

**For information**

**Legislative Council Panel on Manpower**  
**Latest Development of**  
**the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework**

**Purpose**

This paper briefs Members on the latest development of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (QF).

**Background**

2. Officially launched on 5 May 2008 and underpinned by the quality assurance mechanism provided by the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (AAVQO) (Cap. 592), QF is a clear and well-defined seven-level hierarchy covering qualifications in the academic, vocational, professional, and continuing education sectors. Through providing various deliverables and support for industry stakeholders, including employers, practitioners, professional bodies, education and training providers and learners, QF continuously enhances the quality, professionalism and competitiveness of our workforce in an increasingly globalised and knowledge-based economy, thereby ensuring the sustainable manpower development in Hong Kong amidst the rapidly changing world.

3. To achieve the above objectives, QF serves to (a) define clear and objective standards applicable to qualifications in the academic, vocational and professional as well as continuing education sectors; (b) assure the quality of qualifications and the associated learning programmes available to learners; and (c) assure relevancy of learning to industry needs.

***(a) Define clear and objective standards***

4. Specifically, to define clear and objective qualification standards, the Generic Level Descriptors under QF specifies the outcome standards expected of the qualifications at each QF level. There is also in place QF Credit which serves as a common currency under QF, measuring the

volume or size of learning of a qualification. In addition, the Award Titles Scheme standardises the use of titles for qualifications recognised under QF with a view to enhancing the transparency of qualifications and reflecting their levels.

***(b) Quality assurance***

5. Quality assurance is the cornerstone of QF. The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) is specified in Cap. 592 as the Accreditation Authority, which is tasked with the responsibility of assuring the quality of qualifications recognised under QF. HKCAAVQ is also the authority responsible for the administration of the Qualifications Register (QR) under Cap. 592, which is a free-of-charge, public, centralised online database of quality assured qualifications recognised under QF to facilitate the search of quality assured qualifications. As at 30 September 2024, there were over 9 380 academic and vocational qualifications, involving about 310 education and training providers, registered on QR. Statistical information on the qualifications registered on QR is set out at **Annex A**.

***(c) Address industry needs***

6. To ensure the relevancy of QF to the manpower needs of the industries, the Education Bureau (EDB) has established Industry Training and Advisory Committees (ITACs) for 23 industries<sup>1</sup>, which cover over 50% of the workforce in Hong Kong. ITACs comprise representatives from key industry stakeholders as members, which steer the development and utilisation of various tools under QF to promote the industries' manpower development with the support of QF Secretariat under EDB and with reference to the actual manpower situation of their respective industries. QF Secretariat has also been supporting other industries in leveraging QF to promote their manpower development.

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<sup>1</sup> The 23 industries are: Arboriculture and Horticulture, Automotive, Banking, Beauty, Catering, Elderly Care Service, Electrical and Mechanical Services, Fashion, Hairdressing, 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.

## Promotion of QF

7. EDB has adopted a multi-pronged approach to promote the development and application of QF in collaboration with ITACs, as well as the awareness and recognition of QF by different stakeholders, with a view to enhancing the quality of the manpower and fostering the development of vocational and professional education and training (VPET) of Hong Kong.

### *(a) Promotion of development and application of QF*

8. It has been the strategy of EDB to, in collaboration with ITACs, promote QF in different industries through adopting a targeted approach to develop QF tools that address the specific needs and situations of different industries, thereby encouraging their application by practitioners. Key initiatives are summarised as follows-

#### *(i) Specification of Competency Standards (SCS) and Specification of Generic (Foundation) Competencies (SGC)*

9. SCS, which are industries-specific competencies, and SGC, generic skills competencies, complement each other in the development of learning programmes that are relevant to each industry. All ITACs are tasked with drawing up SCS for their respective industries, which set out the skills, knowledge, and outcome standards required of employees in different functional areas. The drawing up of SCS serves as user guides for formulation of in-house training and human resources management such as staff recruitment and performance assessment. On the other hand, SGC are generic skills and knowledge that are shared across different industries and trades and are relevant to most people in the workplace. SGC cover four strands of foundation skills, namely English, Chinese, Numeracy, and Information Technology.

10. As at 30 September 2024, there were over 1 600 SCS-based courses and about 150 SGC-based courses that were developed by the education and training providers. With the Government's financial support, SCS-based training packages are also designed to meet the needs of the industries. Currently, training packages involving 37 job functions for 12 industries have been developed. EDB will continue to promote the development, updating and utilisation of SCS and SGS, which serve as the building blocks for various courses and programmes as well as other tools under QF.

*(ii) Vocational Qualifications Pathway (VQP)*

11. With the competency skills and standards sets out by SCS, VQP acts as a learning and career progression roadmap along which learners and practitioners can showcase these competency skills and progress at various levels through attainment or acquisition of the required occupation-based qualifications. Specifically, VQP outlines the QF Level, scope of learning, SCS requirements, learning outcomes, and assessment criteria of the required occupation-based qualifications for each principal job role. Developed in consultation with ITACs, VQP ensures that occupation-based qualifications meet the needs of the industries and thereby enhancing the connection between education and employment.

12. At present, there are a total of 12 industries that have already adopted VQP<sup>2</sup>, with travel industry tentatively planning to launch VQP in the first half of 2025. There are over 210 VQP courses on QR. As announced in the Chief Executive's 2022 Policy Address, to provide diversified learning and employment opportunities for young people, we have been proactively expanding the VQP adoption, with a target of at least 18 industries by 2027, with a view to further integrating education and training with career development in different industries.

*(iii) Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)*

13. QF 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.

14. At present, the RPL mechanism has been implemented in 19 industries<sup>3</sup>. As at 30 September 2024, more than 42 100 applications from practitioners for assessment under the RPL mechanism, involving

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<sup>2</sup> The industries are: Automotive, Banking, Property Management, Elderly Care Service, Printing and Publishing, Insurance, Logistics, Information and Communications Technology, Retail, Security Services, Import and Export as well as Human Resource Management.

<sup>3</sup> The industries are: Arboriculture and Horticulture, 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.

over 92 700 clusters of competencies, were processed or being processed by the assessment agencies concerned. Details are set out at **Annex B**.

15. 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. Among others, in July 2023, four VQP-based RPL qualifications were launched in Automotive industry to meet the requirements of Voluntary Registration Scheme for Vehicle Mechanics under the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department, which serve as a good example on promoting the application of QF-recognised occupation-based qualifications in licensing arrangements. More VQP-based RPL qualifications will also be developed to assist industry practitioners to obtain the occupation-based qualifications through RPL assessments.

*(iv) Professional Qualifications Recognition*

16. To widen the application of QF and to uplift the professional image of VPET, EDB launched an initiative in 2018 for recognition of professional qualifications under QF. Professional qualifications refer to qualifications granted by bona fide local organisations to individuals who meet the requisite academic qualifications plus prescribed years of industry or professional experience and have passed through a robust assessment in written or practical format.

17. Currently, two bodies (i.e. the Marine Department and the Hong Kong Institute of Bankers (HKIB)) are appointed as the assessment agencies for issuing designated professional qualifications recognised under QF. EDB has also been collaborating with the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau to explore the further development of professional qualifications under QF for the Banking sector, so as to provide a clear and recognised professional development pathway for employers and practitioners in the industry. A total of four new green and sustainable finance-related professional qualifications recognised under QF at QF Level 4 were rolled out by HKIB in August 2024. The development of professional qualifications recognition will support the further extension of QF to qualifications not underpinned by learning programmes.

*(v) QF Credits and Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)*

18. To promote the use of QF Credits, operators have been required to indicate QF credits of all learning programmes at QF Levels 5 to 7 (except for research-based programmes) on QR with effect from

September 2022<sup>4</sup>. In addition, with QF Credits quantifying the learning outcomes in different qualifications, CAT enables the recognition of previous learning units, allowing learners to transfer between programmes without duplication. To promote further development and wider adaptation of CAT, EDB commenced in 2020 the Project on Development of Good Practices on CAT under 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 updating the Policy, Principles and Operational Guidelines for CAT under the QF in Hong Kong (Guidelines). The project was completed in October 2023, and the revised Guidelines were published in March 2024.

19. There is also a CAT centralised database on QR, setting out CAT information and articulation arrangements with a dedicated search function. As at 30 September 2024, there were about 3 090 and 270 qualifications registered on QR indicating CAT arrangements at the institutional and programme levels respectively.

***(b) Promotion of awareness and recognition of QF***

20. In addition, EDB and QF Secretariat have also been proactively promoting the awareness and recognition of QF, including undertaking targeted initiatives for different sectors and overall publicity on QF. The key initiatives are summarised as follows –

- (i) Industry practitioners* – Among others, the Award Scheme for Learning Experience is organised by ITACs with the support of QF Secretariat to encourage practitioners who have excelled in continuous learning to broaden their horizons through engaging in learning activities held locally or around the world. In the 2024 / 2025 round of the Award Scheme, 71 practitioners have been selected, bringing the total awardees to 759 since its introduction in 2013. Moreover, in 2024, QF Secretariat and ITACs conducted over 50 briefing sessions on promotion of QF for various industries with reference to their specific manpower situations.

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<sup>4</sup> Self-accrediting operators with their own established credit systems are voluntary to indicate QF credits of their learning programmes at QF Levels 5 to 7 on 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 QR starting from September 2020, if self-accrediting operators do not indicate QF credits of such programmes on QR.

- (ii) **Schools** – To enhance senior secondary students’ understanding of different industries and QF, projects such as special workplace experience workshops, online seminars and briefing sessions are organised from time to time by ITACs with the support of QF Secretariat. In the 2023/2024 academic year, 60 workshops across 13 industries were conducted, with approximately 1 700 participating students in total. There were also activities targeting teaching staff including career masters, such as seminars with specific themes. Schools are also encouraged to create school-based QF-recognised programmes to support students in early career planning with the support of QF Secretariat.
- (iii) **The general public** – “QF in Action” (QFIA) is a biennial initiative that commends and encourages organisations to create QF projects that promote lifelong learning, improve human capital capability, enhance competitiveness, and support sustainable professional development across various industries in Hong Kong. In 2022, 12 organisations and 11 partner organisations were commended as 2022 QFIA Achiever and QFIA Achiever (Partner). They included government departments, educational institutions, business corporations, non-governmental organisations and more, which had developed projects related to human resource management, professional development, and industry-institution collaboration. QF Secretariat also works closely with ITACs to publicise QF on different platforms, such as publishing QF-related articles on newspapers as well as publications of professional bodies, so as to raise public awareness and understanding of QF.

**(c) Mainland and external collaboration**

21. The intention to develop the nation’s qualifications framework was announced in the National 13<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan in 2016. Over the years, EDB and QF Secretariat have shared our experience in developing and implementing 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 EDB and the Department of Education of Guangdong Province in 2019, EDB, QF Secretariat, and HKCAAVQ have been working closely with the relevant authorities in the Guangdong Province to foster collaboration between the two places on qualifications framework development.

22. In early 2022, 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 the qualifications framework in Guangdong, including providing assistance in establishing a quality assurance mechanism, accreditation standards 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 frameworks of the two places in the long term. The consultancy service was completed in Q3 2024. QF Secretariat and HKCAAVQ have also maintained liaison with the Guangdong authorities on the implementation of the qualifications framework in Guangdong.

23. We have also been actively establishing a network with qualifications frameworks and quality assurance authorities of other jurisdictions to facilitate qualification recognition, support mobility of learners and labour, and enhance opportunities for future cooperation between Hong Kong and other jurisdictions. Among others, referencing projects have been undertaken to provide a translation device to understand the corresponding levels of qualifications between QF and the qualifications frameworks of other jurisdictions, including the 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.

## **Financial Support**

24. Since the 2013-14 financial year, EDB has allocated a recurrent funding of \$10 million per year to support ITACs to launch different initiatives in order to further enhance the knowledge and skills of workers in the industries as well as their competitiveness in the labour market. In addition, to support the sustainable development and implementation of QF, the QF Fund was established in 2014. The QF Fund had a balance of about \$2.53 billion (with the capital amount of \$2.2 billion) at as 30 September 2024, with a total expenditure of about \$574 million over the years. The QF Fund supports relevant schemes and initiatives, including

- (i) Designated Support Schemes for QF (including Accreditation Grant Scheme, RPL Support Scheme, Programme Development



Grant Scheme, Support Scheme for Recognition of Professional Qualifications under QF, and QR Subsidy Scheme)<sup>5</sup>; and

- (ii) Funding for ITACs, QF-related studies / projects and public education such as referencing projects with QF in other places.

25. The Steering Committee on Promotion of VPET and QF Fund was established in 2020 to, among others, advise the Secretary for Education on the promotion of VPET and QF through a coordinated approach. The terms of reference and membership of the Steering Committee are set out at **Annex C**.

### **Way forward**

26. 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**  
**February 2025**

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<sup>5</sup> Details of the Designated Support Schemes for the QF can be found on the QF website (<https://www.hkqf.gov.hk/en/support-schemes>).

**Qualifications registered on Qualifications Register  
(as at 30 September 2024)**

<b>Category</b>	<b>No. of qualifications</b>
(1) Qualifications offered by self-accrediting institutions	3 584
(2) Qualifications offered by non-self-accrediting institutions	5 037
(3) Qualifications offered under the RPL mechanism	723
(4) Qualifications offered under Recognition of Professional Qualifications	39
<b>Total:</b>	<b>9 383</b>

**Recognition of Prior Learning mechanism  
(as at 30 September 2024)**

<b>Industry</b>	<b>Current Appointed Assessment Agency</b>	<b>Launch Date</b>	<b>No. of applications processed/ being processed</b>	<b>No. of clusters of competencies</b>	<b>Success rate</b>
Hairdressing	Vocational Training Council (VTC)	Jun 2008	1 094	5 421	98.6%
Printing & Publishing	VTC	Jun 2008	881	1 534	97.7%
Watch & Clock	VTC	Jun 2008	914	1 032	99.9%
Property Management	VTC	Mar 2011	11 560	17 606	99.1%
Automotive	VTC	Nov 2011	3 228	4 747	97.8%
Jewellery	VTC	Nov 2011	1 826	2 169	99.4%
Logistics	HKU School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE)	Mar 2012	2 666	3 976	99%
Catering	VTC	Jan 2013	4 183	5 347	99.5%
Beauty	Caritas Institute of Community Education	Jul 2014	4 418	25 597	98.8%
Retail	VTC	Dec 2014	6 470	8 741	99.9%
Import & Export	HKU SPACE	Sept 2015	170	260	100%
Elderly Care Service	Hong Kong Association of Gerontology	Sept 2015	2 540	11 265	99.9%
Testing, Inspection & Certification	School of Science and Technology of the Hong Kong Metropolitan University	Nov 2015	29	29	100%
Electrical & Mechanical Services	VTC	Dec 2015	985	3 223	98.3%
Manufacturing Technology (Tooling, Metals & Plastics)	Hong Kong Productivity Council	Mar 2017	176	176	100%
Information and Communications Technology (Operation and Support)	HKU SPACE	Jul 2021	25	156	99.4%
Security Services	HKU SPACE	Jul 2021	598	915	98.2%
Fashion	Clothing Industry Training Authority	Jan 2022	270	471	100%
Arboriculture and Horticulture	HKU SPACE	Apr 2024	90	90	100%
<b>Total</b>			<b>42 123</b>	<b>92 755</b>	<b>99.2%</b>

**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 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 EDB 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  
Professor Alan AU Kai-ming  
Ir Eric CHAN Sze-yuen  
Dr Lawrence CHEUNG Chi-chong  
Mr Chris CHEUNG Kin-chung  
Ms Joanne CHONG Sze-pui, MH  
Professor Ronald CHUNG Chi-kit  
Mr Eugene FONG Yick-jin  
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The Hon LAM Chun-sing  
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Miss Pearl SO Ka-yu  
Mr Joseph TSANG Chi-to  
Miss TSOI Kuen-kuen  
Dr Vincent WONG Wai-lun  
Miss Winnie YING Fung-sau

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Executive Director, Vocational Training Council or his/her representative  
Secretary for Education or his/her represent