



Education Bureau

**Referencing Report of the
Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
(SCQF)
and the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework
(HKQF)**

March 2017

Content

- 1 Preface and Foreword**
- 2 Acronyms**
- 3 Executive Summary**
- 4 Country Report of Scotland**
 - 4.1 SCQF - Aim and Development
 - 4.2 Education and Training System in Scotland
 - 4.3 Scotland Responses to Principles 1 to 5
 - 4.4 Future of SCQF
- 5 Report of Hong Kong**
 - 5.1 HKQF - Aim and Development
 - 5.2 Education and Training System in Hong Kong
 - 5.3 Hong Kong Responses to Principles 1 to 5
 - 5.4 Future of HKQF
- 6 Concluding Remark**

Annexes

- Annex 1: Level-to-Level Comparison of the HKQF and the SCQF Level Descriptors
- Annex 2: SCQF Principles
- Annex 3: SCQF Credit Rating Bodies
- Annex 4: Qualifications on the SCQF
- Annex 5: Policy on Use of Credit in HKQF
- Annex 6: Policy and Principles for Credit Accumulation and Transfer under HKQF

1. PREFACE AND FOREWORD

Preface

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQFP) and the Education Bureau (EDB) of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2012. The aim of this Memorandum of Understanding is to establish collaboration between the HKSAR and SCQFP in the development and implementation of Qualifications Framework in both regions. We have undertaken a number of collaborative activities since 2012. In 2016, we have agreed that it would be beneficial to both regions to scope out the possibility of a formal referencing between the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), in view of the close educational and economic activities between Scotland and Hong Kong.

This report therefore is the culmination of that work and as part of the finalization process we asked Dr Mike Coles, an international expert on Qualifications Frameworks who had undertaken work with both the SCQF and the HKQF to review our report and provide a foreword

**SCQFP and EDB
2017**

Foreword

The goal of all exercises that reference one qualifications framework (QF) to another is enhanced trust for the users of qualifications who may be internationally mobile or those that use qualifications for international recruitment. In a referencing process trust comes from clear and authoritative explanation of how qualifications levels in one jurisdiction relate to those in another jurisdiction. As reported below, the EDB and the SCQFP have jointly produced the explanations of their frameworks and the links that exist between them.

Mutual recognition is something more than referencing. The referencing of the QF level in one region to another provides a starting point for a process of recognition which an organisation in one region can use to give formal value to the status of a qualification coming from another region. This referencing exercise between Hong Kong and Scotland provides such a starting point. The fact that the two bodies involved in creating this referencing position are leading organisations in the qualifications systems in Hong Kong and Scotland, making the outcome of referencing reported below especially valuable.

The process of relating the two frameworks in this report is based on a robust, tried and tested approach. The principles are based on the referencing criteria for the European QF and on the criteria and processes that are used in self-certification of higher education frameworks to the Bologna cycles. Furthermore Hong Kong and Scotland have experience of applying these principles in other referencing exercises to other countries. This experience is evident when one reads the depth of treatment given to each of the principles.

The linking of the levels in the two frameworks has involved a technical approach that has taken account of, for example, the words in the level descriptors and the meanings of the learning outcomes in each framework. More than this the referencing position is also based on contextual information in Hong Kong and Scotland - such as the extent of engagement of stakeholder groups and the learning arrangements for achieving the qualifications in levels. Furthermore the report takes account of the quality assurance arrangements that qualifications in Hong Kong and Scotland are expected to meet.

The linkage established in this report is part of a wider picture of international linkages. There are now over 160 qualifications frameworks in the world, a decade ago there were a handful. Some of these frameworks are regional (geographical) frameworks that act as a reference point for many different national systems. Evidence suggests countries are increasingly looking outward to other countries or regions for good practice in developing qualifications systems. There is now a greater awareness of the need for qualifications systems to have high international credibility, as governments accept that qualifications play a part in facilitating competitiveness and economic growth. At the same time international companies and international organisations, including owners of international qualifications, are increasingly asking for transparency of national systems so that transnational business can be facilitated through the recruitment of employees with the requisite qualifications. The HKQF and the SCQF link is part of this wider picture and will add to the international comparability of qualifications and systems. This report will help with making qualifications better understood across boundaries.

Mike Coles
2017

2. ACRONYMS

AAVQ	Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications
AD	Associate Degree
APQN	Asia-Pacific Quality Network
ATS	Award Titles Scheme
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
CAT	Credit Accumulation and Transfer
CITN	Communication, Information Technology and Numeracy
CLD	Community Learning and Development
DVE	Diploma of Vocational Education
EDB	Education Bureau of the HKSAR Government
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQF	European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning
ERB	Employees Retraining Board
GLD	Generic Level Descriptors
HD	Higher Diploma
HKCAAVQ	Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications
HKDSE	Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education
HKQF	Hong Kong Qualifications Framework
HKSAR	Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
HNC	Higher National Certificate
HND	Higher National Diploma
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
LCQA	Liaison Committee on Quality Assurance
MOI	Medium of instruction
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAS	New Academic Structure
NET	Native-speaking English Teacher
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NLP	Non-local Programme
NPA	National Progression Awards
NVQ	National Vocational Qualifications
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
QA	Quality Assurance
QAA	The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (UK)
QAA Scotland	The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (Scotland)
QAC	Quality Assurance Council
QF	Qualifications Framework
QFS	Qualifications Framework Secretariat

QR	Qualifications Register
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SCQFP	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership
SCS	Specification of Competency Standards
SGC	Specification of Generic (Foundation) Competencies
SFC	Scottish Funding Council
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
SSPU	Self-financed Sub-degree Programme Unit
SVQ	Scottish Vocational Qualification
UGC	University Grants Committee
VPET	Vocational and Professional Education and Training
VTC	Vocational Training Council

3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Education Bureau (EDB) of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQFP) agreed to conduct a referencing study between the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). The referencing is undertaken jointly by the staff of the Qualifications Framework Secretariat (QFS) in Hong Kong and the SCQFP, with the objectives of improving the understanding of Hong Kong and Scottish qualifications, and ultimately leading to better mutual recognition of the qualifications awarded in Hong Kong and Scotland. The report is primarily based on the methodology and results of two studies that link the frameworks with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The two studies are the exploratory re-referencing of the SCQF to the EQF completed in January 2016, and the HKQF-EQF Comparability Study completed in March 2016. In enhancing the qualification recognition between Hong Kong and Scotland, the EDB and the SCQFP considered a direct referencing between the two frameworks was necessary.

The referencing activity within this report is based on 5 principles which are detailed below. These principles are based on the referencing criteria for the EQF and on the criteria and processes that are used in self-certification of higher education frameworks to the Bologna cycles. Both Hong Kong and Scotland have experience of applying these principles (or similar) in other referencing exercises to other countries.

Referencing Principles

Principle 1:

The roles and responsibilities of the relevant bodies and authorities are clear and transparent.

Principle 2:

Comparison of the HKQF and the SCQF demonstrates matching between the levels of the two frameworks

Principle 3:

The HKQF and the SCQF are based on learning outcomes and, where these exist, credit systems and the recognition of credit.

Principle 4:

The policies and processes for the inclusion of qualifications on the HKQF and the SCQF are clear and transparent.

Principle 5:

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

Summary Outcome of Referencing Activity

In establishing the level-to-level correspondences between the HKQF and the SCQF, the approaches of “Good Fit” and “Best Fit” are used. Where a significant match can be ascertained across all domains of the level descriptors and the qualification types between the two frameworks, it is defined as “Good Fit”. In cases where it is not possible to identify exact matches between the levels of the two frameworks, it is defined as “Best Fit” based on a balance of all the relevant factors.

A summary of the “Best Fit” and “Good Fit” of the correspondences between the HKQF and the SCQF levels is given as below:

Good Fit and Best Fit between HKQF and SCQF Levels

Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF)	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)	Principles of “Good Fit” and “Best Fit”
7	12	Good Fit
6	11	Good Fit
5	10	Best Fit
	9	Best Fit
4	8	Best Fit
	7	Best Fit
3	6	Best Fit
2	5	Best Fit
1	4	Best Fit
	3	Best Fit
No match	2	-
	1	-

4. COUNTRY REPORT OF SCOTLAND

This report sets out the evidence that the SCQF meets the five principles which form the basis of the referencing between the SCQF and HKQF.

To provide a context for the reader, the report describes the nature of the SCQF, explains the nature of education and training in Scotland insofar as it relates to the SCQF, and describes the different kinds of qualifications in the Framework. In particular, we (Scotland) have borne in mind that the report will have an international readership and therefore, we have tried to avoid national familiarities, such as abbreviations and acronyms, and we have adopted a “neutral” terminology where possible. For example, we have used the term “approve” when talking about quality assurance in broad terms, rather than get caught up with the distinctions between “approve”, “validate” and “accredit” where the distinctions do not add anything to an understanding of the Scottish system. Also, we have tried to include explanations of matters such as the legal basis of our institutions and agencies, the non-statutory basis of Scottish vocational qualifications and our private education and training institutions, as they tend to be important features of systems in other countries. SCQF Partnership’s processes and plans for monitoring and further developing the Framework are also set out in this report.

The SCQF Partnership is a company limited by guarantee and is a Scottish registered charity. The Partnership has a Board of Directors which comprises nominees of the following organisations:

- College Development Network;
- Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education;
- Scottish Qualifications Authority;
- Universities Scotland.

In addition the Board has a co-opted Director representing employer interests. The Board also has an independent Chair.

The SCQFP embodies a fully collaborative approach by bringing together employers, colleges, universities, providers of learning and public agencies in order to maintain and promote a Framework that helps to promote opportunity and reduce inequality. All of those bodies represented on the Board have a significant interest and involvement in, and influence on, learning in Scotland. The Partnership also works closely with a wide range of stakeholders, to help the company to achieve its goals.

Terms specifically relating to the Scottish context

Awarding Body: In this report, the term “awarding body” means any organisation or institution which awards qualifications. It includes Universities and other higher education institutions along with more commercial organisations such as City and Guilds. Some colleges also act as awarding bodies for some qualifications or learning programmes.

Modern Apprenticeship: Unlike the systems in many other countries, these apprenticeships extend beyond training for skilled craftsmen or women and can include technical and professional level training at the top levels of the SCQF – eg in areas like management and social services.

Articulation : refers to a student gaining entry into either the second or third year of a university degree course after completing an Higher National Certificate (HNC) or Higher National Diploma (HND) at a further education college.

Articulation Hubs: colleges and universities clustered around a lead university that had a high level of articulation activity.

Learning programme: A process that an individual can undertake to achieve the learning outcomes that make up a qualification.

Credit Rating: The process of allocating SCQF Level and Credit Points to qualifications and learning programmes, whether formal, non-formal or informal.

SCQF Credit Points: Credit Points allocated to a qualification or learning programme indicate the typical amount of time that it would take a learner to achieve the learning outcomes of the qualification or learning programme. Ten notional learning hours equates to one SCQF Credit Point.

Credit Rating Body: An organisation that carries out credit rating for the SCQF. These are Scotland’s colleges; Scottish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs); SQA; and other organisations that have been approved by the SCQF Partnership.

Credit Transfer: The transfer of SCQF Credit Points from one programme into another to minimise the duplication of learning.

Learning Outcomes: 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.

Learning Providers: Organisations across all education and training sectors that provide formal, non-formal or informal learning.

Notional Learning Hours: The time required for a typical learner at a specified SCQF Level to achieve the learning outcomes. Includes all the learning activities required for the achievement of the learning outcomes as well as the assessment.

Further Education College: Colleges offering courses and qualifications in a wide range of vocational and academic subjects at many levels. Some specialise in particular industry sectors such as art and design, catering, engineering or finance. They often have links with companies, so that students studying vocational courses can combine classroom learning with work experience.

Private training providers: Offer a wide range of work-based training for students seeking to build careers in specific industries. Private training providers work with colleges and employers to provide practical training and recognised qualifications in subjects such as engineering, construction, ICT and health and social care.

4.1 SCQF Aims and Development

The SCQF was formally launched in 2001. Since that time it has become the standard means of describing the level and credit value of all mainstream qualifications¹ and training programmes in Scotland, and is also used for recruitment and workforce development in some employment sectors.

The scope of the Framework has extended considerably since it was launched and it now contains a number of important local, national and international qualifications. Examples of these include: programmes to increase the capacity of volunteer workers in community learning and development, the qualifications of the Scottish Police, and Microsoft qualifications. Work continues to extend the scope, use and understanding of the Framework.

The main purpose of the SCQF is to make the Scottish system of qualifications, and the way in which they relate to each other, easier to understand and use. It is intended to:

¹ “Mainstream qualifications” mean the qualifications shown and explained on the SCQF diagram <http://www.scqf.org.uk/features/Framework.htm>

- support lifelong learning
- clarify entry and exit points for qualifications and credit-rated learning programmes at whatever level
- show learners and others possible routes for progression and credit transfer
- show the level and credit (size) of the different types of Scottish qualification
- enable credit links to be made between qualifications and learning programmes so as to assist learners to build on previous successes

Since 2009 there have been many changes to education and training in Scotland which affect the SCQF, and the progressive implementation of the SCQF has led to new priorities and processes and re-stated principles.

The SCQF level descriptors were reviewed and revised in 2012, a range of development work, support materials and guidance documents on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) were introduced, more than five hundred new qualifications and learning programmes were entered in the SCQF database, all culminating in the publication of a new SCQF Handbook in 2015. All of these are reflected in this referencing report.

The Framework diagram depicting mainstream qualifications in Scotland is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

THE SCOTTISH CREDIT AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

This Framework diagram has been produced to show the mainstream Scottish qualifications already credit rated by SQA and HEIs. However, there are a diverse number of learning programmes on the Framework, which, due to the limitations of this format, cannot be represented here. For more information, please visit the SCQF website at www.scqf.org.uk to view the interactive version of the Framework or search the Database.

SCQF Levels	SQA Qualifications			Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions	SVQs/MAs
12				Doctoral Degree	Professional Apprenticeship
11				Masters Degree, Integrated Masters Degree, Post Graduate Diploma, Post Graduate Certificate	Professional Apprenticeship SVQ 5
10				Honours Degree, Graduate Diploma, Graduate Certificate	Professional Apprenticeship
9			Professional Development Award	Bachelors / Ordinary Degree, Graduate Diploma, Graduate Certificate	Technical Apprenticeship SVQ 4
8		Higher National Diploma		Diploma Of Higher Education	Technical Apprenticeship SVQ 4
7	Advanced Higher, Awards, Scottish Baccalaureate	Higher National Certificate		Certificate Of Higher Education	Modern Apprenticeship SVQ 3
6	Higher, Awards, Skills for Work Higher				Modern Apprenticeship Foundation Apprenticeship SVQ 3
5	National 5, Awards, Skills for Work National 5				Modern Apprenticeship SVQ 2
4	National 4, Awards, Skills for Work National 4	National Certificate	National Progression Award		SVQ 1
3	National 3, Awards, Skills for Work National 3				
2	National 2, Awards				
1	National 1, Awards				

4.2 Education and Training Landscape

The main learning contexts for learning leading to qualifications in the SCQF are shown in Figure 2 below. This shows the school system, and, in broad terms, the main forms of education and training available to young people on completion of compulsory education. Further information about each of these routes is given in the following sub-sections, with information about the legal status and structure of the school, college, higher education and community routes, together with important features of delivery, the kinds of qualification and learning programmes offered and the main features of quality assurance which applies.²

² More details of the design of the qualifications in the SCQF are given in Annex 4, *Qualifications on the SCQF*, and information about quality assurance arrangements is given in the response to Principle 5.

FIGURE 2: Learning contexts leading to qualifications in the SCQF

Ages		Scottish Colleges Qualifications at SCQF levels 1-12.	Universities and specific higher education institutions Qualifications at SCQF levels 7-12.	Communities Qualifications at all SCQF levels.	Workplaces Qualifications at SCQF levels 3-12.
17+	Secondary School Senior Phase – years S5&S6. Mainly qualifications at SCQF levels 5-7.				
16+					
16	Secondary School Beginning of the Senior Phase – year S4 (Compulsory) Qualifications at SCQF levels 1-5.				
13-15	Secondary School – years S1-S3 (Compulsory) – broad general education Experiences and outcomes – no national qualifications.				
5-12	Primary school – years P1-P7 (national learning outcomes).				
3-4	Pre-school (national learning outcomes).				

A note on the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)

SQA is the national accreditation and awarding body in Scotland. The Education (Scotland) Act 1996 sets out SQA’s functions and the governance arrangements to oversee SQA’s distinct accreditation, regulatory and awarding functions. SQA is sponsored by the Scottish Government’s Learning Directorate.

In its accreditation role, SQA accredits vocational qualifications that are offered across Scotland, including Scottish Vocational Qualifications, and approves awarding bodies that wish to award them.

SQA is the statutory awarding body for qualifications in Scotland. Its duties are to develop, validate, quality assure and award a national framework of

qualifications for Scotland. In addition, SQA has a statutory duty as the regulator for National Qualifications in Scotland as defined by the Equality Act (2010).

The majority of school and college qualifications in Scotland are provided by the SQA however other awarding bodies also operate in Scotland offering a range of qualifications.

4.2.1 Scottish Schools

Legal basis and structure

The Scotland Act 1998 gives the Scottish Parliament legislative control over all education matters, but much of the structure of Scottish education is set by the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. These Acts and other more recent acts are supplemented by regulations issued by the Scottish Government which have the force of law and by guidance issued by Education Scotland, which sets de facto norms and standards for the quality of teaching and learning.

The school curriculum is not governed by legislation in Scotland and there are no compulsory subjects/qualifications that a pupil must take within the Scottish education system. However, guidance on the curriculum – now the Curriculum for Excellence, sets standards which schools are expected to meet. Inspections of educational standards and capacity-building activities in schools are conducted by Education Scotland, which incorporates the national educational inspectorate.

Curriculum for Excellence³

A new “Curriculum for Excellence” based on a structure of experiences and outcomes for young people from 3-18 was introduced in schools and colleges in 2010. It resulted from a “National Debate on Education” which led to the identification of four key purposes of education: enabling young people to become, successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

Qualifications

SQA began to introduce new and revised qualifications linked to Curriculum for Excellence in 2013/14. These qualifications, known as National Courses,

³ Further information can be found at [https://education.gov.scot/scottish-education-system/policy-for-scottish-education/policy-drivers/cfe-\(building-from-the-statement-appendix-incl-btc1-5\)/What%20is%20Curriculum%20for%20Excellence?](https://education.gov.scot/scottish-education-system/policy-for-scottish-education/policy-drivers/cfe-(building-from-the-statement-appendix-incl-btc1-5)/What%20is%20Curriculum%20for%20Excellence?)

Highers and Advanced Highers are subject-based, or topic-based and are made up of units of outcomes. There are also Scottish Baccalaureates (a group award) which consist of Advanced Highers, Highers and an interdisciplinary project at SCQF level 7. These qualifications and units are recorded on the SQA's Scottish Qualifications Certificate which also denotes the SCQF level and credit value of each module or unit achieved. Awards are made on the basis of combinations of assessment, including externally verified ongoing assessment by teachers and national examinations held annually. The outcomes required by specific national qualifications are kept under review by the SQA, which is responsible for maintaining the currency of the qualifications. It does this on the basis of an annual review, with revisions where necessary.

In the fourth year of secondary school – the final compulsory year – young people enter a senior phase which can continue for up to three years at school or in college, taking Highers in 5th year at age 16/17. In the senior phase, they will take national qualifications in a wide range of general and vocational subjects at SCQF levels 1-7 and may also take other qualifications offered by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) or other awarding bodies to reflect their wider achievements.

In Scotland pupils can go to university at age 16/17 with Highers providing the entry requirements for Scottish universities. However increasing numbers of young people stay on for a 6th year, taking Highers and Advanced Highers, and leave school at age 17/18.

Quality Assurance

Public schools are normally deemed to be competent to offer the National Qualifications described above, however they are subject to periodic inspection by Education Scotland⁴ to ensure that they are meeting appropriate quality standards relating to these qualifications.

An on-line National Assessment Resource (NAR) has been developed to support teachers' assessment. The NAR is an online resource for teaching staff which provides quality assured materials in a range of assessment approaches. SQA runs external examinations and external checks on internal assessment carried out in schools and colleges offering these qualifications.

⁴ <https://education.gov.scot/>

Where schools offer additional qualifications and learning programmes, they have to meet the quality assurance requirements of the awarding body for the qualification. This also applies to some SQA qualifications where the teaching, learning and resource requirements go beyond the usual capacity of schools.

4.2.2 Scottish Colleges

Legal basis and structure

Scottish colleges are self-governing organisations in the public sector. They were established with this status in the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Acts of 1992 and 2005 and they are treated as part of Scottish Government for budgeting, reporting, and accounting purposes. The recent Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013 brought about significant changes to college governance and established a new legal framework for a regional structure of colleges. Scottish colleges are now 20 organisations in 13 regions: 10 regions with a single regional college; and three regions with more than one college, but a single regional board that is responsible for strategic planning and allocating funds to the colleges in that region. In the northern region, Highlands and Islands, there are ten colleges. There is also a single national residential adult education college which lies outside the regional structure. Colleges are managed by autonomous boards of governors and the Chairs of College Regional Boards are appointed through the public appointments process. A full list of Scottish colleges can be found in Annex 3, *SCQF Credit Rating Bodies*.

Qualifications

Scottish colleges offer a wide range of general, vocational, technical and professional qualifications and learning programmes. Across the sector, they offer provision at most levels of the SCQF, but the majority of provision in most colleges is at SCQF levels 3-8.

Courses are delivered in colleges through day, evening or weekend classes, in the community, by distance learning and on-line, or in the work place. Some are short courses and others are designed to incorporate extensive periods of skills development – up to three years – in college workshops, restaurants, studios or other specialist areas, or by combining off-the-job and on-the-job learning. Most of the qualifications offered in Scottish colleges are awarded by SQA, but colleges also offer the qualifications of other Scottish, UK or international awarding bodies.

Colleges can also create their own awards and credit-rate them onto the SCQF. Most of these are associated with youth work, adult education and community

learning, such as access to employment, digital literacy, training of volunteers involved in community learning, sport and leisure qualifications.

Scottish colleges offer a range of higher education qualifications. In particular they offer Higher National Certificates (HNCs) at SCQF level 7 and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) at SCQF level 8. These qualifications provide both the practical skills and the theoretical knowledge needed to do a job at a technical level. Many of these qualifications also offer articulation to university degree courses with various kinds of recognition of prior learning, including exemptions and credit transfer. So for example completion of an HNC at level 7 would allow access directly into year 2 of an associated degree. A small number of taught degrees are available in Scottish colleges by the authority of a university or other competent higher education institution.

Quality assurance

Colleges also have their own quality systems and carry out continuous self-assessment as part of a national programme of enhancement. External reviews of quality are carried out by Education Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Funding Council, the body which allocates public funds to colleges and universities. Additional quality assurance processes may be operated by bodies such as Skills Development Scotland for vocational education and training schemes such as Modern Apprenticeships⁵. Quality assurance mechanisms in Scottish colleges include an active element of student participation and feedback. The College Development Network⁶ runs a number of workshops aimed at developing and sharing good practice in quality assurance.

⁵ Unlike the systems in many other countries, these apprenticeships extend beyond training for skilled artisans and can include technical and professional level training at the top levels of the SCQF – eg in areas like management and social services.

⁶ College Development Network is the organisation in Scotland that supports the college sector through delivery of a range of professional learning activities, supporting governance, leadership and organisational development.

4.2.3 Scottish Higher Education Institutions

Legal basis and structure

Higher education is provided in sixteen universities and three other higher education institutions in Scotland. Together, these nineteen institutions are referred to as higher education institutions. University status is conferred by the UK Privy Council⁷ on the advice of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. There are sixteen universities in Scotland which have the authority to award academic degrees.

There are three other higher education institutions: Glasgow School of Art, the Scottish Conservatoire (previously the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama), and Scotland's Rural College, which was formed in 2012 from a merger of three Scottish colleges which specialise in land-based studies⁸. Only the Scottish Conservatoire has degree awarding powers (for taught, but not research degrees).

Universities and the other higher education institutions are all public bodies funded by the Scottish Government through the SFC on the basis of Outcome Agreements. There are no private universities and only a small number of private higher education institutions in Scotland.

A full list of Scottish universities and other higher education institutions – all members of a representative body called Universities Scotland which is an SCQF partner body – can be found in Annex 3, *SCQF Credit Rating Bodies*.

Qualifications

All Scottish universities award degrees at SCQF levels 9-12: i.e. undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral levels. Institutions use SCQF credit points for students entering or transferring between learning programmes or institutions, and use the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) for transfers within the European area.

Higher education provision is developed within the parameters of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, introduced in 2012 to replace a previous Code of

⁷ The Privy Council formally advises the Queen on the exercise of her powers. It advises the Queen on the issuing of Royal Charters, which are used to grant special status to incorporated bodies.

⁸ Although it is a higher education institution, Scotland's Rural College offers qualifications at most levels in the SCQF on sites throughout Scotland. It intends to gain degree-awarding powers.

Practice. The Quality Code was developed by the higher education sector and is published and maintained by QAA: it sets out a series of expectations on which all higher education providers are agreed and is subject to revision as required: it covers academic standards, the quality of provision and support for students, and communication about provision. Higher education institutions are encouraged to create their own quality codes, building on the national expectations. The main aim of the UK Quality Code is to ensure that higher education provision and outcomes are comparable and consistent at a threshold level across the UK.

Quality Assurance

Scottish universities validate their own qualifications making use of the QAA UK Quality Code, including subject benchmarks, and the Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland, which aligns fully with levels 7-12 of the SCQF. In some cases, qualifications have to be endorsed by professional bodies to allow holders of the qualifications to become registered in the profession (teaching, nursing, medicine, law, etc). Universities are responsible for the quality of a range of processes: including programme design and maintenance, credit rating of their own provision, credit rating of the provision of other organisations (if they choose to offer that service), assessment of learners, and making awards to successful learners. They do this through internal evaluation processes, in which individuals external to the institution often have a formal role – especially external examiners and professional bodies. The approach, which is called “Enhancement-led Institutional Review”, aligns with the European Standards and Guidelines and there are international reviewers on all teams. In addition QAA Scotland carries out regular reviews of aspects of the work of these institutions and these reviews are published. Particular features of Scotland’s quality assurance mechanisms are a strong element of student participation in the review process and a national programme of enhancement, aimed at developing and sharing good practice.

4.2.4 Community Learning and Development (CLD)

Legal basis and structure

The legal basis for CLD is established in the *Requirements for Community Learning and Development (Scotland) Regulations 2013*. This places legal requirements on every local authority in Scotland for the delivery of CLD. Policy on CLD is set out in a number of areas, such as youth work, community regeneration, employability, tackling poverty, early years provision, the skills strategy, a greener Scotland and the SCQF.

Qualifications

Partnerships plans involve all kinds of organisations – from the public, private and not-for-profit sectors. This means that schools, colleges, universities and other higher education institutions are part of CLD and many of the qualifications and learning programmes used in CLD are on the SCQF. This includes qualifications and learning programmes developed specifically to support CLD. For example, a recent area of action in CLD has been on continual professional development for the CLD workforce and a number of new qualifications have been developed to support this and these have been credit rated and placed on the SCQF, as have awards for youth achievement and adult achievement and for community capacity-building. Examples of these qualifications are shown in Figure 3.

One notable approach in this sector is the Awards Network⁹, a forum of twenty one, mainly third sector providers of non-formal learning awards in Scotland. One of the aims of the Network is to develop a Scottish framework for valuing, recognising and accrediting young people's achievements through non-formal education. They recognise young people's contributions in a variety of settings including youth work, volunteering, active citizenship, and formal education. Some youth awards have external accreditation and currency through the SCQF, while others have their own long-standing internal processes for validation and accreditation.

**Figure 3: Examples of CLD and
Non-mainstream Programmes on the SCQF**

⁹ <http://www.awardsnetwork.org/>

THE SCOTTISH CREDIT AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

This Framework diagram has been produced to show the mainstream Scottish qualifications already credit rated by SQA and HEIs. However, there are a diverse number of learning programmes on the Framework, which, due to the limitations of this format, cannot be represented here. For more information, please visit the SCQF website at www.scqf.org.uk to view the interactive version of the Framework or search the Database.



SCQF Levels	Examples of CLD and non-mainstream programmes on the SCQF			
12				
11			Mind over Matter <i>Decision Making Processes</i>	Chartered Management Institute <i>Diploma in Strategic Management and Leadership</i>
10			Mercat Tours Ltd. <i>Walking Tour Guiding</i>	abdi <i>Professional Certificate in Evaluating Human Capital Investment</i>
9			Mountain Training Scotland <i>Winter Mountain Leader Award</i>	Young Enterprise Scotland <i>Can, Plan, Do: Supporting the Enterprise Journey</i>
8	COSCA <i>Certificate in Counselling Supervision Skills</i>	Deafblind <i>Diploma in Deafblind Studies</i>	The Governance Forum <i>The Governance Certificate Course</i>	College Development Network <i>Cooperative Learning Principles and Practice</i>
7	The Boy's Brigade <i>George VI Leadership Programme</i>	SQA Awarding Body <i>Supporting Employment Practice</i>	Notre Dame Centre <i>Seasons For Growth</i>	Royal Conservatoire of Scotland <i>Introduction to Actor Training</i>
6	South Ayrshire Council <i>Adult Literacy & Numeracy Volunteer Tutor</i>	The British Computer Society <i>ECDL Advanced</i>	Glasgow Life <i>First Steps in Adult Literacy Tutoring</i>	TUC Education <i>Certificate for Trade Union Learning Representatives</i>
5	Cycling Scotland <i>Cycle Training Assistant</i>	Rural & Urban Training Scheme <i>Bikefix Leadership Award</i>	The Outward Bound Trust <i>Adventure & Challenge Award</i>	Move On <i>Volunteer Peer Education Excellence Programme</i>
4	Calman Trust <i>Live, Learn and Work</i>	West College Scotland <i>Care Matters</i>	Learning Alliance Scotland <i>Effective Mentoring & Peer Education</i>	New College Lanarkshire <i>Relationships</i>
3	Shetland College, UHI <i>Letters, Logjits and Labels</i>	West Lothian Council <i>Everyday Art and Media Literacies</i>	East Ayrshire Council <i>Integrated Youth Literacies</i>	Rathbone <i>OneLife</i>
2	ASDAN <i>Employability Qualification</i>	Playback ICE <i>Moving On Transition in Action</i>	Dundee and Angus College <i>Home Skills</i>	SQA Awarding Body <i>Steps to Work Award</i>
1	SQA Awarding Body <i>Cycling Award</i>	Borders College <i>Ready for Retail</i>		SQA Awarding Body <i>Personal Achievement Bronze, Silver and Gold</i>

Quality Assurance

Organisations in the CLD sector wishing to have qualifications and learning programmes credit rated and placed on the SCQF must ensure that their provision meets the criteria for credit rating laid out in the SCQF Handbook when they are submitting their provision to a CRB. CRBs will have designed and developed a range of quality assurance systems to support SCQF principles to ensure the quality and integrity of the SCQF is maintained. While the individual design of the quality assurance system and processes is entirely within the remit of the CRBs, there are a number of elements and key features of commonality, best practice and documented evidence required to safeguard the integrity of the Framework

4.2.5 Work-based Learning

Legal basis and structure

The main qualification for work based learning in the SCQF is the Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ). These qualifications are based on national occupational standards that cover specific industry sectors in the United Kingdom. SVQs are a requirement, or a recognised qualification, for

registration or practice in a number of sectors, including workers in social services, health care and early years education, and construction workers, plumbers and electricians.

Modern Apprenticeships, with a focus on occupational competences, were introduced in the UK in the 1990s. They share some characteristics with more traditional apprenticeships in other countries, but are also distinctive in a number of ways. A Modern Apprentice must be employed, receiving a wage and also learning on the job. The standards he/she must achieve are set out in an approved Modern Apprenticeship Framework which will include at its core either an SVQ or another workbased qualification relevant to that sector. The Modern Apprenticeship Group, an independent group which draws its authority from the Scottish Government, is responsible for the approval and de-approval of all Scottish Modern Apprenticeship frameworks. The frameworks are developed by Sector Skills Councils. All Frameworks are allocated a level and a credit value on the SCQF.

In addition to SVQs however there are a number of programmes on the SCQF which belong to individual employers or professional bodies and which will be assessed in the workplace. These include, for example, programmes from Microsoft and Oracle and also programmes from the fire service, police service and food standards agency.

Qualifications

There are national occupational standards and SVQs in around 80% of the occupations in Scotland. The use and uptake varies. Sectors with high use of SVQs include Social Services and Healthcare, Business and Administration Retail, Hospitality, Driving Goods Vehicles, Construction, Engineering, and Management.

Quality assurance

Similar to the quality assurance arrangements for the CLD sector described above, individual employers and professional bodies which wish to offer vocational qualifications must be able to demonstrate that they have the necessary quality assurance arrangements in place to meet the criteria for credit rating as described in the SCQF Handbook and/or the relevant quality assurance arrangements of the relevant awarding body.

In the case of SVQs, which are the basis of Scottish Modern Apprenticeships, these are approved for use by SQA Accreditation and then awarding bodies seek accreditation to award the units and/or the full qualifications. All SVQs must be

credit rated by SQA Accreditation.

4.3 Scotland Responses to the Principles 1 - 5

Principle 1

The roles and responsibilities of the relevant bodies and authorities are clear and transparent.

The SCQF is managed by the SCQF Partnership: the members of the Partnership are the College Development Network, QAA Scotland, SQA, and Universities Scotland. The object of the SCQF Partnership is “to advance education through promoting and supporting the Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework as a tool to support lifelong learning in Scotland” and to meet its legal responsibilities the SCQF Partnership must:

- promote wider adoption and use of the Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework as a tool to support lifelong learning in Scotland
- maintain the quality and integrity of the Framework and ensure that there is a common understanding of credit values and levels among users
- ensure that the work of the Partnership is effective.

The SCQF Partnership is a company limited by guarantee and a registered Scottish charity. It was established in 2006 after discussions between the Scottish Government and the main stakeholders on designing an appropriate model for supporting the ongoing development and implementation of the SCQF. The SCQF itself is not set out in any law but the Memorandum and Articles of the Company clearly set out its roles and responsibilities. The SCQF Partnership Board is responsible for the governance of the organization and for ensuring that it delivers on its key priorities. It is constituted with the most senior representatives of the College Development Network; the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in Scotland; the Scottish Qualifications Authority; and Universities Scotland

Although the Scottish Government has no direct managerial role in the functioning of the SCQF (it does have observer status) however much of the funding for the Partnership’s activities comes from the Scottish Government. A proportion of funding also comes from the Scottish Funding Council but this is targeted at working directly with colleges and universities in their role as CRBs.

The work of the SCQF Partnership includes maintaining the quality and integrity of the Framework, linkage with the EQF and other national frameworks, commissioning developmental and research projects, disseminating information about the Framework and supporting individuals and organisations to use the Framework and the level descriptors. The overall aim of the Partnership is to ensure that, as far as possible, all assessed qualifications and learning programmes in use in Scotland are included on the Framework.

As part of its strategic role, which includes agreeing the principles upon which the quality of the SCQF will be assured, the SCQF Partnership has the responsibility of approving additional Credit Rating Bodies (i) to credit-rate their own provision, and (ii) to credit-rate the provision of other bodies.

SCQFP Structures

The SCQF Partnership was established in such a way that partnership working was central to its ability to deliver and implement the Framework. The name chosen for the organisation was deliberate and was intended to send out a message that all stakeholders would have a part to play in making the Framework a success. In order to co-ordinate this partnership working the Partnership has established two key groups consisting of stakeholders from all sectors across Scotland.

SCQF Quality Committee

The SCQF Partnership Board established the SCQF Partnership Quality Committee to provide it with recommendations on all issues concerning the ongoing maintenance and quality assurance of the Framework and its relationship to other Frameworks. The Quality Committee comprises around 15 experts in the development and quality assurance of credit, qualifications and frameworks from a range of sectors, awarding and quality assurance bodies associated with the SCQF. Its Chair is appointed by the Board.

The Committee meets four times a year. It reports to the SCQF Board on applications for recognition as an SCQF credit-rating body and manages the monitoring and review of organisations which are approved by the SCQF Partnership to act as Credit Rating Bodies.

SCQF Forum

The SCQF Partnership has also established a Forum to advise the Partnership on the continuing development and maintenance of the SCQF. The Forum is a national committee of key organisations with responsibility for providing or supporting education and training in Scotland. Its members are senior

representatives from 24 organisations representing the main providers, users and funders of qualifications in Scotland and it is chaired by the Chief Executive officer of the SCQF Partnership.

The Forum enables key organisations, and the sectors they represent, to work together to make full use of the SCQF in meeting needs for access and participation in lifelong learning and to engage in wider debate about the use of the SCQF as a tool which underpins, supports and influences Scottish lifelong learning policies. The Forum meets twice a year and advises the SCQF Partnership on the continuing development and maintenance of the SCQF.

Principle 2

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

The detailed comparison is included at Annex 1. Based on the “Good Fit” and “Best Fit” approaches, the matching of the levels of the two frameworks are as below:

Good Fit and Best Fit between HKQF and SCQF Levels

Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF)	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)	Principles of “Good Fit”/“Best Fit”
7	12	Good Fit
6	11	Good Fit
5	10	Best Fit
	9	Best Fit
4	8	Best Fit
	7	Best Fit
3	6	Best Fit
2	5	Best Fit
1	4	Best Fit
	3	Best Fit

No match	2	-
	1	-

Principle 3

The HKQF and the SCQF are based on learning outcomes and, where these exist, credit systems and the recognition of credit.

Any learning in Scotland at any level can be entered on the SCQF, provided that it is outcome-based, requires at least 10 notional hours of learning, and is subject to quality assured assessment. The SCQF has twelve levels defined by level descriptors which describe outcomes of learning in five domains or characteristics:

- knowledge and understanding
- practice: applied knowledge, skills and understanding
- generic cognitive skills
- communication, numeracy and IT skills
- autonomy, accountability and working with others

Any qualification or learning programme which is on the SCQF must be based on a clear set of learning outcomes and these outcomes must be referenced to the relevant characteristics of the SCQF level descriptors at the appropriate level.

In 2012, following an extended consultation, the SCQF level descriptors were revised. The consultation had revealed broad satisfaction with the descriptors and stakeholders asked for minimal change.

Prior to the creation of the SCQF, learning outcomes had been used in the design of qualifications, with the change from input to output as the basis for assessment and awarding qualifications starting in the 1980s. Since 2010, many of these qualifications have changed and other types of qualifications have been added to the framework. These changes and additions have strengthened the commitment of the SCQF and its users to learning outcomes as a basis for the national system.

All qualifications and learning programmes on the SCQF have a level and a credit value (with the exception of Research Degrees which do not have a credit value).

Credit points are fundamental to the SCQF because they are the building blocks for Credit Transfer. They provide a way of quantifying the amount of learning achieved and they symbolise the amount of time taken to complete a unit/module or qualification/learning programme.

One SCQF credit point represents a notional 10 hours of learning and only whole credit points can be awarded. One credit point is the minimum number of credit points which can be allocated to a learning programme. Along with the level descriptors, credit points allow learners, learning providers and employers to compare different qualifications at the same or even different levels.

Credit transfer

Credit Transfer is a type of Recognition of Prior Learning which allows the transfer to SCQF credit points from one qualification to another or one learning programme to another to minimise duplication of learning.

The amount of credit which will be recognised for Credit Transfer is at the discretion of the receiving institution or awarding body and will be dependent on the commonality of the subject and level of the qualification previously gained with the qualification or learning programme being undertaken.

These arrangements are most commonly used to help learners to do the following:

- move between qualifications/learning programmes in a college or a university or to move between colleges or universities
- move from an HNC or HND course at a college to a degree course at a university or vice versa
 - count learning from a previously gained SVQ or other qualification accredited by SQA towards a degree or an HNC or HND or towards another SQA qualification.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning

The assessment and certification of non-formal and informal learning has been a central feature of education and training reforms in Scotland since the mid-1980s and the principle that there should be certification of achieved learning outcomes regardless of the place, pace or mode of learning has been intrinsic to the SCQF from its inception. This inherent flexibility of the SCQF makes the validation of non-formal and informal learning less of an issue than it may be in more regulatory frameworks.

At the time of writing more than 800 qualifications and learning programmes

based on non-formal learning had been added to the SCQF database. The owners of these qualifications and learning programmes include government agencies, professional and commercial organisations, individual employers and training companies, trade associations, trade unions, youth organisations, community organisations, adult education organisations and charities. The qualifications range in level from SCQF 2 to SCQF 11 and in size from 1 SCQF credit point to over 1000 SCQF credit points. All of these qualifications are awarded on the basis of quality-assured assessment of outcomes of learning.

Principle 4

The policies and processes for the inclusion of qualifications on the HKQF and the SCQF are clear and transparent.

The process of preparing a qualification or learning programme for inclusion on the SCQF database, by allocating it to a level in the framework and giving it a value in SCQF credit points, is known as “credit rating” and bodies which are authorised to carry out this process are called “Credit Rating Bodies” (CRBs). As part of its strategic role, which includes agreeing the principles upon which the quality of the SCQF will be assured, the SCQF Partnership has the responsibility of approving organisations to become Credit Rating Bodies. The organisations must be a body of good standing with a successful track record in the design and delivery of learning provision. They need to have a documented quality assurance system for the design, validation and assessment of these qualifications and learning programmes and evidence through both internal and external reviews, that this quality assurance system is valid and reliable. And it needs to have the capacity and commitment to operate as an SCQF credit-rating body. A list of current Credit Rating Bodies is given in **Annex 3**.

Credit Rating Bodies are also responsible for ensuring that the credit rated qualifications and learning programmes on the SCQF database are current and accurate. The SCQF partner bodies which award qualifications have been approved by Government to credit rate qualifications: these are the SQA, Universities and other higher education institutions in Scotland and Scotland’s colleges.

The SCQF Partnership is responsible for approving other organisations to become Credit Rating Bodies. At the time of writing, there were 6 of these as follows:

- The Chartered Institute of Bankers in Scotland
- City & Guilds
- Scottish Police College – Tulliallan
- The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland (ICAS)
- The Institute of Counselling
- Scottish Fire and Rescue Service - TED

The SCQF Handbook states there is no “standard process” for credit-rating, which is seen as a matter of professional judgement. However, Credit Rating Bodies are expected to establish their processes in accordance with SCQF principles, which are set out in the SCQF Handbook. Credit-rating must focus on learning outcomes and on the arrangements for assessing these learning outcomes. Credit-rating processes are expected to be explicit, reliable, valid, and subject to external review. Any qualification/learning programme has the potential to be included on the SCQF, provided it meets the following criteria:

- must be written in learning outcomes
- must be a minimum of ten notional learning hours
- must be formally assessed;
- must be quality assured

The credit-rating process must involve the use of SCQF level descriptors, and should include a stage where the levels above and below the estimated level are also examined. However, the SCQF Partnership makes clear that the process should also involve other reference points such as relevant qualification or learning programme descriptors, higher education subject benchmark information, SQA specifications and other appropriate sources of information and guidance. The SCQF Partnership advises that the SCQF level descriptors should not normally be the only point of reference. The Partnership offers a range of support materials, seminars and workshops to support credit rating bodies. In all cases, for a qualification or learning programme to be credit rated and placed on the SCQF it must meet four criteria as follows; contain at least 10 notional hours of learning, be based on learning outcomes, be formally assessed and quality assured.

Credit Rating Bodies are required to operate quality assurance systems that include robust checks carried out by an independent body or someone who is not employed by, or part of, the institution or organisation. Providing clear evidence on this is a crucial part of the process of being approved to become a Credit Rating Body.

Third Party Credit Rating

Not all Credit Rating Bodies are allowed to carry out credit rating for other organisations. However, Further Education colleges, universities and other higher education institutions, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and, at the time of writing, Scottish Police College Tulliallan this included within their credit rating status. Such credit rating for external partners or organisations is called Third Party Credit Rating. If an organisation awards qualifications that are not currently on the Framework, or offers learning programmes that do not result in recognised qualifications, SCQF Third Party credit rating provides a means of placing these qualifications and learning programmes on the Framework without the need to go through the process of becoming a credit rating body themselves. Consequently, any organisation can submit a qualification or learning programme to an existing credit rating body that offers a Third Party credit rating service. Most CRBs will offer guidance on this and the growing number of third party programmes on the SCQF suggests that an increasing number of organisations will continue to use Third Party credit rating.

Principle 5

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

At the heart of the SCQF are the twenty-five principles set down in the SCQF Handbook (SCQF Partnership: 2015) – see Annex 2. Principle 1, which underpins all of the other principles, states that the SCQF Partnership and the Credit Rating Bodies share responsibility for ensuring the quality and integrity of the SCQF. This principle underlines the duties that fall on the Credit Rating Bodies, but does not detract from the lead responsibility of the Partnership. The Handbook also states that “Safeguarding the integrity and reputation of the Framework is paramount and quality assurance systems must be strong and rigorous enough so as not to compromise this integrity.”¹⁰ These systems must combine internal quality systems with external scrutiny.

Quality assurance policies and procedures underpin all parts and levels of the SCQF. SCQF Principle 9 crystallises this, stating that Credit Rating Bodies must establish rigorous and appropriate systems for credit rating, including internal and external quality assurance and arrangements for the retention of

¹⁰ SCQF Handbook p33.

evidence confirming decisions on level and credit. These operational procedures must also cover credit transfer and the recognition of prior learning. This requirement applies to all Credit Rating Bodies and the requirements of the SCQF have increasingly been built into the quality assurance process and criteria used by the bodies themselves and the organisations which review or audit them.

Therefore, all CRBs must operate a robust quality assurance system for programme design, approval, validation, accreditation or other related activities and demonstrate that the separate processes which make up the quality assurance system:

- are operated by individuals who are experienced in the relevant process and have subject expertise where this is required;
- are supported by appropriate management structures and have externality in decision making;
- are benchmarked against other equivalent processes; and
- are subject to regular review to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of users.

CRBs must also demonstrate that they regularly reviews and strive to improve and enhance their quality assurance system by:

- carrying out internal reviews on all aspects of the quality assurance system
- taking action on the outcome of such internal reviews.

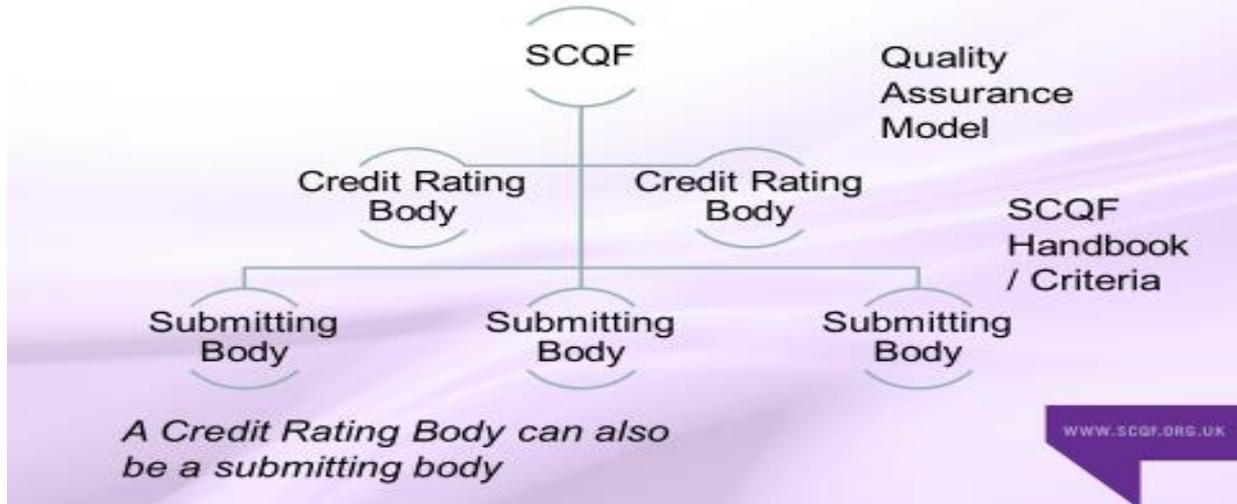
They must further ensure that quality assurance systems are subject to regular external review and provide evidence of the outcome of these external reviews and actions taken as a result of these external reviews. Examples of Evidence Procedures and policies will include:

- the quality assurance of programme design, approval, validation, accreditation, assessment or other related activities;
- roles and responsibilities of staff and/or committees involved in managing and operating both the quality assurance system and the individual processes within it;
- evidence of system review and action taken as a result;
- evidence of benchmarking activities and consideration of issues arising from these;
- evidence of process reviews and actions taken as a result.

Other evidence will include Internal review reports; details of actions taken on the findings of these reports; details of action taken in relation to any quality assurance activity. External review reports from quality assurance bodies such as QAA, SQA, HMIe; external review reports of other external quality assurance schemes; details of actions taken on the findings of these reports

The levels of quality assurance relating to the SCQF are shown below. They include: the overarching role of the SCQF Partnership in maintaining the quality and integrity of the SCQF; the Credit Rating Bodies and third-party Credit Rating Bodies which ensure that the qualifications on the SCQF database meet the required standards; organisations which undertake, support or contribute to the external element of quality assurance of Credit Rating Bodies; and owners which ensure the reliability and validity of the certificates issued for qualifications on the SCQF. The basis of the various levels of quality assurance which underpin the SCQF vary in kind, from legal requirements to agreed guidelines.

Figure 4: Credit Rating Quality Assurance Structure



Credit Rating Bodies

CRBs must ensure that their documented quality assurance systems and arrangements are aligned to SCQF principles for design, approval, assessment and related activities, including RPL, and internal and external review processes.

They must establish rigorous and appropriate systems for credit rating, including systems of internal and external quality assurance and arrangements for the retention of evidence confirming decisions on level and credit.

They must also employ assessment procedures for RPL and credit transfer which are consistent with the normal assessment and general quality assurance of the organisation.

If CRBs are authorised to carry out credit rating for other organisations then they also have the following additional responsibilities:

- Employ rigorous and appropriate systems for credit rating third-party submissions.
- Ensure that third-party organisations are of good standing and credibility and that they:
- submit documented evidence of their assessment processes, including arrangements relating to the internal and external quality assurance of

assessment decisions

- provide details of internal and external auditing/quality assurance of their systems
- submit regular (e.g. annual) reports of progress in the delivery of any credit-rated qualifications or learning programmes and inform the credit-rating body of any changes which may affect the SCQF level or credit points
- review the qualification or learning programme in an agreed timescale.
- place the details of all third-party qualifications or learning programmes which they have credit-rated on the SCQF database and keep these up to date.

All CRBs are subject to monitoring of their SCQF credit rating processes and systems:

- For universities and other higher education institutions which have credit rated provision, this is the responsibility of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and will form part of their overall monitoring processes of quality assurance generally.
- For colleges with credit rated provision, monitoring is carried out by Education Scotland as part of their ongoing monitoring of quality assurance in colleges.
- For SCQFP approved CRBs, the SCQF Partnership conducts an annual monitoring process and a four yearly periodic review.

QAA Scotland: Manages the Enhancement-led Institutional Review process which includes periodic reviews of Scotland's Universities and other higher education institutions, which make specific reference to SCQF requirements/principles. Publishes reports, and conducts annual discussions and follow-up activities. QAA is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the umbrella organisation for quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area.

Education Scotland: Supports quality and improvement in Scottish education. Evaluates the quality of learning and teaching in Scottish schools, colleges, education services and third sector organisations through inspection and review, which make specific reference to SCQF requirements/principles.

SQA Accreditation: Advises on and recommends approval of National Occupational Standards. Accredits SVQs, regulated qualifications and other qualifications on the basis of SQA Accreditation's Regulatory Principles.

Approves and audits the Awarding Bodies of these qualifications (including SQA Awarding Body) making specific reference to SCQF requirements/principles. SQA Accreditation has been approved by Lloyd's Register Quality Assurance to the ISO 9001:2008 Quality Management System Standards. This applies to the approval and subsequent monitoring of awarding bodies and the accreditation of vocational and occupational qualifications, other than those conferred by higher education institutions.

SCQF Partnership: Manages the Framework and ensures the principles set out in the Handbook and the SCQF Quality Assurance Model are adhered to.

Programme Owners

All programme owners who wish to have their programmes credit rated and placed onto the SCQF must:

- provide clear evidence of how the learning programmes will be assessed and that the method of assessment is robust, appropriate, secure and quality assured
- provide clear evidence that their programmes are internally and externally quality assured
- ensure that learners are appropriately certificated and formal records kept
- regularly review their programmes

Some more detailed aspects of quality assurance in the different sectors are given in Section 4 of this report, *Education and Training in Scotland*.

4.4 The Future of the SCQF

Since the SCQF was launched in 2001 the Scottish Government and its agencies have worked to ensure that SCQF levels and credit values are part of everyday work and communication in schools and colleges and with learners and (for younger learners) their parents. The SCQF Partnership has also commissioned several important pieces of research with learners and stakeholders over that period looking at impact and levels of understanding of the Framework across all learning sectors.

Since 2010 a systematic programme of research has been carried out among learners, institutions and employers to gauge levels of understanding and use of the Framework. An emerging trend in this research has been that learners themselves are often using the SCQF to take more control of their own planning

and progression, realising that the Framework is as amenable to recognising non formal learning as it is to recognising formal qualifications gained in schools or other formal institutions.

HEIs and Colleges continue to use the SCQF to inform the design and development of their curriculum portfolio and to ensure that there is a balance of provision at different SCQF levels. Colleges in particular use the SCQF to inform the development of new regional curriculum portfolios, to embed new National Qualifications and to ensure a balance of provision at different SCQF levels including non-formal learning.

Scottish Government priorities

The Scottish Government's strategies to widen access and participation for young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and to develop Scotland's young workforce have encouraged sectors to work more extensively with each other and with schools, Local Authorities and employers, and the SCQF can be seen as integral to this process. This work is enabling better integration of Scotland's education system and is developing both academic and vocational education and training opportunities that support youth employability and offer young people alternative progression pathways and development choices across and upwards through different SCQF levels. The SCQF is essential for informing the design, development and communication of curriculum and alternative progression pathways between different parts of Scotland's education system. In this way it will continue to provide partners with a framework and common vocabulary, assisting in the identification of gaps in provision, informing credit rating and levelling decisions and supporting the recognition and validation of informal and non-formal learning.

These activities complement the current Government focus on education including Developing the Young Workforce¹¹, Curriculum for Excellence¹², Post 16 Education Reform¹³ and raising educational attainment.¹⁴ As well as

¹¹ <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/developingtheyoungworkforce>

¹² [https://education.gov.scot/scottish-education-system/policy-for-scottish-education/policy-drivers/cfe-\(building-from-the-statement-appendix-incl-btc1-5\)/Curriculum%20for%20Excellence%20Implementation](https://education.gov.scot/scottish-education-system/policy-for-scottish-education/policy-drivers/cfe-(building-from-the-statement-appendix-incl-btc1-5)/Curriculum%20for%20Excellence%20Implementation)

¹³ <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/post16reform>

¹⁴ <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/Schools/Raisingeducationalattainment>

initiatives such as ‘How Good is our School’ and ‘Closing the Gap’. Ministers have placed the focus very firmly on education and particularly education of young people and there seems to be a clear vision that learning in many different contexts and settings should be recognised for the benefit of society as a whole. The SCQF Partnership will continue to develop its activities in the development and promotion of the Framework to help deliver on the pledges of Government in relation to excellence and equity in education.

The Partnership will continue to promote the use of the SCQF to support curriculum development, progression planning, and attainment and achievement of learners. The Framework will continue to keep the learner at the centre of its priorities. Supporting learners to achieve their full potential will continue to be a top priority for Scottish Government and the SCQF and the Partnership will play a key role in this.

The SCQFP Strategic Plan

In developing the SCQFP strategic plan, the Partnership, along with others, are fully contributing to supporting the Government agenda to deliver economic recovery. The need to support economic growth and ensure that skills are utilised fully in workforce development are very clear. The SCQFP strategic plan also acknowledges that the principles which underpin the SCQF will be fundamental to the success of Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce. The Partnership recognises fully that the next few years will continue to see many changes in the education and training landscape both structural and contextual. The Strategic Plan has been developed to capitalise fully on the SCQFP’s excellent partnership arrangements whilst still recognising that we will need to be flexible in order to respond to changing priorities for partners. The Partnership will continue to consult with key stakeholders on how best to support them and enhance education, learning, skills and training for individuals and employers.

The vision is to ensure that the Framework provides a range of tools and solutions to support both learners and employers through extremely challenging times ahead. The Partnership will seek to add value to the strategy outlined in Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce as well as those strategies and initiatives which are more closely linked to supporting the economic recovery agenda. To this end, the SCQF Partnership’s Key Objectives for 2015-18 are to:

- Maintain the reputation of the SCQF as a quality framework by monitoring, supporting and enhancing the work of Credit Rating Bodies
- Create greater demand for learning to be recognised on the SCQF from learners and employers

- Provide support and guidance on the inclusion of informal and non formal learning on the Framework along with advice on the use of Recognition of Prior Learning
- Market and promote the use of the Framework and associated tools and guidance
- Cultivate new collaborative relationships with key stakeholders to further embed the SCQF across all sectors
- Promote the SCQF as a tool to support learner transitions
- Promote the experience of developing and maintaining the SCQF to an international audience

5 REPORT OF HONG KONG

5.1 HKQF - Aim and Development

In 2000, in response to 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.

5.2 Education and Training System in Hong Kong

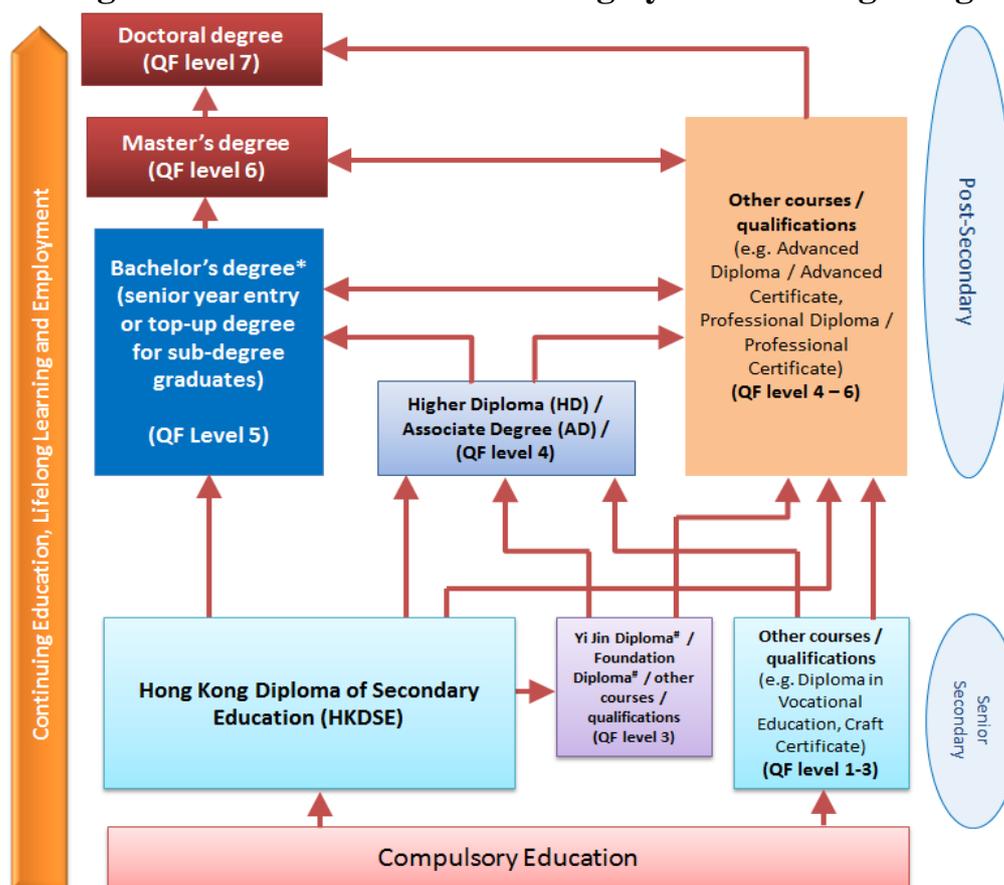
As Hong Kong is a former colony of the United Kingdom (from 1841 to 1997), the Hong Kong education system was closely modeled on the UK. However, after the change of sovereignty in 1997, the education system of Hong Kong has

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.

Education expenditure constitutes over one-fifth of the total recurrent expenditure of the HKSAR Government. 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.

Both Chinese and English are the official languages in Hong Kong. The medium of instruction (MOI) for Hong Kong's 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.

Figure 5 - Education and Training System in Hong Kong



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.

5.2.1 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 PISA report (2015), Hong Kong students ranked second in both reading and mathematics and ninth in science among students from the 72 countries/regions participating in the study.

5.2.2 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)¹⁵. 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.

5.2.3 Vocational and Professional Education and Training

In the 2016 Policy Address, the Government announced that all the recommendations of the Task Force on Promotion of Vocational Education had been accepted and will actively consider how to implement them. The recommendations include the government to rebrand VET in Hong Kong as “vocational and professional education and training” (VPET) covering programmes up to degree level with a high percentage of curriculum consisting of specialised contents in vocational skills or professional knowledge.

VPET 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 VPET for

¹⁵ http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/site/fund_inst.html 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 Technological and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong.

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 VPET and workplace training. VPET operators come from different sectors including private education/training institutes, public organisations, NGOs and commercial corporations.¹⁶ 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.

5.2.4 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

¹⁶ https://www.hkqf.gov.hk/en/news/whats_new/index_id_63.html (Hong Kong Qualifications Framework: Promotion of Vocational Education)

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 2004¹⁷. 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.

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

5.3 Hong Kong Responses to Principles 1 - 5

Principle 1

The roles and responsibilities of the relevant bodies and authorities are clear and transparent.

EDB and QFS

The EDB of the HKSAR Government 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 EDB has overall responsibility for developing and implementing the HKQF.

In this role, the EDB is assisted by an executive arm, the QFS. The major functions and responsibilities of the QFS include the following:

¹⁷ <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)

- assisting the EDB in the development of the infrastructure of QF, with a view to building a more effective platform for life-long learning;
- implementing the QF in various industries and sectors; and
- enhancing the recognition of QF and QF-recognised qualifications locally and internationally.

In the implementation of QF in various industries, the EDB sets up Industry Training Advisory Committee (ITACs) with secretariat services provided by the QFS. The major terms of reference of the ITACs are :

- developing the competency standards of the industry concerned and launching the recognition of prior learning mechanism as appropriate;
- promoting QF to the industry stakeholders; and
- advising the Secretary for Education on the manpower and training needs of the industry.

HKCAAVQ

The HKCAAVQ is legally mandated as the Accreditation Authority (for operators without self-accrediting power) and QR Authority of the HKQF. 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)¹⁸. The functions of the Accreditation Authority are to develop and implement a mechanism for 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.

¹⁸http://www.blis.gov.hk/blis_ind.nsf/WebView?OpenAgent&vwpg=CurAllEngDoc*568*100*589.1#589.1 (AAVQ Ordinance (Cap. 592))

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 later sections of this report.

QAC

UGC-funded institutions are statutory organisations with self-accrediting status¹⁹. 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, which was established by 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 all UGC-funded institutions.

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.

Principle 2

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

¹⁹ The Education University of Hong Kong's self-accrediting status applies only to its programmes in education for the time being. All other programmes are subject to accreditation by the HKCAAVQ.

The detailed comparison is included at Annex 1. Based on the “Good Fit” and “Best Fit” approaches, the matching of the levels of the two frameworks are as below:

Good Fit and Best Fit between HKQF and SCQF Levels

Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF)	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)	Principles of “Good Fit”/“Best Fit”
7	12	Good Fit
6	11	Good Fit
5	10	Best Fit
	9	Best Fit
4	8	Best Fit
	7	Best Fit
3	6	Best Fit
2	5	Best Fit
1	4	Best Fit
	3	Best Fit
No match	2	-
	1	-

Principle 3

The HKQF and the SCQF are based on learning outcomes and, where these exist, credit systems and the recognition of credit

The HKQF is a framework based on learning outcomes with each level of the framework expressed in terms of learning outcomes in the four domains of the 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.

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 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

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 later sections.

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.²⁰

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”.

Under HKQF, recognition of prior learning (RPL) mechanisms have been well implemented in 14 industries so far, whereby industry practitioners and employees with relevant working experience and in possession of the competencies required of the tasks and job functions can apply for a qualification recognised under HKQF. These qualifications are based on the learning outcomes acquired through workplaces (non-formal and informal learning) and assessed by the Assessment Agency (AA) authorised and appointed by the Secretary for Education for undertaking the RPL assessment. The AA will have to be accredited by the HKCAAVQ before the AA can award the qualifications via the RPL mechanism.

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 examined²¹. The guidelines which relate to learning outcomes are as follows:

²⁰ <https://www.hkqf.gov.hk/en/KeyFeatures/credit/index.html> (The HKQF: QF Credit)

²¹ <http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/services/accreditation> (The HKCAAVQ: Accreditation)

Programme Objectives and Learning Outcomes

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.

QAC

The QAC was established by the UGC in 2007 to advise the UGC on quality assurance matters in the higher education sector in Hong Kong and other related matters. . 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 Manual²². 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;

²² <http://www.ugc.edu.hk/doc/eng/qac/manual/auditmanual2.pdf> (Quality Assurance Council: Audit Manual)

- 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.

Learning Outcomes in Vocational Professional Education and Training (VPET)

With support from the EDB and 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, SGCs and Training Packages based on SCS

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

The EDB publishes qualifications guidelines on SCS-based and SGC-based courses²³, which specify that SCS-based courses are courses designed by training providers using mainly the SCSs developed by ITACs under the HKQF, and

²³https://www.hkqf.gov.hk/filemanager/en/content_74/QG%20revised_E_2014.08.pdf (The HKQF: SCS-based/SGC-based courses)

similarly, SGC-based courses are designed and offered by providers using mainly SGCs.

Principle 4

The policies and processes for the inclusion of qualifications on the HKQF and the SCQF are clear and transparent.

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.

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 ²⁴status 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. 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 universities 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.²⁵

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

²⁴ 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.

²⁵ <http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/services/accreditation> (HKCAAVQ: Accreditation criteria)

14 industries²⁶. 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 QR²⁷. More than 7 800 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.

The HKCAAVQ is the Accreditation Authority for HKQF and operates a Four-stage QA Process²⁸, 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. Under normal circumstances, the validity period is $N + 1$ years, where N is the programme duration.

Learning Programme Re-accreditation (re-LPA) is the cyclical evaluation of an accredited learning programme, which determines whether the learning

²⁶ Printing & Publishing, Watch & Clock, Property Management, Automotive, Jewellery, Logistics, Catering, Beauty, Hairdressing, Retail, Import & Export, Elderly Care Service, Testing, Inspection & Certification and Electrical & Mechanical Services

²⁷ <https://www.hkqf.gov.hk/en/support/dss/index.html> (Designated Support Schemes for HKQF)

²⁸ <http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/services/accreditation/four-stage-qa-process> (The HKCAAVQ: Four-Stage Quality Assurance Process)

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.

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 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.²⁹ It also provides guidance notes and a checklist of the key features of Quality Assured Learning Programmes on the QR for self-accrediting operators³⁰.

Accreditation of Non-local Programmes

²⁹ <http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/services/accreditation/academic-accreditation> (The HKCAAVQ: Academic Accreditation)

³⁰ 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))

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 HKQF³¹. 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); and
- 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

³¹ <http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/services/accreditation/non-local-learning-programmes> (The HKCAAVQ: Non-local Learning Programme Accreditation)

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.

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 for the time being 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:

Figure 6: Award Titles Permitted under Award Titles Scheme

QF Level
資歷級別

Choice of Award Titles for Different Levels
各級別可選用的資歷名銜



The ATS lists the award titles which providers are permitted to use for the qualifications they offer under the HKQF, and therefore aims to prevent inflation of titles and the provision of misleading information to learners. The ATS covers qualifications at all QF levels (i.e. Level 1 to 7) in the academic, vocational and professional, and continuing education sectors. Since 1 January 2016 all programmes have conformed 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 learners³².

³² <https://www.hkqf.gov.hk/filemanager/common/CAT/C.A.T.%20Booklet.pdf> (The HKQF: Credit Accumulation and Transfer Policy and Principles)

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

Principle 5

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

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, and the QAC of the UGC provide oversight of different providers and programmes in the education sector. Both agencies base their QA procedures on well-defined and internationally accepted quality assurance principles. The HKCAAVQ has successfully completed an external review against the Guidelines of Good Practice developed by INQAAHE in October 2015.

QA Policies and Systems

In Hong Kong, the quality of education and training providers and their programmes is subject to the oversight of two QA agencies, depending on the sector to which the provider belongs. The two agencies are the HKCAAVQ and, the QAC of the UGC.

In order to enhance coordination between the agencies, the EDB has established the Liaison Committee on Quality Assurance (LCQA) which consists of representatives of the EDB, the HKCAAVQ, 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 were 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 universities provide a total of about 15,000 first-year first-degree places each year.³³ These universities award qualifications at different levels, ranging from sub-degrees to doctorate degrees.

UGC-funded universities are statutory organisations with self-accrediting status³⁴. They have ultimate responsibility for assuring the quality and academic standards of their programmes. All qualifications offered by UGC-funded universities with full self-accrediting status are quality assured by the universities themselves and quality audited by the QAC.

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.³⁵

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:

- 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 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;

³³ http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/site/fund_inst.html (University Grant Committee: UGC-funded Institutions)

³⁴ The Education University of Hong Kong's self-accrediting status applies only to its programmes in education for the time being. All other programmes are subject to accreditation by the HKCAAVQ.

³⁵ <http://www.ugc.edu.hk/big5/qac/about/term/membership.html> (University Grants Committee: Membership of the Quality Assurance Council)

- 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 parties³⁶.

HKCAAVQ

As mentioned, the HKCAAVQ is the Accreditation Authority and the QR Authority of the HKQF. 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.

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 2013³⁷.

Qualifications Assessment

³⁶ <http://www.ugc.edu.hk/doc/eng/qac/manual/auditmanual2.pdf> (University Grants Committee: Audit Manual)

³⁷ <http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/publications/summary-accreditation-reports> (The HKCAAVQ: Summary Accreditation Reports)

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 guidelines³⁸ of the HKCAAVQ are periodically reviewed and updated to keep abreast of the latest developments in credential evaluation and the HKQF.

Hong Kong Qualifications and International Standards

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.

³⁸http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/files/services/assessment/individual-qualifications/Guidance_Notes_for_Applications.pdf (The HKCAAVQ: Qualifications Assessment – Guidance Notes for Application)

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 INQAAHE³⁹. HKCAAVQ has demonstrated substantial (or full) alignment with all individual guidelines including resources (Guideline 2); quality assurance of the agency (Guideline 3); public reporting

³⁹<http://www.inqahe.org/guidelines-good-practice> (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education: Guidelines of Good Practice in Quality Assurance)

(Guideline 4); relationship between the agency and higher education institutions (Guideline 5); institutional or programmatic performance (Guideline 6); and 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.

5.4 Future of the HKQF

The HKQF has been commended as an advanced and mature framework with well-designed architecture and robust QA arrangements. The international dimension of the HKQF has witnessed steady growth including but not limited to the many collaborative projects with overseas QFs and the Mainland authorities.

Locally, a number of new initiatives have been launched to facilitate the further development of the HKQF. These include a review of the existing RPL mechanism including the aim and objectives, coverage, criteria for recognition; a pilot project in spearheading the need and mechanism for validating non-formal and informal learning; a proposal in benchmarking qualifications such as trade tests and professional qualifications which have not been included in the HKQF for the time being; a plan for levelling the secondary school qualifications; and various pilots in different industries for the development of training packages and vocational qualifications pathways.

All these are intended for supporting the lifelong learning of the Hong Kong people as well as for enhancing the competitiveness and capabilities of the local workforce. All the new initiatives and pilot projects have been progressing well with final recommendations to be formulated and to shed light on the future development of the HKQF in the next decade.

Hong Kong has adopted a robust QA system to support the implementation of the HKQF. However, given the continual growth in the VPET sector locally and internationally, it is clear that there are opportunities for Hong Kong to learn from

the development and evolution of international QA standards and practices. Upon successful completion of the EQF comparability study in March 2016, a project on the review the GLD has commenced with a view to better refining the clarity of the level descriptors and developing practical tools associated with the use of the GLD by different stakeholders, including employers, standard setters and providers of education and training.

The policy and operational guidelines for CAT implementation under HKQF have been promulgated since 2015, and more providers have been enabled to set up such CAT policy and mechanism to provide credit transfer arrangement and learning progression.

The Mainland China and the Macau Special Administrative Region of China have shown keen interest in the development of similar qualifications frameworks. There are regular exchanges between Hong Kong, Mainland China and Macau. The EDB and the QFS have been invited to serve as experts of think tank and/or as speakers at various conferences. The network extends well beyond China and Macau, and to European Union, Scotland, Ireland, New Zealand, Thailand, Malaysia and others. There are ongoing referencing projects with the National Framework of Qualifications in Ireland (NFQI), and the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF). All these projects will help facilitate the mutual understanding and recognition of QF-recognised qualifications, thus promoting the mobility of learners and labour between the countries/regions.

6. CONCLUDING REMARK

The collaboration between the EDB and the SCQFP in forming this bilateral agreement on the linkage between the qualifications frameworks has been conducted in an open and constructive way and has generated a mutual trust between the stakeholders of the two regions.

The process of establishing a referencing of one framework to the other has been comprehensive in scope and has produced an outcome which can be a benchmark for users of qualifications in Hong Kong and Scotland to use to facilitate recognition of qualifications by individual institutions/employers.

This relationship is based on consideration of a wide range of technical and contextual information and is offered as the best fit of levels in one framework to levels in the other. As the term “*Best Fit*” suggests the evidence does not lead to a precise and fact based relationship. Decisions have been made by experts in Hong Kong and in Scotland and the outcomes in the table are robust and defensible.

The process used and the outcome itself can serve as a model for such processes for other countries and framework owners as other referencing projects are set up and evaluated.

Both the HKSAR and Scotland are involved in other referencing exercises. It is suggested that the report on this referencing process is circulated widely to other countries engaged in referencing processes so that the process of referencing can be enhanced through ‘learning by doing’. This report would be published on the official websites of the EDB and the SCQFP.

Qualifications systems are often perceived as static, solid, monolithic constructs which serve as a foundation for education and training standards. However qualifications systems are not static and they are constantly evolving to better meet the needs of governments, communities, individual citizens as well as the business community. The qualifications systems in the HKSAR and Scotland will inevitably change in years to come and this referencing position may need to be reviewed in due course.

Annex 1

Comparison of the HKQF and the SCQF demonstrates matching between the levels of the two frameworks

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 (GLD). The four domains are:

- (a) Knowledge and Intellectual Skills;
- (b) Processes;
- (c) Application, Autonomy and Accountability; and
- (d) Communication, IT and Numeracy.

The SCQF is a single framework covering all sectors of learning and has 12 levels defined by Level Descriptors (LD) under five domains:

- (a) Knowledge and Understanding;
- (b) Practice;
- (c) Generic Cognitive Skills;
- (d) Autonomy, Accountability and Working with Others; and
- (e) Communication, ICT and Numeracy Skills.

Though the number of levels differs between the two frameworks, the domains of the level descriptors are quite similar and even almost identical in two domains. The domains of the level descriptors describe in broad terms what the learners should be able to do or demonstrate at a particular level. Each level descriptor specifies the characteristics in terms of knowledge, intellectual skills, generic competencies, processes, application, and extent of autonomy and accountability in work contexts. The level descriptors therefore provide a common vocabulary to assist with the comparison of qualifications, learning programmes, skills and competencies.

The Study adopts the following stages:

(a) Stage 1

- An analysis of the four domains of HKQF and the five domains of the SCQF to establish the similarities and differentiation in terms of outcome requirements, which forms the basis of the next stage of the detailed level-to-level comparison;

(b) Stage 2

- Using the respective studies between HKQF and EQF, and between SCQF and EQF to establish the possible, broad and direct level-to-level comparison between HKQF and SCQF;

(c) **Stage 3**

- 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; and

(d) **Stage 4**

- Assessment of the technical comparison based on typical examples of qualification linked to their respective levels in the two frameworks; this will enrich the social context matching, together with the country area profile of Scotland on qualifications assessment in Hong Kong by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications.

Detailed Level-to-Level Comparison of HKQF and SCQF

Stage 1:

An analysis of the four domains of HKQF and the five domains of the SCQF to establish the similarities and differentiation in terms of outcome requirements as below:

Table 2: Comparison of Domain Descriptors of HKQF and SCQF

HKQF Definitions	SCQF Definitions	Comments
Knowledge and Intellectual Skills covers the analytical and evaluation skills used to solve problems, and the ability to reflect on, practise, plan and manage learning.	Knowledge and Understanding refers to possession of knowledge of subject basis.	The domain of “Knowledge and Intellectual Skills” as in HKQF and “Knowledge and Understanding” as in SCQF is similar.
Processes covers the application of judgement, communication skills and the ability to work with others interactively.	Generic Cognitive Skills covers the abilities of evaluation, critical analysis, problem solving, reflection, etc.	The domain of “Generic Cognitive Skills” in SCQF sometimes refers to abilities in the domain of “Knowledge and Intellectual Skills” in HKQF and sometimes to the domain of “Processes” in HKQF.
	Practice covers the application of knowledge and understanding.	The domain of “Processes” in HKQF can be equated with the domain of “Practice” in SCQF.
Application, Autonomy and Accountability refers to the degree of application, autonomy and accountability assumed while practising those skills.	Autonomy, Accountability and Working with Others	This domain is similar between HKQF and SCQF.

HKQF Definitions	SCQF Definitions	Comments
Communication, IT and Numeracy	Communication, ICT and Numeracy Skills	This domain is very similar between HKQF and SCQF. It is also unique to HKQF and SCQF.
refers to the mastery of the skill areas in communication, IT, and numeracy.		

The equivalency will guide the following stage of level-to-level comparison. Because of the different coverage of the SCQF domains vis-à-vis those in HKQF, the statements in each HKQF domain are compared with the relevant statements from one, or across two or three SCQF domains to which they best relate. For instance, the HKQF domain “*Knowledge and Intellectual Skills*” is compared to the “*Knowledge and Understanding*” and the “*Generic Cognitive Skills*” domain of SCQF. Similarly, the HKQF domain of “*Processes*” is compared to the “*Generic Cognitive Skills*” and “*Practice*” domains of SCQF.

Stage 2:

Using the respective studies between HKQF and EQF, and between SCQF and EQF to establish the possible, broad and direct level-to-level comparison between HKQF and EQF as below:

Table 2: Correspondences between HKQF and SCQF with EQF

Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF)	European Qualifications Framework (EQF)	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)
7	8	12
6	7	11
5	6	10
		9
4	5	8
		7
3	4	6
2	3	5
1	2	4

No match	1	3
	No match	2
		1

Summary of Comparison

Fundamentally speaking, the two frameworks have different number of levels in that the HKQF is a 7-level hierarchy whereas the SCQF is a 12-level hierarchy. In addition, the two frameworks have different entry points, in that HKQF does not start Level 1 until the attainment reaches the comparable level of junior secondary. In SCQF, however, the entry point starts at a lower level to recognise all learning. This means that the “corridor” between each level of the SCQF may be shorter than the HKQF level, making it necessary that one HKQF level may straddle across two SCQF levels.

As both sets of level descriptors of HKQF and SCQF are designed as a developmental continuum, and each level in both frameworks builds on and subsumes the levels beneath, the detailed comparison between levels of HKQF and SCQF therefore will put focus on the holistic expression of learning outcomes, together with the “vertical” reading of the level to be analysed and taking into account of the lower and upper levels.

Level 1 in HKQF and Levels 1 to 4 in SCQF

Under HKQF, the major learning outcomes at Level 1 include the following:

- Demonstrate elementary comprehension in a narrow range of areas;
- Exercise basic skills;
- Apply learnt responses to solve problems;
- Undertake the performance of clearly defined tasks;
- Carry out directed activity under close supervision;
- Produce and respond to a limited range of simple, written and oral communications, in familiar/routine contexts.

The level descriptors of Level 1 in HKQF, and the purpose and outcomes of the qualifications that sit 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 VPET foundation certificates of various lengths and credit values that are offered by the ERB and the VTC.

By contrast, Level 1 in SCQF refers to the very basic learning development and achievement that ranges from participation in experiential situations to the achievement of basic tasks with varying degree of support. Interestingly enough, there is not any domain descriptor for Level 1 in SCQF, as the level is, by design, for giving recognition of experiential learning without any specification of the learning outcomes. National 1 is the only example of a qualification at Level 1 in SCQF, which is designed for students who require considerable support with their learning, without any formal assessment for the achievement of learning outcomes or not. It therefore concludes that Level 1 in the SCQF sits below the standard of Level 1 in the HKQF.

A subsequent comparison of Level 1 in HKQF and Levels 2 - 3 in SCQF is attempted through an analysis of the domain descriptors and the typical qualifications that sit at the two levels. The language of the learning outcomes in HKQF Level 1 and SCQF at Level 2 are dissimilar. The qualifications pitched at SCQF Level 2 are different in terms of outcome standards. The “basic knowledge” and “basic skills” at SCQF Level 2 refer to knowledge and skills that the learner is expected to have acquired before completion of junior secondary education. The HKQF does not include achievements before completion of junior secondary education and deemed as equivalent to SCQF Level 2. Therefore SCQF Level 2 does not have a corresponding level in HKQF.

Having established “no-match” between HKQF Level 1 with SCQF Level 1 and Level 2, an upward mapping of HKQF Level 1 with SCQF Level 3 and Level 4 was attempted. The exercise confirmed that part of the descriptors of HKQF Level 1 is comparable to that of Level 3 and Level 4 of SCQF. Using the “Best Fit” principle, it can be concluded that HKQF Level 1 is best compared with SCQF Level 3 and Level 4. 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. With the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland, learners typically undertake a broad general education in the first three years of their secondary education and are presented for National 3, 4 and 5 qualifications in the fourth year of their secondary education. This is a

different system to that in HK but the mapping of HKQF Level 1 to SCQF Level 3 and Level 4 is validated.

Levels 2 to 7 in HKQF and Levels 5 to 12 in SCQF

There is a broad comparability in requirements in knowledge, skills, autonomy, accountability and generic competency between HKQF Level 2 and SCQF Level 5. Using the “Best Fit” principle, it can be concluded that HKQF Level 2 is best compared with SCQF Level 5. The conclusion is also supported by contextual and social matching. HKQF Level 2 qualifications include the completion of Secondary 5, vocational-oriented qualification of Project Yi Jin and Craft Certificate for apprentices. These qualifications are similar in nature and duration to the National Awards and vocational awards at SCQF Level 5.

Based on linguistic comparison, HKQF Level 3 is well mapped with SCQF Level 6. The contextual and social matching also confirms the comparison. The Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education, being the entry qualification to post-secondary education, is benchmarked to the outcome standards at HKQF Level 3. HKQF Level 3 also holds Diploma in Vocation Education that equips learners for higher vocational education or work. Similarly, qualifications at SCQF Level 6 are general education upper secondary school-leaving certificates and upper-secondary VPET school-leaving certificates. It can be concluded that HKQF Level 3 best fits with SCQF Level 6.

Similarities in the requirements of different domains are observed between HKQF Level 4 and SCQF Level 7 & Level 8. Reality check of qualifications confirms the comparability between the respective levels. HKQF Level 4 equates to the first level of post-secondary education and includes generic qualifications such as Higher Diploma and Associate Degree, similar to the HND and HNC at SCQF Level 8 and Level 7. HKQF L4 stipulates the "rigorous approach" to the acquisition of both "a broad knowledge base" and "specialist knowledge in selected areas". This can be inferred as similar to the requirements of “undertake critical analysis, evaluation and/or synthesis of ideas, concepts, information and issues” of the SCQF L8 and L7.

In the skills domain, the concept of creativity is introduced at HKQF L4 in the descriptor that requires one to "operate in a range of varied and specific contexts involving some creative and non-routine activities". Such requirements are similar in SCQF L8 in that learners will “carry out routines line of enquiry, development or investigation into professional level problems and issues”. In SCQF L7, learners also need to “apply knowledge in practical contexts” and “use some of the basic and routine professional skills”. On the principle of “Best Fit”, it can be concluded that HKQF Level 4 is comparable to SCQF Level 7 and Level 8.

Technical comparison indicates that there appears to be a best fit between HKQF Level 5 and SCQF Level 9 and Level 10. The comparability is also supported by reality check of qualifications linked to the respective levels of the two frameworks. Typical qualification at HKQF Level 5 includes bachelor degrees, both honours and ordinary degrees. Under SCQF, hours degrees are situated at Level 10 and ordinary degrees are situated at Level 9. The entry requirements of hours and ordinary degrees under SCQF are the same as those bachelor degrees under HKQF.

The SCQF L9 and L10 describe the skills in dealing with complex problems in the absence of data and information. Under HKQF, 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 L5, are comparable to the advanced problem-solving skills at SCQF L9 and 10.

Critical understanding, awareness and originality are key skills introduced at SCQF L9 and L10. HKQF L5 descriptors require learners to be able to "generate ideas" and demonstrate "specialised technical, creative and/or conceptual skills". It can be concluded that the two frameworks are comparable in their expectations of advanced skills in respect of creativity and innovation. Using the "Best Fit" principle, HKQF Level 5 is best compared with SCQF Level 9 and Level 10.

Each level of HKQF and SCQF was perceived as a "corridor of learning achievement" rather than a fixed point, and therefore the "corridors" of the HKQF were longer than those in SCQF; and using the above approach, HKQF Levels 4 and 5 were referenced to SCQF Levels 7/8, and 9/10 respectively.

Based on linguistic comparison and contextual analysis, a good fit is found between HKQF Level 6 and SCQF Level 11. Taught and research Master qualifications are allocated to these respective levels in both frameworks. Also, there are several professional awards designed and offered by specialized organizations to meet the professional need of the learners. Similarly, the Professional Development Awards and SVQ 5 under SCQF are professional qualifications.

Based on linguistic comparison and contextual analysis, a good fit is found between HKQF Level 7 and SCQF Level 12. HKQF Level 7 and SCQF Level 12 are the most advanced levels of the two frameworks. Doctorate qualifications are linked to the levels in both frameworks, and they follow the same universal standard and are of similar nature under both frameworks.

Level-to-Level Comparison of HKQF and SCQF

HKQF Level 1	SCQF Level 4 and Level 3	Comments Purple: similarities in language & meaning Green: similarities in meaning Red: differences
<p>Knowledge & Intellectual Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Employ recall and demonstrate elementary comprehension in a narrow range of areas with dependency on ideas of others</u> • <u>Exercise basic skills</u> • Receive and pass on information • Use, under supervision <u>or prompting</u>, basic tools and materials • <u>Apply learnt responses to solve problems</u> • <u>Operate in familiar, personal and/or everyday contexts</u> • <u>Take some account, with prompting, of identified consequences of actions</u> 	<p>Knowledge & Understanding, Generic Cognitive Skills</p> <p>Level 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Basic knowledge</u> • <u>Some simple facts and ideas in, about, and associated with, a subject/discipline/sector</u> • <u>Knowledge of basic processes, materials and terminology</u> • <u>Use, with guidance, given stages of a process to deal with a problem, situation or issue</u> • <u>Operate in straightforward contexts</u> • <u>Identify and/or take account of some of the consequences of action/inaction</u> <p>Level 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic knowledge • Simple facts and ideas in, and associated with, a subject/discipline/sector • Relate knowledge to personal and/or identify <u>with some prompting</u> a process to deal with a situation or issue • <u>Operate in familiar contexts using given criteria</u> • <u>Take account of some identified consequences of action</u> 	<p>Similarities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the knowledge domain of SCQF, L4 and L3 are similar as underlined. Outcome differences are embedded in HKQF L1. • The words “basic” and “elementary” appear in both the HKQF and SCQF level descriptors, such as basic knowledge, exercise of basic skills, using basic tools, and demonstration of elementary comprehension. • Operate in a narrow range: familiar, straightforward, personal and everyday contexts. • Recall facts and solve simple problems. • Respond and solve problems with prompting or guidance. • SCQF L4 requires accountability for consequences of action and inaction, while HKQF L1 mentions accountability for consequences of action.

<p>Processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operate mainly in closely defined and highly structured contexts Carry out processes that are repetitive and predictable Undertake the performance of clearly defined tasks Assume a strictly limited range of roles 	<p>Practice</p> <p>Level 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relate knowledge to personal and/or practical contexts Use a few skills to complete straightforward tasks with some non-routine elements Prepare for familiar and routine tasks Select and use, with guidance, appropriate tools and materials safely and effectively <p>Level 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relate knowledge to personal and/or practical contexts with some prompting Use a few basic, routine skills to undertake familiar and routine tasks Complete pre-planned tasks Use, with guidance, basic tools and materials safely and effectively 	<p>Similarities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Similar requirements between SCQF L4 and L3 descriptors. Similar process of learning and applying knowledge; operate in routine and highly structured contexts. The use of basic tools in SCQF L3 progresses to the selection of appropriate tools in SCQF L4. But the results are the same: to use tools safely and effectively. <p>Differences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SCQF L4 requires one to select and to use tools, while SCQF L3 requires one to use, not to select, tools.
<p>Application, Autonomy & Accountability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 	<p>Autonomy, Accountability & Working with Others</p> <p>Level 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work alone or with others on tasks with regular, directive supervision Contribute to the setting of goals, timelines, etc Contribute to the review of completed work and offer suggestions for improving practices and processes Identify own strengths and weaknesses relative to the work <p>Level 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work alone or with others on simple tasks under frequent directive supervision Contribute to the setting of goals, timelines, etc Participate in the review of completed work and the identification of ways of improving practices and processes 	<p>Similarities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SCQF L4 indicates learners under regular directive supervision while SCQF L3 indicates learners under frequent directive supervision. HKQF L1 also requires that the learners are under repetitive and directive supervision. <p>Differences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SCQF L4 and L3 require contribution in setting of timelines and goals. This is not obvious in HKQF. Also, SCQF requires learners to be reflective in identifying own strengths and weaknesses. HKQF L1, however, indicates the reliance on external quality checking for output. SCQF L4 and L3 indicate learners be under directive supervision. The extent of supervision is different between L4 and L3, in that L4 will be

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify, given simple criteria, own strengths and weaknesses relative to the work 	<p>under regular supervision, while L3 will be under frequent supervision.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HKQF L 1 does not indicate the frequency of supervision. Rather, it indicates the degree of close supervision.
<p>Communication, IT & Numeracy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 	<p>Communication, ICT & Numeracy Skills Level 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use some routine skills Produce and respond to simple but detailed written and oral communication in familiar contexts Use the basic features of familiar ICT applications to process and obtain information Use basic numerical and graphical data in straightforward and familiar contexts <p>Level 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use simple skills Produce and respond to simple but detailed written and oral communication in familiar/routine contexts Carry out simple tasks to process and access information Use simple numerical and graphical data in straightforward and familiar contexts 	<p>Similarities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Similar communication, ICT and numeracy skills in HKQF L1 and SCQF L4 and L3. <p>Differences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HKQF L1 descriptors require the standard of a given level of accuracy, which is not specified but is understood in SCQF L4 and L3, as there are two more levels below SCQF L3.

Qualifications at HKQF Level 1	Qualifications at SCQF Level 4 and Level 3	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of Secondary 3 Certificate/Foundation Certificate at Level 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foundation Certificate (Employees Retraining Board) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BTEC (Business and Technology Education Council) Introductory Diploma / Certificate; NVQ Level 1; National 4/ Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) at SCQF Level 4 / National Certificates/ National Progression Awards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 1-year or 120 credits 	

Summary

1. As to the linguistic comparison, HKQF L1 corresponds with SCQF L4 and L3, because the descriptors of the two SCQF levels are of marginal differences and are embedded in HKQF L1. For instance, the use of “basic tools” (SCQF L3) and “simple tools” (SCQF L4), and “to operate under regular directive supervision” (SCQF L3) and “to operate under frequent directive supervision” (SCQF L4) are indicated in HKQF L1.
2. In the knowledge domain, “elementary comprehension in a narrow range of areas” in HKQF L1 compares well with the “exercise of basic and simple facts” in SCQF L3 and L4.
3. In the skills area, at HKQF L1, 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. These basic practical skills match with SCQF L3 and L4 descriptors.
4. The descriptors in the Communications, IT & Numeracy (CITN) domain of HKQF L1 clearly demonstrate the same requirements of SCQF L3 and L4, in the use of the same outcome statements. For example, the requirement to read and identify the main points and ideas from documents, the ability to use numerical and pictorial data, and the requirement to produce and respond to a limited range of written and oral communications appear in HKQF L1, SCQF L3 and SCQF L4 descriptors.
5. In the area of competence of working and accountability, HKQF L1 and SCQF L3 and L4 have differences in the linguistic presentations. HKQF L1 refers to taking up responsibility under supervision and relying on external checking for output quality. Whilst being prescriptive about the need for supervision, HKQF L1 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 CITN 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. These are similar to SCQF L3 and L4 descriptors as highlighted.
6. The types, purpose and outcomes of the qualifications that sit on HKQF L1, SCQF L3 and SCQF L4 are also similar in nature. Some of the SCQF L3 and L4 qualifications are the same, such as the Standard Grades, but they are differentiated into two levels primarily based on the grades attained by the learners. This situation does not apply to the HKQF.
7. **In conclusion, HKQF L1 and SCQF L3 and L4 are “Best Fit”.**

HKQF Level 2	SCQF Level 5	Comments
<p>Knowledge & Intellectual Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<p>Knowledge & Understanding, Generic Cognitive Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic knowledge. A range of simple facts, ideas and theories in, about, and associated with, a subject/ discipline/ sector • Use a range of skills associated with the subject/discipline/sector to complete some routine and non-routine tasks • Relate knowledge and ideas to personal and/or practical contexts • Plan and organise both familiar and unfamiliar tasks • Select appropriate tools and materials and use them safely and effectively. Adjust tools where necessary following safe practices 	<p>Comments Purple: similarities in language & meaning Green: similarities in meaning Red: differences</p> <p>Similarities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Basic knowledge”, “a range of simple facts” and “a range of skills” and “operate in familiar and unfamiliar contexts” in SCQF are well compared with “applying knowledge based on an underpinning comprehension”, “apply basic tools”, “in a selected number of areas”, and “operate in familiar, personal and/or everyday contexts” in HKQF. • “Use rehearsed stages for solving problems” in HKQF L2 can be compared to “use a range of skills to complete some routine and non-routine tasks” and “relate knowledge to personal and/or practical contexts” in SCQF level 5. <p>Differences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A more advanced skill of SCQF L5, which requires learners to “use and adjust tools safely and effectively”, is not included in HKQF L2.
<p>Processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<p>Practices, Generic Cognitive Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge and understanding of basic processes, materials and terminology • Use a process to deal with a problem, situation or issue that is straightforward • Operate in a familiar context, but where there is a need to take account of or use additional information of different kinds, some of which will be theoretical or hypothetical • Agree goals and responsibilities for self and/or work team 	<p>Similarities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same processes and procedures, some of which are non-routine (HKQF) and theoretical or hypothetical (SCQF). • Handle straightforward issue and procedures, and the need for team work in both frameworks. • The need for co-ordination with others to achieve the goals (HKQF) can be compared with “agree goals and responsibilities for self and/or work team” (SCQF).

		Differences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SCQF includes more elaborated requirements, but all of which are at straightforward level and contexts.
Application, Autonomy & Accountability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	Autonomy, Accountability & Working with Others <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work alone or with others on tasks with minimum directive supervision • Take lead responsibility for some tasks. • Show an awareness of own and/or others' roles, responsibilities and requirements in carrying out work and contribute to the evaluation and improvement of practices and processes 	Similarities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Undertake directed activity with a degree of autonomy” (HKQF) can be compared with “work alone or with others on tasks with minimum directive supervision” (SCQF). • “Accept defined responsibility for quantity and quality of output subject to external quality checking” (in HKQF) can be compared to “take lead responsibility for some tasks” (in SCQF).
Communication, IT & Numeracy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	Communication, ICT and Numeracy Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce and respond to detailed written and oral communication in familiar contexts • Use standard ICT applications to process, obtain and combine information • Use a range of numerical and graphical data in routine contexts that may have some non-routine elements 	Similarities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar basic and a limited range of communication and ICT skills in both frameworks. • Ability to be able to produce and respond to a specified range of written and oral communications.

Qualifications at HKQF Level 2	Qualifications at SCQF Level 5	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (up to 2011) • Project Yi Jin (up to 2011) • Craft Certificate (up to 2015) • Certificate/Foundation Certificate at Level 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ No minimum credit size 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Certificates/ National Progression Awards/SVQ at SCQF Level 5 and National 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ At least 1 year or 120 credits ■ Vocational Oriented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar duration and nature of the qualifications at HKQF L2 and SCQF L5. • Comparability and equivalencies of school qualifications of HKCEE in HKQF and National Certificates in SCQF.

Summary

1. Both HKQF L2 and SCQF L5 define the knowledge domain as the mastery of basic and factual information, with the need to relate knowledge and ideas to personal and/or practical contexts. Common themes appear in the two level descriptors, including knowledge based on an underpinning comprehension, the application of basic tools and materials, the skills to operate in familiar, personal and/or everyday contexts.
2. Although HKQF L2 makes few clear references to knowledge per se and concentrates more on intellectual skills, it seems reasonable to assume that the HKQF descriptors calling for "underpinning comprehension in a selected number of areas" and "making comparisons with some evaluation and interpret available information" indicate an expectation of some cognitive aspect of knowledge use rather than simple regurgitation of facts. This elaboration will support the mapping with SCQF L5 knowledge domain which emphasises the command of a range of simple facts, ideas and theories in, about, and associated with, a subject, discipline and sector.
3. 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, which matches with SCQF L5 in "using a range of skills associated with a subject or a sector" and the need to "select appropriate tools and to use them effectively".
4. In the skills area, SCQF L5 expects the learner to solve problems which may be straightforward as well as theoretical and hypothetical. There is a need for the agreement and recognition of goals to be achieved alone or together. This spirit of team work is evident in HKQF L2, as reflected in "co-ordination with others to achieve common goals". Also in HKQF L2, one has to "take account of the identified consequences of actions", which supports the SCQF requirements on agreeing goals and responsibilities for self and for team.
5. At SCQF L5, the knowledge domain remains to a single field of work or study, but the breadth of knowledge has been expanded to include not only factual knowledge but also theories in a discipline or in sector. HKQF L2 outcomes specify that the application of knowledge should be based on a selected number of areas". One may argue that such an underpinning comprehension goes beyond "basic factual knowledge" at SCQF L3 and L4.

6. In the CITN domain, we get an indication of the best match between HKQF L2 and SCQF L5. Several of the domain descriptors cover the same breadth and depth of requirements as highlighted.
7. In the area of taking accountability and responsibility, SCQF L5 introduces the concept of taking lead responsibility for task completion as well as the adaptation of behaviour to circumstances (including the showing of awareness of one and others' roles). In HKQF L2, it indicates "accepting defined responsibility", "achieving outcomes within time constraint" and "undertaking directed activity with a degree of autonomy". These may be equated to the SCQF L5 concepts.
8. Using typical qualifications in the two frameworks to cross check the comparability also confirms the "Best Fit" principle. HKQF L2 qualifications include the completion of Secondary 5, the then vocational-oriented qualification of Project Yi Jin and Craft Certificate for apprentices. In SCQF, L5 qualifications also include the National Awards and vocational awards, which are for the 16 - 18 year olds.
9. National Certificates are for 16 - 18 year olds and adults in full-time education. These prepare candidates for employment or further study, by developing a range of knowledge and skills. National Certificates have specific aims, which related to occupational areas and are linked to the national occupational standards. These qualifications are similar in nature and duration to Project Yi Jin, Applied Learning under the HKDSE and Craft Certificate for apprentices.
10. SCQF has two additional qualification types, which are the National Progression Awards pitched at L2 to L5, and the Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) Level 2. National Progression Awards and SVQs are designed to develop and assess a defined set of skills and knowledge in specialist vocational areas. They are linked to national occupational standards. These programmes are mainly used for short programmes of study, such as part-time programmes for those already in work or return-to-work programmes for the unemployed. The nature and duration of study can be compared with the HKQF L2 qualifications.
11. **In conclusion, HKQF L2 and SCQF L5 are "Best Fit".**

HKQF Level 3	SCQF Level 6	Comments Purple: similarities in language & meaning Green: similarities in meaning Red: differences
Knowledge & Intellectual Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply knowledge and skills in a range of activities, demonstrating comprehension of relevant theories Access, organize 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 & Understanding, Generic Cognitive Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An appreciation of the body of knowledge that constitutes a subject/discipline/sector A range of knowledge, facts, theories, ideas, properties, materials, terminology, practices and techniques about, and associated with, a subject/discipline/sector Relating the subject/discipline/sector to a range of practical and/or commonplace applications Obtain, organise and use factual, theoretical and/or hypothetical information in problem solving Make generalisations and predictions Draw conclusions and suggest solutions 	Similarities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply and relate knowledge to solve problems, and to operate in both familiar or unfamiliar contexts. HKQF L3 and SCQF L6 both progress in terms of demands from HKQF L2 and SCQF L5. Mastery of a range of knowledge, including theories, in the knowledge domains of both frameworks. Make generalisations, predictions and conclusions in both frameworks. Differences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HKQF L3 requires learners to evaluate information independently and make reasoned judgements. SCQF L6 requires learners to suggest solutions.
Processes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 	Practices, Generic Cognitive Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply knowledge, skills and understanding in known, practical contexts Use some of the basic, routine practices, techniques and/or materials associated with the subject/discipline/sector that may have non-routine elements. Plan how skills will be used to address set situations and/or problems and adapt these as necessary (SCQF Level 7) Present and evaluate arguments, information and ideas that are routine to a subject/discipline/sector 	Similarities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Similar process of learning and applying knowledge. Differences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HKQF L3 requires learners to give presentations, whereas SCQF L7, not SCQF L6, has similar requirements.

<p>Application, Autonomy & Accountability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • (repetitive) Accept well defined but limited responsibility for the quantity and quality of the output of others 	<p>Autonomy, Accountability and Working With Others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take responsibility for carrying out a range of activities where the overall goal is clear, under non-directive supervision • Take account of roles and responsibilities related to the tasks being carried out and take a significant role in the evaluation of work and the improvement of practices and processes • Manage limited resources within defined and supervised areas of work • Exercise some supervisory responsibility for the work of others and lead established teams in the implementation of routine work within a defined and supervised structure 	<p>Similarities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar level of skills is required in both frameworks: to be responsible for some personal responsibilities and for others, to carry out a range of activities, to operate in non-routine and non-directive contexts. • SCQF L6 descriptors require the improvement of practices and processes, while HKQF L3 emphasizes the quality and the quantity of output. <p>Differences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HKQF L3 requires learners to be engaged in self-directed activity, whereas SCQF L6 requires learners to lead established teams in implementation of routine work.
<p>Communication, IT & Numeracy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a wide range of largely routine and well practiced skills • 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 	<p>Communication, ICT & Numeracy Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a wide range of skills • Produce and respond to detailed and relatively complex written and oral communication in both familiar and unfamiliar contexts • Select and use standard ICT applications to process, obtain and combine information • Use a wide range of numerical and graphical data in routine contexts which may have non-routine elements 	<p>Similarities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many similarities in the use of terminology and the outcome statements in the CITN domain of the two frameworks. • HKQF L3 refers to “operate in contexts with non-routine elements” while SCQF L6 refers to “operate in unfamiliar contexts”. It can be compared with similar meanings though phrased differently.

Qualifications at HKQF Level 3	Qualifications at SCQF Level 6	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diploma of Vocational Education at QF Level 3 ■ 60 QF credits or above ■ Vocational Oriented • Diploma/Certificate at QF Level 3 ■ 60 QF credits or above for Diploma ■ Vocational Oriented/General/Continuing Professional development • HKDSE ■ Year 6 of Secondary School ■ Public Examination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Certificate, NPAs, SVQ Level 3 ■ 1 year (at least 120 QF credits) ■ Vocational Oriented ■ Admission: 2 Graded Units and HNDs ■ Year 5 of Secondary School ■ Public Examinations leading to English/Scottish Universities Admission • National Qualification – Higher ■ Year 5 of Secondary School ■ Public Examinations leading to Scottish Universities Admission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar duration and nature. • Similar programmer admission requirements and progression pathways. • Comparability and equivalencies of school qualifications of HKDSE under HKQF and National Qualifications (Advanced Highers and Highers) of SCQF have been confirmed by NARIC.

Summary

1. HKQF L3 in most of the aspects is well mapped with SCQF L6. There is a broad comparability in requirements in knowledge, skills, autonomy, responsibility and accountability between the HKQF L3 and SCQF L6.
2. Both frameworks introduce the concept of theoretical knowledge as in “comprehension of relevant theories in HKQF L3 and “understanding a range of knowledge, facts, theories and ideas” in SCQF L6. Both descriptors indicate a broadened base of knowledge. In HKQF L3, it requires the application of knowledge and skills in a range of activities in relation to a subject or discipline. In SCQF L6, it specifies the appreciation of a body of knowledge that constitutes a subject/discipline or even a sector. This concept is introduced from HKQF L3 and upward under HKQF, and from SCQF L6 upward under SCQF.
3. In the processes and practices domains of the two descriptors, both refer to sometimes unpredictable problems or contexts, therefore requiring learners to operate in a variety of contexts and be able to make generalisation, conclusions and solutions.
4. Both frameworks stress that at this level learners will be able to take responsibility for their own learning and work, and have some responsibilities and supervisory functions for the work of others. The SCQF L6 descriptors include the ability to "exercise some initiative and independence in carrying out defined activities”, to “take account of roles and responsibilities related to tasks”, to “take a significant role in the evaluation of work and improvement of practices”, and to “manage limited resources”. All these are comparable to the HKQF L3 requirements that the learners are able to "engage in self-directed activity with guidance/evaluation", and “accept responsibility for quality and quantity of output”.

5. 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 L3. HKQF L3 also holds the Diploma in Vocational Education (DVE) that qualifies learners to access Higher Diploma programmes at the next QF level (i.e. HKQF L4) and provides progression possibilities for Craft certificate at HKQF L2. Similarly, qualifications referenced to SCQF L6 are general education upper secondary school-leaving certificates (giving access to higher education) and upper-secondary vocational education and training (VET) school leaving certificates (school-based VET and dual VET) leading to skilled work and opening pathways to further learning in tertiary education.
6. With respect to the CITN domain, at HKQF L3 learners are expected to "use a wide range of largely routine and well-practiced skills". All these are well mapped with SCQF L6 descriptors not just in meaning but also in the use of exact terminologies. The concepts of "operate in routine and "non-routine contexts" are prevalent in HKQF L3 and SCQF L6 descriptors.
7. **In conclusion, HKQF L3 and SCQF L6 are "Best Fit".**

HKQF Level 4	SCQF Level 8 and Level 7	Comments Purple: similarities in language & meaning Green: similarities in meaning Red: differences
Knowledge & Intellectual Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 & Understanding, Generic Cognitive Skills Level 8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of the scope, defining features, and main areas of the subject/discipline/sector. Specialist knowledge in some areas • A discerning understanding of a defined range of core theories, concepts, principles and terminology • Awareness and understanding of some major current issues and specialisms • Awareness and understanding of research and equivalent scholarly/academic processes • Undertake critical analysis, evaluation and/or synthesis of ideas, concepts, information and issues that are within the common understandings in a subject/discipline/sector • Use a range of approaches to formulate and critically evaluate evidence-based solutions/responses to defined and/or routine problems and issues Level 7 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An overall appreciation of the body of knowledge that constitutes a subject/discipline/sector • Knowledge that is embedded in the main theories, concepts and principles of the subject/discipline/sector • An awareness of the dynamic nature of knowledge and understanding • An understanding of the difference between explanations based on evidence and/or research and other sources, and of the importance of this difference 	Similarities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same rigor in acquiring key knowledge in specialist and broad domains in both frameworks. • The theme of acquisition of a broad knowledge base with some specialist knowledge in selected areas is comparable between HKQF L4 and SCQF L8 and L7. • The need to deal with familiar and unfamiliar problems is the same requirement of the two frameworks.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present and evaluate arguments, information and ideas that are routine to a subject/discipline/sector Use a range of approaches to address defined and/or routine problems and issues within familiar contexts 	
<p>Processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 or investigation into professional level issues and problems 	<p>Practice, Applied Knowledge, Skills and Understanding</p> <p>Level 8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In using a range of professional skills, techniques, practices and/or materials associated with the subject/discipline/sector, a few of which are advanced and/or complex To adapt routine practices within accepted standards In carrying out routine lines of enquiry, development or investigation into professional level problems and issues <p>Level 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply knowledge in practical contexts Apply knowledge in using some of the basic and routine professional skills, techniques, practices and/or materials associated with the subject/discipline/sector Apply knowledge to practise these in both routine and non-routine contexts 	<p>Similarities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Similar process of learning and applying knowledge in professional contexts. “A range of varied and specific contexts involving some creative and non-routine activities” in HKQF L4 can be compared to “apply knowledge to practice these in both routine and non-routine contexts” in SCQF L7.
<p>Application, Autonomy & Accountability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ability to perform skilled tasks requiring some discretion and judgement, and undertake a supervisory role Undertake self-directed and directive activity Accept some responsibility for the quantity and quality of the output of others Operate within broad general guidelines or functions 	<p>Autonomy, Accountability and Working with Others</p> <p>Level 8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exercise autonomy and initiative in some activities at a professional level in practice or in a subject/discipline/sector Exercise managerial responsibility for the work of others within a defined structure Manage resources within defined areas of work Take the lead on planning in familiar or defined contexts. 	<p>Similarities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Similar abilities in performing skilled tasks, and supervision of others in both framework. “Accept some responsibility for the quantity and quality of the output of others” in HKQF L4 can be compared to “exercise managerial responsibility for the work of others” in SCQF L8 and L7. <p>Differences:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practise in ways that show awareness of own and others' roles, responsibilities and contributions when carrying out and evaluating tasks • Work, under guidance, with others to acquire an understanding of current professional practice • Manage, under guidance, ethical and professional issues in accordance with current professional and/or ethical codes or practices <p>Level 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise some initiative and independence in carrying out defined activities at a professional level in practice or in a subject/discipline/sector • Accept supervision in less familiar areas of work • Exercise some managerial or supervisory responsibility for the work of others within a defined and supervised structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SCQF emphasises professional and ethical conduct of practices.
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Qualifications at HKQF Level 4	Qualifications at SCQF Level 8 and Level 7	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher Diploma at QF Level 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 2 years (240 QF credits) ■ Vocational Oriented ■ 60% Specific 40% generic • Associate Degree <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 2 years (240 QF credits) ■ 60% Generic 40% Specific • Diploma/Advanced Diploma/Professional Diploma <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ QF Level 4 ■ 60 QF credits or above ■ Vocational Oriented/Generic • Certificate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ QF Level 4 ■ 1 QF credit or above ■ Vocational Oriented/Generic 	<p>Level 8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher National Diploma <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 2 years (between 240 QF credits) ■ Vocational Oriented • Diploma in/of Higher Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 2 years (240 QF credits) ■ Academic Oriented and intermediate award to a Bachelor Degree <p>Level 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher National Certificate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 1 year (up to 120 QF credits) ■ Vocational Oriented • Certificate of Higher Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 120QF credits ~ 1st year of a UK Bachelor Degree ■ Academic oriented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar duration and nature of Higher Diploma (HD)/Associate Degree (AD) in HKQF and Higher National Diplomas (HND) and Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE) in SCQF.

Summary

1. SCQF L8 and L7 descriptors differ insignificantly in terms of requirements in the depth and breadth of knowledge base. In the CITN domain, both level descriptors set out similar demands. SCQF L8 requires for the conveying of complex idea and information to a range of audiences. For SCQF L7, the demand is bit constrained to the well-defined structure and coherent form. The differences can be seen as marginal.
2. SCQF L8 and L7 two descriptors have more variations in the domains of “Practices” and “Autonomy, Accountability and Working with Others”. To cite an example, SCQF L8 descriptors require the learners to exercise autonomy and initiative in some activities, whereas L7 descriptors require the learners to exercise some initiatives and independence in carrying out defined activities.
3. In mapping the outcomes in the “Processes” and “Application, Autonomy and Accountability” of HKQF L4 with SCQF L8 and L7, the slight differences between SCQF L8 and SCQF L7 are embraced with HKQF L4 in that the importance of autonomy and initiative is evident. HKQF L4 learners are required to perform skilled tasks with some discretion and judgement, same as SCQF L8 and L7 descriptors. Although several descriptors of HKQF L4 seem to be comparable to SCQF L8, SCQF L7 also resembles the HKQF L4 descriptors.

4. HKQF L4 introduces the concept of specialism and states that a learner should be able to "develop a rigorous approach to the acquisition of a broad knowledge base, with some specialist knowledge in selected areas". SCQF L8 requires learners should have "specialist" knowledge in some areas and "awareness and understanding of some major current issues and specialisms". HKQF L4 stipulates the "rigorous approach" to the acquisition of both "a broad knowledge base" and "specialist knowledge in selected areas". This can be inferred as similar to the requirements of "undertake critical analysis, evaluation and/or synthesis of ideas, concepts, information and issues" of the SCQF L8 and L7.
5. In the skills domain, HKQF L4 emphasises the development in cognitive and practical skills, including 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 HKQF L4 in the descriptor that requires one to "operate in a range of varied and specific contexts involving some creative and non-routine activities". Such requirements are similar in SCQF L8 in that learners will "carry out routines line of enquiry, development or investigation into professional level problems and issues". In SCQF L7, learners also need to "apply knowledge in practical contexts" and "use some of the basic and routine professional skills".
6. Both SCQF and HKQF level descriptors include the ability to assume responsibility for development. In HKQF L4, it is a normal part of supervisory responsibilities and may also be implied by the requirement that the holder of a qualification at HKQF L4 should be able to "accept some responsibility for the quantity and quality of the output of others." This requirement is evident in both SCQF L7 and L8 descriptors, including to "accept supervision in less familiar areas of work" and "exercise some managerial or supervisory responsibility for the work of others within a defined and supervised structure".
7. The concept of "professionalism" appears in HKQF L4 and SCQF L7 and L8 as well. At HKQF L4, learners should be able to investigate "professional level issues and problems". In both SCQF L7 and L8, the descriptors refer to the "exercise of autonomy and initiative in some activities at a professional level in practice".
8. In the CITN domain at HKQF L4 and SCQF L7 and L8, there are many common threads, including "advanced skills", "a wide range of skills", "convey complex ideas", "in familiar and unfamiliar contexts". It is 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.
9. Through the reality check of qualifications registered at the respective levels of HKQF and SCQF, HKQF L4 equates to the first level of post-secondary education and includes generic qualifications such as Higher Diploma and Associate Degree, similar to the HND and HNC of the qualifications at SCQF L7 and L8. Also, the UK NARIC confirms that the AD/HD compares with the DipHE and HND respectively.
- 10. In conclusion, HKQF L4 and SCQF L7 and L8 are "Best Fit".**

HKQF Level 5	SCQF Level 9 & 10	Comments Purple: similarities in language & meaning Green: similarities Red: differences
<p>Knowledge & Intellectual Skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generate ideas through the analysis of abstract information and concepts Analyse, reformat and evaluate a wide range of information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Command wide ranging, specialized technical, creative and/or conceptual skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and analyse both routine and abstract professional problems and issues, and formulate evidence-based responses Critically analyse, evaluate and/or synthesise ideas, concepts, information and issues 	<p>Knowledge & Understanding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A critical understanding of a range of the principles, principal theories, concepts and terminology of the subject/discipline/sector (L9) A critical understanding of the principal theories, concepts and principles (L10) Knowledge of one or more specialisms that is informed by forefront developments (L9) Detailed Knowledge and understanding in one or more specialisms, some of which is informed by, or at the forefront of a subject/discipline/sector (L10) An understanding of the scope and defining features of a subject/discipline/sector, and an integrated knowledge of its main areas and boundaries(L9) Knowledge that covers and integrates most of the principal areas, features, boundaries, terminology and conventions of a subject/discipline/sector (L10) Knowledge and understanding of the ways in which the subject/discipline/sector is developed, including a range of established techniques of enquiry or research methodologies (L10) <p>Generic Cognitive Skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and analyze routine professional problems and issues (L9) Critically identify, define, conceptualize and analyze complex/professional problems and issues (L10) 	<p>Similarities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The descriptors are underlined and indicated with SCQF level to highlight the similarities between the L9 and L10 descriptors. The differences are quite marginal. Similar level of understanding/knowledge in a specialised field. Similar use of information sources. “Critical understanding of a range of principles, theories, concepts” of SCQF L9 and L10 bear similar meanings of “Generalize ideas through the analysis of abstract information and concepts” and “Analyse, reformat and evaluate a wide range of information”. “Knowledge of one or more specialisms” of SCQF has similar meanings of “specialized” technical, creative and/or conceptual skills of HKQF. <p>Differences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HKQF L5 descriptors require the formulation of evidence-based responses, whereas SCQF L9 and L10 descriptors require the provision of professional insights and interpretations and solutions to problems.

<p>Application, Autonomy & Accountability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<p>Autonomy, Accountability & Working with Others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise autonomy and initiative in activities at a professional levels (L9) • Exercise autonomy and initiative in professional/equivalent activities (L10) • Exercise managerial responsibility for the work of others (L9) • Exercise significant managerial responsibility for the work of others and for a range of resources (L10) • Practice in ways that show awareness of own and others' roles and responsibilities (L9 and L10) • Work under guidance with specialist practitioners (L9) • Work, under guidance, in a peer relationship with specialist practitioners (L10) • Seeking guidance where appropriate, manage ethical and professional issues in accordance with current professional and/or ethical codes or practices (L9) • Manage complex ethical and professional issues in accordance with current professional and/or ethical codes or practices (L10) • Recognize the limits of these codes and seek guidance where appropriate (L10) • Work with others to bring about change, development and/or new thinking (L10) 	<p>Similarities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar functions, similar demands on personal initiative and accountability. • Similar demand on awareness for help and further training. • “Exercise managerial responsibility for the work of others” and “awareness of own and others’ roles and responsibilities” of SCQF has similar meanings of “accept responsibility and accountability of achieving personal and group outcomes” of HKQF. • “Work under guidance with specialist practitioners” of SCQP shares the meanings of “Work under the mentoring of senior qualified practitioners’ and “deal with ethical issues” of HKQF. • Both SCQF and HKQF require dealing with “ethical issues” and “seek guidance where appropriate”.
<p>Communication, IT & Numeracy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a range of routine skills and some advanced and specialized skills in support of established practices in a subject/discipline • Make formal and informal presentations on standard/mainstream topics in the subject/discipline to a range of audiences 	<p>Communication, ICT & Numeracy Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a wide range of routine skills and some advanced and specialized skills in support of established practices in a subject/discipline/sector, (L9 and L10) • Present, formally and informally, information on standard/mainstream topics (L9 and L10) 	<p>Similarities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The descriptors are underlined and indicated with SCQF level to highlight the similarities between the L9 and L10 descriptors. The differences are quite marginal. • Similar demand on communication skills to range of audiences.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a range of IT applications to support and enhance work Interpret, use and evaluate numerical and graphical data to achieve goals/targets. Participate in group discussions about complex subjects; create opportunities for others to contribute 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a range of ICT applications to support and enhance work(L9 and L10) Interpret, use and evaluate numerical and graphical data to achieve goals/targets(L9 and L10) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Similar demand on the need to interpret, use and evaluate information and data.
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Qualifications at HKQF Level 5	Qualifications at SCQF Level 9 and Level 10	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bachelors (Honours) and Bachelors (Ordinary) at QF Level 5 3 - 4 years 	<p>Level 9</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bachelors (Ordinary) 360 credits <p>Level 10</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bachelor (Honours) 480 credits or 4-years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Similar duration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional Diploma at 60 credits or above Professional Certificate (any credit size) Admission: QF L4 qualifications 	<p>Level 9</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Graduate Diploma/Certificate 120 credits <p>Level 10</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional Graduate Diploma/Certificate in Education 60 credits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HK: no other option

Summary

1. Typical qualification at HKQF L5 includes bachelor degrees (both honours and ordinary degrees). In addition, there are other qualifications at HKQF L5, including those advanced programmes offered by professional bodies and enterprises for the senior managerial staff. These programmes generally use the award titles of Professional Diploma (if the learning size is 60 credits or above) or Professional Certificate (no prescribed QF credit size).
2. Under SCQF, honours degrees are situated at L10 and ordinary degrees are situated at L9. The entry requirements of honours and ordinary degrees are the same, that is, completion of Advanced Highers and A Level examinations. This entry requirement is the same in HKQF.

3. There are two unique types of qualifications sitting at SCQF L9 and SCQF L10. They are the Graduate Diploma/Certificate at L9 and the Professional Graduate Diploma/Certificate at L10. These qualifications are for learners in possession of a bachelor degree and in further study not at the advanced level of the postgraduate diplomas or certificates.
4. Under HKQF, there is no distinction between the bachelor honours degree and bachelor ordinary degrees, though the duration of the programmes are different. The study duration of the honours undergraduate degrees are four years while the ordinary degrees normally require three years of study. The two qualifications differ in terms of length but fall within the domain descriptors of HKQF L5.
5. Contrarily, the bachelor degrees in SCQF are differentiated into two SCQF levels: honours degrees at SCQF L10 and ordinary degrees at SCQF L9.
6. The level descriptors of SCQF L10 and L9 are similar in many contexts but with some marginal differences in terms of knowledge level, use of intellectual skills, and exercise of autonomy and responsibility. The HKQF L5 descriptors resemble 40% of the SCQF L9 descriptors and about half of the SCQF L10 descriptors, as illustrated in the table above.
7. The SCQF L9 and L10 descriptors in the knowledge domain specify that learners at the two levels should have "consolidated knowledge" and good understanding of principal theories with specialised skills in research and forefront development in discipline. The outcomes descriptors at HKQF L5 in the knowledge and intellectual skills domain make no reference to a body of knowledge but 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.
8. The SCQF L9 and L10 describe the skills in dealing with complex problems in the absence of data and information. Under HKQF, 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 L5, are comparable to the advanced problem-solving skills at SCQF L9 and 10.
9. Critical understanding, awareness and originality are key skills introduced at SCQF L9 and L10. HKQF L5 descriptors require learners to be able to "generate ideas" and demonstrate "specialised technical, creative and/or conceptual skills". It can be concluded that the two frameworks are comparable in their expectations of advanced skills in respect of creativity and innovation.
10. With regard to responsibility levels, the concepts of unpredictability, substantial autonomy, display of leadership and taking responsibility are all mentioned at SCQF L10 and HKQF L5. It is in this area of management responsibility which are well matched between SCQF L10 and HKQF L5.
11. HKQF L5 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".

12. At HKQF L5, "specialised skills" are introduced into the Communication, IT and Numeracy domain. This matches well with the SCQF L9 and L10 almost identically.
13. There appears to be a match between HKQF L5 and SCQF L9 and SCQF L10 altogether, albeit with cross matching of L9 and L10 of SCQF.
14. **In conclusion, HKQF L5 and SCQF L9 and L10 are "Best Fit".**

HKQF Level 6	SCQF Level 11	Comments Purple: similarities in language & meaning Green: similarities Red: differences
<p>Knowledge & Intellectual Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critically review, consolidate, and extend a systematic, coherent body of knowledge (repetitive) Critically review, consolidate and extend knowledge, skills practices and thinking in a subject/discipline 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 Deal with complex issues and make informed judgements in the absence of complete or consistent data/information 	<p>Knowledge & Understanding, Cognitive Generic Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critically review, consolidate and extend knowledge, skills, practices and thinking in a subject/discipline/sector Knowledge that covers and integrates most, if not all, of the main areas of the subject/discipline/sector A critical understanding of the principal theories, concepts and principles A critical understanding of a range of specialised theories, concepts and principles Extensive, detailed and critical knowledge and understanding in one or more specialisms, much of which is at, or informed by, developments at the forefront A critical awareness of current issues in a subject/discipline/sector and one or more specialisms Apply critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis to forefront issues, or issues that are informed by forefront developments in the subject/discipline/sector Identify, conceptualise and define new and abstract problems and issues Develop original and creative responses to problems and issues Deal with complex issues and make informed judgements in situations in the absence of complete or consistent information 	<p>Similarities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critical ability in reviewing and extending knowledge in one or more disciplines in both frameworks. The breadth also requires specialisms across disciplines. Broad knowledge base with certain specialisation (as in specialised research and scholastic skills in HKQF and specialised theories and principles in SCQF). Ability in dealing with complex problems by providing creative responses.

<p>Processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • Design and apply appropriate research methodologies • Conduct research, and/or advanced technical or professional activity 	<p>Practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In demonstrating originality and/or creativity, including in practices • In using a significant range of the principal professional skills, techniques, practices and/or materials associated with the subject/discipline/sector • In using a range of specialised skills, techniques, practices and/or materials that are at the forefront of, or informed by forefront developments • In applying a range of standard and specialised research and/or equivalent instruments and techniques of enquiry • In planning and executing a significant project of research, investigation or development • To practice in a wide and often unpredictable variety of professional level contexts 	<p>Similarities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct of advanced scholarship and design of research methodologies in both frameworks. • Practices in professional contexts exercising appropriate judgement.
<p>Application, Autonomy & Accountability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<p>Autonomy, Accountability and Working with Others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To practise in a wide and often unpredictable variety of professional level contexts • Exercise substantial autonomy and initiative in professional and equivalent activities • Take responsibility for own work and/or significant responsibility for the work of others • Take significant responsibility for a range of resources • Work in a peer relationship with specialist practitioners • Demonstrate leadership and/or initiative and make an identifiable contribution to change and development and/or new thinking • Practise in ways which draw on critical reflection on own and others' roles and responsibilities • Manage complex ethical and professional issues and make informed judgements on issues not addressed by current professional and/or ethical codes or practices 	<p>Similarities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursuit of self-directed activity with accountability to own self and to others. • “Practice significant autonomy in actions” as in HKQF L6 is similar to “Exercise substantial autonomy” in SCQF L11. <p>Differences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SCQF L11 descriptors mention actions based on professional ethical code and contributing to further development.

<p>Communication, IT & Numeracy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<p>Communication, ICT & Numeracy skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate, using appropriate methods, to a range of audiences with different levels of knowledge/expertise • Communicate with peers, more senior colleagues and specialists • Use a wide range of ICT applications to support and enhance work at this level and adjust features to suit purpose • Undertake critical evaluations of a wide range of numerical and graphical data 	<p>Similarities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to communicate to a wide audience who are at different levels with knowledge and expertise, including senior colleagues and specialists. • Ability in the wide use of IT and numeracy skills to enhance work.
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Qualifications at HKQF Level 6	Qualifications at SCQF Level 11	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taught and Research Master <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 1-2 years ■ With or without Research activities ■ Admission: Bachelor Degree 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taught Master <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 1-year or 180 QF credits ■ Admission: Bachelor or Bachelor Honours Degree • Research Master <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 1 or more years ■ Admission: Bachelor or Bachelor Honours Degree or Taught Master • Integrated Master <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 600 QF credits (5 years) ■ Admission: Highers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar Nature • Unique to UK and Scotland
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postgraduate Diploma/Certificate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Normally 1-2 years ■ Can be an intermediate exit award to a Master Degree ■ Underpinned by a Bachelor Degree ■ Postgraduate Diploma in Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postgraduate Diploma <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 120/60 QF credits ■ Admission: Bachelor or Bachelor Honours Degree ■ Postgraduate Diploma in Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar qualifications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional Diploma/Certificate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 0.5-2 years ■ Advanced programmes in specific professions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional Development Awards • Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ) 5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualifications of professional and/or vocational nature

Summary

1. In the knowledge domain, knowledge outcomes at HKQF L6 and SCQF L11 are specialised and require the exercise of critical thinking skills across a field of work or study or more than one field of specialism.
2. For the skills domain, HKQF L6 refers to extending a body of knowledge and specifies the ability to utilise "highly specialised technical research or scholastic skills" and to design and apply "appropriate research methodologies". For SCQF L11, graduates are able to demonstrate in using a significant range of specialised skills and research instruments. Scholastic skills in research and investigation are required. In work contexts, practitioners in both frameworks need to demonstrate originality and creativity in a wide and often unpredictable variety of professional level contexts.

3. The HKQF L6 outcomes emphasize on the demonstration of leadership, making identifiable contribution to change and development, and accept accountability with necessary use of supervision. Similarly, the SCQF L11 outcomes require the assumption of significant responsibility to one and others as well as for the range of resources. People exercise substantial autonomy and initiative, and are required to make identifiable contribution and/or new thinking. The complexity and unpredictability of the contexts in which people are expected to perform are comparable.
4. HKQF L6 and SCQF L11 sit a variety of qualifications, ranging from the academic qualifications of master degrees and postgraduate diplomas and certificates, to professional and vocational development awards. The highest level of Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ) 5 is pitched at the SCQF L11.
5. In terms of the nature and breadth of the academic qualifications at HKQF L6 and SCQF L11, they are similar with comparable entry requirements and approximate duration of studies. For the masters' and postgraduate diplomas/postgraduate certificates, both frameworks normally require a full bachelor degree. Duration of studies are also similar, normally for not less than one year of full-time study, which is equivalent to about 120 QF credits.
6. In HKQF, there are several professional awards designed and offered by specialised organizations to meet the professional needs of the learners. Similarly, the Professional Development Awards (PDA) and the SVQ 5 in SCQF are qualifications normally for people who are already in a career or professional, who wish to extend or broaden their skills and expertise.
7. **In conclusion, HKQF L6 and SCQF L11 are “Good Fit”.**

HKQF Level 7	SCQF Level 12	Comments Purple: similarities in language & meaning Green: similarities in meaning Red: differences
<p>Knowledge & Intellectual Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • Make a significant and original contribution to a specialized field of inquiry, or to broader interdisciplinary relationships • Identify, conceptualize 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 	<p>Knowledge & Understanding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate and/or work with a critical overview of a subject/discipline/sector, including critical understanding of the principal theories, concepts and principles • Knowledge and understanding that is generated through personal research or equivalent work that makes a significant contribution to the development of the subject/discipline/sector • A critical, detailed and often leading knowledge and understanding at the forefront of one or more specialisms <p>Generic Cognitive Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify, conceptualize and offer original and creative insights into new, complex and abstract ideas, information and issues • Deal with complex and/or new issues and make informed judgements in the absence of complete or consistent data/information 	<p>Similarities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical understanding of a subject and across disciplines, and make significant and original contribution to the discipline(s). • Advanced research with creative and original insights. • Deal with complex problems and make informed judgements. <p>Differences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advanced knowledge at the forefront in SCQF and advanced intellectual skills in HKQF.
<p>Processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate command of research and methodological issues and engage in critical dialogue 	<p>Practice, Generic Cognitive Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply a constant and integrated approach to critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas, information and issues • In applying a range of research and/or equivalent instruments and techniques of enquiry • In using a significant range of the principal professional skills, techniques, practices and/or materials associated with the subject/discipline/sector • In using and enhancing a range of complex skills, techniques, practices and/or materials that are at the forefront of one or more specialisms 	<p>Similarities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding and application of advanced research methodology and techniques. • An integrated approach to problem solving, especially in new contexts.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop creative and original responses to problems and issues in the context of new circumstances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In designing and executing research, investigative or development projects to deal with new problems and issues In demonstrating originality and creativity in the development and application of new knowledge, understanding and practices To practise in the context of new problems and circumstances <p>Generic Cognitive Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop creative and original responses to problems and issues 	
<p>Application, Autonomy & Accountability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate leadership and originality in tackling and solving problems Deal with complex ethical and professional issues High degree of autonomy, with full responsibility for own work, and significant responsibility for others Accept accountability in related decision making Apply knowledge and skills in a broad range of complex and professional work activities, including new and unforeseen circumstances 	<p>Autonomy, Accountability and Working with Others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate leadership and originality in tackling and resolving problems and issues Manage complex ethical and professional issues and make informed judgements on new and emerging issues not addressed by current professional and/or ethical codes or practices Take full responsibility for own work and/or significant responsibility for the work of others Take significant responsibility for a range of resources Demonstrate substantial authority and exercise a high level of autonomy and initiative in professional and equivalent activities Practice in ways which are reflective, self-critical and based on research/evidence 	<p>Similarities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstration of leadership and originality in tackling and solving problems. Assumption of autonomy and full responsibility for one's own work as well as for others. Handling of complex and ethical issues in professional environment. <p>Differences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being reflective and self-critical in SCQF.
<p>Communication, IT & Numeracy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 	<p>Communication, ICT & Numeracy skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate at an appropriate level to a range of audiences, and adapt communication to the context and purpose Communicate at the standard of published academic work and/or critical dialogue and review with peers and experts in other specialisms/sectors 	<p>Similarities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Able to communicate effectively to a wide range of audiences with necessary adaptations to changing circumstances. Engagement of critical dialogue with peers and experts.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • Monitor, review and reflect on own work and skill development, and change and adapt in the light of new demands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a range of ICT applications to support and enhance work at this level and specify software requirements to enhance work • Critically evaluate numerical and graphical data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursuit of academic and professional work at high standard.
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Qualifications at HKQF Level 7	Qualifications at SCQF Level 12	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doctoral <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ At least 3 years ■ With research activities ■ Admission: a Master or a Bachelor Degree 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doctoral <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 3 or more years ■ Admission: a Master or a Bachelor Honours degree 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar nature and similar admission requirements

Summary

1. HKQF L7 and SCQF L12 are the most advanced levels of the two frameworks. The linguistic comparison of the two level descriptors reveals many similarities in terms of outcome statements. For the knowledge domain, both descriptors are very clear in the requirements in relation to the advancement of knowledge in a discipline or at the interface between disciplines. In the skills domain, both descriptors specify the demonstration of originality and creativity to deal with issues and problems that are complex, new and sometimes in changing circumstances normally without access to sufficient or complete information. In the competence domain of “Autonomy, Accountability and Working with Others”, HKQF L7 and SCQF L12 require the demonstration of leadership, full autonomy and full responsibility to own self and to others. Professionalism and integrity are required in dealing with problems and ethical issues.
2. In the process domain, HKQF L7 requires learners to “demonstrate command of research and methodological issues and engage in critical dialogue”. SCQF L12 introduces similar concepts in the Generic Cognitive Skills and Practice domains and emphasizes “a constant and integrated approach to critical analysis” and “applying a range of research and techniques of enquiry.”
3. Doctorate qualifications are linked to the levels in both frameworks. The doctorate qualifications under HKQF and SCQF follow the same universal standard and are of similar nature. This includes at least three or more years of duration of study, requirement of research activities with originality and creative ideas, and possession of a master degree or a bachelor degree (in some exceptional cases) as the basic entry requirement to the doctorate programmes.
4. Under the SCQF, the Professional Development Awards which can range from SCQF L6 to L12 also sit on the SCQF L12.

5. Based on the linguistic comparison and the qualification type matching, there is a significant match between HKQF L7 and SCQF L12 in that qualification holders are at the leading edge of the field, making significant contribution to the advancement of knowledge (for learning), or to the advancement of the professional practice (for work).
6. **In conclusion, HKQF L7 and SCQF L12 are “Good Fit”.**

Annex 2

SCQF Principles

SCQF principles	Details
1	Credit Rating Bodies (CRBs) and the SCQF Partnership have equal responsibility for ensuring the quality and integrity of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework.

Principles related to Learning Arrangements and Credit Rating

SCQF principles	Details
2	All qualifications/learning programmes credit rated on to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework must meet the 4 criteria for credit rating.
3	A qualification/learning programme must be capable of being allocated an SCQF level and SCQF credit points in order that it can be included on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework.
4	A qualification/learning programme must have at least 10 notional learning hours (1 SCQF credit point) before it can be credit rated and considered for inclusion on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. Only full SCQF credit points are awarded – fractions of SCQF credit points (e.g. 0.5) are not allowed.
5	Qualification/learning programme designers must determine the Notional Learning Hours required by a typical learner to complete all learning activities within the qualification/programme.
6	The number of SCQF credit points allocated to a unit or module of learning is determined independently of the perceived importance or centrality of that unit/module within a broader programme of learning.
7	The number of SCQF credit points allocated to a unit/module of learning is independent of the standard at which the outcomes are achieved (e.g. grading).
8	Credit Rating Bodies must ensure that within the process of credit rating, and in processes for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), they take due cognisance of the SCQF Level Descriptors and any other relevant reference points.
9	Credit Rating Bodies must establish rigorous and appropriate systems for credit rating, including systems of internal and external quality assurance and arrangements for the retention of evidence confirming decisions on level and credit.
10	Where assessment leads to the award of SCQF credit points then the certificates issued to learners must include the following information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the title of the qualification/learning programme; • the total number of SCQF credit points awarded on completion; • the SCQF level of the qualification/learning programme achieved; • the SCQF logo;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the name of the CRB.
11	Credit Rating Bodies are responsible for uploading the details of all credit rated qualifications/learning programmes to the SCQF database.

Additional Principles when working with a Third Party submission

SCQF principles	Details
12	Credit Rating Bodies must assure themselves, as far as is practically possible, of the good standing and credibility of the Third Party organisation prior to any submission for credit rating.
13	Credit Rating Bodies must establish rigorous and appropriate systems for credit rating Third Party submissions.
14	Credit Rating Bodies must ensure that Third Party organisations submit information, and documented evidence of, their assessment processes, including arrangements relating to the internal and external quality assurance of assessment decisions.
15	The Credit Rating Body must ensure that the Third Party provides details of auditing/quality assurance of their systems including appropriate externality.
16	Credit Rating Bodies must ensure that the Third Party organisation submits regular (e.g. annual) reports of progress in the delivery of any credit rated qualifications/learning programmes and is aware that they must inform the CRB if any significant changes to these are made which may affect the SCQF level or credit points.
17	Credit Rating Bodies must agree an appropriate review date for the credit rated qualification(s)/learning programme(s) with the Third Party organisation.
18	Credit Rating Bodies are responsible for uploading the details of all Third Party qualifications/learning programmes which they have credit rated to the SCQF Database.
19	Credit Rating Bodies are responsible for issuing the SCQF logo to the Third Party organisation and ensuring that they are aware of the requirements for certification as outlined in Principle 10.

Principles relating to Credit Transfer and the Recognition of Prior Learning

SCQF principles	Details
20	The design and development of qualifications and learning programmes for the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework should facilitate and promote credit recognition for prior informal and non-formal learning and credit transfer.
21	Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is given for learning, not for experience alone.
22	SCQF Credit Points awarded as a result of RPL for informal or non-formal learning are of the same value as credit gained through formal learning.
23	RPL for the award of SCQF Credit Points must involve a formal assessment

	or acceptance of evidence of learning which is quality assured.
24	The assessment procedures for RPL including Credit Transfer should be consistent with the normal assessment and general quality assurance of the organisation.
25	The process of monitoring and reviewing the operation of RPL procedures, including those for Credit Transfer, should be clearly defined and integrated within the existing quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms of the organisation.

Annex 3

SCQF CREDIT-RATING BODIES (as at end 2016)

Argyll College	Abertay University	SQA Accreditation
Ayrshire College	Edinburgh Napier University	SQA Awarding Body
Borders College	Glasgow Caledonian University	SQA Credit Rating Service
City of Glasgow College	Herriot-Watt University	City and Guilds
Dumfries and Galloway	Queen Margaret University	Institute of Chartered Accountants in Scotland
Dundee and Angus	Robert Gordon University	Scottish Police College - Tulliallan
Edinburgh College	The Open University in Scotland	The Chartered Institute of Bankers in Scotland
Fife College	University of Aberdeen	Institute of Counselling
Forth Valley College	University of Dundee	Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Glasgow Clyde	University of Edinburgh	
Glasgow Kelvin College	University of Glasgow	
Inverness College (UHI)	University of St Andrews	
Lewis Castle College (UHI)	University of Stirling	
Moray College (UHI)	University of Strathclyde	
Newbattle Abbey College	University of the Highlands and Islands	
New College Lanarkshire	University of the West of Scotland	
North East Scotland College	Glasgow School of Art	
North Highland College (UHI)	Royal Conservatoire of Scotland	
Orkney College (UHI)	Scotland's Rural College	
Perth College (UHI)		
Sabhal Mor College (UHI)		
Shetland College (UHI)		
South Lanarkshire College		
West College Scotland		
West Highland College (UHI)		
West Lothian College		

ANNEX 4

QUALIFICATIONS ON THE SCQF

QUALIFICATIONS OF SQA AWARDING BODY

SQA awarding body is responsible for the development, accreditation, assessment and certification of formal school and college qualifications other than degrees. It is the national examining body for school qualifications.

National Courses

National Courses are the main qualification offered in schools in Scotland. National Courses are also offered in colleges. They are mainly based on general educational or pre-vocational subjects (e.g. National 5 Art and Design, Higher Mathematics, Advanced Higher History).

To be awarded a course at any level, the candidate must provide evidence of achievement of the units that make up the course. Units can be assessed individually or in an integrated way. National 2, 3 and 4 courses only require the completion of the component units and will be ungraded. The award of a course at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher will also require success in an additional external assessment, which will be graded, A to D. The external assessment will sample and integrate skills, knowledge and understanding from the component units. It might take the form of an examination, performance, project, practical activity, or combination of two of these. Highers and Advanced Highers are the main entry qualifications for higher education.

Wider Achievement Awards

SQA have also developed a range of very flexible Wider Achievement Awards which are shorter than National Courses and recognise success across different levels of difficulty, meaning they are suitable for learners of all abilities. Some are endorsed by other professional bodies or government agencies. They include Personal Achievement Awards (SCQF Levels 1 and 2), Employability Awards (SCQF Levels 3 and 4), Leadership Awards (SCQF Levels 5 and 6), Volunteering Skills Awards (SCQF Levels 3, 4 and 5), Modern Languages for Life and Work Awards (SCQF Levels 3 and 4), Internet Safety (SCQF Level 4).

National Certificates (NCs)

NCs are available at SCQF levels 2-6. They are aimed at 16-18 year olds or adults following full-time courses and are mainly offered in vocational colleges. They are designed to prepare people for employment, career development or progression to a higher level qualification. NCs may relate to a subject (e.g. Celtic Studies) or an occupational area (e.g. Electrical Engineering).

National Progression Awards (NPAs)

NPAs are available at SCQF levels 2-6. They are designed to assess a defined set of skills and knowledge in specialist vocational areas and they link to National Occupational Standards, which are the basis of SVQs, and are used in more traditional areas such as Construction and Childcare, and in newer areas such as Digital Literacy and Social Software. They are mainly used by colleges for short study programmes, such as return-to-work courses or part-time learning for those already in work (e.g. the NPA Enterprise and Employability).

Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Diplomas (HNDs)

HNCs are available at SCQF level 7 and HNDs at SCQF level 8. Many HNCs form the first year of a HND. They focus on different occupational areas and prepare people with the knowledge and skills to work in these areas. They cover subject areas from more traditional areas (accounting, business administration, childcare, computing, engineering, hospitality) to newer areas (creative industries, paralegal, sports and leisure). They are aligned to National Occupational Standards, or other professional body standards. Many HNCs and HNDs give entry to degree courses with credit transfer or exemptions of one or two years.

Professional Development Awards (PDAs)

PDAs are available at SCQF levels 6-11. In principle there could also be PDAs at SCQF level 12 although there are none currently. They are aligned to National Occupational Standards or other professional body standards and are designed to assess and certificate progression in a defined set of specialist occupational skills and are intended for individuals already in a career or vocation who wish to extend or broaden their knowledge and skills.

QUALIFICATIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN SCOTLAND

The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions is an outcomes-based structure based on a consistent qualification nomenclature, qualification descriptors, and credits. Undergraduate qualifications offered in Scottish Universities are mainly modular, with each module being allocated to a level in the SCQF and credit-rated.

The Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE) and the Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE)

CertHEs and DipHEs may be awarded for achievement over a breadth of subject areas or for studies focused on one subject, in some cases with a strong vocational focus.

Ordinary degrees

Some Scottish bachelor's (non-honours) degrees will be highly focused while others will develop greater breadth of outcomes. Many degrees that have a specific vocational focus carry recognition by the appropriate professional or statutory body. It is awarded as either a Bachelor of Science (BSc), or a Bachelor of Arts (BA). The Scottish bachelor's (non-honours) degree is a recognised 'normal' entry requirement to a number of professions across the UK.

Honours degrees

The Scottish honours degree (bachelor's degree with honours) will demonstrate a balance of breadth and depth that will be clear from particular definitive records. It is awarded mainly as either a Bachelor of Science (BSc Hons), or a Bachelor of Arts (BA Hons). Many honours degrees will have a specific vocational focus, and in some cases will carry recognition by the appropriate professional or statutory body.

Master's degrees

In the majority of cases, the master's degree reflects a specialised knowledge and understanding of particular areas, applications or levels of expertise in particular subject or professional areas. In some professional areas, master's degrees are linked to structures of continuing professional development.

Doctoral degrees

Doctoral degrees reflect specialised, advanced knowledge, understanding and practice at the frontiers of the subject or professional area. The PhD is normally awarded following successful completion of a thesis which requires the equivalent of a minimum of three years' full-time research and study to complete. Professional doctorates also require the equivalent of three years' full-time research and study to complete and will frequently involve work-based, as well as institution-based, research and study.

QUALIFICATIONS APPROVED BY SQA ACCREDITATION

SQA Accreditation has a remit from Scottish Government to accredit and regulate any type of qualification from approved awarding bodies.

Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs)

Scottish Vocational Qualifications are available at SCQF levels 4-11. The size and level of SVQs varies according to the number of units which have to be achieved in each qualification. They are primarily designed as outcomes of non-formal learning although in some cases elements of the SVQ can be achieved in simulated environments. SVQs are the basis of Scottish Modern Apprenticeships. There are SVQs in most areas of the economy/labour market. SVQs are approved for use by SQA Accreditation and then awarding bodies seek accreditation to award the units and/or the full qualifications. All SVQs must be SCQF credit rated and levelled by SQA Accreditation.

Other accredited qualifications

SQA Accreditation approves qualifications which assess knowledge, understanding and occupational competence in the workplace. This will include regulated qualifications and other competence based qualifications — some of which are included in Scottish Modern Apprenticeship frameworks. It also approves qualifications which assess expertise in areas which are not necessarily work related. These include exam-based qualifications such as music and dance performance. It is not compulsory for these qualifications to be credit rated for the SCQF. However most of these accredited qualifications have been credit rated.

OTHER QUALIFICATIONS AND PROGRAMMES CREDIT RATED BY SCQF CREDIT-RATING BODIES

More than 800 additional qualifications have been added to the SCQF database by CRBs alongside the formal qualifications and programmes outlined in the previous sections. These qualifications may be programmes of colleges, universities and other higher education institutions, or they may be programmes owned by other CRBs. They may also be programmes owned by other bodies who have submitted them to a CRB for credit rating. The owners of these programmes include government agencies, professional organisations, individual employers and training companies, trade unions, youth organisations, community organisations, adult education organisations and charities. The qualifications range from SCQF level 2 to SCQF level 11 and from 1 SCQF credit to over 1000 SCQF credits.

Examples of SCQF Partner organisations which own non-mainstream qualifications and programmes include:

SCQF Level	Qualification Owner	Qualification Name	Credit Points
3	Ayrshire College	Access to Painting & Decorating	8

8	City of Glasgow College	Certificate in Prosecution Practice	16
		Certificate and Diploma in Physical Theatre Practice	
		e-skills award	
		Union Health and Safety representative award	

Examples of SCQFP approved credit-rating bodies own qualifications include:

SCQF Level	Qualification Owner	Qualification Name	Credit Points
11	Institute of Chartered Accountants in Scotland	Chartered Accountancy qualification	480
7	Scottish Police College	Certificate crime scene examination	77
10	Scottish Police College	Police Driving instructors	40
10	Chartered Institute of Bankers in Scotland	Chartered Banker Diploma	125
8	Institute of Counselling	Certificate in Youth Counselling	20
5	City & Guilds	Diploma in Bricklaying at SCQF level 5	49

Examples of credit rated qualifications and programmes of other organisations include:

- *Aerial cutting of trees with a chainsaw* (on behalf of a sector skills organisation)
- *Traditional boat-building and repair* (on behalf of a cultural charity)
- *Community action and leadership* (on behalf of a social/educational charity)
- *Fire safety officers award* (on behalf of a specialist training organisation)
- *Introduction to youth work* (on behalf of local authority)
- *Introduction to workplace skills* (on behalf of a Government Agency)
- *Supporting clients with additional needs* (on behalf of a government agency)
- *Diploma in management consultancy* (on behalf of a professional body)
- *Professional Diploma in marketing* (on behalf of a professional body)
- *European Computer Driving License awards* (on behalf of a UK professional body)
- *Technical specialist awards* (on behalf of an IT vendor)
- *Breathing apparatus instructor* (on behalf of the a training organisation)
- *Training awards* (on behalf of a youth organisation)

SELECTED REFERENCES

SCQF Partnership publications

- *Communicating the SCQF: A Guide for Scottish Colleges. (2013)*
- *Employer levelling tool. (2012)*
- *Facilitating the Recognition of Prior learning: Toolkit. (2010)*

- *How to: Use the SCQF for Workforce Development. (2013)*
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- *Quality Assurance Model for SCQF Partnership Approved Credit Rating Bodies. (2014)*
- *SCQF Credit Rating: Criteria Explained. (2010)*
- *SCQF Handbook. (2015)*
- *The SCQF Database Explained – A Guide for Credit Rating Bodies. (2012)*
- *Strategic Plan 2015-18. (Undated)*
- *Qualifications Can Cross Boundaries (Updated 2015)*

Related reports and guidance

- QAA Scotland. 2014. *Recognition of Prior Learning: National Framework for Scottish Higher Education*. Glasgow: QAA Scotland.
- QAA Scotland. 2014. *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland*. Glasgow: QAA Scotland.
- Scotland's Colleges. 2014. *Guidelines to Promote and Support the Credit Rating Process in Colleges in Scotland*. Stirling: Scotland's Colleges.
- Scottish Government. 2008. *Worth doing: Using the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework in Community Learning and Development*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

Websites

- College Development Network: www.collegedevelopmentnetwork.ac.uk
- Education Scotland: www.educationscotland.gov.uk
- The Higher Education Academy: www.heacademy.ac.uk
- QAA Scotland: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/scotland
- Scotland's Colleges: www.scotlandscollleges.ac.uk
- Scottish Funding Council: www.sfc.ac.uk
- SCQF: www.scqf.org.uk/features/Framework.htm
- SQA: www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/70972.html
- SQA Accreditation: <http://accreditation.sqa.org.uk/accreditation/home>
- Universities Scotland: www.universities-scotland.ac.uk

Annex 5

Policy on Use of Credit in HKQF

Chapter 1: Introduction

- 1.1 The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region has launched the Qualifications Framework (QF) since 2008 to provide a platform to support lifelong learning with a view to enhancing the capability and competitiveness of the workforce. Qualifications recognised under QF are characterised by three key features: **level** which reflects the depth and complexity of learning leading to the qualification; **award title** which reflects the hierarchical level of the qualification and area of study; and **credit** which indicates the volume or size of learning leading to the qualification.
- 1.2 The Operational Guidelines on Use of Credit (**Guidelines**) advise users at **Chapter 2** the definition and general principles governing QF credit. This Chapter includes a step-by-step guide on the procedures of assigning credit to learning programmes and introduces commonly used ratios on contact hours and self-study hours for reference. The Guidelines provide at **Chapter 3** useful advice on how credit assigned will be assessed by quality assurance (QA) bodies.
- 1.3 The Guidelines represent good practices commonly adopted by providers in the education and training sector for credit assignment. Adoption of the Guidelines by all providers is encouraged, and deviations, if any, are expected to be supported by sound justifications to the relevant quality assurance bodies.
- 1.4 The Guidelines are issued in support of the implementation of QF credit for qualifications recognised under QF.

Chapter 2: Credit Assignment

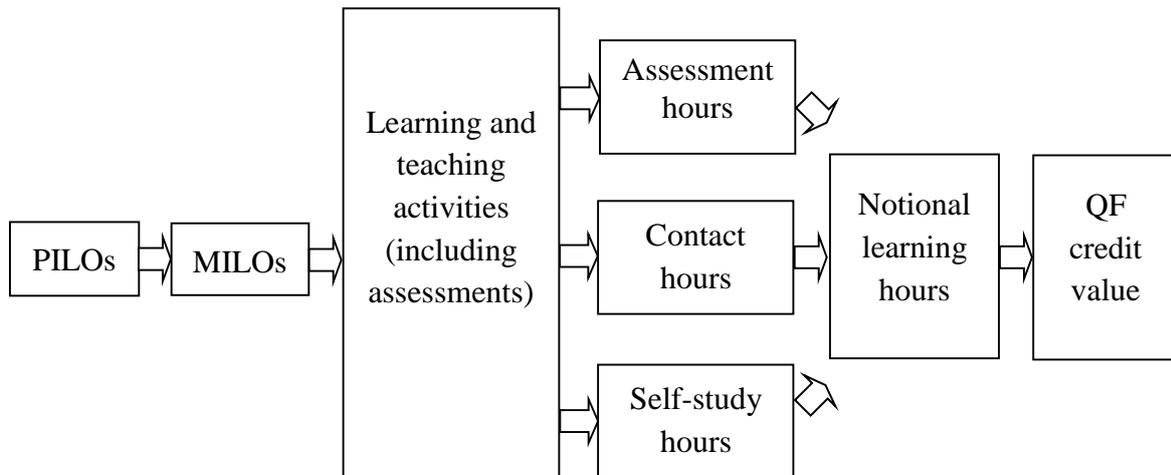
Definition and Principles of Credit under QF

- 2.1 QF credit is a measurement of the size or volume of learning in a learning programme (also applicable to a course, module, etc). It enables learners to know the extent of effort to be spent to complete a learning programme and acquire the relevant qualification.
- 2.2 **QF credit** is defined in terms of notional learning time which takes into account the total time likely to be spent by an average learner in all modes of learning to achieve the learning outcomes, including the class contact hours, self-study hours and assessment hours. Under the Hong Kong QF, **one credit consists of 10 notional learning hours**.
- 2.3 **Annexure 1** provides a glossary of the terms used in the context of QF credit.

General Overview of Credit Assignment Process

- 2.4 Assigning credit to a learning programme involves a number of steps and components. A general overview of the credit assignment process and key components is illustrated

in the following diagram:



Notes:

PILOs : Intended learning outcomes of a programme

MILOs : Intended learning outcomes of a module of a programme

Notional learning hours = *contact hours* + *self-study hours* + *assessment hours*

QF credit value = *total notional learning hours* divided by 10

Step-by-Step Guide for Credit Assignment

2.5 Providers may follow the step-by-step guide as shown below to determine and assign a credit value to a module (and a programme).

Step 1–Specify the intended learning outcomes of the module

- Identify the intended learning outcomes of the module of a programme (MILOs), which specify what a learner will achieve (in terms of knowledge, competencies, attributes, etc.) after completion of the module successfully. MILOs should align with, and contribute towards, the intended learning outcomes of the programme (PILOs) which specify what a learner will achieve after completion of the programme successfully.

Step 2–Assign a QF level to the module

- Assign a QF level to the module with reference to the MILOs and the outcome standards specified in the Generic Level Descriptors (GLD) of QF.
- Details of GLD are available in www.hkqf.gov.hk. The intended learning outcome of the module should match the outcome standards specified for that level under one (or more) of the four domains of GLD (i.e. Knowledge and Intellectual Skills; Processes; Application, Autonomy and Accountability; and Communication, IT and Numeracy).

Step 3–Specify the assessment methods for the module

- Specify the method and types of assessment required of the learners to demonstrate successful completion of the module, and estimate the time required to complete the assessments. The weightings of various forms of assessment (such as tests, mid-term projects and final examinations) and the time required for completing each and every assessment activity should be included.

Step 4–Estimate the notional learning time of an average learner to achieve the MILOs

- Estimate the total notional learning time required of an average learner to achieve the MILOs.
- An average learner refers to a typical learner among a class of learners with varying abilities, aptitudes and experiences.
- Notional learning time refers to the time a learner is expected to spend to achieve the MILOs and includes contact hours, self-study hours and assessment hours. Providers may use the table at **Annexure 2** for listing the notional learning hours (NLHs) for all relevant activities. Providers should avoid double counting if the assessment hours are already included in contact hours or self-study hours of the programme.
- Providers may also make reference to a range of ratios between contact hours and self-study hours for various modes of teaching and learning activities listed at **Annexure 3** for estimating the notional learning time.

Step 5–Assign QF credit value to the module

- Calculate QF credit value by dividing the total NLHs by 10 (see definition of QF credit at paragraph 2.2). To ensure consistency and accuracy, the provider should compare QF level and credit value of the module with that of similar modules (or programmes) in the Qualifications Register (QR).

Step 6–Calculate QF credit value of all modules of a programme

- QF credit value of a programme will be the sum total of QF credit value of all modules of the programme (including credit-bearing and non-credit-bearing modules).
- Below is an example of a programme comprising 10 modules and one non-credit-bearing module. The table shows how QF credit values of the programme are calculated and its QF level determined.

	Module Title	QF Level	Contact Hours	Self-Study Hours	Assessment Hours	Notional Learning Hours	QF Credit Value
1	Module 1	3	30	60	(already included in contact hours & self-study hours)	90	9
2	Module 2	3	30	60		90	9
3	Module 3	3	40	80		120	12
4	Module 4	4	30	60		90	9
5	Module 5	4	30	60		90	9
6	Module 6	4	30	60		90	9
7	Module 7	4	30	60		90	9
8	Module 8	4	30	60		90	9

9	Module 9	4	30	60		90	9
10	Module 10	4	27	60	3	90	9
11	Module 11 (non-credit-bearing)						
Total			307	620	3	930	93

Notes:

- (a) *The ratio of contact hours to self-study hours is 1:2 for Modules 1 to 9.*
- (b) *Module 10 comprises 27 contact hours, 60 self-study hours and 3 assessment hours (for sitting the examination). The ratio of contact hours to self-study hours is slightly higher than 1:2. The learner is expected to spend on average 6 self-study hours in preparing for the examination.*
- (c) *The programme has a total of 930 notional learning hours and has been assigned 93 QF credits (one credit to 10 notional learning hours). Since 63 QF credits (67.7%) are at level 4 (exit level), the programme will lead to a qualification at QF level 4.*

Step 7–Complete documentation for the programme

- Complete the programme documentation by specifying all other related information such as qualification titles, requirements for obtaining the qualification, normal duration to complete the programme (number of weeks, months or years), etc.

Step 8–Review/vetting by peers or external advisors

Step 9–Endorse and approve programme proposal

Step 10–Review and evaluation process

- Steps 8 to 10 are normally part of the internal procedures of programme development of an institution to ensure quality of the programme.

Useful Advice on Credit Assignment

2.6 Estimation of credit value is not an exact science and credit assignment requires the professional judgment of the relevant parties, including teachers, course developers, subject experts, external reviewers, etc., for the particular programme.

2.7 The following are useful advice to providers in determining QF credit values of their programmes in different circumstances:

- (a) Non-credit bearing modules

A module may form part of a learning programme but does not contribute towards MILOs or PILOs. The module may also require no assessment, although it may be a requirement for graduation. Modules of this type should not carry QF credit value.

- (b) Extra-curricular activities

Similarly, extra-curricular activities which are not assessed or do not contribute to MILOs or PILOs should not carry QF credit value.

- (c) Internship, placement and fieldwork

This refers to the supervised learning normally undertaken at the workplace. Such learning may be given different names such as internship, placement, fieldwork, industry attachment, etc. It does not normally refer to casual visits, service learning, community services or volunteering work. Some internship and workplace learning may be related to requirements for professional registration or professional membership.

Workplace learning which contributes to the MILOs or PILOs with the outcomes assessed should be assigned with credit. For this purpose, the actual number of hours (for learning) should be determined by course designers based on their experience and be used in calculating the credit value for workplace learning.

As the duration of internship, attachment, etc. may be relatively long, providers should consider showing the credit value for internship and workplace learning separately from the credit value of the core programme, to enable a better understanding of the size of the programme and a fair comparison among programmes with and without workplace learning.

(d) Online, distance and blended learning

In modules based on online or distance or blended modes of learning, contact hours are the actual hours of face-to-face contact and self-study hours are estimation of the time spent on studying paper-based module pack or materials posted online. In general, contact hours for such module will be less than that of a full-time face-to-face programme and the ratio of contact to self-study hours may be outside the range given at **Annexure 3**. Providers should review the accuracy of the estimated NLHs after they have gained more experience in the process.

(e) Variation in ratio between contact hours and self-study hours

Annexure 3 sets out the range of ratios normally used by providers to determine the self-study hours in relation to the contact hours of a learning activity, having regard to the QF level, nature of discipline, learning and teaching modes, etc. of the programme concerned. In general, in respect of programmes at a lower QF level and with more face-to-face delivery and teacher supervision, a lower ratio should be considered. In respect of programmes at a higher QF level, a higher ratio of contact hours and self-study hours may be used. Ratio adopted by a provider outside the range should be supported by reasons and justifications, such as empirical research or survey results.

(f) QF credit value in whole number

QF credit value should be shown in whole number. Providers should round off (i.e. round up or down) the credit value if it contains a decimal point. Providers should consider enriching the learning content correspondingly when rounding up the credit value of the programme.

For a programme with more than one module, the QF credit value should be

rounded off after summing up the total QF credit values of all the modules of the programme.

(g) SCS-based courses

SCS-based courses are courses designed in accordance with Specification of Competency Standards (SCS) of the industries developed under the QF. SCS comprises Units of Competency (UoCs), each of which is given a credit value for reference. The credit values of the UoCs are not binding on providers and providers may suggest a different credit value for the course as they consider appropriate. Similarly, providers may make reference to the Specification of Generic (Foundation) Competencies (SGC) developed under QF for course design and assignment of credit.

Courses labeled as SCS-based should satisfy the requirement relating to the use of UoCs in the course design. Providers may refer to the Qualifications Guidelines on SCS-based Courses issued by the Education Bureau for details (www.hkqf.gov.hk).

(h) Common Descriptors for Associate Degree and Higher Diploma Programmes

Providers should also take into account the requirement specified in the Common Descriptors for sub-degree programmes in determining the credit values of such programmes, i.e. 60% of learning content for Associate Degree should be generic (in terms of QF credit value) and 60% of the content for Higher Diploma should be specialised or vocationally oriented. Details of the Common Descriptors are available at www.ipass.gov.hk.

2.8 Providers in different sectors may adopt different approaches in assigning credit to their programmes. A “Fixed Ratio” approach is commonly used in the post-secondary education sector. The approach begins with the determination of the contact hours required to deliver the content of a module (and the learning programme as a whole). The contact hours are then used to determine the non-contact hours (including self-study hours and assessment hours) using a pre-determined ratio. The credit of the module/programme will be the sum total of the contact hours and the non-contact hours for that module/programme.

2.9 Some providers may adopt a “Learning Outcomes” approach in credit assignment in line with the philosophy of the outcome-based teaching and learning approach. This approach focuses on the learning outcomes of the module (or a smaller unit or component of the programme). The effort to be put in to achieve the outcomes of the module will be identified and translated into a series of teaching/training, learning and assessment activities. The NLHs of each module is worked out individually, without relying on fixed pre-determined ratios.

2.10 Providers may, according to their individual circumstances and experience, adopt one of these approaches or a mixture of both approaches to suit their needs.

Chapter 3: Credit Assessment

General Principles on Credit Assessment

- 3.1 Assessment of the QF credit value assigned to a learning programme is necessary to ensure the credit value assigned is accurate and credible. Assessment will be carried out by the institution (or provider) internally as an integral part of its internal quality assurance process of the programme, and/or externally by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) as part of the external accreditation process of the programme.
- 3.2 Programmes of self-accrediting institutions (such as the continuing education arms of universities) and the credit assigned to these programmes may be subject to external review by the Joint Quality Review Committee (JQRC) before they are registered in the QR.
- 3.3 In general, the following principles are adopted by QA bodies in assessing the credit assigned to a module or programme:

- (a) Validity

Providers should be able to demonstrate that the methodology used to estimate the notional learning time of a programme is based on sound and valid rationales, with reference to the profile of an average learner targeted for the learning programme.

- (b) Consistency

QF credit value should be assigned by a provider to its learning programmes consistently, e.g. whether the same or similar conversion ratios of contact hours to self-study hours are applied to programmes of a similar nature offered by the same provider.

To ensure consistency, QF credit value assigned will also be assessed with reference to external benchmarks, e.g. comparison with comparable qualifications offered by different institutions or with international norms (such as 120 QF credits for a year of full-time learning), etc.

Providers are advised to use the proformas provided by the relevant QA bodies to record the credit assignment process. Any variation or deviation from established ratios and norms should be supported by justifications and documented for record and review purposes.

- (c) Transparency

Information gathered by providers, such as advice and feedback from academic peers and industry experts, comparison of NLHs of similar programmes, and other useful information which may impact on the decision of the QF credit value of a learning programme, should be properly recorded and made available to QA bodies for assessment.

Credit Assessment by QA Bodies

At institutional level

- 3.4 Institutions/providers are expected to set up an appropriate system for assignment of QF credits to learning programmes, covering the process of programme design, delivery, monitoring and review.
- 3.5 Typically, the following issues at the institutional level will be considered by QA bodies when assessing the QF credit:
- (a) whether the institution/provider has established policies and procedures governing the assignment and assessment of the QF credit of the learning programme it offers;
 - (b) whether the policies and procedures are applied systematically and reviewed periodically;
 - (c) whether discretion has been built into the policies and procedures to accommodate the diversified nature and discipline of learning programmes at different QF levels;
 - (d) whether there is a process of equipping academic/training staff with the skills and knowledge in assigning QF credits to learning programmes; and
 - (e) whether there is a process of engaging stakeholders in assigning, assessing and reviewing the appropriateness of the QF credit value and QF level of a learning programme.

At programme level

- 3.6 The following issues will be considered by QA bodies when assessing the accuracy of QF credit value assigned to a module or a learning programme. These issues are interlocking and they underpin the design, delivery and review of a learning programme:
- (a) Programme objectives and PILOs
The intended learning outcomes of the programme (i.e. PILOs) should reflect the stated programme objectives and should be tested through assessment. Evidence should be produced to show that the intended learning outcomes of the programme correspond to that at the same QF level stipulated in GLD and other relevant documents/descriptors.
 - (b) Programme content and structure
The content and structure of the learning programme must be coherent, integrated and effective in enabling learners to achieve the stated intended learning outcomes at the required standards. The notional learning time allocated to the teaching, learning and assessment activities of a module (and to the learning programme as a whole) must be sufficient to enable learners to achieve the intended learning outcomes.
 - (c) Teaching/training and learning

The teaching/training and learning activities designed for the learning programmes must be effective in delivering programme content and the intended learning outcomes. Appropriate teaching methods should be employed to effectively engage learners in the learning process.

(d) Assessments and tests

Assessments and tests should be designed to enable learners to demonstrate the achievement of the intended learning outcomes at the required standards. The assessment methods and techniques used must be valid, reliable, fair and sufficient to reflect the learning outcomes at the claimed QF levels.

(e) Programme development, monitoring and review

A system must be in place to ensure that the learning programmes remain current and valid and that the intended learning outcomes and the teaching/training, learning, and assessment activities are effective.

3.7 **Annexure 4** is a flowchart to illustrate how credit value is assessed at the programme level. The flowchart also outlines the interrelationship of various stages of credit assessment and the assessment questions to be asked by QA bodies.

Useful Advice on Credit Assessment

3.8 Credit assessment will focus on the intended learning outcomes to be attained by the learners, and how the efforts spent in attaining the intended learning outcomes would be reflected in the credit value assigned to the programme.

3.9 All modules of a learning programme must have a QF credit value and a QF level of their own. QF credit value without a QF level will be invalid. The overall QF level of the programme may be different from the QF level of individual modules. The majority of credits in a learning programme must be at the claimed QF level (exit level) of the programme.

3.10 The knowledge or skills required of a learner prior to the learning for that module should not be taken into account when determining the QF credit value for the module.

3.11 QF credit assigned to a programme should be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure continued validity. The review could be integrated with existing process of quality assurance of the programme. Feedbacks from graduates, teachers and external advisors/examiners would be valuable for assessing the accuracy of the credit value of the programme.

Glossary

Terminology	Explanation
1. QF credit	<p>QF credit is a measurement of the size or volume of learning in a learning programme recognised under the QF. One QF credit consists of 10 notional learning hours.</p> <p>A learner of the programme will be awarded the QF credit only when the learning outcomes specified for the programme are attained and verified.</p> <p>QF credit is either awarded fully or not awarded, and is awarded independent of grading or performance.</p>
2. Notional learning time	<p>Notional learning time refers to the amount of time an average learner is expected to take to complete all learning pertaining to the module/programme and achieve the learning outcomes of the module/programme.</p> <p>It includes time spent on all learning modes and activities, such as lectures, laboratories, workshops, guided learning, self-study, projects, assignments and assessments.</p> <p>Notional learning time is expressed in notional learning hours, and includes contact hours, self-study hours and assessment hours. Notional learning time may also include time spent in the workplace.</p>
3. Average learner	<p>An average learner refers to a typical learner among a class of learners targeted for a particular programme with varying abilities, aptitudes, experiences and motivation.</p>
4. Learning outcomes	<p>Learning outcomes refer to what a learner should know, understand, and/or be able to do upon successful completion of the learning programme.</p>
5. Contact hours	<p>The amount of time (in terms of hours) spent by a learner in direct contact with the teaching/training staff of a programme. It includes attendance in class, tutorials, conducting experiment in laboratory under supervision, supervised session in placement and workshop, etc.</p>
6. Self-study hours	<p>The amount of time (in terms of hours) spent by a learner without direct contact with teaching/ training staff. This includes time spent on self-studying, preparation for tests and examinations, research, writing reports for projects and work placement, studying on-line materials, etc.</p>
7. Assessment hours	<p>The amount of time (in terms of hours) spent by learners in examinations, tests and other related assessment activities.</p> <p>Assessment activities may include contact hours and self-study hours, which should not be double-counted in credit assignment.</p>

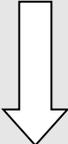
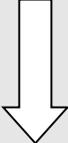
**Table for Estimating Notional Learning Hours (NLHs)
and QF Credit of a Module**

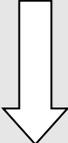
		Learning outcomes	Contact hours (a)	Self-study hours (b)	Total hours (a+b)
Learning and teaching activity					
1	Lecture				
2	Tutorial				
3	Practical work (laboratory, workshop, etc)				
4	Online, distance and blended learning				
5	Internship / placement / fieldwork				
6	Others				
Assessment					
7	Exercise				
8	Project				
9	Test / examination / assessment activities				
10	Others				
Total NLHs					
<i>QF credit = Total NLHs/10</i>					

Range of Ratios Between Contact Hours and Self-study Hours

Learning and teaching activity	Ratio of contact hours to self-study hours
Lecture	Range from 1:0.5 to 1:2
Tutorial	Range from 1:0.5 to 1:2
Practical work (laboratory, workshop, etc)	Range from 1:0.5 to 1:2
Project	Range from 1:0.5 to 1:2
Online, distance and blended learning	Realistic estimation of learning time
Internship / placement/ fieldwork	Actual hours (<i>for learning</i>)
Others	Range from 1:0.5 to 1:2

Flowchart on Credit Assessment at Programme Level by QA bodies

	Issue	Key questions to be addressed
Programme level	<p>Programme Objectives and Programme Intended Learning Outcomes</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> What is the purpose of the learning programme? <input type="checkbox"/> As a result of learning, what are the expected outcomes? <input type="checkbox"/> Are the intended learning outcomes of the learning programme (PILOs) commensurate with the claimed QF level that is consistent with the Generic Level Descriptors?
Programme level	<p>Programme Content and Structure</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Is the sequencing of the module(s) within the learning programme logical and coherent? <input type="checkbox"/> Do the intended learning outcomes of the modules (MILOs) contribute sufficiently and reasonably to PILOs?
Module level	<p>Student/Learner Assessment</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Are the proposed assessment methods and their frequencies fit for measuring the achievement of MILOs? <input type="checkbox"/> Is there a mechanism to benchmark the assessment design against those of similar modules with comparable intended learning outcomes?
Module level	<p>Learning and Teaching/Training</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Are the learning and teaching/training activities appropriate in relation to MILOs?

	Issue	Key questions to be addressed
Module level	QF credit value of the individual modules 	<input type="checkbox"/> Has the number of notional learning hours of the individual module(s) taken into account all learning and assessment activities an average learner is expected to complete and achieve MILOs? <input type="checkbox"/> Can MILOs be achieved in the time allocated?
Programme level	QF credit value of the learning programme 	<input type="checkbox"/> Has the number of notional learning hours of the programme taken into account the total time for an average learner to complete all learning and assessment activities and achieve PILOs? <input type="checkbox"/> Are the majority of QF credits at the exit QF level of the learning programme? <input type="checkbox"/> Can PILOs be achieved in the time allocated?
Both programme and module levels	Programme Development, Monitoring and Review	<input type="checkbox"/> Are there any supporting evidence of benchmarking against similar learning programmes with comparable intended learning outcomes and common descriptors? <input type="checkbox"/> Is there a mechanism in place to collect feedback from stakeholders of the learning programme to review whether the time allocated to the learning and assessment activities is sufficient?

Annex 6

Policy and Principles for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) under Qualifications Framework in Hong Kong

Part I – Introduction

Qualifications Framework in Hong Kong

1.1 In May 2008, the Hong Kong Government launched the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (QF). This framework aims to help Hong Kong people set clear goals and directions for continuous learning with a view to enhancing the quality, professionalism and diversification of the local workforce. The QF is a seven-level hierarchy of quality-assured qualifications covering academic, vocational and professional as well as continuing education sectors.

1.2 With effect from 1 January 2016, all programmes at QF Levels 1 - 7 on the QR have adopted the award titles under the Award Titles Scheme (ATS) which clearly reflect the QF levels of the qualifications. Also commencing from 1 January 2016, all programmes at QF Levels 1 - 4 have indicated the QF credit values on the QR, which reflect learning effort required of the learners to attain the qualifications.

1.3 With the development of the core components of the QF including QF level, QF credit and award titles, it is now opportune for institutions to develop general policy and system supporting CAT to further strengthen learners' mobility and progression in their learning pathways.

Adoption of CAT Policy, Principles and Operational Guidelines

1.4 The CAT policy, principles and operational guidelines contained in this booklet are developed with reference to international norms and existing practices adopted in education and training institutions in Hong Kong. We encourage all institutions to adopt or make reference to the booklet when establishing their policies and systems for recognition and transfer of credit earned.

1.5 Besides, the booklet contains examples of good practices in CAT implementation as Appendices. They include examples of academic regulations and procedures governing the grant of credit transfer, information leaflet with transparent CAT information, special considerations in mapping learning outcomes between modules, and collaborative agreements, etc.

1.6 Adoption of the CAT policy, principles and operational guidelines is on a voluntary basis. Institutions are encouraged to formulate a clear and unambiguous policy in support of CAT in line with their institutional goals, vision and mission. Institutions also have the flexibility to develop their own systems for CAT implementation to suit their own needs. In doing so, they can make use of the suggestions in this booklet in whole or in part, with adaptations as appropriate.

1.7 Institutions may include any organisations that provide formal, non-formal or informal learning, such as universities, education institutions, continuing education units, training providers, enterprises, companies, professional bodies and labour unions, etc. A glossary of terms related to CAT is at [Appendix 1](#).

Part II - Policy and Principles for CAT

2.1 CAT facilitates the recognition of units of learning and allows learners to move from one programme to another without having to duplicate learning. In theory this allows learners to gain a qualification having undertaken study (and hence having been awarded credits) at different places and in different learning contexts at different time. This learning may have been formal, non-formal or informal. Provided that the learning outcomes can be properly validated and assessed they should be eligible for recognition.

2.2 Institutions with delegation of authorities should ensure that the CAT policy developed in individual units and departments is in line with that formulated centrally. Appendices 2 and 3 show some examples of academic regulations on advanced standing as well as credit transfer and module exemption.

2.3 Benefits of CAT to learners:

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

2.4 Benefits of CAT to institutions:

- Enables institutions to attract new pools of learners and previously dormant learners to rejoin the education system.
- Encourages a more holistic approach to qualification planning and development and better communication between individual institutions and across sectors.
- Encourages inter-institutional cooperation in programme design and delivery.

Policy and Principles for CAT

2.5 The policy and principles underpinning CAT will include the following:

Principle 1

CAT policy should be formulated with a view to promoting learner mobility across sectors, levels and types of qualifications by minimising duplication of learning

Principle 2

Systems and procedures developed in institutions to support CAT should be transparent, fair, flexible and easy to use

Principle 3

Decisions regarding credit transfer should be timely, academically defensible, equitable and based on learning outcomes

Principle 4

Credit awarded in recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning is of equal standing to credit awarded through other forms of assessment

Principle 5

In line with the concept of institutional autonomy, CAT shall not affect the authority of a receiving institution to make decisions about the admission of learners. There is a distinction between the separate processes of admission and credit transfer

Principle 6

Credit recognition and credit transfer should not undermine the academic rigour or integrity of the qualification into which the learner is accepted

Principle 7

Institutional commitment and cooperation are essential for the optimal functionality of CAT

Principle 8

CAT systems and procedures should be subject to rigorous quality assurance measures

Formulation of CAT Policy and System

2.6 CAT policy refers to the organisational intent to guide decisions and achieve the outcomes for recognition and transfer of credit. The eight principles underpinning an effective CAT policy are elaborated as follows.

2.7

Principle 1:

CAT policy should be formulated with a view to promoting learner mobility across sectors, levels and types of qualifications by minimising duplication of learning.

2.7.1 The primary aim of a CAT policy is to support effective learning pathways for the benefit of learners.

2.7.2 A major purpose of the policy is to minimise unnecessary duplication of learning and maximise the use of credit that learners have gained from learning already undertaken. This will ensure more efficient use of personal and institutional resources. Learners should not be requested to repeat learning if the prior learning could be duly recognised as equivalent and counted towards further learning.

2.8

Principle 2:

Systems and procedures developed in institutions to support CAT should be transparent, fair, flexible and easy to use.

2.8.1 The transparency of the operation systems and procedures is of fundamental importance to promote stakeholders' confidence in CAT.

2.8.2 The provision of clear information to learners on well-defined and agreed articulation and progression routes will enable them to plan their educational pathways with confidence. By specifying articulation pathways, institutions will help to manage learners' expectations with regard to progression opportunities.

2.8.3 Institutional websites should provide clear, reliable and easy to use information on CAT policy and procedures. Any restriction and limits on transfer of credit, such as the 'shelf-life' of credits (if any), ceiling of transfer, etc. should be specified, along with the implications for progression, grading or final award classification. Information on formal articulation and credit transfer agreements between institutions should be included as well as examples of precedent cases in relation to articulation schemes (e.g. Senior Year Places Scheme). Information on the criteria for selection, the number of credits to be awarded, and additional programme requirements, if there are any, should be provided.

2.8.4 Given the multiplicity of institutions, programmes and learners, it is unlikely that individual components in one programme will be identical in all respect to components in another programme. In order to simplify procedures and to ensure maximum benefit for learners, institutions should adopt a flexible approach to the recognition of credits.

2.8.5 Institutions should consider adopting a "fair recognition"² approach based on a review of learning outcomes, rather than seeking perfect equivalence between two qualifications or programmes.

2.8.6 CAT policy, system and procedures should be easy to understand and use, both on the part of the learner and the institution, especially those staff tasked with implementation. The policy should not be onerous and any institution implementing its own CAT system and procedures should ensure that the operation of the CAT system will not cause undue difficulties for learners or excessive workload for staff.

2.9

Principle 3:

Decisions regarding credit transfer should be timely, academically defensible, equitable and based on learning outcomes.

2.9.1 Decisions on credit transfer should be taken and communicated to applicants within a specified timeframe, to avoid delaying a qualified learner's access to a programme of study.

2.9.2 Decisions made concerning credit transfer should be evidence-based and equitable. They should be academically defensible and consistently applied. Where the institution concerned considers it appropriate to do so, the institution should be prepared to review its decisions and advise the learners accordingly.

2.9.3 Credits are awarded upon attainment of learning outcomes of the programme or component. Credits at the appropriate level can be accumulated and counted towards a qualification. In determining the eligibility of credits for recognition and transfer towards a new qualification, receiving institutions should satisfy themselves that the associated learning outcomes attained are comparable to the required outcomes of the new programme.

2.10

Principle 4:

Credit awarded in recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning is of equal standing to credit awarded through other forms of assessment.

2.10.1 All accredited and verified learning (including formal, non-formal and informal learning) should be eligible for consideration for credit transfer. Receiving institutions should recognise learning achieved by a learner at any time and in any context on an equal basis, provided that the learning outcomes have been appropriately assessed and matched with the requirements of the qualification applied to.

2.10.2 Qualifications attained through the RPL mechanisms are outcome-based and the assessment agencies authorised to award RPL qualifications have themselves undergone rigorous accreditation. All RPL qualifications are recognised under the QF and should therefore be of parity value for consideration of credit transfer.

2.10.3 Receiving institutions should have confidence that the credits awarded in a QF-recognised qualification are quality assured and rigorously assessed by the appropriate quality assurance mechanisms.

2.11

Principle 5:

In line with the concept of institutional autonomy, CAT shall not affect the authority of a receiving institution to make decisions about the admission of learners. There is a distinction between the separate processes of admission and credit transfer.

2.11.1 CAT policy and systems should facilitate the recognition of credit for entry into a qualification (i.e. admission to a programme) as well as recognition of credit towards the award of a qualification (i.e. granting course exemption from part of the qualification).

2.11.2 While an open and transparent CAT system will facilitate learners' progression, it does not guarantee admission of any learner to a programme. Under the principle of institutional autonomy, it is a decision for the receiving institution.

2.12

Principle 6:

Credit recognition and credit transfer should not undermine the academic rigour or integrity of the qualification into which the learner is accepted.

2.12.1 Institutions must ensure that recognising the credit earned by a learner towards the completion of a programme does not adversely affect the integrity and quality of their programmes.

2.12.2 The fact that a learner has achieved credits or has completed a qualification at a lower level does not necessarily mean that he/she will be successful in study at a higher level. Receiving institutions have a duty to consider the ability of any individual learner to complete a qualification successfully.

2.12.3 In implementing any system or procedures for CAT, institutions will need to determine the maximum amount of credit which can be transferred (or the minimum amount of study which must be undertaken at the awarding institution to be eligible for an award). It is observed that institutions commonly accept the transfer of credit from other institutions up to a ceiling of 50% of the total credits required for completion of a programme.

2.13

Principle 7:

Institutional commitment and cooperation are essential for the optimal functionality of CAT.

2.13.1 Institutional CAT policy should be adopted by the relevant decision making body of the institution and its implementation fully supported and appropriately resourced.

2.13.2 Articulation agreements between institutions should protect and preserve the academic standards of each institution as well as the integrity of their qualifications.

2.13.3 Formal articulation agreements between institutions with regard to credit transfer arrangements between qualifications can simplify the operation and improve the efficacy of CAT. Agreements should be documented and promulgated, and be subject to regular review and update as the programmes evolve and develop over time.

2.13.4 International experience demonstrates that the most successful articulation agreements are those developed at the programme design and development stage. Institutional collaboration at the design stage should ensure better dovetailing of curriculum content and learning outcomes and facilitate maximum credit recognition and transfer.

2.14

Principle 8:

CAT systems and procedures should be subject to rigorous quality assurance measures.

2.14.1 Credit transfer arrangements and articulation agreements should be subject to normal QA arrangements at the time of programme validation and registration on the QR. Issues surrounding credit accumulation and transfer should form part of regular internal programme

review processes and collaborating partners should hold regular meetings to ensure continued alignment between articulating programmes.

2.14.2 Institutions may consider building up a database of CAT activities, including statistical information on the number and origin of learners to whom credit transfer has been granted, as well as on their performance in comparison to other learners with normal entry. Feedback from stakeholders should be sought with a view to sharing good practice and addressing issues that may have arisen.

2.14.3 Implementation of CAT should be kept under regular review by the institutions and the relevant QA bodies to ensure that it is functioning effectively. Interim and full evaluation should be scheduled after accumulating experience in the operation of CAT.

Appendix 1 Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition/explanation
Advanced Standing	Advanced standing is the award of credits by an institution in recognition of prior learning achievements at an appropriate level.
Block Credit	Credits received by a learner for a completed qualification in a related subject area, in the form of a “block” of unspecified credits, towards the programme requirements for graduation. Learners to whom block credit has been granted will usually be required to complete a defined “top-up” list of courses to complete graduation requirements.
Course Exemption	<p>An exemption refers to the waiving of the requirement to complete a particular course on the basis of a learner having completed an equivalent course. This means that the learner does not need to take that particular course.</p> <p>Some institutions may require learners to whom course exemption is granted to take other course(s) to meet the credit requirement of the study programme.</p>
Credit	A measurement of the size or volume of learning of a course or programme of study. It also covers credit earned from verifiable non-formal and informal learning.
Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)	<p>A process to facilitate recognition and validation of units of learning and allow learners to move from one programme to another without having to duplicate learning.</p> <p>For the avoidance of doubt, CAT includes course exemption.</p>
Credit Transfer	A process whereby qualifications, part qualifications and learning experience are given appropriate recognition (credit) to enable learners to progress in their studies without unnecessarily having to repeat material or levels of study, to transfer from one course to another, and to gain further educational experience and qualifications without undue loss of time.
Formal Learning	Planned learning that normally takes place in a structured setting and leads to a full or partial qualification.

Term	Definition/explanation
General Credit	Credits which can be used to reduce the number of credits (NOT courses) required for graduation on a one-to-one basis. They may be used to reduce the total number of credits required for graduation but cannot be used for the exemption of a specific course.
Informal Learning	Opportunistic learning that is not structured in terms of content or assessment method but gained through work or social experiences.
Institution	An institution in this booklet refers to any organisation that provides formal, non-formal or informal learning, including universities, education institutions, continuing education units, training providers, enterprises and companies, etc.
Learner	An individual engaged in a learning process (formal, non-formal or informal) regardless of the context of learning.
Learning Outcomes	Learning outcomes describe what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do upon successful completion of a process of learning.
Module	A module is a block of learning defined by a syllabus, including aims, intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning strategies, and assessment plans. It may be called course, subject or unit by some institutions.
Non-formal Learning	Learning that takes place in a formal setting (e.g. workplace training) but does not lead to a formally accredited qualification.
Notional Learning Time	The total time likely to be spent by a learner in all modes of learning in respect of a specified programme. Notional learning time is not limited to time-tabled teaching/lecturing hours in classrooms but includes attendance in classes, experiments in laboratories, supervised or unsupervised sessions, practical learning in workshops, independent study in the library, reading at home, and any other forms of study undertaken by the learner.

Term	Definition/explanation
Programme	A programme is a set of inter-related studies leading to a qualification and consists of a number of modules (courses/subjects/units). Some institutions may refer to a programme as a course (of study) depending on the conventional practice of the institution.
QF Credit	One QF credit is awarded for the 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.
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)	Generally speaking, recognition of prior learning is a process (as well as a mechanism) for recognising skills and experience in previous formal, non- formal and informal contexts. In the context of Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) refers to the recognition of knowledge, skills and competencies already acquired by the practitioners through their prior experience in the workplace for the award of a qualification at QF levels 1 to 4. The assessment of RPL is carried out by an appointed Assessment Agency for an industry which has developed the Specifications of Competency Standards and implemented the RPL mechanism under HKQF.
Specific Credit	Credits which can be used, on a one-to-one basis, for the exemption of a particular course required for graduation. A learner receiving specific credit will be deemed to have obtained the credits for the course in fulfillment of graduation requirements.