NOTE FOR FINANCE COMMITTEE

Qualifications Framework Support Schemes

PURPOSE

This note informs Members of the Administration's plan to continue implementing the Qualifications Framework Support Schemes (QFSS) until around 31 March 2014 using the outstanding balance of the non-recurrent commitment approved under FCR(2007-08)22 and FCR(2011-12)44.

BACKGROUND

2.   The Qualifications Framework (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. At its meeting on 22 June 2007, the Finance Committee (FC) of the Legislative Council approved vide FCR(2007-08)22 a non-recurrent commitment of $208 million for the then Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) to implement a basket of financial assistance schemes, known as QFSS, **for a period of five years** from the date of the formal launch of QF to provide time-limited and non-recurrent financial assistance to encourage relevant stakeholders to participate in QF. Such financial assistance includes accreditation grant for education and training providers to seek accreditation for recognising their courses under QF, grant for programme area accreditation to assist training providers to seek a self-accrediting status in specified programme areas for a specified period of time, accreditation grant and start-up grant to assessment agencies which help conduct assessments under the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism[1], and reimbursement of RPL assessment fees for practitioners. The QF was formally launched on 5 May 2008.

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[1]   RPL mechanism enables practitioners of various backgrounds to receive formal recognition of the knowledge, skills and experience already acquired.

3.   On 18 July 2011, FC approved vide FCR(2011-12)44 improvement measures to enhance the QFSS, including relaxing the operating parameters of QFSS such as the scope, eligibility criteria and level of assistance, and introducing a new one-off grant under QFSS as an incentive to encourage education and training providers to develop courses based on the Specification of Competency Standards (SCS).

BRIEF EXTENSION OF QFSS

4.   Since the launch of QFSS in May 2008, participation in QF has been on a steady increase. As at March 2013, we have assisted 19 industries[2] to set up Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs) under QF, covering 46% of the workforce in Hong Kong. Twelve[3] of these ITACs have drawn up their SCSs which facilitate the development of courses and progression pathways. Work by other ITACs on drawing up their SCSs is in progress. 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. Separately, RPL mechanism has been implemented in eight industries[4].

Encl.

5.   Through the provision of time-limited and non-recurrent financial assistance for relevant stakeholders, QFSS have given impetus for the development of QF. As at end March 2013, a total of about $57 million has been disbursed under QFSS. Details are set out at Enclosure. As at the same date, there were over 7 600 quality assured academic and vocational qualifications, involving programmes provided by about 210 education and training providers, registered in the web-based Qualifications Register, and a total of 3 341 practitioners have sought reimbursement of RPL assessment fees after having successfully completed RPL assessments.

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[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.

[3]   Printing & Publishing, Watch & Clock, Chinese Catering, Hairdressing, Property Management, Electrical & Mechanical Services, Jewellery, Information & Communications Technology, Automotive, Beauty, Logistics, Banking.

[4]   Printing & Publishing, Watch & Clock, Hairdressing, Property Management, Automotive, Jewellery, Logistics and Chinese Catering.

6.   New initiatives are on stream to further strengthen the development of QF. In October 2012, Education Bureau (EDB) announced the introduction of the Award Titles Scheme and the use of credit under QF, which aim to enhance the transparency of qualifications and enable learners to know clearly the learning time and efforts required, to help learners make informed choices of learning programmes and better facilitate recruitment and training by employers. We will further explore the development of a credit accumulation and transfer system to, among other things, provide flexibility for learners and minimise duplication in training. We are also building up our network with relevant authorities overseeing QFs in other places to boost the recognition of the Hong Kong QF elsewhere. In addition, as announced by the Financial Secretary in the 2013-14 Budget, we plan to provide $10 million per year from 2013-14 onwards to support ITACs under QF to launch new initiatives to further enhance the knowledge and skills of workers in the industries, and their competitiveness in the labour market.   These new initiatives include: (i) introducing award schemes for outstanding practitioners to engage in learning activities in different places around the world; (ii) designing SCS-based training programmes and packages that meet the needs of the industries; and (iii) stepping up promotion and publicity of the QF for its wider acceptance among all sectors.

7.   As QF is still at its early stage of development, we have been making reference to the experiences and evolving practices of the QFs in other places. While we will press ahead with the new initiatives set out in paragraph 6 above, we see the need for extending the duration of QFSS until around 31 March 2014. We hope that the additional period of around one year would further broaden and deepen the participation of relevant stakeholders in QF so as to consolidate the progress made so far and ensure the current momentum in the development of QF can take roots and translate into sustainable benefits for the community. This brief extension will provide a solid foundation for the implementation of various new initiatives mentioned in paragraph 6. We will conduct a comprehensive review of QFSS later in 2013 and consider the way forward for QFSS beyond 31 March 2014.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.   As at 31 March 2013, the balance of the approved commitment was about $151 million, which is sufficient for extending QFSS up to around 31 March 2014. No additional funding is required.

9.   Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

Education Bureau
May 2013

Breakdown of Expenditure of
Qualifications Framework Support Schemes

Qualifications Framework Support Schemes	Actual Expenditure ($ million)					Total ($ million)
	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	
(a) Accreditation Grant for Self-financing Programmes	0.3	1.9	3.0	5.5	12.6	**23.3**
(b) Accreditation grant for courses under EDB (then EMB)-subsidised schemes	4.5	1.6	0.8	0	11.5	**18.4**
(c) Grant for Programme Area Accreditation	0.7	0.2	0.1	1.2	1.0	**3.2**
(d) Subsidy for Qualifications Register Registration Fees	1.8	2.0	1.1	1.8	2.6	**9.3**
(e) Accreditation Grant to RPL Assessment Agencies	0	0	0	0.5	0.4	**0.9**
(f) Start-up grant to RPL Assessment Agencies	0	0	0	0	0.3	**0.3**
(g) Reimbursement of RPL Assessment Fees	0*	0*	0.1	0.4	0.9	**1.4**
(h) Development Grant for SCS-based Courses	Not Applicable (Launched in July 2011)			0.1	0.2	**0.3**
Total[#]	**7.3**	**5.7**	**5.1**	**9.5**	**29.4**	**57.0**

* *The total amount of reimbursement of RPL assessment fees made to practitioners in 2008-09 and 2009-10 was $27,580 which cannot be shown in table above due to rounding.*

\# *The total amount may not tally with the sum of breakdown of the expenditure due to rounding.*