

Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Bill

Response to Concerns on the Establishment of the Qualifications Framework and its associated Quality Assurance Mechanism

At the meeting of the Bills Committee on the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Bill (the Bill) held on 10 October 2005, the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) was requested to respond to the concerns raised by some Members over the impact of the implementation of the qualifications framework (QF) on existing workers.

The QF is a voluntary system

2. Some Members and labour unions were concerned that although the QF was not a mandatory system, some employers might require employees to obtain QF-recognised qualifications, which indirectly became ‘licences for employment’.

3. We understand that practitioners in some industries may be concerned about the impact of the implementation of the QF on their employment. We must stress that the QF is not a mandatory system and the implementation of the QF in a certain industry depends on the participation, commitment and support of the industry. The Government has no intention or wish to turn QF-recognised qualifications into ‘work licences’. Since Hong Kong is a free and open economy and labour market, it is indeed infeasible to implement ‘licensing for employment’ in every industry.

4. Nevertheless, we understand that there are certain industries which stipulate the entry and practice requirements due to occupational or individual safety considerations. However, such requirements have nothing to do with the establishment of the QF. In other words, the qualification requirements for entry to a certain industry should be determined at the sole discretion of that particular industry in response to the changing needs of the industry and the society. The establishment of

the QF facilitates the industries to reach consensus on the competency standards, and such standards are not specified by the Government.

Recognition of Prior Learning facilitates workers to pursue continuing education

5. Some practitioners were of the view that an exemption system should be put in place for existing workers in order not to affect their employment. There were also concerns about how the “Recognition of Prior Learning” (RPL) mechanism would be formulated to let workers with low educational attainment also enjoy the benefit under the QF.

6. We believe that the RPL mechanism should be a ‘recognition’ rather than an ‘exemption’ system. This principle is premised on the assumption that the skills and knowledge that the practitioner possesses have been acquired through previous learning and/or work experience, and can be recognised through the RPL mechanism rather than giving an exemption as if such skills and knowledge were not possessed by the practitioner in the first instance. This principle was elucidated in the speech of the Secretary for Education and Manpower in response to the LegCo Motion Debate on “Employees’ QF” in July 2004.

7. The aim of setting up a RPL mechanism is to enable workers with learning aspirations to understand their competencies acquired through experience and previous training in the industries, so that they can determine the starting point for learning and progression, and reduce duplication in training for the same skills. In other words, they may skip certain familiar modules and take courses of relatively higher level or wider scope so that they can receive more effective training which better suits their needs. The RPL mechanism should be based on the ‘Specification for Competency of Standards’ formulated by the respective industries in order to ensure its credibility.

8. In order to facilitate practitioners to have their qualifications recognised, we would set up assessment agencies within the industries that have participated in the QF. Subject to the passage of the Bill, the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA) would accredit the assessment agencies to ensure that they have due capabilities to conduct

RPL. There could be a variety of ways to conduct the assessment, including workplace demonstration and interview. A person having passed the assessment would be issued with a statement of attainment for the purpose of continuing education.

The QF provides multiple progression pathways, enabling citizens to map out their blueprint

9. The labour unions opined that in order to implement the QF successfully, the Government had to formulate a full set of complementary measures, such as restrictions on working hours, minimum wage, paid training leave, etc., so that workers would have the time and financial resources to receive training.

10. We understand that in order to foster a workforce which values training, both the employers and employees should share the same vision, and that employees are encouraged to pursue learning. This would help upgrade the industries and the workforce. We hope that by implementing the QF in different industries, the views of employers and employees on manpower development could be drawn closer, facilitating the discussions on labour policy issues such as working hours and paid training leave. We are aware that the issues of ‘minimum wage’ and ‘standard working hours’ are being thoroughly examined by the Labour Advisory Board.

11. Indeed, the establishment of the QF would enable employers to recognise the benefit of training to the quality of manpower and the service standards of the industries. The ITACs would also promote the importance of manpower training, and encourage both employers and employees within the industries to value manpower development and training.

Concluding Remarks

12. The objective of the Bill is to develop a mechanism of academic and vocational accreditation as well as a Qualifications Register (QR), so as to safeguard the integrity, quality, and credibility of qualifications recognised under the QF. We would not require that existing or future qualifications or courses must be placed under the QF before being offered

in the training market. We would, however, encourage training providers to provide quality and relevant education and training in order to obtain the “quality label” under the QF.

13. The establishment of the QF is a long-term commitment with profound implications. Whether this could succeed hinges on the concerted efforts of employees, employers, industries, professional bodies, training providers, etc. in achieving an all-win situation. We would continue to listen to the views of the stakeholders, and implement the QF in a pragmatic, prudent and gradual manner.

Education and Manpower Bureau
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