Comparability Study of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

1 Purpose of the Consultation Document

1.1 The purpose of this document is to seek comments and views on the Comparability Study of the HKQF and the EQF (the Study), including the methodology and process, the results of the Study and the forward plan. In particular, stakeholders are invited to give their views and comments on the following:

(a) The methodology, process and findings of the Study presented in Section 6 of this document;

(b) Suggestions for further actions to be undertaken by the Project Consultant to enhance the credibility of the results of the Study; and

(c) Suggestions on the use that may be made of the findings by the Government, education and training providers and the industry sector to support the mobility of learners and labour.

2 Background to the HKQF – EQF Comparability Study

2.1 The HKQF was established under the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 592) and launched in 2008. Its objective is to provide a platform to support lifelong learning, with a view to enhancing the capability and competitiveness of the workforce in Hong Kong. The HKQF is a unitary framework with a seven-level hierarchy covering qualifications in the academic, vocational and continuing education sectors. The Education Bureau (EDB) of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government, with the QF Secretariat (QFS) as its executive arm, is responsible for the development and implementation of the HKQF.

2.2 The EQF was established in 2008 by the European Commission (EC) as a common reference framework for European Union (EU) member states and countries. It is a regional reference framework and its objective is to improve the transparency, comparability and portability of qualifications in the EU, thereby promoting the mobility of workers and learners and supporting lifelong learning in the region. The EQF acts as a translation device to relate the national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) of different European countries to a common meta-framework (referred to as “EQF referencing”). The EQF has eight levels but contains no qualifications. The EQF Advisory Group (AG) has been established under the EC to oversee EQF implementation, including EQF referencing. As of June 2015, a total of 25 EU member states
and countries\(^1\) have already completed the EQF referencing process. The remaining countries are expected to complete in 2016.

2.3 At the EQF AG meeting held in October 2014 in Belgium, EDB was invited to make a presentation on the development of the HKQF, for the purpose of exploring the readiness for collaboration between the HKQF and the EQF. At the meeting, EDB and the EQF AG agreed to collaborate on the Study. The term “comparability study” was chosen to distinguish the process from the EU-mandated EQF referencing exercises undertaken by EU countries, although the process of comparison would be similar and of equivalent rigour. The HKQF is one of three non-European QFs conducting comparability studies with the EQF. The other two are the NQFs of Australia and New Zealand.

3 The HKQF-EQF Comparability Study

3.1 The aim of the Study is to establish a trustworthy level-to-level relationship between the HKQF and the EQF, so that qualifications recognised under the HKQF can be situated at a comparable level of the EQF.

3.2 The Study entails a review of the purpose, governance, structure, operation and quality assurance mechanisms of the HKQF and the EQF and a detailed level-to-level comparison of the two frameworks, with reference to the five comparability principles listed below:

Principle 1: The roles and responsibilities of EDB, QFS, and the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAQVQ) in relation to the HKQF and the corresponding authorities for the EQF are clear and transparent.

Principle 2: Comparison of the HKQF and the EQF and their levels demonstrates clear links between the two frameworks.

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

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

Principle 5: Quality Assurance (QA) - both qualifications frameworks are underpinned by quality assurance and are consistent with international quality assurance principles.

3.3 While the methodology and results of the level-to-level comparison between the two frameworks (Principle 2) are at the heart of the Study, the detailed analysis conducted as part of the Study confirms that the HKQF and EQF also comply with Principles 1, 3, 4 and 5.

\(^1\) Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, Estonia, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.
4 Management Structure of the Study

**EDB as Central Co-ordination Point**

4.1 The Secretary for Education announced the commencement of the joint exercise with the EQF at an international conference held in Hong Kong in November 2014. EDB is the central co-ordination point for the Study in Hong Kong. Its role is to steer the comparison process and ensure that the process and methodology adopted are credible and transparent. It acts as a single contact point for all matters relating to the Study and promotes the participation of all relevant stakeholders in the process.

**Joint Technical Group**

4.2 A Joint Technical Group (JTG) was set up at the EQF AG meeting held in October 2014 to advise the two parties on the processes of the Study. The JTG comprises representatives from EDB and members of the EQF AG. Five international experts from Croatia, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg and Poland have joined the JTG. Their involvement is vital in ensuring that the EQF stakeholders’ views are taken into account and adds credibility to the process and outcomes of the comparison. The terms of reference and composition of the JTG are at Appendix 1.

**Local Expert Group**

4.3 A Local Expert Group (LEG) has been established in Hong Kong to assist EDB in steering and overseeing the conduct of the Study. The LEG is supported by a Project Consultant, Ms Andrea HOPE, Associate Academic Vice-President of Hong Kong Shue Yan University, who is responsible for conducting the Study in consultation with relevant stakeholders. The LEG consists of representatives from EDB, QFS, QA bodies, education and training providers, and industry sector groups. The terms of reference and membership list of the LEG are at Appendix 2.

5 Support and Engagement of Stakeholders

5.1 At the initial stage of the Study, five focus group (FG) meetings were held from February to April 2015 to collect views and suggestions from the following HKQF stakeholder groups:
(a) higher/post-secondary education institutions and QA bodies;
(b) professional associations and HR professionals;
(c) education and training providers (including vocational and continuing education), and labour unions;
(d) industry and trade associations, multi-national corporations, trade offices of EU and neighboring countries, and government departments; and
(e) Industry Training Advisory Committees under the HKQF.

5.2 All participants unanimously supported the Study. Their views on the benefits and challenges of the exercise and the use of qualification types as a
reality check for the results of the level-to-level comparison are summarised below:

(a) Participants noted that the results of the Study would not lead to automatic recognition in Hong Kong of qualifications awarded by EU member states and European countries referenced to the EQF. Similarly, qualifications listed on the HKQF would not be automatically recognised by EU member states and European countries referenced to the EQF;

(b) Participants suggested that the methodology should extend beyond a linguistic and conceptual analysis of the level descriptors of the HKQF and the EQF. It should include a social analysis of benchmark qualifications in the HKQF and those referenced to different levels of the EQF to provide evidence of the accuracy of the results of the level-to-level comparison; and

(c) All stakeholder groups should be consulted on the outcomes of the Study, as the results would provide a reference tool to facilitate understanding in Hong Kong of qualifications awarded by EU member states and European countries.

6 Methodology, Process and Results of the Study

Stage 1: Broad Comparison between HKQF and EQF

6.1 Qualifications recognised under the HKQF are quality assured and are characterised and distinguished from one another by their respective QF levels, credit values and titles.

6.2 Under the HKQF, qualifications are assigned to one of the seven QF levels to indicate their position in the hierarchy relative to others. The level of a qualification is determined in accordance with a set of generic level descriptors (GLD) which specify, in four domains, the generic learning outcome standards expected of the qualifications located at each level. The GLD are used by providers and QA bodies to determine the level of qualifications and their associated learning programmes.

6.3 The GLD of the HKQF are at Appendix 3. The GLD are expressed in the following four domains:

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

6.4 The EQF is an eight-level meta-framework, and there are no qualifications on the framework. The eight levels are defined by Level Descriptors (Appendix 4) which specify the outcome requirements of each level in the following three domains:
(a) Knowledge;
(b) Skills; and
(c) Competence.

6.5 An initial broad overarching comparison of the HKQF and the EQF, and the purposes for which they are designed, including their basic principles, structure and the way the levels are described, reveals a number of similarities and differences between the two frameworks.

6.6 Both the HKQF and the EQF are a hierarchical structure based on learning outcomes; both are comprehensive and cover all kinds of learning experience; and the statements that define levels are neutral in terms of the learning environment in which the qualification is obtained.

6.7 Nevertheless, the fundamental purpose of the two frameworks is different. The HKQF, as a unitary framework, defines the learning outcomes an individual should have acquired upon completing an accredited qualification registered at a particular level of the HKQF. The EQF, on the other hand, is a meta-framework intended to function as a translation device to allow comparisons between qualifications on different NQFs.

6.8 The following differences can be observed in the structure of the two frameworks:

(a) number of levels in the hierarchy (7 in the HKQF and 8 in the EQF);
(b) number of descriptor domains (4 in the HKQF and 3 in the EQF); and
(c) degree of detail used in the level descriptors (the descriptors used in the HKQF are much more detailed than those used in the EQF, particularly at the lower levels).

Stage 2: Domain Analysis of Level Descriptors

6.9 The GLD of the HKQF and the Level Descriptors (LD) of the EQF are compared in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HKQF Definitions</th>
<th>EQF Definitions</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge &amp; Intellectual Skills covering the analytical and evaluation skills used to solve problems, and the ability to reflect on practice and plan and manage learning.</td>
<td>Knowledge means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study. In the context of the EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual.</td>
<td>Although HKQF makes few clear references to knowledge <em>per se</em> and concentrates more on skills required for the attainment of knowledge the intent is the same.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills mean the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the</td>
<td>Intellectual skills (HKQF) can be compared to cognitive skills (EQF) used for solving problems.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Plan and manage learning’ (HKQF) can be</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


context of the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).

**Competence** means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Processes</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Competence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>covering the application of judgement</strong>, <strong>communication skills and the ability to work with others interactively</strong>.</td>
<td><strong>mean the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).</strong></td>
<td><strong>means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ‘application of judgement’ as well as ‘communication skills’ (HKQF - Process) can be considered as part of Skills (EQF). The latter one is broader in meaning. ‘Application of judgment also informs responsibility and autonomy that is part of competence (EQF).

Competence (EQF) can be understood as including ‘the ability to work with others’ (HKQF), although it is not explicitly mentioned. Again, the meaning of Competence (EQF) is broader.

| Application, Autonomy and Accountability | **Competence** means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy. | Both descriptors refer to autonomy and the intention of |

linked to ‘responsibility and autonomy’ in study situations (EQF - Competence).
The degree of application, autonomy and accountability assumed while practicing those skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The skill areas</th>
<th>‘accountability’ (HKQF) and ‘responsibility’ (EQF) seem to be the same.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication, IT and Numeracy</td>
<td>Communication, IT and Numeracy (HKQF) are not explicitly mentioned in EQF descriptors. However, they can be considered as included in ‘Skills’ (EQF).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill areas of Communication, IT, and Numeracy</td>
<td>The skill areas of Communication, IT, and Numeracy (CITN) domain is unique to the HKQF and cannot be found in the EQF;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in the above table:

(a) The *Communication, IT and Numeracy* (CITN) domain is unique to the HKQF and cannot be found in the EQF;

(b) The three domains in the HKQF, (*Knowledge and Intellectual Skills; Processes; and Application, Autonomy and Accountability*), generally correspond to the three domains in the EQF (*Knowledge, Skills and Competence*) at all levels, but the coverage of each domain in the two frameworks is different. For example, while the HKQF “*Knowledge and Intellectual Skills*” domain contains reference to the depth of knowledge, it focuses on the skills required to acquire the knowledge; and

(c) In light of (b) above, the statements in each HKQF domain must be compared with the statements in one, two or even three EQF domains. For instance, some statements in the HKQF domain “*Knowledge and Intellectual Skills*” need to be compared to statements in the “*Knowledge*”, “*Skills*” (with reference to cognitive skills) and “*Competence*” (with reference to responsibility and autonomy) domains of the EQF.
Stage 3: Level-to-Level Comparison of HKQF and EQF

Linguistic and Textual Analysis of Three Domains of GLD and LD

6.10 A linguistic and textual approach has been adopted in the comparison of the three domains of the HKQF (Knowledge and Intellectual Skills; Processes; and Application, Autonomy and Accountability) and the three domains of the EQF (Knowledge; Skills; and Competence) to establish the level-to-level relationship between the two frameworks. The remaining domain of the HKQF (Communication, IT and Numeracy) has been analysed separately as described in paragraph 6.14.

6.11 The differences between the two frameworks outlined in paragraph 6.9 meant that in some cases it was not possible to identify exact matches between levels. Where a significant match across all domains at a particular level could be ascertained, this was defined as a “Good Fit” between the levels. In instances of less than perfect match, the concept of “Best Fit”, as adopted in EQF referencing reports, was used.

6.12 “Best Fit” is a determination, on balance of the relevant factors, of where a QF level on a given framework most appropriately sits in reference to a level on another framework. This principle was used in cases where all three dimensions on the EQF could not be matched unequivocally against the four dimensions on the HKQF. In these cases, levels were matched to the level where the outcomes descriptors fitted the best and the findings were verified by reference to concrete examples of qualifications and contextual background information to find the best fit correlation between levels.

6.13 The comparison reveals that Level 1 of the HKQF compares with Level 2 of the EQF, Level 2 of the HKQF compares with Level 3 of the EQF, and so on through the levels. The match between HKQF Level 6 with EQF Level 7 and HKQF Level 7 with EQF Level 8 is particularly good. No match is found on the HKQF for EQF Level 1. The table below shows a summary of the findings of the comparison. Details of the comparison are at Appendix 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HKQF</th>
<th>EQF</th>
<th>Conclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 7</td>
<td>Level 8</td>
<td>Good Fit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 6</td>
<td>Level 7</td>
<td>Good Fit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>Level 6</td>
<td>Best Fit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>Best Fit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>Best Fit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>Best Fit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>Best Fit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>No match</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis of CITN Domain of GLD

6.14 The CITN domain, which defines the outcome standards of specific skills in communication, IT and numeracy, forms an important part of the HKQF. Specifications of Generic Foundation Competencies (i.e. English, Chinese, IT and Numeracy) have been developed under the HKQF according to the outcome requirements of this domain. In the absence of such a domain in the EQF, a conceptual analysis has been applied to find the best match of this domain with the EQF LD in the knowledge, skills and competence domains. The findings of the analysis are detailed at Appendix 6. This analysis provides additional evidence to support the overall results described above.

Analysis of Vertical Progression of GLD of HKQF

6.15 The outcome statements of the GLD of the HKQF have been further analysed to examine how the outcome standards at each level of the HKQF increase in complexity as a learner progresses through the seven levels of the HKQF. This further analysis reveals that there is a clear increase in complexity in each of the domains as one progresses through the seven levels of the HKQF, which also corresponds with that shown in the EQF LD. The results of this vertical analysis are at Appendix 7.

Stage 4: “Reality Check” to Confirm Level-to-Level Comparability

Qualifications in the HKQF and the NQFs in United Kingdom (UK)

6.16 The process of comparison employed in the Study relies on the interpretation of the level descriptors of the two frameworks and requires a degree of subjective judgement. Stakeholders involved in the Study including the LEG and the JTG agreed that it would be necessary to conduct a reality check to confirm the reliability of the findings. They suggested that typical qualifications in Hong Kong and Europe should be used as external references to confirm the outcomes of the level-to-level comparison. Hong Kong stakeholders proposed that, for ease of comparison and understanding, qualifications on the HKQF could be compared with qualifications from the NQFs in the UK due to the historical links between the education systems of Hong Kong and the UK.

6.17 Benchmark qualifications in the post-secondary sector at HKQF Levels 4 to 7 have been easily identified for comparison with similar qualifications from the NQFs of UK. For HKQF Levels 1 to 3, the qualifications included in the reality check were those that a typical learner in Hong Kong would encounter in his/her education journey. These include the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (which replaced the former Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination and Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination); the Craft Certificate and the Diploma of Vocational Education offered by the Vocational Training Council; and a multiplicity of programmes offered for young people through the auspices of the Employees’ Retraining Board. Similar qualifications listed on the NQFs of the UK were selected for comparison.
Reference to Bologna Framework

6.18 The EQF is benchmarked with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (the Bologna Framework). Qualifications awarded upon completion of the short, first, second and third cycles of higher education under the Bologna Framework have been formally acknowledged to be referenced to Levels 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the EQF. These qualifications are the equivalent of associate degree or higher diploma, bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees in Hong Kong (HKQF Levels 4 to 7). As an additional means to confirm the study findings, a comparison was undertaken between the GLD of the HKQF and the Dublin Descriptors which define the learning outcomes at the different levels of the Bologna Framework. The comparison confirms that there is a good match between HKQF Levels 4 to 7 and the Dublin Descriptors for the various cycles of the Bologna Framework, which have been benchmarked to EQF Levels 5 to 8. The detailed comparison is at Appendix 8.

Table of Benchmark Qualifications for Reality Check

6.19 The qualifications selected for the reality check are shown in the Table below. The reality check confirmed the level-to-level matching described in paragraph 6.13:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HKQF Level</th>
<th>Hong Kong Qualifications</th>
<th>EU and UK Qualifications</th>
<th>EQF Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Doctoral Degree</td>
<td>3rd cycle HE (UK Doctoral Degree)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Master Degree</td>
<td>2nd cycle HE (UK Master)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>1st cycle HE (UK Bachelor with Hons)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Associate Degree/ Higher Diploma</td>
<td>Short cycle within 1st cycle HE (UK Foundation Degree, Higher National Diploma)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>HK Diploma of Secondary Education/HK Advanced Level Examination/Yi Jin Diploma/ Diploma of Vocational Education/Diploma for Health Worker</td>
<td>Matriculation from secondary education, access to HE (UK GCE A Level, Vocational Qualifications Level 3 of QCF/Scottish Highers)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>HK Certificate of Education Examinations (to 2011)/ Craft Certificate</td>
<td>UK GCSE Grade A to C/ Vocational Qualifications Level 2 of QCF</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Completion of Secondary 3/ Foundation Certificate</td>
<td>Vocational Qualifications Level 1 of QCF/Foundation Skills Level 1 of QCF</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparability of the HKQF and the EQF in relation to Principles 1, 3, 4 and 5

7.1 In order to confirm the level-to-level matching between the two frameworks in compliance with Principle 2 and to generate confidence among the stakeholders of the HKQF and the EQF in the reliability of the outcomes of the study, EDB and the EC members of the JTG each completed their own level-to-level comparison of the two frameworks. Working independently, both sides reached the conclusions listed at paragraph 6.13. The results have been incorporated in the Joint Report which is expected to be presented to the EQF AG in December 2015.

7.2 In addition to the level-to-level comparison results, the analysis of the HKQF and the EQF demonstrated that both frameworks have clearly defined governance and management systems; both are based on learning outcomes; and both are underpinned by rigorous QA mechanisms that conform to international quality standards.

7.3 In Hong Kong, the enactment of the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 592) and the designation of the HKCAA as the Accreditation Authority and Qualifications Register (QR) Authority under the HKQF in accordance with Cap. 592 provide the legal basis for the recognition of qualifications under the HKQF and their eligibility for inclusion in the QR. The policies and requirements for inclusion of qualifications in the QR, including the assignment of QF level and credit values, the fulfilment of threshold standards and QA procedures, the regulated use of award titles, the recognition of prior learning and the arrangements for credit accumulation and transfer, are clearly spelt out in policy documents promulgated by EDB from 2008 onwards and uploaded onto the HKQF website for public access, with hyperlinks to the websites of various QA authorities and relevant bodies.

Outcomes of the Study

8.1 The detailed comparison of the HKQF and the EQF can demonstrate to both local and overseas stakeholders that the HKQF is a mature framework. Its robust architecture is underpinned by rigorous QA arrangements that ensure that it is fit for purpose in the context of the evolving Hong Kong education system and that it can withstand international scrutiny. The Study potentially paves the way for future comparability/referencing exercises between the HKQF and NQFs and regional QFs from other jurisdictions.

8.2 The EQF is a common reference framework mandated to serve as a translation device between different qualifications systems and their levels, whether for general and higher education or for vocational education and training in Europe. As a meta-framework, the EQF does not contain any qualifications. Qualifications are included and allocated to levels in the European NQFs which are referenced to the EQF. The results of this Study do not establish a link between the HKQF and individual European NQFs. Nevertheless, the role of the EQF as a regional ‘hub’ or reference point will facilitate dialogue between Hong Kong and European NQFs and will also make it easier for education and training institutions, employers and recognition bodies in
European countries to develop an understanding of the HKQF and build links with their Hong Kong counterparts. Analysis of the comparability, similarities and differences between the HKQF and the EQF also strengthens the overall credibility of the EQF as a reference framework.

8.3 More broadly, the results of the Study will enhance the understanding in European countries of the standard of education and training in Hong Kong and the underpinning QA arrangements and inspire trust and respect for Hong Kong’s qualifications. Equally, the outcomes of the exercise will improve the understanding of European qualifications by the people of Hong Kong.

8.4 From the economic perspective, the results of the Study will help local and international commercial and business enterprises to make decisions on investment and commercial issues, particularly if the decisions are dependent on the availability and contribution of professionals and personnel with suitable qualifications. The improved understanding of the relationship between the HKQF and the EQF resulting from the publication of the Joint Report upon completion of this Study is expected to further enhance economic cooperation and partnership between Hong Kong and European countries.

8.5 While both Hong Kong and the EC appreciate the mutual benefits of collaboration between the two frameworks described above, both are conscious that the Study might give rise to expectations of automatic qualifications recognition between Hong Kong and countries whose NQF has been referenced to the EQF. Although it is anticipated that the results of the Study will facilitate the official qualifications recognition process, the results of this Study confer no rights in this regard, as has been made clear throughout the stakeholder engagement exercise.

9 Open Consultation and Forward Plan

9.1 This document sets out the process and findings of the Study. Views and comments from all stakeholders and the public are welcomed. Views collected from the consultation will be taken into account by EDB in finalising the Joint Report, before it is submitted to the EQF AG for consideration.

9.2 The consultation period is from 2 September to 2 October 2015. During the period, this document can be downloaded from www.hkqf.gov.hk/eqf. All stakeholder groups and the general public can send written submissions to EDB via the QFS through email to hkqf@edb.gov.hk or fax to 3106 2035.
Appendix 1

Joint Technical Group
for Comparability Study of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework and the European Qualifications Framework

Terms of Reference

1. The terms of reference of the Joint Technical Group include:
   (a) to develop, and to agree on, the processes and timelines for the comparability study;
   (b) to advise on the risks and benefits of the exercise to each party;
   (c) to enhance information exchanges between Hong Kong and European Union (EU) Member States to facilitate better understanding of respective Qualifications Frameworks and qualification systems;
   (d) to advise on the comparability of levels in the HKQF and EQF, and how the comparability could be demonstrated in a transparent way;
   (e) to assist EDB and European Commission in the production of a report on the outcome of the comparison of HKQF and EQF; and
   (f) to help establish a working relationship between EDB and European Commission leading to long term cooperation in the development and implementation of Qualifications Framework.

Membership

2. Membership of the Joint Technical Group comprises:
   (a) Representatives of EDB of the HKSAR Government (including representatives from the QF Secretariat of Hong Kong); and
   (b) Representatives from EQF-AG (including European Commission, CEDEFOP, and five experts from EU Member States, i.e. Croatia, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg and Poland).
Local Expert Group
for Comparability Study of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework
and the European Qualifications Framework

Terms of reference

1. The Local Export Group (LEG) shall provide the following advice to EDB:
   (a) To advise on the methodology, process and strategy for the Study;
   (b) To provide advice and guidance on consultation and engagement of stakeholders of various sectors in support of the Study;
   (c) To provide advice and guidance on the work and services to be provided by the technical consultant for the Study; and
   (d) To advise on the preparation of the report for consideration of the EDB and submission to the EC and the EQF-AG.

Membership

Chairman: Deputy Secretary for Education

Members:  
Education Bureau  
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education (Further Education)  
Project Coordinator (Further Education)

Qualifications Framework Secretariat  
General Manager, Qualifications Framework Secretariat

Quality Assurance Bodies  
Executive Director, Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications  
Secretary-General, University Grants Committee  
Chairman, Joint Quality Review Committee

Education and Training Sector  
Three representatives from the academic, vocational and continuing education sectors

Industry Sector  
Three representatives from the industry and professional sectors

Secretary: Senior Manager, Qualifications Framework Secretariat
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Knowledge &amp; Intellectual Skills</th>
<th>Processes</th>
<th>Application, Autonomy &amp; Accountability</th>
<th>Communication, IT &amp; Numeracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 7     | • Demonstrate and work with a critical overview of a subject or discipline, including an evaluative understanding of principal theories and concepts, and of its broad relationships with other disciplines  
• Identify, conceptualise and offer original and creative insights into new, complex and abstract ideas and information  
• Deal with very complex and/or new issues and make informed judgements in the absence of complete or consistent data/information  
• Make a significant and original contribution to a specialised field of inquiry, or to broader interdisciplinary relationships. | • Demonstrate command of research and methodological issues and engage in critical dialogue  
• Develop creative and original responses to problems and issues in the context of new circumstances. | • Apply knowledge and skills in a broad range of complex and professional work activities, including new and unforeseen circumstances  
• Demonstrate leadership and originality in tackling and solving problems  
• Accept accountability in related decision making  
• High degree of autonomy, with full responsibility for own work, and significant responsibility for others  
• Deal with complex ethical and professional issues. | • Strategically use communication skills, adapting context and purpose to a range of audiences  
• Communicate at the standard of published academic work and/or critical dialogue  
• Monitor, review and reflect on own work and skill development, and change and adapt in the light of new demands  
• Use a range of software and specify software requirements to enhance work, anticipating future requirements  
• Critically evaluate numerical and graphical data, and employ such data extensively. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Knowledge &amp; Intellectual Skills</th>
<th>Processes</th>
<th>Application, Autonomy &amp; Accountability</th>
<th>Communication, IT &amp; Numeracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 6     | ● Critically review, consolidate, and extend a systematic, coherent body of knowledge  
       ● Utilise highly specialised technical research or scholastic skills across an area of study  
       ● Critically evaluate new information, concepts and evidence from a range of sources and develop creative responses  
       ● Critically review, consolidate and extend knowledge, skills practices and thinking in a subject/discipline  
       ● Deal with complex issues and make informed judgements in the absence of complete or consistent data/information. | ● Transfer and apply diagnostic and creative skills in a range of situations  
       ● Exercise appropriate judgement in complex planning, design, technical and/or management functions related to products, services, operations or processes, including resourcing and evaluation  
       ● Conduct research, and/or advanced technical or professional activity  
       ● Design and apply appropriate research methodologies. | ● Apply knowledge and skills in a broad range of professional work activities  
       ● Practice significant autonomy in determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes  
       ● Accept accountability in related decision making including use of supervision  
       ● Demonstrate leadership and/or make an identifiable contribution to change and development. | ● 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. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
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<th>Processes</th>
<th>Application, Autonomy &amp; Accountability</th>
<th>Communication, IT &amp; Numeracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 5     | ● Generate ideas through the analysis of abstract information and concepts  
      ● Command wide ranging, specialised technical, creative and/or conceptual skills  
      ● Identify and analyse both routine and abstract professional problems and issues, and formulate evidence-based responses  
      ● Analyse, reformat and evaluate a wide range of information  
      ● Critically analyse, evaluate and/or synthesise ideas, concepts, information and issues  
      ● Draw on a range of sources in making judgments.  | ● Utilise diagnostic and creative skills in a range of technical, professional or management functions  
      ● Exercise appropriate judgement in planning, design, technical and/or supervisory functions related to products, services, operations or processes.  | ● 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.  | ● Use a range of routine skills and some advanced and specialised skills in support of established practices in a subject/discipline, for example:  
      ● Make formal and informal presentations on standard/mainstream topics in the subject/discipline to a range of audiences  
      ● Participate in group discussions about complex subjects; create opportunities for others to contribute  
      ● Use a range of IT applications to support and enhance work  
      ● Interpret, use and evaluate numerical and graphical data to achieve goals/targets. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Processes</th>
<th>Application, Autonomy &amp; Accountability</th>
<th>Communication, IT &amp; Numeracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 4     | ● 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 specialised skills and approaches to generate a range of responses. | ● Operate in a range of varied and specific contexts involving some creative and non-routine activities  
      ● Exercise appropriate judgement in planning, selecting or presenting information, methods or resources  
      ● Carry out routine lines of enquiry, development of investigation into professional level issues and problems. | ● The ability to perform skilled tasks requiring some discretion and judgement, and undertake a supervisory role  
      ● Undertake self-directed and a some directive activity  
      ● Operate within broad general guidelines or functions  
      ● Take responsibility for the nature and quantity of own outputs  
      ● Meet specified quality standards  
      ● Accept some responsibility for the quantity and quality of the output of others. | ● Use a wide range of routine skills and some advanced skills associated with the subject/discipline — for example:  
      ● Present using a range of techniques to engage the audience in both familiar and some new contexts  
      ● Read and synthesise extended information from subject documents; organise information coherently, convey complex ideas in well-structured form  
      ● Use a range of IT applications to support and enhance work  
      ● Plan approaches to obtaining and using information, choose appropriate methods and data to justify results & choices  
      ● Carry out multi-stage calculations. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Knowledge &amp; Intellectual Skills</th>
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<th>Application, Autonomy &amp; Accountability</th>
<th>Communication, IT &amp; Numeracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 3     | ● Apply knowledge and skills in a range of activities, demonstrating comprehension of relevant theories  
      ● Access, organise and evaluate information independently and make reasoned judgements in relation to a subject or discipline  
      ● Employ a range of responses to well defined, but sometimes unfamiliar or unpredictable, problems  
      ● Make generalisations and predictions in familiar contexts.  | ● 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  | ● The ability to perform tasks in a broad range of predictable and structured contexts which may also involve some non-routine activities requiring a degree of individual responsibility  
      ● Engage in self-directed activity with guidance/evaluation  
      ● Accept responsibility for quantity and quality of output  
      ● Accept well defined but limited responsibility for the quantity and quality of the output of others  | ● Use a wide range of largely routine and well practiced skills — for example:  
      ● Produce and respond to detailed and complex written and oral communication in familiar contexts, and use a suitable structure and style when writing extended documents.  
      ● Select and use standard applications to obtain, process and combine information  
      ● Use a wide range of numerical and graphical data in routine contexts, which may have some non-routine elements. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
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<th>Processes</th>
<th>Application, Autonomy &amp; Accountability</th>
<th>Communication, IT &amp; Numeracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2     | • 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. | • 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. | • 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. | • Use skills with some assistance — for example:  
      • Take active part in discussions about identified subjects  
      • Identify the main points and ideas from documents and reproduce them in other contexts  
      • Produce and respond to a specified range of written and oral communications, in familiar/routine contexts  
      • Carry out a defined range of tasks to process data and access information  
      • Use a limited range of familiar numerical and graphical data in everyday contexts  
      • Carry out calculations, using percentages and graphical data to given levels of accuracy. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Knowledge &amp; Intellectual Skills</th>
<th>Processes</th>
<th>Application, Autonomy &amp; Accountability</th>
<th>Communication, IT &amp; Numeracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1     | ● Employ recall and demonstrate elementary comprehension in a narrow range of areas with dependency on ideas of others  
       ● Exercise basic skills  
       ● Receive and pass on information  
       ● Use, under supervision or prompting, basic tools and materials.  
       ● Apply learnt responses to solve problems  
       ● Operate in familiar, personal and/or everyday contexts  
       ● Take some account, with prompting, of identified consequences of actions. | ● 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. | ● 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 | ● Use very simple skills with assistance — for example:  
       ● Take some part in discussions about straightforward subjects  
       ● Read and identify the main points and ideas from documents about straightforward subjects  
       ● Produce and respond to a limited range of simple, written and oral communications, in familiar/routine contexts  
       ● Carry out a limited range of simple tasks to process data and access information  
       ● Use a limited range of very simple and familiar numerical and pictorial data  
       ● Carry out calculations, using whole numbers and simple decimals to given levels of accuracy. |
The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) Level Descriptors

Each of the 8 levels in EQF is defined by a set of descriptors indicating the learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at that level in any system of qualifications.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EQF Level</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Competence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In the context of EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual.</td>
<td>In the context of EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking), and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments)</td>
<td>In the context of EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>Basic general knowledge</td>
<td>Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks</td>
<td>Work or study under direct supervision in a structured context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>Basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study</td>
<td>Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools</td>
<td>Work or study under supervision with some autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EQF Level</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>Competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study</td>
<td>A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information</td>
<td>Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study; adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study</td>
<td>A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study</td>
<td>Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change; supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 5[1]</td>
<td>Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge</td>
<td>A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems</td>
<td>Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change; review and develop performance of self and others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the context of EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual. In the context of EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking), and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).

In the context of EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EQF Level</th>
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<th>Competence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 6[^2]</td>
<td>In the context of EQF, knowledge is described as <em>theoretical and/or factual</em>.</td>
<td>In the context of EQF, skills are described as <em>cognitive</em> (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking), and <em>practical</em> (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments)</td>
<td>In the context of EQF, competence is described in terms of <em>responsibility and autonomy</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 7[^3]</td>
<td>Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles</td>
<td>Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study</td>
<td>Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts; take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research</td>
<td>Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields</td>
<td>Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches; take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[^2]: Level 6: Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles. Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study. Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts; take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups.

[^3]: Level 7: Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research. Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields. Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches; take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>EQF Level</th>
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<th>Skills</th>
<th>Competence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In the context of EQF, knowledge is described as <em>theoretical and/or factual</em>.</td>
<td>In the context of EQF, skills are described as <em>cognitive</em> (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking), and <em>practical</em> (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments)</td>
<td>In the context of EQF, competence is described in terms of <em>responsibility and autonomy</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 8[^1]</td>
<td>Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields</td>
<td>The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice</td>
<td>Demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Compatibility with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area

The Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area provides descriptors for cycles. Each cycle descriptor offers a generic statement of typical expectations of achievements and abilities associated with qualifications that represent the end of that cycle.

1. The descriptor for the higher education short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle), developed by the Joint Quality Initiative as part of the Bologna process, corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 5.
2. The descriptor for the first cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 6.
3. The descriptor for the second cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 7.
4. The descriptor for the third cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 8.

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1 The Bologna Process is a series of ministerial meetings and agreements between European countries designed to ensure comparability in the standards and quality of higher education qualifications.
## Level-to-Level Comparison

### 1 Matching HKQF Level 1 to EQF Level 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EQF Domains</th>
<th>EQF Level 2 Descriptors</th>
<th>HKQF Level 1 Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>● Basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study</td>
<td>● Employ recall and demonstrate elementary comprehension in a narrow range of areas with dependency on ideas of others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Skills      | ● Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools | ● Use under supervision or prompting basic tools and materials  
● Carry out processes that are repetitive and predictable  
● The ability to perform tasks of a routine and repetitive nature given clear direction  
● Undertake the performance of clearly defines tasks  
● Carry out a limited range of simple tasks to process data and access information  
● Read and identify the main points from documents about straightforward subjects |
| Competence  | ● Work or study under supervision with some autonomy | ● Carry out directed activity under close supervision  
● The ability to perform tasks of routine and repetitive nature given clear direction |

### 1.1 Notes on Alignment of HKQF Level 1 to EQF Level 2

#### 1.1.1
The EQF defines the knowledge at Level 2 as basic “factual” knowledge which distinguishes it from “general” knowledge defined at Level 1. Although the HKQF makes few clear references to knowledge *per se* and concentrates more on intellectual skills, it seems reasonable to assume that the HKQF descriptor calling for “elementary comprehension in a narrow range of areas” is a more advanced requirement than “general knowledge” and is more in keeping with “basic factual knowledge”. The use of the term “comprehension” indicates an expectation of some cognitive aspect of knowledge use rather than simple regurgitation of facts. The Hong Kong descriptor is further refined by the addition of “a narrow range of areas” which indicates a move from the general to the more specific.

#### 1.1.2
In the skills area, EQF Level 2 has moved away from the “basic skills” described at Level 1 to a requirement for “basic cognitive and practical skills” at Level 2.
Furthermore, the use of these skills is defined as an ability to “use relevant information” and to “carry out tasks” and “solve routine problems”. At Level 1 in the HKQF there is an expectation that learners will be able to carry out processes that are repetitive and predictable and undertake the performance of clearly defined tasks. These are basic practical skills which match well with the EQF Level 2 descriptor. In addition, a number of descriptors in the Communications, IT & Numeracy domain at Level 1 in the HKQF clearly demonstrate the use of basic cognitive skills. For example, the requirement to read and identify the main points and ideas from documents and the ability to use numerical and pictorial data and to produce and respond to a limited range of written and oral communications all indicate, at the very least, a level of simple cognitive functioning.

1.1.3 It is in the area of competency and autonomy that the match between EQF Level 2 and HKQF Level 1 becomes less obvious. Whilst being prescriptive about the need for supervision, the Hong Kong framework is less clear about the consequences of this for learner/worker autonomy. So, for example, whereas the HKQF states clearly that learners should be able to “carry out directed activity under close supervision” (cf. EQF “work or study under supervision”), the issue of autonomy is not specifically addressed. However, the Application, Autonomy & Accountability descriptor which states “the ability to perform tasks of a routine and repetitive nature given clear direction” indicates that some autonomy is anticipated. Likewise, the outcomes listed in the Communications, IT & Numeracy domain, show 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.

1.1.4 Using the ‘best fit’ principle, we find that the two levels are comparable.

Conclusion: BEST FIT
## 2 Matching HKQF Level 2 to EQF Level 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EQF Domains</th>
<th>EQF Level 3 Descriptors</th>
<th>HKQF Level 2 Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts in a field of work or study</td>
<td>Apply knowledge based on an underpinning comprehension in a selected number of areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools and information</td>
<td>Apply basic tools and materials and use rehearsed stages for solving problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Make comparisons with some evaluation and interpret available information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Choose from a range of procedures performed in a number of contexts, a few of which may be non-routine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Carry out a defined range of tasks to process data and access information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Use a limited range of familiar numerical and graphical data in everyday contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study; adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems</td>
<td>Take account of the identified consequences of actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Achieve outcomes within time constraints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Accept defined responsibility for quantity and quality of output subject to external quality checking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2.1 Notes on Alignment between HKQF Level 2 and EQF Level 3

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

**2.1.2** In the skills domain, EQF Level 3 prescribes the acquisition of “a range” of cognitive and basic skills, and indicates that the learner should be capable of
“selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information”. In the HKQF at Level 2, it is clearly stated that learners should be able to “choose from a range of procedures performed in a number of contexts, a few of which may be non-routine”. In addition there is an expectation at this level that learners should be able to “make comparisons with some evaluation and interpret available information”. However, it is in the Communications, IT & Numeracy domain that we get an indication of the best match between HKQF Level 2 and EQF Level 3. Several of the Hong Kong descriptors cover the concept of “selecting and applying”. For example, at Level 2 Hong Kong learners are expected to be able to “identify the main points and ideas from documents and reproduce them in other contexts”.

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

2.1.4 At Level 2, the HKQF requires that learners “carry out a defined range of tasks to process data” and “use a limited range of familiar numerical and graphical data in everyday contexts”. It has to be assumed that these skills are being used to “accomplish tasks and solve problems” (cf. EQF Level 3) and not for purely academic purposes.

2.1.5 In the area of competency, EQF Level 3 introduces the concept of taking responsibility for task completion as well as the adaptation of behaviour to circumstances. In the HKQF, the use of the phrase “non-routine” in the Processes domain at Level 2 may be equated to the EQF concept of (changing) circumstances. Additionally learners at HKQF Level 2 are expected to accept defined responsibility for quantity and quality of output which mirrors the assumption of responsibility for completion of tasks that appears at Level 3 of the EQF.

2.1.6 At EQF level 3, the level of autonomy is increased as individuals are expected to “take responsibility for completion of tasks” and to “adapt own behavior to circumstances in solving problems”. A number of the HKQF Level 2 descriptors appear to align closely with the EQF level 3 Competency outcomes cited above. At HKQF level 2, individuals are expected to “accept defined responsibility for quantity and quality of output” and to “achieve outcomes within time constraints”; to “take account of the identified consequences of actions” and to operate in “non-routine” contexts, all of which would require adaptive behaviour on their part.

2.1.7 Using the “best fit” principle, we find that HKQF Level 2 and EQF Level 3 are comparable.

Conclusion: BEST FIT
## Matching HKQF Level 3 to EQF Level 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EQF Domains</th>
<th>EQF Level 4 Descriptors</th>
<th>HKQF Level 3 Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study</td>
<td>Apply knowledge and skills in a range of activities, demonstrating comprehension of relevant theories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skills</strong></td>
<td>A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work of study</td>
<td>Operate in a variety of familiar and some unfamiliar contexts, using a known range of technical or learning skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Select from a considerable choice of predetermined procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Access, organise and evaluate information independently and make reasoned judgements in relation to a subject or discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Use a wide range of largely routine and well-practiced skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competence</strong></td>
<td>Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change; supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities</td>
<td>Employ a range of responses to well defined, but sometimes unfamiliar or unpredictable, problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>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</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Engage in self-directed activity with guidance/evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Accept responsibility for quantity and quality of output</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Accept well defined but limited responsibility for the quantity and quality of the output of others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.1 Notes on Alignment between HKQF Level 3 and EQF Level 4

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

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

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

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

3.1.5 The concept of supervisory skills is introduced at this level in both frameworks. The EQF states that at Level 4 people should be competent to “supervise the routine work of others, taking responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities”. This is equivalent to the HKQF Level 3 descriptor “accept well defined but limited responsibility for the quantity and quality of the output of others”. Even though the verb “supervise” is not used at HKQF level 3 we infer that taking responsibility for the work of others, in terms of quantity and quality, implies a supervisory role.

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

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

**Conclusion: BEST FIT**
4 Matching HKQF Level 4 to EQF Level 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EQF Domains</th>
<th>EQF Level 5 Descriptors</th>
<th>HKQF Level 4 Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge</td>
<td>Develop a rigorous approach to the acquisition of a broad knowledge base, with some specialist knowledge in selected areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems</td>
<td>Present and evaluate information, using it to plan and develop investigative strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Employ a range of specialised skills and approaches to generate a range of responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Operate in a range of varied and specific contexts involving some creative and non-routine activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Exercise appropriate judgement in planning, selecting or presenting information, methods or resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Use a wide range of routine skills and some advanced skills associated with the subject/discipline (CITN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is an unpredictable change; review and develop performance of self and others</td>
<td>Deal with well-defined issues within largely familiar contexts, but extend this to some unfamiliar problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Take responsibility for the nature and quantity of own outputs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The ability to perform skilled tasks requiring some discretion and judgement and undertake a supervisory role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Accept some responsibility for the quantity and quality of the output of others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1 Notes on Alignment between HKQF Level 4 and EQF Level 5

4.1.1 Level 5 of the EQF builds on previous levels by prescribing the acquisition of knowledge that is both “comprehensive” and “specialised”. The use of the word “specialised” denotes a vertical development in the framework from the previous level. The HKQF also introduces the concept of specialism at Level 4. The HKQF Level 4 descriptors concerning knowledge state that a learner at this level should be able to “develop a rigorous approach to the acquisition of a broad knowledge base, with some specialist knowledge in selected areas”. The EQF requires that learners should have “an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge”. There is no equivalent descriptor in the HKQF, although it could be argued that the “rigorous approach” to the acquisition of both “a broad knowledge base” and “specialist knowledge in selected areas” developed by the HKQF Level 4 learner would imply an awareness of the boundaries of the knowledge thus acquired.
In the skills domain, the EQF at Level 5 prescribes that learners will be able to “develop creative solutions to abstract problems”. This represents a vertical development in respect of the cognitive and practical skills described at EQF Level 4. HKQF level 4 emphasises this development in cognitive and practical skills in a slightly different way, indicating a requirement to “develop investigative strategies”, to “employ a range of specialised skills and approaches to generate a range of responses” and to “exercise appropriate judgement in planning, selecting or presenting information, methods or resources”. The concept of creativity is introduced at Level 4 of the HKQF in the descriptor “operate in a range of varied and specific contexts involving some creative and non-routine activities”.

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

One concept which is introduced in the HKQF at Level 4 which is not mentioned in the EQF Level 5 is that of “professionalism”. At Level 4 of the HKQF, learners should be able to investigate “professional level issues and problems”. The word “professional” does not appear in EQF until Level 6.

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

In conclusion, there appears to be a very good fit between HKQF Level 4 and EQF Level 5 in the domains of knowledge and skills, albeit with some difference in the use of language. Nevertheless the concept of unpredictability in the context of management and supervision appears only in the EQF at this level and may seem to be at a higher level than HKQF Level 4 Application, Autonomy and Accountability descriptors in this respect. By using the ‘best fit’ principle we conclude that HKQF Level 4 and EQF Level 5 are comparable.

**Conclusion: BEST FIT**
## Matching HKQF Level 5 to EQF Level 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EQF Domains</th>
<th>EQF Level 6 Descriptors</th>
<th>HKQF Level 5 Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles</td>
<td>Critically analyse, evaluate and/or synthesise ideas, concepts, information and issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skills</strong></td>
<td>Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study</td>
<td>Critically analyse, evaluate and/or synthesise ideas, concepts, information and issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Command wide ranging, specialised technical, creative and/or conceptual skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify and analyse both routine and abstract professional problems and issues, and formulate evidence-based responses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analyse, reformat and evaluate a wide range of information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Utilise diagnostic and creative skills in a range of technical, professional or management functions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use a range of routine skills and some advanced and specialised skills in support of established practices in a subject/discipline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competence</strong></td>
<td>Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision making in unpredictable work or study contexts; take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups</td>
<td>Exercise appropriate judgement in planning, design, technical and/or supervisory functions related to products, services, operations or processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perform tasks involving planning, design, and technical skills, and involving some management functions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accept responsibility and accountability within broad parameters for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.1 Notes on Alignment between HKQF Level 5 and EQF Level 6

5.1.1 The EQF Level 6 descriptors in the knowledge domain specify that learners at this level should have “advanced knowledge in a field of work or study involving a critical understanding of theories and principles”. The GLDs at Level 5 of the HKQF in the knowledge and intellectual skills domain make no reference to a body of knowledge. Nevertheless we may infer that the expectations of the two frameworks in terms of knowledge acquisition at this level are similar, by reference to the progression from “a broad knowledge base with some specialist knowledge in selected areas” at HKQF Level 4 to “a systematic, coherent body of knowledge” at HKQF Level 6.
5.1.2 The EQF uses the word “advanced” to describe the skills to be achieved at level 6 in order to demonstrate “mastery and innovation” and to solve “complex and unpredictable problems” in a “specialised” field of work or study.

5.1.3 We would argue that the skills of critically analysing, evaluating and synthesising abstract information, ideas, concepts and issues in order to generate ideas, make judgments, formulate evidence-based responses and solve both routine and abstract problems acquired by learners at HKQF Level 5, are equivalent to the advanced problem-solving skills prescribed at EQF level 6.

5.1.4 Innovation is a key skill introduced at Level 6 of the EQF. The HKQF Level 5 descriptors require learners to be able to “generate ideas” and demonstrate “specialised technical, creative and/or conceptual skills”. We find that the two frameworks are comparable in their expectations of advanced skills in respect of creativity and innovation.

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

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

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

5.1.8 In conclusion, there appears to be a very good fit between HKQF Level 5 and EQF Level 6 in the domains of knowledge and skills, albeit with some difference in the use of language. Nevertheless the level of responsibility in the context of management and supervision appears to be higher at EQF level 6 than at HKQF Level 5. Applying the ‘best fit’ principle we conclude that the two levels are comparable.

Conclusion: BEST FIT
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EQF Domains</th>
<th>EQF Level 7 Descriptors</th>
<th>HKQF Level 6 Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>• Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research Critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields</td>
<td>• Critically review, consolidate, and extend a systematic, coherent body of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>• Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields</td>
<td>• Utilise highly specialised technical research or scholastic skills across an area of study • Critically evaluate new information, concepts and evidence from a range of sources and develop creative responses • Critically review, consolidate and extend knowledge, skills practices and thinking in a subject/discipline • Transfer and apply diagnostic and creative skills in a range of situations • Design and apply appropriate research methodologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>• Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches; take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams</td>
<td>• Deal with complex issues and make informed judgements in the absence of complete or consistent data/information. • Exercise appropriate judgement in complex planning, design, technical and/or management functions related to products, services, operations or processes, including resourcing and evaluation • Conduct research, and/or advanced technical or professional activity • Apply knowledge and skills in a broad range of professional work activities • Practice significant autonomy in determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes • Accept accountability in related decision making including use of supervision • Demonstrate leadership and/or make an identifiable contribution to change and development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.1 Notes on Alignment between HKQF Level 6 and EQF Level 7

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

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

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

6.1.4 In conclusion we find that there is a very good fit between the descriptors in the three domains of knowledge, skills and competencies at Level 6 of HKQF and Level 7 of EQF.

Conclusion: GOOD FIT
### 7.1 Notes on Alignment between HKQF Level 7 and EQF Level 8

7.1.1 Level 7 of the HKQF, like EQF Level 8, is the most advanced level of the framework. The EQF Level 8 knowledge descriptor reflects this in the requirement that knowledge should be “at the most advanced frontier of a field and at the interface between fields”.

7.1.2 The HKQF Level 7 descriptors are also very clear in their requirements in...
relation to the advancement of knowledge in a subject or discipline and at the interface between disciplines, stating an expectation that learners at this level should be able to “make a significant and original contribution to a specialised field of enquiry, or to broader interdisciplinary relationships”. The interdisciplinary nature of work or study at this level is further emphasised in the HKQF by the expectation that learners should be able to “demonstrate and work with a critical overview of a subject or discipline, including an evaluative understanding of principal theories and concepts, and of its broader relationships with other disciplines”.

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

7.1.4 In the competence domain, the EQF Level 8 requires the demonstration of “substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity”. The HKQF introduces similar concepts, with the requirement that learners at this level will be able to “demonstrate leadership and originality” and work with a “high degree of autonomy”. They should also be able to “deal with complex ethical and professional issues” The HKQF has an additional requirement that people should assume “significant responsibility for others” which is absent from the EQF at this level.

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

**Conclusion: GOOD FIT**
1. **The Communications, IT and Numeracy Domain of the HKQF**

1.1 The Communications, IT and Numeracy (CITN) domain in the HKQF is very specific to Hong Kong’s education and training context. Generic Foundation Competencies in English, Chinese, IT and Numeracy at QF levels 1-4 are defined across all industries and are subsumed under this domain. The outcomes statements contained in this domain at each level of the framework are very detailed and define the achievement of specific skills sets within the areas of communications, IT and numeracy which are not specifically referred to in the EQF.

1.2 While some reference has been made in the linguistic analysis to relevant descriptors in this domain which support the determination of level-to-level alignment, it has not been possible to undertake a detailed linguistic analysis and comparison of the level descriptors in this domain with those of the EQF. However, we believe that the CITN descriptors form an important part of the HKQF and should be included in the exercise. We have therefore undertaken a conceptual comparison of the CITN descriptors with relevant descriptors in the EQF in an attempt to establish the level-to-level equivalences for this domain. Our findings are detailed below.

2 **HKQF Level 1**

2.1 The majority of the CITN descriptors at Level 1 indicate that learners must be able to demonstrate cognitive skills in order to be able to carry out the stated tasks. For instance, “read and identify the main points and ideas from documents…” and “produce and respond to a limited range of simple, written and oral communications, in familiar/routine contexts”. Level 1 of the EQF makes no mention of cognition. However, the EQF introduces “basic cognitive skills” at Level 2. In addition, Level 2 of the EQF also introduces a requirement to be able to “use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems…” which compares well to the HKQF Level 1 CITN descriptor that learners should be able to “carry out a limited rage of simple tasks to process data and access information”.

2.2 We would thus conclude that the HKQF Level 1 CITN descriptors match with EQF Level 2 descriptors.

3 **HKQF Level 2**

3.1 At HKQF Level 2, we see that there has been a vertical progression in the CITN domain in that the demands on learners have been increased. For example, we move from the requirement to read and identify the main points in a document to being able to “identify the main points and ideas in a document and reproduce them in other contexts”. Likewise, the range of circumstances in which certain cognitive skills are used is expanded from Level 1 to Level 2. For instance “limited range” becomes “defined range” and
the qualifier “very simple” is dropped. The CITN descriptors at HKQF Level 2 match well with the EQF Level 3 skills descriptor which demands “a range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information”. For example, the HKQF descriptor “produce and respond to a specified range of written and oral communications, in familiar/routine contexts” may be seen to encompass the practical and cognitive skills associated with “selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information”.

3.2 We thus conclude that the HKQF Level 2 descriptors in this domain are a good fit with EQF Level 3.

4 HKQF Level 3

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

4.2 We thus conclude that HKQF Level 3 CITN descriptors are a good fit with EQF Level 4.

5 HKQF Level 4

5.1 At Level 4 of the HKQF, the ability to apply “some advanced skills” is introduced in this domain as is the idea of operating in “new contexts”. This matches to EQF Level 5 where there is a requirement to “develop creative solutions to abstract problems” using a “comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills”. We would argue that “a wide range of routine skills and some advanced skills” is at least equivalent to “a comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills” in the EQF at Level 5.

5.2 We thus conclude that the HKQF Level 4 CITN descriptors are a good fit with EQF Level 5.

6 HKQF Level 5

6.1 At level 5 of the HKQF, the overarching descriptor for the CITN domain states “use a range of routine skills and some advanced and specialised skills in support of established practices in a subject/discipline”. This is one descriptor where a linguistic comparison with EQF is possible and we would argue that the HKQF descriptor matches well with the EQF Level 6 skills descriptor which specifies “advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation,
required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study”.

6.2 We thus conclude that the HKQF Level 5 CITN descriptors are a good fit with EQF Level 6.

7 HKQF Levels 6 and 7

7.1 At Levels 6 and 7 of the HKQF, the CITN domain does not include an overarching skills statement. The detailed descriptors identify specific advanced skills in terms of oral and written communication, use of information technology to support and enhance work and the interpretation, evaluation and application of data to achieve goals. The skills descriptors at Level 7 and 8 of the EQF prescribe “specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation” and “the most advanced and specialised skills and techniques required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation” respectively. The HKQF CITN descriptors at both Levels 6 and 7 describe very advanced skills (for example identifying refinements to existing software, undertaking critical evaluations of a wide range of data, critically evaluating numerical and graphical data and employing such data extensively).

7.2 We believe this confirms our findings that Level 6 of the HKQF is a good fit with Level 7 of the EQF and that Level 7 of the HKQF is a good fit with Level 8 of the EQF.
Appendix 7

1 Vertical Progression of Domains of HKQF

1.1 Both the European partners and the LEG requested that the Project Team demonstrate, through a vertical analysis of the domains of the HKQF that the learning outcomes in each of the domains increase in complexity through successive levels of the HKQF.

1.2 This was accomplished by undertaking a mixture of linguistic and conceptual analysis of the descriptors in the HKQF, comparing each descriptor with its nearest equivalent in the level above. This was not always a straightforward process as gradation in the domains of the descriptors is not always continuous; for example one element may be present at levels 1 and 2 but not at 3 and then reappear at level 4. There were also some overlaps with the same descriptor being used at two levels.

1.3 Overall, the Project Team was able to demonstrate, by selected examples, that there is a clear increase in complexity in each domain throughout the levels of the HKQF.

2 Knowledge and Intellectual Skills Domain

2.1 In this domain we have chosen the descriptors which deal with how learners use and process information.

2.2 At Level 1 the relevant descriptor involves a basic requirement to “receive and pass on information”. By Level 2 the complexity of this task has been increased to include a requirement for interpretation, evaluation and comparison (“make comparisons with some evaluation and interpret available information”). The Level 3 descriptor requires learners to “access, organise and evaluate information independently and make reasoned judgements in relation to a subject”. This level therefore introduces another level of complexity in that learners will no longer be passive recipients of information but will have the necessary skills to access and organise it and to work independently in making judgements in a defined area. By Level 4, there is an expectation that as well as evaluating information, learners will be able to present it to others and also use it to plan future work – “present and evaluate information, using it to plan and develop investigative strategies”. Level 5 sees an expansion of the range of information used as well as an expectation that learners will be able to reformat the information (“analyse, reformat and evaluate a wide range of information”). Levels 6 and 7 introduce the concepts of critical evaluation and creativity as well as increasing expectations with regard to the nature of the information. At Level 6 learners should be able to “critically evaluate new information…from a range of sources and develop creative responses”. Level 7 represents the pinnacle of skills in terms of processing “new, complex and abstract” information. In addition, at Level 7 there is also an expectation that learners should be able to use this information to offer “original and creative insights”; i.e. to create new knowledge.
3 Processes Domain

3.1 In the processes domain there is a clear progression in the complexity of tasks, activities and processes and the contexts in which they are being carried out.

3.2 At Level 1 we see the simplest requirements for performing “clearly defined tasks” in “closely defined and highly structured contexts”. By Level 2 there is an expectation that learners will be able to “choose from a range of procedures” in a “number of contexts, a few of which may be routine”. At Level 3 the concept of choice is widened with learners being expected to “select from a considerable choice of predetermined procedures”; and the range of contexts is also expanded to include “a variety of familiar and some unfamiliar contexts”. Specialisation and creativity are introduced at Level 4. Learners are expected to be able to “operate in a range of varied and specific contexts involving some creative and non-routine activities”. Level 5 introduces the concept of diagnostic ability alongside creativity and the context of work or study is also elevated to include technical, professional and management functions – “utilise diagnostic and creative skills in a range of technical, professional or management functions”. Level 6 further builds on the use of diagnostic and creative skills by introducing a requirement that the person should be able to use skills learned and used in one context in other situations - “transfer and apply diagnostic and creative skills in a range of situations”. Once again Level 7 represents the pinnacle of achievement by introducing the concept of originality and the creation of new knowledge into the descriptors - “develop creative and original responses to problems and issues in the context of new circumstances”. As we have seen, the concept of originality runs through all the domain descriptors at this level which equates to doctoral studies in an academic context.

4 Application, Autonomy and Accountability

4.1 In this domain we will look at the evolving nature of accountability and how accountability requirements increase from Level 1 to Level 7.

4.2 At Level 1 the descriptor states that the learner/worker should “rely entirely on external monitoring of output and quality” indicating that there is very little expectation with regard to personal responsibility or accountability. At Level 2 the concept of limited personal responsibility is introduced - “accept defined responsibility for quantity and quality of output” but there is still a reliance on external quality oversight (“subject to external quality checking”). By Level 3 the qualifier “defined” has been dropped widening the scope of the descriptor to “accept responsibility for quantity and quality of output”. Additionally the concept of assuming responsibility for the work of others is introduced at this level- “accept well defined but limited responsibility for the quantity and quality of the output of others”. At Level 4 the expectation in terms of supervisory skills is strengthened further with the replacement of the words “well defined but limited” with “some” (“accept some responsibility for the quantity and quality of the output of others”). Level 5 introduces the idea of accountability alongside responsibility and further extends the idea of
supervisory responsibility in that learners at this level are expected to “accept responsibility and accountability within broad parameters for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes”. Level 6 increases expectations with regard to independent working by stating that learners/workers should “practice significant autonomy in determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes”. Finally, at Level 7 complete autonomy and significant managerial responsibility are achieved: a “high degree of autonomy, with full responsibility for own work and significant responsibility for others”.

5 Communication, IT & Numeracy Domain

5.1 Because of the nature of the descriptors in this domain it is difficult to trace their vertical progression through all seven levels of the hierarchy. However there are some examples which do illustrate the concept of increasing complexity through the levels of the framework.

5.2 With regard to skills relating to mathematical calculations, Level 1 of the framework states that learners should be able to “carry out calculations, using whole numbers and simple decimals to given levels of accuracy”. By Level 2 calculations involve the use of percentages and graphical data – “carry out calculations, using percentages and graphical data to given levels of accuracy” and by Level 4 the complexity of calculations has increased to include “multi-stage calculations”.

5.3 The progression of descriptors covering reading and comprehension demonstrates a similar pattern. At Level 1 learners are able to “read and identify the main points and ideas from documents about straightforward subjects”. Level 2 develops this by introducing the expectation that the points and ideas identified be “reproduce(d) in other contexts”. Finally, at Level 4, both the size and complexity of the tasks has increased to include the synthesis of ideas from multiple sources and the production of well-structured reports: “read and synthesise extended information from subject documents; organise information coherently, convey complex ideas in well-structured form”.

5.4 It is perhaps the descriptors dealing with communication skills in their various forms which best illustrate the verticality through all of the levels in this domain. At Level 1 learners are expected to be able to “take part in discussions about straightforward subjects”. At Level 2 expectations are higher with regard to both the level of participation and the nature of the subject area (“take active part in discussions about identified subjects”). Level 3 of the HKQF is silent on the topic of discussion skills but by Level 4 it has been developed to include an expectation that learners will be able to lead discussions and to “present using a range of techniques to engage the audience in both familiar and new contexts”. At Level 5 of the framework the scope of presentation techniques is expanded to include both formal and informal presentations on mainstream topics such that learners should “make formal and informal presentations on standard/mainstream topics in the subject/discipline to a range of audiences”. Level 6 introduces a requirement to communicate with more specialised audiences – “communicate, using appropriate methods, to a range of audiences including peers, senior colleagues, specialists”. Finally, there are two descriptors at Level 7 which define the highest level of ability in
the area of both oral and written communication skills. The first of these demands that learners “strategically use communication skills, adapting context and purpose to a range of audiences.” The second states that learners should be able to “communicate at the standard of published academic work and/or critical dialogue”.

5.5 In all of the examples cited above there is a clear demonstration of a requirement for progressive skills development in handling an increasingly complex range of tasks in increasingly complex environments as we progress from Level 1 to Level 7 of the framework.
Appendix 8

1 External Referencing of HKQF Levels 4-7 to the Bologna Framework

1.1 In the diagrams below the descriptors for levels 4 – 7 of the HKQF are compared with the Dublin descriptors. Because the Dublin Descriptors do not use domains, these have been excluded from the tables and instead the HKQF descriptors which represent the best match for the Dublin Descriptors at each level are shown. Qualifications at the relevant level of the HKQF and one or more NQFs referenced to the EQF are then identified to support the comparison.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dublin Descriptors – Short Cycle Qualifications within the First Cycle (EQF level 5)</th>
<th>HKQF Level 4 Matching Descriptors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon general secondary education and is typically at a level supported by advanced textbooks; such knowledge provides an underpinning for a field of work or vocation, personal development, and further studies to complete the first cycle;</td>
<td>• develop a rigorous approach to the acquisition of a broad knowledge base, with some specialist knowledge in selected areas;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• can apply their knowledge and understanding in occupational contexts;</td>
<td>• deal with well-defined issues within largely familiar contexts, but extend to some unfamiliar problems;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• have the ability to identify and use data to formulate responses to well-defined concrete and abstract problems;</td>
<td>• operate in a range of varied and specific contexts involving some creative and non-routine activities;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• can communicate about their understanding, skills and activities, with peers, supervisors and clients;</td>
<td>• carry out routine lines of enquiry, development of investigation into professional level issues and problems;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• have the learning skills to undertake further studies with some autonomy</td>
<td>• present using a range of techniques to engage the audience in both familiar and some new contexts;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• read and synthesise extended information coherently, convey complex ideas in well-structured form;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• undertake self-directed and some directive study;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• take responsibility for the nature and quality of own outputs.</td>
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1.2 The Bologna Short Cycle typically covers qualifications such as the Higher National Diploma and the Associate Degree, which may be seen as intermediate qualifications en route to a Bachelor degree.

1.3 With regard to knowledge, the Dublin Descriptors for short cycle qualifications indicate that at this level, learners will be to building upon general secondary education. Level 4 of the HKQF also represents the first stage of post-secondary study in an academic context and demands that students should develop a rigorous approach to the acquisition of a broad knowledge base with some specialist knowledge.
The Dublin Descriptors at this level require an ability to formulate responses to well-defined concrete and abstract problems. This equates to the Hong Kong expectation that learners will be able to deal with well-defined issues within largely familiar contexts but extend this to some unfamiliar problems. In addition, the HKQF Level 4 descriptors require learners to be able to operate in contexts “involving some creative and non-routine activities” and “carry out routine lines of enquiry, development of investigation into professional level issues and problems”.

In terms of communication skills, the Dublin Descriptors prescribe that upon completion of a short cycle HE qualification, learners should be able to communicate about understanding, skills and activities with peers, supervisors and clients. The equivalent HKQF Level 4 descriptors require learners to be able to “present using a range of techniques to engage the audience in both familiar and some new contexts” and “convey complex ideas in a well-structured form”.

Finally the Dublin Descriptors prescribe that learners at this level should exercise some autonomy with regard to further studies. The HKQF Level 4 descriptors are not restricted to the study context but also prescribe that learners at this level should be able “undertake self-directed activity.”

HKQF Level 4 equates to the first level of post-secondary education and includes generic qualifications such as the Higher Diploma and Associate Degree, while the Bologna Short Cycle also typically covers qualifications such as the Higher National Diploma, the Associate Degree and the Foundation Degree. Given the match between the HKQF Level 4 descriptors and the Dublin Descriptors for Short Cycle Qualifications described above, we feel confident that this confirms our initial assessment based on the linguistic comparison of the HKQF Level 4 and EQF Level 5 descriptors, that HKQF Level 4 is comparable to EQF Level 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dublin Descriptors – First Cycle Qualification (EQF Level 6)</th>
<th>HKQF Level 5 Matching Descriptors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study;</td>
<td>• generate ideas though the analysis of abstract information and concepts;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and have competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving</td>
<td>• identify and analyse both routine and abstract professional problems and issues, and formulate evidence based responses;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• critically analyse, evaluate and/or synthesise ideas, concepts, information and issues;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• draw on a range of sources in making judgements;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• make formal and informal presentations on</td>
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<tr>
<td>Problems within their field of study;</td>
<td>Standard/mainstream topics in the subject/discipline to a range of audiences;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgements that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues;</td>
<td>- accept responsibility and accountability within broad parameters for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- have developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy.</td>
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1.8 In terms of the Bologna process, first cycle qualifications are the equivalent of a Bachelor degree. Hence the Dublin Descriptor relating to knowledge at this level specifies that it will include some aspects that will be “informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study” and requires that learners be able to apply it in a “professional” manner and “devise arguments and solve problems within their field of study”. This equates to the HKQF level 5 descriptor which prescribes that learners should be able to “identify and analyse both routine and abstract professional problems and issues and formulate evidence-based responses”.

1.9 The Dublin Descriptors for First Cycle qualifications introduce the requirement to be able to gather and interpret data and form judgements which include reflection on ethical issues. The HKQF Level 5 descriptors prescribe that learners should be able to ‘critically analyse, evaluate and/or synthesise ideas, concepts, information and issues” and “draw on a range of sources in making judgements” as well as “deal with ethical issues”.

1.10 With regard to communication at this level, the Dublin Descriptors require learners be able to communicate with “both specialist and non-specialist audiences” which matches the HKQF Level 5 descriptor “make formal and informal presentations on standard/mainstream topics in the subject/discipline to a range of audiences”.

1.11 Finally, the Dublin Descriptors for First Cycle qualifications prescribe that learners should be able to demonstrate a “high degree of autonomy” with regard to further learning”. The GLDs at HKQF Level 5 are not restricted to the learning environment but include the comparable outcome that learners at this level should accept “responsibility and accountability within broad parameters for determining and achieving personal… outcomes”.

1.12 The generic qualification in the First Cycle of the Bologna process is the Bachelor degree. This is also the main qualification appearing at Level 5 of the HKQF. This provides confirmation of our finding that HKQF Level 5 is
Dublin Descriptors – Second Cycle Qualification (EQF level 7) | HKQF Level 6 Matching Descriptors
---|---
• have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with the first cycle, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context; | • critically review, consolidate, and extend a systematic, coherent body of knowledge;
• can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study; | • critically review, consolidate and extend knowledge, skills, practices and thinking in a subject/discipline;
• have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements; | • conduct research, and/or advanced technical or professional activity;
• can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously; | • design and apply appropriate research methodologies;
• have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous. | • critically review, consolidate, and extend knowledge, skills, practices and thinking in a subject/discipline; and/or management functions related to products, services, operations or processes, including resourcing and evaluation;
• exercise appropriate judgement in complex planning, design, technical and/or management functions related to products, services, operations or processes, including resourcing and evaluation;
• communicate, using appropriate methods, to a range of audiences including peers, senior colleagues, specialists;
• practice significant autonomy in determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes.

1.13 The second cycle of the Bologna process follows completion of a Bachelor degree and leads to the equivalent of a Master qualification. The Dublin Descriptors at this level introduce the concept of originality in developing ideas within the context of research. Likewise, the idea of originality is introduced at HKQF Level 6 (“critically review, consolidate and extend knowledge, skills, practices and thinking in a subject discipline”) and the Level descriptors refer to the ability to perform research – “conduct research” and “design and apply appropriate research methodologies”.

1.14 Linked to the research theme, the Dublin Descriptors for Second Cycle Qualifications prescribe that learners should be able to function with “incomplete or limited information” which matches the HKQF requirement
that learners at this level should be able to “deal with complex issues and make informed judgements in the absence of complete or consistent data/information”.

1.15 In terms of communication skills, the Dublin Descriptors expect learners completing Second Cycle qualifications to be able to communicate to “specialist and non-specialist audiences”, which is comparable to the HKQF Level 6 outcome: “communicate, using appropriate methods, to a range of audiences including peers, senior colleagues, specialists”.

1.16 With regard to autonomy, the Dublin Descriptors require learning to be largely “self-directed or autonomous” which matches well with the HKQF Level 6 descriptor that learners should “practice significant autonomy in determining personal … outcomes”.

1.17 Once again, we see a good match between the Dublin Descriptors for the Second Cycle of the Bologna Process and those for HKQF Level 6. In both cases the benchmark qualification at this level is the Master degree. We can thus conclude that HKQF Level 6 is comparable to EQF Level 7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dublin Descriptors – Third Cycle Qualification (EQF Level 8)</th>
<th>HKQF Level 7 Matching Descriptors</th>
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<tr>
<td>• have demonstrated a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field;</td>
<td>• 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;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• have demonstrated the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity;</td>
<td>• demonstrate command of research and methodological issues and engage in critical dialogue;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• have made a contribution through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work, some of which merits national or international refereed publication;</td>
<td>• develop creative and original responses to problems and issues in the context of new circumstances;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• are capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas;</td>
<td>• make a significant and original contribution to a specialised field of inquiry, or to broader interdisciplinary relationships;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• can communicate with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise;</td>
<td>• identify, conceptualise and offer original and creative insights into new, complex and abstract ideas and information;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• can be expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge based society.</td>
<td>• strategically use communications skills, adapting context and purpose to a range of audiences;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• communicate at the standard of published academic work and/or critical dialogue.</td>
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1.18 The Third Cycle of the Bologna process represents the pinnacle of academic attainment and is populated by doctoral level degrees such as the PhD. At this level the Dublin Descriptors require that the learner will have acquired a systematic understanding of a field of study linked to a “mastery of the skills and methods of research linked to that field”. The HKQF at Level 7 prescribes an “evaluative understanding of the principle theories and concepts (of a subject or discipline), and its broad relationships with other disciplines”. At HKQF Level 7, learners should also be able to “demonstrate command of research and methodological issues and engage in critical dialogue”. The Dublin Descriptors prescribe that research conducted at this level should “extend(s) the frontier of knowledge” which equates to the HKQF descriptor that requires “a significant and original contribution to a specialised field of enquiry”.

1.19 At this level, the Dublin Descriptors also require that learners should be “capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas”. This is comparable to the HKQF requirement that learners be able to “identify, conceptualise and offer original and creative insights into new, complex and abstract ideas and information”.

1.20 With regard to communication skills, the Dublin Descriptors define a requirement that learners at this level should be able to communicate with “peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general”. Although the HKQF Level 7 descriptors are not so detailed in this respect, they do prescribe that learners at this level should be able to “strategically use communication skills, adapting context and purpose to a range of audiences” and that this communication be at the “standard of published academic work and/or critical dialogue”.

1.21 The Third Cycle of the Bologna process represents the pinnacle of academic attainment and is populated by doctoral level degrees such as the PhD. Level 7 of the HKQF also consists of doctoral degrees, confirming our conclusions that HKQF Level 7 is comparable to EQF Level 8.