**For discussion
on 19 January 2016**

Legislative Council Panel on Manpower

**Policy Initiative on Qualifications Framework by
Education Bureau**

Purpose

      The Chief Executive announced his 2016 Policy Address on 13 January 2016. This paper aims to brief Members on the major development of the Qualifications Framework (QF) in the past year.

Background

2.   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. Since the formal launch of QF in 2008, we have been making steady progress in developing the key components including –

    (a)   establishing Industry Training Advisory Committees;

    (b)   drawing up Specification of Competency Standards for industries;

    (c)   implementing Recognition of Prior Learning mechanism in the relevant industries;

    (d)   promoting Specification of Generic (Foundation) Competencies;

    (e)   maintaining a Qualifications Register;

    (f)   introducing the Award Titles Scheme and the use of QF credit;

    (g)   promulgating the policy and principles for Credit Accumulation and Transfer; and

    (h)   building up network with QF authorities and quality assurance (QA) bodies of other places proactively to enhance understanding and mutual trust as well as learners' mobility.

(a)   *Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs)*

3.   At present, we have set up 20 ITACs for 21 industries/sector[1], covering 53% of the workforce in Hong Kong.   A new ITAC for the Fashion industry was established on 1 July 2015.   We shall continue to reach out to stakeholders of other industries to explore the feasibility of setting up new ITACs.

(b)   *Specification of Competency Standards (SCSs)*

4.   ITACs are tasked to draw up SCSs for the relevant sectors, which set out the skills, knowledge and outcome standards required of employees in different functional areas of the respective sectors.   The ITACs of 18 industries have now drawn up their SCSs, and the ITACs of two industries will complete drawing up their SCSs respectively in 2016 and 2017 and the remaining industry will kick-start the work in 2016. As at 31 December 2015, about 800 SCS-based courses have been developed by education and training providers.   In addition, 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.

(c)   *Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Mechanism*

5.   QF not only covers qualifications obtained from academic education and training, but also enables formal recognition of the skills, knowledge and relevant experience acquired by practitioners in the workplace through the RPL mechanism which is based on the SCSs of various industries.   Practitioners may pursue further learning with their RPL qualifications as a starting point to acquire higher and broader qualifications.   At present, the RPL mechanism has been implemented in 14 industries[2].   As at 30 November 2015, about 15 600 applications involving about 27 700 clusters of competencies were processed/are being processed by the assessment agencies concerned.   Details are set out at **Annex A**[3].   We will continue to work closely with other industries

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[1]   Printing & Publishing,   Watch & Clock,   Catering,   Property Management, Electrical & Mechanical Services,   Jewellery,   Information & Communications Technology, Automotive, Logistics, Banking, Import & Export, Testing, Inspection & Certification, Retail, Insurance,   Manufacturing Technology (Tooling, Metals and Plastics),   Elderly Care Service, Security Services, Human Resource Management, Beauty and Hairdressing, as well as Fashion.

[2]   Printing & Publishing, Watch & Clock, Hairdressing, Property Management, Automotive, Jewellery, Logistics, Chinese Catering, Beauty, Retail, Import & Export, Elderly Care Service, Testing, Inspection & Certification, as well as Electrical & Mechanical Services.

[3]   Not including the Electrical & Mechanical Services industry which has only implemented its RPL mechanism starting from December 2015.

with a view to extending the RPL mechanism to those which have completed their respective SCSs.

(d)   Specification of Generic (Foundation) Competencies (SGCs)

6.   Generic (Foundation) Competencies are generic skills and knowledge that are shared across different industries and trades and are relevant to most people in the workplace.   SGC covers four strands of foundation skills, namely, English, Chinese, Numeracy and Information Technology.   In 2011 and 2012, we invited the Vocational Training Council to launch a pilot project, the Vocational English Enhancement Programme (VEEP), on the development of vocational English courses based on the SGC of QF.   A total of 21 courses[4] were rolled out from April 2011 to August 2012.   In the light of the positive feedback from the industries, the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research approved the use of the Language Fund to continue providing VEEP to the industries for another three years starting from November 2012.   During the period, a total of 30 teaching and learning packages which comprise 12 trade-specific and 18 generic courses ranging from QF Levels 1 to 4 were developed and a total of 100 classes were delivered with positive feedback.

(e)   Qualifications Register (QR)

7.   QR, a web-based database containing information on qualifications and their respective learning programmes that have been quality assured and recognised under QF, is available to the public free of charge.   As at 31 December 2015, there were over 8 400 academic and vocational qualifications, involving about 240 education and training providers, registered in QR.   As the statutory Accreditation Authority and QR Authority, the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) will continue to ensure the quality and standards of QF-recognised programmes. Statistical information on the qualifications registered in QR is set out at **Annex B**.

(f)   Award Titles Scheme (ATS) and the use of QF Credit

8.   The Education Bureau (EDB) announced the introduction of ATS and the use of QF credit in October 2012.   ATS specifies the award titles that can be used for qualifications at various QF levels whereas QF

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4   These are courses in Transport Logistics; Manufacturing, Import/Export & Wholesale; Hotel, Catering & Tourism; Retail; Banking & Finance; and Generic Skills.

credit is a measure of volume or size of learning programmes recognised under QF. As of 1 January 2016, the titles of all programmes registered in the QR conform to the ATS and the QF credit values of all programmes at QF Levels 1 to 4 were shown on the QR.

(g)   Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)

9.   To promote learners' mobility and progression by minimising duplication of learning, EDB promulgated in July 2014 the policy and principles for CAT which apply to all programmes from QF Levels 1 to 7 as Phase 1 of the CAT project. Providers are encouraged to make reference to the policy and principles in reviewing their existing CAT systems or establishing a CAT system that suits their own circumstances. Phase II of the CAT project seeks to develop a set of practical guidelines for CAT implementation and is close to completion. The guidelines, derived from research and experience gained from pilot exercises involving a number of providers and their learning programmes, include good practices in handling CAT applications, considerations for granting credit transfer, support to staff and learners, and transparency of CAT information to the public, etc. The CAT policy and principles, together with the practical guidelines to be published in the first quarter of 2016 tentatively, will effectively support lifelong learning, thus achieving the ultimate objective of QF.

(h)   Co-operation with Other Places on QF

10.   We have been actively establishing network with QF and QA authorities of other places to enhance understanding and mutual trust as well as learners' mobility. In May 2011, the QF Secretariat and the Guangdong Occupational Skill Testing Authority signed the "Letter of Intent on Enhancing the Exchange on and Transferability of Vocational Standards and Qualifications Recognition between Hong Kong and Guangdong", witnessed by representatives from EDB of Hong Kong and the Department of Human Resources and Social Security of Guangdong.

11.   In March 2012, EDB signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQFP) to enhance collaboration and facilitate exchange and experience sharing on QF. Subsequently, EDB has engaged SCQFP to conduct a project on the development of evaluation strategy and toolkits for the Hong Kong QF (HKQF) from May to September 2015, which has laid a good foundation for developing future evaluation strategies.

12.   Subsequent to the signing of a Cooperation Arrangement between EDB and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority in March 2014, both parties agreed to undertake a project on referencing between HKQF and the New Zealand QF.   The project is expected to commence in early 2016.

13.   In November 2014, we commenced our collaboration with the European Commission on the Comparability Study between HKQF and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).   The Comparability Study provides a translation device to understand the corresponding levels of qualifications between HKQF and EQF, bringing mutual benefits to Hong Kong and European Union member states.   In December 2015, EDB presented the joint report on the Comparability Study to the EQF Advisory Group in Berlin, Germany.   The joint report was well received, leading to the completion of the Comparability Study.

14.   In July 2015, the QF Secretariat signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Thailand Professional Qualification Institute to explore mutual benefits in the comparison of competency standards between Hong Kong and Thailand and to plan for the possible collaboration with the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework in future.

(i)   2014-15 Budget initiatives

15.   Apart from the above, the Financial Secretary announced in the 2013-14 Budget to allocate $10 million per year to support ITACs to launch new initiatives to further enhance the knowledge and skills of workers in the industries, and their competitiveness in the labour market. These initiatives include –

   (a)   introducing the QF Award Scheme for Learning Experiences for outstanding practitioners to engage in learning activities in different places around the world;

   (b)   designing SCS-based Training Packages that meet the needs of the industries; and

   (c)   stepping up promotion and publicity of QF for its wider acceptance among all sectors.

16.   For (a), the Award Scheme aims to recognise outstanding or emerging practitioners who can serve as exemplars and role models for their respective industries and help attract the younger generation to

pursue career in these fields. The Award Scheme also encourages emerging practitioners to engage in learning activities in different places around the world with a view to broadening their horizons and developing network with industry partners in and outside Hong Kong. For the 2015-16 Award Scheme, a total of 50 practitioners have been selected by the respective ITACs for the award. Awardees engaging in learning activities in Hong Kong receive an award of $10,000 while those engaging in learning activities outside Hong Kong receive an award of $30,000. We shall invite applications for the 2016-17 Award Scheme starting from the first quarter of 2016.

17. For (b), the SCS-based Training Packages, developed with reference to SCSs of respective industries, aim to serve as a catalyst for the development of SCS-based training and assessment materials for wider adoption by enterprises and course providers to meet the needs of the industries. The first batch of training packages for four ITACs involving six job functions has almost been completed. For the second batch of development, six ITACs have selected a total of 10 job functions for development of SCS-based Training Packages. Development of this batch of training packages is in good progress and is expected to complete in mid-2016.

18. For (c), we have stepped up our promotion and publicity targeting at three groups –

(i) *School sector:* Riding on the ITAC networks and the competency standards and progression pathways developed for the respective industries, we organised seven pilot projects with ITACs to promote QF and the relevant industries to senior secondary school students in 2015. Over 1 000 students attended the talks, workshops or visits. Two more industries will launch their pilot school projects in early 2016. Besides, we organised promotion days with the Logistics, Watch & Clock, and Jewellery ITACs to provide information on QF and careers in these industries, with an attendance of over 4 300 students at senior secondary or post-secondary levels and their parents. We also conducted talks to introduce QF to schools with an attendance of over 600 teachers and students. 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 QF promotion days for 10 industries which were attended by over 1 300 stakeholders including employers, employees and representatives from industry organisations.

(iii) *Community at large:* In 2015, we published more than 30 QF-related articles in newspapers as well as publications of professional bodies, trade unions and trade associations to enhance stakeholders' understanding and awareness of QF. The revamping of the QF website will also be completed in early 2016 with an enhanced user interface.

Qualifications Framework Fund

Establishment of the QF Fund

19.   With the approval of the Finance Committee (FC) of the Legislative Council (LegCo) in 2007, a non-recurrent commitment of $208 million was created to implement a basket of financial assistance schemes, known as Qualifications Framework Support Schemes (QFSS) to provide time-limited financial assistance to encourage relevant stakeholders to participate in QF. Recognising the importance of QF in maintaining a quality workforce, the Chief Executive announced in the 2014 Policy Address to establish an endowment fund of $1 billion, namely the QF Fund, to provide a steady source of income to support the sustainable development and implementation of QF. With the approval of the LegCo FC on 12 July 2014, the QF Fund was established on 1 September 2014. On the same day, a Steering Committee on QF Fund (Steering Committee) was set up to advise the Secretary for Education on the policy, strategy and administration of the QF Fund. The terms of reference and membership of the Steering Committee are set out at **Annex C**.

20.   As it takes time for the QF Fund to generate and accumulate sufficient investment income to meet the funding requirements, the balance of the approved commitment for QFSS (about $94.5 million as at 31 December 2015 out of the total commitment of $208 million) will continue to be used for meeting the cash flow requirements of the various initiatives under the QF Fund together with the investment income generated by the principal of the QF Fund.

Uses of the QF Fund

21.   The QF Fund supports schemes/initiatives for the sustainable development and implementation of QF, including but not limited to the following two areas –

      (a)   Designated Support Schemes for QF (with the previous time-limited QFSS incorporated and regrouped as the Accreditation Grant Scheme, RPL Support Scheme, Programme Development Grant Scheme and QR Subsidy Scheme); and

      (b)   Funding for ITACs, QF-related studies or projects and public education.

22.   For (a), in 2015, the Steering Committee has endorsed various improvements to the operating parameters and levels of assistance to assessment agencies under the RPL Support Scheme. They include providing full reimbursement of accreditation and re-accreditation fees, increasing the start-up grant and maintenance grant and relaxing the relevant operational parameters, as well as providing an annual retainer grant. The Accreditation Grant Scheme for Self-financing Progammes was also expanded in order to provide grant to institutions for Institutional Review for private university title. Details of the Designated Support Schemes for QF with effect from 1 January 2016 are set out at **Annex D**.

23.   As for (b), in 2015, the Steering Committee has approved three pilot projects on the development of vocational qualifications pathway initiated by three ITACs, namely Automotive, Banking and Property Management. The pilot projects seek to map out the progression pathways of different job roles in the respective industries in terms of the Units of Competency under the relevant SCSs and explore if new vocational qualifications are required for the job posts in demand. The vocational qualifications developed will further link up QF-recognised qualifications to the workplace and attract new blood and encourage practitioners to pursue learning and upgrading. The pilot projects are expected to complete by end of 2016. Based on the outcomes of these pilot projects, we shall consider whether the development of vocational qualifications pathway should be extended to other industries/sector under HKQF.

24.   Meanwhile, with the endorsement of the Steering Committee, we are also conducting an exploratory study on possible alignment of professional qualifications under HKQF.   The findings of the study will benefit HKQF's development as it will bring to light the feasible ways for professional qualifications to be benchmarked against or recognised under HKQF, thereby enhancing the scope of HKQF and benefitting more of the local workforce in their pursuit of lifelong learning.

25.   On the other hand, recognising the need to step up efforts in promoting QF to the community at large and with the endorsement of the Steering Committee, we have engaged a consultancy firm to conduct a study on developing a brand strategy for HKQF, which will complete in the second quarter of 2016.   Based on the findings of the study, we shall formulate a detailed brand strategy with a view to enhancing the public image and recognition of QF by various stakeholders in the coming years.

26.   As at 31 December 2015, the accumulated amount of funding disbursed from the approved commitment for QFSS amounted to about $113.5 million, in which 373 education and training providers have received a total grant of $71.3 million for seeking accreditation of about 4 260 programmes by HKCAAVQ.

Way Forward

27.   Implementation of QF in Hong Kong is a long term endeavor. We shall continue to explore with stakeholders of different sectors to set up new ITACs and liaise closely with national and regional QFs in order to enhance the international image and recognition of HKQF.

Education Bureau
January 2016

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism
(as at 30 November 2015)

Industry	Launch Date	No. of applications processed/ being processed	No. of clusters of competencies	Success rate
Hairdressing	Jun 2008	922	4 956	99.6%
Printing & Publishing	Jun 2008	826	1 471	97.9%
Watch & Clock	Jun 2008	833	943	100%
Property Management	Mar 2011	7 898	11 592	99.1%
Automotive	Nov 2011	838	1 441	98.1%
Jewellery	Nov 2011	936	1 190	99.3%
Logistics	Mar 2012	1 263	1 756	100%
Chinese Catering	Jan 2013	1 152	1 681	99.7%
Beauty	Jul 2014	218	1 359	95.1%
Retail	Dec 2014	668	1 173	100%
Import & Export	Sept 2015	22	26	Assessment results pending
Elderly Care Service	Sept 2015	41	115	Assessment results pending
Testing, Inspection & Certification*	Nov 2015	0	0	Not applicable
Total		**15 617**	**27 703**	**99.1%**

* Applications were only received in December 2015 after the RPL mechanism was launched in November 2015.

Qualifications registered in the Qualifications Register
(as at 31 December 2015)

Category	No. of qualifications
(1) Qualifications offered by self-accrediting institutions	3 427
(2) Qualifications offered by non-self-accrediting institutions	4 379
(3) Qualifications offered under the Recognition of Prior Learning mechanism	616
Total:	**8 422**

Steering Committee on Qualifications Framework Fund

Terms of Reference

The Steering Committee advises Secretary for Education on –

(a)   the overall strategy for making use of the Qualifications Framework Fund (the Fund) as a vehicle to support the sustainable development and implementation of the Qualifications Framework;

(b)   the scope and parameters of schemes, initiatives and activities to be covered by the Fund; and

(c)   any other matters that may be referred to the Steering Committee by the Education Bureau concerning the policy and administration of the Fund.

Where necessary, the Steering Committee also advises the Trustee of the Fund on the formulation of policies for and monitoring of the investment of the Fund.

In discharging its functions, the Steering Committee may set up sub-committees, conduct studies, engage professional services and co-opt members as and when necessary.

Membership (from 1.9.2014 to 31.8.2016)

Chairperson:	Dr York LIAO, SBS, JP
Vice-Chairperson:	Prof Alfred CHAN Cheung-ming, SBS, JP
Members:	Dr Lawrence CHAN Wan-ching
	Mr Winston CHOW Wun-sing
	Mr Dennis HO Chiu-ping
	Mr IP Wai-ming, MH
	Mr LAM Chun-sing
	Ms Carrie LEUNG Ka-lai
	Mrs Agnes MAK TANG Pik-yee, MH, JP
	Mr WONG Kit-loong
	Prof Peter YUEN Pok-man
Ex-officio Members:	Executive Director, Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications
	Secretary for Education or his/her representative

The Steering Committee may also invite co-opted members as and when necessary.

Designated Support Schemes for Qualifications Framework

1. Accreditation Grant Scheme

Scope	The scheme aims to encourage education and training providers to seek accreditation at the institutional and programme levels under the Qualifications Framework (QF), and assist mature providers in seeking self-accrediting status in specified programme areas. Accreditation grant will be provided for the following activities – • Initial Evaluation • Institutional Review and Periodic Review • Programme Validation and Re-validation • Programme Area Accreditation (PAA) (covering both first-time and subsequent exercises; the latter takes the form of Periodic Review)
Eligibility	• Providers and qualifications concerned must be successfully accredited by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) • Programmes/qualifications concerned must be registered in the Qualifications Register (QR)

Level of Subsidy		Courses subsidised by the Education Bureau (then Education and Manpower Bureau)[1]	Non-profit-making providers	Other providers
	Initial Evaluation / Institutional Review fees[2]	100%	100%	50%
	Programme Validation / Programme Re-validation fees			
	• Specification of Competency Standards (SCS)-based or Specification of Generic (Foundation) Competencies (SGC)-based programmes	100%	100%	50%
	• Other programmes	100%	70%	35%
	PAA/Periodic Review fees	100%	70%	35%

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[1] These courses include those under the "Skills Upgrading Scheme" (which is now renamed "Skills Upgrading Scheme Plus") and the "Employees Retraining Scheme" (which is now renamed "Manpower Development Scheme").

[2] Institutional Review (IR) include IR for registration under the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance and IR for private university title.

2. RPL Support Scheme

Scope	The scheme covers the fees for accreditation of RPL assessment agencies (AAs) and collaborating organisations, one-off start-up/maintenance grant for the actual expenditure including the staff costs incurred by the AAs in setting up/maintaining the assessment mechanism, retainer grant to AAs for operating RPL for "mature" industries (i.e. the five-year transitional period has lapsed), subsidy for each new application of RPL cluster processed by the AAs and reimbursement to practitioners who have successfully applied for RPL assessment.				
	Accreditation grant/Assessment fee to RPL AAs /collaborating organisations	*Start-up /Maintenance grant to RPL AAs*	*Retainer Grant to RPL AAs*	*Subsidy to RPL AAs*	*Reimbursement of RPL assessment fees*
Eligibility	• First time and subsequent accreditations • Successful accreditation by HKCAAVQ • Appointed by the Secretary for Education (SED)	• Successful accreditation by HKCAAVQ (first-time accreditation) • Appointed by SED	• AAs for "mature industry" (i.e. the five-year transitional period has lapsed) • Appointed by SED	Appointed by SED	Practitioners successfully completed the RPL assessments

Level of Subsidy	100% of accreditation/ re-accreditation and assessment fee for RPL AAs and collaborating organisations	• Up to $500,000 per agency for the actual expenditure including the staff costs incurred in setting up the assessment mechanism for each phase of RPL implementation
		• Up to $300,000 per agency for the actual expenditure including the staff costs incurred in the adjustment of the assessment mechanism arising from the revision/addition of RPL clusters initiated by the ITAC concerned
			An annual recurrent grant of $200,000	$500 for each new application of RPL cluster processed	100% of RPL assessment fees. To be reimbursed in two stages:
					• Successfully completed RPL assessments
					  - 75% of RPL assessment fees
					• Completed a QF-recognised training course afterwards
					  - remaining 25% of RPL assessment fees

3. *Programme Development Grant Scheme*

Scope	The scheme provides a one-off grant for education and training providers to develop SCS-based or SGC-based courses.	
	SCS-based	*SGC-based*
Eligibility	• Newly developed and operating SCS-based courses • 12 QF credits or above • Qualifications concerned must be successfully accredited • Must be registered in QR	• Newly developed and operating SGC-based courses • 6 QF credits or above • Qualifications concerned must be successfully accredited • Must be registered in QR
Level of Subsidy	• For courses with 12-35 QF credits - $30,000 each • For courses with 36 QF credits or above - $50,000 each	• For courses with 6-17 QF credits - $20,000 each • For courses with 18 QF credits or above - $40,000 each

4. *QR Subsidy Scheme*

Scope	The scheme covers the registration and hosting fees of the qualifications/programmes onto QR, and provides an annual maintenance fee of QR to the QR Authority.	
	Subsidy of the registration and hosting fees	*Maintenance fee of QR*
Eligibility	All qualifications and their associated programmes registered in QR	QR Authority
Level of Subsidy	100% for both registration fees and hosting fees	$3 million per year