

INFORMATION NOTE

Accreditation of professional training in Hong Kong

1. Background

1.1 At the request of the Panel on Education at its meeting on 14 April 2008, this information note provides information on accreditation of professional training, particularly on pre-service nursing programmes, in Hong Kong.

2. Accreditation of professional training

2.1 In Hong Kong, some professional organizations or tertiary institutions can provide accredited professional training to students or practitioners to qualify them to practise in certain fields or encourage them to acquire specialist skills and knowledge, with the qualifications obtained being recognized either locally or internationally.

2.2 At present, there is neither a common framework governing accreditation of professional training programmes provided by professional organizations or tertiary institutions, nor an overarching body responsible for conducting accreditation of such programmes. The statutory Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications is responsible for accrediting non-university tertiary institutions and the programmes of study run by them at degree and sub-degree levels. Nonetheless, its accreditation functions do not cover professional training programmes provided by various professional organizations or tertiary institutions.

2.3 Broadly speaking, professional organizations are given autonomy to establish their own criteria and mechanisms to accredit professional training programmes run by themselves or some tertiary institutions for various purposes. For instance,

- (a) in the accounting profession, the Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants, which is a statutory licensing body of accountants established under the *Professional Accountants Ordinance*, has statutory powers to govern the registration, training and education of accounting students and accountants, such as accrediting its Certified Public Accountants (CPA) Qualification Programme offered to practitioners who wish to be qualified as certified public accountants, with the qualification being recognized in certain overseas places;¹

¹ Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants (2006).

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- (b) in the medical profession, the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine is empowered by the *Hong Kong Academy of Medicine Ordinance* to evaluate, approve or disapprove the standards of postgraduate medical education, programmes or courses of study or examinations provided to practitioners specializing in certain fields;²
- (c) in the legal profession, the Law Society of Hong Kong has established the Mediator Accreditation Scheme to accredit solicitors working in mediation. The Scheme requires applicants for mediation accreditation to complete certain mediation training programmes approved by the Law Society's Mediator Accreditation Committee.³ According to the Law Society, while solicitors who are not accredited under the Scheme are not barred from working in mediation, the Scheme can safeguard the minimum professional standard of meditation practice in Hong Kong, encourage their members to advance their mediation skills and promote their members' mediation services.

2.4 Likewise, the nursing profession has established its own accreditation system of pre-service training programmes run by some hospitals and tertiary institutions, which is to be discussed in the following paragraphs.

3. Accreditation of pre-service nursing programmes

3.1 In Hong Kong, pre-service (i.e. pre-registration and pre-enrolment) nursing programmes offer professional training to students who wish to practise as registered nurses or enrolled nurses under the *Nurses Registration Ordinance* (NRO). A person is eligible for being a registered nurse or an enrolled nurse upon completion of a three-year pre-registration nursing programme or a two-year pre-enrolment nursing programme, provided that such programmes are offered by recognized training schools and accredited by the statutory Nursing Council of Hong Kong (the Nursing Council) established under NRO.⁴ The current pre-service nursing programmes accredited by the Nursing Council are listed in **Appendix I**.

² Section 5(c), Hong Kong Academy of Medicine Ordinance.

³ Law Society of Hong Kong (2008).

⁴ *Nursing Council of Hong Kong* (2008).

Accrediting authority

3.2 The Nursing Council is responsible for recognizing "courses of nursing training for the purposes of registration or enrolment" under NRO.⁵ The Nursing Council has appointed an Accreditation Committee to help discharge this accreditation function. The Committee provides "independent authoritative advice on academic and professional standards in an institution by carrying out accreditation", such as "validating or revalidating any nursing programme for the purpose of registration conducted by the institution" and/or "reviewing the general academic and professional standards of the institution". The Committee also promotes good practices of accreditation and quality assurance, and seeks to maintain academic and professional standards of nurses.⁶

3.3 All members of the Accreditation Committee are appointed by the Nursing Council. It is the Nursing Council's practice to appoint a Council member without any nursing background to serve as the Committee's chair, so as to enhance fairness and objectivity in the conduct of accreditation. Besides, to maintain impartiality and expertise, the Nursing Council has appointed people with different backgrounds to the Accreditation Committee, including experts from the nursing, medical and academic fields, the Hong Kong Hospital Authority, the Department of Health of the Government and private hospitals.⁷

3.4 At present, the Nursing Council has 15 members, comprising the head of the nursing service in the Government's Department of Health, eight registered nurses, two representatives from the tertiary institutions which have nursing programmes, one representative from the Hong Kong Hospital Authority, and three lay members.⁸ Except the head of the nursing service in the Department of Health, all Council members are appointed by the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.⁹ The chair of the Nursing Council, currently a registered nurse, is elected by the Council members from among themselves.¹⁰

Purposes of accreditation

3.5 According to the Nursing Council's Handbook for Accreditation of Training Institutions, the Nursing Council sets out the following five purposes of accreditation:¹¹

- (a) examining the extent to which a training institution meets the Nursing Council's requirements for the provision of nursing education;

⁵ *Nursing Council of Hong Kong* (2008), and sections 8(1)(c) and (g) and 14(1)(c)(i) and (v), NRO.

⁶ *Nursing Council of Hong Kong* (2008).

⁷ Information provided by the Nursing Council.

⁸ Section 3(2), NRO.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Section 3(5)(a), NRO, and *Nursing Council of Hong Kong* (2008).

¹¹ *Nursing Council of Hong Kong* (2005b) p.1.

- (b) reviewing the educational environment and processes of a training institution;
- (c) evaluating the curriculum to assess its comparability with similar curricula in Hong Kong and international standards;
- (d) evaluating the curriculum by making reference to the Nursing Council's guidelines for nursing training; and
- (e) advising a training institution on its areas of strength, weakness and vulnerability.

Accreditation process

3.6 Both pre-registration and pre-enrolment nursing programmes are subject to the same accreditation process prescribed in the Handbook for Accreditation of Training Institutions. According to the Nursing Council, it takes at least nine months to complete accreditation of a nursing programme. **Appendix II** provides a flow chart published by the Nursing Council to illustrate the accreditation process.

Submission of a self-study report to the Nursing Council

3.7 A training institution applying for the Nursing Council's accreditation of a new pre-service nursing programme is required to submit to the Nursing Council a "self-study report", which must contain the requisite information in the following order prescribed in the Handbook for Accreditation of Training Institutions:

- (a) justification for establishing a nursing programme and/or major curricula changes;
- (b) a detailed curriculum for the nursing programme offered;
- (c) teaching and supporting personnel involved in the implementation of the curriculum;
- (d) teaching resources and facilities available for students;
- (e) resources and facilities for clinical practice;
- (f) research and professional work;
- (g) quality assurance mechanism; and
- (h) staff development programmes.

Formation of an Accreditation Panel

3.8 On receipt of an application for accreditation, the Nursing Council appoints an Accreditation Panel to study and determine whether the self-study report of the training institution concerned contains all of the requisite information. In particular, the Accreditation Panel is responsible for clarifying and verifying the congruency between the information provided by the training institution and the actual practice of the institution. The Accreditation Panel comprises three Nursing Council members, two non-Nursing Council members of the Accreditation Committee, one external member¹² and the Nursing Council's Secretary (who is a staff member seconded from the Government and not a Council member) or his or her designate. According to the Nursing Council, members of the Accreditation Panel must not have any affiliation with programmes under accreditation. They, as well as members of the Nursing Council, are required to abstain from consideration of the application if there is any conflict of interest.

Rejection criteria

3.9 If the Accreditation Panel finds that the training institution's self-study report does not contain all of the requisite information, the institution may provide supplementary information to the Panel in two separate attempts for further consideration of the application. The Accreditation Panel may reject the application if the institution still fails to provide evidence on any of the following areas under the Nursing Council's Rejection Criteria for Accreditation of Training Institutions (the Rejection Criteria) effective from 19 December 2005:

- (a) whether the institution can provide a full curriculum designed according to one of the reference guides issued by the Nursing Council;¹³
- (b) whether the strength of the core teaching team, including quantity and qualifications, is adequate for launching a quality programme;¹⁴

¹² According to the Nursing Council, it has invited 11 renowned professionals in the health care system or academic field to serve as external members.

¹³ Those reference guides are: (a) A Reference Guide to the Syllabus of Subjects and Requirements for the Preparation of Registered Nurse (General) in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region; (b) A Reference Guide to the Syllabus of Subjects and Requirements for the Preparation of Registered Nurse (Psychiatric) in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region; (c) Core-Competencies for Enrolled Nurses (General) & A Reference Guide to the Syllabus of Subjects and Requirements for the Preparation of Enrolled Nurse (General) in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region; and (d) Core-Competencies for Enrolled Nurses (Psychiatric) & A Reference Guide to the Syllabus of Subjects and Requirements for the Preparation of Enrolled Nurse (Psychiatric) in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

¹⁴ The Rejection Criteria states that for non-tertiary institutions, reference should be made to tertiary institutions and the Criteria for Entry into the Nursing Council's Former Indicative Register of Teachers of Nurses.

- (c) whether the students meet the essential entry requirements as stipulated by the Nursing Council; and
- (d) whether there is confirmed clinical placement with appropriate supervision.

Accreditation visit

3.10 If the Accreditation Panel determines that the training institution's self-study report contains all of the requisite information, it will make recommendations on the application as appropriate to the Accreditation Committee. If necessary, the Accreditation Panel may conduct an accreditation visit to the institution. The length of the visit depends on the complexity of the issues concerned and the number of the institution's campuses, with a visit normally lasting for not more than three days. During the visit, the institution must be in full operation and prepare the following information for the Panel's review:¹⁵

- (a) the institution's annual reports;
- (b) the timetable and clinical schedule for the week during which the visit is conducted;
- (c) samples of assessment or examination;
- (d) quality assurance tools, including reports from external examiners or advisors;
- (e) institution and student handbooks; and
- (f) any other materials the institution deems essential for the understanding of the programme offered.

3.11 During the visit, the Accreditation Panel may meet with the head, senior management staff, students and graduates of the institution and potential employers of the graduates. The Accreditation Panel may visit the various facilities in the institution, including clinical venues where clinical practicum takes place, and review the curricula and other relevant materials provided by the institution. The Accreditation Panel then makes recommendations as appropriate to the Accreditation Committee for consideration of the application.

¹⁵ Nursing Council of Hong Kong (2005b) p.3.

Accreditation criteria and report

3.12 The Accreditation Committee is required to "make a professional judgement" according to a list of criteria prescribed in the Handbook for Accreditation of Training Institutions, which covers the following areas:

- (a) institutional structure;
- (b) government and management;
- (c) programme development and design;
- (d) development of new work;
- (e) teachers;
- (f) scholarly activity;
- (g) students;
- (h) programme evaluation and standards;
- (i) resources and facilities;
- (j) collaboration; and
- (k) past reviews.

3.13 The Accreditation Committee is required to submit an accreditation report with its recommendations to the Nursing Council.

Decision on accreditation

3.14 After considering the reports and recommendations from the Accreditation Committee, the Nursing Council decides on the accreditation status of the programme offered by the training institution and makes recommendations to the institution for improvement to the programme. The Nursing Council may refuse to grant accreditation to the programme concerned if the institution fails to implement the recommendations. The Nursing Council will not reconsider application for accreditation of the same programme within at least 18 months or a period as deemed appropriate by the Accreditation Committee. According to the Nursing Council, the accreditation process does not provide an appeal mechanism because the institution failing to obtain accreditation status for its programme may re-apply for accreditation after the 18-month period, which enables the institution to have sufficient time to modify the programme concerned.

Appendix I

Pre-service Nursing Programmes Accredited by the Nursing Council of Hong Kong (as at 13 March 2008)

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

- A.I.1 Higher Diploma in Nursing
- A.I.2 Bachelor of Science (Honours) Degree in Nursing
- A.I.3 Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Nursing (Psychiatric Stream)

The University of Hong Kong

- A.I.4 Bachelor of Nursing (Honours) Programme

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

- A.I.5 Bachelor of Nursing (Honours) Programme
- A.I.6 Postgraduate Diploma in Psychiatric/Mental Health Nursing

The Open University of Hong Kong

- A.I.7 Higher Diploma in Nursing [an integrated Conversion Programme for Enrolled Nurses (General)]
- A.I.8 Higher Diploma in Mental Health Nursing [an Enrolled Nurse (Psychiatric) Conversion Programme]

The Queen Elizabeth Hospital School of General Nursing

- A.I.9 Hospital Authority Higher Diploma in Nursing Programme

The Hong Kong Sanatorium & Hospital

- A.I.10 Enrolled Nurses (General) Training Programme

Appendix I (cont'd)

The St. Teresa's Hospital

A.I.11 Enrolled Nurse (General) Nursing Programme

The Kowloon Hospital

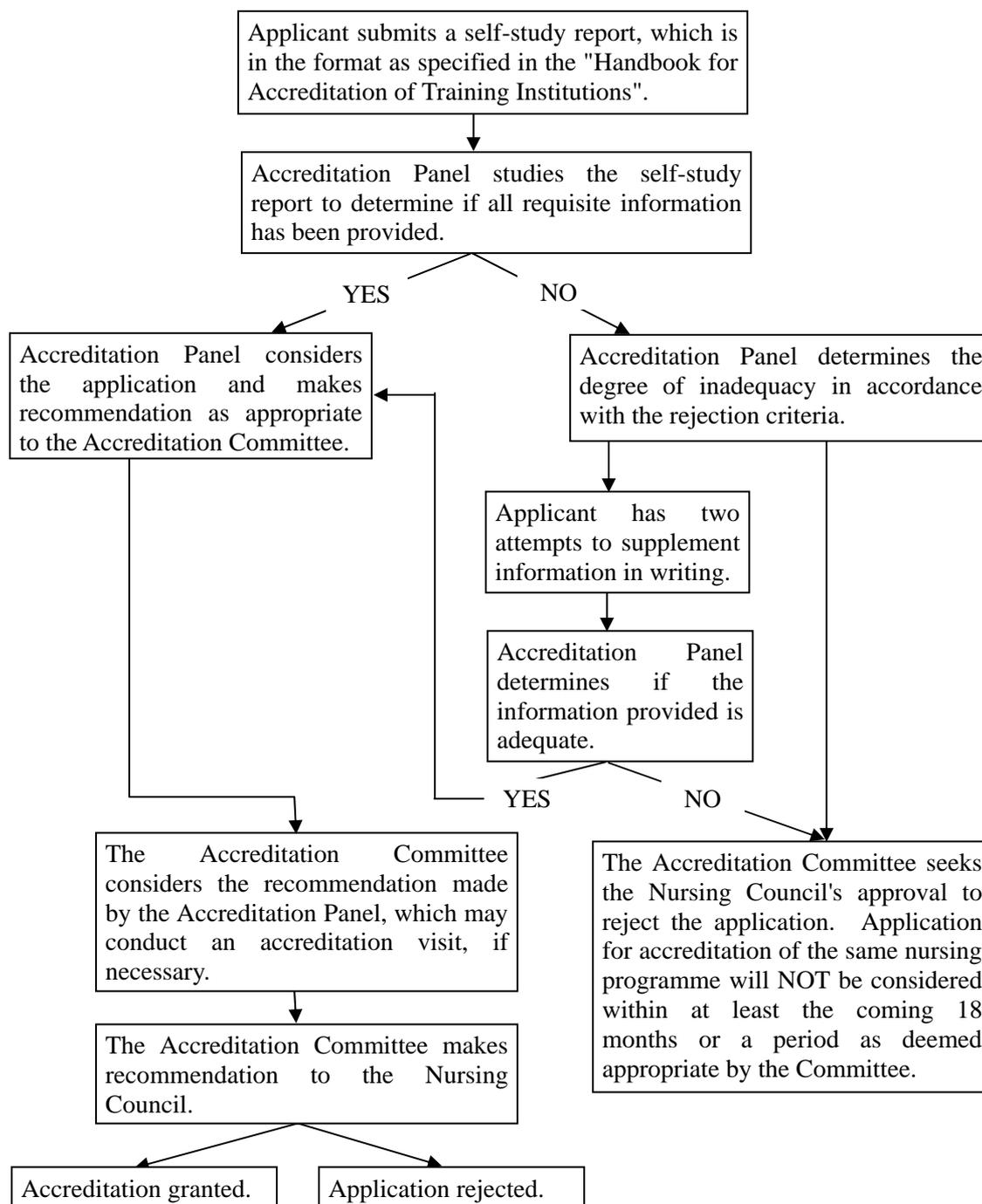
A.I.12 Enrolled Nurse (General) Training Programme for the Welfare Sector

The Castle Peak Hospital

A.I.13 Enrolled Nurse (Psychiatric) Training Programme for the Welfare Sector

Appendix II

**Process of Accreditation of Pre-registration/
Pre-enrolment Nursing Programmes
(with effect from 19 December 2005)**



Remark: Accreditation process takes at least nine months to complete, provided that all requisite information has been submitted with the original application.

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