

**For discussion
on 20 January 2015**

Legislative Council Panel on Manpower

Policy Initiative on Qualifications Framework by Education Bureau

Purpose

The Chief Executive announced his 2015 Policy Address on 14 January 2015. This paper aims to brief Members on the major development of the Qualifications Framework (QF) in the past year.

Background

2. QF is a platform covering academic, vocational and continuing education sectors 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. Since the formal launch of QF in 2008, we have been making steady progress in developing the key components including –

- (a) establishing Industry Training Advisory Committees;
- (b) drawing up Specification of Competency Standards for industries;
- (c) implementing Recognition of Prior Learning mechanism in the relevant industries;
- (d) promoting Specification of Generic (Foundation) Competencies;
- (e) maintaining a Qualifications Register;
- (f) introducing the Award Titles Scheme and the use of QF credit;
- (g) promulgating the policy and principles for Credit Accumulation and Transfer; and
- (h) building up network with QF authorities and quality assurance (QA) bodies of other places proactively to enhance understanding and mutual trust as well as learners' mobility.

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

3. At present, we have set up 19 ITACs for 20 industries/sector¹, covering 52% of the workforce in Hong Kong. It is worth noting that starting from 1 January 2015, the Beauty ITAC and Hairdressing ITAC have merged to become the Beauty & Hairdressing ITAC to create synergy; and the Chinese Catering ITAC has extended its ambit to cover the whole catering industry and is renamed as the Catering ITAC. We shall continue to reach out to stakeholders of other industries to explore the feasibility of setting up new ITACs.

(b) *Specification of Competency Standards (SCSs)*

4. ITACs are tasked to draw up SCSs 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 ITACs of 17 industries have now drawn up their SCSs, and the ITACs of the other three industries will complete drawing up their SCSs successively. As at 31 December 2014, more than 700 SCS-based courses have been developed by education and training providers. In addition, SCSs are gaining 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. 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 SCSs 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 ten industries². As at 30 November 2014, over 11 800 applications involving about 21 300 clusters of competencies were processed by the assessment agency. Details are set out at **Annex A**. We will continue

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

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

to work closely with other industries with a view to extending the RPL mechanism to those which have completed their respective SCSs.

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

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. In 2011 and 2012, we have invited the Vocational Training Council to launch a pilot project, the Vocational English Enhancement Programme (VEEP), on the development of vocational English courses based on the SGC of QF. A total of 21 courses³ were rolled out from April 2011 to August 2012. In the light of the positive feedback from the industries, the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research has approved the use of the Language Fund to continue providing VEEP to the industries for another three years starting from November 2012.

(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 QF, is available to the public free of charge. As at 31 December 2014, there were over 8 000 academic and vocational qualifications, involving about 240 education and training providers, registered in 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 in QR is set out at **Annex B**.

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

8. The Education Bureau (EDB) announced the introduction of ATS and the use of QF credit in October 2012. ATS specifies the award titles that can be used for qualifications at various QF levels whereas QF credit is a measure of volume or size of learning programmes recognised under QF. In respect of the use of QF credit, all programmes on QR at Level 1 to 4 must show their QF credit values by 1 January 2016,

³ These are courses in Transport Logistics; Manufacturing, Import/Export & Wholesale; Hotel, Catering & Tourism; Retail; Banking & Finance; and Generic Skills.

whereas programmes at Levels 5 to 7 are encouraged to indicate their QF credit values on a voluntary basis.

(g) *Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)*

9. To promote learners' mobility and progression by minimising duplication of learning, EDB promulgated in July 2014 the policy and principles for CAT which apply to all programmes from QF Levels 1 to 7. Providers are encouraged to make reference to the policy and principles in reviewing their existing CAT systems or establishing a CAT system that suits their own circumstances. Developing the policy and principles for CAT is Phase I of the CAT project. Phase II of the CAT project is now underway with participation of several providers, professional body and enterprises. Phase II of the CAT project seeks to develop a set of practical guidelines for CAT implementation, including but not limited to good practices in handling CAT applications, considerations for granting credit transfer, support to staff and learners, and transparency of CAT information to the public. The set of policy and principles for CAT, together with the practical guidelines to be derived from Phase II of the CAT project, will effectively support lifelong learning, thus achieving the ultimate objective of QF.

(h) *Co-operation with Other Places on QF*

10. We have been actively establishing network with QF and QA authorities of other places to enhance understanding and mutual trust as well as learners' mobility. In May 2011, the QF Secretariat and the Guangdong Occupational Skill Testing Authority signed the "Letter of Intent on Enhancing the Exchange on and Transferability of Vocational Standards and Qualifications Recognition between Hong Kong and Guangdong", witnessed by representatives from EDB of Hong Kong and the Department of Human Resources and Social Security of Guangdong. In March 2012 and March 2014, EDB signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership, and a Cooperation Arrangement with the New Zealand Qualifications Authority respectively to enhance collaboration and facilitate exchange and experience sharing on QF. More recently, we commenced our collaboration with the European Commission on the technical alignment between the Hong Kong QF and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in November 2014. The technical alignment exercise will provide a translation device to understand the corresponding levels of qualifications between the Hong Kong QF and EQF, bringing mutual benefits to Hong Kong and European Union member states.

2013-14 Budget initiatives

11. Apart from the above, the Financial Secretary announced in the 2013-14 Budget to allocate \$10 million per year to support ITACs to launch new initiatives to further enhance the knowledge and skills of workers in the industries, and 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 promotion and publicity of QF for its wider acceptance among all sectors.

12. For (a), 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. The Award Scheme also encourages emerging practitioners to engage in learning activities in different places around the world with a view to broadening their horizons and developing network with industry partners in and outside Hong Kong. For the 2014-15 Award Scheme, a total of 51 practitioners have been selected by the respective ITACs for the award. Awardees engaging in learning activities in Hong Kong receive an award of \$10,000 while those engaging in learning activities outside Hong Kong receive an award of \$30,000. We shall invite applications for the 2015-16 Award Scheme in the first quarter of 2015.

13. For (b), the SCS-based Training Packages, developed with reference to SCSs 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. It is expected that the first batch of training packages for four ITACs involving six job functions will be ready for publishing in the first half of 2015. For the second round of development, six ITACs have selected a total of 13 job functions for development of SCS-based Training Packages. Tender invitations have been issued earlier this month.

14. For (c), we have stepped up our promotion and publicity targeting at three groups –

- (i) **School sector:** Riding on the ITAC networks and the competency standards and progression pathways developed for the respective industries, we organised five pilot projects with ITACs to promote QF and industries to senior secondary school students in 2014, and over 200 students attended the talks, workshops or visits. Two more industries will launch their pilot school projects in early 2015. We also conducted talks to introduce QF to schools with an attendance of over 1 000 teachers and students. Besides, we delivered a talk at the Information Expo on Multiple Pathways in 2014. All these efforts aimed at enabling teachers, students, parents and the community at large to understand how QF can facilitate students' planning of further study and careers.
- (ii) **Industry sector:** We organised a QF Conference in November 2014 to signify the commencement of our collaboration with the European Commission on the technical alignment between the Hong Kong QF and EQF. The Conference was attended by over 300 local and overseas stakeholders including industry representatives, with overseas experts and local academics serving as speakers. Besides, the QF Partnerships Commendation Ceremony 2014 was held in December 2014 to commend organisations which have actively supported the implementation of QF in many areas. Over 120 certificates of commendation were presented to employers, employee organisations, education and training providers as well as professional bodies.
- (iii) **Community at large:** In 2014, we published about 30 QF-related articles in newspapers as well as publications of professional bodies, trade unions and trade associations to enhance stakeholders' understanding and awareness of QF. A new set of announcement of public interest (API) on QF and QR was launched in September 2014 and broadcast on the QF website (www.hkqf.gov.hk) and EDB YouTube Channel (www.youtube.com/user/edbgothk). Currently, we are revamping the QF website in order to enhance its user interface.

Qualifications Framework Fund

Establishment of the QF Fund

15. With the approval of the Finance Committee (FC) of the Legislative Council (LegCo) in 2007, a non-recurrent commitment of \$208 million was created to implement a basket of financial assistance schemes, known as Qualifications Framework Support Schemes (QFSS) to provide time-limited financial assistance to encourage relevant stakeholders to participate in QF. Recognising the importance of QF in maintaining a quality workforce, the Chief Executive announced in the 2014 Policy Address to establish an endowment fund of \$1 billion, namely the QF Fund, to provide a steady source of income to support the sustainable development and implementation of QF. With the approval of the LegCo FC on 12 July 2014, the QF Fund was established on 1 September 2014. On the same day, a Steering Committee on QF Fund (Steering Committee) was set up to advise the Secretary for Education on the policy, strategy and administration of the QF Fund. The terms of reference and membership of the Steering Committee are set out at **Annex C**.

16. As it takes time for the QF Fund to generate and accumulate sufficient investment income to meet the funding requirements, the balance of the approved commitment for QFSS (about \$124 million as at 31 December 2014 out of the total commitment of \$208 million) will continue to be used for meeting the cash flow requirements of the various initiatives under the QF Fund together with the investment income generated by the principal of the QF Fund.

Uses of the QF Fund

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

- (a) Designated Support Schemes for QF (with the previous time-limited QFSS incorporated and regrouped as the Accreditation Grant Scheme, RPL Support Scheme, Programme Development Grant Scheme and QR Subsidy Scheme); and
- (b) Funding for ITACs, QF-related studies or projects and public education.

18. For (a), details of the Designated Support Schemes for QF are set out at **Annex D**.

19. As for (b), the Steering Committee has earlier endorsed the conduct of technical alignment exercise between the Hong Kong QF and EQF. As at 31 December 2014, the accumulated amount of funding disbursed from the approved commitment for QFSS amounted to about \$83.8 million, in which 359 education and training providers have received a total grant of \$66.0 million for seeking accreditation of about 4 200 programmes by HKCAAVQ.

20. In the coming year, we shall assist interested ITACs in designing vocational qualifications for different job roles in the respective industries on a pilot basis, so as to further link up QF-recognised qualifications to the workplace. This will help attract new blood and encourage practitioners to pursue learning and upgrading. We are also planning a study on recognition of professional qualifications, and to step up our efforts to promote QF to the community at large. We shall consult the Steering Committee on these initiatives.

Way Forward

21. Implementation of QF in Hong Kong is a long term endeavour. We shall continue to explore with stakeholders of different sectors to set up new ITACs, and arrange merging of existing ITACs where appropriate to create synergy. We shall also continue to reach out to stakeholders with a view to soliciting more support and enhance recognition of QF.

Education Bureau
January 2015

**Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism
(as at 30 November 2014)**

Industry	Launch Date	No. of applications	No. of clusters of competencies	Success rate
Hairdressing	Jun 2008	859	4 692	99.98%*
Printing & Publishing	Jun 2008	798	1 425	97.8%*
Watch & Clock	Jun 2008	677	754	100%
Property Management	Mar 2011	6 523	9 595	99.2%*
Automotive	Nov 2011	614	1 104	98.1%*
Jewellery	Nov 2011	657	900	99.3%*
Logistics	Mar 2012	998	1 279	100%
Chinese Catering	Jan 2013	688	1 111	99.5%*
Beauty	Jul 2014	59	528	100%
	Total	11 873	21 388	99.4%

- *Automotive : With 2 applications failed to provide documentary proof and 18 applications failed in the assessment
- Chinese Catering : With 5 applications failed in the assessment
- Hairdressing : With 1 application failed in the assessment
- Jewellery : With 6 applications failed in the assessment
- Printing & Publishing : With 31 applications failed in the assessment
- Property Management : With 77 applications failed in the assessment

**Qualifications registered in the Qualifications Register
(as at 31 December 2014)**

Category	No. of qualifications
(1) Qualifications offered by universities and other self-accrediting institutions	3 451
(2) Qualifications offered by non-self-accrediting institutions	4 237
(3) Qualifications offered under the Recognition of Prior Learning mechanism	460
Total:	8 148

Steering Committee on Qualifications Framework Fund

Terms of Reference

The Steering Committee advises Secretary for Education on –

- (a) the overall strategy for making use of the Qualifications Framework Fund (the Fund) as a vehicle to support the sustainable development and implementation of the Qualifications Framework;
- (b) the scope and parameters of schemes, initiatives and activities to be covered by the Fund; and
- (c) any other matters that may be referred to the Steering Committee by the Education Bureau concerning the policy and administration of the Fund.

Where necessary, the Steering Committee also advises the Trustee of the Fund on the formulation of policies for and monitoring of the investment of the 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 (from 1.9.2014 to 31.8.2016)

Chairperson: Dr York LIAO, SBS, JP
Vice-Chairperson: Prof Alfred CHAN Cheung-ming, BBS, JP
Members: Dr Lawrence CHAN Wan-ching
Mr Winston CHOW Wun-sing
Mr Dennis HO Chiu-ping
Mr IP Wai-ming, MH
Mr LAM Chun-sing
Ms Carrie LEUNG Ka-lai
Mrs Agnes MAK TANG Pik-yee, MH, JP
Mr WONG Kit-loong
Prof Peter YUEN Pok-man

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

The Steering Committee may also invite co-opted members as and when necessary.

Designated Support Schemes for Qualifications Framework

1. Accreditation Grant Scheme

Scope	<p>The scheme aims to encourage education and training providers to seek accreditation at the institutional and programme levels under the Qualifications Framework (QF), and assist mature providers in seeking self-accrediting status in specified programme areas. Accreditation grant will be provided for the following activities –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial Evaluation • Institutional Review and Periodic Review • Programme Validation and Re-validation • Programme Area Accreditation (PAA) (covering both first-time and subsequent exercises; the latter takes the form of Periodic Review) 			
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers and qualifications concerned must be successfully accredited by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) • Programmes/qualifications concerned must be registered in the Qualifications Register (QR) 			
Level of Subsidy		Courses subsidised by the Education Bureau (then Education and Manpower Bureau) ⁴	Non-profit-making providers	Other providers
	Initial Evaluation / Institutional Review fees	100%	100%	50%
	Programme Validation / Programme Re-validation fees			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specification of Competency Standards (SCS)-based or Specification of Generic (Foundation) Competencies (SGC)-based programmes 	100%	100%	50%
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other programmes 	100%	70%	35%
	PAA/Periodic Review fees	N/A	70%	35%

⁴ These courses including “Skills Upgrading Scheme” (which is now renamed “Skills Upgrading Scheme Plus”) and the “Employees Retraining Scheme” (which is now renamed “Manpower Development Scheme”).

2. RPL Support Scheme

Scope	The scheme covers the fees for accreditation of RPL assessment agencies, one-off start-up grant for the actual expenditure incurred by the agencies in setting up the assessment mechanism, subsidy for each new application of RPL cluster processed by the agencies and reimbursement to practitioners who have successfully applied for RPL assessment.			
	<i>Accreditation grant to RPL assessment agencies</i>	<i>Start-up grant to RPL assessment agencies</i>	<i>Subsidy to RPL assessment agencies</i>	<i>Reimbursement of RPL assessment fees</i>
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First time and subsequent accreditations • Successful accreditation by HKCAAVQ • Appointed by the Secretary for Education (SED) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful accreditation by HKCAAVQ (first-time accreditation) • Appointed by SED 	Appointed by SED	Practitioners successfully completed the RPL assessments
Level of Subsidy	50% of accreditation fee	Up to \$300,000 per agency for the actual expenditure incurred in setting up the assessment mechanism	\$500 for each new application of RPL cluster processed	100% of RPL assessment fees. To be reimbursed in two stages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successfully completed RPL assessments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 75% of RPL assessment fees • Completed a QF-recognised training course afterwards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - remaining 25% of RPL assessment fees

3. Programme Development Grant Scheme

Scope	The scheme provides a one-off grant for education and training providers to develop SCS-based or SGC-based courses.	
	<i>SCS-based</i>	<i>SGC-based</i>
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Newly developed and operating SCS-based courses 12 QF credits or above Qualifications concerned must be successfully accredited Must be registered in QR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Newly developed and operating SGC-based courses 6 QF credits or above Qualifications concerned must be successfully accredited Must be registered in QR
Level of Subsidy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For courses with 12-35 QF credits - \$30,000 each For courses with 36 QF credits or above - \$50,000 each 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For courses with 6-17 QF credits - \$20,000 each For courses with 18 QF credits or above - \$40,000 each

4. QR Subsidy Scheme

Scope	The scheme covers the registration and hosting fees of the qualifications/programmes onto QR, and provides an annual maintenance fee of QR to the QR Authority.	
	<i>Subsidy of the registration and hosting fees</i>	<i>Maintenance fee of QR</i>
Eligibility	All qualifications and their associated programmes registered in QR	QR Authority
Level of Subsidy	100% for both registration fees and hosting fees	\$3 million per year