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The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

Comparability Study of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF): Joint Technical Report

January 2017

Comparability Study of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF):
Joint Technical Report

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Contents

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Acronyms

AA	Assessment Agency
AAVQ	Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications
APQN	Asia-Pacific Quality Network
ATS	Award Titles Scheme
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
CAT	Credit Accumulation and Transfer
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Education
CEPA	Hong Kong-Mainland China Closer Economic Partnership Agreement
EC	European Commission
EDB	Education Bureau of the HKSAR Government
EEAS	European External Action Service
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQF	European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning
EQF-AG	EQF Advisory Group
ERB	Employees Retraining Board
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
EUAP	European Union Academic Programme
GLD	Generic Level Descriptors
HKCAAVQ	Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications
HKQF	Hong Kong Qualifications Framework
HKSAR	Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
HUCOM	Heads of Universities Committee
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
ITAC	Industry Training Advisory Committee
JQRC	Joint Quality Review Committee
JTG	Joint Technical Group
LCQA	Liaison Committee on Quality Assurance
LEG	Local Expert Group
MOI	Medium of instruction
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAS	New Academic Structure
NCP	National Coordination Point
NET	Native-speaking English Teacher
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NLP	Non-local Programme
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OBTL	Outcomes-based Teaching and Learning
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAA	Programme Area Accreditation
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PR	Periodic Review
QAC	Quality Assurance Council
QF-EHEA	Qualifications Framework in the European Higher Education Area
QFS	Qualifications Framework Secretariat

QR	Qualifications Register
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SCS	Specification of Competency Standards
SGC	Specification of Generic (Foundation) Competencies
SSPU	Self-financed Sub-degree Programme Unit
UGC	University Grants Committee
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VTC	Vocational Training Council

Executive Summary

1.   The Education Bureau (EDB) of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group (EQF AG) have conducted a comparability study (the Study) on the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) and the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF).   The Study is undertaken by a Joint Technical Group (JTG) consisting of representatives of the EDB and the EQF AG, with the objective of improving the understanding of Hong Kong qualifications in Europe and the understanding in Hong Kong of qualifications linked to the EQF via the referencing of national qualification levels to the EQF. It is expected that the mutual understanding and trust generated by the process of the Study can facilitate qualifications recognition, support mobility of learners and labour, and enhance opportunities for future cooperation between Hong Kong and Europe.

2.   In order to create the greatest possible degree of confidence in the findings of the Study, the JTG has established five Principles to assess the comparability of the two frameworks, relating to the key aspects of transparency of governance, level-to-level comparability, the learning outcomes basis of the frameworks, the accreditation of qualifications for inclusion on the frameworks and the underpinning quality assurance systems.   Examination of the two frameworks under the five Principles is described in detail in this report.

3.   In Hong Kong, the Study is overseen by a Local Expert Group consisting of key stakeholders from different sectors. The Local Expert Group under the chairmanship of the EDB is assisted by a Project Consultant. Wide stakeholder engagement throughout the process has been achieved by means of a series of Focus Group sessions at the beginning of the Study and a process of public consultation to review the Study findings.

4.   The HKQF is a local qualifications framework consisting of a hierarchy of seven levels. In order to be included in the framework at a particular level, qualifications must be formally accredited as being capable of delivering the learning outcomes specified in four domains of the Generic Level Descriptors (Knowledge and Intellectual Skills; Processes; Application, Autonomy and Accountability; and Communication, IT and Numeracy). The EQF is a meta-framework consisting of eight levels, designed to act as a hub or translation device. Learning outcomes are defined under three domains of Level Descriptors (Knowledge; Skills; and Competence).   By referencing their National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) to the EQF, European countries are able to compare their own qualifications to those of other countries engaged in the EQF referencing process.

5.   To ensure the reliability of the level-to-level comparison, the EDB and the EQF AG have, separately, undertaken an independent detailed analysis of the level descriptors of the two frameworks and both arrive at the same conclusions, which are corroborated by reference to the social context of qualifications at the comparable levels of the HKQF and of NQFs referenced to the EQF.

6.   The-level-to-level comparison is shown below:

HKQF	EQF
Level 7	Level 8
Level 6	Level 7
Level 5	Level 6
Level 4	Level 5
Level 3	Level 4
Level 2	Level 3
Level 1	Level 2
No match	Level 1

7.   This report is divided into eight sections, each of which has contributions from both the EDB and the EQF AG:

- Introduction
- Methodology of Comparability Study
- Principle 1: The roles and responsibilities of the EDB, the QFS[1], the HKCAAVQ[2] in relation to the HKQF and the corresponding authorities for the EQF are clear and transparent
- Principle 2: Comparison of the HKQF and the EQF demonstrates matching between the levels of the two frameworks
- Principle 3: The HKQF and the EQF are based on learning outcomes
- Principle 4: The policies and processes for the inclusion of qualifications on the HKQF and the European national frameworks referenced to the EQF are clear and transparent
- Principle 5: Both qualifications frameworks are underpinned by quality assurance and are consistent with international quality assurance principles
- Conclusion

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[1] Qualifications Framework Secretariat
[2] Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications

Section 1: Introduction

This joint report is prepared by a joint working group of the Education Bureau (EDB) of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) and the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group (EQF AG) (namely, the Joint Technical Group (JTG)) that has conducted a detailed comparative analysis of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) and the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF). Membership and terms of reference of JTG are at **Appendix 1**. This report analyses the technical and conceptual characteristics of the respective frameworks in the context for which they are designed and, by comparing the two frameworks, seeks to identify key aspects of similarities and differences and thereby determine the comparability between them.

The purpose of this comparative analysis is to create a "zone of mutual trust" and thereby improve the understanding of Hong Kong qualifications in Europe and the understanding in Hong Kong of qualifications linked to the EQF via the referencing of national qualifications systems/frameworks and their levels to the EQF. It is expected that the mutual understanding, transparency and trust generated by the process can facilitate qualification recognition, support mobility of learners and labour, and enhance opportunities for future cooperation between Hong Kong and Europe.

International comparability of qualifications is important to Hong Kong and Europe, and is articulated through the objectives and policies of their qualifications frameworks (QFs). One of the objectives of developing QFs is to facilitate the recognition of qualifications in order to enhance the mobility of learners and workers - both within and between countries and territories. QFs are rapidly emerging around the world. Research conducted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Education (CEDEFOP) and the European Training Foundation (ETF) shows that in 2015, more than 150 countries and territories are involved in the development and implementation of QFs[3]. International cooperation in using National QFs (NQFs) via transnational frameworks for recognition purposes has become a growing trend. The same is true for meta- or regional QFs to which NQFs of that region are referenced.[4]

QFs form part of the education and training system of a country or territory and its quality assurance (QA) framework, and can improve stakeholders' confidence and trust in the education and training system. The knowledge and understanding of the QA mechanisms underpinning both frameworks gained through this comparative analysis provides a sound basis for strengthening mutual trust and understanding of QFs and qualifications, and more importantly, their applications in the real world. This also empowers decision-makers to recognise qualifications in the context of their frameworks to better support learner and labour mobility.

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[3] http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/2213.(Global inventory of regional and national qualifications frameworks)

[4] EQF, ASEAN qualifications reference framework, the Caribbean Qualifications Framework, the Gulf Qualifications Framework, the Pacific Qualifications Framework, the Southern African Development Community Qualifications Frameworks and the Transnational Qualifications Framework for the Virtual University of Small States of the Commonwealth

10

Role and Development of the EQF

The EQF is one of the core European instruments for supporting the cross-border mobility of learners and labour and facilitating the recognition of qualifications and lifelong learning across Europe. The development and implementation of the EQF is based on the "*Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning*" adopted in 2008. [5] The objective of this Recommendation is to create a common reference framework which would serve as a translation device between different qualifications systems/ frameworks and their levels, whether for general and higher education or for vocational education and training. The core of the EQF is its eight reference levels defined in terms of learning outcomes in three domains, i.e. Knowledge, Skills and Competence. The main goal of the EQF is to improve the transparency, comparability and portability of citizens' qualifications issued in accordance with the practice in different European Union (EU) member states. As a meta-framework, the EQF does not itself contain any qualifications. Qualifications of EU member states are included and allocated to levels in their NQFs which are referenced to the EQF. The Recommendation is principally concerned with the relationships of qualifications systems/frameworks within Europe and does not contain a mandate to engage in formal agreements with countries outside Europe relating their NQFs to the EQF.

"EQF referencing" is the process that results in the establishment of a relationship between national qualifications systems/frameworks and their levels and the EQF. Through this process, national authorities responsible for qualifications systems/frameworks, in cooperation with stakeholders responsible for developing and using qualifications, define the correspondence between the national qualifications system/framework and their levels and the eight levels of the EQF. The results of this process are described in "EQF referencing reports", following the 10 agreed referencing criteria and procedures[6].

As of June 2016, 29 European countries have referenced their national qualifications levels to the EQF. These countries are Austria, Belgium (FL, FR), Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK. Other participating European countries are expected to present their referencing reports in 2016/17.

The development of NQFs in Europe is partly inspired by the Bologna process and the agreement of ministers of higher education to implement QFs in the European higher education area (the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA [7])). All countries involved in EQF implementation are participating in the Bologna process. Twenty-five countries have "self-certified" their higher education

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[5] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:111:0001:0007:EN:PDF (The Official Journal of the European Union (6.5.2008))
[6] https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/criteria_en.pdf
[7] http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/qf/qf.asp (Qualification Frameworks in the EHEA)

qualifications to the QF-EHEA. Countries are increasingly combining the processes of referencing to the EQF and self-certification to the QF-EHEA[8]; Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia have produced joint reports on both processes, reflecting the priority given to the development and adoption of comprehensive NQFs covering all levels and types of qualifications. It is expected that this approach will be chosen by most countries preparing to reference to the EQF in 2015/16. This development reflects the increasingly close cooperation between the two European framework initiatives, also illustrated by regular meetings between EQF national coordination points and Bologna framework coordinators.

Role and Development of HKQF

In 2000, in response to the advent of globalisation, rapid advances in technology and Hong Kong's further transformation into a knowledge-based economy, the HKSAR Government announced its intention to co-operate with the education, industrial and commercial sectors to develop a platform to support lifelong learning, and commissioned a study on the implications of establishing a QF for Hong Kong.

After a detailed study and extensive consultation with stakeholders, the HKSAR Government endorsed the establishment of the HKQF and its underpinning QA mechanism in February 2004. The aim of establishing the HKQF is to provide a platform for lifelong learning with a view to enhancing the capability and competitiveness of the workforce. The HKQF will help define the standards of qualifications, assure their quality, and develop articulation ladders between different levels of qualifications across the academic, vocational and continuing education sectors.

The HKQF was formally launched in 2008. In the same year, the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 592) (AAVQ Ordinance), which provides a legal framework for the QA mechanism underpinning the HKQF, came into force. Since then, the HKQF has made steady progress with a number of significant developments, including the introduction of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism; the Award Titles Scheme; the use of QF credit; the promulgation of a set of policy and principles for credit accumulation and transfer (CAT); and the development of a set of operational guidelines for CAT.

In 2014, the Chief Executive of the HKSAR Government announced in his Policy Address the establishment of a QF Fund amounting to HK$1 billion (€ 115 million) to provide steady financial resources to support and sustain the development and implementation of the HKQF. The Fund was established on 1 September 2014 and has been used to provide funding for various support schemes, projects, and promotional initiatives related to the HKQF.

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[8] Self-certification reports verify the compatibility of the national framework for higher education with the QF-EHEA. Self-certification is done on basis of the 'Dublin Descriptors', which are fully compatible with the descriptors of EQF levels 5-8. – cf. http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Documents/QF-EHEA-May2005.pdf

Comparability Study of HKQF and EQF

In 2012, the EDB commissioned an external consultant to conduct a feasibility study to assess the readiness of the HKQF to undertake a comparability study with the EQF and other national and regional frameworks. This study has found that the HKQF has a comprehensive architecture and has been effectively implemented. It concludes that the HKQF is sufficiently well established to benefit from international comparison. In October 2014, the EDB was invited to present the HKQF to the EQF AG at a meeting held in Belgium. The presentation was well-received and both the EDB and representatives of the European Commission (EC) and the EQF AG supported the proposal to undertake a joint comparability study (the Study). Following the EQF AG meeting, the JTG formed for conducting the Study held its first meeting and discussed the preparatory and initial work for the Study.

The Study commenced on 26 November 2014 at an international conference held in Hong Kong entitled: *"Qualifications Across Boundaries: Perspectives of Hong Kong Qualifications Framework and European Qualifications Framework"*[9]. The conference was attended by over 300 local and overseas participants from various countries. Representatives of the European Commission and the EQF AG were speakers at the conference. The JTG held its second meeting immediately after the conference in Hong Kong, in which the EQF AG and the EDB separately presented risk and benefit analyses of the Study. The analyses were subsequently reviewed and updated in the light of experience and issues arising.

Aim and Limitation of the Study

The aim of the Study is to promote transparency and comparability of qualifications between Hong Kong and European countries. This signifies an important development of the HKQF in the international context and helps strengthen Hong Kong's position as a leading business and education hub.

The HKQF and the EQF differ in their purpose and functioning. This report clarifies the relationships between the HKQF and the EQF on a technical level, taking into account the similarities and differences between the two frameworks. The term "comparability" is used to express a clear distinction from the formal process of "referencing" European NQFs to the EQF. The Study consists of a detailed comparative analysis to determine the relationship between the HKQF and the EQF in terms of their purpose, structure, levels and underpinning QA mechanisms. It does not intend to introduce changes to either of the QFs. While a different terminology has been adopted for the process, the approaches and processes of comparison are equally stringent as those of referencing and the findings of the Study should be treated with the same level of trust and respect.

The Study does not establish formal links between the HKQF and the EQF or European NQFs. Nevertheless the role of the EQF as a central "hub" or reference point will facilitate direct dialogue about qualifications between Hong Kong and European countries whose NQFs are referenced to the EQF. The Study will also make it easier for education

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9   http://www.hkqf.gov.hk/guie/RC_evt_20141126.asp   (Qualification Across Boundaries: Perspectives of Hong Kong Qualifications Framework and European Qualifications Framework)

and training institutions, employers and recognition bodies in European countries to develop an understanding of the HKQF and build links with their Hong Kong counterparts and vice versa. Analysis of the comparability, similarities and differences between the HKQF and the EQF also strengthens the overall credibility of the EQF as a reference framework.

While it is possible that findings of the Study may be used by individuals or organisations to assess individual qualifications from one framework to another, it should be clear that holders of Hong Kong and European qualifications will not be entitled, on the basis of the Study, to claim automatic recognition of their qualifications. Qualifications assessment and recognition remain the responsibility and prerogative of the relevant qualifications recognition authorities.

Nevertheless, it is envisaged that the outcomes of the Study may serve as a basis to support transparent and consistent qualifications recognition decisions by the designated authorities, informed by a strong understanding and appreciation of the learning outcomes delivered by the qualifications that are included in the HKQF on one hand, and those that are linked to the EQF through referencing of European NQFs to the EQF on the other.

This report will also be useful for people in the European countries seeking to understand Hong Kong qualifications, their position in the Hong Kong education system and the QA system that underpins the HKQF; and vice versa for Hong Kong people in the context of the NQFs that have been referenced to the EQF. This includes people responsible for making decisions in relation to the admission of international students and for the employment of personnel holding qualifications from national educations systems referenced to the EQF.

The intended audiences for this report also include policy makers within Hong Kong, Europe and beyond who wish to gain further understanding of the commonality and differences between the HKQF and the EQF. This report may be used in this context as a resource to inform policy decision-making for future education and training cooperation and engagement, particularly in key policy areas of strategic importance to Hong Kong and Europe.

Hong Kong and Europe Relations

The EU and Hong Kong have long had strong bilateral relations and cooperate on a range of economic, social and political issues. After the Mainland China, the EU is Hong Kong's largest trading partner and Hong Kong continues to provide a familiar and convenient gateway for trading flows between the Mainland China and the EU. There are some 2000 EU companies operating in a wide variety of sectors in Hong Kong. In 2013, the bilateral trade between the two territories amounted to around HK$650 billion (€75 billion).

EU companies continue to prosper under the Hong Kong-Mainland China Closer Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), with many EU companies registered as "Hong Kong service suppliers". In accordance with the Basic Law of the HKSAR, Hong Kong is treated by the EU as a separate entity from the Mainland China for trade policy purposes.

The European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) issue a joint annual report on political and economic developments in the HKSAR. The latest report was issued in April 2015.[10]

The EU and Hong Kong hold annual Structured Dialogue meetings (the latest took place on 11 November 2014 in Brussels[11]) to take stock of ongoing co-operations and explore potential new areas of work. Issues discussed are wide-ranging including economic policy; regulation of the financial sector; education; intellectual property protection; etc.

Cooperation between the EU and Hong Kong in the field of higher education is increasing. Through the Erasmus Plus programme, Hong Kong students and PhD candidates receive funding to study in various European universities.[12] The European Union Academic Programme (EUAP) Hong Kong is funded by the EU. In 2012, four local universities (Hong Kong Baptist University, Lingnan University, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, and The University of Hong Kong) formed a consortium to create regional synergies in EU Studies. The EUAP is designed to strengthen EU-Hong Kong relations through academic activities and network building with local, regional and European partners. The EUAP promotes public awareness of the EU, its impact on, and its relationship with Hong Kong. The EUAP also promotes academic excellence in EU Studies by building on and further extending existing academic and research activities, and by developing new multidisciplinary activities in the tertiary institutions and for secondary schools in Hong Kong.[13]

Some European countries have already established bilateral relationships or agreements with Hong Kong in the matters of qualifications. The present Study does not invalidate or undermine these agreements nor take them as a constraint on its own independent consideration of the HKQF and the EQF. The Study does not imply any extension to these agreements nor require other countries to engage in similar processes. They are documented below demonstrating some of the understanding and trust that has already been established between European countries and Hong Kong:

> (a)   In March 2012, the EDB signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership to enhance collaboration and facilitate exchange and experience sharing on QFs[14]; and

> (b)   An MOU between the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic

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[10]   http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52015JC0012&from=EN (Joint Report to the European Parliament and the Council: HKSAR Annual Report 2014)
[11]   http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/hong_kong/documents/news/2014_sd_press_statement.pdf (Joint Press Statement: Structured Dialogue meeting between European Union and the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region explores ways to deepen relations)
[12] http://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/hong_kong/documents/more_info/publications/key_facts_leaflet_hk_04_en.pdf (European Union Office to Hong Kong and Macao: Key Facts)
[13]   http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/hong_kong/education/eu_academic_programme/index_en.htm (European Union Office to Hong Kong and Macao: EU Education)
[14]   http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr14-15/english/panels/mp/papers/mp20150120cb2-651-4-e.pdf, p.4 (Legislative Council Panel on Manpower: Policy Initiative on Qualifications Framework by Education Bureau)

15

and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) and Quality and Qualifications Ireland
was signed in October 2014. Under the agreement, the two agencies agree to
cooperate by exchanging information, recognising each other's decisions and
cooperating with each other in QA activities where feasible.[15]

Hong Kong and International Collaborations in QF

In addition to the MOUs cited above, the EDB and the Qualifications Framework
Secretariat (QFS) have been active both regionally and internationally to collaborate with
other authorities in the field of QF development:

(a)   In May 2011, the QFS and the Guangdong Occupational Skill Testing
Authority (OSTA) of China signed a "Letter of Intent on Enhancing the Exchange
on and Transferability of Vocational Standards and Qualifications Recognition
between Hong Kong and Guangdong";

(b)   In March 2014, the EDB signed a Cooperation Arrangement with the
New Zealand Qualifications Authority; and

(c)   In July 2015, the QFS signed an MOU with the Thailand Professional
Qualifications Institute.

Regional recognition of the HKQF is also evident from the fact that Hong Kong has been
invited to collaborate with the Office of the Education Council of Thailand and the Task
Force of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Qualifications Reference
Framework. In addition, the EDB and the QFS have been working with several ASEAN
member states in the context of information and experience sharing in the development
of QF

Hong Kong and International Education

Education expenditure constitutes over one-fifth of the total recurrent expenditure of the
HKSAR Government. A brief description of the Hong Kong education system is at
Appendix2. The Government's target is to develop Hong Kong as a regional education
hub. Policies to support this goal include the provision of scholarships and relaxing the
immigration and employment restrictions for non-local students. The HKQF is one of the
few QFs around the world that permits the inclusion of non-local qualifications.
Programmes of overseas institutions which are offered in Hong Kong may be locally
accredited and placed on the Qualifications Register (QR) of HKQF.

In the 2014/15 academic year, some 15,200 non-local students studied in publicly-
funded institutions in Hong Kong. Among them, around 1 600 students studying full-
time in Hong Kong are from countries in Europe.

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[15]   http://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Memorandum%20of%20Understanding%20-
%20QQI%20and%20HKCAAVQ,%20Hong%20Kong.pdf (Memorandum of Understanding between
Quality and Qualifications Ireland, Dublin, Ireland and the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of
Academic and Vocational Qualifications, Hong Kong)

Hong Kong also encourages student exchanges, and has extended the policy on student exchange from degree students to sub-degree students. In the 2014/15 academic year, publicly-funded tertiary institutions received about 1,400 students from European countries, while about 1,200 Hong Kong students took part in exchange activities in Europe.

Students from the EU member states are eligible to apply for subsidy under the Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme, which aims to attract academically strong students around the world to pursue PhD study in Hong Kong. The Scheme provides a monthly stipend and travel allowance to awardees for a period of three years.

Apart from student exchanges, the HKSAR Government encourages academic links and research collaboration between academics in the EU and Hong Kong through Joint Research Schemes operated by the Research Grants Council. There are currently around 700 research collaborations between institutions in Europe and publicly-funded institutions. Hong Kong institutions have also been active in the Erasmus Mundus programme and one higher education institution has received grants to sponsor incoming and outgoing visiting scholars. More than 170 incoming and outgoing scholars have benefitted from the grants since 2010.

National Education Systems in Europe

All European countries participating in the EQF have their own education system(s). It is beyond the scope of this report to provide a description of them. Information on the education systems in the different countries participating in the EQF can be found on the website of the Eurydice network [16]. This network supports and facilitates European cooperation in the field of lifelong learning by providing information on education systems and policies in 37 countries and by producing studies on issues common to European education systems.

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[16] https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Main_Page

Section 2: Methodology of Comparability Study

Coordination of the Comparability Study

The EDB is the Central Coordination Point for the Study in Hong Kong. The role of the EDB is to:

- provide a single contact point for all matters relating to the Study;
- ensure that the methodology used to compare the HKQF and the EQF is transparent, open and accessible to all stakeholders;
- provide access to information and guidance to stakeholders concerning issues on how Hong Kong qualifications relate to European qualifications under the EQF;
- promote the participation of all relevant stakeholders in the Study; and
- approve the findings of the joint report on behalf of the HKSAR Government.

Joint Technical Group (JTG)

The JTG was set up by the EQF AG and the EDB in October 2014 to advise the two parties on the processes of the Study.

The membership of the JTG consists of representatives from the EDB and the EQF AG, and includes officials from the European Commission and CEDEFOP, and international experts from five EU member states (Croatia, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, and Poland). The JTG is tasked with the responsibility of facilitating information exchange between Hong Kong and EQF AG as well as other EU member states. Among other things, the JTG will report their views and comments on the Study to the EQF AG.

The JTG has held four meetings to advise on the comparative analysis and help coordinate the production of the joint report.

Local Expert Group

A Local Expert Group (LEG) was set up in Hong Kong to assist the EDB in steering and overseeing the process of the Study. The LEG is supported by a Project Consultant in conducting the comparison. The membership and terms of reference of LEG are at **Appendix3**.

Stakeholder Engagement and Public Consultation

In order to collect comments and views from Hong Kong stakeholders about the Study, five Focus Group (FG) meetings were held between February and April 2015 in Hong Kong. The methodology and issues of concern in the comparison process were presented at the meetings by the EDB, the QFS and the Project Consultant. Attendees were invited to make comments and raise questions about the aims and approaches of the Study.

Each of the five FG meetings was held for a specific group of stakeholders of the relevant sectors, as follows:

- leading education institutions and QA bodies;
- professional associations and HR professionals;
- smaller and vocational training providers, and labour unions;
- industry and trade associations, multi-national corporations, trade offices of EU and neighbouring countries; and
- Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs).

All participants in the FG meetings were highly supportive of the Study. Representatives of industry and labour organisations could see how the Study might help in staff recruitment and labour mobility. Participants were of the view that a "reality check" of the findings of the comparative analysis by reference to benchmark qualifications would be necessary to provide evidence of the accuracy of the level-to-level comparison.

Upon completion of the Study, a public consultation was conducted on 22 September 2015 to seek views of stakeholders on the findings of the Study as endorsed by the LEG and the JTG. A consultative forum was attended by around 300 people from different sectors. Attendees expressed confidence in the methodology and findings of the Study. The public consultation period lasted from 2 September to 2 October 2015, and stakeholders were encouraged to give their views on the Study and the findings, in writing or through the website.

On the European side, the main stakeholder forum is the EQF AG, composed of country representatives as well as European level education and labour market stakeholders. Furthermore, the ongoing activities in the context of the international dimension of the EQF have been presented to the Education Committee, which is a working group under the EU Council of Ministers.

Principles of the Comparability Study

To ensure the rigour and credibility of the Study, the EQF AG and the EDB have agreed that five Principles, adapted from the EQF referencing criteria, should be applied in the comparison of the HKQF and the EQF. The five Principles are applicable to both frameworks reflecting that this is a joint study between the EDB and the EQF AG. The Principles are listed below:

Principle 1
The roles and responsibilities of the EDB, QFS, HKCAAVQ in relation to the HKQF and the corresponding authorities for the EQF are clear and transparent.

Principle 2
Comparison of the HKQF and the EQF demonstrates matching between the levels of the two frameworks.

Principle 3
The HKQF and the EQF are based on learning outcomes.

Principle 4
The policies and processes for the inclusion of qualifications on the HKQF and the European national frameworks referenced to the EQF are clear and transparent.

Principle 5

Both qualifications frameworks are underpinned by quality assurance and are consistent with international quality assurance principles.

Detailed comparison of the two frameworks under the five Principles is provided in **Sections 3 to 7**.

Section 3: Principle 1

The roles and responsibilities of the EDB, the QFS, the HKCAAVQ in relation to the HKQF and the corresponding authorities for the EQF are clear and transparent.

Summary

This section seeks to demonstrate that the roles and responsibilities of the authorities overseeing the HKQF and the EQF are clear and transparent.

The EDB of the HKSAR Government has overall responsibility for developing and implementing the HKQF. In this role it is assisted by an executive arm, the QFS. The HKCAAVQ is legally mandated as the Accreditation Authority (for operators without self-accrediting power) and QR Authority of the HKQF. In respect of the Study, the EDB acts as the Central Coordination Point for Hong Kong.

In Europe, the EQF AG, chaired by the EC, oversees EQF implementation. This body comprises representatives of all participating countries, Council of Europe, EU social partners, CEDEFOP, ETF and other stakeholders. National Coordination Points have been established in all participating countries to facilitate communication and support referencing of NQFs to the EQF.

EDB and QFS

The EDB is responsible for formulating, developing and implementing the policies in respect of education from pre-primary to tertiary level in Hong Kong as well as the HKQF. The EDB also oversees the operation of educational programmes under its purview.

The QFS is the executive arm of the EDB and is responsible for assisting the EDB in developing and implementing the HKQF.

HKCAAVQ

The HKCAAVQ is an independent statutory body set up under the HKCAAVQ Ordinance (Cap. 1150) to provide QA and assessment services to education and training institutions, course providers and the general public across the academic and vocational sectors. In addition to these functions, the HKCAAVQ also provides advisory and consultancy services on education qualifications and standards to government bureaux and private organisations in Hong Kong.

In 2008 when the HKQF was formally launched, the HKCAAVQ was designated as the Accreditation Authority and QR Authority of the HKQF under the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (AAVQ Ordinance) (Cap. 592)[17]. The functions of the Accreditation Authority are to develop and implement a mechanism for

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[17] http://www.legislation.gov.hk/blis_pdf.nsf/6799165D2FEE3FA94825755E0033E532/08A299C8E0 1C2F21482575EF001FFE6F?OpenDocument&bt=0 (AAVQ Ordinance (Cap. 592))

accreditation of academic and vocational qualifications to underpin the HKQF including conducting accreditation tests to assure the quality of qualifications and their associated learning programmes.

In its role as the QR Authority, the HKCAAVQ's functions include:

- Determining the entry of a qualification onto, and removal of such qualification from, the QR;
- Ensuring and enhancing the credibility of the QR structure; and
- Monitoring advertisements relating to the HKQF to prevent misrepresentation.

Further details of the QA processes operated by the HKCAAVQ can be found in **Sections 6 and 7** of this report.

The EQF Recommendation

The development and implementation of the EQF is based on the "*Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning*". The objective of this Recommendation is to create a common reference framework which serves as a translation device between different qualifications systems/frameworks and their levels, whether for general and higher education or for vocational education and training. This EQF Recommendation was adopted in 2008 and calls on member states particularly to:

- Link their national qualification systems/frameworks to the EQF ("EQF referencing");
- Indicate the EQF level on all newly issued certificates, diplomas or Europass documents; and
- Designate national coordination points to support and guide the relationship between national qualifications systems and the EQF.

Governance of EQF at European Level

At the EU level, the EQF AG, chaired by the EC, oversees EQF implementation. It comprises representatives of all participating countries, Council of Europe, EU social partners, CEDEFOP, ETF and other important EU stakeholders (e.g. public employment services, student union, lifelong learning stakeholders). The work of EQF AG is organised in the form of regular meetings (4-5 per year), peer learning activities and working groups. CEDEFOP supports the work of EQF AG by providing analytical and progress reports for discussion.

The EQF AG has adopted 10 criteria and procedures[18] to ensure that NQFs are referenced to the EQF in a coherent and transparent way. Transparent procedures for including qualifications into the NQF, underpinning QA arrangements and the requirement to demonstrate a clear and demonstrable link between the national qualifications levels and the EQF are among the most important ones. The criteria also help structure the referencing reports that countries present to the EQF AG, which discusses these reports and provides feedback to the presenting countries. The presentation and discussion of the reports are intended to improve understanding of qualification systems among countries.

The second important network at European level is the National Coordination Points (NCPs). The 2008 EQF Recommendation invites countries to set up NCPs to be able to "speak with one voice" on behalf of complex national qualifications systems. This is considered necessary to achieve consistent referencing of NQFs to the EQF. NCPs have been established in all participating countries. They support the referencing to the EQF and in some countries they are also in charge of overall NQF coordination and promotion. The institutional basis of the NCPs varies largely between countries and includes NCPs operating under the remit of ministries of education or labour, NCPs situated within the same organisation as the ENIC/NARIC Centre[19], independent organisations and NCPs operating as joint initiatives of several government bodies.

EQF Implementation at National Level in European Countries

The EQF has been the main catalyst for the rapid development and implementation of learning outcomes-based NQFs in Europe.[20] Nearly all countries participating in the EQF referencing process see NQFs as necessary for relating national qualifications levels to the EQF in a transparent and trustworthy manner. The NQFs developed in European countries may differ from one another in format and function. The EQF referencing reports are produced to provide transparency and evidence on how the 10 referencing criteria are met.

The development of NQFs and the referencing to the EQF is organised at national level according to the structures and requirements of the respective countries. The national authorities responsible for these processes are usually ministries responsible for education and training and/or qualification authorities. These processes are carried out in cooperation with key stakeholders.

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[18] See Criteria and procedures for referencing national qualifications levels to the EQF, http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/index.cfm?do=groupDetail.groupDetailDoc&id=10973&no=2

[19] Networks of academic recognition centres (the European network of information centres (ENIC) and the National academic recognition information centres (NARIC), http://www.enic-naric.net/

[20] Cedefop. 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2014. Overview and analysis of NQF developments in Europe. http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/national-qualifications-frameworks

Section 4: Principle 2

Comparison of the HKQF and the EQF demonstrates matching between the levels of the two frameworks.

Summary

This section explains how the two frameworks and their levels compare with each other.

The structural comparison of the two frameworks has revealed a number of similarities as well as differences in terms of their purposes, structures and functions. The HKQF is a local framework consisting of seven levels and learning outcomes are described in four domains. The EQF is a regional reference framework consisting of eight levels with three domains in its level descriptors. The EQF does not contain any qualifications.

Both the HKQF and the EQF have carried out an independent level-to-level comparison of the two frameworks, and both parties have reached the same conclusion on the outcome of the comparison. The comparison shows that there are good matches between levels in the two frameworks. The level-to-level comparison is summarised below:

HKQF Level	Matching EQF Level
Level 7	Level 8
Level 6	Level 7
Level 5	Level 6
Level 4	Level 5
Level 3	Level 4
Level 2	Level 3
Level 1	Level 2
No match	Level 1

Methodological Approach

The underlying principle is that the processes and outcomes of the comparison must be transparent and relevant to generate trust in the findings. To determine the comparability of the levels of the HKQF and the EQF, the following methods have been applied:

- Broad structural comparison of the two frameworks (comparing the architecture and policy of the two frameworks, the concepts of learning outcomes on which they are based, a vertical and horizontal analysis of the level descriptors and the way the levels are defined);

- Technical comparison of the two frameworks including a linguistic/textual analysis of the expected learning outcomes statements of the level descriptors in the two frameworks;
- Contextual matching and use of typical examples of qualification types linked to levels to enrich context;
- Social context matching; and
- Consultation on the findings of comparison between both frameworks.

The broad structural comparison of the two frameworks is followed by a holistic overall comparison of the learning outcomes statements of the two frameworks. The outcome statements of the two frameworks which describe the learning outcomes at each level are examined by comparing printed versions of the two frameworks side by side in order to identify the extent of matching between the HKQF and the EQF levels. This is a useful first step, but because of the different ways in which the descriptors are expressed and the difference in domain taxonomy, the possibility of subjectivity of interpretation exists.

After completion of the broad structural comparison, the four domains *(Knowledge and Intellectual Skills; Processes; Application, Autonomy and Accountability; and Communication, IT and Numeracy)* of the HKQF and the three domains *(Knowledge, Skills and Competence)* of the EQF are analysed using a linguistic approach.

While the broad structural and technical comparisons are useful to provide an initial view on how the HKQF and the EQF levels match each other, the differences between the two frameworks in terms of forms and conceptualisation require more in-depth research and analyses to make the comparison credible. Typical qualifications linked to levels are used to enrich the context and deepen the comparison. This process is further supplemented by a detailed analysis of the fourth domain of the HKQF *(i.e. Communication, IT and Numeracy)*, as well as a vertical analysis of the outcome statements in each domain to show how learning outcomes at each level increase in complexity as they progress upwards. In accordance with the principle of "Best Fit" (see definition at Para 4.4.3), other factors have also been taken into account before final judgements of comparability are made.

Broad Structural Comparison between HKQF and EQF

The broad structural comparison of the HKQF and the EQF is undertaken, covering their purposes, basic principles, structure and the way the level descriptors are defined.

The HKQF

The HKQF is a seven-level hierarchy covering qualifications in the academic[21], vocational and continuing education sectors. Qualifications recognised under the HKQF are quality assured and level-rated in accordance with objective and well-defined standards. These

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[21] Academic qualifications listed on the HKQF are mainly at post-secondary education level (HKQF Level 4 and above). Specific levels of the HKQF are benchmarked against general education attainments at secondary levels by design. However, the general education attainments do not appear in the QR.

qualifications are characterised and distinguished from one another by their levels, credit values and titles.

Under the HKQF, each qualification is assigned a level to indicate its position in the hierarchy relative to others. The level of a qualification is determined in accordance with a set of generic level descriptors (GLD) [22] which specify, in four domains, the learning outcome standards expected of the qualifications located at each level. The four domains are:

- Knowledge and Intellectual Skills;
- Processes;
- Application, Autonomy and Accountability; and
- Communication, IT and Numeracy.

The learning outcomes reflect the relative depth and complexity of learning to be attained from a qualification, and cover the academic, vocational and professional aspects of the learning.

The GLD are designed as a developmental continuum. A qualification at a higher level of the QF places a higher demand on the learners in respect of knowledge, cognitive abilities and applied skills. The GLD are used to locate a qualification comparatively in the HKQF. The learning outcomes specified in the GLD provide benchmarks for the design of learning programmes at a given level.

The EQF

The EQF is a regional reference framework whose purpose is to improve the transparency, comparability and portability of qualifications in Europe. It takes into account the diversity of national systems and facilitates the translation and comparison of qualifications (VET, higher education, general education) between countries. Its eight learning outcomes-based levels[23] act as a translation grid and shared reference point to which NQFs and their levels are positioned. As a meta-framework, it does not contain qualifications itself. Qualifications are included in and allocated to levels of NQFs which are referenced to the EQF levels.

To fully understand each EQF level, the following principles have to be taken into account:

- The level descriptors refer to both work and study contexts and reflect specialisations as well as generalisations;
- To distinguish between levels and express the increased complexity of learning outcomes, key words are used as indicators of threshold levels,

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[22] The HKQF level descriptors can be found at http://www.hkqf.gov.hk/media/HKQF_GLD_e.pdf
[23] The EQF level descriptors can be found at https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en/content/descriptors-page

e.g. EQF Level 1: "basic general knowledge" and EQF Level 7: "highly specialised knowledge..."; EQF Level 1: "structured context" and EQF Level 5: "context...where there is unpredictable change";

- Each level builds on and subsumes the levels beneath; and
- A full understanding of one particular level requires "horizontal" reading - across the three domains *(Knowledge, Skills and Competence)* - as well as "vertical" reading where lower and higher levels are taken into account.

Similarities and Differences between HKQF and EQF

In terms of similarities, both the HKQF and the EQF are based on learning outcomes (see **Section 5**); each has a hierarchical structure; both are comprehensive and cover all kinds of learning experience; and the statements that define levels are neutral in terms of the learning environment in which the qualification is obtained. In both frameworks, Level 1 is the starting point and each subsequent level builds on the outcomes of the level below.

The differences between the HKQF and the EQF derive principally from their fundamental purpose as a local and a regional framework respectively. The HKQF defines the learning outcomes an individual should have acquired upon completion of an accredited qualification registered at a particular level of the HKQF. The EQF, on the other hand, is a meta-framework intended to function as a translation device to allow comparison between qualifications on different national frameworks. No qualifications are registered on the EQF.

Table 1: Comparison of Definitions in HKQF and EQF

HKQF Definitions	EQF Definitions
A qualification in the Qualifications Register is granted by an education/training operator upon completion of a learning programme. A qualification may also be granted by an appointed assessment agency after successful assessment of the skills, knowledge or experience acquired by an individual in a particular industry.[24]	**A qualification** means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards.

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[24] http://www.hkqr.gov.hk/HKQR/commonMaint.do?go_target=aboutUsGlossary   (The Hong Kong Qualifications Register: Glossary)

HKQF Definitions	EQF Definitions
Award Titles Scheme (ATS) aims to specify the use of award titles permitted at the seven levels of the HKQF. ATS reflects the nature, area of study and hierarchy of the qualification.[25]	No definition of qualification types or titles in the EQF.
Learning outcomes refer to what a learner should know, understand, and/or be able to do upon successful completion of a learning process.	**Learning outcomes** means statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.
HKQF descriptors - domains • Knowledge and Intellectual Skills; • Processes; • Application, Autonomy and Accountability; and • Communication, IT and Numeracy.	**EQF descriptors - domains** • Knowledge; • Skills; and • Competence

There are three obvious differences between the HKQF and the EQF:

- Number of levels in the hierarchy (7 in the HKQF and 8 in the EQF);
- Number of descriptor domains (*4 in the HKQF and 3 in the EQF*); and
- Degree of detail used in the level descriptors.

Each of these differences has created a challenge for the Study. Not only does the number of domains differ between the two frameworks, but, in addition, the domains do not match precisely in meaning or concept. The *Communication, IT and Numeracy* domain in the HKQF is very specific to the education and training context of Hong Kong. Generic foundation competencies in *English, Chinese, IT and Numeracy* at HKQF Level 1 - 4 are defined and adopted across all industries and are subsumed under this domain. In the EQF these generic skills are not explicitly mentioned. The three remaining HKQF domains (*Knowledge and Intellectual Skills*; *Processes*; and *Application, Autonomy and Accountability*) appear at first examination to compare well with the corresponding EQF domains (*Knowledge, Skills and Competence*) at all levels. However, on closer scrutiny, it becomes apparent that there are significant conceptual differences with regard to the outcomes that are included in the various domains. For instance, the HKQF domain "*Knowledge and Intellectual Skills*" contains reference to the depth of knowledge but focusses more on the skills required for the attainment of knowledge.

Because of the different coverage of the EQF domains vis-à-vis those in the HKQF, the statements in each HKQF domain are compared with the relevant statements from one,

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[25] http://www.hkqr.gov.hk/HKQR/commonMaint.do?go_target=aboutUsGlossary (The Hong Kong Qualifications Register: Glossary)

or across two or three EQF domains to which they best relate. For instance, the HKQF domain "*Knowledge and Intellectual Skills*" is compared to the "*Knowledge*", "*Skills*" (with reference to cognitive skills) and "*Competence"* (with reference to responsibility and autonomy) domains of the EQF as shown in Table 2.

The descriptors used in the HKQF are much more detailed than those used in the EQF, particularly at the lower levels. As a result, in addition to undertaking a linguistic analysis of the levels, conceptual comparative techniques are used to establish the underlying meaning of the descriptors.

**Table 2: Comparison of Learning Outcomes of
Level Descriptors of HKQF and EQF**

HKQF Definitions	EQF Definitions	Comments
Knowledge and Intellectual Skills cover the analytical and evaluation skills used to solve problems, and the ability to reflect on, practice and plan and manage learning.	**Knowledge** means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study. In the context of the EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual.	Although the HKQF makes few clear references to knowledge *per se* and concentrates more on skills required for the attainment and application of knowledge, the intent is the same.
	Skills mean the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).	Intellectual skills (HKQF) can be compared to cognitive skills (EQF) used for solving problems. 'Plan and manage learning' (HKQF) can be linked to 'responsibility and autonomy' in study situations (EQF - Competence).
	Competence means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.	

HKQF Definitions	EQF Definitions	Comments
Processes cover the application of judgement, communication skills and the ability to work with others interactively.	**Skills** mean the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments). **Competence** means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.	The 'application of judgement' as well as 'communication skills' (HKQF - Process) can be considered as part of Skills (EQF). The latter is broader in meaning. 'Application of judgment' also informs responsibility and autonomy that is part of competence (EQF). Competence (EQF) can be understood as including 'the ability to work with others' (HKQF), although it is not explicitly mentioned. Again, the meaning of Competence (EQF) is broader.
Application, Autonomy and Accountability The degree of application, autonomy and accountability assumed while practicing those skills.	**Competence** means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.	Both descriptors refer to autonomy and the intention of 'accountability' (HKQF) and 'responsibility' (EQF) seem to be the same.

HKQF Definitions	EQF Definitions	Comments
Communication, IT and Numeracy Skill areas of Communication, IT, and Numeracy.	**Skills** mean the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).	The skill areas 'Communication, IT and Numeracy' (HKQF) are not explicitly mentioned in EQF descriptors. However, they can be considered as included in 'Skills' (EQF).

Level-to-Level Comparison between HKQF and EQF

Both the EDB and the EQF AG conduct an independent level-to-level comparison of the two frameworks. The results are then compared and agreement reached on the conclusions. A short summary of the level-to-level comparison is outlined below. The detailed findings of the level-to-level comparison can be found in **Appendix4**, which provides a textual/linguistic comparison of the level descriptors of each level of the frameworks. The focus of this comparison is not only on the individual descriptors for each domain but also on a combination of descriptors across domains and on their progression from one level to the next level.

The differences between the two frameworks outlined above mean that in some cases it is not possible to identify exact matches between levels. Where a significant match across all domains can be ascertained, this is defined as a "Good Fit" between the levels. For other level comparisons, the concept of "Best Fit", as adopted in EQF referencing reports, is used.

"Best Fit" is a determination, on balance of the relevant factors, of where a QF level on a given framework most appropriately sits in reference to a level on another framework. This principle is used in cases where all three dimensions on the EQF cannot be matched unequivocally against the four dimensions on the HKQF. In these cases, levels are matched to the level where the outcomes descriptors fit the best and the findings are verified by reference to real-life examples of qualifications and contextual background information to find the best fit correlation between levels.

The textual/linguistic comparisons reveal that there are many similarities between the two frameworks in terms of specified outcomes. However, there are also some differences. In some cases different wordings have been used, but a similar meaning can be deduced. Some differences, however, are more fundamental and these are

highlighted in **Appendix 4**. The number of cases of the latter category are few and not of enough significance to undermine the overall findings of the comparison.

The language of the learning outcomes in both the HKQF and the EQF at Level 1 is similar, but the purpose and outcomes of the qualifications that sit at HKQF Level 1 and those referenced to EQF Level 1, seem to be different. The "basic knowledge" and "basic skills" at EQF Level 1 refer to knowledge and skills learners are expected to have acquired upon completion of primary education.   The HKQF does not include achievements which are equivalent to EQF Level 1. Therefore EQF Level 1 does not have a corresponding level in the HKQF.

Technical comparison and contextual background information provide for the best fit for HKQF Level 1 with EQF Level 2. This is because the outcome standards at HKQF Level 1 are, by design, benchmarked to the learning outcomes expected to be achieved by learners who have completed Secondary 3 of general education in Hong Kong (i.e. a school qualification at lower secondary level). There is also a range of VET foundation certificates of various lengths and credit values that offer basic skills training at this Level. Most EU member states have referenced their lower secondary school leaving certificates, or some basic VET certificates, to EQF Level 2. The contextual and social mapping to these levels shows that EQF Level 2 and HKQF Level 1 have similar outcomes for learners. Using the "Best Fit" principle, it can be concluded that HKQF Level 1 is best compared with EQF Level 2.

Although part of the descriptors of HKQF Level 2 seem to be comparable to that of EQF Level 2, HKQF Level 2 descriptors are in several aspects more demanding and better correspond to that of EQF Level 3. Using the "Best Fit" principle, it can be concluded that HKQF Level 2 is best compared with EQF Level 3. This conclusion is supported by contextual and social matching which take into account the overall purpose of qualifications at this level and the value attached to these qualifications in the Hong Kong context. As explained in paragraph 4.4.6 above, the outcome standards at HKQF Level 2 are, by design, benchmarked to the learning outcomes expected to be achieved by learners who have completed Secondary 5 of general education in Hong Kong. Also, a Secondary 5 graduate who had taken the former Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) would be awarded a HKCEE certificate which was widely recognised as the equivalent of the UK GCSE (and UK GCSE at grade A-C is referenced to EQF Level 3). EQF Level 3 is often used for VET qualifications, which are comparable to the Craft certificates at Level 2 of the HKQF. We can thus conclude that HKQF Level 2 is comparable to EQF Level 3.

There is a broad comparability in requirements in terms of knowledge, skills, autonomy, responsibility and accountability between the HKQF Level 3 and EQF Level 4. In Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE), which is the key general education qualification accepted as the entry qualification to post-secondary education including universities, is benchmarked to the outcome standards at HKQF Level 3. HKQF Level 3 also holds the Diploma in Vocational Education (DVE) that qualifies learners to access Higher Diploma programmes at HKQF Level 4. Similarly, European qualifications referenced to EQF Level 4 are general education school-leaving certificates at upper secondary level (giving access to higher education), and VET certificates (school-based

VET and dual VET) at upper-secondary level leading to skilled work and opening pathways to further learning in tertiary education. Overall, HKQF Level 3 best fits with EQF Level 4.

Although part of the descriptors of HKQF Level 4 seem to match those of EQF Level 4, the HKQF Level 4 descriptors seem to be more demanding and match better with those of EQF Level 5. Knowledge and skills requirements seem to be comparable albeit with significant differences in the use of language. The concept of unpredictability in the context of management and supervision appears only in the EQF at this level and may seem to be at a higher level than the HKQF Level 4 descriptors for "Application, Autonomy and Accountability". However, taking into account contextual factors and the fact that HKQF Level 4 functions as the first level of post-secondary education and includes generic qualifications such as the Higher Diploma and Associate Degree, it can be concluded that HKQF Level 4 best fits with EQF Level 5.

There appears to be a good fit between HKQF Level 5 and EQF Level 6 in the domains of knowledge and skills, albeit with some significant difference in the use of language. Nevertheless the level of responsibility in the context of management and supervision appears to be higher at EQF Level 6 than at HKQF Level 5. Applying the "Best Fit" principle and because Bachelor degree qualifications are allocated to HKQF Level 5 and EQF Level 6, it could be concluded that HKQF Level 5 best fits with EQF Level 6.

Based on the linguistic analysis of the descriptors of the two frameworks (i.e. the three domains of the EQF and the four domains of the HKQF), a good fit is found between Level 6 of the HKQF and Level 7 of the EQF. The comparison also takes into account that Master degree qualifications are allocated to these respective levels in both frameworks.

Level 7 of the HKQF, like Level 8 of the EQF, is the most advanced level of the framework. The linguistic comparison suggests that there is a good fit between Level 7 of the HKQF and Level 8 of the EQF in that learners are working/studying at the leading edge of their specialised fields and are contributing to the advancement of knowledge or professional practice. Learning outcomes of Doctorate degree qualifications are linked to these levels in both frameworks.

**Table 3: Summary of Correspondence between Levels
of HKQF and EQF**

HKQF	EQF	Examples of national qualification types (linked to the EQF via NQFs referenced to the EQF)
7 Doctoral Degree	8	**Third cycle degrees (Doctorate)** **Higher professional qualifications** Estonia: occupational qualification 'chartered engineer'
6 Master Degree	7	**Second cycle degrees (Master's)** **Higher professional qualifications** Czech Republic: 'Chemical engineer product 'manager''
5 Bachelor Degree	6	**First cycle degrees (Bachelor's)** Ireland: Honours Bachelor Degree **Higher professional qualifications** Germany: 'Master Craftsman (certified)'
4 Associate Degree Higher Diploma	5	**Short Cycle Higher Education (SCHE) qualifications** **Higher professional qualifications**
3 HK Diploma of Secondary Education Diploma of Vocational Education Yi Jin Diploma	4	**Upper secondary general education certificates** **Upper secondary VET certificates**
2 HK Certificate of Education Examinations Project Yi Jin Craft Certificate	3	**VET qualifications Secondary education certificates**
1 Completion of Secondary 3 Foundation Certificate	2	**Lower-secondary education certificates** **Basic VET qualifications**
	1	**Primary education certificates** **Basic VET qualifications**

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Section 5: Principle 3

The HKQF and the EQF are based on learning outcomes.

Summary

The definitions of "Learning Outcomes" adopted in the two frameworks are similar. In the HKQF, learning outcomes refer to what a learner should know, understand, and/or be able to do upon successful completion of a learning process. The EQF states that learning outcomes are statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process.

The HKQF is a framework based on learning outcomes with each level of the framework expressed in terms of learning outcomes in four domains of the Generic Level Descriptors (GLD). Review of the learning outcomes specified at the programme level forms an integral part of the accreditation processes. The learning outcomes of the HKQF cover all learning activities irrespective of the time, place or mode of learning.

In the EQF, the learning outcomes are expressed in three domains of the level descriptors, which can be achieved from all forms of learning in work and study situations.

Outcomes-based Teaching and Learning (OBTL) in Hong Kong

In recent years, there has been widespread interest in the outcomes of educational experiences and how those outcomes meet a variety of societal needs. International trends in education have shown a shift away from the teacher-centred model that emphasises what is presented, towards a learner-centred model focusing on what students know and can actually do.

Charged with a mandate to advise on the allocation of public funds to higher education, the University Grants Committee (UGC) of Hong Kong engaged a consultant to conduct a review of practices related to learning outcomes in Hong Kong's higher education institutions. In 2006, the UGC issued a directive requiring UGC-funded institutions to adopt an outcomes-based approach in teaching and learning in the four-year honours degree curriculum that would be introduced for the first time in 2012. The UGC, in particular, encouraged teaching staff to adopt OBTL in teaching and increase collaboration and sharing of information among institutions. This initiative has been made possible by a grant of HK$65 million (€7.5 million) across the higher education sector.

In the sub-degree sector, the rapid growth and proliferation of self-financed sub-degree qualifications between 2000 and 2005 gave rise to concerns among the public about the quality and standards of qualifications awarded by self-financing providers. It has become increasingly important for providers to be able to demonstrate the quality and standards of their programmes and to assure the public and stakeholders that their offerings are aligned with societal needs and their awards meet international quality standards. The introduction of the HKQF in 2008 and the development of the

accreditation standards by the HKCAAVQ have further ensured that the OBTL approach is firmly embedded across the education and training sectors.

Outcomes Basis of the HKQF

As described in **Section 4**, the HKQF is a framework based on learning outcomes with each level of the framework expressed in terms of learning outcomes in four domains of the GLD (*Knowledge and Intellectual Skills; Processes; Application, Autonomy and Accountability; and Communication, IT and Numeracy*). Review of learning outcomes at the programme level forms an integral part of the programme accreditation and review processes that underpin the HKQF.   The processes undertaken by the QA bodies responsible for the different sectors of education and training are described in **Sections 6 and 7**.

The assignment of QF credit value to learning programmes registered in the QR is also directly related to learning outcomes in that QF credits are calculated based on the notional learning hours required by an average learner to achieve the intended learning outcomes for each module of a programme, where 10 notional learning hours equates to one QF credit.[26]

According to the policy and principles for credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) under the HKQF promulgated by the EDB, "Decisions regarding credit transfer should be timely, academically defensible, equitable and based on learning outcomes". It also specifies a principle that "in determining the eligibility of credits for recognition and transfer towards a new qualification, receiving institutions should satisfy themselves that the learning outcomes attained are comparable to the required outcomes of the new programme".

Outcomes-based Approach of Accreditation in Hong Kong

HKCAAVQ

The HKCAAVQ is the Accreditation Authority of the HKQF responsible for the accreditation of all learning programmes recognised under the HKQF (other than those provided by institutions with self-accrediting status). The HKCAAVQ publishes open and transparent guidelines with regard to accreditation including the processes, criteria used and the sources of evidence to be examined[27]. The guidelines which relate to learning outcomes are as follows:

Programme Objectives and Learning Outcomes

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[26] http://www.hkqf.gov.hk/guie/HKQF_Credit1.asp (The HKQF: QF Credit)
[27] http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/services/accreditation (The HKCAAVQ: Accreditation)

The learning outcomes should reflect the stated programme objectives, which will be tested through assessment. The evidence from assessments must show that the QF level of the learning outcomes corresponds to the GLD. The sources of evidence include:

- Programme objectives;
- Programme intended learning outcomes;
- Intended learning outcomes of each stream (if applicable); and
- Mapping of intended learning outcomes against programme objectives.

Programme Content and Structure

The content and structure of the learning programmes must be coherent, integrated and effective in enabling students to achieve the stated learning outcomes and the required standards. The learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities and assessments must be coherent, balanced and pitched at the appropriate level in the QF.

Quality Assurance Council (QAC)

The Quality Assurance Council (QAC) was established by the UGC in 2007. The mission of the QAC is to ensure that the quality of educational experience in all first degree level programmes offered by UGC-funded institutions is sustained and improved, and is at an internationally competitive level. The QAC has been tasked to undertake regular quality audits of institutions to monitor the implementation of outcomes-based approaches to teaching and learning.

To assist institutions and audit panels with their preparation for audit, the QAC publishes an Audit Manual[28]. The Manual specifies the factors that will be taken into consideration with regard to the development and implementation of learning outcomes:

- Arrangements for programme design and approval;
- The definition of learning outcomes for programmes and for individual modules;
- Procedures for linking programme outcomes to defined academic standards and qualification descriptors;
- Principles and procedures for assessing the achievement of learning outcomes; and
- Arrangements for programme monitoring and review.

Joint Quality Review Committee (JQRC)

The JQRC was established by the Heads of Universities Committee (HUCOM)[29] of Hong Kong in 2005 to oversee the quality of programmes at sub-degree level and below offered by the self-financed sub-degree programme units (SSPUs) of the UGC-funded institutions. It is the JQRC's responsibility to assess these programmes for classification

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[28] http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/doc/qac/manual/auditmanual2.pdf (Quality Assurance Council: Audit Manual)

[29] The Presidents of the eight UGC-funded institutions meet regularly at HUCOM to deliberate on strategic issues related to the development of the local higher education sector

on the QR[30]. In doing so, the JQRC makes reference to various factors including the
following:

- Proposed QF level;
- QF credits;
- Objectives and learning outcomes;
- Area of study/training; and
- Validity period for registration in the QR.

Learning Outcomes in Vocational Education and Training (VET)

With support from the QFS, various industries in Hong Kong have set up Industry
Training Advisory Committees (ITACs) and drawn up competency requirements and
standards for the industries, known as Specifications of Competency Standards (SCSs),
with reference to the GLD of the HKQF. These competency standards represent the
industry benchmarks for the skills, knowledge and attributes required to perform a task
at a certain level. Each unit of competency within the SCSs is assigned a level based on
the outcome standards of the GLD. The assessment guidelines for the outcome
standards are also stipulated in the SCSs.

In addition to industry-specific competencies, generic competencies (known as
Specification of Generic (Foundation) Competencies (SGCs)) have also been developed
under the HKQF. These are skills and knowledge that are commonly shared across
different industries and trades and are relevant to most people in the workplace. They
are complementary to the industry-specific SCSs. The SGCs cover four strands of
foundation skills, namely, English, Chinese, Numeracy and Information Technology, at
HKQF Level 1 to 4.

Moderation of SCSs and SGCs

SCSs and SGCs developed under the HKQF are moderated by the HKCAAVQ to ensure
that the levels assigned to units of competency in these SCSs and SGCs are accurate,
consistent and meet the requirements of the relevant industries/sectors.

The EDB publishes qualifications guidelines on SCS-based and SGC-based courses[31],
which specify that SCS-based courses are courses designed by training providers using
mainly the SCSs developed by ITACs under the HKQF, and similarly, SGC-based courses
are designed and offered by providers using mainly SGCs.

Learning Outcomes and the EQF

EQF learning outcomes are statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able
to do on completion of a learning process. The eight EQF levels are described in terms of
learning outcomes in three domains *(Knowledge, Skills and Competence)*.

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[30] http://www.jqrc.edu.hk/index.files/QR.htm (Joint Quality Review Committee: Programme
Endorsement for Qualifications Register (QR))
[31] http://www.hkqf.gov.hk/guie/SCS_SCS-based.asp (The HKQF: SCS-based/SGC-based courses)

"Knowledge" is described as theoretical and/or factual; "Skills" are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments); and "Competence" is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy. The outcome statements in these three domains should not be read in isolation from each other.

To understand the characteristics of one level one must undertake "horizontal reading" of the level descriptors. The descriptors cover the full range of learning outcomes, irrespective of the learning or institutional context, from basic education, through school and skilled worker levels up to doctoral or senior professional levels. Each level (from EQF Level 1 to Level 8) builds on and subsumes the levels beneath, and shows the learning outcomes of increased complexity and progression in various dimensions (e.g. complexity and depth of knowledge, the range of complexity of application/practice, etc.). Level descriptors cover both work and study situations, academic as well as vocational settings, and initial as well as continuing education or training, i.e. all forms of formal, non-formal and informal learning.

The requirements for learning outcomes in national frameworks and qualifications referenced to the EQF are set out in EQF referencing criterion 3.

Levels of European NQFs are learning-outcomes-based. NQF level descriptors reflect the EQF level descriptors, and as they are parts of national systems, they also reflect national contexts, values, traditions and objectives. This is especially evident in the way in which countries have designed, adapted and further developed national level descriptors[32].

The learning outcomes approach is implemented widely but not yet comprehensively in European education and training systems.

The emergence and introduction of comprehensive frameworks has made it possible (at least to a certain degree) to approach a shift to learning outcomes in a more systematic and, to some extent, more consistent way.

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[32] Cedefop. 2013. Analysis and overview of national level descriptors http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/6119

Section 6: Principle 4

The policies and processes for the inclusion of qualifications on the HKQF and the European national frameworks referenced to the EQF are clear and transparent.

Summary

All qualifications recognised under the HKQF are placed on a publicly accessible database, the QR. The types of qualification which can be entered onto the QR are defined in legislation and the quality assurance process is conducted or overseen by the relevant QA bodies and the QR Authority. Qualifications must conform to other requirements specified under the HKQF (such as QF credit and use of award titles) for inclusion on the QR. Mechanisms are in place to validate all forms of learning irrespective of level or mode.

Qualifications of European countries are situated on their respective NQFs. They are not directly allocated to EQF levels, but are linked to them via the referencing of national qualifications levels to the EQF levels. In most European countries, the inclusion of qualifications on the NQF is regulated and defined by national acts or regulations.

The HKQF

The purpose of developing the HKQF is to provide a platform for lifelong learning and to enhance the capability and competitiveness of the workforce. A qualification that may be recognised under the HKQF should be an award obtainable by an individual from pursuing a formal learning programme or from assessment of his/her previous informal and non-formal learning through the RPL mechanism.

QR

The QR is a register established by the Secretary for Education under the AAVQ Ordinance (Cap. 592) which contains qualifications recognised under the HKQF. The HKCAAVQ has been specified in the Ordinance as the QR Authority, responsible for developing and maintaining the QR.

The QR is an online database that provides free information for public access on qualifications recognised under the HKQF, including the learning programmes leading to these qualifications and the operators that provide them. It also provides information on qualifications awarded by assessment agencies appointed to conduct RPL assessments.

The AAVQ Ordinance defines the types of qualifications that may be entered in the QR as follows:

- A qualification obtainable from the completion of a learning programme where the Accreditation Authority determines that the learning programme meets a QF standard;

- A qualification obtainable from the completion of a learning programme operated by a self-accrediting operator, or an accredited operator with Programme Area Accreditation [33]status in the related subject area; and
- A qualification related to an industry or a branch of an industry awarded by an assessment agency appointed to conduct RPL assessments where the appointed assessment agency determines that the qualification meets a QF standard.

The QR is a local register and as a general rule, contains programmes accessible to Hong Kong learners. This means the programme registered should primarily be delivered and the assessment conducted in Hong Kong. However, qualifications awarded by a non-local institution (non-local qualifications) may also be registered in the QR after going through local accreditation, if the programmes are delivered in Hong Kong and are accessible to learners locally.

Qualifications eligible for entry into the QR must have been quality assured by the HKCAAVQ as the Accreditation Authority or by a self-accrediting operator. Nine institutions (eight UGC-funded institutions and The Open University of Hong Kong) are specified as self-accrediting operators in the AAVQ Ordinance. The HKCAAVQ publishes open and transparent guidelines on accreditation including the processes, criteria used and the sources of evidence to be examined.[34]

In addition to qualifications obtainable from completion of a learning programme, the QR also contains qualifications awarded by assessment agencies appointed under the RPL mechanism. The RPL mechanism is one of the major support measures underpinning the HKQF to provide an alternative route for experienced employees to acquire a QF-recognised qualification without necessarily going through a formal learning programme. The mechanism has been put in place in 13 industries[35]. The assessment agencies of the RPL mechanism must be accredited by the HKCAAVQ before appointment by the Secretary for Education.

To encourage operators to register qualifications in the QR, the EDB has introduced financial incentive schemes including grants for accreditation of learning programmes and registration of qualifications in the QR[36]. More than 8 000 qualifications are now registered in the QR.

Accreditation of Learning Programmes under HKQF

To ensure the credibility of qualifications awarded by a wide range of education and training providers, the HKQF is underpinned by a robust mechanism of academic and vocational accreditation to assure the quality of qualifications listed on the QR.

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[33] An operator with Programme Area Accreditation status has been deemed capable by the HKCAAVQ of self-accrediting its programmes in a specified programme area at a specified QF level for a specified duration.

[34] http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/services/accreditation (HKCAAVQ: Accreditation criteria)

[35] Printing & Publishing, Watch & Clock, Property Management, Automotive, Jewellery, Logistics, Chinese Catering, Beauty, Hairdressing, Retail, Import & Export, and Elderly Care Service.

[36] http://www.hkqf.gov.hk/guie/DSSQF.asp (Designated Support Schemes for HKQF)

The HKCAAVQ is the Accreditation Authority for HKQF and operates a Four-stage QA Process[37], as described below:

Stage 1 : Initial Evaluation (IE) is a process to assess whether operators are able to achieve their stated objectives and to operate learning programmes that meet the stated QF standards. Operators must have a valid IE status before they are permitted to operate accredited learning programmes.

Stage 2: Learning Programme Accreditation (LPA) is an accreditation exercise through which the HKCAAVQ assesses whether the learning programmes meet the required standards to achieve the stated objectives, and deliver the intended learning outcomes that meet the QF standards. When a learning programme has been accredited, the qualification can be entered into the QR for an approved validity period.

Learning Programme Re-accreditation (re-LPA) is the cyclical evaluation of an accredited learning programme, which determines whether the learning programme continues to meet the stated objectives, and delivers the learning outcomes that meet the QF standards as determined at the LPA stage. The operator is expected to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes and continuous improvement as a result of its internal QA procedures over the validity period. If a learning programme is re-accredited, the programme can stay on the QR for an approved validity period. Under normal circumstances, the validity period is N + 1 years, where N is the programme duration.

Stage 3: Programme Area Accreditation (PAA) is an accreditation step that determines whether operators have robust and well established internal quality assurance systems to self-monitor and accredit their own programmes, taking into account their track record of self-monitoring and assuring the standards of their accredited learning programme(s). Subject to fulfilling certain eligibility criteria, operators may apply to the HKCAAVQ to initiate a PAA exercise in the area of study/training of their accredited learning programmes.

Stage 4: Periodic Review (PR) is a review exercise conducted every five years to determine whether an operator with a valid PAA status are capable of maintaining a robust internal quality assurance system to self-monitor its programmes in the specified programme area(s), and ensure that its operation meets the stated objectives.

The HKCAAVQ follows four guiding principles in conducting the accreditation processes:

- Threshold standard;
- Peer review;
- Fitness for purpose; and
- Evidence based

The accreditation is conducted based on a principle of "threshold standard", which means that an operator must demonstrate that it can operate programmes that meet the QF standards, and that a learning programme must meet a particular QF standard for entry

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[37] http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/services/accreditation/four-stage-qa-process (The HKCAAVQ: Four-Stage Quality Assurance Process)

onto the QR. The QF standards are outcome standards as expressed in the GLD of the HKQF.

The principle of "peer review" is upheld through the engagement of experts in accreditation panels who possess the expertise and experience in the discipline or industry relevant to the programmes under accreditation. The role of the accreditation panel is to review the quality of operators and their learning programmes, collect and evaluate evidence, and form a judgment as to whether the operators and their learning programmes meet the required standards and stated aims and objectives.

"Fitness for purpose" means that the learning outcomes expected of a student upon completion of a learning programme would meet the operator's stated objectives and standards at the level specified for the learning programme.

The principle of "evidence based" means that an accreditation decision is to be made by the accreditation panel with reference to the evidence provided by the operator to support the claim that the programme meets the threshold accreditation standards and its objectives.

As operators are different in various dimensions, including their sizes, complexity of operation and scope of expertise, the HKCAAVQ will take these differences into account in the accreditation processes. The minimum (threshold) standards that must be met by all operators remain the same, but the type of evidence they are required to present may differ.

A transparent approach will be adopted throughout the process so that all parties involved (i.e. the operator and the accreditation panel) have a common understanding of the process and relevant issues that may arise. Throughout the accreditation process, the operator is required to respond to any questions and concerns raised by the accreditation panel and to provide evidence to support its responses. An operator who is aggrieved by a determination and/or decision(s) of the accreditation can lodge an appeal under the AAVQ Ordinance.

The HKCAAVQ publishes a number of guidance notes for operators on its accreditation processes.[38] It also provides guidance notes and a checklist of the key features of Quality Assured Learning Programmes on the QR for self-accrediting operators[39].

Accreditation of Non-local Programmes

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[38] http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/services/accreditation/academic-accreditation   (The HKCAAVQ: Academic Accreditation)

[39]   http://www.hkqr.gov.hk/HKQRPRD/export/sites/default/.content/attachment/en/-EN-1_For_Uploading-3_SpecificSelf-accred-VQ_CAT_QR-Guidance-for-Self-Accrediting-Operators.pdf (The HKCAAVQ: Guidance Notes on Upload of QR Records by Self-Accrediting Operators on the QR (including the SFSD Programmes quality assured by JQRC)

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The HKCAAVQ provides accreditation services for non-local learning programmes (NLP) registered/exempted under the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance (Cap. 493) leading to non-local awards offered in Hong Kong. These are usually programmes offered in Hong Kong by overseas institutions in partnership with local providers.

The accreditation conducted by the HKCAAVQ benchmarks the NLP against Hong Kong's education system and the requirements of the HKQF. The NLP and the associated qualification accredited by the HKCAAVQ can be placed on the QR and recognised under the HKQF[40]. Also, an accredited NLP will enjoy similar status as an accredited local programme, in that providers offering accredited NLPs are eligible for accreditation grants and learners of the programmes may apply for student financial assistance.

Accreditation of NLPs comprises two stages:

- The IE stage is to determine whether an institution or the partnership of a local and a non-local institution is able to achieve its objectives and to operate the learning programmes that meet the claimed QF standards. The institution must demonstrate that it has the ability to effectively manage and provide adequate financial and physical resources for the development, delivery, assessment and QA of the NLPs in all the disciplines covered at the claimed QF level(s);

- The LPA stage is to determine whether the learning programme meets the required standards to achieve its claimed objectives and deliver the intended learning outcomes. The required standards include the outcome standards of the QF and those prescribed in the local education system.

Credit Requirements under HKQF

QF credit is a measurement of the size or volume of learning. It enables learners to know the extent of effort to be spent in order to complete a learning programme (or a module of a programme) and acquire the relevant qualification.

In line with the definition commonly adopted in other economies, one QF credit point consists of 10 notional learning hours. The definition is built upon a learner-centred concept. It is defined in terms of notional learning time, and takes into account the total time likely to be spent by an average learner in all modes of learning in respect of a specified programme, e.g. attendance in classes, experiment in laboratories, supervised or unsupervised sessions, practical learning at workshop, independent study in library, reading at home, and any other forms of study by the learner. Notional learning time is not limited to time-tabled teaching/lecturing hours in classrooms.

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[40]   http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/services/accreditation/non-local-learning-programmes   (The HKCAAVQ: Non-local Learning Programme Accreditation)

To ensure credibility, the QF credit value assigned to a programme is quality assured as part of the accreditation process of the programme. In 2012, the EDB issued a directive that all programmes at HKQF Level 1 to 4 must show their QF credit values on the QR by 1 January 2016. For programmes at HKQF Level 5 to 7, the use of QF credit is not mandatory but providers are encouraged to indicate the QF credit values of these programmes on the QR on a voluntary basis.

Qualification Titles

The Award Titles Scheme (ATS) was introduced in 2012 with the aim of standardising and simplifying the use of titles for qualifications recognised under the HKQF. The ATS also aims to prevent inflation of titles and the provision of misleading information to learners.

Table 4: Award Titles Permitted under Award Titles Scheme

Level	Award Titles Permitted for Each Level						
7	Doctor 博士						
6	Master 碩士	Postgraduate Diploma 深造文憑 Postgraduate Certificate 深造證書	Professional Diploma 專業文憑 Professional Certificate 專業證書	Advanced Diploma 高等文憑 Advanced Certificate 高等證書	Diploma 文憑	Certificate 證書	
5	Bachelor 學士						
4	Associate 副學士	Higher Diploma 高級文憑 Higher Certificate 高級證書					
3							
2							Foundation Certificate 基礎證書
1							

The ATS lists the award titles which providers are permitted to use for the qualifications they offer under the HKQF. The ATS covers qualifications at all QF levels (i.e. Level 1 to 7) in the academic, vocational and continuing education sectors. By 1 January 2016 all existing and new programmes are required to adopt titles that conform to the ATS.

Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)

In July 2014, the EDB promulgated the policy and principles for CAT under the HKQF to further strengthen the support for learning progression for learners[41]. While adoption of the policy and principles by individual providers is voluntary, the aim is to provide a clear policy framework within which they may develop or refine their existing arrangements for credit transfer within and across sectors in line with QF principles, thereby minimising unnecessary duplication of learning by learners and achieving the ultimate objective of

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[41] http://www.hkqf.gov.hk/guie/hkqf_cat.asp (The HKQF: Credit Accumulation and Transfer Policy and Principles)

the HKQF in supporting lifelong learning. Operators can upload information on CAT arrangements at institutional level and for individual programmes to the QR.

The EQF

Allocating Qualifications to Levels of European NQFs

The EQF is a meta-framework which can, in principle, be used as a reference point for all qualifications and all forms of learning whatever route the learning takes. Qualifications are not directly allocated to EQF levels, as they are only linked to EQF levels via the referencing of national qualifications levels to the EQF levels.

Table 5: Allocating Qualifications to Levels of European NQFs
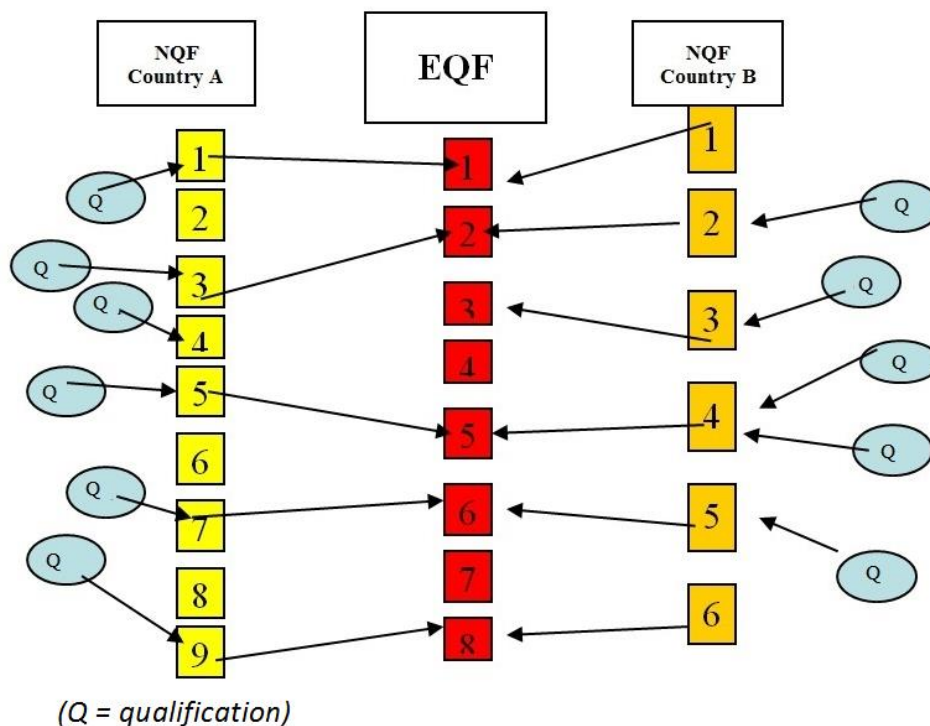
(Q = qualification)

In most countries, the inclusion of qualifications is regulated and defined by national acts or regulations. NQFs are a "gatekeeper" for approved (quality assured) qualifications. In many countries, national registers, catalogues or databases of qualifications are in use. They store information on qualifications, qualifications standards, certificates, degrees, diplomas, titles and/or awards available in a country or a region. In the future, these national qualifications registers will be linked to the European portal.[42] Through this European database, it will be possible to access detailed information on qualifications in NQFs referenced to the EQF.

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[42] Portal for "Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe" -
http://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/search/site?f%5b0%5d=im_field_entity_type%3A97

The allocation of qualifications to NQF levels is based on two fundamental underlying principles:

- The principle and objective of learning outcomes: Qualifications are allocated to a level based on the level of learning outcomes related to the qualification; and

- The principle of "Best Fit": Qualifications can focus on different dimensions or categories of learning outcomes and can also include learning outcomes related to different levels. Therefore, a "perfect fit" is usually not possible and some judgement or approximation is necessary for classifying qualifications in an NQF. This decision is based on the collective professional judgement of stakeholders and on the relation with other qualifications in the national qualification system/framework.

In order to establish the relationship between qualification types and NQF levels, most countries use a combination of technical/linguistic matching and social/political principles (similar to the approach used for matching levels – see EQF referencing criterion 2):

- Technical/linguistic matching: qualifications descriptors are compared with level descriptors; and

- Social/political principles: take into consideration how this qualification (or qualification type) is currently regarded nationally, how its social standing is understood (such as the importance of the qualification in the labour market, its traditional status and position in society and among citizens) and how it is related to other qualifications. Such judgement is made based on empirical research, on analyses of available data or by directly consulting stakeholders.

Qualification Types Linked to NQFs and to EQF Levels

The purpose of the EQF is to act as a benchmark for the level of any learning recognised in a qualification in an NQF that has been referenced to the EQF. Since there is a wide variety of qualifications across Europe, the qualifications (or qualification types) linked to the eight EQF levels are quite different. Each individual EQF level also accommodates various qualification types; they differ, for example, in terms of educational sector, institutional context, content, volume and scope, purpose (e.g. progression to further learning or labour market access). However, they are considered as equivalent in terms of the level of learning outcomes achieved. By "equivalent", it is understood, for example, that the learning outcomes portray a similar level of autonomy among learners by which they are able to make use of the knowledge and skills obtained. However, this does not necessarily mean that such qualifications are similar in terms of content, learning objectives and volume or that they are interchangeable.

The following paragraphs provide some information on qualification types from different educational sectors and their referencing to EQF levels.[43]

Higher Education
Qualifications from higher education are linked to the EQF Level 5 to Level 8.

- Short cycle higher education (SCHE) qualifications within or linked to the first cycle (Bachelor) are allocated to EQF Level 5[44];

- Qualifications awarded to students that certify completion of one of the three sequential cycles identified by the Bologna Process [45] are allocated to EQF levels 6 to 8[46]: EQF Level 6: first cycle (Bachelor), EQF Level 7: second cycle (Master) and EQF Level 8: third cycle (Doctorate); Honours Bachelor degrees are linked to EQF Level 6 in Ireland and the UK-Scotland); and
- "Pre-Bologna" qualifications (i.e. they are not part of the three cycles of the QF-EHEA) are also sometimes linked to EQF levels 6 to 8 (for example, in Slovenia and Italy).

Vocational Education and Training
VET qualifications are linked to EQF Levels 1 to 8, depending on the country.
- Some countries have linked basic VET qualifications to EQF Levels 1 and 2 (for example, UK - England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Malta).

- Some countries have linked qualifications related to positions of "assistants" to EQF Level 3 (for example, Estonia or Slovenia).

- EQF Level 4 is often used for upper secondary VET certificates (school-based VET and dual VET) leading to skilled work.

- Many VET qualifications linked to EQF Level 5 have a clear hybrid character: they have a "hub function" since they are valued as labour market entry qualifications by employers and at the same time have currency for entry to higher education. They are often considered as higher professional qualifications (post-secondary VET or "higher VET"). This qualification type can also found on EQF Levels 6 and 7.

- In few cases, VET qualifications are linked to EQF Level 8 (for example, in Estonia: the occupational qualifications "chartered civil engineer" or "chartered architect").

General Education
General education qualifications are mainly linked to EQF Level 1 to Level 5.

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[43] However, it has to be noted that there are many "zones of overlap" and the borderlines between VET and higher education are partially blurring.
[44] SCHE are programmes of study within the Bologna first cycle, but which do not represent the full extent of this cycle. Such awards may prepare the student for employment, while also providing preparation for, and access to, studies to completion of the first cycle.
[45] http://www.ehea.info/ (The European Higher Education Area)
[46] In some countries, a distinction is made between "academic" and "professional" degrees; however, these different types are usually linked to the same level.

- Some countries have also defined "entry levels" in their NQFs which are linked to EQF Level 1 (for example, in the UK-England, Wales and Northern Ireland) or are not linked to the EQF at all (for example, in the Netherlands) but are seen as a ladder into the qualifications system in their context and thus play a role for social inclusion;

- EQF Level 1 is used for basic education certificates or for classifying primary education (for example, in Belgium-Flanders);

- So far, most countries have linked their lower secondary education to EQF Level 2. A minority of countries have linked it to both Levels 2 and 3, making the level dependent on the final grades (for example, Malta and the UK-England, Wales and Northern Ireland) For example, Latvia has referred it to Level 3; Italy and Croatia have linked lower secondary education to Level 1;

- A few countries, notably Austria and Germany, have yet to include general education qualifications in their frameworks;

- General education upper secondary school-leaving certificates (providing access to higher education) would normally be linked to EQF Level 4; and

- In some cases, general education qualifications are also linked to EQF Level 5 (such as the Advanced Higher or the Scottish Baccalaureate in UK-Scotland).

Scope of European NQFs Referenced to the EQF

The EQF is designed as a comprehensive QF for lifelong learning and, thus, to capture all types and levels of qualifications across Europe (such as general education, VET, higher education). EQF Level 5 is compatible with the descriptors of the SCHE qualifications and EQF Levels 6, 7 and 8 are compatible with the three cycles of the QF-EHEA[47]. However, these levels are also open to qualifications achieved outside higher education.

Most countries are following a comprehensive approach in the design of their NQFs: The majority of NQFs (in 35[48] out of 39 countries) have been designed as comprehensive frameworks and cover all levels and qualifications types from all educational sectors (VET, higher education and general education). The remaining countries (the Czech Republic, , Italy, France and Switzerland) have developed frameworks with a limited scope or chosen to develop and implement separate frameworks for vocational and higher education. Some countries, such as Germany and Austria, have agreed on comprehensive NQFs but are taking a step-by-step approach where some qualifications (for example school leaving certificates of general education at upper secondary level) have yet to be included.

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[47] http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/qualification/QF-EHEA-May2005.pdf. Most countries carry out their EQF referencing and QF-EHEA self-certification in a single process, and present a single report addressing the criteria of both processes.

[48] In the UK, the frameworks of Scotland and Wales are comprehensive; the qualifications and credit framework in England/Northern Ireland includes only vocational/professional qualifications.

The EQF is constructed as a reference point for all qualifications in Europe regardless of which body awards them; however, the main requirement is that they are allocated to the national levels referenced to the EQF levels. Up to now, most NQFs have covered qualifications awarded by public institutions of education and training (national authorities or other bodies accredited by these authorities). However, countries increasingly consider or have taken steps (e.g France, the Netherlands, Sweden, UK-Scotland) to include quality assured qualifications which are awarded outside formal education and training systems, for example in the non-formal and private sector, which are often of high relevance in the labour market.

The EQF should also facilitate the relationship between international sectoral qualifications (awarded by international bodies and multinational companies) and national qualifications systems/frameworks. Some countries have already included them in their NQFs, while others are in the process of developing strategies to do so. The EQF AG supports a coherent approach across Europe.

Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning

According to the EQF Recommendation, each level of qualification should, in principle, be attainable through a variety of educational and career paths (including non-formal and informal learning). The 2012 Council Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning[49] confirms the link between QFs and validation arrangements: NQFs provide a common reference point for learning acquired inside as well as outside formal education and training systems. A pre-condition for linking NQFs and validation is the use of the same or equivalent learning outcome-based standards and to apply the same quality requirements as for any other assessment and certification process.

In order to coordinate the linkage between NQFs and validation, the mandate of the EQF AG was extended to include also the monitoring of the implementation of the Council Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning.

A few countries have already integrated validation into their NQF, and in several countries this work is progressing with the further development and implementation of their NQFs. The 2014 update of the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning[50] also confirms that many countries give priority to the linking of frameworks and validation arrangements. Since countries have different traditions and regulations for validation, there are also different levels of developments regarding the link between NQFs and validation. However, in more than half of the countries, learning outcomes acquired in non-formal or informal learning contexts can be used to acquire a qualification classified in the NQF and/or can be used to access formal education included in the NQF. In a few countries, these links are established in a comprehensive and systematic way and qualifications at all levels can by and large be obtained through

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[49]   http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222(01)&from=EN (The Official Journal of European Union (22.12.2012))
[50]   http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory   (The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training)

validation (for example, in France). In other countries such links may only apply in relation to some qualifications or validation only leads to exemptions from part(s) of specific programmes classified in the NQF.

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)

The EQF referencing criteria state that NQFs (or qualifications systems) referenced to the EQF and the qualifications allocated to national levels are linked to credit systems (where they exist).

The European systems for credit transfer and accumulation, namely the ECTS[51] used in higher education and the ECVET[52], both follow the learning outcomes approach. They are considered as tools for describing programmes or qualifications in a transparent way, support the transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes, and allow for flexible pathways to obtain qualifications.

- ECTS: The ECTS credits are allocated to study programmes leading to a qualification as well as to their educational components (such as modules, course components, work placements etc.). They are allocated based on the estimated workload students need in order to achieve expected learning outcomes (i.e. time needed for lectures, seminars, projects, practical work, self-study and examinations). 60 ECTS credits are allocated to the workload and associated learning outcomes of a full-time academic year. Credits are awarded to individual students after completion of the respective learning activities. They may be accumulated with a view to obtaining qualifications and may be transferred into another programme. The ECTS key documents are: Course Catalogue, Student Application Form, Learning Agreement and Transcript of Records. The updated ECTS User's Guide[53], which offers guidelines for implementing the ECTS and links to useful supporting documents, is subject to approval by the Ministerial Conference in May 2015.

- ECVET: The description of qualifications in terms of units of learning outcomes that can be assessed and validated separately is one of the main elements of the ECVET. The ECVET points are a numerical representation of the overall weight of learning outcomes in a qualification or unit. The ECVET points are allocated on the basis of 60 points per year of formal full time VET. The total number of points is assigned to that qualification. Assessed learning outcomes can be accumulated towards a qualification or transferred to other learning programmes or qualifications.

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[51] http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/ects_en.htm (The European Commission: European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS))
[52] http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/ecvet_en.htm (The European Commission: The European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)
[53] http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/publications/2015/ects-users-guide_en.pdf (ECTS Users' Guide 2015)

The ECVET key documents are: Memorandum of Understanding, Learning Agreement and Personal Transcript.

Although these credit systems are not directly designed as part of the EQF[54], they complement the EQF in its aim to increase transparency and to support mobility and lifelong learning.

While the ECTS is already used in around 75% of higher education courses, the ECVET is at an earlier stage of implementation. This was confirmed by the evaluation of the ECVET[55] which also highlighted that the ECVET points are perceived critically and that in general there would be no particular relevance or demand for credit points due to their unclear technical specifications. However, several countries are planning to implement the ECVET alongside NQF developments. Credit systems (the ECVET or national ones) are already an integral part of NQFs in a few countries, for instance in Croatia, Malta, Slovenia and the UK frameworks.

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[54] However, ECTS credits are used in formulating national qualifications frameworks for higher education.

[55]
http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/more_info/evaluations/docs/education/ecvet14_en.pdf
(Implementation of Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)-Final Report, 4 July 2014)

Section 7: Principle 5

Quality Assurance - both qualifications frameworks are underpinned by quality assurance and are consistent with international quality assurance principles.

Summary

Hong Kong's quality assurance system for academic and vocational qualifications is robust and inspires international confidence. The HKCAAVQ is the Accreditation Authority and QR Authority for the HKQF. The HKCAAVQ, the JQRC and the QAC of the UGC provide oversight of different providers and programmes in the education sector. All three agencies base their QA procedures on well-defined and internationally accepted quality assurance principles. The HKCAAVQ has recently successfully completed an external review against the Guidelines of Good Practice developed by INQAAHE.

QA has always been a fundamental underlying principle of the EQF. As a meta-framework, the EQF does not set standards for quality, nor does it prescribe how national quality assurance processes are to be implemented. However, the quality assurance requirements for national qualifications frameworks or systems are taken into account in the EQF referencing process and this process ensures that national QA systems are consistent with the relevant European principles and guidelines.

Introduction

The role played by the HKCAAVQ in assuring the quality of the qualifications and learning programmes that are listed on the QR has been described in detail in previous Sections. Nonetheless, it should be noted that in Hong Kong, the quality of education and training providers and their programmes is subject to the oversight of three QA agencies, depending on the sector to which the provider belongs. The three agencies are the HKCAAVQ, the QAC of the UGC and the JQRC.

In order to enhance coordination between the three agencies, the EDB has established the Liaison Committee on Quality Assurance (LCQA) which consists of representatives of the EDB, the HKCAAVQ, the JQRC and the QAC. The objectives of the LCQA are to promote sharing of good practices among all the QA bodies and enhance consistency and transparency so as to strengthen accountability. Steering Committees have been formed under the LCQA to oversee matters pertaining to the further development of the HKQF, including the implementation of the ATS, use of the QF credit and implementation of CAT policy and operational guidelines.

The arrangements for QA in the different sectors are described below.

QAC

Eight UGC-funded institutions (seven universities and the Hong Kong Institute of Education[56]) provide a total of about 15,000 first-year first-degree places each year.[57]

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[56] Hong Kong Institute of Education is to be renamed as Hong Kong Education University in due course subject to legislative approval .

These institutions award qualifications at different levels, ranging from sub-degrees to doctorate degrees.

UGC-funded institutions are statutory organisations with self-accrediting status[58]. They have ultimate responsibility for assuring the quality and academic standards of their programmes. All qualifications offered by UGC-funded institutions are quality assured by the institutions themselves and quality audited by the QAC.

The QAC was established under the aegis of the UGC in 2007 in response to the growing public concern on the quality of educational provisions in higher education institutions. It assists the UGC in providing a third-party oversight on the quality of such provisions in its institutions. Its mission is:

- To assure that the quality of educational experience in all first degree level programmes and above, however funded, offered in UGC-funded institutions is sustained and improved, and is at an internationally competitive level; and

- To encourage institutions to excel in this area of activity.

The roles and function of the QAC are as follows:

- To advise the UGC on QA matters in the higher education sector in Hong Kong and other related matters as requested by the UGC;

- To conduct audits and other reviews as requested by the UGC, and report on the QA mechanisms and quality of the offerings of institutions;

- To promote QA in the higher education sector in Hong Kong; and

- To facilitate the development and dissemination of good practices in QA in higher education.

In line with the HKSAR Government's commitment to maintain a higher education system that meets international standards, membership of the QAC includes distinguished international academic leaders as well as senior local academics and eminent members of the community.[59]

The main objective of the QAC quality audits is to assure the quality of learning in the UGC-funded institutions. The QAC quality audits seek to achieve a number of objectives:

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[57] http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/site/fund_inst.htm (University Grant Committee: UGC-funded Institutions)
[58] The Hong Kong Institute of Education's self-accrediting status applies only to its programmes in education. All other programmes are subject to accreditation by the HKCAAVQ.
[59] http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/qac/about/membership/membership.htm (University Grants Committee: Membership of the Quality Assurance Council)

- To confirm that the arrangements for QA are fit for purpose and conform to the institution's role and mission;
- To provide assurance that the standards of higher education (at degree level and above) align with expectations in Hong Kong and can be compared to provision by similar institutions in other jurisdictions;

- To ensure that students have access to appropriate learning opportunities through taught provision, private study and supported learning;

- To promote and enhance high quality teaching and learning.
- To confirm that students are fully supported in their academic and personal development;

- To advance the highest possible levels of student achievement;
- To encourage strategic developments which enrich the curriculum and enhance students' opportunities for employment and career development; and

- To provide public information, through audit reports and other documents, about the quality and academic standards of UGC-funded provision to assist prospective students, employers and other interested parties[60].

JQRC

UGC-funded institutions also offer self-financing post-secondary programmes primarily through their continuing education arms or member institutions under their aegis. Sub-degree programmes offered by the Self-financed Sub-degree Programme Units (SSPUs) of the UGC institutions are subject to oversight by the JQRC which was set up by HUCOM of the UGC-funded institutions in 2005 in response to the public concern on the rapid increase in the number of sub-degree programmes offered by the SSPUs and their quality.

The objectives of JQRC are to:

- Provide for and implement a framework for peer review capable of assuring the quality of self-financing, sub-degree programmes of the continuing education units and other departments or colleges of the members;

- Advise the members on the appropriate placement of the sub-degree programmes in the QR;

- Advise the members, as requested, on the standards of, and, if requested by a member, to validate, any self-financing programme

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[60] http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/qac/manual/manual.htm   (University Grants Committee: Audit Manual)

which the member intends to offer; and

- Assist the members to maintain and improve the quality of the provision of self-financing sub-degree programmes through formative feedback and sharing of good practice.

The remit of the JQRC covers the quality assurance processes for self-financing sub-degree programmes offered by the continuing education units, community colleges, and other departments/divisions of the institutions. However, it should be noted that the JQRC does not perform an accrediting role, but it ensures that the quality assurance processes of the member institutions for self-financed sub-degree programmes are rigorous and are properly implemented.

JQRC adopts a two-stage approach for the peer review of the quality assurance processes of the SSPUs of the member institutions. This includes a Preview stage and an Institutional Review stage. Alongside the two-stage review framework, JQRC also performs an endorsement role with regard to self-financing sub-degree programmes submitted by member institutions for upload onto the QR. The role of the JQRC in the assessment and endorsement of qualifications for entry onto the QR is described in **Section 6**.

The Board of Directors of the JQRC consists of one representative from each of its eight member institutions appointed by the Vice Chancellor/ President of the institution. The Board formulates the long-term strategic plans of the JQRC and determines the overall direction of its work. It sets the review approach for the peer review of the SSPUs of member institutions, appoints an Academic Council to undertake the review activities and to consider the review outcomes. A representative from the EDB attends the Board meetings as observer.

The Academic Council comprises senior academics from member institutions and professionals from industry/commerce. It formulates QA strategies and advises on the QA framework for the peer review of the SSPUs. The Academic Council is also responsible for undertaking the two-stage review.

In addition to its review function, the JQRC has a role in promoting good practices in quality assurance, and in advising the UGC-funded institutions on matters and policies related to the quality and standards of sub-degree programmes.

HKCAAVQ

As the Accreditation Authority for the HKQF, the ambit of the HKCAAVQ covers the accreditation of academic and vocational qualifications offered by institutions, other than those which have self-accrediting status under the AAVQ Ordinance (Cap. 592). Institutions under the purview of the HKCAAVQ are wide-ranging, including publicly funded institutions[61] and self-financing post-secondary institutions. The HKCAAVQ also

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[61] www.hkapa.edu/ (The Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts) and http://www.vtc.edu.hk/html/en/ (Vocational Training Council)

provides consultancy services relating to quality assurance for the education and training sector under the HKCAAVQ Ordinance (Cap. 1150).

Since the launch of the HKQF in 2008, the HKCAAVQ has accredited over 200 institutions and operators from the education sector and a wide range of industries, e.g. automotive, banking, beauty, hairdressing, catering, elderly care, insurance, property management and retail, etc. Programmes accredited by the HKCAAVQ are QF-recognised and entered into the QR. The HKCAAVQ has published accreditation reports on their website since 2013[62].

Qualifications Assessment

The HKCAAVQ also provides Qualifications Assessment service to individuals. The service aims to assess non-local qualifications possessed by an individual and determine whether the totality of the educational qualification(s) obtained by the individual meets the standard of a particular level of qualification in Hong Kong. The key attributes of the qualification(s), such as learning outcomes, volume of study and exemption arrangements, are assessed against guidelines that make reference to key features of the HKQF, including the GLD and QF Credits. The assessment may also include a comparison of the qualification against the HKQF and the NQF of the country where the qualification is awarded. Advice may also be sought from international credential evaluation agencies such as the United Kingdom's National Recognition Information Centre (UK NARIC) and the Australian Education International's National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (AEI-NOOSR). The outcome of the assessment is a determination on whether the totality of the educational qualification of the individual is comparable in standard to a local qualification.

The assessment policy and guidelines[63] of the HKCAAVQ are periodically reviewed and updated to keep abreast of the latest developments in credential evaluation and the HKQF.

Governance

The governing body of the HKCAAVQ is the Council. Its Chairman, Vice-chairman and members are appointed, in their personal capacity, by the Chief Executive of the HKSAR Government. The composition of the Council's membership includes local and international members who have expertise and experience in QF development and implementation, quality assurance or accreditation; or good standing in the field of education and training or in any industry. The Permanent Secretary for Education or her representative is an ex-officio member of the Council.

Hong Kong Qualifications and International Standards

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[62] http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/publications/summary-accreditation-reports (The HKCAAVQ: Summary Accreditation Reports)

[63] http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/files/services/assessment/individual-qualifications/Guidance_Notes_for_Applications.pdf (The HKCAAVQ: Qualifications Assessment – Guidance Notes for Application)

To ensure that programmes at higher education levels (i.e. QF level 5 and above) are benchmarked to both local and international standards, the HKCAAVQ appoints both local and international specialists to the accreditation panel for these programmes.

The HKCAAVQ is committed to promoting good practices in QA among institutions, training bodies, authorities and other stakeholders in both local and international contexts. To ensure that its accreditation approaches are benchmarked with the latest international good practices and standards, the HKCAAVQ has established links with QA agencies in the Mainland China and overseas.

The HKCAAVQ is a founding member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN). It is also an Affiliate of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).   It works together with the following partner organisations under bilateral Memoranda of Co-operation/ Understanding:

- Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities;
- Council for Private Education, Singapore;

- Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan;

- Higher Education Evaluation Center of the Ministry of Education, China;

- Knowledge and Human Development Authority, Dubai;
- Malaysian Qualifications Agency;

- National Institution for Academic Degrees, Japan;

- Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, UK;

- Quality and Qualifications Ireland;

- Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, Australia; and

- UK National Recognition Information Centre.

Reviews and Surveys of HKCAAVQ

In June 2015 the HKCAAVQ commissioned the INQAAHE to conduct an external review on the organisation and its services.   The panel appointed by INQAAHE concludes that HKCAAVQ comprehensively adheres to the Good Practice Guidelines issued by INQAAHE[64]. HKCAAVQ has demonstrated substantial (or full) alignment with all individual guidelines including resources (Guideline 2); quality assurance of the agency (Guideline 3); public reporting (Guideline 4); relationship between the agency and higher education institutions (Guideline 5); institutional or programmatic performance (Guideline 6); and

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[64]   http://www.inqaahe.org/admin/files/assets/subsites/1/documenten/1231430767_inqaahe---guidelines-of-good-practice[1].pdf (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education: Guidelines of Good Practice in Quality Assurance)

decisions by the agency (Guideline 9). The HKCAAVQ is listed on the INQAAHE web-site for comprehensively adhering to the Good Practice Guidelines.

To further enhance international recognition and in line with its vision of becoming a regionally and globally recognised QA agency, the HKCAAVQ plans to conduct external reviews every five years.

The HKCAAVQ conducts surveys on the services it offers, including annual survey on operators and panel members to seek feedback on the standard and processes of its accreditation services and the improvements required. The results and follow-up actions are reported to the Council and to institutions at briefing sessions.

Quality Assurance in EQF

From the outset, QA has been a fundamental underlying principle of the EQF. It is considered as the very basis of mutual trust between countries and systems, which in turn is a decisive factor for the success of the EQF referencing process. QFs and QA mechanisms must work together in a systematic and transparent way to guarantee confidence in qualifications, for NQFs to be considered as a tool to guarantee and maintain quality.

QA systems and processes differ considerably across European countries and also across sub-sectors of education and training. Most countries have several QA bodies in place which manage QA processes over a specific sector or sub-system. This diversity of QA systems and processes reflects the diversity of governance, education and training systems as well as cultural traditions that shape and characterise the European region.

The EQF, in its role as a meta-framework, does not set standards for quality, nor does it prescribe how national QA processes are to be implemented.

Transparency through Qualifications Registers and Databases and the Indication of EQF Levels on Certificates and Diplomas

Transparency of information plays a pivotal role in QA and is a major pre-requisite for enhanced trust and confidence in European qualifications. Many countries have thus developed or are developing web-based and freely accessible national registers or databases of qualifications. Work is currently ongoing to link them to the EQF portal[65] (see Principle 4 for more information). All EQF referencing reports, once presented to the EQF AG and finalised, are made available through this portal.

The EQF Recommendation invites all countries which have referenced to the EQF to include a reference to the relevant EQF level in newly awarded qualifications certificates, diplomas and Europass supplements. So far, fifteen countries already indicate EQF levels on newly issued certificates, diplomas or Europass documents and it is a priority under the EQF to do so.

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[65] https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/search/site?f[0]=im_field_entity_type%3A97#   (The   European Commission: Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe)

EQF Referencing: The quality assurance requirements for national qualifications frameworks or systems are referred to in EQF referencing criteria 5 and 6

When countries relate their NQFs or systems to the EQF, EQF referencing criteria require them to illustrate that their QA arrangements are consistent with relevant European principles and guidelines.

EQF referencing criterion 5 specifically refers to QA and requires that *"The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications framework or system and are consistent with the relevant European principles and guidelines (as indicated in Annex III of the EQF Recommendation)."*

EQF referencing criterion 5 thus requires countries to demonstrate the links between their national QA systems, the NQF and the overarching regulations and agreements in this field. According to referencing criterion 6[66], EQF referencing reports should also include a written statement from the relevant national QA bodies that they agree with the documentation provided in the referencing process.

Common Principles for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training defined in *Annex III* of the 2008 EQF Recommendation[67]

Annex III of the EQF Recommendation provides a set of guiding principles for countries' QA arrangements for higher education and VET to underpin the implementation of the framework. The criteria presented in *Annex III* are broadly consistent with the European Quality Assurance for VET (EQAVET)[68] and the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for higher education[69]. These principles state that QA should be an integral part of the internal management of education and training institutions and that they should be regularly evaluated, as should the agencies that carry out QA. The QA procedures should include reference to context, input, process and output dimensions, while giving particular emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes. QA should be a cooperative process across education and training levels and systems, involving all relevant stakeholders, including learners.

VET: Implementation of the EQAVET Recommendation and its Link to NQFs

The EQAVET is the European reference framework for QA in VET. It was formally established through the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council

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[66] Criterion 6: *"The referencing process shall include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies."*

[67] https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/journal_en.pdf (The Official Journal of the European Union (6.5.2008))

[68] http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/eqavet_en.htm (The European Commission: Education and Training)

[69] http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/ (The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education)

of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)[70].

The EQAVET is not a QA system, but rather a meta-framework for QA. It invites countries to promote and monitor continuous improvement in their VET systems, through the use of a QA and improvement cycle based on four phases (Planning, Implementation, Evaluation and Review), which are linked to quality criteria and indicative descriptors. It provides a systematic approach to QA and emphasises the importance of monitoring and improving quality by combining internal and external evaluation with qualitative analysis. The EQAVET can be applied at the system, provider and qualification awarding levels. The EQAVET also promotes European cooperation in developing and improving QA in VET through the EQAVET network, which is a community of practice bringing together countries and social partners, supported by scientific advisers, Cedefop and the European Commission. The EQAVET network plays an important role in promoting a culture of QA across countries, by supporting implementation at national level and by strengthening synergies and cooperation at European level. In addition, implementation at national level is supported by Quality Assurance National Reference Points (NRP), which have been established in the individual countries.

As a tool, the EQAVET is of a non-binding nature. It adopts a flexible approach, allowing countries and VET providers to select tools and elements from a wider array and to adjust them for their purposes and needs. Since its adoption in 2009, the EQAVET has contributed to advancing a quality culture in VET across European countries, and to its Fdeveloping comparable criteria and methodologies. In 2005, national Ministers responsible for higher education adopted the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" (ESG[71])". These standards and guidelines, which are designed to be applicable to all higher education institutions and QA agencies in Europe, aim to promote mutual trust while respecting the diversity of national and institutional contexts. The ESG provide guidance and reference points for internal and external QA in higher education; they are not to be understood as standards for quality, nor do they prescribe how the QA processes are implemented. The revised ESG have been approved by the Ministers at the EHEA Ministerial Conference in 2015. The revised guidelines include a standard that "The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the NQF for higher education and, consequently, to the framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area" (Standard 1.2).

The ESG are based on the following four principles for QA in the EHEA:

- Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance;

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[70]   http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:155:0001:0010:EN:PDF (The Official Journal of the European Union (8.7.2009))
[71] http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/ (The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA)

- QA responds to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, programmes and students;

- QA supports the development of a quality culture; and

- QA takes into account the needs and expectations of students, all other stakeholders and society.

The ESG thus recognises the primacy of national systems of higher education, the importance of institutional and agency autonomy within those national systems, and the particular requirements of different academic subjects.

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

ENQA was set up in 2000, with the aim to disseminate information, experiences and good practices in the field of QA in higher education. ENQA membership is open to QA agencies in the EHEA member states, and requires compliance with the ESG. This compliance is checked every five years through independent review. External reviews of ENQA member agencies are considered to play an important role for assuring quality and trustworthiness of QA agencies for higher education in Europe. By the end of 2014, ENQA had 44 full members in 25 countries of the EHEA.[72]

European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR)[73]

Set up in 2008, the EQAR maintains a register of those higher education QA agencies that substantially comply with the ESG. Compliance must be demonstrated through an external review by independent experts. The main objective of the EQAR is to provide the public with clear and reliable information on QA agencies operating in Europe; the register is thus web-based and freely accessible. As of 2015, 36 agencies in 19 countries were listed on the register.

The Bologna Process has led to a significant transformation of QA of Higher Education in Europe, making the establishment of QA systems and the general improvement of quality in higher education a priority in many countries. The majority of countries have clear external QA systems in place. Also, most countries have set up national agencies for QA. Many of these developments can be directly attributed to the implementation of the Bologna Process, along with the increased recognition of the importance of stakeholder participation, in particular of students.

Practically all EHEA countries have established some form of external QA system, although there are significant differences in the philosophy and approach behind systems. These can be traced back to the wide diversity of political systems, higher education systems and socio-cultural traditions across countries, which also substantiates the non-prescriptive nature of the ESG. One important distinction that can be drawn across countries is whether the main focus of QA is on institutions or programmes, or both. The vast majority of QA systems now focus both on institutions and programmes.

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[72]   http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/ENQA-2014-Annual-Report.pdf   (The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education 2014 Annual Report)
[73] http://www.eqar.eu/; direct link to the register: http://www.eqar.eu/register/map.html. EQAR was set up by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Students' Union (ESU), the European University Association and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE).

This suggests that while in the early stages of developing external QA systems the focus tends to be on programme evaluation, over time this often evolves to an institutional focus. Countries also increasingly extend their focus in QA to the quality of teaching and learning.[74]

Quality Assurance in General Education

The common principles for QA laid out in *Annex III* of the EQF Recommendation do not explicitly cover general education.

General education is typically subject to strong national regulation in practically all countries. Very often, countries apply a combination of external and internal school evaluation as key method of QA. In many countries, school inspection models applied and often play an important role for QA in general education.[75]

Quality Assurance Arrangements for Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning[76]

The 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning asks for the implementation of transparent QA measures in line with existing QA frameworks that support reliable, valid and credible assessment methodologies and tools.

QA is a key aspect in establishing the link between NQFs and validation (see Principle 4). For the QA of validation arrangements, the majority of countries use (or intend to use) the general QA mechanisms already in place for the educational system and the NQF, signaling that validation of non-formal and informal learning is subject to the same quality requirements as any other assessment and certification process. Only a small group of countries follows the approach of establishing specific QA arrangements for validation.

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[74]
http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/%281%29/Bologna%20Process%20Implementation%20Report.pdf
(The European Higher Education Area in 2012: Bologna Process Implementation Report)
[75] http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/178EN.pdf   (The European Commission: Assurance Quality in Education Policies and Approaches to School Evaluation in Europe, Eurydice Report)
[76] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222%2801%29 (ERU-Lex)

Section 8: Conclusion

Nature of the Study

Since 2008, 28 participating European countries have successfully referenced their NQFs to the EQF in accordance with a set of defined criteria, and published their referencing reports. The EQF has fulfilled its objective of acting as a translation device, permitting individual countries to gain a better understanding of the qualifications in other countries referenced to the EQF and promoting learner and worker mobility. In this regard, the EQF has been successful.

The HKQF has been developing as a local framework encompassing qualifications in different sectors of education and training in Hong Kong. The progress of developing the HKQF is encouraging in that it helps industries to define competency standards, assure the quality of education and training provided, and facilitate the progression of learners in Hong Kong.

The Study conducted jointly by EDB and EQF AG helps internationalise the HKQF and at the same time, extends the influence of the EQF beyond Europe. The Study also fosters mutual understanding and recognition of the quality and standards of education and training systems in the two regions.

The Study is more than a technical exercise per se. It signifies cooperation, trust and respect in the education and training systems between the two regions.

Engagement and Support from Stakeholders in Hong Kong

Throughout the Study, the EDB, the QFS and the Project Consultant have consulted key stakeholders in different sectors of Hong Kong. The consultation and engagement processes cover not only discussion on the Study *per se* but also serve as a forum to provide information on the latest development of the HKQF and its relationship with the EQF and NQFs referenced to the EQF.

Support from local stakeholders for the Study and its findings has been consistently strong with practically no dissenting views on the Study. A positive aspect of the Study as observed from the consultation activities has been the increased awareness of the HKQF and the potential uses of the framework in supporting lifelong learning and ployment.

Benefits, Risks and Possible Uses of the Study

The benefits of the Study to both Hong Kong and the EU have been fully explained in the risk and benefit analyses undertaken by both sides.

The Study is expected to be of use to policy makers and beneficial to stakeholders and organisations in different sectors. The HKCAAVQ, which provides assessment services on

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non-local qualifications will find the level-to-level comparison particularly useful. Multinational companies operating in Hong Kong will find that the comparison provides strong reference on standards of qualifications when recruiting talent from overseas. In this context, the Study is expected to provide support to the work of human resource management and promote mobility of learners and labour.

Nevertheless, there are potential risks associated with it. One possible risk is that it may, albeit unintentionally, raise the expectation of qualification holders (both from Hong Kong and the EU) that the qualifications they possess will automatically be recognised for employment and/or professional practice purposes in the two regions. We have made conscious efforts during the consultation to explain the purpose, objective and the limitation of the Study in order to dispel any possible misunderstanding and to manage any unrealistic expectations. This will also be explained in the joint report when it is published.

Findings of the Study

It is worth noting that the EDB and the EQF AG have separately and independently conducted a comparison of the two frameworks and both sides have arrived at the same conclusion with regard to the level-to-level relationship between the two frameworks. Both sides agree that the five principles adopted in the Study have made the comparison between the HKQF and the EQF meaningful.

Lessons Learnt

There are lessons to be learnt both from the conclusions reached and from the process which has been undertaken to reach those conclusions.

From the Hong Kong perspective, the lessons learnt include:

- The GLD were adopted when the HKQF was first developed in 2004. While the descriptors are effective in describing the learning outcomes at each level, thereby facilitating the location of a qualification at a particular level of the framework, the Study and feedback from stakeholders have shed light on the need to review the structure of the GLD and to refine the outcome statements to better reflect the outcome standards at each level.

- Hong Kong has adopted a robust QA system to support the implementation of the HKQF. The system is effective to meet the diverse needs of providers and learners, and complies with international good practice as demonstrated in the external review of the HKCAAVQ conducted by INQAAHE. However, given the continual growth in the VET sector locally and internationally, particularly the work undertaken in Europe to improve the QA for VET, it is clear that there are opportunities for Hong Kong to learn from the development and evolution of international QA standards and practices. .

- The Study demonstrates that the outcomes-based approach has become a feature widely shared in the education and training sector worldwide. It is important for Hong Kong to continue to encourage and support the development and use of the approach in the education and training sector in Hong Kong.

- The Study has proved that the HKQF is an advanced framework with well-designed architecture and robust QA arrangements. A number of new initiatives are being explored to facilitate the further development of the HKQF. They include extending the RPL mechanism, which recognises non-formal and informal learning, to more industries, and benchmarking qualifications such as trade tests and professional qualifications under the HKQF. More efforts will be made to further promote the HKQF within and outside Hong Kong to enhance public awareness and use of the framework.

- The Mainland China and the Macau Special Administrative Region of China have shown keen interest in the development of the HKQF. There are regular exchanges with Hong Kong at government level and between QA agencies on QF related matters. More comparability studies and similar exercises are being planned. A joint study between Hong Kong and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) will soon commence.

From the EQF perspective, the main lessons learnt are:

- This Study has taken place in the context of three pilots comparing the EQF with three mature qualifications frameworks; besides the HKQF, these concern the comparison between the EQF and the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and between the EQF and the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF).

- The Study has permitted a better understanding of the principles and day-to-day operation of the HKQF, its qualifications as well as the QA mechanisms underpinning them. It also reveals that a QF is not just a technical tool, but is deeply embedded within the broader political, social and economic context (in this case the HKSAR and the European Union). This requires the technical experts to become familiar with these complex contexts and how they condition the expectations of the respective parties and their stakeholders as well as engaging with the technical work of comparison.

- Despite the challenges of comparing the operational HKQF with a regional referencing framework (the EQF), which is different in nature and purpose, it has been possible to establish comparability between the two frameworks and their levels. In this context an important lesson from the EQF perspective is that the nature, purpose and the governance of the EQF and the relationships between the EQF and the European NQFs need careful explanation. This asymmetry between an NQF and a regional QF is also reflected in the different consultative processes followed by the two parties to the Study. While the Hong Kong side was able to engage in wide consultation with local

stakeholders on the Study, discussions on the European side were generally limited to the EQF Advisory Group.

- Policy learning: The Study, the discussions in the JTG and the mutual visits have allowed rich exchanges of knowledge and experiences which have been of invaluable benefit to the EQF side in the context of a reflection on the EQF as well as on the European NQFs and the policies and processes associated with these.

- The most challenging part proved to be the comparison of the descriptors between both frameworks, which cover different domains between the HKQF *(Knowledge & Intellectual Skills; Processes; Application, Autonomy and Accountability; Communication, IT and Numeracy)* and the EQF *(Knowledge, Skills and Competence)*. Detailed analyses of the descriptors of both frameworks did however prove possible and could be used to draw conclusions on the comparability of the levels of both frameworks. The contextual analysis that has been carried out in addition has also been a continuing learning experience for the EQF side.

GLOSSARY

Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF)

Appointed Assessment Agency	An agency appointed by the Secretary for Education under the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 592) to conduct assessment of skills, knowledge or experience of an individual and to grant qualifications based on Recognition of Prior Learning mechanism under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) upon successful completion of the assessment.
Award Titles Scheme (ATS)	A scheme aims to standardise the use of award titles under the HKQF, which reflects the nature, area of study and hierarchy of the qualification. Details at http://www.hkqf.gov.hk/guie/HKQF_ATS.asp.
Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)	A process to facilitate recognition and validation of units of learning and allows learners to move from one programme to another without having to duplicate learning. Details of policy, principles and operational guidelines of CAT implementation at http://www.hkqf.gov.hk/guie/hkqf_cat.asp.
Education Bureau (EDB)	The policy bureau of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government responsible for formulating, developing and reviewing policies, programmes and legislation in respect of education from pre-primary to tertiary level; and overseeing the effective implementation of educational programmes. It is also the bureau for the establishment of the HKQF. Details at http://www.edb.gov.hk.
Formal Learning	Planned learning that normally takes place in a structured setting and leads to a full or partial qualification.
Four Stage Quality Assurance Process	An approach of the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) to conduct accreditation according to a structured process to underpin the HKQF. The stages of the process include Initial Evaluation (IE), Learning Programme Accreditation (LPA), Programme Area Accreditation (PAA) and Periodic Review (PR). Details at http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/services/accreditation/four-stage-qa-process.
Granting body	A granting body is the person, school, institution, organisation or other body which grants the qualification. A granting body can be the operator delivering the learning programme leading to the qualification, or the appointed assessment agency assessing the skills, knowledge and/or experience acquired by an individual for the purpose of recognition of prior learning.
Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and	As the Accreditation Authority and Qualifications Register Authority under the HKQF, the HKCAAVQ is entrusted with the role of implementing a quality assurance system to underpin the HKQF and to develop and administer the Qualifications Register (QR). Details at

Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ)	http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk.
Informal learning	Opportunistic learning that is not structured in terms of content or assessment method but gained through work or social experiences.
Industry Training and Advisory Committees (ITACs)	These Committees are set up by the EDB to provide platforms for stakeholders to take forward the HKQF on industry basis, and to exchange views on manpower development and upgrading. Details at http://www.hkqf.gov.hk/guie/com_ITAC.asp.
Joint Quality Review Committee (JQRC)	It is an independent corporate quality assurance body established in 2005 by the Heads of Universities Committee (HUCOM) of Hong Kong constituted by the eight institutions under the aegis of the University Grants Committee (UGC). Its major function is to provide for the peer review of the quality assurance processes of the self-financed sub-degree programmes of these institutions. The eight member institutions are City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University, Lingnan University, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, The Hong Kong Institute of Education, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, and The University of Hong Kong. Details at http://www.jqrc.edu.hk.
Mode of delivery	Learning Programmes in the Qualifications Register may be delivered using one or more of the following four modes of delivery: • Full-Time mode generally refers to the delivery of programme with a full load of course work and the learners are expected to be a full-time learner. It also includes mixed mode, sandwich and blended learning; • Part-Time mode generally refers to the delivery of programme with less than a full load of course work and normally outside normal working hours. The programme usually can allow learners to have his/her own full-time job. It also includes day release and evening classes; • Electronic learning refers to the delivery of learning solely or mainly by electronic means; and • Distance learning refers to learning under which a student is separated by location from the instructor or other learners. The learner may or may not have face-to-face contact with the instructors and he/she can learn by self-study of various means.
Non-formal learning	Learning that takes place in a formal setting (e.g. workplace training) but does not lead to a formally accredited qualification.
Learning outcomes	Learning outcomes refer to what a learner should know, understand and/or be able to do upon successful completion of a learning process.
Learning	A learning programme is a programme of study or training defined by

programme	a curriculum and operated by an education/training operator which will lead to a qualification upon successful completion of the learning.
Non-local qualification	Non-local qualification refers to a qualification granted in Hong Kong by an operator from another country or region that operates in Hong Kong (either independently or in partnership with an accredited Hong Kong provider). The learning programme of the qualification is registered (or exempted from registration) under the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance (Cap. 493). Only those non-local programmes which have been accredited by the HKCAAVQ can be registered in the QR.
Programme Area Accreditation (PAA)	PAA is the third stage of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process. It is conferred on programme providers with sufficient quality assurance competency and maturity at the organisational level and a good track record in their validated programme(s). Upon the award of PAA status, a provider may develop and operate learning programmes within an approved scope of programme areas at specified QF level(s) for an approved period of time (validity period), and have the qualifications of its learning programmes entered into the QR for HKQF recognition without going through the normal route of learning programme accreditation or re-accreditation by the HKCAAVQ.
Qualification	A qualification in the QR is granted by an education/training operator upon completion of a learning programme. A qualification may also be granted by an appointed assessment agency after successful assessment of the skills, knowledge or experience acquired by an individual in a particular industry through the Recognition of Prior Learning mechanism.
Qualifications Framework Credit (QF Credit)	QF credit is a measurement of the size or volume of learning in a learning programme or a qualification based on the formula that one QF credit is awarded for completion of 10 notional learning hours with attainment of learning outcomes upon assessment. Notional learning hours take into account the total time likely to be spent by an average learner on all modes of learning including attendance in classes, self-study, on-line learning, practical learning, examination, etc.
Qualifications Framework Level (QF Level)	QF level is ordered and benchmarked against the outcome-based Generic Level Descriptors of the HKQF which describe the common features of qualifications at the same level. The QF level reflects the complexity of learning in a qualification.
Qualifications Register (QR)	Qualifications Register (QR) is a register established by the Secretary for Education under the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 592) for entering qualifications recognised under the HKQF. The HKCAAVQ has been specified in the Ordinance as the QR Authority, with responsibility for developing and administering the QR. All qualifications registered in the QR have been quality assured by an appropriate accreditation authority

	including the HKCAAVQ or a self-accrediting operator.
Qualifications Register Authority (QR Authority)	The HKCAAVQ is specified under the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap 592) as the QR Authority to maintain the QR.
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism	The RPL mechanism under the HKQF enables experienced practitioners of various backgrounds to receive formal recognition of the knowledge, skills or experience already acquired at the workplace. Successful applicants will be awarded a Statement of Attainment, which is recognized under the HKQF. Details at http://www.hkqf.gov.hk/guie/RPL.asp.
Self-accrediting operators	These operators have ultimate responsibility for assuring the quality and academic standards of their programmes. They are not required to seek programme accreditation from any external body before registering their programmes on the QR. Under Schedule 2 of the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 592), self-accrediting operators in Hong Kong are: • City University of Hong Kong • Hong Kong Baptist University • Lingnan University • The Chinese University of Hong Kong • The Hong Kong Institute of Education (for learning programmes in teacher education only) • The Hong Kong Polytechnic University • The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology • The University of Hong Kong • The Open University of Hong Kong
Specification of Competency Standard (SCS)-based programme	SCS-based programmes are designed in accordance with the requirements of the Qualifications Guidelines with adoption of the SCS established by individual ITACs which set out the skills, knowledge and competency standards required of practitioners to perform various job functions in specific industries effectively. Details at http://www.hkqf.gov.hk/guie/SCS_SCS-based.asp.
Specification of Generic (Foundation) Competencies (SGC)-based programme	SGC-based programmes are designed in accordance with the requirements of the Qualifications Guidelines with adoption of the SGC, which cover four strands of foundation skills, namely English, Chinese, Numeracy and Information Technology. Details at http://www.hkqf.gov.hk/guie/SCS_SGC.asp.
University Grants Committee (UGC)	UGC is a non-statutory advisory committee responsible for advising the HKSAR Government on the development and funding needs of the publicly funded higher education institutions. Details at http://ugc.edu.hk.

European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

Council Recommendation on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (VNFIL)	The 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) calls on Member States to put arrangements in place by 2018 to allow individuals a) to have knowledge, skills and competences which have been acquired through non-formal and informal learning validated, and b) to obtain a full qualification, or, where applicable, part qualification, on the basis of validated non-formal and informal learning experiences. The 2012 Council Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning confirms the link between qualifications frameworks and validation arrangements. The EQF Advisory Group has been put in charge of following up on this process. (Cf. Validation) http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2012:398:0001:0005:EN:PDF
European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)	The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is a learner-centred system for credit accumulation and transfer, based on the transparency of learning, teaching and assessment processes. Its objective is to facilitate planning, delivery and evaluation of study programmes and learner mobility through the recognition of qualifications and periods of learning. It is a system that helps to design, describe and deliver study programmes and award higher education qualifications.
European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)	The European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) aims at facilitating the transfer, recognition and accumulation of learning outcomes of individuals on their way to achieve qualifications in vocational education and training regardless where learning outcomes have been acquired.
European Higher Education Area (EHEA)	The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was launched along with the Bologna Process' decade anniversary, in March 2010, during the Budapest-Vienna Ministerial Conference. As the main objective of the Bologna Process since its inception in 1999, the EHEA was meant to ensure more comparable, compatible and coherent systems of higher education in Europe. (Cf. QF-EHEA; Cf. Self-certification; Cf. Bologna Process) http://www.ehea.info/
European Quality Assurance for Vocational Education and Training	The European Quality Assurance for Vocational Education and Training is a reference tool for policy-makers based on a four-stage quality cycle that includes goal setting and planning, implementation, evaluation and review. It respects the autonomy of national governments and is a voluntary system to be used by

	public authorities and other bodies involved in quality assurance. http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/home.aspx
EQF Advisory Group (EQF AG)	EQF AG is the European level governance body for the EQF, set up based on the 2008 EQF Recommendation. The EQF AG is the body responsible for providing overall coherence and promoting transparency of the process of relating qualifications systems to the EQF. It comprises representatives of all participating countries, Council of Europe, EU social partners, Cedefop, ETF and other important EU stakeholders. The work is organised in form of regular meetings (4-5 a year), peer learning activities and working groups. [Definition: mix between what is written in the report, Note 3 and http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/index.cfm?do=group Detail.groupDetail&groupID=2107]
EQF Recommendation	Refers to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. It is the official document which constitutes the EQF. Recommendations are official EU documents without legal force but are negotiated and voted on according to appropriate legislative EU procedures. Although not legally binding to the Member States, all of them have chosen to implement the Recommendation. The total number of countries currently implementing the EQF is 38. Further examples of Recommendations include the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, and the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training. http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:111:0001:0007:EN:PDF
EQF Referencing Criteria	The 'Criteria and procedures for the referencing of national qualifications levels to the EQF' is a list of 10 criteria, which guide the referencing process of participating countries and bring some conformity to it in the interests of mutual trust. They help to ensure that national qualifications frameworks (or systems) are linked to the EQF in a coherent and transparent way. The criteria have provided a structure for the process of referencing and for the report of the process. (Cf. Referencing) http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-

	policy/doc/eqf/criteria_en.pdf
EQF Referencing Report	EQF Referencing Reports are an important element of the EQF Referencing Process (cf. Referencing). A Referencing Report is a statement of the relationship between a national qualifications system or framework of a country and the EQF, at a specific point of time. The 10 EQF Referencing Criteria (see above) provide a basis for the preparation of these reports. Countries then present their reports to the EQF AG. The EQF AG discusses them and provides feedback on the reports. The presentation and discussion of the reports improve understanding of qualification systems among EQF countries.
Europass	A portfolio of five different documents and an electronic folder aiming to contain descriptions of the entire holder's learning achievements, official qualifications, work experience, skills and competences, acquired over time. These documents are: the Europass CV, the Diploma Supplement, the Certificate Supplement, the Europass Mobility and the Language Passport. https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/en/home
Formal learning	Learning which takes place in an organised and structured environment, specifically dedicated to learning, and typically leads to the award of a qualification, usually in the form of a certificate or a diploma; it includes systems of general education, initial vocational training and higher education. http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222(01)&from=EN
Informal learning	Informal learning means learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure and is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support; it may be unintentional from the learner's perspective; examples of learning outcomes acquired through informal learning are skills acquired through life and work experiences, project management skills or ICT skills acquired at work, languages learned and intercultural skills acquired during a stay in another country, ICT skills acquired outside work, skills acquired through volunteering, cultural activities, sports, youth work and through activities at home (e.g. taking care of a child). http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222(01)&from=EN
International Sectoral Qualification	An "International Sectoral Qualification" is a certificate, diploma, degree or title awarded by an international body (or a national body accredited by an international body) and used in more than one country which includes learning outcomes (based on standards developed by an international sectoral organisation or an international company) relevant to a sector of economic

	activity.
Learning outcomes	As statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence: *'Knowledge'* is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study. In the context of the EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual; *'Skills'* means the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments); *'Competence'* means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy. https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/journal_en.pdf
National Coordination Point (NCP)	National Coordination Points, also known as EQF-NCPs, are contact points, which are set up in all participating countries, to support and coordinate the EQF Referencing Process at national level.
National Qualifications Framework (NQF)	An instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims to integrate and coordinate national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society. https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/journal_en.pdf
National Qualifications System	All aspects of a Member State's activity related to the recognition of learning and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. This includes the development and implementation of institutional arrangements and processes relating to quality assurance, assessment and the award of qualifications. A national qualifications system may be composed of several subsystems and may include a national qualifications framework. https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/journal_en.pdf
Non-formal learning	Learning which takes place through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time) where some form of learning

	support is present (e.g. student-teacher relationships); it may cover programmes to impart work skills, adult literacy and basic education for early school leavers; very common cases of non-formal learning include in-company training, through which companies update and improve the skills of their workers such as ICT skills, structured on-line learning (e.g. by making use of open educational resources), and courses organised by civil society organisations for their members, their target group or the general public. http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222(01)&from=EN
Principle of Best-fit	Best-fit is a way of finding harmony between two sets of differing data. Best-fit requires a common judgement from a range of stakeholders so that there can be confidence in the outcome of the approximation. It is a decision that is based on collective professional judgements of stakeholders. This principle is applied when referencing NQF levels to the EQF levels or when allocating qualifications (or qualification types) to NQF levels. This principle was also used by a joint technical expert group established comparability between the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and the EQF levels and provided the collective professional judgement for the decisions.
Qualifications Framework in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)	An overarching framework that makes transparent the relationship between European national higher education frameworks of qualifications and the qualifications they contain. (Cf. EHEA; Cf. Self-certification)
Qualification	In the context of the EQF, qualification means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards. https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/journal_en.pdf
Referencing Process	Referencing in the EQF is a process that results in the establishment of a relationship between the levels of national qualifications, usually defined in terms of a national qualifications framework, and the levels of the EQF. Through this process, national authorities responsible for qualifications systems, in cooperation with stakeholders responsible for developing and using qualifications, define the correspondence between the national qualifications system and the eight levels of the EQF.
Self-certification	The self-certification is a process by which the competent authorities of a given country verify that the national qualifications framework is compatible with the overarching QF-EHEA Framework. Once the self-certification process has been

	completed, self-certification reports should be published so that partners in the EHEA may access them. Many countries prepare these reports as a joint report with their EQF referencing report (Cf. EHEA; Cf. QF-EHEA). http://www.ehea.info/
Short Cycle Higher Education (SCHE)	SCHE are higher education degree programmes of less than 180 ECTS (typically 120 ECTS) in volume, leading to a degree that is recognised at a lower level than a qualification at the end of the first cycle. Such programmes may prepare learners for employment, while also providing preparation for, and access to studies for the completion of the first cycle. The descriptors of the short cycle correspond to the learning outcomes of EQF Level 5.
Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area	The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area contribute to the common understanding of quality assurance for learning and teaching across borders and among all stakeholders. They have played and will continue to play an important role in the development of national and institutional quality assurance systems across the EHEA and cross-border cooperation. Engagement with quality assurance processes, particularly the external ones, allows European higher education systems to demonstrate quality and increase transparency, thus helping to build mutual trust and better recognition of their qualifications, programmes and other provision. The European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) are used by institutions and quality assurance agencies as a reference document for internal and external quality assurance systems in higher education. Moreover, they are used by the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), which is responsible for the register of quality assurance agencies that comply with the ESG.
Validation (of learning outcomes)	Validation refers to the confirmation by a competent body that learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) acquired by an individual in a formal, non-formal or informal setting have been assessed against predefined criteria and are compliance with the requirements of a validation standard. Validation typically leads to certification. (Cf. Council Recommendation on VNFIL)

## Joint Technical Group

Terms of Reference

1.   The terms of reference of the Joint Technical Group include:

    a.   to develop, and to agree on, the processes and timelines for the Comparability Study (the Study);

    b.   to advise on the risks and benefits of the exercise to each party;

    c.   to enhance information exchanges between Hong Kong and European Union (EU) Member States to facilitate better understanding of respective qualifications frameworks and qualification systems;

    d.   to advise on the comparability of levels in the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), and how the comparability could be demonstrated in a transparent way;

    e.   to assist the Education Bureau (EDB) and the European Commission in the production of a report on the outcome of the comparison of the HKQF and the EQF; and

    f.   to help establish a working relationship between the EDB and the European Commission leading to long term cooperation in the development and implementation of qualifications frameworks.

Membership

2.   Membership of the Joint Technical Group comprises:

    a.   Representatives of the EDB of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (including representatives from the Qualifications Framework Secretariat of Hong Kong); and

    b.   Representatives from the EQF Advisory Group (including the European Commission, CEDEFOP, and five experts from EU Member States, i.e. Croatia, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg and Poland).

Hong Kong Education System

As Hong Kong is a former colony of the United Kingdom (from 1841 to 1997), the Hong Kong education system was closely modeled on the UK. However, after the change of sovereignty in 1997, the education system of Hong Kong has undergone a number of changes. The most significant of these has been the introduction of the New Academic Structure (NAS) in the 2009/10 academic year, which resulted in a move from a system of 7 years of secondary education followed by 3 years of university education (modeled on the British system) to a new structure consisting of 6 years of secondary education and 4 years of university education. Under the NAS, the 9 years of compulsory education, namely 6 years in primary school and 3 in junior secondary school, remain the same.
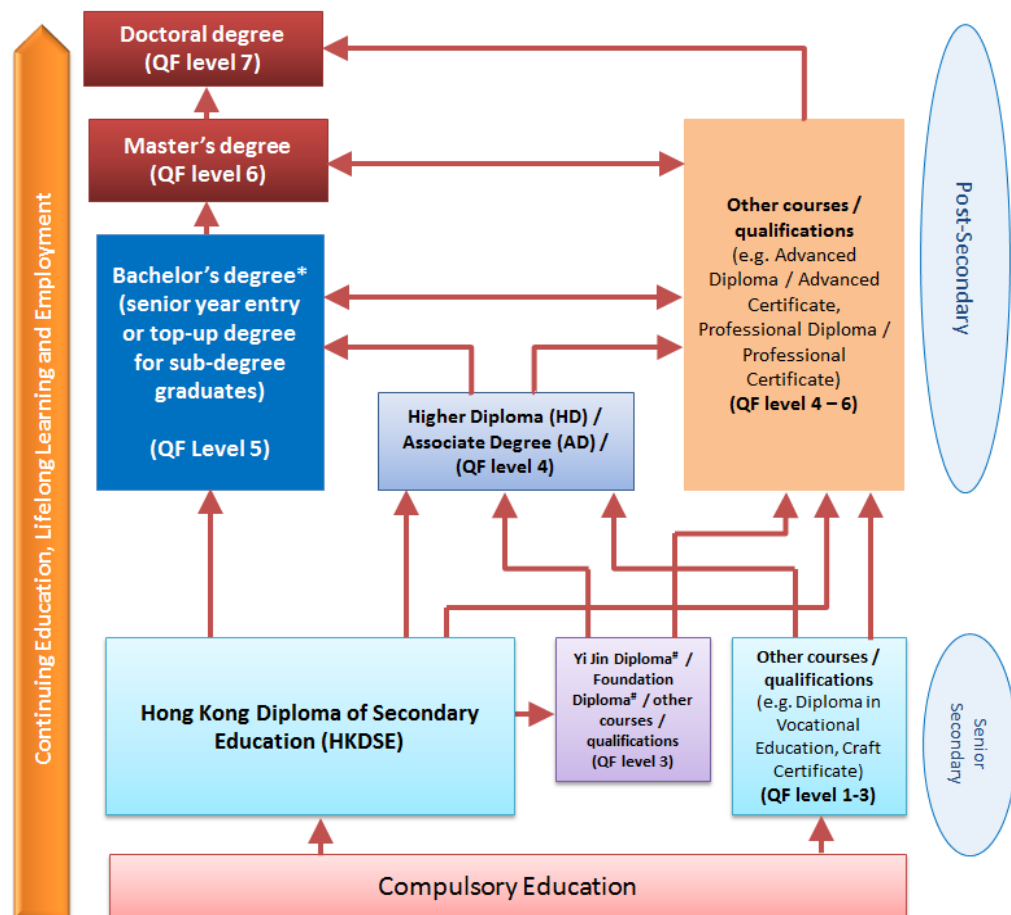
Note: The arrows in this chart denote possible articulation pathways only. Additional qualifications/requirements may be needed for some articulations.

* Under the new academic structure in Hong Kong, most Bachelor's degree programmes consist of four years of study. Upon completion of AD or HD programmes, students are eligible to be

admitted to senior year places of the Bachelor's degree programmes or to top-up degree programmes.

\#   Successful completion of Yi Jin Diploma and Foundation Diploma is comparable to the attainment of Level 2 in five subjects, including Chinese Language and English Language in the HKDSE Examination.

Medium of Instruction

Both Chinese and English are the official languages in Hong Kong. The medium of instruction (MOI) for Hong Kong higher education is usually English, while local primary and secondary schools use either English or Chinese as their MOI for teaching and learning. The HKSAR Government is committing both policies and resources to enable students to be biliterate (Chinese and English) and trilingual (Cantonese, Putonghua and English). To enhance the teaching of English Language and increase exposure of students to English, a Native-speaking English Teacher (NET) Scheme has been implemented in public-sector secondary and primary schools.

Student Achievements

Hong Kong students have performed very well and their achievements continue to be among the top globally, as evidenced by the results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA is a three-year international study conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) that assesses reading, mathematical and scientific literacy in the mother tongue of 15 year-old students. In the latest PISA report (2012), Hong Kong students ranked second in both reading and scientific literacy and third in mathematical literacy among students from the 65 countries/regions participating in the study.

Post-Secondary and Higher Education

Hong Kong provides multiple and flexible pathways for local students to pursue post-secondary and higher education. Both publicly-funded and self-financing programmes are provided at different levels, including sub-degree, undergraduate and above.

At present, Hong Kong has 20 local degree-awarding post-secondary education institutions, eight of which are Government-funded through the University Grants Committee (UGC)[77]. Together with providers offering sub-degree programmes, there are around 30 post-secondary institutions in Hong Kong. It is the HKSAR Government's policy to support the parallel development of the publicly-funded and self-financing post-secondary education sectors. The self-financing sector plays an important role in broadening the opportunities and choices for further education, thereby providing quality, diversified and flexible pathways with multiple entry and multiple exit points for school leavers.

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[77] http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/site/fund_inst.htm. The other 12 are the publicly-funded Hong Kong Academy for the Performing Arts (HKAPA) and the self-financing Caritas Institute of Higher Education, Centennial College, Chu Hai College of Higher Education, Gratia Christian College, Hang Seng Management College, HKCT Institute of Higher Education, Hong Kong Nang Yan College of Higher Education, Hong Kong Shue Yan University, Open University of Hong Kong, Tung Wah College and the Vocational Training Council's (VTC's) Technological and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong.

Vocational Education and Training

Vocational Education and Training (VET) is well catered for in Hong Kong through a combination of publicly funded and private providers. The Vocational Training Council (VTC) and the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) are the largest providers of vocational education, training and professional development for young and adult learners. The VTC offers a wide range of full-time and part-time courses, leading to formal qualifications up to degree level, and provides valuable credentials for about 250 000 learners each year through a full range of pre-employment and in-service programmes with internationally recognised qualifications.

The ERB co-ordinates, funds and monitors training courses and services that are market driven and employment-oriented so as to meet the changing needs of the employment market. The ERB has appointed about 100 training bodies with about 400 training centres across the territory to provide training courses and services. The ERB offers around 700 training courses straddling nearly 30 industries.

Major companies as well as various trade and professional bodies in Hong Kong provide training opportunities in VET and workplace training. VET operators come from different sectors including private education/training institutes, public organisations, NGOs and commercial corporations. [78] More and more company-specific courses have been accredited by the HKCAAVQ and registered in the QR. Employees who have completed such in-house training can obtain QF-recognised qualifications and progress further in their learning and career.

Hong Kong and Mainland China

In the Mainland China, the education system is overseen by the Ministry of Education. The education system includes pre-school, primary, secondary, vocational and higher education. Since 1986, the Chinese government has passed a compulsory education law, making 9 years of education mandatory for all Chinese children. The 9 years include 6 years of primary and 3 years of junior secondary education, after which students usually go on to complete senior secondary education, although some may choose to join vocational high schools or secondary professional schools for three to five years of specialised education. Higher education is offered in universities, colleges, institutes, and vocational colleges. To enter a university or college, students have to take the national entrance examination, which makes getting into a university highly competitive.

Although Hong Kong's education system is entirely independent from the Mainland China, close links have been fostered between the two systems since 1997. An MOU on the Mutual Recognition of Academic Degrees in Higher Education was signed in 2004[79]. This MOU facilitates the mutual recognition of academic degrees legally awarded by the higher education institutions in the Mainland China (including scientific research organisations) and Hong Kong as specified in the agreement, strengthens co-operation in education and promotes the exchange of students between both places. It also encourages and supports the co-operation of higher education institutions in the Mainland China and Hong Kong in the recognition of course credits.

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[78] www.hkqf.gov.hk/guie/Promotion%20of%20VET.asp (Hong Kong Qualifications Framework: Promotion of Vocational Education)
[79] http://www.edb.gov.hk/en/edu-system/postsecondary/policy-doc/mutual-recognition.html (Memorandum of Understanding between the Mainland and Hong Kong on Mutual Recognition of Academic Degrees in Higher Education and listed institutions)

83

In the school sector, the HKSAR Government launched a "sister-school scheme" in 2004 to encourage Hong Kong schools to establish partnerships with schools in the Mainland China. In January 2015, the Government further supported this scheme by subsidising primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong to forge links with their counterparts in the Mainland China through student exchange activities and school visits.

Local Expert Group

Terms of Reference

The Local Expert Group (LEG) shall provide advice and guidance to the Education Bureau (EDB) on:

a. the methodology, process and strategy for the alignment/referencing projects of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework and other national/regional Qualifications Frameworks (HKQF alignment/referencing projects);
b. the consultation and engagement of stakeholders of various sectors where necessary for the HKQF alignment/referencing projects;
c. the work and services to be provided by the consultant, if any, for the HKQF alignment/referencing projects; and
d. the preparation of the report for consideration of the EDB and the relevant authorities outside Hong Kong for the HKQF alignment/referencing projects.

Membership

Chairman: Deputy Secretary for Education

Members: Education Bureau

Principal Assistant Secretary for Education (Further Education)

Project Coordinator (Further Education)

Qualifications Framework Secretariat

General Manager, Qualifications Framework Secretariat

Quality Assurance Bodies

Executive Director, Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications

Secretary-General, University Grants Committee

Chairman, Joint Quality Review Committee

Education and Training Sector

Three representatives from the academic, vocational and continuing education sectors

Industry Sector

Three representatives from the industry and professional sectors

Secretary: Senior Manager, Qualifications Framework Secretariat

2016

<u>Appendix 4</u>

**Detailed Technical Comparison of the HKQF
and the EQF Level Descriptors**

HKQF Definitions	EQF Definitions	Comments Blue=differences <u>Underlined: comparable</u>
A **qualification** in the Qualifications Register <u>is granted by an education / training operator</u> upon completion of a learning programme. A qualification may also be granted <u>by an appointed assessment agency after successful assessment of the skills, knowledge or experience acquired</u> by an individual in a particular industry. http://www.hkqr.gov.hk/HKQR/commonMaint.do?go_target=aboutUsGlossary	**Qualification** means a <u>formal </u>outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has <u>achieved learning outcomes to given standards</u>	**Definitions** Intent is the same
The **Award Titles Scheme** aims to standardise the use of award titles under the Qualifications Framework (QF), which reflects the nature, area of study and hierarchy of the qualification. http://www.hkqf.gov.hk/media/HKQF/HKQF_ATS_E_2012_10.pdf, p1	No definition of Qualification in the EQF	

HKQF Definitions	EQF Definitions	Comments Blue=differences <u>Underlined: comparable</u>
The **Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF)** is a seven-level hierarchy covering qualifications in the academic, vocational and continuing education sectors. Qualifications recognised under the HKQF are quality assured and level-rated in accordance with objective and well-defined standards. The HKQF provides a transparent and accessible platform to promote lifelong learning with a view to enhancing the competitiveness of the workforce in Hong Kong. **Qualifications Framework Level** Qualifications recognised under the HKQF are ordered by levels in accordance with the outcome-based Generic Level Descriptors which describe the common features of qualifications at the same level. The HKQF level reflects the complexity of learning in a qualification. http://www.hkqr.gov.hk/HKQR/commonMaint.do?go_target=aboutUsGlossary	**The European Qualifications Framework (EQF)** In 2008 the Recommendation of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) was adopted with the objective of creating a common reference framework which should serve as a translation device between different European qualifications systems and their levels. This common reference framework should: – improve the transparency, comparability and portability of citizens' qualifications – promote lifelong learning – increase the employability, mobility and social integration of workers and learners – contribute to modernising education and training systems and to the interrelationship of education, training and employment The EQF consists of eight levels of learning outcomes covering all levels and types of qualifications. Each level is formulated in terms of knowledge, skills and competences and should be attainable through a variety of educational and career paths. As a meta-framework the EQF neither includes qualifications as such, nor does it address the ways in which countries structure and prioritise their education and training policies and institutions. The 2008 Recommendation set two milestones for Member States:	The HKQF is a local framework and the EQF is a regional reference framework.

88

HKQF Definitions	EQF Definitions	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Learning outcomes refer to what a learner should <u>know, understand, and/or be able to do</u> upon successful <u>completion of the learning programme</u>.	**Learning outcomes** means statements of what a learner <u>knows, understands and is able to do</u> on <u>completion of a learning process</u>, which are defined in terms of <u>knowledge, skills and competence</u>	Shared meaning
HKQF descriptors – dimensions • Knowledge & Intellectual Skills; • Processes; • Application, Autonomy and Accountability; • Communication, IT and Numeracy http://www.hkqf.gov.hk/guie/HKQF_GLD.asp	**EQF descriptors – dimensions:** • Knowledge, • Skills, • Competence	**Dimensions/Summary**: The EQF descriptors are structured based on domains of learning (K, S, C). The dimensions of the two descriptors tables cannot be linked to each other one-by-one (see below). The HKQF seems to refer to a lesser extent than the EQF to "practical skills" (such as manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments. The HKQF refers explicitly to communication, IT and numeracy that are to a lesser extent explicitly mentioned in the EQF.

HKQF Definitions	EQF Definitions	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Knowledge & <u>Intellectual</u> Skills covering the <u>analytical and evaluation skills</u> used to <u>solve problems</u>, and the ability to reflect on practice and <u>plan and manage learning</u>	**Knowledge** means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study. In the context of the EQF, is described as theoretical and/or factual.	Although the HKQF makes few clearer reference to knowledge per se and concentrates more on the skills required for the attainment of knowledge, the intent is the same
	Skills means the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and <u>solve problems</u>. In the context of the EQF, skills are described as <u>cognitive</u> (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).	Intellectual skills (HKQF) can be compared to cognitive skills (EQF) used for solving problems. "Plan and manage learning" (HKQF) can be linked to "responsibility and autonomy" in study situations (EQF - Competence).
	Competence means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or <u>study situations</u> and in professional and personal development. In the context of the EQF, competence is described in terms of <u>responsibility and autonomy.</u>	

90

HKQF Definitions	EQF Definitions	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Processes covering the application of judgement, communication skills and the ability to work with others interactively;	**Skills** means the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments). **Competence** means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.	The "application of judgement" as well as "communication skills" (HKQF - Process) can be considered as part of Skills (EQF). The latter is broader in meaning. Competence (EQF) can be understood as including "the ability to work with others" (HKQF), although it is not explicitly mentioned. Again, the meaning of Competence (EQF) is broader.
Application, Autonomy and Accountability The degree of application, autonomy and accountability assumed while practicing those skills	**Competence** means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.	Both dimensions refer to autonomy and the intention of "accountability" (HKQF) and "responsibility" (EQF) seems to be the same.

HKQF Definitions	EQF Definitions	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Communication, IT and Numeracy Skill areas of Communication, IT, and Numeracy	**Skills** means the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).	The skill areas "Communication, IT and Numeracy" (HKQF) are not explicitly included in EQF descriptors (but are included in some NQFs referenced to the EQF). However, they can be considered as included in "Skills" (EQF).
Non-formal learning Learning that takes place in a formal setting (e.g. workplace training) but does not lead to a formally accredited qualification http://www.hkqf.gov.hk/guie/HKQF_CAT.asp, p33	**Non-formal learning** means learning which takes place through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time) where some form of learning support is present (e.g. student-teacher relationships); it may cover programmes to impart work skills, adult literacy and basic education for early school leavers; very common cases of non-formal learning include in-company training, through which companies update and improve the skills of their workers such as ICT skills, structured on-line learning (e.g. by making use of open educational resources), and courses organised by civil society organisations for their members, their target group or the general public; http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2012:398:0001:0005:EN:PDF	The definition used in the EQF context only refers to the learning context and not to the result of learning; learning outcomes acquired in these settings can be equivalent in content and relevance to formal qualifications; qualifications gained through non-formal learning can be linked to the EQF via their inclusion in NQFs that are referenced to the EQF.

HKQF Level 1	EQF Level 1	Comments Blue=differences, Underlined: comparable
Summary Award titles: • Completion of Secondary 3 • Foundation Certificate (ERB)	**Summary** Qualification types linked to EQF level 1 are often considered as basic certificates for general education (for example, the "Certificate of completing primary school" in Poland (6 years) or second cycle of basic education (6 years) in Portugal or 6th grade of primary education in Hungary and primary education certificate (4th grade) in Lithuania. In some countries the Primary education certificate linked to the EQF level 1 includes eight years (ISCED 1 and 2] as in in Croatia or Lower secondary school-leaving certificates as in Italy. Examples of VET qualifications linked to the EQF level 1 are "VET level 1" in Malta or "Vocational training preparation" in Germany. Sometimes also qualifications for people with special learning needs (for example, Estonia and Latvia) or level 1 certificate in communication in Ireland are referenced to the EQF level 1 and functional skill entry level in England.	As to linguistic comparison, the HKQF level 1 seems to correspond to EQF level 1, but the purpose and outcomes of the qualifications that sit on the HKQF 1 and those referenced to the EQF level 1, seem to be different.

HKQF Level 1	EQF Level 1	Comments Blue=differences, Underlined: comparable
Knowledge & Intellectual Skills • Employ recall and demonstrate <u>elementary comprehension in a narrow range of areas</u> with dependency on ideas of others • <u>Exercise basic skills</u> • Receive and pass on information • Use, <u>under supervision</u> or prompting, basic tools and materials. • Apply learnt responses to solve problems • Operate in familiar, personal and/or everyday contexts • Take some account, with prompting, of identified consequences of actions.	**Knowledge** <u>Basic general knowledge</u> **Skills** <u>Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks</u> **Competence** Work or study <u>under direct supervision</u> in a structured context	"Elementary comprehension in a narrow range of areas" (HKQF 1) can be compared to "Basic general knowledge" (EQF 1 – Knowledge) and "Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks" (EQF 1 – Skills). "Exercise basic skills" (HKQF 1) can be compared to "Basic skills" (EQF 1 – Skills). **"**Under supervision" (HKQF 1) can be compared to "under direct supervision" (EQF 1 – Competence). The EQF 1 descriptors do not refer to any kind of responsibility.
Process • Operate mainly in closely defined and highly <u>structured contexts</u> • Carry out processes that are repetitive and predictable • Undertake the performance of <u>clearly defined tasks</u> • Assume a strictly limited range of roles.	**Skills** Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks **Competence** Work or study under direct supervision in a <u>structured context</u>	Both descriptors refer to structured contexts; the use of "highly structured context" in HKQF 1 could be understood as signaling an even lower level than EQF 1. "Clearly defined tasks" (HKQF 1) can be compared to structured context (EQF 1 – Competence).

HKQF Level 1	EQF Level 1	Comments Blue=differences, Underlined: comparable
Application, Autonomy & Accountability • The ability to perform tasks of routine and repetitive nature given clear direction • Carry out directed activity under close supervision • Rely entirely on external monitoring of output and quality	**Competence** Work or study under direct supervision in a structured context	"Carry out directed activity under close supervision" and "Rely entirely on external monitoring of output and quality" (HKQF 1) can be compared to "Work or study under direct supervision in a structured context" (EQF 1 – Competence).
Communication, IT and Numeracy • Use very simple skills with assistance — for example: • Take some part in discussions about straightforward subjects • Read and identify the main points and ideas from documents about straightforward subjects • Produce and respond to a limited range of simple, written and oral communications, in familiar/routine contexts • Carry out a limited range of simple tasks to process data and access information • Use a limited range of very simple and familiar numerical and pictorial data • Carry out calculations, using whole numbers and simple decimals to given levels of accuracy.		

The language of the learning outcomes in both the HKQF and EQF at Level 1 is similar, but the purpose and outcomes of the qualifications that sit on the HKQF and most of the NQFs referenced to EQF Level 1, are different. Qualifications (types) referenced to EQF Level 1 relate to basic certificates for general education/VET, or awards in adult learning for achieving basic skills for specific target groups. Hong Kong does not certify and include achievements which are equivalent to EQF Level 1 therefore EQF level 1 does not have a corresponding level in the HKQF.

HKQF Level 1	EQF Level 2	Comments Blue=differences: Underlined: comparable
Summary Award titles: • Completion of Secondary 3 • Foundation Certificate (ERB)	**Summary** EQF level 2 accommodates qualification from lower secondary education in most countries as is the case for instance in Czech republic, Denmark, Estonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia or GCSEs at grade D-G' in UK- England, Wales and Northern Ireland. There are also some elementary qualifications for example "VET level 2" in Malta, and vocational qualification 1 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.	HKQF level 1 corresponds well to EQF level 2.

HKQF Level 1	EQF Level 2	Comments Blue=differences: Underlined: comparable
Knowledge & Intellectual Skills • Employ recall and demonstrate <u>elementary comprehension in a narrow range of areas</u> with dependency on ideas of others • <u>Exercise basic skills</u> • Receive and pass on information • Use, under supervision or prompting, <u>basic tools and materials.</u> • Apply learnt responses to solve problems • <u>Operate in familiar, personal and/or everyday contexts</u> • <u>Take some account, with prompting, of identified consequences of actions.</u>	**Knowledge** <u>Basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study</u> **Skills** <u>Basic cognitive and practical skills</u> required to use relevant information to carry out tasks and to <u>solve routine problems</u> using simple rules and tools **Competence** <u>Work or study under supervision with some autonomy</u>	EQF defines the knowledge at Level 2 as basic "factual" knowledge which distinguishes it from "general" knowledge defined at Level 1 "Elementary comprehension in a narrow range of areas" (HKQF 1) can be compared to "Basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study" (EQF 2 – Knowledge). "Exercise basic skills" (HKQF 1) can be compared to "Basic cognitive and practical skills" (EQF 2 – Skills). "Basic tools and materials" (HKQF 1) can be compared to "simple rules and tools" (EQF 2 – Skills). "Operate in familiar, personal and/or everyday contexts" (HKQF 1) can be compared to "solve routine problems" (EQF 2 – Skills). "Take some account, with prompting, of identified consequences of actions" (HKQF 1) can be compared to "Work or study under supervision with some autonomy" (EQF 2 – Competence).

97

HKQF Level 1	EQF Level 2	Comments Blue=differences: Underlined: comparable
Process • Operate mainly in closely defined and highly structured contexts • <u>Carry out processes that are repetitive and predictable</u> • Undertake the performance of clearly defined tasks • Assume a strictly limited range of roles.	**Skills** Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information to carry out tasks and to <u>solve routine problems</u> using simple rules and tools **Competence** Work or study under supervision with some autonomy	"Carry out processes that are repetitive and predictable" (HKQF 1) can be compared to "solve routine problems" (EQF 2 – Skills).
Application, Autonomy & Accountability • The ability to perform tasks of routine and repetitive nature given clear direction • <u>Carry out directed activity under close supervision</u> • Rely entirely on external monitoring of output and quality	**Competence** <u>Work or study under supervision with some autonomy</u>	"Carry out directed activity under close supervision" (HKQF 1) can be compared to "Work or study under supervision with some autonomy" (EQF 2 – Competence). (The descriptions related to HKQF 1 - Knowledge & Intellectual Skills also refer to some responsibility: "Take some account, with prompting, of identified consequences of actions")

HKQF Level 1	EQF Level 2	Comments Blue=differences: Underlined: comparable
Communication, IT and Numeracy • Use very simple skills with assistance — for example: • Take some part in discussions about straightforward subjects • Read and identify the main points and ideas from documents about straightforward subjects • Produce and respond to a limited range of simple, written and oral communications, in familiar/routine contexts • Carry out a limited range of simple tasks to process data and access information • Use a limited range of very simple and familiar numerical and pictorial data • Carry out calculations, using whole numbers and simple decimals to given levels of accuracy.		

The EQF defines the knowledge at Level 2 as basic "factual" knowledge which distinguishes it from "general" knowledge defined at Level 1. Although the HKQF makes few clear references to knowledge per se and concentrates more on intellectual skills, it seems reasonable to assume that the HKQF descriptor calling for "elementary comprehension in a narrow range of areas" is a more advanced requirement than "general knowledge" and is more in keeping with "basic factual knowledge". The use of the term "comprehension" would seem to indicate an expectation of some cognitive aspect of knowledge use rather than simple regurgitation of facts. The HKQF descriptor is further refined by the addition of "a narrow range of areas" which also seems to suggest a move from the general to the more specific.

In the skills area, EQF Level 2 has moved away from the "basic skills" described at Level 1 to a requirement for "basic cognitive and practical skills" at Level 2. Furthermore, the use of these skills is defined as an ability to "use relevant information" and to "carry out tasks" and "solve routine problems". At Level 1 in the HKQF there is an expectation that learners will be able to carry out processes that are repetitive and predictable and undertake the performance of clearly defined tasks. We would argue that these are basic practical skills which match well with the EQF Level 2 descriptor. In addition, a number of descriptors in the Communications, IT & Numeracy domain at Level 1 in the HKQF clearly demonstrate the use of basic cognitive skills. For example, the requirement to read and identify the main points and ideas from documents and the ability to use numerical and

pictorial data as well as the requirement to produce and respond to a limited range of written and oral communications all indicate, at the very least, a level of simple cognitive functioning.

It is in the area of competence the match between EQF Level 2 and HKQF Level 1 becomes less obvious. Whilst being prescriptive about the need for supervision, the HKQF is less clear about the consequences of this for learner/worker autonomy. So, for example, whereas the HKQF states clearly that learners should be able to "carry out directed activity under close supervision" (cf. work or study under supervision), the issue of autonomy is not specifically addressed. However, if we look at the Application, Autonomy & Accountability descriptor which states "the ability to perform tasks of a routine and repetitive nature given clear direction" this would seem to indicate that some autonomy is anticipated. Likewise, looking at the outcomes listed in the Communications, IT & Numeracy domain, we would have to assume that, although supervised, these tasks (e.g. carry out calculations, use numerical and pictorial data, take part in discussions, process data and access information) must be carried out with a degree of autonomy. In addition, the HKQF descriptor "take some account, with prompting, of identified consequences of actions", as well as being a relatively advanced cognitive skill, also indicates a degree of autonomy in action.

Using the "best fit" principle, it can be concluded that two levels are comparable.

Conclusion: BEST FIT

HKQF Level 2	EQF Level 2	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Summary Award titles: • HK Certificate of Education Examinations (up to 2011) • Project Yi Jin • Craft Certificate	**Summary** EQF level 2 accommodates qualifications from lower secondary education in most countries as is the case for instance in Czech republic, Denmark, Estonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia or GCSEs at grade D-G' in UK- England, Wales and Northern Ireland In U–England. There are also some elementary qualifications for example "VET level 2" in Malta, vocational qualification 1 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.	Several descriptors seem to be comparable; however, there are some formulations which suggest that EQF 2 expresses a lower level than HKQF 2: • The use of the term "basic" at EQF 2 – Skills: • HKQF 2 also refers to non-routine contexts; EQF 2 – Skills only refers to routine problems. Based on best fit, HKQF level 2 seems to better correspond to EQF level 3.

101

HKQF Level 2	EQF Level 2	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Knowledge & Intellectual Skills • Apply knowledge based on an underpinning comprehension in a selected number of areas • Make comparisons with some evaluation and interpret available information • Apply basic tools and materials and use rehearsed stages for solving problems. • Operate in familiar, personal and/or everyday contexts • Take account the identified consequences of actions.	**Knowledge** Basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study **Skills** Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools **Competence** Work or study under supervision with some autonomy	The use of the term "basic" (EQF 2 – Skills) seems to express a lower level than HKQF 2. "Apply basic tools and materials" (HKQF 2) can be compared to "using simple rules and tools" (EQF 2 – Skills). "use rehearsed stages for solving problem" and "Operate in familiar, personal and/or everyday contexts" (HKQF 2) can be compared to "solve routine problems" (EQF 2 – Skills). "Take account the identified consequences of actions" (HKQF 2) can be compared to "Work or study under supervision with some autonomy" (EQF 2 – Competence).
Process • Choose from a range of procedures performed in a number of contexts, a few of which may be non-routine • Co-ordinate with others to achieve common goals.	**Skills** Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools **Competence** Work or study under supervision with some autonomy	HKQF 2 also refers to non-routine contexts; EQF 2 – Skills only refers to routine problems.

HKQF Level 2	EQF Level 2	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Application, Autonomy & Accountability • The ability to perform a range of tasks in predictable and structured contexts • Undertake directed activity with a degree of autonomy • Achieve outcomes within time constraints • Accept defined responsibility for quantity and quality of output subject to external quality checking.	**Competence** Work or study under supervision with some autonomy	"Undertake directed activity with a degree of autonomy" and "Accept defined responsibility for quantity and quality of output subject to external quality checking "(HKQF 2) can be compared to "Work or study under supervision with some autonomy" (EQF 2 – Competence).
Communication, IT and Numeracy • Use skills with some assistance — for example: • Take active part in discussions about identified subjects • Identify the main points and ideas from documents and reproduce them in other contexts • Produce and respond to a specified range of written and oral communications, in familiar/routine contexts • Carry out a defined range of tasks to process data and access information • Use a limited range of familiar numerical and graphical data in everyday contexts • Carry out calculations, using percentages and graphical data to given levels of accuracy.	**Skills** Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools	

Several descriptors seem to be comparable; however, there are formulations which suggest that EQF 2 expresses a lower level than HKQF Level 2:

2016

• The use of the term "basic" at EQF Level 2 – Skills; and

• HKQF 2 also refers to non-routine contexts; EQF Level 2 – Skills only refers to routine problems.

Based on best fit, HKQF Level 2 seems to better correspond to EQF Level 3.

HKQF Level 2	EQF Level 3	Comments Blue=differences Underlined : comparable
Summary Award titles: • HK Certificate of Education Examinations (up to 2011) • Project Yi Jin • Craft Certificate	**Summary** EQF level 3 is often used for VET qualifications for semi-skilled workers as is the case in Slovenia or Croatia; for skilled workers' IVET qualifications (e.g. CZ 3 years VET certificate), VET (journeyman's certificate in Denmark, dual VET (two-year program) in Germany, level 3 certificate in Ireland, professional operator certificate in Italy, vocational aptitude diploma in Luxembourg or MBO-3 VET in the Netherlands. In some countries, secondary education certificates are referenced to the EQF level 3 as for example, "GCSE at grade A-C" in UK- England, Wales and Northern Ireland, secondary education certificate (grades 1-5) in Malta, secondary education certificate in Portugal, certificate attesting completion of five years secondary education in Luxembourg or certificate of general basic education in Latvia.	Although several descriptors of HKQF level 2 seem to be comparable also to EQF level 2, HKQF level descriptors 2 are in several aspects more demanding and better correspond to EQF level 3. There appears to be a best fit between HKQF Level 2 and EQF Level 3.

HKQF Level 2	EQF Level 3	Comments Blue=differences Underlined : comparable
Knowledge & Intellectual Skills • Apply knowledge based on an underpinning comprehension in a selected number of areas • Make comparisons with some evaluation and interpret available information • Apply basic tools and materials and use rehearsed stages for solving problems. • Operate in familiar, personal and/or everyday contexts • Take account of the identified consequences of actions.	**Knowledge** Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study **Skills** A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information **Competence** Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study Adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems	"Apply basic tools and materials" (HKQF 2) can be compared to "applying basic methods, tools, materials and information" (EQF 3 – Skills). "Take account of the identified consequences of actions" (HKQF 2) can be compared to "Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study" (EQF 3 – Competence).

HKQF Level 2	EQF Level 3	Comments Blue=differences Underlined : comparable
Process • <u>Choose from a range of procedures performed in a number of contexts, a few of which may be non-routine</u> • Co-ordinate with others to achieve common goals.	**Skills** A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information	"Choose from a range of procedures performed in a number of contexts, a few of which may be non-routine" (HKQF 2) can be compared to "Adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems" (EQF 4 – Competence).
	Competence Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study <u>Adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems</u>	Coordination with others is part of the descriptors for HKQF 2; this is not included at EQF 3.
Application, Autonomy & Accountability • The ability to perform a range of tasks in predictable and structured contexts • Undertake directed activity with a degree of autonomy • Achieve outcomes within time constraints • <u>Accept defined responsibility</u> for quantity and quality of output subject to external quality checking.	**Competence** <u>Take responsibility</u> for completion of tasks in work or study Adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems	"Accept defined responsibility…" (HKQF 2) can be compared to "Take responsibility…" (EQF 3 – Competence).

HKQF Level 2	EQF Level 3	Comments Blue=differences Underlined : comparable
Communication, IT and Numeracy • Use skills with some assistance — for example: • Take active part in discussions about identified subjects • <u>Identify the main points and ideas</u> from documents and reproduce them in other contexts • Produce and respond to a specified range of written and oral communications, in familiar/routine contexts • Carry out a defined range of tasks to process data and access information • Use a limited range of familiar numerical and graphical data in everyday contexts • <u>Carry out</u> calculations, using percentages and graphical data to given levels of accuracy.	**Skills** A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by <u>selecting and applying</u> basic methods, tools, materials and information	

At EQF Level 3, the knowledge domain remains restricted to a single field of work or study, but the breadth of knowledge has been expanded to include not only factual knowledge but also knowledge of "principles, processes and general concepts". Overall, the HKQF is relatively silent on the matter of "knowledge" per se and instead specifies the progressive acquisition throughout the seven levels of the hierarchy of intellectual skills involved in the application of knowledge. Nevertheless, the HKQF Level 2 outcomes specify that the application of knowledge should be based on an "underpinning comprehension in a selected number of areas". One may argue that such an underpinning comprehension goes beyond "basic factual knowledge" at EQF level 2 and encompasses the knowledge of "principles, processes and general concepts' specified at EQF level 3.

In the skills domain, EQF Level 3 prescribes the acquisition of "a range" of cognitive and basic skills, and indicates that the learner should be capable of "selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information". In the HKQF at Level 2, it is clearly stated that learners should be able to "choose from a range of procedures performed in a number of contexts, a few of which may be non-routine". In addition there is an expectation at this level that learners should be able to "make comparisons with some evaluation and interpret available information". However, it is in the Communications, IT & Numeracy domain that we get an indication of the best match between HKQF Level 2

and EQF Level 3. Several of the Hong Kong descriptors cover the concept of "selecting and applying". For example, at Level 2 Hong Kong learners are expected to be able to "identify the main points and ideas from documents and reproduce them in other contexts".

In the EQF, the problems learners are expected to solve at Level 3 are no longer described as "routine" as at Level 2. In the HKQF, problem solving has also progressed from "applying learnt responses to solve problems" at Level 1 to the application of basic tools and materials and using rehearsed stages for solving problems at Level 2. The word "routine" in relation to problems does not occur at either Level 1 or Level 2 of the HKQF.

The HKQF requires that learners to "carry out a defined range of tasks to process data" and "use a limited range of familiar numerical and graphical data in everyday contexts". It has to be assumed that these skills are being used to "accomplish tasks and solve problems" (cf. EQF Level 3) and not for purely academic purposes.

In the area of competence, EQF Level 3 introduces the concept of taking responsibility for task completion as well as the adaptation of behaviour to circumstances. In the HKQF, the use of the phrase "non-routine" in the Processes domain at Level 2 may be equated to the EQF concept of (changing) circumstances. Additionally learners at HKQF Level 2 are expected to accept defined responsibility for quantity and quality of output which mirrors the assumption of responsibility for completion of tasks that appears at Level 3 of the EQF. At EQF level 3, the level of autonomy is increased as individuals are expected to "take responsibility for completion of tasks" and to "adapt own behavior to circumstances in solving problems". A number of the HKQF Level 2 descriptors appear to align closely with the EQF level 3 Competence descriptor outcomes cited above. At HKQF level 2, individuals are expected to "accept defined responsibility for quantity and quality of output" and to "achieve outcomes within time constraints"; to "take account of the identified consequences of actions" and to operate in "non-routine" contexts, all of which would require adaptive behaviour on their part.

In conclusion, there appears to be a best fit between HKQF Level 2 and EQF Level 3 in all the domains.

Conclusion: BEST FIT

HKQF Level 3	EQF Level 3	Comments Blue=differences Underlined; comparable
Summary: Award titles: • Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education • Diploma of Vocational Education • Yi Jin Diploma	**Summary** EQF level 3 is often used for VET qualifications for semi-skilled workers as is the case in Slovenia or Croatia; for skilled workers' IVET qualifications (e.g. CZ 3 years VET certificate), VET (journeyman's certificate in Denmark, dual VET (two-year program) in Germany, level 3 certificate in Ireland, professional operator certificate in Italy, vocational aptitude diploma in Luxembourg or MBO-3 VET in the Netherlands. In some countries, secondary education certificates are referenced to the EQF level 3 as for example, "GCSE at grade A-C" in UK- England, Wales and Northern Ireland, secondary education certificate (grades 1-5) in Malta, secondary education certificate in Portugal, certificate attesting completion of five years secondary education in Luxembourg or certificate of general basic education in Latvia.	HKQF Level 3 in many aspects exceeds EQF Level 3. It seems to better fit with EQF level 4.

HKQF Level 3	EQF Level 3	Comments Blue=differences Underlined; comparable
Knowledge & Intellectual Skills • Apply knowledge and skills in a range of activities, demonstrating comprehension of relevant theories • Access, organise and evaluate information independently and make reasoned judgements in relation to a subject or discipline • Employ a range of responses to well defined, but sometimes unfamiliar or unpredictable, problems • Make generalisations and predictions in familiar contexts.	**Knowledge** Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study **Skills** A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information	"Comprehension of relevant theories" (HKQF 3) seems to express a higher level than "Knowledge of facts…" (EQF 3 – Knowledge). The use of the term "basic" at EQF 3 – Skills also suggests a lower level.
Process • Operate in a variety of familiar and some unfamiliar contexts, using a known range of technical or learning skills • Select from a considerable choice of predetermined procedures • Give presentations to an audience	**Skills** A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information **Competence** Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study Adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems	The use of the term "basic" at EQF 3 – Skills also suggests a lower level.

HKQF Level 3	EQF Level 3	Comments Blue=differences Underlined; comparable
Application, Autonomy & Accountability • The ability to perform tasks in a broad range of predictable and structured contexts which may also involve some non-routine activities requiring a degree of individual responsibility Engage in self-directed activity with guidance/evaluation • Accept responsibility for quantity and quality of output • Accept well defined but limited responsibility for the quantity and quality of the output of others	**Competence** Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study Adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems	Responsibility for work of others is not mentioned at EQF 3 but at 4. The descriptors of HKQF 3 seem to express a higher level than EQF 3 – Competence.
Communication, IT and Numeracy • Use a wide range of largely routine and well practiced skills — for example: Produce and respond to detailed and complex written and oral communication in familiar contexts, and use a suitable structure and style when writing extended documents. • Select and use standard applications to obtain, process and combine information Use a wide range of numerical and graphical data in routine contexts, which may have some non-routine elements.	**Skills** A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information	

HKQF Level 3 in many aspects exceeds EQF Level 3. It seems to be a better fit with EQF Level 4.

Comparability Study of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) and the
European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF):
Joint Technical Report

2016

HKQF Level 3	EQF Level 4	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Summary: Award titles: • HK Diploma of Secondary Education • Diploma of Vocational Education • Yi Jin Diploma	**Summary** National levels linked to EQF Level 4 are often used for classifying secondary school-leaving certificates from general education and/or VET.	There is a broad comparability in requirements in knowledge, skills, autonomy, responsibility and accountability between the HKQF Level 3 and EQF Level 4. Both frameworks stress that at this level learners will be able to take responsibility for their own learning and work and have some responsibility and supervisory functions for the work of others. The Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education that is accepted in the local context as being the entry qualification to post-secondary education, including universities, is benchmarked to the outcome standards at HKQF Level 3. HKQF Level 3 also holds the Diploma in Vocational Education (DVE) that qualifies learners to access Higher Diploma programmes at the next QF level and provides progression possibilities for Craft certificate at HKQF Level 2. Similarly, qualifications referenced to EQF Level 4 are general education upper secondary school-leaving certificates (giving access to HE) and upper–secondary VET school leaving certificates (school-based VET and dual VET) leading to skilled work and opening pathways to further learning in tertiary education. Overall, HKQF Level 3 best fits with EQF Level 4.

114

Comparability Study of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) and the
European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF):
Joint Technical Report

HKQF Level 3	EQF Level 4	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Knowledge & Intellectual Skills • Apply knowledge and skills in a range of activities, demonstrating comprehension of relevant theories • Access, organise and evaluate information independently and make reasoned judgements in relation to a subject or discipline • Employ a range of responses to well defined, but sometimes unfamiliar or unpredictable, problems • Make generalisations and predictions in familiar contexts.	**Knowledge** Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study. **Skills** A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study. **Competence** Exercise self management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change. Supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities.	At Level 4, EQF introduces the concept of "theoretical knowledge". HKQF has already introduced the concept of the application of knowledge at Level 2 and develops this concept further at Level 3 where there is a requirement to demonstrate "comprehension of relevant theories". In addition, EQF places this knowledge "in broad contexts" while HKQF words this slightly differently, contextualizing this knowledge "in a range of activities". Both descriptors refer to sometimes unpredictable problems or contexts. "A range of responses to well defined" (HKQF 3) can be compared to "generate solutions to specific problems" (EQF 4 - Skills).

HKQF Level 3	EQF Level 4	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Process • Operate in a variety of familiar and some unfamiliar contexts, using a known range of technical or learning skills • Select from a considerable choice of predetermined procedures • Give presentations to an audience	**Skills** A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study **Competence** Exercise self management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change Supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities	"Operate in a variety of familiar and some unfamiliar contexts" (HKQF 3) can be compared to "contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change" (EQF 4 – Competence). "Using a known range of technical or learning skills" (HKQF 3) can be compared to "A range of cognitive and practical skills" (EQF 4 - Skills).

HKQF Level 3	EQF Level 4	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Application, Autonomy & Accountability • The ability to perform tasks in a broad range of <u>predictable and structured contexts which may also involve some non-routine activities</u> requiring a degree of individual responsibility • <u>Engage in self-directed activity with guidance/evaluation</u> • Accept responsibility for quantity and quality of output • <u>Accept well defined but limited responsibility for the quantity and quality of the output of others</u>	**Competence** <u>Exercise self management within the guidelines of work or study</u> <u>contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change</u> <u>Supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities</u>	"Predictable and structured contexts which may also involve some non-routine activities" (HKQF 3) can be compared to "contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change" (EQF 4). "Engage in self-directed activity with guidance/evaluation" (HKQF 3) can be compared to "Exercise self management within the guidelines of work or study" (EQF 4). "Accept well defined but limited responsibility for the quantity and quality of the output of others" (HKQF 3) can be compared to "Supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities" (EQF 4).

HKQF Level 3	EQF Level 4	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Communication, IT and Numeracy • Use a wide range of largely <u>routine and well practiced</u> <u>skills</u> — for example: • Produce and respond to detailed and complex written and oral communication in familiar contexts, and use a suitable structure and style when writing extended documents. • Select and use standard applications to obtain, process and combine information • Use a wide range of numerical and graphical data in routine contexts, which may have <u>some non-routine elements</u>.	**Skills** A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study.	HKQF Level 3 learners are expected to "use a wide range of largely routine and well-practiced skills". At first sight this would appear to align well with the EQF Level 3 skills descriptors relating to the application of a "wide range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by applying basic methods, tools, materials and information". However, the concept of "non-routine" that is introduced in HKQF at Level 3 is only introduced at Level 4 of EQF.

At Level 4, the EQF introduces the concept of "theoretical knowledge". The HKQF has already introduced the concept of the application of knowledge at Level 2 and develops this concept further at Level 3 where there is a requirement to demonstrate "comprehension of relevant theories". In addition, the EQF places this knowledge "in broad contexts" while the HKQF words this slightly differently, contextualizing this knowledge "in a range of activities". It can be understood from this that a <u>broadening of the knowledge base is required at this level in both frameworks.</u>

EQF Level 4 limits problem solving to the ability to solve "specific problems in broad contexts within a field of work or study". At Level 3, the HKQF appears to go further by specifying that learner will be able to operate in "some unfamiliar contexts" using "a known range of technical or learning skills" (cf. cognitive skills in the EQF). In the skills domain, Level 4 of the EQF introduces the idea that people should be able to "generate solutions" to problems. At Level 3 of the HKQF, the descriptors include "employ a range of responses.... to problems", "evaluate information" and "making reasoned judgements" which are all skills used in problem solving.

Both the EQF and the HKQF stress that at this level, learners will be able to take responsibility for their own work. The EQF level 4 descriptors include the ability to "exercise self-management within guidelines" which is comparable to the HKQF Level 3 requirement that the learner be able to "engage in self-directed activity with guidance/evaluation"

118

The concept of unpredictability and unfamiliarity of context is introduced at Level 4 in the EQF and at Level 3 of the HKQF. The EQF Level 4 outcomes require learners who have completed qualifications at this level to "work or study (in) contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change". This is equivalent to the HKQF Level 3 descriptors concerning the employment of "a range of responses to well defined, but sometimes unfamiliar or unpredictable problems", being able to "operate in a variety of familiar and some unfamiliar contexts" and to "perform tasks....which may involve some non-routine activities requiring a degree of individual responsibility".

The concept of supervisory skills is introduced at this level in both frameworks. The EQF states that at Level 4 people should be competent to "supervise the routine work of others, taking responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities". This is broadly equivalent to the HKQF Level 3 descriptor which states that learners achieving this level should "accept well defined but limited responsibility for the quantity and quality of the output of others". Nevertheless the verb "supervise" is not used at HKQF level 3 and while we believe that taking responsibility for the work of others, in terms of quantity and quality, implies the assumption of some supervisory role, it is clear that the capacity to exercise supervisory skills is more constrained at Level 3 of the HKQF than at Level 4 of the EQF.

With respect to the CITN domain, at HKQF Level 3 learners are expected to "use a wide range of largely routine and well-practiced skills". At first sight this would appear to align well with the EQF Level 3 skills descriptors relating to the application of a "wide range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by applying basic methods, tools, materials and information". However, the concept of "non-routine" that is introduced in the HKQF at Level 3 is only introduced at Level 4 of the EQF. HKQF Level 3 also introduces a level of complexity with regard to the detailed descriptor on written communication skills ("produce and respond to detailed and complex written and oral communications") which would seem to be at a higher level than implied by the skills descriptors at EQF Level 3.

Applying the "best fit" principle we conclude that HKQF Level 3 and EQF level 4 are comparable.

Conclusion: BEST FIT

Comparability Study of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF):
Joint Technical Report

HKQF Level 4	EQF Level 4	Comments Blue=differences Underlined : comparable
Summary: Award titles: • Associate Degree • Higher Diploma	**Summary** National levels linked to EQF level 4 are used for classifying secondary school-leaving certificates from general education giving access to HE and/or VET certificates.	Although several descriptors of HKQF Level 4 seem to match EQF Level 4, HKQF Level 4 descriptors are in some aspects more demanding and better correspond to EQF Level 5. Additionally HKQF Level 4 functions as the first level of post-secondary education and includes generic qualifications such as Higher Diploma and Associate Degree.
Knowledge & Intellectual Skills • Develop a rigorous approach to the acquisition of a broad knowledge base, with some specialist knowledge in selected areas • Present and evaluate information, using it to plan and develop investigative strategies • Deal with well defined issues within largely familiar contexts, but extend this to some unfamiliar problems • Employ a range of specialized skills and approaches to generate a range of responses.	**Knowledge** Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study **Skills** A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study **Competence** Exercise self management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change Supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities	The HKQF Level 4 descriptors concerning knowledge state that a learner at this level should be able to "develop a rigorous approach to the acquisition of a broad knowledge base, with some specialist knowledge in selected areas" that seems to be higher than in the EQF Level 4. "Largely familiar contexts, but extend this to some unfamiliar problems" (HKQF 4) can be compared to "contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change" (EQF 4 – Competence).

HKQF Level 4	EQF Level 4	Comments Blue=differences Underlined : comparable
Process • Operate in <u>a range of varied and specific contexts involving some creative and non-routine activities</u> • Exercise appropriate judgement in planning, selecting or presenting information, methods or resources • Carry out routine lines of enquiry, development of investigation into professional level issues and problems.	**Skills** A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study **Competence** Exercise self management within the guidelines of work or study <u>contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change</u> Supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities	"A range of varied and specific contexts involving some creative and non-routine activities" (HKQF 4) can be compared to "contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change" (EQF 4 – Competence).
Application, Autonomy & Accountability • The ability to perform skilled tasks requiring some discretion and judgement, and undertake a <u>supervisory role</u> • Undertake self-directed and a some directive activity • <u>Operate within broad general guidelines</u> or functions • Take responsibility for the nature and quantity of own outputs • Meet specified quality standards • <u>Accept some responsibility for the quantity and quality of the output of others.</u>	**Competence** <u>Exercise self management within the guidelines of work or study contexts</u> that are usually predictable, but are subject to change <u>Supervise the routine work of others</u>, <u>taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities</u>	Both descriptors refer to supervision of others. "Operate within broad general guidelines" (HKQF 4) can be compared to "Exercise self management within the guidelines of work or study contexts" (EQF 4 – Competence). "Accept some responsibility for the quantity and quality of the output of others" (HKQF 4) can be compared to "taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities" (EQF 4 – Competence).

121

HKQF Level 4	EQF Level 4	Comments Blue=differences Underlined : comparable
Communication, IT and Numeracy • Use a wide <u>range of routine skills and some advanced skills</u> associated with the subject/discipline — for example: • Present using a range of techniques to engage the audience in both familiar and some new contexts • Read and synthesise extended information from subject documents; organise information coherently, convey complex ideas in well- structured form • Use a range of IT applications to support and enhance work • Plan approaches to obtaining and using information, choose appropriate methods and data to justify results & choices • Carry out multi-stage calculations.	**Skills** A <u>range of cognitive and practical skills</u> required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study	

Although several descriptors of HKQF Level 4 seem to be comparable also to EQF Level 4, HKQF Level 4 descriptors are in some aspects more demanding. Additionally HKQF Level 4 equates to the first level of post-secondary education and includes generic qualifications such as Higher Diploma and Associate Degree.

HKQF Level 4	EQF Level 5	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Summary Award titles: • Associate Degree • Higher Diploma	**Summary** EQF Level 5 accommodates various qualification types. Most of them belong to the VET sector and are considered as higher professional qualifications which also have currency for entry into higher education (e.g. the professional qualification in BE-fl, the VET higher diploma in MT, the higher national diploma and the higher national certificate in the UK-EWNI/Sco). Also SCHE qualifications (higher education) are allocated to EQF level 5 (e.g. the Associate degree in the NL or the Higher certificate in IE).	Although several descriptors of HKQF Level 4 seem to be comparable also to EQF Level 4, HKQF Level 4 descriptors are in several aspects more demanding and better correspond to EQF Level 5 Additionally HKQF Level 4 equates to the first level of post-secondary education and includes generic qualifications such as Higher Diploma and Associate Degree. By using the "best fit" principle we conclude that HKQF Level 4 and EQF Level 5 are comparable.

HKQF Level 4	EQF Level 5	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Knowledge & Intellectual Skills • Develop a <u>rigorous approach to the acquisition of a broad knowledge base</u>, with some specialist knowledge in selected areas • Present and evaluate information, using it to plan and develop investigative strategies • Deal with well defined issues within largely familiar contexts, but extend this to some unfamiliar problems • <u>Employ a range of specialized skills and approaches to generate a range of responses.</u>	**Knowledge** comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an <u>awareness of the boundaries of that</u> <u>knowledge</u> **Skills** a comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop <u>creative solutions to abstract problems</u> **Competence** • exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change • review and develop performance of self and others	The HKQF Level 4 descriptors concerning knowledge state that a learner at this level should be able to "develop a rigorous approach to the acquisition of a broad knowledge base, with some specialist knowledge in selected areas". EQF requires that learners should have "an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge". There is no equivalent descriptor in HKQF, although it could be argued that the "rigorous approach" to the acquisition of both "a broad knowledge base" and "specialist knowledge in selected areas" developed by the HKQF Level 4 learner would imply an awareness of the boundaries of the knowledge thus acquired. "Develop creative solutions to abstract problems" could in a broader sense be comparable to "develop investigative strategies", to "employ a range of specialised skills and approaches to generate a range of responses" and to "exercise appropriate judgement in planning, selecting or presenting information, methods or resources". "Largely familiar contexts, but extend this to some unfamiliar problems" (HKQF 4) seems to express a lower level than "where there is unpredictable change" (EQF 5 – Competence).

124

HKQF Level 4	EQF Level 5	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Process • Operate in a range of varied and specific contexts involving some creative and non-routine activities • Exercise appropriate judgement in planning, selecting or presenting information, methods or resources • Carry out routine lines of enquiry, development of investigation into professional level issues and problems.	**Skills** a comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems **Competence** • exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change • review and develop performance of self and others	One concept which is introduced in HKQF at Level 4 which is not mentioned in EQF Level 5 is that of "professionalism". At Level 4 of HKQF, learners should be able to investigate "professional level issues and problems". The word "professional" does not appear in EQF until Level 6.

Comparability Study of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) and the
European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF):
Joint Technical Report

| HKQF Level 4 | EQF Level 5 | Comments

Blue=differences

Underlined: comparable |
|---|---|---|
| **Application, Autonomy & Accountability**

• The ability to perform skilled tasks requiring some discretion and judgement, and <u>undertake a supervisory role</u>
• Undertake self-directed and a some directive activity
• Operate within broad general guidelines or functions
• Take responsibility for the nature and quantity of own outputs
• Meet specified quality standards
• Accept some responsibility for the quantity and quality of the output of others. | **Competence**

• exercise management and <u>supervision</u> in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change
• review and develop performance of self and others | The descriptors of managerial and supervisory competences have also increased in complexity from Level 4 to Level 5 of the EQF. The holder of a qualification at Level 5 is expected to assume greater responsibility for the review and development of the performance of self and others, and the context has changed from "routine" and "usually predictable" at Level 4 to one that is subject to "unpredictable change" at Level 5. Similarly, HKQF Level 4 specifies that learners who have completed a qualification at this level should be able to "undertake a supervisory role" and "undertake...some directive activity" and operate in contexts that are "largely familiar but extend to some unfamiliar problems".

The concept of unpredictability in the context of management and supervision appears only in EQF at this level. |

126

2016

HKQF Level 4	EQF Level 5	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Communication, IT and Numeracy • Use a wide range of routine skills and <u>some advanced skills</u> associated with the subject/discipline — for example: • Present using a range of techniques to engage the audience in both familiar and some new contexts • Read and synthesise extended information from subject documents; organise information coherently, convey complex ideas in well- structured form • Use a range of IT applications to support and enhance work • Plan approaches to obtaining and using information, choose appropriate methods and data to justify results & choices • Carry out multi-stage calculations.	**Skills** a comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems.	In the Communication, IT and Numeracy domain at Level 4 of HKQF, the ability to apply "some advanced skills" is introduced as the idea of operating in "new contexts". This would seem to equate to EQF Level 5 where there is a requirement to "develop creative solutions to abstract problems". It could be argued that there is a need to possess advanced skills (both cognitive and practical) in order to be able to develop creative solutions and to handle abstract problems.

Level 5 of the EQF builds on previous levels by prescribing the acquisition of knowledge that is both "comprehensive" and "specialised". The use of the word "specialised" denotes a vertical development in the framework from the previous level. The HKQF also introduces the concept of specialism at Level 4. The HKQF Level 4 descriptors concerning knowledge state that a learner at this level should be able to "develop a rigorous approach to the acquisition of a broad knowledge base, with some specialist knowledge in selected areas". The EQF requires that learners should have "an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge". There is no equivalent descriptor in the HKQF, although it could be argued that the "rigorous approach" to the acquisition of both "a broad knowledge base" and "specialist knowledge in selected areas" developed by the HKQF Level 4 learner would imply an awareness of the boundaries of the knowledge thus acquired.

In the skills domain, the EQF at Level 5 prescribes that learners will be able to "develop creative solutions to abstract problems". This represents a vertical development in respect of the cognitive and practical skills described at EQF Level 4. HKQF Level 4 emphasises this development in cognitive and practical skills in a slightly different way, indicating a requirement to "develop investigative strategies", to "employ a range of specialised skills and approaches to generate a range of responses" and to "exercise

appropriate judgement in planning, selecting or presenting information, methods or resources". The concept of creativity is introduced at Level 4 of the HKQF in the descriptor "operate in a range of varied and specific contexts involving some creative and non-routine activities".

The descriptors of managerial and supervisory competences have also increased in complexity from Level 4 to Level 5 of the EQF. The holder of a qualification at Level 5 is expected to assume greater responsibility for the review and development of the performance of self and others, and the context has changed from "routine" and "usually predictable" at Level 4 to one that is subject to "unpredictable change" at Level 5. Similarly, HKQF Level 4 specifies that learners who have completed a qualification at this level should be able to "undertake a supervisory role" and "undertake...some directive activity" and operate in contexts that are "largely familiar but extend to some unfamiliar problems". The EQF Level 5 competence descriptors include the ability to assume responsibility for staff development (i.e. review and develop performance of. others). While such a role is not specified in the HKQF Level 4 GLDs, one could argue that it is a normal part of supervisory responsibilities and may also be implied by the requirement that the holder of a qualification at HKQF Level 4 should be able to "accept some responsibility for the quantity and quality of the output of others." One concept which is introduced in the HKQF at Level 4 which is not mentioned in EQF Level 5 is that of "professionalism". At Level 4 of the HKQF, learners should be able to investigate "professional level issues and problems". The word "professional" does not appear in EQF until Level 6.

In the Communication, IT and Numeracy domain at Level 4 of HKQF, the ability to apply "some advanced skills" is introduced as the idea of operating in "new contexts". This would seem to equate to EQF Level 5 where there is a requirement to "develop creative solutions to abstract problems". We would argue that there is a need to possess advanced skills (both cognitive and practical) in order to be able to develop creative solutions and to handle abstract problems.

In conclusion, there appears to be a good fit between HKQF Level 4 and EQF Level 5 in the domains of knowledge and skills, albeit with some significant difference in the use of language. Nevertheless the concept of unpredictability in the context of management and supervision appears only in EQF at this level and may seem to be at a higher level than HKQF Level 4 Application, Autonomy and Accountability descriptors in this respect.

By using the "best fit" principle it can be concluded that HKQF Level 4 and EQF Level 5 are comparable.

Conclusion: BEST FIT

HKQF Level 5	EQF Level 5	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Summary Award titles: • Bachelor • Bachelor (Hons)	**Summary** EQF level 5 accommodates various qualification types. Most of them belong to the VET sector and are considered as higher professional qualifications which also have currency for entry into higher education (e.g. the professional qualification in BE-fl, the VET higher diploma in MT, the higher national diploma and the higher national certificate in the UK-EWNI/Sco). Also SCHE qualifications (higher education) are allocated to EQF level 5 (e.g. the Associate degree in the NL or the Higher certificate in IE).	HKQF level 5 accommodates Bachelor qualifications; they are not linked to EQF level 5 but 6. • Some descriptors are comparable between HKQF level 5 and EQF level 5; • EQF level 5 – Competence seems to express a higher level than HKQF level 5.
Knowledge & Intellectual Skills • Generate ideas through the analysis of abstract information and concepts • Command wide ranging, specialised technical, creative and/or conceptual skills • Identify and analyse both routine and abstract professional problems and issues, and formulate evidence-based responses • Analyse, reformat and evaluate a wide range of information • Critically analyse, evaluate and/or synthesise ideas, concepts, information and issues • Draw on a range of sources in making judgments.	**Knowledge** comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge **Skills** a comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems	"Abstract professional problems" (HKQF 5) can be compared to "abstract problems" (EQF 5 – Skills).

HKQF Level 5	EQF Level 5	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Process • Utilise diagnostic and creative skills in a range of technical, professional or management functions • Exercise appropriate judgement in planning, design, technical and/or <u>supervisory functions</u> related to products, services, operations or processes.	**Skills** a comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems **Competence** • <u>exercise management and supervision</u> in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change • review and develop performance of self and others	"Supervisory functions" (HKQF 5) can be compared to "exercise management and supervision" (EQF 5 – Competence).
Application, Autonomy & Accountability • Perform tasks involving planning, design, and technical skills, and involving some management functions • Accept responsibility and accountability within broad parameters for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes • Work under the mentoring of senior qualified practitioners • Deal with ethical issues, seeking guidance of others where appropriate.	**Competence** • exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change • review and develop performance of self and others	"Some management", "Work under the mentoring of senior qualified practitioners" and "seeking guidance of others where appropriate" (HKQF 5) seem to express a lower level compared to "exercise management" and "review and develop performance of self and others" (EQF 5 – Competence).

HKQF Level 5	EQF Level 5	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Communication, IT and Numeracy • Use a range of routine skills and some advanced and specialized skills in support of established practices in a subject/discipline, for example: • Make formal and informal presentations on standard/mainstream topics in the subject/discipline to a range of audiences • Participate in group discussions about complex subjects; create opportunities for others to contribute • Use a range of IT applications to support and enhance work • Interpret, use and evaluate numerical and graphical data to achieve goals/targets.		

HKQF Level 5 in many aspects exceeds EQF Level 5. It seems to be a better fit with EQF Level 6.

HKQF Level 5	EQF Level 6	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Summary Award titles: • Bachelor • Bachelor (Hons)	**Summary** EQF level 6 accommodates Bologna first cycle degrees (Bachelor) are linked to EQF level 6. This level also accommodates some higher professional qualification types (VET – for example, the master craftsman [certified] or the "operative IT professional [certified]" in Germany). Honours Bachelor degrees are linked to EQF level 6 in Ireland and the UK-Scotland.	There appears to be a good fit between HKQF Level 5 and EQF Level 6 in the domains of knowledge and skills, albeit with some significant difference in the use of language. Nevertheless the level of responsibility in the context of management and supervision appears to be higher at EQF level 6 than at HKQF Level 5. Applying the "best fit" principle and because Bachelor qualifications are allocated to HKQF Level 5 and EQF Level 6, it could be concluded that the two levels are comparable.
Knowledge & Intellectual Skills • Generate ideas through the analysis of abstract information and concepts • Command wide ranging, specialised technical, creative and/or conceptual skills • Identify and analyse both routine and abstract professional problems and issues, and formulate evidence-based responses • Analyse, reformat and evaluate a wide range of information • Critically analyse, evaluate and/or synthesise ideas, concepts, information and issues • Draw on a range of sources in making judgments.	**Knowledge** Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles **Skills** Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	"Generate ideas" (HKQF 5) can be compared to "innovation" (EQF 6 - Knowledge). "Critically analyse, evaluate and/or synthesise ideas, concepts, information and issues" (HKQF 5) can be compared to "critical understanding of theories and principles` (EQF 6 – Knowledge).

HKQF Level 5	EQF Level 6	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Process • Utilise diagnostic and creative skills in a range of technical, professional or management functions • Exercise appropriate judgement in planning, design, technical and/or supervisory functions related to products, services, operations or processes.	**Skills** Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study **Competence** Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects taking responsibility for decision making and unpredictable work or study contexts	The skills of critically analyzing, evaluating and synthesizing abstract information, ideas, concepts and issues in order to generate ideas, make judgments, formulate evidence-based responses and solve both routine and abstract problems that should be acquired by learners at HKQF Level 5, are equivalent to the advanced problem-solving skills prescribed at EQF Level 6.
	Take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals or groups	"The HKQF Level 5 descriptors specify the responsibility for decision making more closely by relating it to the exercise of "appropriate judgement in planning, design, technical and/or supervisory functions" and the performance of "tasks involving planning, design and technical skills". Exercise appropriate judgement" (HKQF 5) can be compared to "taking responsibility for decision making" (EQF 6 - Competence). "Management functions" and "supervisory functions" (HKQF 5) can be compared to "take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals or groups" (EQF 6 - Competence).

HKQF Level 5	EQF Level 6	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Application, Autonomy & Accountability • Perform tasks involving planning, design, and technical skills, and involving some management functions • Accept responsibility and accountability within broad parameters for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes • Work under the mentoring of senior qualified practitioners • Deal with ethical issues, seeking guidance of others where appropriate.	**Competence** Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects taking responsibility for decision making and unpredictable work or study contexts. Take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals or groups.	HKQF 5 refers to "some management functions", "Work under the mentoring of senior qualified practitioners" and "seeking guidance of others"; the management competence at EQF 6 seems to be higher as the level descriptors specify that a learner should be able to "manage complex technical or professional activities or projects" and "take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups".
Communication, IT and Numeracy • Use a range of routine skills and some advanced and specialized skills in support of established practices in a subject/discipline, for example: • Make formal and informal presentations on standard/mainstream topics in the subject/discipline to a range of audiences • Participate in group discussions about complex subjects; create opportunities for others to contribute • Use a range of IT applications to support and enhance work Interpret, use and evaluate numerical and graphical data to achieve goals/targets.	**Skills** Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	At level 5 of HKQF, "specialised skills" are introduced. This matches well with the EQF Level 6 Skills descriptor that requires learners to demonstrate "mastery and innovation" in the application of "advanced skills required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study".

The EQF Level 6 descriptors in the knowledge domain specify that learners at this level should have "advanced knowledge in a field of work or study involving a critical understanding of theories and principles". The outcomes descriptors at Level 5 of the HKQF in the knowledge and intellectual skills domain make no reference to a body of knowledge. Nevertheless we may infer that the expectations of the two frameworks in terms of knowledge acquisition at this level are similar, by reference to the progression from "a broad knowledge base with some specialist knowledge in selected areas" at HKQF Level 4 to "a systematic, coherent body of knowledge" at HKQF Level 6.

The EQF uses the word "advanced" to describe the skills to be achieved at level 6 in order to demonstrate "mastery and innovation" and to solve "complex and unpredictable problems" in a "specialised" field of work or study. It could be argued that the skills of critically analyzing, evaluating and synthesizing abstract information, ideas, concepts and issues in order to generate ideas, make judgments, formulate evidence-based responses and solve both routine and abstract problems that should be acquired by learners at HKQF Level 5, are comparable to the advanced problem-solving skills prescribed at EQF level 6. Innovation is a key skill introduced at Level 6 of EQF. The HKQF Level 5 descriptors require learners to be able to "generate ideas" and demonstrate "specialised technical, creative and/or conceptual skills". We find that the two frameworks are comparable in their expectations of advanced skills in respect of creativity and innovation.

With regard to responsibility levels, the EQF at Level 6 expects learners to take "responsibility for decision making in unpredictable... contexts". The concept of unpredictability has already been mentioned at Level 4 in the HKQF and is subsumed into Level 5. The HKQF Level 5 descriptors specify the responsibility for decision making more closely by relating it to the exercise of "appropriate judgement in planning, design, technical and/or supervisory functions" and the performance of "tasks involving planning, design and technical skills".

As in the previous two levels, it is in the area of management responsibility that Level 5 of the HKQF and Level 6 of the EQF seem less well-matched. The EQF Level 6 Competence descriptors specify that a learner should be able to "manage complex technical or professional activities or projects" and "take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups". The level of responsibility at Level 5 of the HKQF appears to be more circumscribed. The descriptors refer to "some management functions", and to accepting "responsibility and accountability within broad parameters for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes". It also specifies that learners at this level would "work under the mentoring of senior qualified practitioners" and "seek guidance of others where appropriate" in relation to dealing with ethical issues.

At Level 5 of the HKQF, "specialised skills" are introduced into the Communication, IT and Numeracy domain. This matches well with the EQF Level 6 Skills descriptor that requires learners to demonstrate "mastery and innovation" in the application of "advanced skills required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study".

In conclusion, there appears to be a good fit between HKQF Level 5 and EQF Level 6 in the domains of knowledge and skills, albeit with some significant difference in the use of language. Nevertheless the level of responsibility in the context of management and supervision appears to be higher at EQF level 6 than at HKQF Level 5.

Applying the "best fit" principle it can be concluded that HKQF Level 5 best fit with the EQF Level 6.

Conclusion: BEST FIT

HKQF Level 6	EQF Level 6	Comments Blue=differences Underlined : comparable
Summary Award titles: • Master • Postgraduate Diploma • Postgraduate Certificate	**Summary** EQF level 6 accommodates Bologna first cycle degrees (Bachelor). This level also accommodates some higher professional qualification types (VET – for example, the master craftsman [certified] or the "operative IT professional [certified]" in Germany). Honours Bachelor degrees are linked to EQF level 6 in Ireland and the UK-Scotland.	• HKQF 6 includes Master qualifications; they are not linked to EQF 6 but 7. • HKQF 6 descriptors refer to "research" – this is not mentioned at EQF 6 but 7. • Both descriptors refer to "complex" issues or problems, to a high degree of responsibility and to the "absence of complete or consistent data/information (HKQF 6) or "unpredictable problems" (EQF 6 – Skills). • However HKQF 6 descriptors put a stronger emphasis on extending knowledge, skills, practices and thinking than EQF level 6; this is more strongly expressed at EQF 7. Based on the comparison of descriptors, a correspondence between HKQF Level 6 and EQF Level 6 could also be argued; however, the qualifications allocated to HKQF Level 6 as well as the reference to research and development/extending of knowledge suggests that this level better matches EQF Level 7.

HKQF Level 6	EQF Level 6	Comments Blue=differences Underlined : comparable
Knowledge & Intellectual Skills • Critically review, consolidate, and extend a systematic, coherent body of knowledge • Utilise highly specialized technical research or scholastic skills across an area of study • Critically evaluate new information, concepts and evidence from a range of sources and develop creative responses • Critically review, consolidate and extend knowledge, skills practices and thinking in a subject/discipline • Deal with complex issues and make informed judgements in the absence of complete or consistent data/information.	**Knowledge** Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles **Skills** Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	

HKQF Level 6	EQF Level 6	Comments Blue=differences Underlined : comparable
Process • Transfer and apply diagnostic and creative skills in a range of situations • Exercise appropriate judgement in complex planning, design, technical and/or management functions related to products, services, operations or processes, including resourcing and evaluation • Conduct research, and/or advanced technical or professional activity • Design and apply appropriate research methodologies.	**Skills** Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study **Competence** Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects taking responsibility for decision making and unpredictable work or study contexts Take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals or groups	
Application, Autonomy & Accountability • Apply knowledge and skills in a broad range of professional work activities • Practice significant autonomy in determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes • Accept accountability in related decision making including use of supervision • Demonstrate leadership and /or make an identifiable contribution to change and development.	**Competence** Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects taking responsibility for decision making and unpredictable work or study contexts Take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals or groups	

139

HKQF Level 6	EQF Level 6 2016	Comments Blue=differences Underlined : comparable
Communication, IT and Numeracy • Communicate, using appropriate methods, to a range of audiences including peers, senior colleagues, specialists • Use a wide range of software to support and enhance work; identify refinements to existing software to increase effectiveness or specify new software • Undertake critical evaluations of a wide range of numerical and graphical data, and use calculations at various stages of the work.		

HKQF Level 5 in many aspects exceeds EQF Level 6. The qualifications allocated to HKQF Level 6 as well as the reference to research and development/extending of knowledge suggests that this level better matches EQF Level 7.

HKQF Level 6	EQF Level 7	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Summary Award titles: • Master • Postgraduate Diploma • Postgraduate Certificate	**Summary** EQF level 7 accommodates second cycle degrees (Master) as well as some higher professional qualification types (VET – for example, the "Senior detective" or the "Chemical engineer product manager" in the Czech Republic or strategic IT professionals (certified) in Germany .	In conclusion it is found that there is a good fit between the descriptors in the three domains of knowledge, skills and competence in the EQF and the four domains of knowledge & intellectual skills; processes; application, autonomy and accountability; and communication, IT and numeracy at Level 6 of HKQF and Level 7 of EQF.

HKQF Level 6	EQF Level 7	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable

Knowledge & Intellectual Skills
 	
• <u>Critically</u> review, consolidate, and <u>extend a systematic, coherent body of knowledge</u>
• <u>Utilise highly specialized technical research or scholastic skills across an area of study</u>
• <u>Critically</u> evaluate new information, concepts and
  evidence from a range of sources and develop creative
  responses
• <u>Critically</u> review, consolidate and <u>extend knowledge, skills practices and thinking</u> in a subject/discipline
• <u>Deal with complex issues</u> and make informed judgements in the absence of complete or consistent data/information.
	Knowledge
	
	• <u>highly specialised knowledge</u>, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for <u>original thinking and/or research</u>
	• <u>critical</u> awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields
	
	Skills
	
	<u>specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or</u>
	
	<u>innovation</u> in order to <u>develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge</u> from different fields
	
	Competence
	
	• manage and transform work or study <u>contexts</u> that are <u>complex</u>, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches
	• take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams
		Both descriptors refer to "critical" review/evaluation or awareness.
		
		"Extend a systematic, coherent body of knowledge" and "extend knowledge, skills practices and thinking" (HKQF 6) can be compared to "original thinking and/or research" (EQF 7 – Knowledge) and "develop new knowledge and procedures" (EQF 7 – Skills).
		
		"Utilise highly specialized technical research or scholastic skills across an area of study" (HKQF 6) can be compared to "highly specialised knowledge" (EQF 7 – Knowledge) and "specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or Innovation" (EQF 7 - Skills).
		
		"Deal with complex issues" (HKQF 6) can be compared to "complex contexts" (EQF 7 - Competence

142

2016

HKQF Level 6	EQF Level 7	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Process • Transfer and apply diagnostic and creative skills in a range of situations • Exercise appropriate judgement in complex planning, design, technical and/or management functions related to products, services, operations or processes, including resourcing and evaluation • Conduct research, and/or advanced technical or professional activity • Design and apply appropriate research methodologies.	**Skills** specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields **Competence** • manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches • take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams	"Complex…functions" (HKQF 6) can be compared to "complex contexts" (EQF 7 – Competence). Both descriptors refer to "research".

HKQF Level 6	EQF Level 7	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Application, Autonomy & Accountability • Apply knowledge and skills in a broad range of professional work activities • Practice significant autonomy in determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes • Accept accountability in related decision making including use of supervision • Demonstrate leadership and /or make an identifiable contribution to change and development.	**Competence** • manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches • take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams	"Practice significant autonomy in determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes" and "Accept accountability in related decision making including use of supervision" (HKQF 6) can be compared to "take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams" (EQF 7 – Competence). "Demonstrate leadership and /or make an identifiable contribution to change and development" (HKQF 6) can be compared to "manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches" (EQF 7 – Competence).
Communication, IT and Numeracy • Communicate, using appropriate methods, to a range of audiences including peers, senior colleagues, specialists • Use a wide range of software to support and enhance work; • identify refinements to existing software to increase effectiveness or specify new software • Undertake critical evaluations of a wide range of numerical and graphical data, and use calculations at various stages of the work.		

At Level 7 of the EQF and Level 6 of the HKQF, knowledge outcomes are more specialized and require the exercise of critical thinking skills across a field of work or study. Learners who have successfully completed qualifications at EQF level 7 should have acquired highly specialized knowledge, which they use as a basis for original thinking and/or research. Level 6 of the HKQF refers to extending a body of knowledge and specifies the ability to utilise "highly specialized technical research or scholastic skills" and to design and apply "appropriate research methodologies". The breadth of knowledge outcomes at the two levels is also comparable. At EQF Level 7, graduates are able to demonstrate an awareness of knowledge issues at the interface between different fields and to create new knowledge by integrating knowledge from different fields, while holders of HKQF Level 6 qualifications will be able to utilise "highly specialized technical research or scholastic skills across an area of study" and in a "range of situations".

In both frameworks the descriptors encompass skills in the advanced technical and professional domains as well as the academic. The EQF refers to the creation of "new knowledge and procedures" "in a field of work or study" and the HKQF gives equal status to the ability to "conduct research" and to conduct "advanced technical or professional activity". In terms of competency, the EQF level 7 outcomes refer to managing work or study contexts
that are "complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches". The HKQF Level 6 outcomes, on the other hand, talk about dealing with "complex issues" and "making informed judgements in the absence of complete or consistent data/information" as well as undertaking "complex planning, design, technical and/or management functions". The complexity and unpredictability of the contexts in which graduates are expected to perform are comparable between the two levels.

Graduates at this level in both Frameworks are expected to assume a high level of autonomy and to exercise significant responsibility for the management of others. The EQF specifies that they should "take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic management of teams". The HKQF descriptors refer to "determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes", "accept(ing) accountability" and "demonstrat(ing) leadership".

In conclusion it is found that there is a very good fit between the descriptors in the three domains of knowledge, skills and competences at Level 6 of the HKQF and Level 7 of the EQF.

Conclusion: GOOD FIT

HKQF Level 7	EQF Level 7	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Summary Award Title: Doctor	**Summary** EQF level 7 accommodates second cycle degrees (Master) as well as some higher professional qualification types (VET – for example, the "Senior detective" or the "Chemical engineer product manager" in the Czech Republic.	Based on the comparison of descriptors, a correspondence between HKGF Level 7 and EQF Level 7 could be argued; however, the qualifications allocated to HKQF Level 7 suggest that this level better fits to EQF Level 8.

HKQF Level 7	EQF Level 7	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Knowledge & Intellectual Skills • Demonstrate and work with a critical overview of a subject or discipline, including an evaluative understanding of principal theories and concepts, and of its broad relationships with other disciplines • Identify, conceptualise and offer original and creative insights into new, complex and abstract ideas and information • Deal with very complex and/or new issues and make informed judgements in the absence of complete or consistent data/information • Make a significant and original contribution to a specialised field of inquiry, or to broader interdisciplinary relationships.	**Knowledge** • highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research • critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields **Skills** specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields **Competence** • manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches • take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams	"Critical overview of a subject or discipline…and of its broad relationships with other disciplines" (HKQF 7) can be compared to critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface (EQF 7 – Knowledge). "Original and creative insights into new, complex and abstract ideas and information" and "significant and original contribution" (HKQF 7) can be compared to "original thinking and/or research" (EQF 7 – Knowledge) and "innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures" (EQF 7 – Skills). "Deal with very complex and/or new issues" (HKQF 7) can be compared to "manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches" (EQF 7 – Competence).

148

HKQF Level 7	EQF Level 7	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Process • Demonstrate command of research and methodological issues and engage in critical dialogue • Develop creative and original responses to problems and issues in the context of new circumstances.	**Skills** specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields **Competence** • manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches • take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams	"Demonstrate command of research" (HKQF 7) can be compared to "specialised problem-solving skills required in research" (EQF 7 – Skills). "Develop creative and original responses to problems and issues in the context of new circumstances" (HKQF 7) can be compared to "innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures" (EQF 7 – Skills).

HKQF Level 7	EQF Level 7	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Application, Autonomy & Accountability • Apply knowledge and skills in a broad range of complex and professional work activities, including new and unforeseen circumstances • Demonstrate leadership and originality in tackling and solving problems • Accept accountability in related decision making • High degree of autonomy, with full responsibility for own work, and significant responsibility for others • Deal with complex ethical and professional issues.	**Competence** • manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches • take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams	Both descriptors refer to "complex contexts". "Demonstrate leadership and originality in tackling and solving problems" (HKQF 7) can be compared to "manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches" (EQF 7 – Competence). "Accept accountability in related decision making" and "High degree of autonomy, with full responsibility for own work, and significant responsibility for others" (HKQF 7) can be compared to "take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams" (EQF level 7).

HKQF Level 7	EQF Level 7	Comments Blue=differences Underlined: comparable
Communication, IT and Numeracy • Strategically use communication skills, adapting context and purpose to a range of audiences • Communicate at the standard of published academic work and/or critical dialogue • Monitor, review and reflect on own work and skill development, and change and adapt in the light of new demands • Use a range of software and specify software requirements to enhance work, anticipating future requirements • Critically evaluate numerical and graphical data, and employ such data extensively.	**Skills** specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields	

Based on the comparison of descriptors, a correspondence between HKQF Level 7 and EQF Level 7 could be argued; however, the qualifications allocated to HKQF Level 7 suggest that this level better fits to EQF Level 8.

HKQF Level 7	EQF Level 8 2016	Comments Blue=differences Underlined : comparable
Summary Award Title: Doctor	**Summary** EQF level 8 includes third cycle degrees (Doctorate) as well as some higher professional qualification types (VET – for example, in Estonia: the occupational qualifications "chartered engineer" or "chartered architect")	**Summary** Level 7 of HKQF, like Level 8 of EQF, is the most advanced level of the framework. Based on linguistic comparison there is a good fit between Level 7 of HKQF and Level 8 of EQF in that learners are working/studying at the leading edge of their field and are contributing to the advancement of knowledge or professional practice. Doctorate qualifications are linked to these levels in both Frameworks

HKQF Level 7	EQF Level 8	Comments Blue=differences Underlined : comparable
Knowledge & Intellectual Skills • Demonstrate and work with a critical overview of a subject or discipline, including an evaluative understanding of principal theories and concepts, and of its broad relationships with other disciplines • Identify, conceptualise and offer original and creative insights into new, complex and abstract ideas and information • Deal with very complex and/or new issues and make informed judgements in the absence of complete or consistent data/information • Make a significant and original contribution to a specialized field of inquiry, or to broader interdisciplinary relationships.	**Knowledge** At the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields **Skills** The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation required to solve critical problems in research/and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice **Competence** Demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research	"Broad relationships with other disciplines (HKQF 7) can be linked to "interface between fields" (EQF 8 – Knowledge) "Original and creative insights" and "significant and original contribution" (HKQF 7) can be linked to "innovation" (EQF 8 – Skills) and "development of new ideas" (EQF 8 – Competence)

HKQF Level 7	EQF Level 8	Comments Blue=differences Underlined : comparable
Process • Demonstrate command of research and methodological issues and engage in critical dialogue • <u>Develop creative and original responses to problems and issues</u> in the context of new circumstances.	**Skills** The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation required to solve critical problems in research/and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice **Competence** Demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research	Develop creative and original responses to problems and issues (HKQF 7) can be linked to "innovation" (EQF 8 – Skills) and "development of new ideas" (EQF 8 – Competence).

HKQF Level 7	EQF Level 8 2016	Comments Blue=differences Underlined : comparable
Application, Autonomy & Accountability • Apply knowledge and skills in a broad range of complex and professional work activities, including new and unforeseen circumstances • <u>Demonstrate leadership and originality</u> in tackling and solving problems • <u>Accept accountability</u> in related decision making • <u>High degree of autonomy</u>, with full responsibility for own work, and significant responsibility for others • Deal with complex ethical and professional issues.	**Competence** <u>Demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy</u>, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the <u>development of new ideas or processes</u> at the forefront of work or study contexts including research	"Demonstrate leadership and originality in tackling and solving problems" (HKQF /) can be compared to "demonstrate substantial authority, innovation…to the development of new ideas or processes" (EQF 8 – Competence). "Accept accountability in related decision making" and "high degree of autonomy, with full responsibility for own work, and significant responsibility for others" can be compared to "demonstrate substantial authority,…autonomy" (EQF 8 – Competence).

HKQF Level 7	EQF Level 8	Comments Blue=differences Underlined : comparable
Communication, IT and Numeracy • Strategically use communication skills, adapting context and purpose to a range of audiences • Communicate at the standard of published academic work and/or critical dialogue • Monitor, review and reflect on own work and skill development, and change and adapt in the light of new demands • Use a range of software and specify software requirements to enhance work, anticipating future requirements • Critically evaluate numerical and graphical data, and employ such data extensively.	**Skills** The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation required to solve critical problems in research/and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice	

Level 7 of the HKQF, like Level 8 of the EQF, is the most advanced level of the framework. The EQF Level 8 knowledge descriptor reflects this in the requirement that knowledge should be "at the most advanced frontier of a field and at the interface between fields". The HKQF Level 7 descriptors are also very clear in their requirements in relation to the advancement of knowledge in a subject or discipline and at the interface between disciplines, stating an expectation that learners at this level should be able to "make a significant and original contribution to a specialised field of enquiry, or to broader interdisciplinary relationships". The interdisciplinary nature of work or study at this level is further emphasized in the HKQF by the expectation that learners should be able to "demonstrate and work with a critical overview of a subject or discipline, including an evaluative understanding of principal theories and concepts, and of its broader relationships with other disciplines".

EQF Level 8 specifies that learners should have mastery of "the most advanced and specialised skills and techniques", be able to "solve critical problems in research" and "extend....existing knowledge or professional practice". The HKQF Level 7 descriptors include "command of research and methodological issues" and the ability to "offer original and creative insights into new, complex and abstract ideas and information" and to "develop creative and original responses to problems and issues in the contexts of new circumstances".

In the competence domain, EQF Level 8 requires the demonstration of "substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity". HKQF Level 7 introduces similar concepts, with the requirement that learners at this level will be able

to "demonstrate leadership (authority) and originality (innovation)" and work with a "high degree of autonomy". They should also be able to "deal with complex ethical and professional issues (professional integrity)". HKQF Level 7 has an additional requirement that people should assume "significant responsibility for others" which is absent from EQF at this level.

It is clear that there is a very good fit between Level 7 of HKQF and Level 8 of EQF in that learners are working/studying at the leading edge of their field and are contributing to the advancement of knowledge or professional practice.

Conclusion: GOOD FIT