

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 (QF).

Background

2. The QF 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 QF is to promote lifelong learning with a view to continuously enhancing the quality, professionalism, and competitiveness of our workforce. The latest developments of the QF 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 QF. We will continue to reach out to stakeholders of industries not yet covered by the QF, with a view to promoting further and wider adoption of the QF.

(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

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.

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 QF. All ITACs have drawn up SCS for their respective industries. As at 30 September 2023, over 1 500 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 QF 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 2023, more than 39 500 applications from practitioners for assessment under the RPL mechanism, involving over 89 700 clusters of competencies, were processed or being processed by the assessment agencies concerned. Details are set out at **Annex A**.

6. We have been further refining the RPL mechanism, with a view to further facilitating practitioners' progression in learning and careers and to addressing the needs of the industries. In Q1 2024, the RPL mechanism will be launched for the Arboriculture and Horticulture industry, which will become the 19th industry implementing the mechanism. In addition, following the expansion of scope to Community Care and Support under the existing RPL mechanism, the Elderly Care Service industry has started a pilot-run of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning (NFIL) since September 2023, with a view to facilitating experienced caregivers to acquire QF-recognised qualifications for the purpose of job entry and/or learning progression. 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

² Automotive, Beauty, Catering, 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.

the manpower needs of the industries.

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

7. 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 2023, about 150 SGC-based courses were developed by the education and training providers.

(e) Qualifications Register (QR)

8. QR, a web-based database containing information on qualifications and their respective learning programmes that have been quality assured and recognised under the QF, is available to the public free of charge. As at 30 September 2023, there were over 8 700 academic and vocational qualifications, involving about 290 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 QF-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

9. 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 QF. 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.

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)*

10. 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 their own circumstances. In 2020, 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 was completed in October 2023, and the revised Guidelines will be published in Q4 2023. 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 2023, there were about 2 880 and 250 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)*

11. 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. At present, there are over 80 VQP courses on the QR.

12. To further develop flexible vocational progression pathways for practitioners, we will expedite the development of VQP under the QF to increase the number of industries covered to at least 18 by 2027 in consultation with the respective ITACs. In this regard, in September

2023, VQP was newly launched in four more industries, namely Information and Communications Technology, Logistics, Retail and Security Service, and is now available for a total of ten industries⁴. 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.

(i) *Recognition of Professional Qualifications*

13. To widen the application of the QF, the EDB launched an initiative in 2018 for recognition of professional qualifications under the QF. Professional qualifications recognised under the QF 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 QF and uplifts the professional image of vocational and professional education and training (VPET).

14. Two bodies (i.e. the Marine Department and the Hong Kong Institute of Bankers (HKIB)) are currently appointed as the assessment agencies (AA)⁵ for issuing designated professional qualifications recognised under the QF.

15. The EDB has been collaborating with the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau to explore the further development of professional qualification under the QF for the Banking sector, so as to provide a clearer and recognised professional development pathway for employers and practitioners in the industry. A total of three new Compliance professional qualifications recognised under the QF at QF Levels 4 to 5 are expected to be rolled out by the HKIB within 2023.

(j) *Co-operation with Other Places on Qualifications Framework*

16. The intention to develop the nation's qualifications framework

⁴ The other six industries include Automotive, Banking, Property Management, Elderly Care Service, Printing and Publishing, as well as Insurance.

⁵ The term of the Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants which offered one professional qualification as an AA lapsed in September 2023. It had not applied for re-appointment as an AA because it has been undergoing a full-scale long-term organisational restructure in response to the further reform of regulatory regime of the accounting profession undertaken by the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau.

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 QF with various organisations and parties on the Mainland. Since the signing of the Letter of Intent on Qualifications Framework 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 qualifications framework. 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 qualifications framework of the two places in the long term.

17. We have also been actively establishing a network with qualifications framework 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 QF and the qualifications framework 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

18. Since the 2013-14 financial year, 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 QF for its wider acceptance among all sectors.

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

QF Fund

Establishment of the QF Fund

19. Building on the success of the Qualifications Framework Support Schemes (QFSS) with time-limited funding approved in 2007 and recognising the importance of the QF 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 QF. 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.

20. 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

21. The QF Fund supports schemes / initiatives for the sustainable development and implementation of the QF, 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 QF, and QR Subsidy Scheme)⁶; 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**.

22. The total expenditure on various support schemes / initiatives under the QFSS and the QF Fund over the years amounts to \$516 million.

Way Forward

23. Over the last decade, the QF 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 QF and adopt it in their recruitment, training, promotion, and student admission. Looking forward, the Government will further strengthen and drive the development of the QF to enhance recognition of qualifications for different industries and provide youngsters with quality-assured pathways for further studies and career development. In particular, the QF 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
November 2023

⁶ Details of the Designated Support Schemes for the QF can be found on the QF website (<https://www.hkqf.gov.hk/en/support/dss/index.html>).

Annex A**Recognition of Prior Learning mechanism
(as at 30 September 2023)**

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	1 079	5 403	98.7%
Printing & Publishing	VTC	Jun 2008	870	1 523	97.7%
Watch & Clock	VTC	Jun 2008	893	1 011	99.9%
Property Management	VTC	Mar 2011	11 548	17 592	99.1%
Automotive	VTC	Nov 2011	1 570	2 993	98.1%
Jewellery	VTC	Nov 2011	1 782	2 121	99.4%
Logistics	HKU School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE)	Mar 2012	2 587	3 887	99.2%
Catering	VTC	Jan 2013	4 121	5 282	99.7%
Beauty	Caritas Institute of Community Education	Jul 2014	4 403	25 492	98.8%
Retail	VTC	Dec 2014	6 341	8 608	99.9%
Import & Export	HKU SPACE	Sept 2015	167	257	100%
Elderly Care Service	Hong Kong Association of Gerontology	Sept 2015	2 487	11 105	99.9%
Testing, Inspection & Certification	School of Science and Technology of the Hong Kong Metropolitan University	Nov 2015	25	25	100%
Electrical & Mechanical Services	VTC	Dec 2015	941	3 164	98.8%
Manufacturing Technology (Tooling, Metals & Plastics)	Hong Kong Productivity Council	Mar 2017	173	173	100%
Information and Communications Technology (Operation and Support)	HKU SPACE	July 2021	15	96	98.9%
Security Services	HKU SPACE	July 2021	362	648	97.1%
Fashion	Clothing Industry Training Authority	Jan 2022	219	346	100%
		Total	39 583	89 726	99.1%

Annex B

**Qualifications registered on the Qualifications Register
(as at 30 September 2023)**

Category	No. of qualifications
(1) Qualifications offered by self-accrediting institutions	3 431
(2) Qualifications offered by non-self-accrediting institutions	4 532
(3) Qualifications offered under the Recognition of Prior Learning mechanism	719
(4) Qualifications offered under the Recognition of Professional Qualifications	32
Total:	8 714

Major Developments of the Support Measures on the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (QF) in 2023

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 2023 Award Scheme, a total of 69 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 695 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 37 job functions for 12 industries were developed from 2013 to 2023.

Promotion and Publicity of the QF

3. In 2023, 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 QF and the relevant industries to senior secondary school students from time to time. In the 2022/23 academic year, a series of over 100 workshops for 16 industries were organised and approximately 3 100 students joined the activities. To enable teachers and school principals to understand how the QF could facilitate students' career and life planning, we organised two 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. We

will continue to explore collaboration with the school sector, industry partners and other organisations to organise school projects for secondary school students and explore further opportunities to promote school-based QF-recognised programmes to facilitate further studies and career planning of students.

- (ii) **Industry sector:** In 2023, we organised / co-organised over 60 activities and briefing sessions to promote the QF for various industries, which were attended by stakeholders including employers, employees, and representatives from industry organisations. In May 2023, we hosted the QF Partnerships Commendation Ceremony and QF 15th Anniversary Celebration to recognise the support given by industry stakeholders in the implementation of the QF and to encourage further use of the QF in promoting lifelong learning. Over 300 partner organisations from a wide array of industries, professions, relevant government departments as well as education and training institutions attended and/or were commended. Moreover, under “QF in Action (QFIA) 2022”, a total of 23 enterprises, industry organisations, education and training providers and government departments adopting and applying the QF have been recognised as QFIA Achievers / Partners and featured in a publication to showcase the success stories of their applications of QF for various manpower development initiatives.
- (iii) **Community at large:** In 2023, we published more than 50 QF-related articles in newspapers as well as publications of professional bodies, trade unions, and trade associations to enhance stakeholders’ understanding and awareness of the QF. We had also secured the support of some post-secondary education and training institutions to publish information about QF 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, BBS, 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) 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 February 2022, 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. A consultant has been engaged since August 2022 to conduct questionnaire surveys, focus group meetings and research on recruitment advertisements. The project is expected to be completed in Q3 2025.

The EDB also continues to feature QF languages in its civil service recruitment exercises with a view to raising public awareness of the QF, and expects to extend the practice to more recruitment exercises and to encourage application of the QF in the areas of training and development in 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. Previously, 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 was completed in

October 2023.

- (iii) *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 and the practical reference guide are expected to be completed by Q1 2024.