest developments of the HKQF are set out in the ensuing paragraphs.

(a) *Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs)*

3. We have set up ITACs for 23 industries¹, covering 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.

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. All ITACs have drawn up SCS for their respective industries. As at 30 September 2022, over 1 400 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 18 industries². As at 30 September 2022, more than 38 200 applications from practitioners for assessment under the RPL mechanism, involving over 86 600 clusters of competencies, were processed or being processed by the assessment agencies concerned. Details are set out at **Annex A**. Among others, the Fashion industry launched its RPL mechanism in January 2022. We will continue to explore extending the RPL mechanism to other industries and work closely with our industry partners to further refine the RPL mechanism to address the manpower needs of the industries.

(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

² Automotive, Beauty, Catering (Chinese Cuisine), Elderly Care Service, Electrical and Mechanical Services, Fashion, 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.

Technology. As at 30 September 2022, over 140 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 2022, there were 8 500 academic and vocational qualifications, involving about 270 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 of all learning programmes at QF Levels 5 to 7 (except for research-based programmes) on the QR with effect from September 2022³.

(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* (the Guidelines) was promulgated in 2016 to facilitate the review of the existing CAT systems by providers or the establishment of a CAT system that suits

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.

their own circumstances. In 2020, in view of the expanded application of CAT since the promulgation of the Guidelines, the EDB engaged a consultant to undertake the Project on Development of Good Practices on CAT under the QF, with a view to developing 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. The project is expected to be completed within 2022. 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 2022, there were about 3 880 and 290 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 has been completed⁴. At present, there are about 60 VQP courses on the QR. We will expedite the development of VQP to increase the number of industries adopting the VQP from six at present to at least 18 in the next five years, in consultation with the respective ITACs. The development of VQP will continue to be included in the process of drafting or revising SCS for industries as appropriate to ensure the inclusion of competencies for key job roles in SCS.

⁴ Including the Automotive, Banking, Property Management, Elderly Care Service, Printing and Publishing, as well as Insurance industries.

(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 (HKIB)) have been appointed as the assessment agencies for issuing designated professional qualifications recognised under the HKQF.

14. The EDB has been collaborating with the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau to explore the further 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. A total of six new Fintech professional qualifications recognised under the HKQF at QF Levels 5 to 6 are expected to be rolled out by the HKIB within 2022.

(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. Since the signing of the Letter of Intent on QF Co-operation between Hong Kong and Guangdong between the EDB and the Department of Education of Guangdong Province in 2019, the EDB, the QF Secretariat, and the HKCAAVQ have been working closely with the relevant authorities in the Guangdong Province to foster collaboration between the two places on QF. In early 2022, the HKCAAVQ accepted the invitation from the relevant authorities in the Guangdong Province to provide a two-year consultancy service to the latter to support the development of Guangdong Lifelong Education Qualifications Framework, including providing assistance in establishing a quality assurance mechanism, accreditation standard and procedures, piloting an accreditation exercise and developing guidelines for setting up a qualification register, thereby laying the foundation for

further liaison and cooperation between the QF of the two places in the long term.

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;
- (b) designing SCS-based Training Packages that meet the needs of the industries; and
- (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)⁵; 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 \$470 million.

⁵ 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>).

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 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 2022

**Recognition of Prior Learning mechanism
(as at 30 September 2022)**

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	1 073	5 393	98.7%
Printing & Publishing	VTC	Jun 2008	867	1 520	97.7%
Watch & Clock	VTC	Jun 2008	877	995	99.9%
Property Management	VTC	Mar 2011	11 537	17 578	99.1%
Automotive	VTC	Nov 2011	1 522	2 940	98.1%
Jewellery	VTC	Nov 2011	1 769	2 107	99.4%
Logistics	HKU School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE)	Mar 2012	2 452	3 657	99.4%
Chinese Catering	VTC	Jan 2013	4 082	5 207	99.7%
Beauty	Caritas Institute of Community Education	Jul 2014	4 336	25 423	99%
Retail	VTC	Dec 2014	6 295	8 562	99.9%
Import & Export	HKU SPACE	Sept 2015	167	257	100%
Elderly Care Service	Hong Kong Association of Gerontology	Sept 2015	2 486	11 104	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	459	1 438	98.8%
Manufacturing Technology (Tooling, Metals & Plastics)	Hong Kong Productivity Council	Mar 2017	168	168	100%
Information and Communications Technology (Operation and Support)	HKU SPACE	July 2021	10	86	98%
Security Services	HKU SPACE	July 2021	80	146	94.3%
Fashion	Clothing Industry Training Authority	Jan 2022	44	57	100%
		Total	38 240	86 654	99.2%

**Qualifications registered on the Qualifications Register
(as at 30 September 2022)**

Category	No. of qualifications
(1) Qualifications offered by self-accrediting institutions	3 392
(2) Qualifications offered by non-self-accrediting institutions	4 373
(3) Qualifications offered under the Recognition of Prior Learning mechanism	707
(4) Qualifications offered under the Recognition of Professional Qualifications	28
Total:	8 500

Major Developments of the Support Measures on the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) in 2022

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 2022 Award Scheme, a total of 71 practitioners were 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 626 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 were developed from 2013 to 2022.

Promotion and Publicity of the HKQF

3. In 2022, 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 school projects with the ITACs to promote the HKQF and the relevant industries to senior secondary school students. A total of 16 workshops were organised and approximately 1 200 students joined the activities. To enable teachers and school principals to understand how the HKQF could 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 briefings for secondary schools and special 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 2022, we organised / co-organised over 70 activities and briefing sessions to promote the HKQF for various industries, which were attended by stakeholders including employers, employees, and representatives from industry organisations. Besides, certain enterprises, industry organisations, government departments and education and training providers are going to join the new cohort of the “QF in Action 2022”, showing various applications of QF in manpower training and development. They will be recognised as QFIA Achievers in the Commendation Ceremony to be held in 2023.
- (iii) ***Community at large:*** In 2022, we published more than 40 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 had 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, JP

Vice-Chairperson: Ms Caroline MAK Sui-king, JP

Members:

- Dr CHAN Cheuk-hay
- Ir Eric CHAN Sze-yuen
- Dr Lawrence CHEUNG Chi-chong
- Ms Joanne CHONG Sze-pui, MH
- Professor Ronald CHUNG Chi-kit
- Mr Eugene FONG Yick-jin
- Dr Alex KAI Sze-fai
- Mr Victor KWOK Hoi-kit
- The Hon LAM Chun-sing
- Dr Ringo LEE Yiu-pui
- Mr Luke LIANG Lu-ka
- 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 to identify the trends for using QF languages in recruitment advertisements in different industries, and focus group discussions and telephone / online surveys were carried out to evaluate the reasons behind and the benefits received by stakeholders. The project was completed in Q1 2022.

The EDB 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 the training of other Government departments.

- (ii) Surveys on Use of QF: Following the introduction of different infrastructure under the QF, such as the introduction of SCS in all ITACs, the implementation of the RPL mechanism in 18 industries, and the development of VQP for some industries, and to facilitate the further enhancements of the QF, we consider it opportune to strengthen the promotion strategies on the use of the QF and the application of its infrastructure, in addition to merely promoting the awareness and perceptions of the QF. In February, the Steering Committee endorsed the proposal of conducting a new set of the QF Surveys to comprehensively look into the extensiveness and effectiveness of the use and application of the QF, including the use of QF language in recruitment advertisements, and collect useful and specific feedbacks from stakeholders. The QF Surveys will be conducted from 2022 to 2025.
- (iii) 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. The project is expected to be completed within 2022.

- (iv) *Study on Work-based Learning under QF*: The Task Force on Promotion of VPET recommended in its review report submitted to the Government in 2020 that more robust policies be formulated to encourage, coordinate, support, and facilitate the post-secondary education sector to incorporate Work-based Learning (WBL) and assessment in their VPET programmes at both the sub-degree and degree levels through close partnership with industries. The Task Force also considered it necessary to step up the WBL elements of VPET programmes and integrate them into the core curriculum. In October 2021, the Steering Committee endorsed the proposal of conducting a study on WBL to better understand the overall development of WBL (including assessment at workplaces) under the QF and to produce a practical reference guide to facilitate the understanding of education and training providers on WBL and the incorporation of such elements in their programmes. The study is expected to be completed in 2023.