

Legislative Council Panel on Manpower

**Progress Report on Development and Implementation of
Qualifications Framework**

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the latest progress of the development and implementation of the Qualifications Framework (QF).

Background

2. In 2004, the Government announced the establishment of a QF to provide a platform to promote lifelong learning, with a view to enhancing the overall competitiveness of our workforce. The QF is a seven-level hierarchy covering qualifications in the academic, vocational and continuing education sectors. All qualifications recognised under the QF are quality assured.

3. Since 2004, the Education Bureau (EDB) has been working with relevant stakeholders, including employers, employees, trade unions, professional bodies, and education and training providers to establish the infrastructure for the QF. The Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (AAVQO), Cap.592, which provides a legal framework for the quality assurance mechanism underpinning the QF commenced full operation on 5 May 2008. The QF was formally launched on that date.

Latest Developments of QF

Quality Assurance Mechanism

4. Under the AAVQO, the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) is specified as the Accreditation Authority and entrusted with the responsibility of assuring the quality of academic and vocational qualifications and their associated learning programmes. To undertake this new role, the HKCAAVQ has restructured its organisation and developed new operation models including its accreditation approaches and procedures to suit the requirements and standards of the QF. These operational models which include a newly devised “collective approach” for bulk applications have been put to practice in stages. The models are subject to constant

reviews and refinement by the HKCAAVQ in the light of experience and feedback from providers.

5. As part of the quality assurance mechanism underpinning the QF, the Secretary for Education has appointed an Appeal Board to consider appeals against accreditation decisions made by the HKCAAVQ. A Rules Committee is also formed which has held meetings to make rules to regulate the practices and procedures of appeal. The Appeal Board has so far received one appeal case but the case was subsequently withdrawn by the appellant.

Qualifications Register (QR)

6. A QR has been set up upon commencement of the AAVQO. It is a centralized web-based database containing information on qualifications and their respective learning programmes that have been quality assured and recognised under the QF. Up to the end of June 2009, there are about 5 600 academic and vocational qualifications registered in the QR. A breakdown of the qualifications is at the Annex. The hit rate has reached 204 000, which shows that the QR is increasingly known and frequently used by learners. To encourage registration of qualifications in the QR, we have introduced a financial assistance scheme to subsidize the registration fees.

Industry-led Development

7. To help ensure that education and training programmes meet the manpower needs of industries, we have been assisting industries to set up Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs) to develop Specifications of Competency Standards (SCSs). The SCSs set out clearly the skills, knowledge and outcome standards required of employees in different functional areas of the respective industries, and provide a basis for course providers to design training courses to meet the needs of the industries.

8. We have so far set up ITACs for 12 industries¹, covering over 760 000 employees (approximately 20% of the labour force). Of these 12 ITACs, eight have finalized the SCSs. Two other ITACs are currently conducting extensive consultation on their draft SCSs, and for the remaining two ITACs, drafting of the SCSs is nearing completion.

¹ Printing & Publishing, Watch & Clock, Chinese Catering, Hairdressing, Property Management, Electrical & Mechanical Services, Jewelry, Beauty, Logistics, Automotives, Information Communication and Technology, and Banking

9. Up to the end of June 2009, training organizations have organized more than 100 courses based on the completed SCSs. Over 5 000 employees have attended these SCS-based courses and their feedback on the usefulness and relevancy of the courses to their work is generally positive.

10. We will continue to reach out to employers, employees, professional bodies and other stakeholders with a view to setting up more ITACs in other industries.

Recognition of Prior Learning Mechanism

11. To encourage and facilitate further learning of workers, we have developed a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism to give formal recognition to the knowledge, skills and experience acquired by workers in the workplace. We have implemented, on a pilot basis, the RPL mechanism for three industries² for a period of two years with effect from June 2008. Following consultation with the relevant ITACs, we have appointed the Vocational Training Council as the assessment agency for conducting RPL assessments for these three industries.

12. We have recently conducted an interim review on the implementation of the RPL mechanism. Up to the end of June 2009, a total of about 800 applications for assessment involving 2 300 clusters of competencies at various QF levels have been received by the assessment agency. The majority of applicants (over 90%) have successfully passed the assessment tests and are awarded statements of attainment in respect of the competencies assessed. Applicants who have failed in the assessment tests are offered free counseling service by the assessment agency to prepare them better for further assessment, if they so wish.

13. Feedback from applicants indicates that, on the whole, the RPL mechanism is operating effectively and the assessment processes are generally fair and efficient. Feedback from consultations with stakeholders also suggest that a higher participation rate would be expected towards the later stage of the transitional period³.

14. We will continue to monitor and review the effectiveness of the pilot mechanism. In the meantime, we are consulting parties concerned

² Watch & Clock, Hairdressing, and Printing & Publishing.

³ There will be a 5-year transitional period for each industry during which employees can seek to obtain formal qualifications on the basis of past relevant working experience, without assessment, for Level 1 to 3 qualifications under the QF.

about extending the mechanism to other industries which have completed their SCSs and are ready to introduce the RPL mechanism to their employees. We will continue to conduct briefings to ITAC members, including trade associations, trade unions, employers, employees and other stakeholders, explaining to them the objectives and processes of the mechanism. The opportunity is also taken to consider, in consultation with the relevant ITACs, the need of establishing more than one assessment agency for an industry.

QF Support Schemes

15. To support the implementation of the QF, we have launched a number of financial assistance schemes which cover accreditation grants for 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 employees. Up to the end of June 2009, a total of 168 providers have applied for grants for the accreditation of about 2 600 qualifications and for registering them in the QR. A total of about 3 700 qualifications are eligible for financial subsidies for their registration in the QR. So far, a total of about \$ 7 m have been disbursed under these financial assistance schemes to eligible providers. We envisage that more applications will be received when providers are better prepared for the submission of their learning programmes to the HKCAAVQ for accreditation.

Publicity and promotion

16. To enhance the public awareness of the QF, we have arranged a series of publicity activities to promote the QF through various channels and media. These activities include broadcasting of Announcement of Public Interest (API) in television and public transports, conducting exhibitions and road-shows in MTR stations and major shopping malls, interviews with newspapers and radio, talks in education expo, dedicated QF website, etc. Since 2009, we have launched a reaching-out programme to intensify our publicity efforts. We have held more than 20 talks and seminars on the QF with the school sector, and more than 130 talks/seminars to practitioners in the industry sector. We plan to further intensify our publicity efforts in the coming years.

Way Forward

17. The QF, launched in May 2008, is still at its early development stage. We will monitor the effectiveness of the various systems and

schemes introduced to underpin the QF, and where appropriate, will consider adjustments necessary to better support the development. We will continue to implement the QF in a steady and step-by-step manner and will focus on industries where ITACs have been formed so as to lay a solid foundation for the further development of the QF. We are also mindful of the need to continue to work in close partnership with stakeholders in different sectors.

18. Members are requested to note the latest position regarding the development and implementation of the QF. We will further report the progress to the Manpower Panel in due course.

Education Bureau
July 2009

Qualifications registered in the Qualifications Register
(as at 30 June 2009)

	Category	No. of qualifications
1	Qualifications offered by universities and other self-accrediting institutions	1,982
2	Qualifications offered by non-self-accrediting institutions	3,462
3	Qualifications offered under the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism	125
	Total	5,569