



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

**GUIDELINES ON SUBSTANTIAL CHANGE  
TO ACCREDITATION STATUS**

**Version 1.0**

**June 2008**

## **Preamble**

1. The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) is established under the HKCAAVQ Ordinance (Chapter 1150) as a statutory body responsible for conducting accreditation activities generally or as authorised under any other local enactment. In particular the HKCAAVQ has the statutory powers to perform the roles of the Accreditation Authority and QR Authority under the Qualifications Framework (QF) which was established by the Hong Kong SAR Government.
2. These Guidelines are intended to serve as general reference for (a) operators who have obtained an accreditation status upon successfully completing the Institutional Review (IR), Initial Evaluation (IE) or Programme Area Accreditation (PAA) exercise (b) operators offering validated/revalidated learning programmes and (c) accredited assessment agencies in seeking approval for changes to either the organisational aspects or their educational/training provisions.
3. These Guidelines supersede any previously published guidance notes, guidelines and handbook(s) on the same matters. The Guidelines are also subject to refinement and revisions from time to time and the most updated version of the Guidelines will be available on the HKCAAVQ website.

## **Accreditation Status of an Operator**

4. The scope of the accreditation status is defined in the relevant HKCAAVQ accreditation report. For example:

Type of Accreditation exercise	Scope of the approved accreditation status
Initial Evaluation	QF Level(s) of the programmes which the operator is considered competent to operate upon successful validation of the programme concerned.

Programme Area Accreditation	Programme area(s) and QF Level(s) of the programme which the operator is considered competent to operate and which can meet the requisite QF standards without prior external accreditation of the programme(s) by the HKCAAVQ.
Institutional Review	The accreditation status granted to the operator as defined in the terms of reference of the exercise concerned.
Accreditation of Assessment Agency	The industry or branch(es) of an industry and specified QF Level(s) of which the assessment agency is competent to conduct assessments under the QF for the purpose of recognition of prior learning.
Programme Validation/Revalidation	The programme can be offered as an accredited programme of the HKCAAVQ at the approved QF Level and during the specified validity period.

5. The accreditation status of an operator/assessment agency or learning programmes is granted upon a critical evaluation of pertinent issues as elaborated in respective HKCAAVQ Guidelines for the specific accreditation exercise.
6. The accreditation status of an operator/assessment agency is time limited. The validity period and the scope of approval are specified in the relevant accreditation report.
7. For learning programmes which have been validated or re-validated by the HKCAAVQ, their accreditation status is defined by the award title, QF Level, validity period together with any other specifications as specified in the scope of approval (e.g. yearly maximum student number) and these are stated in the relevant accreditation report.

8. The accreditation status of an operator/assessment agency or the programme will lapse if substantial changes have been introduced without the HKCAAVQ's prior approval. If in doubt whether a change is considered a substantial change, it is advisable for the operator/assessment agency to consult the HKCAAVQ Secretariat before implementation of any changes.

### **Substantial Changes**

9. Examples of substantial changes are given below:

#### In respect of the operator of learning programmes

- a) Changes in the purpose/status/governance structure of the operator (e.g. private or public character, ownership, legal status, merging of operators, creation or change in the component division which is responsible for academic development, engagement of other local or non-local partners in programme planning/delivery).
- b) Changes in corporate structure and leadership including changes in strategic plans or the organisational structures for decision making.
- c) Changes in the academic model of the operator such as a change which leads to significant revisions in the operator's orientation and programme objectives, including ability to offer programmes at the approved QF Level, leading to a different mode of operation, e.g. from a predominately face-to-face delivery to a distance learning mode.
- d) Changes in the campus site where the programmes were delivered or campus development plans.
- e) Changes in the funding model or resource distribution policies.
- f) Changes in key policies and mechanism of quality assurance.

In respect of the assessment agency

- g) Changes in the status, direction and mission of the assessment agency.
- h) Changes in core leadership or senior management resulting in changes in strategic plans or the organisational structures for decision making.
- i) Changes in the funding model, financial plan or resource distribution policies.
- j) Changes in the principles and criteria for the conduct of assessment tests.
- k) Changes in the management of assessment processes.
- l) Changes in the scope of QF Levels under which the assessment tests are related.

In respect of learning programmes

- m) Changes in policies on admission, exemption and advanced standing.
- n) Major changes in programme structure and content e.g. additional/removal of practicum or internship or replacement of core modules by electives.
- o) Change in the site at which the programme is delivered and assessed.
- p) Change in teaching or learning support for the programme e.g. shift to predominant use of part-time teachers, reduction in specialist teaching facilities, out-sourced teaching facilities.
- q) Changes in the processes in assuring quality or benchmarking of learning outcomes and exit standards.

## **Principles in processing changes by the HKCAAVQ**

10. The HKCAAVQ will adhere to the following principles in processing changes initiated by the accredited operator/assessment agency.

### Continuous improvement

11. The operator/assessment agency granted with an accreditation status is expected to be engaged in an on-going process of self reflection, evaluation and improvement. Such a process very often will become the stimulus for change. The HKCAAVQ in dealing with substantial changes will consider the application in the light of the institution's strive for continuous improvement so as not to discourage necessary strategic planning or impede innovation, in the view of the principle that there is no arbitrary expansion of the scope of the given accreditation status and no derogation of the ability of the accredited operator/assessment agency to ensure quality.

### Focus on communication

12. The operator/assessment agency should take the initiative to seek advice from the HKCAAVQ as to whether the changes which it plans to introduce may likely constitute a substantial change. The HKCAAVQ will also provide advice to facilitate an operator/assessment agency to prepare the substantial change proposals for timely processing by the HKCAAVQ.

### 'Fitness for purpose' approach

13. The processing of the change proposal will adhere to the fitness for purpose principle, with due attention to the nature of the operator/assessment agency, the scope and magnitude of the change.

## Processing of Change Proposals

14. The operator/assessment agency should communicate with the HKCAAVQ at a sufficiently early time when they plan to introduce substantial changes at the organisational and/or programme level where appropriate.
15. Ideally, a formal substantial change proposal should be submitted to the Council at least **three months prior to the planned implementation date for the change** but it is acknowledged in some cases a shorter period of notice may be unavoidable or that in an extreme case retroactive approval might become necessary. However, in order to protect quality and to discourage operators from not seeing prior approval of substantial changes, as a matter of principle, the steps to be followed in such cases must stay as close as possible to the normal process.
16. Depending on the nature and the scope of the substantial changes, the HKCAAVQ will determine the most cost effective means to process the change proposal. Upon receipt of the written change proposal, the HKCAAVQ Secretariat professional staff, based on the records of previous accreditation exercises(s) undergone by the operator/assessment agency will conduct a first assessment of the proposed changes to decide whether the changes can be assessed by means of a paper exercise or an appropriate Panel exercise will be organised.
17. The HKCAAVQ will confirm in writing the process to consider the change proposal, including the timeframe for completing the process and the necessary fee.
18. While the HKCAAVQ will strive to process the change proposal in good time, the HKCAAVQ will not be held responsible for any consequences in the circumstances that the change cannot take effect according to the preferred timeframe of the operator/assessment agency.
19. Where deemed necessary, an approval for change may be subject to pre-conditions or requirements.

### **Information needed for the processing of substantial changes**

20. The basic information required in the submission includes the following:
- a) A description of the change with particular reference to the scale and scope of the change, the rationale and the timetable for the change.
  - b) Discussion of the rationale for the change and the internal approval process that has been undertaken by the operator/assessment agency for the change.
  - c) Relationship and implication of the change to the operator/assessment agency and/or its academic development activities where appropriate.
  - d) Justifications that the operator/assessment agency continues to be competent and possesses the necessary infrastructure and quality assurance processes to manage the change without affecting its ongoing conduct of the learning programmes/assessment tests at specified level(s) meeting the QF standard(s).
  - e) Budgetary provisions (in terms of human and physical resources) to implement the change and the financial implications on the overall financial position of the entire institution.

### **Fees for processing substantial changes**

21. A fee will be charged for processing a change proposal. The exact fee will be determined on the HKCAAVQ's cost recovery principle, and making reference to the accreditation fee charged for a regular accreditation exercise.

## **Changes that need to be processed as regular accreditation exercises**

22. Where the proposed changes may have a bearing on the scope of the accreditation status (please refer to paragraph 4), the operator/assessment agency will need to undergo the relevant accreditation exercise afresh instead. Some examples of these cases, which will not be processed as substantial changes, are given below:
- (a) An operator with IE status to operate programmes at QF Levels 1-3 will need to undergo relevant IE exercise if it intends to operate programmes at QF Level 4 or above.
  - (b) An operator with PAA status who wishes to extend the scope of approval to other programme areas or QF Levels e.g. offer of multi-disciplinary programmes involving programme areas falling outside the scope of the approved programme area.
  - (c) An assessment agency to extend the scope of accreditation status to cover other industry or branches of an industry or QF Levels.
  - (d) Addition of new exit awards or specialist awards within an accredited programme or change in the mode of study or addition of a new mode of study for an operating programme.
23. These “changes” are to be processed through standard accreditation exercises under the Four-stage QA model as appropriate and the relevant accreditation guidelines and accreditation fee will apply.

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