Guidelines on Development of Vocational Qualifications Pathways under Hong Kong Qualifications Framework

Purpose

1. This set of guidelines provides a reference for stakeholders involved in or interested in the development of Vocational Qualifications Pathways (VQPs) under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF). It sets out the guiding principles and describes the processes involved for developing VQPs in two contexts:

(i) For the 23 QF-implementing industries that have established Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITAC)[1];

(ii) For other relevant industries or professions.

Background

2. A VQP provides a roadmap for learning and employment progression within an industry or profession. Learners and practitioners can advance through various job posts by attaining occupation-based VQP qualifications recognised under the HKQF. These qualifications are built on the core competencies required for specific job posts, as identified by relevant ITACs or authorities composed of major stakeholders.

3. By developing QF-recognised, quality assured VQP qualifications in a hierarchical structure for different tiers of job posts across various industry streams, VQPs effectively connect education and training with the workplace. This creates clear and transparent learning and career progression pathways, fostering talent attraction and retention while encouraging practitioners to enhance their skills through continuous learning.

4. Since 2015, pilot projects in the Property Management, Automotive and

[1] Arboriculture & Horticulture, Automotive, Banking, Beauty, Hairdressing, Catering, Elderly Care Service, Electrical & Mechanical Services, Fashion, 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, Watch & Clock

Banking industries have laid the groundwork for VQP development. The scope of VQP has been expanding to include other QF-implementing industries to meet emerging manpower needs. As announced in the 2022 Policy Address, the QF Secretariat will strengthen collaboration with industries to expedite the development of VQP, aiming to increase the number of industries adopting VQPs under the HKQF from 6 to at least 18 within the following five years.

Guiding Principles of VQPs

5. The VQPs developed under the HKQF are governed by the following principles, grouped into three categories.

5.1 Development and Design

5.1.1 Industry Representativeness

The development process involves specific ITACs and/or relevant authorities composed of representatives from major industry stakeholders. This ensures the VQPs are aligned with industry needs, enhancing their relevance, representativeness and recognition.

5.1.2 Job Analysis Approach

Development of VQPs must undergo thorough job and task analysis processes to identify specific tasks and responsibilities associated with various job posts. This ensures relevant industry expertise and competency requirements are incorporated into VQP qualifications.

5.1.3 Occupation Specificity

VQPs cater to the qualification requirements specific to individual job posts within their respective industry streams.

5.1.4 Competency Focus

VQPs focus on developing qualifications centred around specific core competencies, including knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours, as well as

performance standards required for individual job posts.

5.2 Structure and Standards

5.2.1 Hierarchical Structure

VQPs are structured hierarchically, offering VQP qualifications at different tiers for specific job posts to support continuous learning and career progression.

5.2.2 QF-level Rating and QF Credit Bearing

VQP qualifications apply the Generic Level Descriptors to define the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours required for the core tasks and responsibilities of specific job posts at different QF levels. Where the core competencies span multiple QF levels, the qualification is set at the QF level that accounts for over 50% of the total QF credits, thereby reflecting both the dominant credit weighting and the highest competency level.

5.2.3 Outcome-based Approach

VQP qualifications are designed to ensure the attainment of specified outcome standards through appropriate assessment methods, ensuring learners develop the practical core competencies required.

5.2.4 Quality Assurance

VQPs undergo industry consultation and rigorous quality assurance processes conducted by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) to ensure they meet quality standards and comply with HKQF standards.

5.3 Implementation and Utility

5.3.1 Adoptability

VQPs developed are typically published as shared resources unless approved otherwise to facilitate wider replication and adoption by education and

training providers and promote industry-wide recognition.

5.3.2 Applicability

The core competencies identified in VQPs can be utilised to develop training packages, learning programmes, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) qualifications, etc. to meet specific industry needs. Education and training providers are required to fully incorporate all core competencies specified in the VQPs into the intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities, and assessments of their VQP learning programmes. However, they retain flexibility to define the entry requirements, credit size, and learning content of the learning programmes unless specified otherwise.

Development Process

6. While sharing similar guiding principles, the VQP development process differs in the following two contexts:

(i) 23 QF-implementing industries with an established ITAC;

(ii) Other relevant industries or professions.

6.1 For Industries with an Established ITAC

A 4-step development process is adopted, with the key deliverables for each step outlined in detail in Annex A.

(i) Step 1: Environmental Scan
(ii) Step 2: Job Analysis
(iii) Step 3: UoC Development, Mapping and Clustering
(iv) Step 4: Consultation and Moderation

This 4-step development process involves mapping Units of Competency (UoCs) from Specification of Competency Standards (SCSs) developed under the steer of a specific ITAC to respective job posts in various industry streams. A professional writer team is usually engaged, with the support of the QF Secretariat, to conduct extensive task and job analysis, stakeholder

engagement, and industry consultation. It charts learning and progression pathways based on the UoCs and SCSs, packaging UoCs into clusters as constituents for VQP qualifications. This enables education and training providers to design relevant VQP learning programmes and helps industry stakeholders understand the competency profile of VQP qualification holders for recruitment and professional development purposes.

6.2 For Other Relevant Industries or Professions

The VQP development process starts with job analysis rather than Specifications of Competency Standards (SCSs). It achieves equivalent rigour and industry alignment through governance by relevant authorities. The VQPs developed are equally valid, as all core competencies are derived from comprehensive job analysis, validated by the relevant industry authority, and subjected to rigorous HKCAAVQ quality assurance to ensure compliance with HKQF standards. A 4-step development process is adopted, as detailed in Annex B.

(i) Step 1: Invitation and Preparation
(ii) Step 2: Proposal Submission and Evaluation
(iii) Step 3: VQP Development and Assessment
(iv) Step 4: Publishing of VQP Information

This mechanism applies to industries or professions where an authority, bureau, government department, or statutory body with human capital development roles similar to an ITAC is available. The construction sector, represented by the Construction Industry Council (CIC) and Hong Kong Institute of Construction (HKIC), is considered appropriate for the first trial because of its expertise and proven track record in developing QF learning programmes for a variety of construction occupations and trades, as well as in establishing continuous learning and professional development pathways for the industry. In this context, the CIC performs a role analogous to an ITAC by approving the VQPs and core competency requirements for specific occupations.

7. Despite different organisational backgrounds, VQPs developed in both contexts share the same characteristics. Detailed mechanisms with workflows and reference templates are provided in Annexes A and B, respectively.

Applications

8. The core competencies identified for specific job posts within their respective industry streams, as outlined in the VQPs, can be effectively utilised to create Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) qualifications, learning programmes and training packages. These resources cater to the industry's manpower development requirements. Examples are provided below, with more details available on the HKQF website. (www.hkqf.gov.hk)

Industry	Example
Automotive	Four QF level 3 RPL qualifications developed from VQP clusters for related job posts are recognised by the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) for registration under the "Voluntary Registration Scheme for Vehicle Mechanics".
Elderly Care Service	Learning Programmes developed from related VQP clusters for the following job posts are recognised by the Social Welfare Department: ● Care Worker (QF level 2) ● Health Worker (QF level 3) ● Home Manager / Health & Care Practitioner (QF level 4)
Security Services	Five training packages at QF levels 1, 2 and 4 were developed from UoCs selected from VQP clusters for related job posts.

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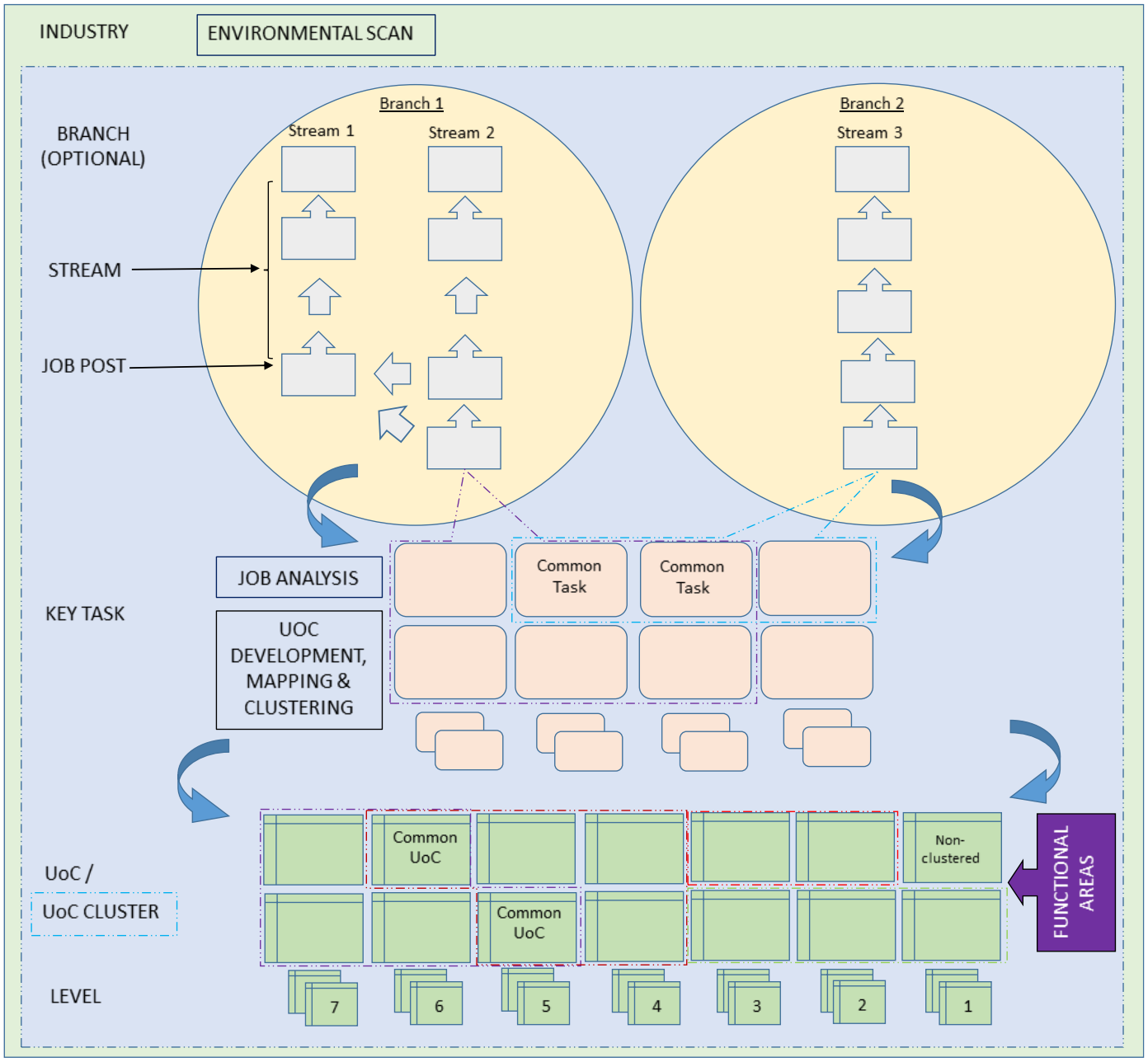
Annex A

(A.1) 4-Step VQP Development Process for Industries with an Established ITAC

Key Deliverables for Each Step
Step 1: Environmental Scan
1A. Industry Analysis: A comprehensive report on Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental (PESTLE) scan findings. 1B. Progression Pathways: A researched diagram mapping the hierarchical structure of principal and emerging job posts within and across the identified streams. 1C. Preliminary Functional Areas: A researched diagram providing an initial overview of the functional areas involved in the industry / branch (optional), on the understanding that further refinement may be required during Job Analysis in Step 2. 1D. Research and Stakeholders Engagement Plan: An initial plan outlining the research and stakeholders engagement strategies for quality assurance.
Step 2: Job Analysis
2A. Job Analysis Matrix: A comprehensive table mapping the key tasks associated with each job post to refined functional areas. 2B. Job Description: A narrative description of the general tasks, duties, and responsibilities of a specific job post. 2C. Key Tasks Mapped with Functional Areas: A breakdown of all tasks described in terms of outcomes (using action verbs, objects, and context/ condition). These tasks are associated with specific functional areas and may be divided into one or more Units of Competency (UoCs).

Key Deliverables for Each Step
Step 3: UoC Development, Mapping and Clustering
3A. UoCs: A complete set of UoCs presented in a standardised format, including title, code, range, level, credit, competencies (knowledge, skills, and attitude and behaviour), assessment criteria and remarks. 3B. Progression Pathways Mapped with UoCs: An expanded diagram and matrix of the 1B: Progression Pathways and 2A: Job Analysis Matrix displaying vertical job post ladders and categorising the related UoCs required for each job post. This highlights logical UoC clusters and proposes appropriate QF levels/credits. 3C. UoCs Distribution per Functional Areas: A summary table providing an overview of the UoC distribution across functional areas. 3D. Credit Assignment Procedures: A description of the process for assigning credits to the UoCs, along with the associated quality assurance procedures. 3E. List of Non-Clustered UoCs (if any): A comprehensive list of any UoCs not part of a cluster, accompanied by justifications for their inclusion.
Step 4: Consultation and Moderation
4A. Post-consultation version of SCS: The final version of the Specification of Competency Standards (SCS) following moderation and subsequent refinements.

(A.2) Conceptual Diagram of SCS Structure



(A.3) Key Terminologies

Terms	Description
Industry	A sector of an economy comprising businesses or organisations engaged in similar activities, products, or services.
Branch (Optional)	● A significant segment within an industry characterised by similar economic activities. ● Not applicable to all industries and subject to findings of the industry analysis.
Stream	● A group of occupations within a broad field of practice, connected by the knowledge, skills and capabilities required for a broadly defined vocation that encompasses both educational and occupational progression. ● Progression pathways within different streams form the primary dimension of the SCS development; while the functional areas associated with individual UoCs represent the secondary dimension. ● A stream may have multiple progression pathways, each with different number of job posts.
Job Post	● A broad term encompassing a range of job titles within a specific sector or industry that an individual aspires to work in. ● Vertical, lateral, and diagonal progressions are permissible for job posts across different progression pathways.
Key Task	● A specific self-contained work activity that can be identified and assessed. ● Individual key tasks may be common across job posts derived from the same or different progression pathways.

Terms	Description
UoC / UoC Cluster	● The development of UoCs and UoC clusters for job posts in different streams is the primary objective of the SCS development project. ● The design of UoCs and assignment of levels and credit sizes should reference the Generic Level Descriptors and the credit assignment procedures established by the Professional Writer. ● A UoC cluster represents a meaningful and logical grouping of competencies formed by one or more UoCs. The number of composite UoCs and credit size of UoC clusters should be reasonably designed to ensure portability. ● While UoCs are generally developed to form specific clusters, any exceptions should be highlighted with explanations. ● Individual UoCs may be shared among key tasks of job posts derived from the same or different progression pathways, as well as different UoC clusters. ● The level of a UoC cluster is generally determined by the level to which the majority of associated UoCs belong. ● The proposed codes and titles of UoCs and UoC should clearly differentiate them from one another.

(A.4) Reference Templates

Step 1: Environmental Scan

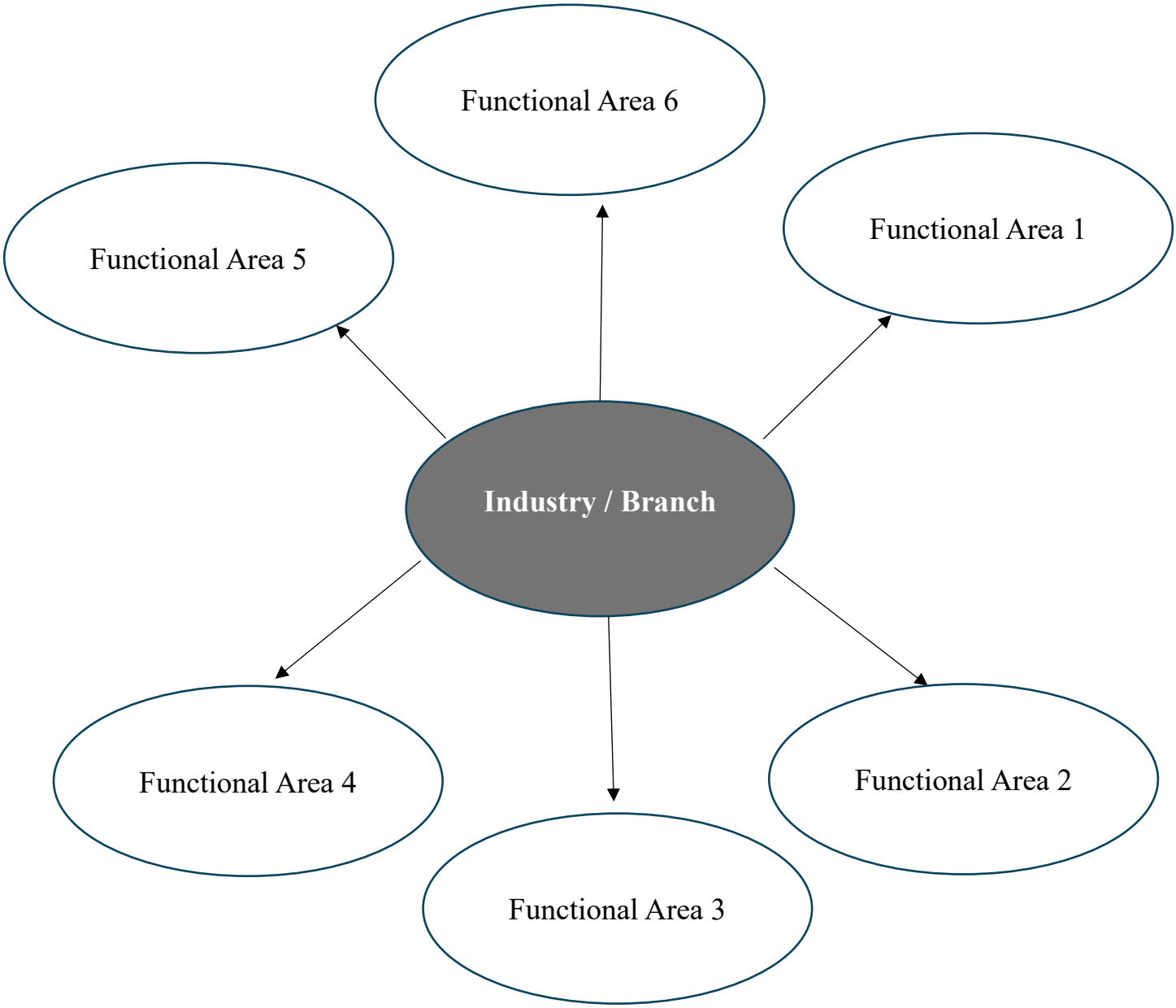
1A: Industry Analysis

A comprehensive report analysing the findings of a scan on Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental factors (PESTLE), along with a preliminary assessment of their implications for the competency requirements of the specific occupations or industry streams.

1B: Progression Pathways

Stream	Stream 1	Stream 2	Stream 3
Job Post	Job Post C ↑ Job Post B ↑ Job Post A	Job Post F ↑ Job Post E ↑ Job Post D	Job Post J ↑ Job Post I ↑ Job Post H ↑ Job Post G

1C: Preliminary Functional Areas

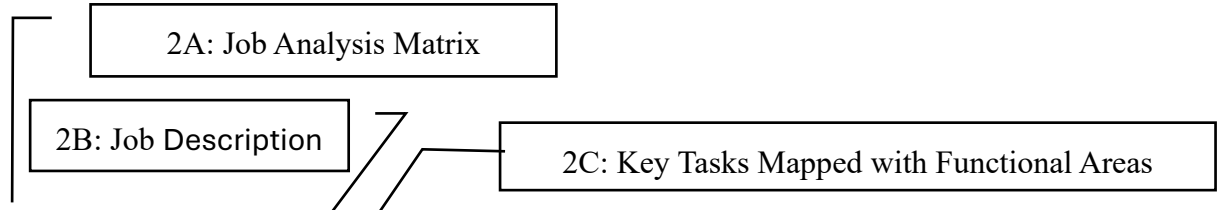


1D: Research and Stakeholders Engagement Plan

Research or Stakeholder	**Method** ***(e.g. literature review, questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, etc)***	**Name of Material/ Organisation** ***(e.g. literature, employers, trade unions, professional bodies, HR experts etc)***	**Targeted Respondents** ***(e.g. name, post, etc)***	**Purpose** ***(e.g. consultation on specific functional area, triangulation, etc)***	**Timeframe**

Step 2: Job Analysis

2A, 2B & 2C: Job Analysis Matrix, Job Description and Key Tasks Mapped with Functional Areas (Initial Mapping)



Stream	
Job Post	
Job Description	XXXXXXXXXX

Key Tasks, UoC Title & Functional Areas

Key Task	UoC Title	Functional Areas					
		F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6

Step 3: UoC Development, Mapping & Clustering

3A: Unit of Competency (UoC)

Title	
Code	
Range	
Level	
Credit	
Competency Requirements	6.1 6.2 6.3
Assessment Criteria	
Remarks	

3B: Progression Pathways Mapped with UoCs

Stream	
Job Post	
Job Description	
Key Tasks & UoC Information	

Key Task	UoC Code	UoC Title	UoC Level	UoC Credit	Cluster Title	Cluster Level	Cluster Credit

3C: UoCs Distribution per Functional Areas

Functional Area	**QF Level**							
	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Total
F1								
F2								
F3								
F4								
F5								
F6								
Total								

3D: Credit Assignment Procedures

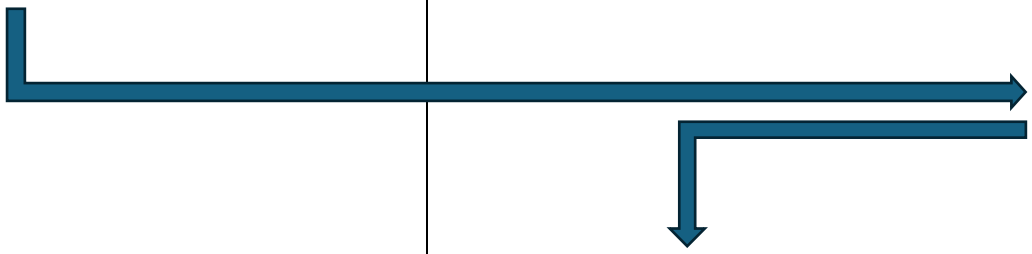
#	Aspect	Description
1	Underpinning Principles of Credit Assignment Process	
2	Application of Credit Assignment Principles	
3	Stakeholders Identification and Engagement	
4	Verification of Assigned Credit Values	
5	Review of Assigned Credit Values	

3E: List of Non-Clustered UoCs, if any

No.	Non-clustered UoC	Reason
N1.		
N2.		
N3.		
N4.		
N5.		

Annex B

(B.1) 4-Step VQP Development Process for Other Relevant Industries / Professions

Step	QFS / EDB	Target Authority / Organisation	HKCAAVQ (VQ)
【Step 1】 Invitation and Preparation	A. Identify target industry / profession and invite the related authority / organisation to submit proposals.		*[Assess and advise on suitability]*
【Step 2】 Proposal Submission and Evaluation	 C. Evaluate proposal in conjunction with VQ and refer the authority / organisation to VQ for a VQP assessment.	B. Prepare and submit a proposal to QFS using the reference template (attached).	
【Step 3】 VQP Development and Accreditation Exercise			D. Validate programmes to determine whether if VQP qualification requirements are met. E. Notify QFS and the authority / organisation of the outcome.
【Step 4】 Publishing of VQP Information	 H. Link to the authority's / organisation's webpage containing key VQP information.	F. Publish the programmes on the QR (with remarks stating its VQP nature) and VQP information (e.g. progression pathways, core competency standards of job posts, etc) on the authority's / organisation's website.	 G. Approve tagging courses with VQP designation on the QR.

(B.2) Proposal for Development of Industry-based Vocational Qualifications Pathways (Reference Template)

1. Introduction

2. Organisation

2.1 Organisation Name
2.2 Relevant Industry / Profession
2.3 Organisation Background and Legal Status
2.4 Vision and Mission
2.5 Educational Philosophy
2.6 Governance Structure
2.7 Capability and Experience in Operating Outcome-based Programmes
2.8 Rationale and Objectives for Application

3. Vocational Qualifications Pathways (VQPs)

3.1 Relevant Job Posts
- 3.1.1 Associated Branch / Stream
- 3.1.2 Job Title
- 3.1.3 Progression Pathways
- 3.1.4 Summary of Key Duties
- 3.1.5 Estimated Number of Practitioners

3.2 Summary of Core Competencies for the Relevant Job Posts Confirmed through an Appropriate Mechanism

3.3 Detailed Description of Core Competencies for the Relevant Job Posts (Based on job analysis, detail the required knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours, performance requirements, outcome standards, QF Level and QF Credit. Please refer to the QF Generic Level Descriptors. Descriptions should start with an action verb, incorporating the context and method of application, to articulate the required performance standards and the demonstrable level of knowledge and skills.)

4. Programme Content and Assessment

4.1 Relevant Job Posts
4.2 Programme QF-recognition Status (or Planned Submission for Accreditation)
4.3 Programme Operator Name

4.4 Awarding Body Name
4.5 Programme Objectives
4.6 Entry Requirements
4.7 QF Credit
4.8 QF Level
4.9 QR Registration Number
4.10 Registration Validity Period
4.11 Intended Learning Outcomes (must correspond with Section 3)
4.12 Programme Structure (Themes and content must correspond to the Intended Learning Outcomes and indicate the allocation of notional learning hours)
4.13 Assessment (Assessment tasks must correspond to the Intended Learning Outcomes, with details on mode, weighting and criteria)
4.14 Other Information: Please provide the programme and assessment outline (if available)