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Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of
Academic & Vocational Qualifications

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Mrs Carrie Lam, GBS, JP
Chief Secretary for Administration
Chairman, Steering Committee on Population Policy
c/o Secretariat of the Steering Committee
26/F, Central Government Offices
2 Tim Mei Avenue, Tamar
Hong Kong

Dear Mrs Lam

Re: HKCAAVQ Response to the Population Policy Consultation Document

On 24 October 2013, the Government launched a four-month public engagement exercise with the release of the Population Policy Consultation Document (the Consultation Document).

As you know, the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) takes up the statutory roles as the Accreditation Authority and Qualifications Register Authority under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework. Deliberation has been made on how the HKCAAVQ could contribute to the strategic objectives and respond to the consultation questions specific to areas on education and training.

On behalf of the HKCAAVQ, it is my pleasure to enclose our Response to the Consultation Document for the Steering Committee's consideration.

Yours sincerely

Professor LEE Keng-mun, William
Executive Director

**HONG KONG COUNCIL FOR ACCREDITATION OF
ACADEMIC AND VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS**

Introduction

1. On 24 October 2013 the Government launched a four-month public engagement exercise with the release of the Population Policy Consultation Document (the Consultation Document).
2. The Steering Committee on Population Policy (SCPP) considers that a sustainable population policy should have the vision of enhancing our human capital to sustain Hong Kong as Asia's world city. Acknowledging that Hong Kong's future lies in economic development and social progress going hand in hand, the SCPP proposes that the objective of Hong Kong's population policy should be:

“To develop and nurture a population that will continuously support and drive Hong Kong's socio-economic development as Asia's world city, and to engender a socially inclusive and cohesive society that allows individuals to realise their potential, with a view to attaining quality life for all residents and families.”

(para. 1.17 & 1.22, p.9, Consultation Document)

3. The SCPP proposes to tackle the population challenges through the following five policy strategies *(para. 1.23, p.10, Consultation Document)*:
 - (a) Increase the quantity of the labour force by encouraging more people to work or to work longer.
 - (b) Improve the quality of the labour force by improving education and training and minimising skills mismatch.
 - (c) Adopt a more proactive strategy and targeted approach to attract talent from overseas and the Mainland, and consider a more effective importation of labour system without jeopardising the interests of local workers.
 - (d) Explore effective measures to remove barriers to childbearing and consider how the care-giving responsibility could be shared by families and our community.
 - (e) Tap the valuable pool of elderly resources through building an age-friendly environment, promoting active ageing and developing the silver hair market.

Specific Topics Related to Education and Training

4. In accordance with the five strategies identified by the SCPP, the Consultation Document sets out in its five Chapters key issues and questions. Of these, the six consultation questions outlined in Chapters 2 and 3 are considered the ones

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most related to education and training and the work of the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ).

Chapter 2 “Unleashing the Potential of Existing Population”

- (i) How to encourage female homemakers to work and to extend the work life of early retirees?
- (ii) How to help new arrivals, persons with disabilities and ethnic minorities join the labour force through education and training while achieving social integration?

Chapter 3 “Enhancing the Quality of our Home-grown Talent”

- (iii) How to get ourselves better informed of the types of talent/skill required to drive our economic development?
- (iv) How to improve the quality of our post-secondary education and to align it closer with the needs of our economic development and employers?
- (v) How to revive the value of and inspire interest in vocational education for improving skills matching and increasing job diversity?
- (vi) How to further promote continuing learning?

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- (i) How to encourage female homemakers to work and to extend the work life of early retirees?

- 5. The disadvantage faced by female homemakers in terms of education and training and access to workforce participation is that their existing qualifications may no longer be relevant to the skills required in a wide range of occupations or that their post school learning has been largely informal or non-formal. To encourage female homemakers to return to work, some institutional recognition should be given to their informal and non-formal learning (along with other measures) which would allow them to trade back into the qualifications system to upgrade or gain new skills. **Hong Kong has a developed mechanism of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) under the Qualifications Framework (QF) for industries with Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs). A similar system for recognition of non-formal and informal learning is also needed.** We note that the Education Bureau (EDB) is looking into the feasibility of developing a mechanism to validate informal and non-formal learning under the QF. We fully support this development.
- 6. Refresher or short term courses of ‘bite-sized’ skill sets should be made available that will bring the skills of women who have been out of the workforce back up to par. Such programmes should be offered flexibly in blended learning arrangements where possible. The HKCAAVQ could be tasked to accredit these programmes and place them on the Qualifications Register (QR).
- 7. Extending the work life of early retirees also involves recognition of skills (along with other measures). Hong Kong has an aging workforce and many retired

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workers have a depth of skills obtained through their experience in the workforce but may have lower levels of formal qualifications than new entrants in the labour market. Early retirees in Hong Kong are relatively young and many are still capable of continuing with work or embarking on new careers. **Strategies are needed to increase the recognition of a full range of prior learning and to provide early retirees access to training programmes to upgrade their skills, particularly in promoting familiarity with new technologies.** Any prior learning and work experience that has not been included in accredited programmes should be picked up by the RPL or other recognition mechanisms as appropriate.

8. Strategies should be developed to capture the expertise of early retirees and provide them with the opportunity to become trainers and tutors in the “continued learning” process of related trades and professions. While the HKCAAVQ would not develop train-the-trainer courses, we would have a role in accrediting such a framework of qualifications in training that could then be matched with specific industries. The accreditation of Vocational English Courses is a recent example of work of this kind. Retirees’ expertise and experience in related trades and professions would also be a valuable resource to extend the HKCAAVQ’s pool of Specialists by serving as panel members or providing expert advice to accreditation panels.

(ii) How to help new arrivals, persons with disabilities and ethnic minorities join the labour force through education and training while achieving social integration?

9. The adaptation of outcome-based learning has made it possible to credit learners’ achievement at every level, whatever learning pathway they may have followed, and at whatever rate they have acquired the necessary competence. This paves the way for the recognition of prior learning in general.
10. What is also needed to support these learners to access the labour force (along with other measures) is a flexible system of credit accumulation that allows both portability and progression. **The development of a Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) system will be an important tool, along with the RPL mechanism under the QF and recognition of non-formal and informal learning to assist these groups to join the labour force and achieve social integration.**
11. For many new arrivals, their unfamiliar non-local qualifications may also disadvantage them from joining the labour force. **To help new arrivals, the Government may consider supporting or subsidizing new arrivals to have their non-local qualifications assessed by the HKCAAVQ** thus allowing them to have a head start in seeking employment. Retirees could also be valuable resources to help train new arrivals to quickly join the labour force. The HKCAAVQ could have a role in accrediting a framework of qualifications obtained through train-the-trainer courses for retirees in the context of training new arrivals to join the Hong Kong labour force.

(iii) How to get ourselves better informed of the types of talent/skill required to drive our economic development?

12. In vocational education and training (VET), Specifications of Competency Standards (SCS) are being progressively developed by ITACs which provide a platform for employers, employees, professional bodies and other stakeholders to exchange their views on manpower development and upgrading for each industry. These competency standards relate directly to job roles and would enhance the understanding of education and training providers of exactly what competencies industries need and allow providers to design programmes to meet these needs.
13. Training programmes developed with reference to the SCS should provide focused training to cater for industry needs at different levels. The HKCAAVQ bridges training programmes and industries by actively facilitating on the one hand the accreditation of SCS-based training programmes by conducting briefing sessions to potential training providers, and on the other hand participating in consultation sessions for industries on SCS.
14. Using existing SCS, the ITACs will further specify and group the Units of Competency in SCS to develop job specific training packages to facilitate training provision for the industries. The HKCAAVQ also plays a key role in quality assuring and moderating the designs of the training packages against SCS and facilitating accreditation of programmes based on these training packages.
15. To further enhance the linkages of SCS and qualifications, the HKCAAVQ will encourage greater participation by employers in accreditation panels so that feedback on the appropriateness of learning programmes to industry needs can be directly given to operators.
16. As the number of ITACs grows, updating and further development of SCS may result in duplication of efforts in generic areas of the SCSs. **With reference to the international trend of interdisciplinary-based education and training, and cross industry collaborations, consideration should be given to consolidating ITACs into broader industry groupings that will allow the promotion of common approaches and cross industry development to keep abreast of the future needs of the labour force in Hong Kong.**

(iv) How to improve the quality of our post-secondary education and to align it closer with the needs of our economic development and employers?

17. Quality assurance (QA) is the key to the development of public confidence in qualifications, as well as the building of credibility and trust which is essential for the implementation of articulation and credit transfer systems. Essentially the QF is about QA. In order to align more closely with the needs of our economic

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development and employers, greater access must be established to quality lifelong learning.

18. The purpose of QA is to ensure and enhance the quality of learning that benefits the learners, their employability in a competitive economy and participation in learning and in society. This is only possible if stakeholders also actively participate in the QA processes.
19. Hong Kong currently has three QA bodies which were established to address particular stakeholder concerns. In the light of the challenges of an ageing population that undermine future economic growth, it is now timely to consider moving to a unified QA body for the entire post-secondary sector to provide consistent QA for all post-secondary institutions, and better coordination of initiatives such as a CAT system and alignment of post-secondary education with the needs of our economic development and employers.
20. The QF provides a clear reference for all social groups to plan and prepare for joining the workforce. With the hierarchical structure of the QF and the clear competency standards set against each level, the vocational qualifications, which are industry specific, allow an alternative pathway as well as a gateway for learners to develop themselves and create their own career roadmap.
21. The HKCAAVQ as the Accreditation Authority plays the gatekeeper's role to assure the quality of qualifications in the non-self accrediting sector and as a result enhances the credibility and acceptance of the QF. The range of accredited qualifications on the QR allows learners to choose from basic training at lower levels to the more comprehensive programmes at higher levels. The former will encourage learners, especially those with lower academic qualifications, to take the first steps to recognition and joining the labour force.
22. To further align the QF with the needs of our economic development and employers, greater government investment is needed in developing examples of career paths for learners that outline progression and linkages to higher level qualifications and occupational outcomes. These career paths and maps would need to be regularly updated and easily accessible and closely linked to the efficient use of a CAT system.
23. Given that Bachelor degrees at Level 5 are now four years in duration and contain significant amount of general education, linkages from Level 4 to Level 5 qualifications could be more straightforward. However, mapping of specific credits into particular degrees will still be required. At the policy level, common descriptors for Bachelor Degree programmes, like those for the Associate Degree and Higher Diploma, should be developed. These developments would further enhance a CAT system.
24. In addition, outcome-based accreditation will help build a closer relationship between the education providers and the stakeholders in getting the "right products" to serve the relevant industry. While the HKCAAVQ is not responsible for identifying "graduate attributes", the HKCAAVQ could reinforce how these attributes are determined through accreditation. At the same time, we could

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facilitate the identification of good practice through sharing with operators. Furthermore, with the development of a Central Repository by the HKCAAVQ to capture information and track records of accredited operators and learning programmes, the HKCAAVQ could build a database with intended learning outcomes for various types of programmes, which would provide some useful references to the sector and the industry for further review of “graduate attributes”.

- (v) How to revive the value of and inspire interest in vocational education for improving skills matching and increasing job diversity?

25. The implementation of the QF, which orders and supports both academic and vocational qualifications, definitely strengthens the recognition and the value of vocational training. The pathway provided by the QF, which allows individuals to create their own roadmap for training and career development, helps inspire interest in vocational training.
26. According to the *Report on Manpower Projection to 2018*¹ released by the Labour and Welfare Bureau in 2012, with 2010 as the base year for projection, there may be a slight overall manpower shortfall in Hong Kong in 2018; manpower supply and demand for holders of first degree and above qualifications is forecast to be more or less balanced while those at upper secondary, craft, technician and sub-degree levels will experience a shortfall to the tune of about 22,000 (see tables below).

Manpower Requirements by Education Level in 2010 and 2018

Education level	Actual manpower requirement in 2010		Projected manpower requirement in 2018		Projected change from 2010 to 2018	Projected average annual change (2010-2018)
	Number	% share	Number	% share	Number	%
Lower secondary and below	983 200	29.9	786 700	21.9	- 196 400	- 2.7
Upper secondary	1 252 200	38.1	1 370 300	38.1	+ 118 100	+ 1.1
Craft	12 000	0.4	15 800	0.4	+ 3 800	+ 3.5
Technician	103 300	3.1	127 000	3.5	+ 23 700	+ 2.6
Sub-degree	166 800	5.1	241 500	6.7	+ 74 700	+ 4.7
First degree	613 100	18.7	819 200	22.8	+ 206 100	+ 3.7
Postgraduate	154 000	4.7	235 800	6.6	+ 81 800	+ 5.5
Total	3 284 600	100.0	3 596 400	100.0	+ 311 800	+ 1.1

¹ http://www.lwb.gov.hk/report/mp2018_en.pdf

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Projected Manpower Resource Balance by Broad Education Level in 2018

Education level	(a) Projected manpower supply in 2018	(b) Projected manpower requirement in 2018	(c) = (a) – (b) Projected manpower resource balance in 2018 (surplus (+)/ shortfall (-))
Lower secondary and below	795 200	786 700	+ 8 500
Upper secondary, Craft, Technician and Sub-degree	1 732 700	1 754 600	- 22 000
First degree and above	1 054 600	1 055 000	- 500
Total	3 582 400	3 596 400	- 14 000

Projected Manpower Resource Balance in 2018 under the Base-case, High-case and Low-case Scenarios

	(a) Projected manpower supply in 2018 [@]	(b) Projected manpower requirement in 2018	(c) = (a) – (b) Manpower resource balance in 2018
Scenario			
Base-case	3 582 400	3 596 400	- 14 000
High-case	3 582 400	3 746 300	- 163 800
Low-case	3 582 400	3 379 700	+ 202 700

[@] Historical data suggest no apparent relationship between economic growth rate and manpower supply in the short to medium term. Thus, no adjustment to MSP has been made in the scenario studies.

27. To tackle the demographic challenges and to support Hong Kong's long term manpower needs, the Government should take actions to promote VET and lifelong learning such as:

- (a) Respond to the needs of the community and increase the diversity of VET provision. At present, the Vocational Training Council and the Employees Retraining Board are the major providers of VET programmes in Hong Kong. More VET providers in the market will encourage healthy competition to enhance quality, effectiveness and sustainability of the development of the VET sector; ensuring that VET delivery is more closely attuned to the needs of industry.
- (b) Introduce mechanisms or soft propaganda to change the mindset of the society (parents and students) and promote skills-based training;
- (c) Provide incentive schemes to encourage the self-financed sub-degree providers to transform themselves to provide higher level VET programmes that meet the needs of the society;

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- (d) Improve the recognition of Applied Learning (ApL) courses to increase their attractiveness to secondary students. This will also increase understanding of VET among youngsters;
 - (e) Implement concrete measures to enhance the competitiveness and employability of VET graduates by identifying future options and career paths. Develop articulation programmes to achieve these aspirations;
 - (f) Provide further support to the ITACs to consolidate vocational / professional qualifications and promote vocational and lifelong learning; and
 - (g) Develop an information portal to facilitate information and resources sharing.
28. **The ApL courses introduce vocational training in secondary school education and also stimulate interests among students for future career paths in their chosen industries.** The HKCAAVQ will provide accreditation to ApL courses and as a result these courses will not only be recognized as a secondary school subject but also be accredited as a vocational training programme listed on the QR.

(vi) How to further promote continuing learning?
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29. For lifelong learning and the QF to become part of the language of learning, **the benefits experienced by learners, employers and learning providers need to be researched and communicated widely.**
30. Learners have to view the QF as supporting their learning as progressing into employment or further learning. Individual employers need to see the benefits of improved retention, productivity and customer service when they use the QF in their recruitment, selection and training of employees.
31. Learning providers need to be able to see the benefits of the flexibility offered by the QF in improving their capacity to make judgments about entry to courses and progress through coursework, including giving recognition to learners' prior knowledge and skills.
32. The Government needs to provide an appropriate range of incentives for employers to enter these arrangements and for professional bodies to engage with the QF.
33. Under the current Continuing Education Fund (CEF) scheme, CEF course learners are entitled to a subsidy of HK\$10,000 in course fee within a time limit of four years. To enrol under the CEF scheme, new programmes launched after 2008 must be accredited by the HKCAAVQ. **To encourage those who have already exhausted the subsidy or reached the time limit to re-engage in continuing learning, the CEF scheme can be extended to provide the same subsidy of HK\$10,000 every two years.**

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34. With the current QR platform, implementing the QF credit and putting in place a CAT system can facilitate learners to understand the volume of learning in programmes, and the transferability and progression of qualifications among institutions. These could help working adults to make informed choices in their continuous learning. However, as accreditation is voluntary, not all programmes in the education and training sector are currently recognised under the QF, and can benefit from the use of QF credits and the future CAT system.
35. The HKCAAVQ will continue to review its accreditation guidelines to increase transparency and understanding of the various QF levels among different operators. The common descriptors for Associate Degree and Higher Diploma programmes developed by the EDB have proven to be a helpful reference to students and operators of programmes. These common descriptors show statements on programme objectives, learning outcomes, curriculum requirements, entrance requirements, programme duration, exit qualification and articulation pathways, etc. As mentioned above, more of these descriptors are needed, especially for Bachelor Degree programmes to realise the benefits of the QF.

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List of abbreviations

ApL	Applied Learning
CAT	Credit Accumulation and Transfer
CEF	Continuing Education Fund
EDB	Education Bureau
HKCAAVQ	Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications
ITACs	Industry Training Advisory Committees
QA	Quality Assurance
QF	Qualifications Framework
QR	Qualifications Register
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SCPP	Steering Committee on Population Policy
SCS	Specification of Competency Standards
VET	Vocational Education and Training