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Panel on Education

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the special meeting on 28 April 2008**

Quality assurance of sub-degree courses

Purpose

    This paper provides a summary of the deliberations of the Panel on Education (the Panel) on quality assurance (QA) of sub-degree programmes in relation to academic accreditation. Other issues concerning sub-degree education have been set out in the updated background brief issued to members on 14 April 2008 vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1566/07-08.

Existing QA systems

2.   All local post-secondary programmes are required to undergo QA before they can be offered in Hong Kong. There are two QA mechanisms. For publicly-funded and self-financing programmes offered by institutions with self-accrediting status, which include the eight University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions and their self-financing arms, the Open University of Hong Kong, and the Hong Kong Shue Yan University, they are subject to the internal QA procedures stipulated by the institutions concerned. As far as sub-degree programmes are concerned, the Heads of Universities Committee established the Joint Quality Review Committee (JQRC) in August 2005 to oversee QA of the self-financing programmes offered by the UGC-funded institutions and their self-financing arms.

3.   For non-self-accrediting institutions, their programmes are accredited by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ). Under the current accreditation mechanism, institutions are required to go through Institutional Reviews and submit their individual programmes for Programme Validations and Revalidations periodically.

Review of the Post-Secondary Education Sector

4.   In 2005, a Steering Committee was appointed by the Education and Manpower Bureau (re-organized as the Education Bureau on 1 July 2007) to review the development of the post-secondary education sector and to map out the way forward.   The Review was conducted in two phases.   The Phase I Review was completed in January 2006, and the Phase I Review Report was published in March 2006 for public consultation.   The Phase I Review mainly took stock of the development of the post-secondary education sector since the announcement of the policy target stated in the 2000 Policy Address to enable 60% of senior secondary school leavers to have access to tertiary education by 2010.

5.   Taking into account the views received in the Phase I Review, the Steering Committee conducted the Phase 2 Review.   The focus of the Phase 2 Review was on enhancing the quality assurance mechanisms and transparency of the self-financing post-secondary sector as well as enhancing the learning experience, recognition of and articulation opportunities for sub-degree students.   The Steering Committee made 22 recommendations in the Phase II Review Report which was published in April 2008.   Of these, 12 recommendations relate directly or indirectly to quality assurance.

Deliberations of the Panel

6.   Members of the Panel have long expressed concern about the quality of self-financing sub-degree programmes.   The Panel held a meeting on 14 April 2008 to discuss the Phase II Review Report.   The views expressed by members concerning quality assurance of sub-degree courses in relation to academic accreditation are summarized below.

Transparency of sub-degree courses

7.   Members noted the setting up of an information portal by the Administration for the sub-degree sector in June 2007 to provide information on individual course providers and their programmes.   Members considered it imperative to enhance the transparency of sub-degree courses to enable students to make informed choices.   They supported the recommendation of the Steering Committee for the launching by the Administration with input from the service providers of a new information portal for the self-financing sub-degree sector, providing institution-specific and programme-specific information.   The information might include, among other things, teaching and non-teaching facilities provided by the institutions, qualifications of teaching staff, teacher-student ratio, progression or articulation pathways of graduates, involvement of professional bodies in curriculum design and

recognition of programmes, etc.   The Administration agreed to strengthen the existing information portal by providing more detailed information on the sub-degree programmes as well as articulation and employment statistics of sub-degree graduates of individual providers.

Enhancement of the QA mechanisms

8.   While acknowledging the co-existence of two QA regimes for sub-degree programmes, members considered it necessary to strengthen the QA process, in particular for the programmes offered by non-self-accrediting institutions.   Members noted cross membership between JQRC and HKCAAVQ to facilitate communication and the benchmarking of standards among post-secondary programmes.   In the Phase I Review Report, the Steering Committee recommended a closer dialogue between HKCAAVQ and JQRC to ensure comparability in quality and standards of programmes at the same academic level.

9.   In the Phase 2 Report, the Steering Committee recommended the establishment of a Tripartite Liaison Committee comprising the Education Bureau, JQRC and HKCAAVQ to facilitate an on-going dialogue among the quality assurance agencies of the sub-degree sector, to provide a forum for discussing quality-related issues concerning the sub-degree sector, and to enhance comparability of the quality assurance mechanisms and the programmes offered by institutions with and without self-accrediting status.

10.   Members noted that the Tripartite Liaison Committee had been established.   To take on board another recommendation of the Steering Committee, the Administration had also established an Expert Group to draw up a set of "Good Practices for the Sub-degree Sector" to promote sharing of good practices and provide references for the sub-degree sector.

11.   There had been concern about the effectiveness of the various measures to enhance the quality assurance of sub-degree programmes given their non-mandatory nature.   The Administration stressed that it would work in partnership with HKCAAQV and JQRC to facilitate the development of options such as promulgating clear minimum admission requirements and making it mandatory for providers to follow; requiring providers to submit annual reports on student admission and performance, and ensuring providers would strengthen learning support for students admitted on special consideration.

Quality of sub-degree teachers

12.   Given that sub-degree programmes were run on a self-financing basis and the only income of providers was tuition fee, members doubted the amount of resources that could be afforded by course providers for the employment of teachers.   Without offering a reasonable remuneration package, it would

unlikely attract quality teachers for sub-degree courses. Members noted with concern the absence of specific measures to support the upgrading of the quality of sub-degree teachers in the Phase II Review Report.

13.   According to the Administration, although the Steering Committee had not made any recommendation to provide direct subsidy to support the professional development of sub-degree teachers, it had recommended that subject to funding availability, the Administration should consider launching a new Quality Enhancement Grant Scheme to provide non-recurrent grants to institutions and educational bodies to support worthwhile projects/initiatives that could, among others, encourage development and adoption of effective teaching methods or approaches. Moreover, the proposals to modify the Start-up Loan Scheme and the Land Grant Scheme to facilitate the application for land at nominal premium and interest-free loans and to allow borrowing institutions to apply for extension of the loan repayment period to up to 20 years could help the institutions to set aside more resources for their teaching staff.

14.   Members considered these measures insufficient for enhancing the quality of teachers for sub-degree programmes. Many members were of the view that the Administration should consider providing subsidy for quality sub-degree programmes, instead of leaving it to the market to develop the sub-degree education entirely on a self-financing basis.

Relation between academic and professional accreditation

15.   Members noted with concern the recent unsuccessful application by the Hong Kong Institute of Technology (HKIT) to the Nursing Council for accreditation of its Associate Degree Programme in Nursing which had been accredited by HKCAAVQ. While members appreciated the distinction between accreditation of a sub-degree programme by HKCAAVQ and by the relevant professional accreditation body, they considered it important to keep students fully informed of this before their enrolment to the relevant programme. Such information should be included in the information portal for the sub-degree sector set up by the Administration. There was a view that accreditation of a sub-degree programme by HKCAAVQ and by the relevant professional body was not entirely unrelated. In considering whether a particular sub-degree programme should be accredited, HKCAAVQ should have regard to the design of the programme for its likelihood to be accredited by the relevant professional body. .

16.   The Administration stressed that accreditation of a sub-degree programme by HKCAAVQ and by the relevant professional body was neither equivalent nor linked. The Administration agreed on the need to enhance the transparency of the self-financing sub-degree programmes and accessibility of information on these programmes, and would strengthen the existing information portal for the sub-degree sector. The Administration would also

collaborate with the sub-degree sector, HKCAAVQ and professional bodies to enhance publicity and public awareness of the distinction between academic and professional accreditation.

17.   The Administration also pointed out that $30 million had been earmarked for the Accreditation Grant Scheme to subsidize the accreditation expenses incurred by institutions. The Grant subsidized in full the fees of successful Institutional Reviews, and 50% of the fees for individual programme validation. The Steering Committee recommended the continuation of the Scheme to encourage the provision of quality-assured post-secondary programmes, and that the accreditation grant scheme could be subsumed into the financial assistance schemes to be launched by the Administration in support of the Qualifications Framework.

Relevant papers

18.   A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in the **Appendix.**

Council Business Division 2
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**Relevant papers on
Quality assurance of sub-degree courses**

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Education	13.10.2000 (Item I)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	23.4.2001 (Item V)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education Subcommittee on increase in post-secondary education opportunities	1.6.2001	Minutes Agenda Papers
Legislative Council	27.6.2001	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 196 - 254 (Motion)
Legislative Council	6.3.2002	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 11 - 15 (Questions)
Legislative Council	13.3.2002	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 55 - 57 (Question)
Panel on Education	26.3.2002 (Item I)	Minutes The Report on Higher Education in Hong Kong
Panel on Education	7.5.2002 (Item I)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	13.5.2002 (Item V)	Minutes Agenda
Legislative Council	12.6.2002	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 83 - 155 (Motion)
Panel on Education	2.12.2002 (Item I)	Minutes Agenda
Legislative Council	11.12.2002	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 24 - 32 (Question)

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Education	20.1.2003 (Item IV)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	30.6.2003 (Item I)	Minutes Agenda
Legislative Council	9.7.2003	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 53 - 63 (Question)
Panel on Education	20.10.2003 (Item IV)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	17.11.2003 (Item IV)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	27.3.2006 (Item IV)	Minutes Agenda
Legislative Council	10.5.2006	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 313 - 363 (Motion)
Panel on Education	11.12.2006 (Item IV)	Minutes Agenda
Legislative Council	14.3.2007	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 25 - 34 (Question)
Legislative Council	2.5.2007	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 224 - 279 (Motion)
Legislative Council	31.10.2007	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 28 - 44 (Question)
Legislative Council	21.11.2007	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 141 - 179 (Motion)

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