

A Platform for Lifelong Learning – Hong Kong Qualifications Framework

Overview

In May 2008, the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) launched the Qualifications Framework (QF). QF is a seven-level hierarchy covering qualifications in the academic, vocational and continuing education sectors. Qualifications recognised under the QF are quality assured and level-rated in accordance with objective and well-defined standards.

Objectives of QF

The objective of establishing QF is to provide a platform to encourage and facilitate lifelong learning, with a view to enhancing the capability and competitiveness of the workforce in Hong Kong through –

- Defining clear and objective standards applicable to qualifications in the academic, vocational and continuing education sectors;
- Assuring the quality of qualifications and the associated learning programmes available to learners; and
- Assuring relevancy of learning to industry needs.

Quality Assurance

QF is underpinned by a robust quality assurance mechanism to ensure all qualifications recognised under QF are of good quality and standard. All qualifications including their providers (other than those offered by institutions with self-accrediting status) have to be accredited by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications before they can be registered in the Qualifications Register (QR).

Qualifications Register

QR is a web-based database containing information on qualifications and their respective learning programmes that have been quality assured and recognised under QF. It is available to the public free of charge at www.hkqr.gov.hk. As at end January 2013, there are over 7 500 academic and vocational qualifications, involving about 200 education and training providers, registered in QR.

QF Level

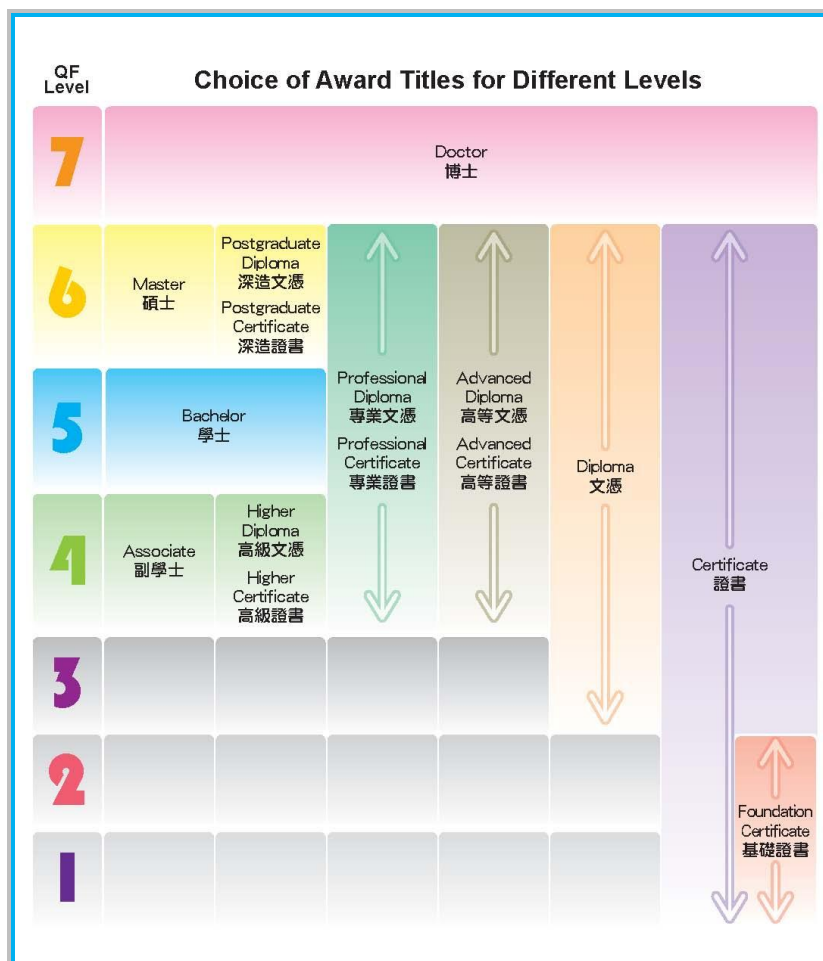
Under QF, each qualification is assigned a level to indicate its position in the hierarchy relative to others. The level of a qualification is determined in accordance with a set of generic level descriptors (GLD) which specify, in four domains, the outcome standards expected of the qualification at each level. The four domains are –

- (a) Knowledge and Intellectual Skills;
- (b) Processes;
- (c) Application, Autonomy and Accountability; and
- (d) Communications, IT and Numeracy.

Award Titles Scheme and Use of Credit under QF

The HKSAR Government announced the introduction of the Award Titles Scheme (ATS) and use of QF credit in October 2012. ATS specifies the award titles that can be used for qualifications at various QF levels. By simplifying and standardising the use of titles, ATS will ensure consistency and transparency of award titles and reflect more clearly the level of qualifications.

QF credit is a measure of volume or size of learning programmes recognised under QF. One QF credit consists of 10 notional learning hours, which takes into account the total learning time required through different modes of learning, including class attendance, on-line learning, practical learning, self-study, examinations and other assessment activities. The adoption of QF credit will provide clear and transparent information on the size or volume of learning programmes and the efforts and outcome expected from learners to complete the programmes.



Industry-led Development

Industries hold a pivotal role in the strategic development of QF. The Government has been assisting industries to set up Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs), consisting of representatives of employer associations, trade unions, professional bodies and regulatory bodies of the relevant industries, to serve as a platform for stakeholders to put QF into implementation and to exchange views on the training needs and manpower development for the industries. As at end January 2013, a total of 19 ITACs¹ have been established.

ITACs are tasked to draw up Specifications of Competency Standards (SCSs) for the relevant sectors. The SCSs set out the skills, knowledge and outcome standards required of employees in different functional areas of the respective sectors, and provide a basis for course providers to design training courses to meet the needs of the sectors.

ITACs also advise the Government on the development of a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism in their respective industry to recognise the experiences and competencies acquired by practitioners at the workplace.

Recognition of Prior Learning Mechanism

The RPL mechanism provides an alternative route for practitioners of various backgrounds to receive formal recognition under QF of the knowledge, skills and experience already acquired. It facilitates practitioners with learning aspirations to know what competencies they have acquired through experience or previous training in the industries, so that they can determine their starting point for learning and progression, and reduce duplication in training for the same skills. RPL mechanism is developed based on SCSs formulated by individual industries. As at end January 2013, RPL mechanism has been implemented in eight industries².

¹ Printing & Publishing, Watch & Clock, Chinese Catering, Hairdressing, Property Management, Electrical & Mechanical Services, Jewellery, Information & Communications Technology, Automotive, Beauty, Logistics, Banking, Import & Export, Testing, Inspection & Certification, Retail, Insurance, Manufacturing Technology (Tooling, Metals and Plastics), Elderly Care Service and Security Services.

² Printing & Publishing, Watch & Clock, Hairdressing, Property Management, Automotive, Jewellery, Logistics and Chinese Catering.

QF for Progression

Progression pathways provide opportunities for individuals to realise their potential and are essential to upgrading the quality of human capital of our society to meet the changing demands of the economy. QF helps promote and support lifelong learning and progression of learners in the following ways –

- QF helps order qualifications of different sectors in a unified hierarchy, and render information of the qualifications clear and transparent to learners;
- Qualifications are quality assured by authentic accreditation bodies to uphold standard and to ensure that learning objectives of each programme are achieved;
- Qualifications developed from SCSs are benchmarked to industry standards and relevant to the manpower needs of industries, reducing mismatch between learning outcomes of programmes and job requirements in industries;
- Bite-size and flexible learning mode is encouraged; and
- Informal and non-formal learning, especially work experiences, are recognised through established RPL mechanism to help progression of learners without formal qualifications.

Support Schemes

In 2008, the Government injected \$208 million to launch the QF Support Schemes (QFSS). In 2011, further improvements were made to relax the operating parameters of the QFSS for the benefit of more learners, training providers and industries. These schemes include –

- Accreditation grant for self-financing programmes
- Grant for programme area accreditation
- Subsidy for QR registration fees
- Development grant for Specification of Competency Standard-based courses
- Reimbursement of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) assessment fees

As announced in the 2013 Budget Speech, the Government has proposed to allocate \$10 million per year to support ITACs to launch new initiatives under QF to further enhance the knowledge and skills of workers in the industries, and their competitiveness in the labour market. The new initiatives include –

- Introducing award schemes for outstanding practitioners to engage in learning activities in different places around the world;
- Designing training programmes and package based on Specifications of Competency Standards that meet the needs of the industries; and
- Stepping up promotion and publicity of the QF for its wider acceptance among all sectors.

International Network

We will continue to extend and strengthen international network and to further explore possibility for collaboration in matters of mutual benefits and interests with regional and international partners. To this end –

- a Letter of Intent with the Guangdong Occupational Skill Testing Authority was signed in May 2011 to explore the feasibility of cooperation and the possibility of benchmarking competency standards developed under the HKQF with the relevant National Occupational Standards of the Mainland China;
- In March 2012, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the EDB and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership to establish and strengthen the collaboration in the context of QF development..

Related Links

More information on QF is available at the website www.hkqf.gov.hk.

Qualifications recognised under QF and the associated learning programmes can be found on QR website www.hkqr.gov.hk.