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28 June 2012

Ms Amy Yu
Clerk to Panel on Education
Legislative Council Secretariat
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central
Hong Kong

Dear Ms Yu,

Panel on Education
Follow-up to meeting on 11 June 2012
Start-up Loan for Post-secondary Education Providers

At the meeting of the Panel on Education held on 11 June 2012, the Administration was requested to provide written response on the following –

- (a) the accreditation criteria adopted by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (“HKCAAVQ”) for programmes offered by non-University Grants Committee (“UGC”) funded post-secondary institutions;
- (b) the time required by HKCAAVQ to complete the accreditation process; and
- (c) a comparison between the accreditation criteria adopted for programmes offered by UGC-funded institutions and non-UGC funded institutions.

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Quality assurance bodies

At present, there are three quality assurance bodies for the post-secondary education sector. HKCAAVQ is a statutory body responsible for the quality assurance of all operators and programmes except the UGC-funded institutions which enjoy self-accrediting status¹. The Quality Assurance Council (“QAC”) is a semi-autonomous non-statutory body under the aegis of the UGC to conduct quality audits of the UGC-funded institutions and programmes offered at degree level or above, however funded. The Joint Quality Review Committee (“JQRC”) was established by the Heads of Universities Committee (“HUCOM”) to provide peer review of the quality assurance processes of self-financing sub-degree programmes offered by the UGC-funded institutions. In response to the Higher Education Review 2010, the Administration has advised this Panel earlier that we would explore the possibility of eventually setting up a single quality assurance body.

Criteria and time required

HKCAAVQ conducts a whole range of quality assurance exercises including initial and periodic review of operators/agencies at the institutional level and accreditation of individual programmes. On the other hand, QAC and JQRC focus on the quality assurance mechanism and processes adopted by UGC-funded institutions and do not conduct accreditation of individual programmes offered by the self-accrediting UGC-funded institutions. All three bodies formulate their methodology having regard to good international practices. The quality assurance process is based on peer review and evidenced-based approach, normally involving self evaluation and review by a panel of experts. Detailed guidelines are easily accessible on the websites of the three bodies. Salient points on the criteria and time required are set out at the Annex.

Yours sincerely,



(Ms Pecvin Yong)
for Secretary for Education

¹ The Hong Kong Institute of Education has self-accrediting status in respect of its teacher education programmes at degree and above levels. Its non-teacher education programmes are subject to validation by HKCAAVQ.

**Criteria and Time for Quality Assurance Exercises by
HKCAAVQ, QAC and JQRC**

HKCAAVQ

HKCAAVQ publishes detailed guidelines on a whole range of QA activities underpinning the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (QF). Details can be found in (http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/services_fourstage.asp). Based on the guidelines, accreditation of learning programmes is intended to ensure that –

- (a) learning outcomes and standards of the learning programmes are appropriate for the qualifications to which they lead;
 - (b) content and design of the learning programmes and the methods of delivery are likely to achieve their purposes;
 - (c) content and assessment are based on academic and vocational standards, as appropriate;
 - (d) delivery arrangements, including management, facilities, staffing and student services are appropriate for the learning programmes and will enable their successful delivery at the Qualifications Framework (“QF”) level proposed; and
 - (e) operators have systems and resources in place to effectively manage, quality assure and improve their programmes.
2. There are two sets of criteria for accreditation of learning programmes, one set for programmes of QF levels 1 – 3, which are more vocational-oriented; and the other set for programmes of QF levels 4 – 7, which are more academic-oriented. The accreditation criteria for programmes of QF level 4 – 7 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

Quality Assurance Council

3. QAC publishes an Audit Manual setting out the details of its external audit (<http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/doc/qac/publication/auditmanual.pdf>). Since student learning is the focal point of the audit system, audits examine all aspects of an institution's activities which contribute to student learning quality. These activities range from planning and policy development, through programme design, approval and review, to teaching, assessment and student support. The QAC has selected a set of such activities, common to all institutions, as the 'focus areas' of audit. Each focus area is a significant contributor to student learning quality, and is sufficiently generic that it can be interpreted in a way which is relevant to each institution's activities and practices. Taken together, the focus areas effectively define the scope of a QAC audit.

4. The eleven common focus areas of audit are –
- (a) Articulation of appropriate objectives
 - (b) Management, planning and accountability
 - (c) Programme development and approval processes
 - (d) Programme monitoring and review
 - (e) Curriculum design
 - (f) Programme delivery, including resources, teaching mode, and the student learning environment
 - (g) Experiential and other 'out of classroom' learning (e.g. leadership development, overseas exchange, work-integrated learning, service learning)
 - (h) Assessment
 - (i) Teaching quality and staff development
 - (j) Student participation
 - (k) Activities specific to research degrees

Joint Quality Review Committee

5. JQRC's major remit is the implementation of a framework of quality assurance, based on peer review, for the self-financed sub-degree programmes of the UGC-funded institutions. This quality assurance framework builds upon the internal quality assurance mechanisms of the institutions and takes into account their self-accrediting status. The Institutional Review is the major tool employed in JQRC's quality assurance framework. Details are set out in its website (<http://www.jqrc.edu.hk/index.files/Review.htm>). Issues to be considered include –

- (a) Institutional plans and policies
- (b) Programme approval authority
- (c) Programme approval, delivery and monitoring
- (d) Institutional support for quality
- (e) Indicators of quality / quality assurance

Time required

6. The guidelines also set out the steps and estimated time required to complete relevant exercise. In the case of HKCAAVQ, an accreditation exercise for a typical programme at QF Level 4 – 7 (i.e. sub-degree to doctoral degree levels) will normally take about **17 weeks** to complete, counting from the receipt of the accreditation documents from the operator and excluding the preparatory discussion and work. The key tasks in these 17 weeks are as follows –

<u>Weeks</u>	<u>Key Tasks</u>
1-7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Preliminary assessment of accreditation documents to ensure that it is sufficient for the exercise to proceed > Accreditation Panel to provide initial comments to operators and request additional evidence or information as needed > Operators to provide requested evidence or information
8-9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > On-site visit > Post-visit follow up, if applicable
10-17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Panel report preparation
17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Notification of outcome to operators