

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Meeting on 18 March 2014

HKCAAVQ's views on issues related to the governance and regulation of the self-financing post-secondary sector

Purpose

This paper summarises the views of the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) on issues related to the governance and regulation of the self-financing post-secondary sector.

HKCAAVQ's role in quality assurance of the self-financing post-secondary education sector

2. The HKCAAVQ is an independent statutory body established under the HKCAAVQ Ordinance (Cap 1150). As the Accreditation Authority and Qualifications Register (QR) Authority under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (QF), the HKCAAVQ is responsible for the quality assurance of all operators and programmes except the University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions which have self-accrediting status. The HKCAAVQ undertakes accreditation with reference to standards that have been benchmarked both locally and internationally through a process of peer review. The HKCAAVQ Council comprises members from the local and international academia as well as local community leaders. In addition, there are around 900 Specialists serving the HKCAAVQ. They are practitioners from industry as well as academics and professionals with experience in areas such as quality assurance, institutional management, programme delivery and management. About a quarter of the Specialists are from overseas; they provide views and advice from an international perspective and mainly support academic accreditation. The HKCAAVQ issues an

accreditation report on the outcome of the accreditation activity. Guidelines on the principles, processes and procedures of the HKCAAVQ accreditation services are available on HKCAAVQ's website (www.hkcaavq.edu.hk).

3. The HKCAAVQ has developed a Four-Stage Quality Assurance Process (the Process) to accredit operators and their learning programmes under the QF. This quality assurance model addresses the diversity of academic and vocational training provision taking into account operators' maturity. The HKCAAVQ embarked on a review of the Process three years ago to evaluate the effectiveness of the current approach. After rigorous study and extensive consultation, a refined quality assurance model has been developed and implementation is now underway.

4. The refined model moves towards a more learner-centred philosophy and an enabling approach. It introduces a "Facilitating Phase" to enhance new operators' awareness of the accreditation requirement and streamline the process for experienced ones. The four stages are Initial Evaluation (IE), Programme Validation (PV), Programme Area Accreditation (PAA) and Periodic Review (PR). Operators that wish to have their learning programmes validated are required to present evidence that they meet the required standards as specified in the Process.

5. Stage 1, IE, is the first stage of the Process. It is an evaluation of whether a programme provider has the organisational capability to effectively manage and provide adequate resources to the development, delivery, assessment and quality assurance of its learning programmes and educational/training services. The criteria are as follows:

- (a) Organisational Management
- (b) Staffing and Staff Development
- (c) Financial and Physical Resources
- (d) Quality Assurance

6. Stage 2, PV, is an overall evaluation of the learning programme to determine whether its planning and management, syllabuses, delivery arrangements and assessment methods, are able to achieve its claimed objectives and deliver its intended learning outcomes. The criteria are as follows:

- (a) Programme Objectives and Learning Outcomes
- (b) Programme Content and Structure
- (c) Teaching and Learning
- (d) Student Assessment
- (e) Admission Requirements and Student Selection
- (f) Workplace Attachment and Student Support Services
- (g) Staffing and Staff Development for Learning Programmes
- (h) Quality Assurance (including Programme Development and Management)
- (i) Financial and Physical Resources for Learning Programmes
- (j) Student Records and Information Management

7. Stage 3, PAA, is an accreditation step that determines whether operators have well balanced and robust internal quality assurance systems to self-monitor and accredit their own programmes, given their track records of self-monitoring and assuring the standards of their accredited learning programme(s).

8. Stage 4, PR, is an external review exercise conducted every five years to determine whether an operator with a valid PAA status continues to maintain robust internal quality assurance systems to self-monitor and ensure that their operation meets their stated objectives, and whether their learning programmes meet the QF standards in the specified programme area(s).

9. Operators applying for PAA and PR should have tested systems in place and in operation to conduct internal reviews of both their organisational

governance and management and the learning programmes they offer, as part of their approach to continuous improvement.

10. The four stages are designed to progressively develop operators' competency in self-review, self-monitoring and enhancement of their internal quality assurance capacity. The external accreditation exercises help operators develop internal mechanisms to improve the quality of their institutional operations and learning programmes.

A Single Quality Assurance Body

11. UGC recommended in its Report on Higher Education Review 2010 that a single quality assurance body for the entire post-secondary sector should be set up, and that a single body should integrate the methods and approaches of quality assessment, validation and accreditation across the system.

12. The HKCAAVQ supports in principle this recommendation. While the HKCAAVQ recognises that there can be no "one size fits all" quality assurance model for the post-secondary sector as operators have varied levels of maturity and may be at different stages of development, we should be working towards greater levels of comparability of quality standards. We note that the Government has been taking incremental steps to strengthen the quality assurance mechanism, while exploring the feasibility of eventually setting up a single quality assurance body.

13. The HKCAAVQ is a member of the Liaison Committee on Quality Assurance (LCQA) set up by the Government comprising the Education Bureau (EDB), HKCAAVQ, the Joint Quality Review Committee (JQRC) and the Quality Assurance Council (QAC) of UGC, intended to promote sharing of good practices

among all the quality assurance bodies and enhance consistency and transparency.

14. When talking about harmonisation of standards, there is a need to build consensus on the scope and levels under discussion. There are standards concerning the overall education system (say multiple pathways for lifelong learning and articulation, QF standards expressed in the currency of a sector-wide Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS), learning outcomes and Generic Level Descriptors (GLD), qualifications titles and programme profile, etc.); there are standards concerning the minimum requirements for universities / colleges to operate programmes at corresponding levels; there are standards underpinning respective academic levels and disciplines (say Common Descriptors of Associate Degree and Higher Diploma programmes, Specifications of Competency Standards for industries, etc.) and there are quality assurance standards for evaluating the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance mechanisms of institutions for meeting external standards and for self enhancement.

15. Quality assurance is playing an increasingly important role in post-secondary education, given globalization and massification and diversification of education services. Public confidence in quality assurance, transparency and a balance between public interest and academic autonomy are foundations in the quality assurance model. Any change in the quality assurance bodies in Hong Kong should not impact on the current levels of confidence and support for institutions that have evolved over a long period of time.

Working Group to Plan for and Oversee External Quality Audits on Sub-degree Operations of UGC-funded Institutions

16. At present, the UGC-funded sub-degree operations are outside the purview of any external quality assurance bodies in Hong Kong. With the policy support given by EDB, the HKCAAVQ joined the Working Group to Plan for and Oversee

External Quality Audits on Sub-degree Operations of UGC-funded Institutions (Working Group) which also comprises representatives from UGC and UGC-funded institutions.

17. The Working Group aims at identifying the optimal approach to and a permanent mechanism for conducting external quality audits on sub-degree operators of the UGC-funded institutions, regardless of the nature of funding.

18. In support of the Government's initiative to establish an external quality audit mechanism for sub-degree operations of the UGC-funded institutions, the HKCAAVQ has been strengthening its capacity and capability for meeting the needs arising from the developments in the post-secondary education sector, in particular the sub-degree sector. A number of initiatives have been put in place, they include: research on local and overseas quality audits; staff capacity building; and restructuring and enhancement of physical resources.

19. The HKCAAVQ believes that the introduction of an external periodic quality audit mechanism could address the concerns of the community at large about the lack of impartiality of the existing mechanism of the entire sub-degree sector, and will benefit students, the institutions and the sector as a whole.

Efficacy of the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance (Cap 320)

20. The Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance (Cap 320) and its subsidiary legislation, the Post Secondary Colleges Regulations (Cap 320A), were first enacted in 1960 to govern the registration and operation of post-secondary colleges and their consequent exemption from the provisions of the Education Ordinance (Cap 279).

21. At present, there are six colleges registered under the Ordinance, namely:

- (a) The Hong Kong Shue Yan University (first registered in 1976 as Hong Kong Shue Yan College)
- (b) Caritas Institute of Higher Education (first registered in 2001 as Caritas Francis Hsu College);
- (c) Chu Hai College of Higher Education registered in 2004;
- (d) Hang Seng Management College registered in 2010;
- (e) Tung Wah College registered in 2011; and
- (f) Centennial College in 2012.

22. The HKCAAVQ conducts Institutional Review (IR) for institutions that wish to seek registration under Cap 320. IR is an accreditation exercise for establishing evidence of an institution's capability to operate programmes at Bachelor degree level while meeting the standards at QF level 5 in accordance with Schedule 3 of the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap 592).

23. The authority for registration under Cap 320 rests with the Permanent Secretary for Education who may take into account the outcome of the IR accreditation report and other considerations as he/she deems necessary. A Post Secondary College registered under Cap 320 may, with the prior approval of the Chief Executive in Council, award degrees.

24. This approach has worked effectively with existing operators with physical resources in place and track records of provision, however, these IRs have been increasingly requested by "start-up" institutions without any physical infrastructure or history of operation.

25. The HKCAAVQ in its capacity as an academic accreditation body evaluates through IR whether an applicant institution has an overall appropriate academic structure and environment and the Council is therefore able to offer advice on the fulfilment of the criteria related to these academic aspects as listed in section 4 of Cap 320.

26. In October 2012, EDB issued a consultation document on Review of Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance (Cap 320) and Post Secondary Colleges Regulations (Cap 320A). The review aimed to provide update and replace obsolete legal requirements to keep pace with the changes in the self-financing post-secondary sector, as well as to promote the healthy development of the sector.

27. In its consultation document, EDB proposed a number of legislative amendments to the Ordinance and the Regulations:

- (a) Removal of registration requirement on length of programmes offered
- (b) Removal of admission requirement on student age
- (c) Removal of admission requirement on specific academic qualifications
- (d) Removal of requirement of CE-in-Council's approval for using "Hok Yuen"(學院)
- (e) Removal of registration requirement of evening colleges
- (f) Streamlining of procedures for approving award of degrees
- (g) Updating of provision on other qualifications and awards to be conferred
- (h) Removal of medical requirements on college hostels

28. The HKCAAVQ welcomes the proposed amendments to Cap 320 as outlined in the consultation document and supports all of the proposed changes. We shall continue to offer advice to the Government as to how best to refine Cap 320.

Conclusion

29. The self-financing post-secondary sector plays a pivotal role in upgrading the quality of the human resources in Hong Kong by offering a wide array of

continuing and professional education and lifelong learning opportunities for our workforce and the community at large.

30. The implementation of a quality assurance system of agreed standards is important for the post-secondary sector in Hong Kong, and the setting of standards, regulations and oversight mechanisms takes concerted effort by the policy maker, the quality assurance body and the stakeholders.

HKCAAVQ
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