

Legislative Council Panel on Manpower

2009-10 Policy Agenda

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

Purpose

As an ongoing initiative on the 2009-10 Policy Agenda, the Government will continue to implement the Qualifications Framework (QF) by phases. This paper briefs Members on the latest progress of the development and implementation of the 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 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

Industry-led development

4. Education and training programmes developed under the QF aim to meet the manpower needs of the industries in Hong Kong. To ensure relevancy to industry needs, we have been assisting various industries in setting up Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs). The ITACs are tasked to draw up Specifications of Competency Standards (SCSs) for the relevant industries, which set out 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.

5. We have so far set up ITACs for 13 industries¹, covering a total of over 1.2 million employees (about 33% of the total labour force). The latest ITAC was set up in October 2009 covering approximately 510,000 employees for the import and export industry. These ITACs have made good progress in drawing up SCSs of their respective industries : 11 have completed the SCSs; one is finalizing the draft SCSs; while the ITAC for Import and Export is expected to commence work on drafting the SCS in the near future.

6. As at today, training providers have designed more than 100 courses on the basis of the completed SCSs. About 6,000 employees have attended these SCS-based courses and their feedback on the usefulness and relevancy of the courses to their work is generally positive.

7. 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.

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

Quality Assurance Mechanism

8. QF must be underpinned by a robust quality assurance mechanism to ensure that courses developed are of good quality. The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) is specified as the Accreditation Authority under the AAVQO, and entrusted with the responsibility of assuring the quality of academic and vocational qualifications and their associated learning programmes.

9. The HKCAAVQ has developed new accreditation approaches and procedures to suit the requirements and standards of the QF, including a newly devised “collective approach” for processing bulk applications. These new approaches and procedures are put to practice in stages, and will be enhanced in the light of experience and feedback from providers.

10. To strengthen the credibility of the quality assurance mechanism, the Secretary for Education has appointed an Appeal Board to consider appeals against accreditation decisions made by the HKCAAVQ. A Rules Committee has also been formed to make rules to regulate the practices and procedures of appeal.

Qualifications Register

11. Information on qualifications and learning programmes that have been quality assured and recognised under the QF are uploaded on a Qualifications Register (QR) and made available over the internet free of charge to the public for reference. As at the end of September 2009, about 5,700 academic and vocational qualifications have been registered in the QR with a cumulative hit rate of over 232,000, which shows that the QR is increasingly known to, and frequently used by, the public.

Recognition of Prior Learning Mechanism

12. We have developed a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism under the QF. The mechanism enables workers to obtain formal recognition for the knowledge, skills and experience they acquired at the workplace, and facilitate their further learning without starting from

scratch. The RPL mechanism has been implemented, on a pilot basis, 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.

13. As at the end of September 2009, a total of about 950 applications for assessment involving about 3,000 clusters of competencies at various QF levels have been received by the assessment agency. The majority of the applicants (over 90%) have successfully passed the assessment tests and were awarded statements of attainment in respect of the competencies assessed. Applicants who have failed in the assessment tests were offered free counseling service by the assessment agency to prepare them better for further assessment, if they so wish.

14. Feedback from applicants indicates that, on the whole, the RPL mechanism is operating effectively and the assessment processes are generally fair and efficient. We will continue to monitor and review the effectiveness of the pilot mechanism.

15. In the meantime, we are consulting parties concerned 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.

QF Support Schemes

16. We have launched a number of financial assistance schemes to support the implementation of QF, including 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.

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

17. Up to the end of September 2009, a total of 190 providers have applied for grants for the accreditation of about 2,700 qualifications and for registering them in the QR. A total of about HK\$9 millions 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

18. Public awareness of the QF and support of the community are important to ensure success of the QF initiative. In this regard, we have arranged a series of publicity activities to promote the QF, including broadcasting of Announcement of Public Interest 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

19. The QF, launched in May 2008, is still at its early development stage. We will monitor the effectiveness of the various systems and schemes underpinning the QF and, where appropriate, consider refinements. Adopting a steady and step-by-step approach, we will focus on industries where ITACs have been formed so as to lay a solid foundation for the further development of the QF. We will continue to work in close partnership with stakeholders in different sectors.

Education Bureau
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