

Legislative Council Panel on Education

**Discussion of issues related to the policy on self-financing
post-secondary programmes**

Meeting on 13 June 2016

HKCAAVQ's Submission

Purpose

1. This paper summarises the role of the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) with respect to quality assurance issues on self-financing post-secondary programmes.

**HKCAAVQ's role in quality assurance of self-financing post-secondary
programmes**

2. HKCAAVQ is an independent statutory body established under the HKCAAVQ Ordinance (Cap. 1150) and it does not receive any recurrent funding from the Government. Its Council comprises local and international academics as well as local industry and community leaders. The daily operations of HKCAAVQ are managed by the HKCAAVQ Secretariat led by an Executive Director.
3. HKCAAVQ performs the statutory roles as the Accreditation Authority and Qualifications Register (QR) Authority under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (QF). HKCAAVQ is responsible for the quality assurance of the majority of self-financing institutions and their programmes except the University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions and their self-financing units which have self-accrediting status. HKCAAVQ learning programme accreditation is voluntary except for self-financed degree programmes. Post-secondary colleges registered under the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance (Cap. 320) offering degree programmes have to seek approval from the Chief Executive (CE) in Council. In

addition, accreditation of sub-degree programmes¹ offered by self-financing institutions is mandatory.

4. HKCAAVQ undertakes accreditation through a process of peer review with reference to standards that have been benchmarked both locally and internationally. There are around 750 Specialists with a wide spectrum of backgrounds and experience serving on HKCAAVQ's accreditation panels. HKCAAVQ issues an accreditation report on the accreditation outcome, i.e. whether an institution meets the accreditation standards, and it includes recommendations for continuous improvement.

5. HKCAAVQ follows a Four-Stage Quality Assurance Process (the QA Process) to accredit institutions and their learning programmes under the QF. The QA Process consists of four stages: Initial Evaluation (IE), Learning Programme Accreditation and Re-accreditation (LPA and Re-LPA), Programme Area Accreditation (PAA) and Periodic Review (PR). Institutions that wish to have their learning programmes accredited are required to present evidence that both the institutions and their programmes meet the required standards as specified in the QA Process. An overview of the QA Process is given in [Appendix](#). In addition, HKCAAVQ conducts Institutional Reviews (IR) for self-financing institutions to evaluate their institutional capacity and competence to operate QF recognised qualifications, including degree programmes where appropriate. Institutions seeking registration under Cap. 320² approach HKCAAVQ to assess their compliance with the governance and academic requirements under Cap. 320; and ascertain whether they have an overall academic environment suitable for delivering their degree programmes³. HKCAAVQ also conducts IR for institutions registered

¹ Sub-degree programmes offered by UGC-funded institutions and their self-financing operators are not subject to HKCAAVQ accreditation.

² The approval of institutions' registration under Cap. 320 rests with the Permanent Secretary for Education.

³ The approval of offering degree level programmes offered by Cap. 320 registered post-secondary colleges rests with the Chief Executive (CE) in Council.

under Cap. 320 applying for private university title in Hong Kong⁴. An IR for Private University Title assesses a self-financing Cap. 320 institution's ability to meet the standards expected of a private university before it can make an application for university title for approval by the CE in Council. Guidelines on the principles, processes and procedures of the HKCAAVQ accreditation services are available on its website (www.hkcaavq.edu.hk).

6. One of HKCAAVQ's strategic objectives is to discharge its gate-keeping function as a statutory quality assurance body. Accreditation serves two purposes. Firstly, HKCAAVQ ensures that minimum standards are met in accreditation exercises. Secondly, HKCAAVQ promotes quality enhancement by advising institutions to establish their internal quality assurance capability for continuous improvement purposes. It is one of HKCAAVQ's functions to provide training to institutions. The four stages in the QA Process are also designed to facilitate institutions to progressively develop their competency for self-review, self-monitoring and enhancement of their internal quality assurance capacity.

Impact of quality assurance

7. The decline in the student population is and will continue to be a major challenge in the post-secondary sector, particularly for the self-financing institutions. The accreditation processes conducted by HKCAAVQ take environmental considerations into account to ensure that changes in the environment will not negatively affect institutional and programme quality. Some examples of how accreditation standards are considered in this context are included below.

⁴ The approval of applications from self-financing Cap. 320 institutions seeking private university title rests with the CE in Council. The Roadmap for Becoming a Private University was promulgated in summer 2015. http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/edu-system/postsecondary/policy-doc/Roadmap_for_Becoming_a_Private_Univeristy_eng.pdf

- (a) As part of the LPA process, institutions apply for a maximum intake number. They are required to justify the numbers with reference to recent survey/research data and analysis; and demonstrate that they have the necessary resources to support the number of students they apply for. In addition, HKCAAVQ reviews institutions' annual enrolment figures reported to the Education Bureau against the approved numbers and takes follow-up actions as necessary. In cases of under-enrolment, HKCAAVQ asks institutions concerned to explain and provide evidence that the enrolment situation will not negatively affect their ability to fund the programme operations in the future. HKCAAVQ also acts proactively. Institutions have been reminded of the importance of having realistic financial and student intake projections, reflecting the latest market situation and taking the institutions' latest enrolment figures into account in future accreditation submissions.

- (b) Admission is one of the criteria of HKCAAVQ accreditation. The Education Bureau prescribes the standard admission requirements for Bachelor's degree and sub-degree programmes. HKCAAVQ accreditation panels assess whether admission routes through "other equivalent qualifications" are justified and supported by clear and acceptable definitions and that appropriate approval processes are in place for enrolments.

- (c) Institutions offering degree level programmes are required to develop graduate profiles and are asked to provide evidence of the need in the labour market and the community of the programmes they offer. HKCAAVQ assesses the information provided by institutions in the accreditation process.

8. However, accreditation is time bound through a validity period. The accreditation process of HKCAAVQ forms a safety net with learning programmes being quality assured and institutions' organisational

competency being evaluated in terms of governance, organisational management, financial and physical resources, staffing and staff development and the institutional quality assurance mechanism during a validity period. To safeguard student interests, the QA Process has built in a mechanism to check the quality of learning programmes at regular intervals through re-accreditation or periodic review. Failure to demonstrate the ability to maintain learning programme quality may lead to the accreditation status being revoked.

9. If substantial changes occur during the validity period, institutions are obliged to seek HKCAAVQ's prior approval before implementing such changes (e.g. changes to admission requirements or maximum intake number) to learning programmes or to the organisational structures of the institution. Admittedly, the current quality assurance approach to a lesser extent allows HKCAAVQ as a quality assurance body to actively monitor institutions and their programmes during the validity period. In other words, the quality assurance approach is based on a self-regulatory system whereby it is the responsibility of institutions to take the initiative to report any major changes of accredited programmes to HKCAAVQ for assessment. If it is established that timely reporting of substantial changes have not been undertaken by institutions, or false or misleading information has been provided, HKCAAVQ may vary or withdraw the accreditation report.

10. Quality assurance is playing an increasingly important role in post-secondary education, given globalization, massification and diversification of education services. Public confidence in quality assurance, transparency and good governance are the foundations of the quality assurance model. In terms of transparency, HKCAAVQ publishes information related to accreditation services on its website for public access. These documents detail the accreditation policies and procedures, as well as the standards and criteria for making accreditation decisions. Accredited qualifications are readily accessible to stakeholders through

the online Qualifications Register. Summary reports of accreditation outcomes are also published on the HKCAAVQ website.

Conclusion

11. HKCAAVQ is implementing an appropriate and effective quality assurance mechanism taking the environment of the sector and the diversity of institutions into consideration. The quality assurance mechanism is regularly reviewed with reference to international quality assurance practices in the education field. In 2015, HKCAAVQ undertook an external review of compliance with the Good Practice Guidelines of the International Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education⁵ and was evaluated to have fully met the Guidelines⁶. The Four-stage QA Process was implemented in 2008 when the QF was launched. Our QA Process was reviewed in 2011-13 to ensure the effectiveness of the accreditation approach and processes. In light of the significant changes in the education landscape in recent years, HKCAAVQ has embarked on a major project to review the accreditation standards and criteria. This review aims to address the diverse needs of the sector, reflect the challenges and the expectations of the Hong Kong society, as well as ensure such expectations are articulated as clearly as possible in our accreditation activities.

12. HKCAAVQ has established effective working relationship with self-financing post-secondary institutions to understand their development plans. We have also been working closely with the the Quality Assurance

⁵ The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) is a world-wide association of over 200 organisations active in the theory and practice of quality assurance in higher education. Its members are quality assurance agencies, with a great majority from organisations that have an interest in quality assurance in higher education.
<http://www.inqaahe.org/>

⁶ The INQAAHE Board informed HKCAAVQ on 9 October 2015 that HKCAAVQ comprehensively aligned with the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice (GGP) in our provision of accreditation services for the higher education sector.
<http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/news/hkcaavq-aligned-with-inqaahe-guidelines-of-good-practice>

Council of the University Grants Committee towards greater levels of comparability of quality standards to best address the needs of the sector.

13. HKCAAVQ is mindful of indications that institutions are identifying ways to cope with the challenges arising from the decline in the student population, e.g. diversifying their programme offerings outside of Hong Kong to expand their sources of income or delivering part of a learning programme or the entire programme online. We are ensuring that our QA approaches and processes can handle these new developments in the sector effectively.

14. 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. The implementation of a quality assurance system with appropriate standards is important for the post-secondary sector in Hong Kong. The setting of standards, regulations and oversight mechanisms requires a combined effort by policy makers, quality assurance bodies and stakeholders.

HKCAAVQ

June 2016

An Overview of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process Developed by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) to Underpin the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (QF)

HKCAAVQ employs the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process to accredit institutions and programmes. The purposes of each of the four stages are as follows:

Stage 1: Initial Evaluation (IE)

To assess whether institutions are able to achieve their stated objectives, and to operate learning programmes that meet the stated QF standards.

Stage 2: Learning Programme Accreditation (LPA)

- To evaluate learning programmes' design, delivery, management and review to ensure they are appropriate for the qualifications to which they lead to.
- To continue to be offered as QF recognised qualifications, accredited programmes are subject to re-accreditation (re-LPA) before the expiry of the validity period. Re-LPA is the cyclical evaluation of an accredited learning programme. Institutions are expected to demonstrate continuous improvement as a result of internal QA procedures over the validity period. Re-LPA determines whether the requisite standards are maintained.

Stage 3: Programme Area Accreditation (PAA)

To determine whether institutions have well-balanced and robust internal QA systems to self-monitor and accredit their own programmes, given their track records of self-monitoring and assuring the standards of their accredited learning programmes.

Stage 4: Periodic Review (PR)

To determine whether an institution with a valid PAA status continues to maintain robust internal QA 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 areas.

Details of the Four-stage QA Process can be found at HKCAAVQ's website:
<http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/services/accreditation/four-stage-qa-process>.

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