



香港學術及職業資歷評審局
Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of
Academic & Vocational Qualifications

主席 廖長江議員 太平紳士
Chairman The Honourable Martin Liao, JP

副主席 陳兆根博士 工程師
Vice-Chairman Ir. Dr. Alex S. K. Chan

總幹事 李經文教授
Executive Director Prof. William K. M. Lee, BA MA PhD

BY FAX (3151 7052) and BY POST

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Miss Polly YEUNG
Clerk to Panel on Education
Legislative Council Secretariat
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central
Hong Kong

Dear Miss Yeung,

Panel on Education on 18 March 2014

**Supplementary Information on Hong Kong Council for Accreditaion of
Academic and Vocational Qualifications**

At the Panel on Education meeting on 18 March 2014, Members sought additional information on the following aspects in relation to the accreditation services provided by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditaion of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) –

- (a) how HKCAAVQ ensures the sustained quality of accredited programmes;
- (b) whether the academic performance of graduates of the accredited programmes would be assessed; and
- (c) whether the standards applied in the accreditation exercise were benchmarked internationally.

Supplementary information is at the Annex for Members' information.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Lee Keng-mun, William
Executive Director
HKCAAVQ

Annex**Supplementary Information on Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications****1. How the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) ensures the sustained quality of accredited programmes**

HKCAAVQ is the Accreditation Authority and Qualifications Register Authority under the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 592) which underpins the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (QF). We perform our functions within the remit of the HKCAAVQ Ordinance (Cap. 1150). HKCAAVQ is not a regulatory body under the provisions of the Ordinances, but an accreditation and quality assurance agency. HKCAAVQ has put in place the Four-stage Quality Assurance (QA) Process to conduct accreditation under QF. The four stages are Initial Evaluation (IE), Programme Validation (PV), Programme Area Accreditation (PAA) and Periodic Review (PR), the details of which are provided at Appendix.

HKCAAVQ spares no effort in making operators aware of the accreditation requirements in order to facilitate self-evaluation of their readiness to undergo accreditation. Operators are alerted early in the accreditation process should they be unable to demonstrate sufficient evidence to meet the required accreditation standards. Operators would have chosen not to proceed with the accreditation exercise if the chance of successful accreditation is considered slim.

HKCAAVQ monitors the quality of programmes to ensure that they continue to meet the specified standards after accreditation through the following means –

- (a) **Pre-conditions** may be stipulated for fulfillment before the accreditation status is granted;
- (b) **Requirements** may be attached to the approval, which need to be fulfilled by the stipulated deadline within the validity period in order to maintain a valid accreditation status. For instance, an operator may be required to submit a progress report to demonstrate the effective implementation of its QA measures for the accredited programme within the validity period. If the operator fails to meet the requirements, the accreditation status of the programme will lapse;
- (c) **Recommendations** may be made to an operator for the purpose of continuous improvement of its programmes. Whilst such recommendations are non-binding, they would be revisited in the context of Programme Revalidation, and the operator would need to

explain what action has been taken to follow up on the recommendations as stated in the previous accreditation report;

- (d) The accreditation status of an operator or the programme will lapse if **substantial changes** are introduced without HKCAAVQ's **prior approval**. Substantial changes are any significant modification of the scope of an accredited operator or programme, such as the requirements on admission and graduation, appointment criteria of teaching staff, policy in assuring quality, maximum number of intake, etc; and
- (e) All accredited programmes are subject to **Programme Revalidation (Re-PV)** from time to time to ascertain whether the justifications for the original validation with respect to the programme are still valid and to note progress. Whether any substantial changes to the accredited programme have been made without HKCAAVQ's prior approval will also be reviewed at the Re-PV stage.

For the purposes of continuous enhancement of the Four-stage QA Process, HKCAAVQ embarked on a comprehensive review in 2011 to evaluate the effectiveness of the approach. After rigorous study and extensive consultation, a refined QA model has been developed and implementation is now underway. The Steering Committee for the review also proposed a refinement involving the introduction of Annual Reporting by operators of accredited programmes, which is still subject to further consideration by the Council.

2. **Whether the academic performance of graduates of the accredited programmes would be assessed**

The evaluation as to whether students can attain the intended learning outcomes upon graduation can be conducted at different stages of accreditation, i.e. during PV and Re-PV.

Evaluation at Programme Validation

During PV, for new programmes, HKCAAVQ examines the attainment of intended learning outcomes through review of the proposed assessments. For some non-local programmes which are already in operation prior to seeking HKCAAVQ's accreditation¹, we examine samples of graded/marked assessments to demonstrate attainment of the learning outcomes. The design and results of assessments must show that the QF level of the intended learning outcomes corresponds to the Generic Level Descriptors under the QF.

The evaluation of the assessments of a programme involves two levels: system level and implementation level. The system level refers to the

¹ Non-local programmes in Hong Kong are required to be registered under the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulations) Ordinance (Cap. 493). The operators can decide whether and when to seek accreditation by HKCAAVQ for a non-local programme to be offered as a locally-accredited programme.

design of the assessment tools. The programme description should contain information such as assessment weightings and strategies. As for the implementation level, assessment papers, marking schemes / criteria would be examined for the purpose of ascertaining the aligning of intended learning outcomes with the design of the assessments. By reaching the standards expected of the assessments, students should be able to attain the intended learning outcomes.

Evaluation at Programme Revalidation

All accredited programmes have a set validity period and are subject to Re-PV before the validity period ends. For the purposes of reviewing its actual implementation, sample graded/marked assessments of students of the accredited programme would be examined during Re-PV to ascertain if students could in fact reach the standards expected for attaining the learning outcomes. Moreover, in line with international practice, graduate survey results showing graduates' articulation pathways and employment situation (e.g. rank, field of work and employment rate) will also be evaluated to determine if the expected learning outcomes have been attained by the students. Operators are also required to provide information on review findings in relation to the attainment of learning outcomes during the validity period. As a result of such continuous review, it is expected that enhancements will be made in terms of attainment of the learning outcomes and student learning experience.

3. Whether the standards applied in the accreditation exercise are benchmarked internationally

Under the QF, each of the seven levels is characterized by outcome-based Generic Level Descriptors (GLD), which describe the common features of qualifications at the same level. The GLD promulgated by the Education Bureau takes into account overseas experience in its design. Given that all qualifications systems adopt similar GLD, our standards are broadly comparable to those in other countries. HKCAAVQ's standards are benchmarked with international practice, with the adoption of the QF.

HKCAAVQ appoints Specialists to serve on accreditation panels and to advise on quality assurance matters. Currently, there are around 900 specialists registered with HKCAAVQ. About a quarter of the Specialists are from overseas, providing views and advice from an international perspective.

HKCAAVQ is committed to promoting good practices in quality assurance among institutions, training bodies, professional bodies and other stakeholders in both local and international contexts. Apart from adopting of an internationally comparable qualifications framework, we benchmark our approaches with practices and standards of overseas QA bodies in a number of ways: (a) developing close ties with international QA agencies;

(b) sharing of knowledge and experience in QA; and (c) conducting external review against overseas good practices for QA agencies.

(a) Close Ties with International QA Agencies

To benchmark approaches with the latest international good practices and standards, HKCAAVQ has established close ties with QA agencies overseas and in the Mainland. HKCAAVQ is a founding member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN). We also collaborate with various partner organisations as set out below under bilateral Memoranda of Co-operation / Understanding –

- (i) Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT);
- (ii) Higher Education Evaluation Center of the Ministry of Education, China (HEEC);
- (iii) Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA);
- (iv) National Institution for Academic Degrees, Japan (NIAD-UE);
- (v) Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, UK (QAA);
- (vi) Shanghai Education Evaluation Institute (SEEI); and
- (vii) Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA).

For the purpose of enhancing our global connections, we frequently receive delegations from QA agencies and educational authorities worldwide. We also send colleagues to visit overseas QA agencies. Through these regular contacts we introduce our counterparts to the standards, criteria and process of accreditation undertaken by HKCAAVQ, and explore areas of mutual interest for future collaboration.

(b) Sharing Knowledge and Experience in QA

To share our knowledge and experience in QA, our staff regularly participate and present papers in international conferences. During these conferences, we have very fruitful exchange with representatives from higher education institutions and QA agencies.

Our contributions and efforts in the promotion of good practices on QA have been widely recognised in the QA sector. We have won the APQN Quality Awards, which identify and distinguish extraordinary QA contributions and good practices that have the potential for replication in the Asia-Pacific region, for two consecutive years. In 2013, we received the APQN Quality Award in the category of International Focus in recognition of our work in aligning ourselves to international trends and good practices in QA over the years, as well as our innovative work in the development and provision of accreditation for non-local programmes in Hong Kong. In 2014, the APQN Award (in the category of training and

support of reviewers) recognised our contributions to training and support of reviewers locally and regionally and our development of effective materials for training.

(c) External Review against Overseas Good Practice for QA Agency

For the purposes of continuous enhancement of our QA services and fine-tuning our approaches to further align with international good practices, we will undertake an external review against the *INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice for QA Agency*. Currently, 13 international QA agencies have undertaken an external review against the *Guidelines*. The review, which will start in July 2014, is expected to be completed by September 2015. It is anticipated that such an external review will assist us to further refine our practices and align them more closely with international quality standards.

HKCAAVQ
May 2014

Appendix

Four-stage Quality Assurance Process

Four-stage Quality Assurance (QA) Process is a quality assurance process with four stages, through which the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) evaluates operators and their learning programmes under the Qualifications Framework (QF). All operators that wish to have their learning programmes validated must apply for Initial Evaluation, followed by Programme Validation.

- (a) **Initial Evaluation (IE):** IE is an evaluation of whether an operator has the organisational competency to effectively manage and provide adequate resources to the development, delivery, assessment and QA of its learning programmes and educational/training services.
- (b) **Programme Validation (PV) and Programme Revalidation (Re-PV):** 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. Re-PV is the re-accreditation of programmes before the expiry date of their validity period under PV.
- (c) **Programme Area Accreditation (PAA):** PAA is conferred on operators with sufficient QA competency and maturity at the organisational level and a good track record in their validated programme(s). Upon gaining PAA, an operator may develop and operate learning programmes within an approved scope of programme area(s) at specified QF Level(s) for an approved period of time (validity period), and have the qualifications of its learning programmes entered into the Qualifications Register for QF recognition without going through PV or Re-PV by HKCAAVQ.
- (d) **Periodic Review (PR):** Operators granted a PAA status have to undertake PR in order to maintain their PAA status. PR is repeated at regular intervals according to the validity period of the PAA status. PR is used to ascertain whether the internal QA processes of the operator continue to be effective and sound.