

# **Good Practices on Credit Accumulation and Transfer under the Qualifications Framework**

## **Consultation Document**

### **Purpose**

This consultation document aims to seek education and training providers' views on the proposed good practices on credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) under the Qualifications Framework (QF).

### **Background**

2. The policy and principles for CAT under the QF were promulgated by the Education Bureau (EDB) in 2014 to promote learners' mobility and progression by facilitating recognition and transfer of credits and minimising duplication of learning. In 2016, the EDB published the Policy, Principles and Operational Guidelines for CAT under the QF to facilitate the review of the existing CAT system by education and training providers and the development of a CAT system that would suit their own needs. Adoption of the Policy, Principles and Operational Guidelines is voluntary. As at April 2022, there were 2871, 265 and 30 qualifications registered on the Qualifications Register (QR) indicating CAT arrangements at the institutional level, programme level, and for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) qualifications respectively. Since 2018, professional qualifications have been included in the QF as a new type of qualifications attainable by way of assessments, and CAT/articulation arrangements have been extended to QF-recognised professional qualifications in recent years.

3. The primary focus of the existing Policy, Principles and Operational Guidelines for CAT under the QF is on facilitating the transfer of credits into qualifications obtained by completion of learning programmes. The Guidelines reflect the state of CAT development in the community at the time of publication. In the light of expanded

application of CAT beyond the institutional and programme levels in recent years, there is a need to update and enhance the Policy, Principles and Operational Guidelines for CAT under the QF.

### **Good Practices on CAT under the QF**

4. The Policy, Principles and Operational Guidelines for CAT under the QF provide an overarching framework that facilitates the articulation of qualifications across different sectors at all QF levels and the establishment of progression pathways. To reflect a wider scope of application of CAT since the promulgation of the policy, the EDB has engaged the Shue Yan University as the Consultant to undertake the Project on Development of Good Practices on CAT under the QF (the Project).

5. The Project has two objectives:

- (a) To develop a set of good practices on CAT in support of its application across institutions, industries and various levels of education and training; and
- (b) To update the Policy, Principles and Operational Guidelines for CAT under the QF in view of the latest developments of the QF and vocational and professional education and training (VPET) in Hong Kong and overseas.

6. The Consultant conducted a survey with all the education and training institutions with qualifications listed on the QR in June 2021 to solicit their input on the current practices on CAT and suggestions for advancement of CAT system under the QF. Subsequently, the Consultant carried out follow-up interviews with ten relevant parties, including higher education institutions, corporate academies under the Corporate Tech Academy Network<sup>1</sup>, a professional body, a commercial company, a non-governmental organisation and a government department, which provided useful examples illustrating good practices in specific areas of CAT across

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<sup>1</sup> Corporate Tech Academy Network was established in October 2018 with six founding member corporations, namely CLP Power Academy, Hong Kong Institute of Construction, Hong Kong International Aviation Academy, MTR Academy, Towngas Engineering Academy and HKPC Academy.

different sectors and QF levels. Based on the Project's findings, the Consultant has proposed a set of good practices on CAT under the QF in the following aspects:

- Recognition of Prior Learning and Experience
- Learning Pathways
- Cross-sector Collaboration
- Transparency of CAT Policy and Processes
- Mapping of Learning Outcomes
- Embedding Industry Competencies into the Curriculum of Mainstream Education
- Quality Assurance

Details of each of the good practices are at **Annex**.

7. The proposed good practices on CAT are developed with reference to the contemporary practices adopted in the academic and VPET sectors. They constitute a supplementary section of the Policy, Principles and Operational Guidelines for CAT under the QF. Education and training providers are encouraged to adopt or make reference to the publication when establishing or reviewing CAT arrangements.

### **Invitation of Submissions**

8. The EDB would like to seek views from education and training providers on the proposed good practices on CAT put forward in this consultation document, and/or any other issues pertinent to the development of CAT under the QF. Views and comments should reach the Qualifications Framework Secretariat **on or before 24 June 2022**.

9. Please send us your views by mail, email or facsimile **on or before 24 June 2022** –

Mailing address:           Qualifications Framework Secretariat  
                                  Units 901-903, 9/F, Dah Sing Financial Centre  
                                  248 Queen’s Road East  
                                  Wanchai, Hong Kong

Email address:            [hkqf@edb.gov.hk](mailto:hkqf@edb.gov.hk)

Fax number:               (852) 3106 2035

Education Bureau  
May 2022

## **Good Practices on Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) under the Qualifications Framework (QF)**

### **1. Recognition of Prior Learning and Experience**

Prior learning and experience should be duly recognised for consideration for programme articulation and/or credit transfer, provided that the learning outcomes are appropriately assessed and matched with the requirements of the target qualifications.

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism under the QF provides an alternative route for practitioners to be awarded QF-recognised qualifications without having to undertake all or part of a learning programme. RPL qualifications may be accepted for advanced standing towards academic programmes up to bachelor's degree level. The following case studies illustrate some good practices of recognition of prior experiential learning as well as RPL implementation in different sectors and contexts to facilitate access to or exemption from the completion of learning programmes.

- a) Recognition of prior learning and experience has been increasingly practiced by industry academies. For instance, a **corporate academy** in the public transport and engineering sector aims to enhance the competencies of the industry's workforce through the provision of systematic training and development programmes. To this end, it offers a suite of accredited programmes at QF Levels 3 and 4 which are listed on the Qualifications Register (QR) and are open to its employees and members of the public. Learners' relevant prior learning and experience will be taken into consideration as appropriate during the enrolment.

Specifically, the academy takes learners' prior experience into account to ensure access to its programmes for the widest possible range of learners. In the case of learners who are working in the industry and have basic knowledge and hands-on skills gained in the workplace and from previous training, the academy will examine their background on a case-by-case basis and grant them **subject exemption/credit transfer** to its programmes where appropriate. Holders of RPL qualifications are also eligible to apply for such an arrangement. It gives due recognition of the relevant experience of learners and reduces the need for repeated learning.

In addition to subject exemption/credit transfer, prior experience and qualifications of learners are also taken into account for the purpose of determining whether the entry requirements of the programmes are met. Applicants who do not fulfill the academic admission criteria but have relevant work experience or qualifications, including RPL qualifications, may also be admitted, subject to passing an interview.

- b) The public sector also supports the recognition of relevant prior learning and experience and works closely with the relevant industries in this regard. For instance, a **government department** encourages the members of the existing workforce of a sector to apply for RPL assessment of defined clusters of work competencies, which may enable them to attain the QF Level 2 qualification to meet the regulatory training requirement, in lieu of the need to complete a learning programme.

- c) It is indeed not uncommon that RPL is implemented by higher education institutions (HEIs) in admitting students to their undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes. For instance, under the published CAT policy of a **university**, it is stipulated that *formally assessed clusters of Units of Competency (UoC) at QF Level 4 will be accepted for the award of, up to the maximum foundation level, free credit component of its part-time bachelor's degrees offered by distance learning.*

The university has, in the implementation of the policy, put in place a mechanism to assign the subject team of the programme concerned to consider the relevance of UoC clusters on a case-by-case basis and to determine the number of credits to be granted.

Since the clusters of UoC accepted by the university under the policy are QF-recognised, the university may obtain the details about such qualifications from the QR, instead of having to conduct its own assessment of the competencies concerned. For the learners, the policy also enables them to gain due recognition of the knowledge and skills they have gained from previous work experience in their pursuance of life-long education and skills enhancement, which effectively reduces the need for unnecessary duplication of learning, thereby encouraging them to enroll in such programmes.

Prior experiential learning is also considered by a **university** on a case-by-case basis in the admission to its programmes up to QF Level 6. Mature applicants who do not meet the stipulated entrance requirements may be admitted on a case-by-case basis provided that they can demonstrate sufficient motivation, knowledge and potential to indicate a high probability of being able to complete the programme successfully. For admission to taught postgraduate programmes, the professional qualifications and work experience of the applicants in the related professional area will be considered in addition to their academic achievements.

## 2. Learning Pathways

A learning pathway is a specially designed suite of qualifications offered by different providers at sequential QF Levels which provides a clear roadmap for learners to achieve both academic and career goals. It can also provide flexibility and expand access to qualifications that lead to registration or licensing in a given sector. Well-articulated learning pathways established through collaboration between corporate academies and relevant institutions can facilitate and promote learner mobility particularly in the realm of VPET.

- a) The mission of a **corporate academy** in the field of power engineering is to provide an alternative route for school leavers and working adults to acquire skills and knowledge for career and professional development in the industry; develop and ensure an adequate supply of competent employees for the industry; and establish partnerships among industry, academic and professional institutions to jointly promote excellence in the profession. The academy does not offer accredited programmes itself, but cooperates with selected **local institutions** with expertise in

the field to make available accredited programmes from QF Levels 2 to 6, and to provide articulation between different levels of programmes..

By signing Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with selected HEIs, a **corporate academy** in public transport and engineering provides opportunities for learners who have completed its own QF-recognised advanced diploma programmes at QF Level 4 to pursue further academic studies at QF Level 5 by completing designated accredited top-up programmes leading to degrees in relevant disciplines awarded by overseas institutions.

The learning pathways provided by the corporate academies connect career development and professional/vocational training with higher education, and result in the attainment of both academic and professional qualifications by learners. By engaging in the design, development and delivery of learning pathways, the corporate academies are able to secure appropriate recognition for the outcomes of continuing professional development, provide access to academic programmes of study, reduce duplication of learning and ensure a steady supply of well-qualified workers in the related industry.

- b) The QF infrastructure and its various deliverables are considered objective components and benchmarks for building learning pathways. A **government department** has established a Vocational Qualifications Pathway (VQP) that consists of Specification of Competency Standards (SCS)-based qualifications at QF Levels 2, 3 and 4 to enable the workforce in the sector to upgrade their skills and knowledge. To enable experienced employees who do not possess the required academic qualifications to be admitted to a programme and achieve career progression to the next level, the department has approved the development of Specification of Generic (Foundation) Competencies -based bridging programmes as an alternative way to gain access to the learning programmes and qualifications for the purposes of licensing and registration.

### 3. Cross-sector Collaboration

The case studies in this section illustrate different models of cross-sector collaboration that have been carefully developed and successfully implemented in Hong Kong to promote learner mobility. Formal agreements between industries or professional bodies and HEIs, specifying policy and procedures for credit recognition and articulation, underpin the arrangements. International research into best practice on CAT suggests that articulation agreements should best be made at the early programme development stage to ensure dovetailing of curriculum content and learning outcomes and to facilitate seamless articulation.

- a) A **commercial company** offers a range of in-house skills enhancement initiatives and accredited programmes at QF Levels 1 to 3 which articulate to specific relevant professional programmes in the field of security and property management at QF Levels 3 to 5 offered by a range of partners in the continuing education and VPET sectors.

CAT supports the company's staff to progress from the QF-recognised in-house training to higher level programmes offered by other institutions. Employees who have completed in-house training at QF Levels 1 to 3 are eligible for CAT when articulating to institutions with which the company has signed an MOU for collaboration. These CAT opportunities under the QF are listed on the QR.

Learners feel supported to continue their studies in the academic programmes, which will enhance their job performance and sense of belonging and improve their career prospects.

- b) A **corporate academy** contributes to VPET provision in Hong Kong by providing a pathway for industry employees based on partnerships among the **industry, academic and vocational institutions** and **professional bodies** with the aim of promoting excellence in the engineering profession.

The academy contributes to the curriculum design and course content of accredited programmes offered by the partner HEIs, which ensures that the programmes featured in the pathway are practical and relevant to the industry's training needs. It also provides expert guest lecturers, industry mentors and project supervisors for the academic programmes, as well as workshop facilities and site visits for practical learning.

The partnership approach can satisfy the training and development needs of the industry, which has access to a wide range of professional talents. The learning programme providers are able to attract good students and offer relevant, work-focussed programmes that are enriched by access to industry resources. The continued commitment of both sides is crucial to the pathway's success.

- c) Professional qualifications by assessment have been included in the QF since 2018. In this regard, a **professional body** in the finance sector has a long history of collaboration with HEIs to promote and facilitate the access of suitably qualified applicants with relevant knowledge and skills to the profession.

It has signed MOUs with a number of **HEIs**, based on thorough scrutiny of the learning outcomes and course syllabi of the relevant programmes, which permit learners to attain both an academic degree and an intermediate professional qualification awarded by the professional body upon graduation from the HEI, provided that they have studied specified courses as part of their academic programme. They may also be eligible for module exemptions towards the highest qualification awarded by the professional body. Under the terms of the MOU, professional qualifications at the appropriate level awarded by the professional body will also be recognised by the HEIs for course exemptions in their programmes.

The cross-sector collaboration provides opportunities for accelerated professional advancement for graduates of the HEIs, and access with advanced standing to professionally oriented academic programmes for industry professionals. It adds value to the academic programmes which provide articulation to the professional qualification and enhances the efficiency of the graduate recruitment process for the profession.

- d) A **non-governmental organisation (NGO)** has effectively extended cross-sector collaboration to include the secondary school sector. A **tripartite school-industry-university partnership** has been initiated by the NGO to provide an articulation pathway for non-academically oriented learners, starting from their selection of Applied Learning (ApL) subjects for Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) and offering pathways to both employment and related higher diploma (HD) and degree programmes at QF Levels 4 and 5.

The pathway programme is designed to help ease the school-to-work transition for such learners by equipping them with both academic and career readiness. All of the partners have a specific role in the process:

- **Schools** identify appropriate learners and provide dedicated teachers and school resources;
- **Industry partners** provide company visits, mentoring, job shadowing and assist with skills mapping to make sure that industry-recognised skills are embedded into the learning pathway;
- The **continuing education arm of the university** teaches/co-teaches the ApL subjects in schools, provides the secondary-to-tertiary transition pathway, delivers the HD programme and offers opportunities for HD graduates to articulate to degree studies.

The partnership echoes the Government's commitment to promote VPET as a preferred choice, with a view to enabling young people to acquire both work skills and soft skills for their future career progression. Its success owes much to the strengthened engagement of industry partners, enhanced workplace experience, and the pilot VPET learning pathways starting with ApL courses and providing articulation opportunities to HD and degree programmes. It has also gained wide recognition from the community and been cited by Our Hong Kong Foundation as a good example of strengthening school-industry partnership and providing multiple pathways to youths.

#### **4. Transparency of CAT Policy and Processes**

Advances in information technology and insights gained from implementing CAT over the past five years have contributed to significant improvements in the user experience of CAT. By observing the principles of clarity, reliability and convenience to users, and facilitating effective communication among institutions and CAT applicants, the good practices described in this section have significantly improved the CAT experience of learners.

- a) A key feature of successful systems in HEIs has been the establishment of a centralised database of precedent cases. A **university** has set up a centralised, automated system for processing credit transfer applications with a central database of course mapping records, as well as a credit transfer website that provides clear and easily accessible information about the forms of credit transfer that are available, details of precedent cases and how to apply on-line. Such a facility expedites the CAT procedures and improves learners' confidence in CAT.

Feedback from applicants and students is positive about the centralised computer system, which they have found informative and convenient to use.

- b) The greatest transparency in CAT is achieved when there is a full understanding between the sending and receiving institutions about requirements for CAT which can be made available to potential applicants in a timely fashion. A degree programme offered by a **university** demonstrates the following good practices to ensure good communication about CAT arrangements for all users.

The academic department responsible for offering the degree programme holds regular meetings with its counterparts in other universities to establish common CAT arrangements, and also meets with representatives of sub-degree providers whose graduates are eligible to articulate to the degree programme, with the aim of giving due consideration to the previous learning credits of potential applicants through inter-sector collaboration and cross-institution partnership. It also keeps programme staff informed about the list of mapped subjects for CAT from relevant articulated sub-degree programmes and provides documentation about course mapping for reference by subject lecturers.

The practice demonstrates the importance of ongoing collaboration and communication among partner institutions at various levels to ensure effective, timely and transparent CAT arrangements for learners

- c) Based on its long experience of implementing CAT, a **university** has streamlined the process for applicants by developing pathway entry programmes at QF Levels 5 and 6. Learners who have completed associate degree (AD), HD or bachelor's degree programmes at other institutions are eligible to make applications in a related area at either bachelor's or master's level, and those who are admitted to a pathway entry programme will complete a prescribed reduced curriculum without having to apply for advanced standing.

As no separate CAT application is required, the pathway entry programmes result in time and cost savings for both the university and the learners. Learners have found this arrangement very simple and convenient because they know before making their application which courses are needed to fulfill the graduation requirements of the pathway programme. Applicants who do not meet the entry requirements for the pathway programme may still register for the full credit version of the programme and apply for advanced standing through the normal university process.

## 5. Mapping of Learning Outcomes

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 programmes. The outcome-based approach featured in the examples below highlights the role of the QF in facilitating the mapping of learning outcomes for programme development and

articulation, and demonstrates how its application to CAT can effectively reduce the need for duplication of learning.

- a) The SCS developed by individual Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITAC) under the Education Bureau set out the skills and knowledge required for practitioners to perform various job functions as well as the outcome standards for measuring their competency in such positions. The UoCs in SCS are a common benchmark and reference of the competency standards of industry practitioners and facilitate the mapping of programme learning outcomes.

A **government department** which wishes to enhance the quality of service provided by the industry practitioners has defined clear specifications of the competencies required for a series of posts and matched its competency requirements with the learning outcomes specified in the UoC under the relevant SCS in developing highly relevant job-based training programmes.

- b) The determination of learning outcomes is a fundamental part of curriculum development in both the academic and VPET sectors. In the case of professional programmes, the required knowledge, skills and competencies at each level are defined by the professional body with reference to the Generic Level Descriptors (GLD) of the QF. The GLD facilitates the mapping of learning outcomes and signing of agreements between institutions.

One example is the MOU signed between two **post-secondary institutions** that permits the articulation of graduates of the HD in Engineering from one institution to the Bachelor of Engineering (Honours) in Civil Engineering offered by the other as senior year students. Before signing the MOU, a comparison of syllabi was conducted to determine a schedule of advanced standing, which was worked out through a mapping of learning outcomes, course content, credit load and course level facilitated by the GLD of the QF.

- c) A **university** facilitates the articulation of selected students to Year 3 of its bachelor's degree programmes under the Senior Year Admission (SYA) Scheme by granting a standard number of credits through Block Credit Transfer in completion of part of general university requirements on the basis of the mapping of learning outcomes. Students who have successfully completed General Education and language skills requirements as part of their AD/HD programme are deemed to have achieved the generic learning outcomes of the corresponding requirements of the university.

## **6. Embedding Industry Competencies into the Curriculum of Mainstream Education**

As demonstrated in the case studies in Section 3 above, one of the most effective ways to provide learning pathways that minimise duplication of learning and promote the achievement of both academic and career goals is through intensive cross-sector collaboration between a specific industry and providers of accredited academic and VPET programmes.

The case studies in this section provide examples of embedding industry competencies into the curriculum of mainstream education in cross-sector partnerships between industry and secondary schools/post-secondary institutions.

- a) A **tri-partite school-industry-university partnership** project provides a pathway for non-academically oriented learners starting from their selection of career-oriented ApL subjects at HKDSE all the way to university education. It ensures the integration of industry competencies and workplace-based experience in the school curriculum to promote career-readiness and also features a planned articulation to a related HD programme offered by the school of continuing education of the partner university.

An **international industry leader** was appointed to complete the skills mapping for the pathway curriculum to ensure that the learning outcomes focus on emerging skills sets, based on fast growth areas for entry-level jobs as well as skills and competencies for technical and professional jobs in the industry.

The ApL subject is co-taught by lecturers from the university's school of continuing education and teachers from the schools, to ensure seamless articulation for students who wish to proceed to the HD programme and beyond. Upon successful completion of the ApL elective, students will be awarded a certificate at QF Level 3.

Feedback from the industry partners and students has been encouraging. MOUs were signed with several industry partners who were keen to equip students with the foundation competencies required for entry level jobs to enhance their career readiness upon graduation. Task groups had also been formed across schools under the project to set up learning communities. The participating schools found the project beneficial to both students and teachers. The learning motivation of students was high as they were given non-conventional and diversified learning opportunities suiting their aspirations and interests. The teachers gained exposure through company visits and networking opportunities.

- b) A **secondary school** has developed a two-year school-based vocational learning programme in collaboration with a **trade association** and a **large company** in the automotive industry. The trade association and the relevant **ITAC** contributed to programme development by giving advice about programme content and the UoC required to match the competency requirements of entry level jobs in the industry.

Upon successful completion of the programme, graduates will be awarded a diploma at QF Level 3 and will be eligible for student membership of the trade association. They will be able to apply for entry-level jobs at the company and other members of the trade association. Applicants who have successfully completed the school-based diploma and achieved five HKDSE subjects including English and Chinese at Level 2 or above are given additional consideration for admission to HD programmes in the related field offered by a VPET institution. Learners who have completed HKDSE and meet the requirements for admission to university are able to present an enriched student profile in support of their application for a place on a degree programme.

The school and the trade both benefit from the collaboration, as the diploma motivates students to pursue learning that enhances their employment opportunities and the trade benefits from an increased supply of trained manpower. Students also benefit from improved opportunities to pursue further studies in the field once they have completed their secondary education.

## 7. Quality Assurance

7.1 The QF imposes strict quality assurance (QA) measures for all qualifications listed on the QR. The rigour of the QA processes inspires confidence in the reliability of the outcomes of QF-recognised qualifications and facilitates articulation into academic, professional and vocational programmes at higher levels, as demonstrated in the examples below:

- a) The quality-assured learning programmes under QF specify the learning outcomes achieved by the learners and are well-regarded by HEIs for articulation arrangements. A **commercial company** in the property management industry has signed MOUs with a number of HEIs to provide learning progression for employees who have completed its in-house SCS-based programmes at QF Levels 1 to 3.
- b) For the registration of licensed workers by a **government department**, only candidates who have completed QF-recognised programmes developed according to the syllabus prescribed by the government department will be deemed to have met the statutory requirements for registration.

7.2 As CAT policy and procedures have become well established, academic institutions have been able to accumulate sufficient data to review and assess the outcomes of the process and implement improvements as part of their established QA processes.

- a) A study conducted by four **universities** participating in a government-funded project on transfer students' experience of the SYA scheme found that they tend to have an above-average Grade Point Average and a lower attrition rate than their counterparts who entered the degree programme in Year 1. However, they engage in fewer extra-curricular activities due to the pressure to complete the graduation requirements within the two-year timeframe for their fully-funded study.

The findings support the universities in formulating policies to offer additional academic and pastoral support and mentoring to transfer students to optimise their experience of university study.

- b) Other planned initiatives in the project include piloting the establishment of an Office for Transfer Articulation and Transparency at one of the partner **universities** to enhance internal and external communications and to promote cross-institutional collaboration in support of transfer-receptive cultures at all partner institutions.