

**For information on
28 April 2008**

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Accreditation of Academic Qualifications

At the request of the Panel on Education, this paper provides information on the principles and procedures in respect of the accreditation of academic qualifications by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ).

HKCAAVQ

2. The HKCAAVQ is an independent statutory body established under the HKCAAVQ Ordinance, Cap. 1150, and its local and overseas members are appointed by the Chief Executive. An important area of the work of the HKCAAVQ concerns the accreditation of academic qualifications and associated learning programmes.

Academic Accreditation by HKCAAVQ

Accreditation Principles

3. The HKCAAVQ conducts academic accreditation through a “peer review” process, under which it will appoint an accreditation panel consisting of specialists in the relevant subject or discipline as well as experts in quality assurance and education, who will work together with registrars of the HKCAAVQ to examine the quality of the learning programme and ascertain whether the programme meets the academic standards required for a particular qualification level (eg Associate Degree Award). The accreditation exercise adopts a Fitness-for-Purpose approach which takes into account the objectives of a learning programme when assessing its quality.

4. It should be noted that, as a matter of principle, the responsibility for demonstration of ability in an academic accreditation exercise rests with the provider of the learning programme. The accreditation panel will make its determination on the basis of all relevant evidence, including written submissions provided by the provider, any further written clarifications made by the provider in response to comments made by the panel, as well as information gathered by the panel through interviews and on-site visits.

Academic Accreditation Process

5. Academic accreditation of a learning programme usually involves a two stage exercise, comprising firstly an institutional review of the provider and secondly a separate validation of the learning programme. It is only after the first stage has been successfully completed that a provider can submit the learning programme for the second stage validation.

6. In the institutional review process, the panel will assess both academic and general standards (e.g. governance, organisational structure, resources management and the quality assurance mechanism) to ascertain whether the operator is capable of offering qualifications/programmes at a particular level. When validating a learning programme, the panel will assess the programme development and management process, the content and design of the programme, staffing and physical resources available and the method of delivery in order to determine whether the planned programme can meet the academic standards required to achieve the objective of the programme. The panel's recommendation will be considered by the Council whose decision is subject to review under the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 1150).

7. If the outcome of the programme validation exercise is positive, approval will be granted and the operator concerned will be able to publicise the programme as a HKCAAVQ-validated programme. Students enrolled in such a programme will be eligible for government financial assistance pursuant to the relevant support schemes. The granting of accreditation approval may sometimes be subject to

conditions and requirements. In some cases, the HKCAAVQ may specify conditions to be fulfilled by the provider before the commencement of the learning programme. The HKCAAVQ may also specify requirements with which the provider will have to comply, either on an ongoing basis or before a specific deadline. In respect of both such conditions and requirements, the HKCAAVQ will perform the necessary checks to ensure their compliance by the provider.

8. Accreditation approval is granted for a fixed validity period. Programmes successfully validated are subject to re-validation before the expiry of the specified validity period if the accreditation status is to be upheld. Re-validation is not mechanical, and in an extreme situation (e.g. where the programme is consistently not delivered up to the standard required and no sign of improvement on the part of the provider is shown), accreditation approval for the programme can be withdrawn.

Academic Accreditation and Professional Recognition

9. Academic accreditation and professional recognition are separate processes with different objectives. It is a longstanding practice in Hong Kong and in many other leading jurisdictions with a long accreditation tradition that academic accreditation and professional recognition are dealt with separately by different quality assurance bodies. Whilst academic accreditation is concerned with whether a learning programme is capable of meeting the academic standards required for a particular qualification level, professional recognition is often focused on whether a particular professional association will admit an individual as a professional member or recognize his capability to perform a specific professional role and therefore whether the individual possesses specific professional competencies (often pursuant to specific legal provisions). In the case of Hong Kong, academic accreditation is mainly performed by the HKCAAVQ (with the exception of those institutions with self-accrediting status), whereas professional recognition is undertaken by relevant professional bodies in accordance with their own, profession-specific rules.

10. In the case of some professions, completion of the professional recognition process may only be possible after the relevant learning programme has commenced (e.g. where the professional body deems it necessary to look at the programme in operation). This is a decision for the relevant professional body to make, and will not affect the academic programme validation by the HKCAAVQ which is in most cases completed before the operation of the relevant learning programme.

Education Bureau
Hong Kong Council of Accreditation of Academic and Vocational
Qualifications

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