

# 立法會 *Legislative Council*

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## **Panel on Manpower**

### **Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 17 June 2010**

## **Qualifications Framework**

### **Purpose**

This paper summarizes past discussions by the Panel on Manpower ("the Panel") on the Qualifications Framework ("QF").

### **Background**

2. In February 2004, the Executive Council endorsed the establishment of QF and its associated quality assurance mechanism to provide a platform for lifelong learning and to enable learners to progress along a clear articulation pathway.
3. QF is a seven-level cross-sectoral hierarchy covering qualifications in the academic, vocational and continuing education sectors. With well-defined standards of qualifications and clear indication of the articulation ladders between them, QF enables people to set clear goals and direction for obtaining quality-assured qualifications. The implementation of QF will benefit learners and help enhance the overall competitiveness of the workforce.

### **The Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Bill**

4. The Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Bill was introduced into the Legislative Council on 6 July 2005. The Bill sought to provide for accreditation of academic and vocational qualifications under QF administered by an accreditation authority, and for related and consequential matters. At the House Committee meeting on 8 July 2005, a Bills Committee was formed to scrutinize the Bill. The Bill was enacted on 2 May 2007 and came into effect on 1 October 2007.

5. During the scrutiny of the Bill by the Bills Committee, the Administration undertook -

- (a) to report to the Panel the progress of implementation of QF in individual industries on a half-yearly basis; and
- (b) to report to the Panel the results of the review of the pilot scheme on recognition of prior learning ("RPL") for the first three industries (i.e. Printing and Publishing, Watch and Clock, and Hairdressing industries) that had finalized their respective Specification of Competency Standards ("SCSs").

### **Deliberations of the Panel**

#### Funding proposals for the development and implementation of QF

6. At its meeting on 17 May 2007, the Panel was briefed on the funding proposals for the development and implementation of QF.

7. While supporting the funding proposals for the development and implementation of QF, some members expressed concern about the financial burden on employees. These members pointed out that employees had to pay assessment fees, in addition to tuition fees for training courses, should they wish to undergo RPL assessment for the purpose of pursuing further training. They urged the Administration to consider increasing the rate of reimbursement for these employees. Members enquired whether employees would be eligible for the proposed reimbursement of RPL assessment fee, if they did not have plans to enrol in QF-recognized training courses.

8. The Administration responded that the prime objective of RPL was to help employees with low educational attainment to seek recognition of their skills, knowledge and experience, so that they could pursue continuing learning or skills upgrading without starting from scratch. The purpose of providing reimbursement of RPL assessment fee was to encourage more employees to pursue lifelong learning, which was also the primary objective of establishing QF. The Administration proposed to reimburse 50% of the RPL assessment fee, subject to a maximum of \$1,000 per person, incurred by an employee who had satisfactorily completed a QF-recognized training course after passing the RPL assessment. As the proposed financial assistance schemes were geared towards supporting lifelong learning, employees who did not pursue further learning or training could not benefit from the schemes. To extend the schemes to cover employees who did not pursue further training would remove the incentive and defeat the purpose of the schemes.

9. Noting that the proposed financial assistance schemes would cover non-profit-making training providers only, some members pointed out that as the vast majority of labour unions were running training courses on a

non-profit-making basis, these schemes should be extended to cover training programmes offered by labour unions. However, some other members considered that if the Administration intended to recognize labour unions as training providers eligible for the proposed financial assistance schemes, similar consideration should also be given to trade associations.

10. The Administration pointed out that it was the established practice of the Government to provide subsidies to non-profit-making organizations only. Training providers affiliated with labour unions might consider applying for non-profit-making status from the Inland Revenue Department, in order to be eligible for the proposed financial assistance schemes.

11. After considering members' views, the Administration agreed to increase the reimbursement rate of the RPL assessment fee to 100%, subject to a cap of \$1,000 per employee upon completion of a QF-recognized training course. However, the Administration advised that it was unable to extend the eligibility criteria for the subsidies to cover organizations that were not classified as non-profit-making. If the Administration were to extend the eligibility criteria to labour unions, other organizations such as trade associations and professional bodies would likely have a claim for similar treatment. The Administration would have difficulty in holding the line of refusing subsidizing profit-making organizations.

#### Progress on the development and implementation of QF

12. At its meetings on 23 October 2008, 16 July and 22 October 2009, the Panel was briefed on the latest position regarding the development and implementation of QF.

13. Some members asked whether the Administration would offer incentives to stimulate the participation of employers and employees in QF. They pointed out that many employees had long working hours and could hardly spare the time to attend training courses after work. In addition, some workers did not see the need to participate in QF as they believed that they could negotiate for a reasonable salary provided that their employers were satisfied with their experience and skills. Some members were concerned whether study leave would be offered to encourage workers to attend learning programmes.

14. The Administration advised that the provision of study leave was a matter for individual industries and employers. The Education Bureau ("EDB") had been working closely with the relevant stakeholders including employers, employees, trade unions, professional bodies, and education and training providers to build up the infrastructure of QF. The implementation of QF would benefit both employers and employees, as employers would be assured of workers' qualifications and the courses developed would help workers upgrade their skills. QF also helped workers assess whether their pay was commensurate with their qualifications. It would take time for the

community to accept and appreciate the benefits brought about by QF.

15. Members enquired about the short-term plan in respect of QF and whether the Administration would assess the benefits brought about by QF in terms of personal development, career advancement and social contribution.

16. The Administration explained that it was consulting relevant stakeholders on the development of QF. In the short-term, the Industry Training Advisory Committees ("ITACs") for the import and export industry was expected to commence work in the third quarter of 2009, to be followed by the retail industry. The two industries covered about 300 000 employees each (together with the employees covered by the 12 industries with ITACs, represented approximately 40% of the total labour force). Up to the end of June 2009, about 5 600 academic and vocational qualifications were registered in the Qualifications Register. There was no empirical data to assess the impact of QF on personal development and social contribution. The Administration stressed that QF sought to provide a platform to promote life-long learning, with a view to enhancing the overall competitiveness of the workforce. While promoting QF, the Administration was mindful that the attainment of QF qualification would not become a prerequisite for a person to secure employment.

17. A member enquired about the interface between the new senior secondary curriculum under the new academic structure for senior secondary and higher education and QF for early school leavers. The Administration explained that QF provided a platform to promote lifelong learning with a view to enhancing the overall competitiveness of the workforce. Early school leavers who joined the workforce and who did not have the requisite qualifications could obtain quality-assured qualifications under QF. So far, 13 industries had set up ITACs to draw up SCSs. SCSs set out the skills, knowledge and outcome standards required of employees in different functional areas and provided a basis for course providers, including those of the Vocational Training Council ("VTC") and the Employees Retraining Board ("ERB"), to design education and training courses to meet the needs of the industries. Workers with lower level of educational attainment could attend these courses and seek recognition of their skills, knowledge and experience under different levels of QF.

18. A member enquired about the targets of QF, such as the number of industries that would set up ITACs and develop RPL qualifications, in the coming two years. The member also enquired about the interface of QF with VTC, ERB and the Labour Department in respect of provision of training to young people.

19. The Administration advised that there was close liaison among EDB, the Labour Department, VTC and ERB on the provision of training to young people. The Administration had not set any target for QF as the setting up of ITAC was industry driven. Moreover, the preparation of SCS took time. It

took about two to three years for an ITAC to draw up its own SCS. The Administration informed members that the ITAC on Import and Export would soon commence drafting its SCS and as a start, the SCS would cover only a part of the import and export industry given its extensive coverage on different trades. The Administration would monitor the effectiveness of the various systems and schemes underpinning QF and, where appropriate, consider further enhancement.

20. A member considered that the low participation rate of workers in RPL was a result of inadequate promotion. The Administration explained that it had embarked on a series of publicity and promotional activities in collaboration with stakeholders, including assessment agency, trade associations and labour unions. An outreach programme had been launched under which exhibitions, talks and seminars on QF were held with the industry and school sectors. The Administration would continue to enhance publicity of QF and RPL through different channels, including broadcasting of Announcements in the Public Interest in television and public transports, launching exhibitions and road-show in Mass Transit Railway stations, and interviews with newspapers and radio.

### **Relevant papers**

21. Members may wish to refer to the following minutes of meetings and papers for further details of the discussions -

- (a) Report of the Bills Committee on Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Bill [LC Paper No. CB(2)1533/06-07];
- (b) Administration's paper on the funding proposals for the development and implementation of QF in Hong Kong for the meeting of the Panel on Manpower on 17 May 2007 [LC Paper No. CB(2)1828/06-07(13)];
- (c) Administration's supplementary paper on the funding proposals for the development and implementation of QF in Hong Kong for the meeting of the Panel on Manpower on 17 May 2007 [LC Paper No. CB(2)2172/06-07(01)];
- (d) minutes of meeting of the Panel on Manpower on 17 May 2007 [LC Paper No. CB(2)2174/06-07];
- (e) Administration's paper on the development and implementation of QF in Hong Kong for the meeting of the Panel on Manpower on 23 October 2008 [LC Paper No. CB(2)65/08-09(01)];

- (f) Administration's supplementary paper on the development and implementation of QF for the meeting of the Panel on Manpower on 23 October 2008 [LC Paper No. CB(2)789/08-09(01)];
- (g) minutes of meeting of the Panel on Manpower on 23 October 2008 [LC Paper No. CB(2)481/08-09];
- (h) minutes of meeting of the Panel on Manpower on 16 July 2009 [LC Paper No. CB(2)2553/08-09]; and
- (i) minutes of meeting of the Panel on Manpower on 22 October 2009 [LC Paper No. CB(2)653/09-10].

22. The above minutes and papers are also available on the website of the Legislative Council (<http://www.legco.gov.hk>).

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