

HKQF International Conference 2018

Keynote Speech by Mr Kevin YEUNG, JP

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The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

HKQF: Retrospect and Prospect

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning. On behalf of the Education Bureau of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) Government, I would like to extend a very warm welcome to you all for joining the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework International Conference 2018 today. This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (QF), and we are honoured to have QF experts as well as partners from around the world joining us for the Conference. On this occasion, our speakers will share insights on major developments and best practices in the world, and examine the future roadmap of QFs in the changing landscape of education and skills training.

Retrospect: What led to the establishment of Hong Kong QF?

2. First of all, I would like to take some time to recapitulate the key historical development of QF in Hong Kong. In early 2000s, the advent of technologies and rapid globalisation triggered fundamental changes to the economic structure around the world. To maintain our competitiveness, Hong Kong made substantial efforts to transform ourselves into a knowledge-based economy. However, the education and training system at that time was inadequate in fostering a vibrant, flexible and responsive environment that promoted lifelong learning. There was a proliferation of qualifications in the market, which lacked common benchmarks of quality. Both learners and industry were uncertain about the outcomes of education and training and whether their needs were adequately met. Clear progression ladders were unavailable for learners to draw up their roadmaps to upgrade themselves. There was an imminent need to provide individuals with opportunities to optimise their potential, so as to meet the changing demands of the economy.

3. To address these inadequacies and foster an environment conducive to lifelong learning, the Hong Kong SAR Government decided to develop a framework that would enable the development of flexible and diverse progression pathways with multiple entry and exit points. The framework should have the following essential elements.

4. First, there should be common benchmarks in the framework for quality assurance of qualifications. Second, the framework should provide a platform applicable to academic, vocational as well as continuing education sectors to facilitate articulation and maximise flexibility of learning. Third, industry training specifications should be drawn up under the framework to ensure that the skills and standards required of the workforce would be included in the outcomes of qualifications. With these clear elements in mind, we established the Hong Kong QF in 2008 such that learners could draw up their own roadmaps to acquire qualifications to upgrade themselves and pursue lifelong learning at different stages and through different channels. We were also aware that the QF had become a common feature in overseas education and training systems, including Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. Looking back, we are very proud that Hong Kong took this important step to formulate our QF to promote quality and relevance of education and training, which has proved to be a critical development in nurturing human capital for Hong Kong.

5. Some people might find the concept of QF a bit abstract. At its simplest, the Hong Kong QF is a seven-level hierarchy of qualifications. The Hong Kong QF not only provides the **destinations** for learners and employers by outlining clearly what a holder of a certain qualification knows and can do, it also provides the **pathways** between qualifications so that learners can understand how to reach their destinations.

Present: How far have we gone?

6. Implementation of the Hong Kong QF is underpinned by three important concepts, and we believe that they will continue to drive the development of QF in the next decade. They are “quality”, “recognition” and “progression”.

(a) Quality - Uplifting the Quality of Qualifications

7. The first concept I would like to highlight is **quality**. As a credible qualifications system, a robust quality assurance mechanism is one of the pillars of the Hong Kong QF. When the Hong Kong QF was established, we also built the corresponding legal framework for the quality assurance mechanism together with the appointment of an independent statutory quality assurance body, the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (or in short the HKCAAVQ). The legal framework for the quality assurance system is a valuable infrastructure supporting the development of the Hong Kong QF.

8. Except the nine local self-accrediting universities, all other operators and their programmes and qualifications have to go through the accreditation process by the HKCAAVQ before they can be recognised by the Hong Kong QF. The HKCAAVQ has been one of the closest partners of the Hong Kong QF over the last decade to make sure that the governance structure, academic standards, teacher quality and quality assurance mechanisms of the course operators and their qualifications are up to standard. A good quality assurance mechanism also supports a coherent qualifications system which enables smooth interfacing of academic, vocational and continuing education, in which traditional distinctions between the sectors have become blurred. For the vocational sector, effective quality assurance system is essential to improve the quality and relevance of vocational and professional education and training programmes. With the opening up of the operation of training programmes to more “non-traditional” operators in the vocational sectors, it has called for new approaches in quality assurance measures.

9. Guest speakers will share in this Conference their valuable insights on “Good Practices in Quality Assurance” amidst the challenges brought by the increasingly diversified and growing market in education and manpower training.

(b) Progression - Linking Learning with Employment

10. The second concept I would like to talk about is “**progression**”. Since the establishment of the Hong Kong QF, we have spared no effort in ensuring that this qualifications system can support our learners to progress through lifelong learning and skills upgrading. It is an emerging trend of international qualifications system to forge closer links between learning and employment in response to the fast changing labour market. In Hong Kong, we place a strong emphasis on using the QF as a platform for promoting progression in employment.

11. Apart from refining the academic outcome standards under our qualifications system to take heed of the education and training needs, we also work very closely with the 23 industries¹ in which the Hong Kong QF is implemented to ensure that the outcome standards of qualifications, or competencies, in the vocational sector can meet the needs of the industries. We are very grateful to our Industry Training Advisory Committees for their invaluable support to promoting the Hong Kong QF. These Committees comprise representatives of employers, employees, professional bodies and regulatory bodies. They are indispensable partners of the Hong Kong QF as they provide professional advice on up-to-date training needs and manpower development for the respective industries and draw up competency standards in respect of key functional areas of the industries. These competency standards facilitate training providers to formulate learning programmes that best meet the needs of the industries, thus further enhance the synergy between learning and employment and facilitate the building up of progression ladders. Success of the Hong Kong QF’s development on this front is evident by the increasing number of employers participating in the provision of QF-accredited in-house training for their staff.

¹ The 23 industries include Arboriculture & Horticulture, Automotive, Banking, Beauty, Catering, Elderly Care Service, Electrical & Mechanical Services, Fashion, Hairdressing, Human Resource Management, Import & Export, Information & Communications Technology, Insurance, Jewellery, Logistics, Manufacturing Technology (Tooling, Metals & Plastics), Printing & Publishing, Property Management, Retail, Security Services, Testing, Inspection & Certification, Travel as well as Watch & Clock.

12. We are grateful to have guest speakers from Europe and Asia-Pacific who will elaborate on the global emerging trends of QFs in building a closer link between learning and employment. Some employers will also share their experience on how the Hong Kong QF can facilitate an alternative pathway for progression and learning.

(c) Recognition - Bringing HKQF to the Globe

13. Another concept I would like to highlight is “recognition”. Being one of the world’s freest economies, Hong Kong is well placed to further develop itself as a regional education hub with world-class universities and quality institutions. To attract quality overseas students to study in Hong Kong and increase the exposure of our local students, the Hong Kong QF plays an important role in facilitating recognition of qualifications with our overseas counterparts. We have completed four benchmarking or comparability studies with the QFs of the European Union, Scotland, Ireland and New Zealand. These studies not only enhance the profile of the Hong Kong QF internationally and promote the mobility of learners with recognised qualifications, but also illustrate Hong Kong’s role in the international education arena.

14. Looking forward, we will continue the collaboration with our partners including the European Commission, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership, the Quality and Qualifications Ireland and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority. Besides, Hong Kong hopes to contribute to the setting up of our country’s QF based on our experience in the implementation of the one in Hong Kong. At the same time, Hong Kong is ready to continue to engage our international counterparts to extend the network of the Hong Kong QF.

Prospect: The Future of HKQF

15. I am proud to witness that over the last decade, we have built up solid infrastructure of a quality qualifications system that supports progression and fosters recognition. More and more organisations, institutions and employers recognise the importance of the Hong Kong QF and adopt it in their recruitment, training, promotion and student admission. Nevertheless, there is no room for complacency and we

need to remain prudent in promoting our qualifications system so that it will continue meeting the education and training needs of our society. We will focus on the wider application of the Hong Kong QF to enhance recognition of qualifications for different industries, and facilitate learners' pursuit of a wide array of quality-assured pathways for further studies and career development. In particular, the development of the Hong Kong QF will augment the Government's initiative to **step up promotion for vocational and professional education and training (or in short VPET)**.

16. I would now like to briefly introduce two recent initiatives under the Hong Kong QF which would enable it to better support VPET.

(a) Alignment of Professional Qualifications

17. First, we would like to send a strong and clear message to the community that the Hong Kong QF encompasses also professional qualifications that can be attained through the vocational route. We have just introduced a new initiative this month to recognise professional qualifications under the Hong Kong QF. Before the launching of the new initiative, qualifications recognised under the Hong Kong QF were confined to those obtained from completion of learning programmes as well as through the "Recognition of Prior Learning" mechanism for recognising work experiences and competencies. Now, the Hong Kong QF also recognises professional qualifications granted by bona fide local organisations that are not underpinned by associated learning programmes.

18. Recognition of professional qualifications is a big step forward for both the Hong Kong QF and VPET. The new initiative not only promotes a wider application of the Hong Kong QF, but also uplifts the professional image of VPET. For example, the Hong Kong QF now recognises the Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants and the Marine Department of the Hong Kong SAR Government for issuing Associate Level qualification and seven types of seafarer licences² respectively. Among these Hong Kong QF-recognised professional qualifications, five of them are pitched at Hong Kong QF Level 5, the

² Namely Certificates of Competency (CoCs) for Deck Officer Class 3, Class 2 and Class 1; CoCs for Marine Engineer Officer Class 3, Class 2 and Class 1; and CoC for Electro-technical Officer.

same level as degree qualifications; while the remaining three qualifications are pitched at Hong Kong QF Level 4, the same level as sub-degree qualifications. These professional qualifications do not require entrants to possess a degree qualification beforehand, but with adequate industry or professional experience as well as completion of robust assessments, people opting for VPET could also attain the professional level.

(b) Building up a Clear Vocational Qualifications Pathway

19. Apart from uplifting the professional image of VPET, we are also making use of the Hong Kong QF to draw up clear progression pathway in different industries for learners, while helping employers to formulate clear matching of skills and competence for different roles. By drawing up vocational qualifications pathway, we identify the QF Level, scope of learning, industry competency standards required, learning outcomes and assessment criteria of the required occupation-based qualifications for each principal job role.

20. The vocational qualification pathway can ensure that occupation-based qualifications would best meet the needs of the industries and assure that the abilities of the qualification holders could perform the occupations concerned well. It gives confidence to learners pursuing VPET that clear career ladders are available in different industries. After entering the industries, the pathway also facilitates practitioners' career planning and advancement by clearly setting out the requisite competencies to handle tasks effectively in different positions. We have now developed the vocational qualification pathway for the automotive, banking and property management industries, and we are extending its development to other industries in phases.

21. We are very pleased to have Dr Carrie Yau, Executive Director of the Vocational Training Council to join us. Dr Yau and our other speakers from different sectors will share their vision on how the Hong Kong QF can better respond to new challenges in skills training and support VPET in the coming decade.

22. Ladies and Gentlemen, before bringing my session to a close, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude for your support to the Conference again. It is a very meaningful occasion for everyone who is involved in the implementation of the Hong Kong QF.

23. I hope you will all have fruitful exchanges in the Conference. Let's continue to join hands to bring the advancement of QFs around the world to new heights. Thank you very much.