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25 April 2014

Miss Betty Ma
Clerk to Panel on Manpower
Legislative Council Secretariat
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central
Hong Kong

Dear Miss Ma,

**Panel on Manpower on 27 January 2014
Supplementary Information on Qualifications Framework**

At the Panel on Manpower meeting on 27 January 2014, Members sought additional information on the following aspects in relation to the implementation of the Qualifications Framework (QF) –

- (a) Employees' representation on Industry Training Advisory Committees;
- (b) Development progress of training programmes based on the Specification of Competency Standards;
- (c) Development of accessible articulation pathways and the credit accumulation and transfer system;
- (d) Recognition of QF by the community at large and further promotion of QF in different industries;
- (e) Whether employees whose skills or experience are not recognised under the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism would become more vulnerable for displacement;
- (f) Whether the implementation of RPL mechanism in the property management industry has benefitted the practitioners; and

- (g) Whether new arrivals who possess professional qualifications acquired in the Mainland are recognised under QF.

Supplementary information is set out at the Annex for Members' information.

Yours sincerely,



(Ms Pecvin YONG)
for Secretary for Education

Supplementary Information on Qualifications Framework (QF)

(a) Employees' representation on Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs)

We have so far assisted 19 industries in setting up ITACs to implement QF in the respective industries. For each and every ITAC, the Government has invited all concerned labour unions of the related industry to participate. Hence, employees are represented in all ITACs, alongside representatives from employers, professional bodies and other stakeholders of respective industries.

ITACs conduct industry wide consultation to gauge the views of all stakeholders (including relevant labour unions) before finalising and promulgating the Specification of Competency Standards (SCSs) for their industries. Therefore, the views of employees are fully taken into account in the development and implementation of QF.

(b) Development progress of SCS-based training programmes

Fifteen ITACs have drawn up their SCSs so far, and the other ITACs will complete their SCSs successively. The number of SCS-based programmes has increased from some 100 in June 2009 to more than 620 in April 2014. Besides, as announced in the 2013-14 Budget, an additional \$10 million is allocated to ITACs per year starting from 2013-14 to implement new initiatives, one of which is the design of SCS-based training packages. It is expected that the first batch of training packages for four ITACs would be ready for publishing in the third quarter of 2014. The initiative will serve as a catalyst for the development of SCS-based materials for wider adoption by enterprises and course providers to meet the needs of the industries.

(c) Development of accessible articulation pathways and credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) system

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism under QF enables practitioners in the industries of various backgrounds to obtain

formal qualifications up to QF Level 4 through recognition of the knowledge, skills and relevant experience that they have acquired in the workplace. At present, the RPL mechanism has been implemented in eight industries¹. The Education Bureau (EDB) would strive to enhance the acceptance of the RPL mechanism so that more practitioners may pursue further learning with their RPL qualifications as a starting point to acquire higher and broader qualifications.

Separately, EDB is now developing a set of policy and principles for CAT pursuant to the introduction of QF credit in October 2012. Under the CAT system, learner/practitioners can accumulate the credits of different programmes and training systematically and transfer the accumulated credits into recognised qualifications. CAT benefits practitioners and learners in the following ways –

- helps to eliminate unfair or unnecessary barriers to access to learning and to minimise the need for any repetition of learning already achieved;
- recognises the learning outcomes of modular-based or unit-based learning and allows the accumulation of credits earned for such learning;
- permits learners to move in and out of formal education and to engage in workplace-based training in the knowledge that credit previously earned will be taken into account in the future;
- provides flexibility to learners allowing them to study at times and places to fit their life pattern and personal circumstances, thereby providing more opportunities for employees to participate in lifelong learning; and
- enables learners to calibrate their expectations more realistically and map out their study plans accordingly. Learners will better understand the value of what they are studying/have studied and how it fits into the framework of qualifications.

QF provides a common platform and a standardised benchmark to facilitate the arrangement of CAT among different sectors and training institutions. To facilitate the development of the CAT system, EDB would be conducting a few pilot exercises with a view to developing the operational guidelines. In fact, a pilot exercise is being conducted in respect of facilitating articulation and mutual recognition of credits and qualifications between the Employees Retraining Board and the Vocational

¹ Printing & Publishing, Watch & Clock, Hairdressing, Property Management, Automotive, Jewellery, Logistics and Chinese Catering.

Training Council with a view to assisting industry practitioners to move up the articulation ladder progressively.

(d) Recognition of QF by the community at large and further promotion of QF in different industries

The Government has been promoting QF through various channels since its launch in 2008. During the past year, we have particularly stepped up our promotion and publicity targeting three groups –

- (i) **School sector:** Riding on the ITAC networks and the competency standards and progression pathways developed for the respective industries, we have organised six career information seminars from October to December 2013, covering career information on 19 industries with ITACs. Over 1 000 students, teachers and parents from more than 150 schools attended the seminars. Besides, we continued to participate in many talks organised by school sponsoring bodies, youth groups and trade unions to further the promotion of QF. We also set up a booth in the “Information Expo on Multiple Pathways 2013”. All these efforts aimed at enabling teachers, students, parents and the community at large to understand how QF can facilitate students’ planning of further study and careers.
- (ii) **Industry sector:** We organised a QF Stakeholders Forum in May 2013 to solicit views of over 100 stakeholders from industries and training providers on the implementation and development of QF. Moreover, a RPL Sharing Session was conducted in November 2013 to consolidate the experiences of the eight industries that have implemented the RPL mechanism. Over 300 representatives from ITACs, employers, personnel responsible for human resource management, practitioners and training providers attended the RPL Sharing Session. Besides, we observe that 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.
- (iii) **Community at large:** In 2013, we published more than 50 QF related articles in newspapers as well as publications of professional bodies, trade unions and trade associations to increase stakeholders’ understanding and awareness of QF. The announcement of public interest (API) on QF and Qualifications Register (QR) continue to be broadcast on the QF website

(www.hkqf.gov.hk) and the EDB YouTube Channel (www.youtube.com/user/edbgovhk). The revamped QR website was launched on 23 December 2013. We are considering a revamp of the QF website in the coming year.

We shall further strengthen our promotional efforts with the establishment of the proposed QF Fund in the 2014-15 financial year.

(e) Whether employees whose skills or experience are not recognised under the RPL mechanism would become more vulnerable for displacement

Implementation of QF in individual industries is on a voluntary basis. Acquiring QF-recognised qualifications (by way of learning or recognition under the RPL mechanism) is not a prerequisite for employment. By drawing up the SCSs, ITACs have facilitated the development of education and training courses and mapping out of progression pathways for employees in the respective sectors. Practitioners may also pursue further learning with their RPL qualifications as a starting point.

Experience indicates that instead of being driven out of the industries for not acquiring the QF-recognised qualifications, individual practitioners have been encouraged to seek recognition under the RPL mechanism and/or engage in learning activities. Indeed, we observe a growing awareness of the RPL mechanism as reflected in the significant increase in the number of applications processed under the RPL mechanism over the past four years, from about 950 applications involving around 3 000 clusters as at end September 2009 to over 9 790 applications involving about 18 200 clusters of competencies as at end February 2014. With the development of QF, learners have access to a wide array of quality assured programmes registered in QR to pursue lifelong learning.

(f) Whether the implementation of RPL mechanism in the property management industry has benefitted the practitioners

Overall speaking, we observe that more and more employers in various industries, particularly the property management industry, are now accepting or taking into account QF-recognised qualifications obtained under the RPL mechanism or through learning in staff recruitment, performance assessment and/or promotion. Moreover, more education

and training providers are accepting RPL qualifications as meeting the necessary entry requirements in individual programmes so that practitioners may pursue further learning with their RPL qualifications as a starting point.

We do not have information on the wage level of practitioners of the property management industry before and after acquiring recognition under the RPL mechanism. It must nevertheless be pointed out that QF aims at building up an infrastructure to facilitate lifelong learning and professional/vocational upgrading. Its success cannot and should not be measured in terms of increases in income of the practitioners.

(g) Whether new arrivals who possess professional qualifications acquired in the Mainland are recognised under QF

The RPL mechanism under QF enables formal recognition of the skills, knowledge and relevant experience acquired by practitioners in the workplace which is not confined to one in Hong Kong. New arrivals who have acquired relevant experience in the Mainland may also apply for recognition under the RPL mechanism in the industries concerned.

Separately, the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) provides professional assessment service to individuals possessing qualifications awarded by granting bodies outside Hong Kong. Each application is assessed independently on the basis of the totality of the applicant's qualifications, with emphasis on the integrated learning outcomes of the applicant's highest and terminal qualifications and the components of the course of study. HKCAAVQ assesses whether the totality of an applicant's qualification meets the standard of a particular level of qualification in Hong Kong. For new arrivals who possess certain qualifications acquired in the Mainland, they may also apply to HKCAAVQ for assessment service. It should, however, be noted that recognition of a particular qualification for employment is essentially a matter for the user to decide. In general, it is up to individual employers to decide whether a particular qualification obtained by an applicant should be regarded as meeting the requirements for filling the relevant job position.