

Legislative Council Panel on Manpower

Policy Initiative on Qualifications Framework by Education Bureau

Purpose

The Chief Executive announced his 2013 Policy Address on 16 January 2013. This paper aims to brief Members on the major development and other complementary measures of the Qualifications Framework (QF) in the Policy Address.

Vision

2. In May 2008, the Government launched QF to establish an accessible articulation pathway to promote lifelong learning with a view to continuously enhancing the quality, professionalism and diversification of our local workforce. QF is a seven-level hierarchy covering qualifications in the academic, vocational and continuing education sectors. All qualifications recognised under QF are quality assured.

Implementation of on-going measures

(a) Industry-led development

3. As at early January 2013, the number of Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs)¹ has increased to 19², covering about 46% of the workforce in Hong Kong.

4. The ITACs have made good progress in drawing up Specification of Competency Standards (SCSs) of their respective industries. Twelve of these ITACs have drawn up their SCSs, and the other ITACs will complete drawing up

¹ 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.

² 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.

their SCSs successively so as to specify the competency standards of various levels of their industries for human resources management purpose. So far, more than 400 SCS-based courses have been developed by education and training providers. We have also 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 Specification of Generic (Foundation) Competencies of QF. A total of 21 courses in Transport Logistics, Import/Export & Wholesale, Hotel, Catering & Tourism, Retail, Banking & Finance and Generic Skills were rolled out from April 2011 to August 2012. In the light of the positive feedback from the industries on the pilot project, the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) has approved the use of the Language Fund to continue providing VEEP to the industries for another three years starting from November 2012. 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.

(b) Recognition of Prior Learning mechanism

5. The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism, which assists practitioners in pursuing further education and training, has been implemented in eight industries³. As at end November 2012, over 5 400 applications involving about 11 100 clusters of competencies at QF levels 1 to 4, were processed by the assessment agency (the number of applications has been increased by 170% when comparing with the number as at end September 2011). Almost all applicants (99.5%) were successfully awarded Statements of Attainment in recognition of their competencies they acquired. Applicants who failed in the assessments were offered free-of-charge counseling service by the assessment agency to better prepare them for further assessment, if they so wish. Statistical information on these applications is set out at **Annex A**.

6. We will continue to work closely with other industries with a view to extending the RPL mechanism to the sectors which have completed their respective SCSs. With the introduction of RPL mechanism to more industries and the improvement measures under the Qualifications Framework Support Schemes (QFSS), we envisage that more practitioners will benefit from the mechanism.

³ Printing & Publishing, Watch & Clock, Hairdressing, Property Management, Automotive, Jewellery, Logistics and Chinese Catering (the RPL mechanism of the Chinese Catering industry was just launched on 7 January 2013).

(c) Quality assurance mechanism

7. The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ), specified as the Accreditation Authority and the Qualifications Register (QR) Authority under the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 592), continues to safeguard the quality and standards of qualifications and the associated learning programmes recognised under QF. HKCAAVQ is currently conducting a review of its Four-stage Quality Assurance Process with a view to streamlining the accreditation process and strengthening its underpinning role for QF development.

(d) Qualifications Register

8. The 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 end December 2012, there are over 7 700 academic and vocational qualifications, involving about 200 education and training providers, registered in QR. Since the implementation of QF in 2008, the cumulative hit rate has steadily increased to about 639 000, indicating the progressively wider acceptance of QR by learners. The QR Authority is now conducting a review of QR with a view to improving its user-friendliness and effectiveness. We will continue our efforts to promote the use of QR to the public. Statistical information on the qualifications registered in QR is set out at **Annex B**.

(e) QFSS

9. To support the implementation of QF, the Education Bureau (EDB) has launched a number of financial assistance schemes, collectively known as QFSS, including accreditation grants for course providers, subsidies for registration of qualifications in the QR, accreditation and start up grants for RPL assessment agencies, and reimbursement of RPL assessment fees to practitioners.

10. Starting from August 2011, we have improved the operating parameters of QFSS, including the scope, eligibility criteria and level of assistance to boost the development of QF. We have also introduced a new one-off grant under QFSS to encourage and provide a greater incentive for education and training providers to develop SCS-based courses. After the introduction of the improvement measures, the total amount of subsidies disbursed to education and training providers has been increased significantly from \$18 million in end July 2011 to \$51 million as at end December 2012, including a total of 232 education and training providers applying for accreditation grant to cover the accreditation fees for over 3 900 qualifications.

(f) Award Titles Scheme and Use of Credit

11. EDB announced the introduction of the Award Titles Scheme (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. 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. As for QF credit, it 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.

12. Since ATS and use of QF credit are two major initiatives in the local education and training landscape, a longer period is allowed for their implementation in order to ensure smooth transition and full compliance. Starting from 1 January 2014, programmes newly registered in QR must adopt titles that conform to ATS. At the same time, providers should indicate the QF credit values of such programmes if they are pitched at QF levels 1 to 4. Starting from 1 January 2016, all programmes in QR must adopt titles that conform to ATS. Programmes from QF levels 1 to 4 will also show the QF credit values. ATS and use of QF credit will further strengthen the infrastructure of QF in order to go in line with international development. Besides, we shall explore the development of the credit accumulation and transfer system.

(g) International networking with QFs of other areas

13. In addition, we shall further co-operate with the QFs of other areas. In March 2012, EDB signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework Partnership to strengthen the development and co-operation between Hong Kong and Scotland on the development of QF. Besides, at the 6th Structured Dialogue Meeting between European Union and Hong Kong Special Administrative Region held in December 2012, both sides agreed to explore the feasibility of co-operation on QF.

(h) Promotion and publicity

14. We have participated in some 10 briefing sessions organised by individual secondary schools, school heads association and youth group to promote the awareness of QF of secondary students and the availability of competency standards as well as progression pathways of various industries.

On 12 and 13 May 2012, we set up a booth in the “Information Expo on Multiple Pathways 2012” to promote the awareness of QF to the public including students, learners, parents and educators. On 6 December 2012, we also hosted a large-scaled event, namely “QF Partnerships Commendation Ceremony” to commend and show our appreciation to more than 100 organisations for their support and contribution to QF. In 2012, we published over 20 articles in the newspaper and the publications of professional bodies, trade unions and trade associations to increase stakeholders’ understanding on QF.

15. The announcement of public interest (APIs) on QF and QR were broadcasted in Roadshow on buses in the first half of 2012 and continue to be broadcasted on QF website (www.hkqf.gov.hk) and EDB YouTube Channel (www.youtube.com/user/edbgovhk). The dedicated web-pages for the industries joining QF are also well received by industry stakeholders and learners who consider them informative and useful.

16. We shall continue to strengthen our network with industries and relevant stakeholders through different activities, including visits, seminars, exhibitions, experience-sharing sessions, etc. The Government will actively encourage co-operation between ITACs as well as education and training providers to provide more relevant training opportunities to young people and in-service personnel so as to integrate education, training, business and employment seamlessly.

Way Forward

17. 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. We shall also continue to reach out to stakeholders with a view to soliciting more support and enhance recognition of QF.

Education Bureau
January 2013

**Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism
(as at end November 2012)**

(a) Number of applications by industry

Industry	Launch Date	No. of applications
Hairdressing	June 2008	708
Printing & Publishing	June 2008	697
Watch & Clock	June 2008	201
Property Management	March 2011	3 563
Automotive	November 2011	77
Jewellery	November 2011	70
Logistics	March 2012	104
	Total	5 420

(b) Number of RPL clusters of competencies by QF Level

Industry	QF level 1	QF level 2	QF level 3	QF level 4	Total
Hairdressing	23	68	3 575	493	4 159
Printing & Publishing	22	69	810	370	1 271
Watch & Clock	4	6	124	133	267
Property Management	127	2 187	2 166	472	4 952
Automotive	2	7	105	87	201
Jewellery	2	9	20	118	149
Logistics	20	48	35	52	155
Total	200	2 394	6 835	1 725	11 154

QF levels 1 to 3: Assessment by verification of documents

QF level 4: Assessment by assessment tests

(c) Number of RPL clusters of competencies by successful rate

Industry	QF level 1	QF level 2	QF level 3	QF level 4	Total
Hairdressing	100%	100%	100%	99.8%*	99.98%*
Printing & Publishing	100%	100%	100%	91.9%*	97.6%*
Watch & Clock	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Property Management	100%	100%	100%	95.4%*	99.6%*
Automotive	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Jewellery	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Logistics	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total	100%	100%	100%	97.0%	99.5%

* Hairdressing : With 1 applicant failed in the assessment

Printing & Publishing : With 30 applicants failed in the assessment

Property Management : With 16 applicants failed in the assessment

**Qualifications registered in the Qualifications Register
(as at end December 2012)**

Category	No. of qualifications
(1) Qualifications offered by universities and other self-accrediting institutions	3 482
(2) Qualifications offered by non-self-accrediting institutions	3 964
(3) Qualifications offered under the Recognition of Prior Learning mechanism	310
Total:	7 756