



Accreditation of Non-local Learning Programmes

Frequently Asked Questions

Registration vs Accreditation

1. What are the benefits of seeking accreditation of non-local programmes which are already legally permitted to be offered in Hong Kong under the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance (Cap 493)?

The qualifications of accredited non-local programmes may be entered into the Qualifications Register (QR) for recognition under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF). Students holding non-local qualifications that appear on the QR will be recognised as meeting the standard of a particular qualification obtained in Hong Kong. Full-time students studying locally-accredited self-financing post-secondary education courses (including non-local programmes) in Hong Kong, may also apply for grant and low interest loan under the Financial Assistance Scheme for Post-secondary Students.

2. Will registration and accreditation of non-local programmes co-exist?

Yes. Registration (including exemption from registration) and accreditation are under different ordinances [the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance (Cap 493) and the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap 592) respectively] and are administered by different authorities.

For registration, an assessment is conducted on comparability with the home course conducted in the home country. Accreditation benchmarks the learning programme against the local system including the HKQF. The introduction of the voluntary process of accreditation of non-local programmes offered in Hong Kong does not affect the function or the process for registration (including exemption from registration).

3. Will operators be required to submit annual returns after successful accreditation of the non-local learning programmes?

Yes. As registration (including exemption from registration) and accreditation of non-local programmes are different processes, the annual returns required under the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance (Cap 493) will remain unchanged.

Accreditation Model

4. What is accreditation of non-local learning programmes?

Accreditation of non-local learning programmes is a quality assurance process that underpins the HKQF. It comprises two stages.

The first stage is Initial Evaluation for collaborative provision which is to determine whether the collaborating operators (partnership) are able to achieve their objectives as claimed and to operate the learning programmes (under the collaborative partnership) that meet the claimed QF standards.

The second stage is Programme Validation. It is an overall evaluation of the non-local learning programme to determine whether the learning programme meets the required standards and achieves its claimed objectives as well as delivers the intended learning outcomes that meet the competency standards prescribed in the Generic Level Descriptors (GLD) of the HKQF. The GLD are available at <http://www.hkqf.gov.hk>.

5. What kinds of learning programmes can be validated under the Accreditation of Non-local Learning Programmes? Can purely distance learning programmes be subject to accreditation of non-local learning programmes?

The accreditation exercise is designed for registered / exempted non-local courses under the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance (Cap 493) intended to be entered into the QR for QF recognition. Accreditation services will only be provided to registered and exempted courses required to be regulated under Cap 493. Purely distance learning programmes are not included in the registration requirement under Cap 493 and are therefore not within the remit of the Accreditation of Non-local Learning Programmes.

6. What constitutes collaborative provision of a non-local learning programme?

Collaborative provision of a non-local learning programme involves a Hong Kong operator (local operator) and a non-local operator jointly operating a programme of learning in Hong Kong, which leads to a qualification awarded by the non-local operator. The local operator and the non-local operator are treated as acting jointly as the operators of the non-local learning programme to be accredited.

7. What is a partnership?

In the Guidelines on Accreditation of Non-local Learning Programmes, “partnership” refers to the collaborating operators (local and non-local) responsible for the collaborative provision of a non-local learning programme of the non-local operator. “Local operator” refers to the operator whose base of operation is in Hong Kong (including the local offices of a non-local educational institution), and “non-local operator” to the partner whose base of operation is outside Hong Kong. Where the local operator is a branch campus of the non-local operator (whether or not established as a separate legal entity), the partnership refers to the relationship between the branch campus and its parent institution.

8. If one non-local operator has three different partners in Hong Kong, will it be required to undergo three different Initial Evaluation (IE) exercises?

Yes, as IE is per partnership at a specified QF Level and evaluates the collaborative provision. Each partnership is unique and their terms of collaboration may be different from one another.

9. How will different types of collaboration be accredited?

Under the principle of “fitness for purpose”, the onus of proof lies with the partnerships to demonstrate that the quality assurance system and mechanism under the collaborative arrangements as presented is sufficient for the non-local programme and is effective to ensure compliance with the HK requirements.

10. How is the notion of outcome-based education (OBE) embodied in accreditation?

The accreditation panel evaluates whether the graduates really attain the claimed intended learning outcomes of the programme, taking into consideration the programme design and delivery factors holistically: curriculum coverage and structure, student admission requirements, delivery and student learning experience and support. Student assessment serves as evidence of the attainment. The claimed learning outcomes are then mapped against the competency standards prescribed in the Generic Level Descriptors of the HKQF for the purpose of QF Level determination. Together with quality assurance considerations such as programme management and review as well as other input factors such as staffing and staff development, financial and physical resources, management information system, the programme design and delivery factors for evaluating OBE learning programme form the basis of Programme Validation.

11. If an operating non-local programme was not designed as an outcome-based programme in the first place, how can they undergo accreditation?

All learning programmes must have assessment as evidence of what students know and can do at the end of the learning experience provided by the learning programmes. It is the responsibility of the partnership to discuss and see how evidence can be provided during the programme validation exercise to demonstrate to the accreditation panel that the learning programme meets the accreditation requirements and delivers learning outcomes that meet the HKQF standards as prescribed under the Generic Level Descriptors.

Accreditation Process

12. What is the process of accreditation of non-local learning programmes?

Accreditation of non-local learning programmes is to be conducted in a Collective Approach by subject area / discipline. The purpose of the Collective Approach is to make available accreditation services in an efficient, cost effective and consistent way so as to handle a large quantity of accreditation requests in a shorter period without compromising quality. The schedule of accreditation service by discipline is available at http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/services_accreditation_NLP.asp.

13. What can we do if we are interested in participating in the accreditation process?

Interested partnerships with non-local learning programmes in the discipline being considered for accreditation should return a signed Statement of Intent to the HKCAAVQ indicating that they are ready to undergo the Initial Evaluation and Programme Validation of their collaborative non-local learning programmes. In the Statement of Intent a person / representative should be nominated jointly by the local and the non-local partners as the authorised liaison point with the HKCAAVQ on all matters related to the accreditation.

14. If the number of non-local learning programmes in a discipline to be accredited is large, will some of them be accredited first while others will be accredited later?

The scheduling of NLP accreditation exercises will primarily be based on the date of submission of Statement of Intent. NLP accreditation is now a mainstream service provided by the HKCAAVQ. Adopting the standard practice, the outcome of an accreditation exercise will be available in the form of an Interim Report within five working days after the on-site visit.

15. What happens if our organisation missed the accreditation timeline?

A partnership that has missed the scheduled service for a specified discipline is still welcome to indicate its interest by submitting a completed Statement of Intent (http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/Application%20Forms/NLP/Statement_of_intent8-final.doc). We will try our best to allot an available timeslot as soon as possible to the partnership taking into account other accreditation requests.

16. Will Initial Evaluation and Programme Validation be conducted in parallel?

No. Initial Evaluation is a pre-requisite of Programme Validation but they can be conducted back to back if there are savings in time and cost.

17. Is it a must for personnel of the non-local partner to attend the on-site visit in Hong Kong?

Yes. Personnel from the partnership attending the visit should include representatives of the local and the non-local operators. Such representatives should be persons with

decision-making authority and be familiar with the non-local learning programmes, in the collaboration. If appropriate, the meetings can also be conducted via tele- or video-conferencing.

18. What will be the size of the panel?

The panel will consist of both local and overseas specialists. There will be at least one overseas member with experience in managing international collaborative programmes. The size of the panel will depend on the required expertise for the programmes and the collaboration. For example, a typical panel may consist of one overseas member, two or more local academics and one local practitioner, as well as a HKCAAVQ professional staff member.

19. Will there be any meeting to debrief the operator of the panel's decision(s) at the end of the on-site visit?

The panel will organise an exit meeting with the senior management representatives of the partnership. The panel will share key observations with the senior management at the exit meeting.

20. Will the HKCAAVQ validate different modes (i.e. full-time and part-time) of the same learning programmes under the same partnership?

Yes. Different modes of the same learning programmes under the same partnership will be accredited in the same Collective Exercise of the same discipline.

21. How can the partnerships tell whether they have prepared well for the accreditation exercise or not?

Through the Operators' Briefing Session and Operators' Workshop as well as with reference to the Guidelines on Accreditation of Non-local Learning Programmes, operators are made aware of the accreditation criteria and standards for preparation of accreditation documents, documentary evidence and the on-site visit. In the course of the accreditation exercise, the panel will give Initial Comments on the submitted accreditation documents and interact with the operators during the on-site visit. Through these activities the partnerships have the opportunity to demonstrate to the panel their competency in meeting the required accreditation standards. Such arrangements are in

line with the “no surprise” principle of the HKCAAVQ in conducting accreditation exercise.

Operators’ Training Workshop

22. What are the topics covered in the Operators’ Training Workshop on NLP Accreditation?

The purpose of the training workshop is to provide operators with specific information on accreditation criteria, standards and required evidence so that they may determine whether they are ready for NLP accreditation and can make preparations for compiling the accreditation document and the on-site visit. These topics are not covered in the NLP briefing.

23. How do I enroll in the training workshop?

Participation in the training workshop is by invitation. The HKCAAVQ normally sends out invitations to target NLP operators with learning programmes in relevant discipline(s) ahead of forthcoming exercise(s).

Accreditation Document and Evidence

24. Is there a specific format for the accreditation document?

The HKCAAVQ provides a template for the accreditation document as well as a data template for the learning programme for use by the partnerships. Required documents to be submitted with the accreditation document are also specified in Appendices 1 and 2 to the Guidelines on Accreditation of Non-local Learning Programmes. It is the responsibility of the collaborating partners to provide sufficient and appropriate documentary evidence in the accreditation process to enable the HKCAAVQ to make an accreditation decision. Possible sources of evidence to be provided by the collaborating partners are also outlined in Appendices 1 and 2. To facilitate partnerships submitting multiple programmes for accreditation at the same time, a reference template is available as Appendix 8 of the Guidelines to show how accreditation considerations common to all programmes can be addressed at the same time. The possible sources of evidence are indicative of what will be required; it is up to the partnership to offer other evidence that is relevant in demonstrating that an accreditation criterion has been met. When preparing the accreditation document, the partnerships are only expected to submit what they have been using on a daily operational basis and / or for planning and decision-making

purposes.

25. How many copies of the Accreditation Document need to be submitted?

All panel members need to be provided with a hard copy of the Accreditation Document. Three additional copies will also be requested for filing and other purposes. In addition, operators are asked to submit an electronic version of the Accreditation Document for electronic distribution under a secure arrangement.

26. If the terms contained in the collaborative agreement are considered to not fully meet the accreditation requirements of the HKCAAVQ, will there be any implications to the accreditation outcome, noting that a collaborative agreement once signed is not easily altered?

The collaborating partners are expected to work out feasible solutions to issues identified jointly and if necessary an addendum to the agreement may be a possible solution under such circumstances.

27. There is sensitive business information in the collaborative agreement, e.g. surplus sharing ratio. Can the partners refuse to disclose such information to the HKCAAVQ?

The key consideration under the criterion of Financial Resources are whether the partnership has appropriate resources to support the delivery of the learning programme and a mechanism to deploy such resources to meet the quality standard of the learning programme. Evidence to prove the partnership's competency in meeting the aforesaid key considerations is required to be provided to the HKCAAVQ. Therefore, whether sensitive business information is required or not depends on whether it serves as relevant and appropriate evidence.

28. Regarding the evidence of financial health for Initial Evaluation, does the latest audited account or financial statement suffice as it refers to institutional level, rather than programme level?

As the focus of Initial Evaluation is on collaborative provision, the required evidence can be the latest audited account or financial statement such as management accounts depending on the governance structure of the respective partners. Please note that this financial information should be provided separately from the Accreditation Document as

it will only be reviewed by the Subject Expert (Financial Management and Corporate Governance), the panel chairman and the HKCAAVQ staff member in the capacity of the Panel Member-Secretary.

29. How many years should the audited account(s) or financial statement(s) submitted to HKCAAVQ cover?

The current or the latest audited financial report will be sufficient.

30. How does staffing policy contribute to the Initial Evaluation process?

The partnership should have an effective staffing policy to ensure the availability of an adequate number of staff with the appropriate expertise, experience and competency to teach in the non-local learning programmes. How the stated staffing policy has been implemented will then be reviewed by the Panel.

Accreditation Standards

31. What are the differences between accreditation of local and non-local learning programmes?

The principles for Programme Validation of non-local learning programmes are the same as those for local learning programmes, as all learning programmes, regardless of origin and nature must meet the stated objectives and the standards for the HKQF before their qualifications can be entered into the Qualifications Register. For Initial Evaluation of partnerships of non-local learning programmes, the panel focuses on the collaboration between the non-local operator and the local (Hong Kong) operator rather than just the local operator.

32. What is the impact of 3+3+4 on accreditation standards?

NLP accreditation will benchmark the programmes against the prevailing local education system, the HKQF and any other relevant government policies, specifications, guidelines and common descriptors, etc. With the advent of 3+3+4, operators should also provide information supported by documentary evidence of the strategic and action plans for attuning to the new education system as appropriate.

33. With the new academic structure of 3+3+4, will the curriculum of NLP be required to include liberal studies?

The programme content and structure should reflect the programme objectives and be able to deliver the intended learning outcomes at the claimed QF Level, taking into account the prior skills, knowledge and experience of the target students. Onus of proof lies with the partnership. In the course of accreditation, the benchmark is the Generic Level Descriptors of the HKQF as well as the prevailing local education system as stipulated in any relevant government policies, specifications, guidelines or common descriptors for qualifications.

34. It is stated that the non-local programmes are expected to meet the local standards. What are the local standards?

The Generic Level Descriptors (GLD) developed to underpin the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) are used to benchmark against the intended learning outcomes of the non-local learning programmes undergoing NLP accreditation. The GLD describes the minimum competency requirements of qualifications at the same level and helps locate a qualification at a specific level on the QF.

35. Regarding the compatibility of the degrees from different countries, overseas universities design their programmes to meet their home countries' requirements and standards. These programmes are accepted internationally and are not purely designed for Hong Kong. Why is it necessary for these internationally accepted programmes to meet the Hong Kong standards?

One of the purposes of voluntarily seeking NLP accreditation status in Hong Kong is for gaining recognition under the HKQF so as to enable the partners and eligible full-time students to gain access to relevant Government incentive schemes. Therefore, the HKQF standards are the benchmark.

36. Since the curriculum of the non-local learning programme is owned by the non-local operator, the Hong Kong operator may not have the rights to revise it for the purpose of meeting the accreditation standards in Hong Kong. What are the options for the Hong Kong operator to be able to participate in non-local programme accreditation?

Accreditation is a voluntary exercise. The partnership should understand that both the home course requirements [under the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance (Cap 493)] and the requirements of the local education system [under the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap 592)] should be met if it wants to obtain both registration (including exemption from registration) and accreditation status for the non-local learning programmes.

37. How will the non-local learning programme be assessed in terms of programme length and volume of study?

The local benchmark would be used as a reference. By local benchmark, it refers to both the HKQF and the prevailing local education system. It is the responsibility of the partnership to provide evidence to the effect that the learning programme as designed with the stated programme length and in the study mode meets the claimed objective and the claimed QF standard.

38. Is there any requirement on the study mode and location for a non-local learning programme undergoing accreditation?

The HKCAAVQ does not prescribe the study mode and location of regulated non-local learning programmes to be accredited as long as they fulfil the accreditation criteria for the purpose of the HKQF, the registration requirements under Cap 493 as well as the following general requirements and the local benchmark.

- The learning programme should carry an award (i.e. a qualification) as a formal approval of the achievement of the learning programme.
- The learning programme should be accessible to learners of Hong Kong.
- The learning programme should include formal assessments to ascertain that learners have achieved the specified learning outcomes of the programme.
- The learning programme should correspond to an assigned QF level in accordance with the Generic Level Descriptors.

39. Is the benchmark of non-local programmes (including top-up degrees) set against the 3-year or 4-year degrees conferred by the local universities in HK?

NLP Accreditation is to answer the legal requirements stipulated in the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (AAVQO, Cap 592), i.e. whether the programme meets the standards of its claimed objectives as well as the HKQF standards. The Generic Level Descriptors that prescribe the competency requirements and standards at each QF Level as well as those prevailing in the industry / discipline in the current education system are the benchmark.

Accreditation Outcome

40. What can be the accreditation outcome?

The accreditation outcome will be one of the following. Conditions and restrictions may be specified.

- Accreditation is approved at specified QF level(s) within a stipulated validity period without any pre-conditions and/or requirements to be met by the partnership; or
- Accreditation is approved at specified QF level(s) within a stipulated validity period subject to the fulfillment by the partnership of certain pre-conditions and/or requirements by the stipulated deadline(s); or
- Accreditation as sought is not approved.

41. How is the accreditation outcome released?

A Statement of Accreditation confirming the granting of the accreditation status to the partnership and the non-local learning programme(s) concerned will be issued together with the Accreditation Reports for approval cases, or upon satisfactory fulfilment of all of the pre-condition(s) for relevant cases with pre-condition(s). In the latter case, the validity period will only commence after satisfactory fulfilment of the pre-condition(s).

42. What is the implication if the outcome of the accreditation exercise is non-approval?

The partnership and / or the learning programme concerned will not be granted an accreditation status. In other words, the qualification of the learning programme cannot be entered into the Qualifications Register (QR) for recognition under the HKQF. However, since accreditation and registration are separate exercises under different ordinances, a non-approval accreditation outcome will not affect the status and operation of the non-local learning programme concerned under the Non-Local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance (Cap 493).

43. Will the HKCAAVQ provide the rationale for non-approval in an accreditation exercise?

Yes. Evidence and reasons for the HKCAAVQ to make accreditation decisions will be stipulated in the Accreditation Report. This is to help operators reflect upon their operation and to enhance the quality of their education provision.

44. If one non-local operator has two different partners in Hong Kong and each of these two partnerships participates in the accreditation exercise and if the outcome for the first one is approval but the other is non-approval, how can the award issued by the same non-local operator be distinguished as 'accredited' and 'not accredited'?

Qualifications of successfully validated learning programmes entered into the QR are associated with the operators (i.e. the local operators) and granting bodies (i.e. the non-local operators). The partnership with the local partner that is not successfully accredited in an IE will not meet the pre-requisite for proceeding to programme validation and hence the local partner's name will not be identified in the QR as the operator of the learning programme concerned.

45. As the accreditation exercises are conducted in different months, how does the HKCAAVQ ensure the consistency of the results?

HKCAAVQ will ensure consistency of the different accreditation exercises conducted at different times through the participation of professional staff and because all accreditation exercises are guided by the same principles as follows: 1) Peer review, 2) Fitness for purpose, 3) Evidence-based, and 4) Threshold standards.

Accreditation Status and Recognition

46. Is it necessary to apply for Initial Evaluation again at the end of the validity period?

Initial Evaluation is per collaboration at a specified QF level(s) and is valid for two years. Within the two-year validity period, the collaborative partners must have at least one non-local learning programme accredited at the approved QF level in order to continue to be entitled to the Initial Evaluation status. If partnerships continue to have the learning programmes successfully validated their Initial Evaluation status at relevant QF Level(s) will not expire.

47. If a local operator has already attained the IE status from previous accreditation exercise, can the local operator be exempted from IE in the NLP accreditation? Will IE be only applicable to the overseas operator under such circumstances?

The IE in NLP is to assess the capability of the two partners in co-offering the learning programmes at a specified QF Level. The IE status is linked to the partnership at the specified QF Level. Therefore, both local and overseas operators will be evaluated as one entity, distinct from any other individual IE status.

48. Will the qualifications of accredited non-local programmes be locally recognised by the Civil Service Bureau?

Yes. Upon successful accreditation, the qualifications of relevant non-local learning programmes may be entered into the QR for recognition under the QF, in accordance with the terms and procedures stipulated by the QR Authority. Such qualifications attained by individual students will be recognised as meeting the standard of comparable qualifications obtained in Hong Kong and will be accepted by the Civil Service Bureau for employment purpose.

Accreditation Fee and Subsidy

49. What is the cost of accreditation?

The prevailing fee schedule for accreditation of local learning programmes has been adopted for the time being until further notice. Discount may be considered for multiple programme validations per partnership under the Collective Approach on a full cost recovery basis.

50. Will the fees be different for validation of learning programme in both the full-time and part-time modes from validation of learning programme in a single mode?

Accreditation fees are levied under the principle of full cost-recovery. The HKCAAVQ will be able to advise on the exact accreditation fee for learning programmes in both the full-time and part-time modes after receiving details of the learning programme via the Statement of Intent (SoI) submitted by the partnership.

51. What is the Initial Evaluation (IE) fee if our organisation has 5 to 6 courses at different Qualifications Framework (QF) Levels?

IE evaluates the collaborative provision of each partnership (i.e. the local partner and the non-local partner working together in the offer of non-local learning programme(s) in HK) at specified QF Level(s). The fees listed for IE on the HKCAAVQ website are per partnership by QF Level.

(http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/services_accreditation_NLP.asp)

52. Under the same partnership, if an operator plans to conduct IE for Bachelor (QF Level 5) and Master (QF Level 6) degree programmes, does the operator need to pay the IE fee for each level?

Under the same partnership, IE status attained at a higher QF Level can be extended downwards within the range of QF Levels 4 – 7 or within the range of QF Levels 1-3. In other words, payment for IE service at QF Level 3 for one partnership (i.e. \$27,000) covers QF Levels 1-3; payment for IE service at a QF Level within QF Levels 4-7 for one partnership covers the same level or lower, but does not extend to QF Levels 1-3.

53. If our organisation applies for IE Level 5 for General Business programmes in 2011 and IE Level 6 for Accounting and Finance programmes in 2012, should we still pay the full IE fee in the second round of accreditation under the same partnership?

If the same partnership plans to have NLPs accredited at QF Levels 5 and 6 in the near future, the partnership may consider requesting an IE at the higher QF Level in the first round of the exercise so that the attained status, if approved, will cover the applied Level and the Level below within QF Levels 4-7. In this case, only one IE fee at QF Level 6 (i.e. \$65,000) will be levied for the exercise.

54. The learning programmes offered under the same partnership may share similar features such as content, staff, facilities and resources. Will there be room for discount?

The Accreditation fee is levied according to the principle of full cost recovery. Discount is offered when cost saving is achieved through workload reduction such as multiple programme validations per partnership under the Collective Approach in the same discipline.

55. How about the Programme Validation (PV) fee for a learning programmes with different exit awards at different QF Levels (e.g. Diploma, Advanced Diploma and Bachelor Degree)?

The fee listed for programme validation (http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/services_accreditation_NLP.asp) covers a learning programme that leads to one exit award at a particular QF Level. For a learning programme with intermediate qualifications at different exit points, the PV fee will be calculated on the basis of the number of exit qualification(s) per QF Level. It is feasible for a discount to be offered to such programmes, after taking into account the magnitude of cost savings that can be achieved from the assessment of common elements.

56. What is the likely level of discount for NLP accreditation in the Collective Approach?

As per answers to Q49 and Q50, any discount is calculated on a per partnership basis by taking into consideration aspects such as:

- Panel formation requirements
- Number of programmes in the partnership
- Nature of programmes

57. When do I settle the accreditation fee?

The schedule for payment of the accreditation service is normally as follows:

- a. 100% of the IE accreditation fee and 30% of the PV accreditation fee to be paid upon signing the Service Agreement
- b. The remaining to be paid one month before the visit date.

58. Tell me more about the accreditation grants to operators of self-financing programmes. Does the 100% IE reimbursement apply to all operators or only to the non-profit making organisations? What are the criteria of applying for the subsidy? Can I get the subsidy more than once?

The Qualifications Framework Support Scheme is operated by the Education Bureau. Details about the scheme are available at: <http://www.hkqf.gov.hk/guie/QFSS.asp>. As the Scheme is outside the remit of the HKCAAVQ, operators are advised to approach the Education Bureau for further information.

Others

59. Will the HKCAAVQ work together with professional accreditation bodies in NLP accreditation or take into account the accreditation outcome of such professional accreditation bodies?

NLP accreditation is different from professional accreditation which is done in accordance with its own statutes and rules. The two processes are conducted separately with different objectives. The former assesses the NLP against standards specified under Cap 592. It is conducted by a panel of experts in the relevant subject / discipline before recognition under the QF can be granted. Professional accreditation addresses standards specified under relevant professional ordinance / constitution for the purpose of registration or employment in a particular profession. In some cases, professional accreditation is only carried out after the commencement of the programme especially when the professional body deems it necessary to examine the effectiveness of practical sessions of the programme. This will be a decision of the professional body concerned, and is independent of how the NLP accreditation process is to be conducted and scheduled by HKCAAVQ.

60. If the learning programmes have already been accredited by other accreditation authorities back home or are subject to an internal quality assurance mechanism of self-accrediting universities, will the HKCAAVQ take into account these accreditation outcomes and simplify its validation process such as by simply reviewing the mapping of the learning outcomes to the GLD of the HKQF? Will the HKCAAVQ consider having mutual recognition with other accreditation authorities?

Outcomes of internal quality assurance exercises or external accreditation provide useful reference to the HKCAAVQ for the purpose of NLP accreditation and therefore

have been specified as part of the required documentary evidence to be submitted to the HKCAAVQ. Accreditation is a holistic assessment of the quality of the NLP against the local standards using instruments such as the GLD specified for the HKQF. Mapping of learning outcomes against GLD is only the first step in QF Level determination but is not the concluding step in affirming whether the NLP meets the HKQF standards. Mutual recognition is only possible if the QA bodies concerned have entered into formal agreements on common tools, instruments, criteria and standards.

When conducting the Pilot Exercise of NLP accreditation in the discipline of Computing and Information Technology in 2009, representatives from two sister Quality Assurance bodies of the UK and Australia were invited to observe the exercise. Due to substantial differences in the objectives, process and breadth and depth of the quality assurance frameworks adopted by the QA bodies concerned, it was observed that “mutual recognition is considered at the present moment not an appropriate quality assurance measure for NLPs in HK”. This is primarily because recognition / accreditation by sister QA bodies are conducted against the home standards and education system. This observation was echoed by one of the sister QA body observers of the pilot exercise in a Transnational Education Forum organised by the British Council in Manchester, the United Kingdom (UK) in October 2010.

In summary, when a home programme has been accredited by the relevant accreditation authority, the accreditation status is granted on the basis of delivering the programme in the home country by the home staff for students studying there. The context, supporting infrastructure and students can be very different for the NLP operated in Hong Kong and there are certainly new issues concerning NLP provision that need to be assessed in the NLP accreditation exercise in order for the HKCAAVQ to be able to determine whether the NLP meets the standards stipulated by law in Hong Kong.

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