

Guidelines

on

Stage 3 - Programme Area Accreditation

of

Four-stage Quality Assurance Process

version 1.1

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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 under the provisions of the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (AAVQO) (Cap 592) to perform the roles of the Accreditation Authority and the QR Authority. Qualifications of learning programmes that have been granted accreditation status by the Accreditation Authority may be entered into the Qualifications Register (QR) for recognition under the Qualifications Framework (QF) in Hong Kong.
2. These Guidelines provide a general reference for operators who wish to seek Programme Area Accreditation status under the QF. These Guidelines also serve as reference for the accreditation panel (panel) which is established by the HKCAAVQ to be responsible for the accreditation exercise pursuant to the principle of 'peer review'. The panel can exercise its professional judgement according to the principles set out within these Guidelines.
3. These Guidelines are applicable to operators operating local learning programmes. Operators with non-local learning programmes wishing to apply for accreditation should refer to the Guidelines on Accreditation of Non-local Learning Programmes available on the HKCAAVQ website at <http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk>.
4. These Guidelines are by no means exhaustive. The Guidelines also supersede any prior guidance notes, other guidelines or handbook that the HKCAAVQ or the former Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA) has published or issued previously regarding Programme Area Accreditation.
5. Whilst the HKCAAVQ endeavours to ensure the accuracy of the information contained herein, the HKCAAVQ reserves the right to delete, suspend or edit all information at any time in its absolute discretion without giving any prior notice. To obtain the most up-to-date information, users may look up the electronic version of these Guidelines from the HKCAAVQ's website at <http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk>.
6. A general overview about the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process that underpins the Qualifications Framework (QF) is available in the Section entitled Four-stage QA Model on the HKCAAVQ's website at <http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk>.
7. For enquiries, please contact the HKCAAVQ at info@hkcaavq.edu.hk or by phone at Tel: 3658 0000.

1. What is Programme Area Accreditation?

- 1.1 *Programme Area Accreditation (PAA)* is the third stage of the Four-stage Quality Assurance (QA) Process adopted by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) to underpin the QF. Upon successful PAA, an operator may develop and operate learning programmes within **an approved scope of programme area (breadth) at specified QF level(s) (depth) for an approved period of time (validity period)** and have the qualifications of its learning programmes entered into the QR for QF recognition without going through the normal route of prior programme validation or revalidation by the HKCAAVQ.
- 1.2 Programmes offered by the operator outside the approved scope of programme area(s) and QF level(s) are not covered by the PAA status.
- 1.3 The PAA status is subject to Periodic Reviews (the fourth stage of the Four-stage QA Process) by the HKCAAVQ, to be conducted prior to expiry of the validity period.
- 1.4 If the operator wishes to apply for changes to the approved breadth and depth of the PAA, the changes will be subject to HKCAAVQ's decision including but not limited to the conduct of an appropriate accreditation exercise. The Guidelines on Substantial Change to Accreditation Status are available on the HKCAAVQ website at <http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/publication.asp>.

2. Who is eligible to apply for Programme Area Accreditation?

- 2.1 Since the approval of a PAA status permits the operator to quality assure its own programmes, an operator applying for PAA must have an established and sound track record to demonstrate that it has a standing ability to develop, operate and quality assure programmes in the programme area under consideration, to the accreditation standards required in an external quality assurance process. As such, the HKCAAVQ must be satisfied that the operator has well-balanced and robust systems implemented for continuous internal quality assurance, review and enhancement of the organisational management and the design and operation of outcome-based learning programmes.

- 2.2 Before submitting an application for PAA status, the operator is expected to have an established and sound track record in institutional governance, management, quality assurance (QA) as well as in the relevant programme area by:
- a. Demonstrating its QA competency and maturity at institutional level to run an educational and training operation that meets its purpose as well as the quality requirements underpinning the QF and to design and deliver outcome-based learning programmes.
 - b. Demonstrating QA competency and maturity in practice via successful completion of normally not less than two cycles of revalidation of (a) learning programme(s) in the programme area under consideration. The learning programme(s) should still be ongoing and at the QF level at which the operator intends to claim for the PAA status, if the exercise is to be successful.

Very positive HKCAAVQ accreditation reports (i.e. approval without pre-conditions and requirements) will serve as important evidence of successful completion of accreditation exercise(s).

3. The Guiding Principles of HKCAAVQ Accreditation

- 3.1 The guiding principles for the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process are as follows.
- Peer review
 - Fitness for purpose
 - Evidence-based
 - Threshold standard
- 3.2 Under the principle of ‘peer review’, accreditation decisions are made by the HKCAAVQ on the basis of recommendations put forth by peers involved in the exercise as members of an accreditation panel (panel). The panel will have a cross-sectoral representation covering the full spectrum of institutional management, quality assurance and operation of learning programmes in relevant programme area(s). The panel members are academic and professional experts with relevant expertise and experience in areas such as institutional and programme area management, programme delivery and management, quality assurance and QF matters. The role of the panel is to assess the capability and capacity of the operator in managing and quality assuring the learning programme(s) in the programme area(s) under consideration for the purpose of meeting the QF standards, to collect and evaluate evidence so as to form a judgment as to whether the operator and its programme area(s) (discipline/s) meet the required accreditation standards.

- 3.3 Under the principle of ‘fitness for purpose’, the operator and programme area(s) (discipline/s) are accredited on the basis of their stated objectives, and taking into consideration differences in nature, size, operational complexity and scope of expertise in respective programme area(s) / (discipline/s) of the operator.
- 3.4 Accreditation decisions are to be made on the basis of evidence provided by the operator in support of its claim that it meets the PAA accreditation standards stipulated in these Guidelines. Judgment will be made independently of any other previous accreditation decision(s) made on the same operator and/or its programme area(s) and / or its learning programme(s).
- 3.5 Accreditation decisions are made by threshold standard. ‘Threshold standards’ refer to the minimum quality requirements stipulated in these Guidelines, drawing reference from prevailing education system in Hong Kong and the learning outcomes requirements laid down in the Generic Level Descriptors (GLD) as well as any other relevant policy intention / regulation / guidelines / common descriptors / specification of competency standards (SCS) promulgated by the Hong Kong SAR Government.

4. The Scope of PAA

- 4.1 The core area of study will form the boundary of the intended programme area. Small components of learning programmes cannot be used to justify an operator’s claim for PAA status in the whole area. For example, for an Accountancy programme with Banking as elective / minor, the Banking elective / minor cannot be used to apply for PAA in Banking.
- 4.2 In an area where a cluster of programmes with a common purpose is used as the basis for a PAA application, the programme area should be the core area of study for the common purpose.¹

¹ For example, if the objectives of the learning programmes listed below under PAA consideration are to develop students in the engineering discipline for application in various business and industrial settings, the programme area under consideration should be Engineering.

- HD in Electrical Engineering
- HD in Intelligent Buildings and Automation Engineering
- HD in Computer and Information Engineering
- HD in Electronic Engineering with Business Management
- HD in Lifestyle Electronics

The operator cannot use these programmes as the basis to apply for PAA in the Area of Business Management or the Area of Design.

- 4.3 Programme design may include elements not directly within the scope of the intended approved programme area as long it is de minimus, is generally accepted in local educational provision and is in line with the approved academic model as well as the long-term programme development plan and strategic plan (paras. 7.13, 7.21, 7.22). Depending on the purpose(s) of the learning programmes used as the basis for the PAA consideration, major, minor and stream of study / concentration can be a feature of the programme design. Major studies must be within the boundary of the programme area. Minor studies and stream of study / concentration should normally be in a closely related area to the programme area and academically relevant.
- 4.4 As a guiding principle, in line with local and international practices, major studies normally take up 50% of the full curriculum, minor studies is normally between 20% and 50% of the full curriculum while streams of study / concentration are normally not more than 20%. The onus of proof lies with the operator to justify why it is considered appropriate and on a par with generally acceptable practices in the relevant education / training community to offer major, minor or stream of study / concentration at a percentage of the curriculum below the norm.
- 4.5 The list of 21 Areas of Study / Training and Programme Areas (**Appendix 1**) will be the reference for determination of the title of the approved programme area(s) under the PAA status, if granted. Creation of new title for programme area shall only be considered if there is evidence that the proposed new area is not covered in the list of 21 Areas of Study / Training and Programme Areas and therefore will be a last resort.
- 4.6 Cross-discipline programmes may only be covered by the approved PAA status provided that both disciplines are within the approved scope of the PAA and are subject to effective and robust quality assurance of cross-discipline studies.

5. What are the components of PAA?

- 5.1 In the assessment of the operator's standing ability to obtain PAA status, the HKCAAVQ will consider its overarching QA competency and maturity at institutional level and also the maturity in the design and operation of outcome-based learning programmes for the applied programme area(s). Therefore, assessment of the PAA status comprises two sequential procedures, i.e. Institutional Review (IR) and Discipline (or Programme Area) Review (DR). IR is a composite part of the PAA but at the same time a prerequisite of DR in view that programme area maturity is underpinned by robust management and QA systems and procedures at institutional level.
- 5.2 At institutional level, QA is a manifestation of the operator's systems, capacity and capability to run an educational and training operation that meets its purpose as well as the quality requirements underpinning the QF. The IR examines an operator's overall governance, institutional structure, management, resources, academic environment and quality assurance. These aspects of operation will provide reference to the operator's overall systems and capacity. The operator's overall strategic plan encompassing the blueprint for institutional development in general and for the programme area (discipline) under consideration in particular will provide important reference to the operator's capability in achieving its vision through the application of its systems and making active use of its resources.
- 5.3 The DR scrutinises the QA competency in practice, on the basis of a focused study of the programme area concerned. The quality and standards of the learning programmes as well as the effectiveness of the programme monitoring and review mechanisms within the programme area under consideration will provide reference to the operator's competency to ensure and determine whether the learning programmes under the programme area(s) concerned meet the standards as required under the QF. The academic development plan and the short-term and long-term strategic plans for the programme area featuring programme design, development and corresponding academic and resources considerations should be an integral part of the overall strategic plan of the operator. The academic development plan should illustrate the academic model adopted by the operator. These plans and evidence of mechanisms and measures to ensure their realisation will be the basis for the HKCAAVQ to decide the scope and level of the PAA status within the stipulated validity period. Therefore, the wider the scope that the

operator wishes to claim in the PAA exercise, the more extensive the strategic plan(s) should be and the more supporting evidence would need to be produced.

6. How to get prepared for Programme Area Accreditation?

- 6.1 To prepare for PAA, an operator should conduct a self-evaluation for the purpose of assessing its own readiness to meet the accreditation criteria and standards (see Section 7) and undertake any necessary reforms or changes to its institutional structure and processes. The self-evaluation will form the basis of the accreditation document to be submitted for the PAA exercise. Guidelines on the Preparation of Accreditation Documents through a Self-evaluation Process are available at **Appendix 2**.
- 6.2 In its self-evaluation, the operator should address the following four core questions, which guide the quality assurance activity in a PAA process.
- What are the purposes (objectives) and outcomes of its education provision? (What does it want to achieve?)
 - What systems and activities support the achievement of its purposes and outcomes? (How does it achieve them?)
 - What are the indicators of success? (How does it know it is doing well and let others know too?)
 - How does it seek feedback and adjust itself for its future performance? (How does it apply what it knows?)
- 6.3 The operator should also determine which of the programme area(s) that it is ready to proceed with PAA.

7. What are the Accreditation Criteria and Standards for PAA?

To complete PAA successfully, an operator has to demonstrate that it has attained the threshold standards of PAA in the areas outlined below under Institutional Review and Discipline Review respectively. The panel's assessments will be on the basis of the accreditation document and any other relevant evidence gathered through the accreditation process, according to the

guiding principle of 'fitness for purpose'. The possible sources of evidence for PAA to facilitate the panel's consideration are outlined in **Appendix 3**.

Areas to be considered in PAA are as follows.

7.1 Institutional Review

7.1.1 Governance and Institutional Structure

The operator's governing body must be responsible for the formulation of its educational / training purpose, the quality, integrity and financial stability and sustainability in an appropriate, effective and efficient manner. The governing body must monitor the performance of the operator against its planned strategies and operational targets consistent with its legal and social responsibilities and obligations. There should be an appropriate institutional structure to execute the direction laid down by the governing body.

7.1.2 Overall Institutional Management

The operator's management, financial control and quality assurance arrangements must be sufficient and adequate to manage its existing operations and to respond to development and change.

7.1.3 Academic Development Plan

The operator must have a developmental blueprint commensurate with its overall strategic plan to encapsulate an iterative process involving academic and resource decisions under institutional leadership.

7.1.4 Financial Viability and System

The operator must be financially viable in order to sustain its institutional operation and provision of learning programmes. Its financial statement and other records must exhibit clearly the source(s) of funding, income, as well as expenditure. The operator must demonstrate the application of rigorous resources planning and allocation mechanisms to its operation as well as availability of a contingency plan to meet its commitments.

7.1.5 Quality Assurance including Programme Approval, Monitoring and Review

The operator must have a system with clear policies and procedures in place to monitor the quality and standards of the learning programmes and these procedures are effective in meeting the operator's purpose (mission) and intended learning outcomes and objectives of its learning programme(s), and in determining the QF Level(s) of the outcome-based learning programmes. The system must include robust processes of programme approval, monitoring and review.

7.1.6 Staffing Policies

The operator must have a team of teaching and supporting staff who are qualified and competent for the effective delivery of their outcome-based learning programmes and education / training operation.

7.1.7 Resources and Support Services

The operator must have adequate physical resources for the delivery of its learning programmes and these resources must be effectively deployed.

7.2 Discipline Review

7.2.1 Discipline-level Management

The operator's management, financial control and quality assurance arrangements at the discipline level must be sufficient to manage existing operations within the proposed programme area and to respond to development and changes.

7.2.2 Strategic Plan

The operator must have short-term and long-term strategic plans which are both responsive to the aims and objectives of the whole institution and teaching goal of the discipline, as well as feasible in terms of finance, resources, teaching and learning policies, quality assurance and staffing.

7.2.3 Programme Development and Management

The operator must have its educational objectives and learning outcomes set at appropriate levels, in a clear and consistent manner. It must have effective mechanisms to ensure that its learning programmes meet those objectives. It must also have an ongoing process in place for monitoring the programmes. If cross-disciplinary programmes are included in the strategic plan, the operator should demonstrate availability of a robust QA mechanism and sharing of resources for cross-disciplinary academic planning, management, delivery, monitoring and review.

7.2.4 Admission, Progression and Assessment

The operator must have valid and effective systems and procedures for student admission, monitoring of students' progress, as well as assessment of student achievement.

7.2.5 Teaching and Learning Policies

The operator must have a system in place for the formulation and implementation of effective teaching and learning policies to ensure the quality of the intended learning outcomes.

7.2.6 Scope of Programme Area

The operator must have a demonstrable sound track record in planning and delivering learning programmes of the programme area under consideration. Its learning programmes must have a clearly defined scope which is relevant to its mission and within its capability and financial means for further development².

7.2.7 Justification of QF Level

The operator must ensure that the structure, content and learning outcomes of the intended programme area match the classifications under the General Level Descriptors of QF.

² The learning programmes should be in line with the approved academic model as well as the programme development plan and strategic plan.

7.2.8 Discipline-level Staffing and Staff Development

The operator must have adequate teaching and supporting staff with the qualities, competence, qualifications and experience necessary for the effective delivery of its learning programmes. The qualifications should be consistent with prevailing government regulation.

7.2.9 Discipline-level Resources and Support Services

The operator must have adequate physical resources for the delivery of its learning programmes and these resources must be effectively deployed.

8. How is the Accreditation Process Conducted?

- 8.1 It normally takes about **30 weeks** from receipt of the accreditation document to complete the PAA process. The time schedule will be specified in the Service Agreement signed by the HKCAAVQ and the operator.

Initiating the Process

- 8.2 An operator should approach the HKCAAVQ for an initial consultation at least **six months** before formal application. At the initial consultation, the operator will be briefed on the accreditation process and the preparation required for the accreditation exercise. Alternatively, the operator should seek to attend the HKCAAVQ's operators' workshop so as to get itself acquainted with the PAA accreditation standards and to ascertain whether it is ready for PAA.
- 8.3 After the initial consultation, the operator should conduct a self-evaluation, making reference to Section 7 of these Guidelines to decide whether it is ready to undergo the accreditation process and to Section 4 and Appendix 1 to identify the programme area(s) which it wishes to seek PAA status. Should the findings be affirmative, the operator may wish to proceed with the PAA process.
- 8.4 The operator should then submit a completed Statement of Intent for PAA service to the HKCAAVQ, indicating that they are ready to undergo a PAA exercise. Upon signing of Service Agreement, the operator is required to submit an accreditation document on the basis of

its self-evaluation and any other required information to the HKCAAVQ by the stipulated deadline(s).

The Panel

- 8.5 Normally, the IR and each DR will be conducted by separate panels via separate on-site visits or by a single panel via an on-site visit conducted back-to-back, depending on the complexity and the number of programme area(s) included in the PAA exercise. The HKCAAVQ may consider the feasibility of conducting the IR and DR(s) with the use of combined or shared panels when these arrangements are feasible. The size and composition of the panel will depend on the QF level(s) and the scope of the programme area being accredited.
- 8.6 The panel(s) will be formed in accordance with the guiding principle of peer review. The panel(s) consist(s) of members with the requisite profiles and expertise. The HKCAAVQ has full authority in the selection of membership of the panel(s) for a particular exercise, after seeking views from the operator on any conflict of interests of the potential panel members. Each panel will include a HKCAAVQ professional staff member as the Panel Member-Secretary. Panelists are subject to the HKCAAVQ's Code of Conduct which stipulates compliance with code of confidentiality and declaration of conflict of interests. The roles of panel members are outlined in **Appendix 4**.

Initial Examination of Accreditation Document

- 8.7 The HKCAAVQ may conclude upon an initial examination of the accreditation document that the information provided is inadequate and / or the state of readiness of the operator is such that it is unlikely to conduct a meaningful accreditation process by the HKCAAVQ according to the scope of the Terms of Reference of the exercise specified in the Service Agreement. In this event, the HKCAAVQ may terminate the accreditation exercise and any unused accreditation fee will be refunded to the operator.
- 8.8 Should this situation occur, the operator's validated learning programmes in the applied programme area(s) are required to undergo revalidation by the HKCAAVQ prior to expiry of the validation status, if the operator intends to continuously have the qualifications of the relevant learning programmes entered into the QR and be recognised under the QF. The revalidation exercise(s) will be conducted separately from the PAA exercise.

- 8.9 If the HKCAAVQ considers that the operator's accreditation document contains the necessary information to reflect its institutional QA competency and the programme area maturity so as to proceed with the accreditation exercise, the operator will be notified of the arrangement of the on-site visit as specified in the Service Agreement. After reviewing the accreditation document, the panel(s) may seek further clarification and / or ask for other supporting documents and information as evidence during the Stage of Initial Comments. The supporting documents and information requested can be made available to the panel(s) either prior to the site visit or on-site.

Preparing for Accreditation

- 8.10 A thorough understanding of what is required of the operator in the accreditation process is the first step to successful accreditation. The roles and responsibilities of operators in accreditation are outlined in **Appendix 5**.
- 8.11 Accreditation is conducted by the HKCAAVQ on the assumption that the operator concerned is involved in a continuous process of self-evaluation. Before seeking the accreditation service, the operator should undertake an internal self-evaluation for the purpose of assessing its own readiness to meet the intended purpose of the accreditation exercise and undertaking any necessary reforms and changes to any aspects of its structure, systems and processes.
- 8.12 The process of self-evaluation should be a constructive one, and should enable the operator to identify its won strengths and weaknesses, and to formulate improvement plans for enhancement and institute any necessary enhancement. The preparatory / self-evaluation stage can be shorter or longer depending on the circumstances of the individual operator and the internal procedures adopted, etc.
- 8.13 It is important that the process involves personnel at the senior management and programme area levels and senior members of staff members responsible for quality assurance as well as other staff members who are involved / may be affected by any changes brought about by the PAA. It is a good practice to involve advisers, students and other stakeholders such as employers in the self-evaluation.
- 8.14 The preparation of self-evaluative accreditation document is outlined in Section 6 of these Guidelines.

The On-site Visit

- 8.15 The on-site visit(s) will be planned by the HKCAAVQ in consultation with the Panel Chair. The visit(s) provide(s) an occasion for interaction between the panel(s) and relevant personnel from the operator, and other stakeholders, such as students and employers.
- 8.16 At the IR on-site visit, the panel will meet the governing body, senior management representatives, and also other key staff members of the operator to explore issues related to IR. A typical IR on-site visit might consist of:
- Meeting with Council and Board members/senior management
 - Meeting with Principals/Vice-Principals
 - Meeting with Heads of committees from areas such as academic planning, finance, human resource management, teaching and learning support (including library), quality assurance and student support (including information technology, student amenities and counselling).
 - Meeting with external advisory board/committee
 - Scrutiny of documents such as minutes of meetings
 - Tour of facilities (institutional)
- 8.17 The DR on-site visit will focus on discipline-specific issues. A typical DR on-site visit might consist of:
- Meeting with discipline/department leaders
 - Meeting with external examiners/employers
 - Meeting with teaching and supporting staff
 - Meeting with student representatives/graduates
 - Tour of facilities (discipline related)
 - Scrutiny of documents such as minutes of meetings, examiners' report, sample of teaching materials, students' work.
- 8.18 The timeframe for the on-site visit(s) will be agreed with the operator and included in the Service Agreement.
- 8.19 The HKCAAVQ will determine the criteria for the selection of people to be interviewed, and the size of the interview groups for efficient interaction with the panel.

- 8.20 It is the responsibility of the operator to ensure that there are suitable facilities available to the panel during the on-site visit, including availability of a private meeting room with sufficient space for the panel and the interviewees, access to documents, and the provision of reasonable refreshments. As the interviews are part of the evidence needed for the panel to make the accreditation recommendations, it is the responsibility of the operator to ensure that the requested interviewees are available to meet the panel.
- 8.21 The precise visit programme, including the schedule of persons to be met, will be determined in the light of the panel(s)' examination of the accreditation document. The content of the visit programme(s) will be designed to enable the panel(s) to pursue any relevant issues according to the accreditation criteria and standards of the PAA.
- 8.22 The panel(s) will evaluate the evidence provided both in the accreditation document and at the on-site visit(s). It will form a judgment as to whether the operator meets the required accreditation standards and put forth such recommendations on accreditation outcome to the HKCAAVQ for decision.
- 8.23 The panel(s) will organise (an) exit meeting(s) with the senior management representatives of the operator. The exit meeting will however not be an oral feedback session reporting on the panel's recommendations for the accreditation outcomes at the end of the IR / DR visits in view that the findings from respective exercises (i.e. IR / DR) may inform each other in terms of quality assurance.

Preparation of Accreditation Report

- 8.24 On the basis of the findings and observations put forth by the panel(s) on completion of the on-site visit(s), the HKCAAVQ will make accreditation decisions to be presented in an accreditation report in the capacity of the Accreditation Authority, as provided for under Cap 592. The report with positive outcome will also specify the validity period of an accreditation decision and the condition(s) or restriction(s), if any, subject to which the decision is to have effect.
- 8.25 If the operator considers that there is any material factual inaccuracy in the draft report, there will be an opportunity to draw this to the attention of the HKCAAVQ.
- 8.26 Upon clearance of factual accuracy, the finalised accreditation report will be released to the operator.

- 8.27 The HKCAAVQ may vary or withdraw the accreditation report if it is satisfied that the report has been produced in reliance on any misleading or false statement, representation or information, either oral or in writing, and / or if the operator is no longer competent to ensure and determine that its learning programmes in the approved programme area(s) meet the QF standards and that it has determined within the stipulated conditions and restrictions specified in the accreditation report that its learning programmes meet relevant QF standards.

9. What can be the Accreditation Outcomes?

- 9.1 Having regard to the terms of reference of the accreditation as stipulated in the signed Service Agreement and in the capacity of the Accreditation Authority as provided for under Cap 592, the HKCAAVQ will consider the accreditation panel's recommendation(s) and make accreditation decisions in respect of the operator seeking PAA. The accreditation outcomes can be approval, approval with pre-condition(s) and/or requirement(s), and non-approval. Validity period, the QF level(s) of the programme area(s) and the approved programme area(s), will be clearly stated in the accreditation report for approval cases. Other conditions and restrictions may be specified.
- 9.2 Pre-condition(s) is / are to be fulfilled prior to the start of the validity period of the PAA status. Requirements are to be fulfilled by the stipulated deadline(s) within the validity period. For such cases, the approval of the PAA status will depend on whether the operator can successfully fulfil the pre-condition(s) and/or requirement(s) of the PAA exercise. As the operator is expected to have already reached a stage of QA competency and maturity when PAA application is considered, it is anticipated that pre-conditions and / or requirements, if stipulated, should rarely be related to major and fundamental quality issues.
- 9.3 Restrictions such as those laid down on the scope of the approved programme area(s) may be specified in the decision. Under such circumstances, the operator is expected to comply with the restriction(s) on an on-going basis unless otherwise advised by the HKCAAVQ.
- 9.4 A Statement of Accreditation confirming the granting of the accreditation status to the operator will be issued together with the accreditation report 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 start after satisfactory fulfilment of the pre-condition(s).

- 9.5 Qualifications of quality assured learning programmes covered under the granted PAA status may be entered into the QR in accordance with the terms and procedures stipulated by the QR Authority.
- 9.6 If the PAA status is not approved, the operator's validated learning programmes within the programme area concerned will continue to be subject to cycles of revalidation by the HKCAAVQ before expiry of the validation validity period if the operator intends to have the qualifications of the respective learning programmes entered into the QR for QF recognition.

10. What is the Possible Follow-up after the PAA?

- 10.1 Operators having successfully completed the PAA exercise will have its PAA status (within the programme area(s) and QF level(s) concerned) granted within a specified validity period as stated in the Accreditation Report. They are subject to the next cycle of *Periodic Review* exercise prior to the expiry of the validity period in order to maintain the PAA status.

Fulfilment of Pre-condition(s) and Requirement(s)

- 10.2 Where pre-condition(s) and / or requirement(s) apply, the fulfilment of the pre-condition(s) and / or requirement(s) within the specified timeframe is mandatory to obtain and to maintain valid accreditation status.

Appeal

- 10.3 An operator who is aggrieved by the accreditation outcome can lodge an appeal to the Appeal Board against the accreditation decision, the validity period of the decision, the condition(s) or restriction(s) as stated in the Accreditation Report. Details of the Appeal Procedures are published in accordance with Part 3 (Section 13) of the AAVQO and can be accessed from the QF website at <http://www.hkqf.gov.hk>

Substantial Changes to Accreditation Status

- 10.4 It is the responsibility of the operator to inform the HKCAAVQ of any substantial change(s) to the accreditation status, which might have an impact on its competency to continue to meet the criteria of PAA, before the change is made. In case of doubt, the operator should consult the

HKCAAVQ on the need for seeking approval on substantial change(s) as soon as feasible, and prior to making any change(s). Guidelines on Substantial Change to Accreditation Status are available on the HKCAAVQ website at <http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk>. The PAA status will lapse if substantial change(s) has / have been introduced without the HKCAAVQ's prior approval.

Advertisements Relating to the QF and the QR

10.5 The operator is required to comply with section 18 of Cap 592 when publishing advertisements that relate to the QF and the QR.

Entry of Qualifications of Quality Assured Learning Programmes Covered by the PAA Status

10.6 Information about how to enter the qualification(s) of quality assured learning programme(s) to be covered under the granted PAA status into the QR is available on the QR website at <http://www.hkqr.gov.hk>.

11. How is Validity Period Determined and What is the Operator Required to do During and Upon Expiry of the Validity Period?

11.1 The validity period of the PAA status varies according to the maturity level of the operator, as well as the duration of the programmes in the programme area concerned. Normally, the validity period can be between 2 and 5 years, that is one year after completion of the normative learning programmes of the programme area(s) under consideration. The validity period will normally enable the operator to run a full cycle of its learning programmes in the approved programme area to demonstrate its competency to quality assure its programmes so that the HKCAAVQ panel may exercise evidence-based judgement in the next round of Periodic Review. The HKCAAVQ may stipulate a shorter validity period for cases where a closer monitoring is considered justified.

11.2 An operator with the PAA status is subject to annual monitoring via returns providing information about new programmes to be offered under the approved programme area. It will also be subject to the next stage of quality assurance, *Periodic Review* (Stage 4), to maintain its PAA status. *Periodic Review* is to ascertain whether the internal quality assurance processes of an operator with the PAA status continues to be effective and sound.

- 11.3 An operator may lose its PAA status if the validity period expires before it can successfully complete a Periodic Review with positive outcome, or if it introduces substantial change(s) without the prior approval of the HKCAAVQ. The HKCAAVQ also reserves the right to withdraw the PAA status before expiry of the validity period if the operator fails to maintain the standard as required under the approved PAA status.
- 11.4 The power for the operator with an approved PAA status to quality assure its programmes shall not extend to learning programmes which are not of its sole award including but not limited to non-local learning programmes.

12. How is Feedback Collected?

- 12.1 The HKCAAVQ will seek feedback on its main services. Feedback will typically be collected via the following formal means with respective stakeholders with a view to continuously enhancing the HKCAAVQ's services:
- Panel's opinion survey at the end of the accreditation exercise
 - Invitation for operators to meet with the HKCAAVQ to clarify points made in the final Accreditation Report
 - Annual survey of operators using the accreditation services.

13. What are the Accreditation Timeline and Fees?

- 13.1 **The indicative** timeline outlining the main steps in PAA is in **Appendix 6**. The timeline for individual exercises may vary depending on the complexity and scope of the exercise.
- 13.2 The HKCAAVQ is a statutory, not-for-profit self-financed body. Accreditation fee is levied on a full cost recovery principle. The HKCAAVQ's charges for carrying out PAA are outlined in the fee schedule, as approved by the Secretary for Education, on the HKCAAVQ website at <http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/main.asp>. The fee level varies according to the QF level of the programme area under review and the exact accreditation fee for the exercise planned for the operator will be specified in the Service Agreement.

**Areas of Study & Training
and Programme Areas**

(As at 8 May 2009)

Areas of Study and Training		Programme Areas
1.	Architecture, Construction and Town Planning	e.g. Architecture, Building and Real Estate, Building Technology, Town Planning and Urban Studies, etc.
2.	Arts, Humanities, Liberal Studies and General Studies	e.g. History, Philosophy, Cultural and / or Religious Studies, etc.
3.	Beauty, Hairdressing and Related Studies, Home Economics, Personal Care	e.g. Hairdressing, Make-up, Body Painting, Cookery, Gardening, Floral Decoration, Domestic Helper Training, Personal Care Worker Training, Health and Beauty Care, Image Design, etc.
4.	Biological, Physical and Mathematical Sciences	e.g. Biological Sciences, Food and Nutritional Sciences, Chemistry, Physics, Environmental Studies, Earth Science, Other Physical Sciences, Mathematics, Statistics, Actuarial Science, Analytical and Laboratory Sciences, etc.
5.	Business & Management, General	e.g. General Business Administration, Marketing, Institutional Administration, Commercial Studies, Secretarial Studies, Office Administration, General Management, Customer Services, Human Resources Management, Information Systems, E-Commerce, etc.
6.	Business & Management in Specific Industries	e.g. Retailing, Wholesaling, Shipping, Import and Export, Facilities Management, Recreation Management, Property Management, Construction Management, Estates Agent, Law, Publishing, Fashion Merchandising, etc.
7.	Business, Global and China	e.g. Global or International Business, China Business, etc.

	Areas of Study and Training	Programme Areas
8.	Computing and Information Technology	e.g. Computing Studies, Information Technology, Internet Technology, Multimedia Studies, Computer Support, Telecommunications, Games and Entertainment Technology, Systems Development and Administration, etc.
9.	Economics, Accountancy, Finance & Investment	e.g. Economics, Accounting, Taxation, Banking, Finance, Investment, Insurance, Securities, Fund and Asset Management, etc.
10.	Education, Teacher Training and Sports Science	e.g. Curriculum and Instruction, Education Administration and Policy, Education Psychology, Pre-service or In-service Training for teachers, Teachers Professional Upgrading, Child Education and Services, Speech and Hearing Sciences, Physical Education, Sports Science, etc.
11.	Engineering and Technology	e.g. Chemical Engineering and Materials Techniques, Civil Engineering, Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Computer Engineering, Manufacturing and Industrial Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Building Services Engineering, Electrical and Mechanical Services, Surveying, Biotechnology, Textile and Clothing Technology, etc.
12.	Fine Arts, Performing Arts, Design and Creative Media Art & Industry	e.g. Drawing, Painting and Sculpturing, Music, Dance, Drama, Film, Video, Television, Audio-visual Entertainment, Theatre Arts, Technical Arts, Carnival Entertainment, Fashion, Product and Interior Design, Jewellery Art, Multimedia Game Design, Printing & Publishing, Other Creative Media Art & Industry, Advertising Design, etc.
13.	Languages, Translation and Literature	e.g. Chinese Language, Chinese Literature, English Language, English Literature, Translation, Japanese, Korean, German, French, Other Languages, Other Literature, Comparative Literature, Linguistics, etc.
14.	Law and Legal Studies	e.g. Civil Law, Criminal Law, Common Law, China Law, International Law, Commercial Law, Arbitration, Alternative

Areas of Study and Training		Programme Areas
		Dispute Resolution, Criminology, etc.
15.	Mass Media and Communications, Journalism and Public Relations	e.g. Cinema, Television, Broadcasting, Speech Communication, Journalism, Mass Communication, Public Relations, Corporate Communications, etc.
16.	Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences	e.g. Clinical and Pre-clinical Medicine, Clinical and Pre-clinical Dentistry, Nursing, Rehabilitation Medicine, Medical and Dental Technology, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Optometry, Radiography, Chinese Medicine, Massage, Acupuncture, Tui-na, Other Health Care Studies, Other Medical Diagnostics and Treatment Studies, Health Sciences, etc.
17.	Security and Disciplinary Forces Studies	e.g. Security Studies, Disciplinary Forces Studies, etc.
18.	Social Sciences	e.g. Sociology, Psychology, Geography and Resource Management, Social Work, Counselling, Government and Public Administration, Regional Culture Studies, Library Science, Gender Studies, Other Behavioral Sciences, etc.
19.	Other Technical Studies and Training	e.g. Clock and Watch, Vehicle Servicing, Property Maintenance, Audio-visual Services, Automobile, Gas, Jewellery Making, Machine and Metal Work, Plastic and Tooling, Product Design and Model Making, Welding, Seamanship, Cleaning Services Training, Pre-employment Training, etc.
20.	Recreation, Leisure, Tourism and Hospitality	e.g. Recreation and Leisure Studies, Tourism, Hotel, Hospitality Studies, Chinese and Western Catering, Food & Beverages, MICE & Event Management, etc.
21.	Transports and Logistics	e.g. Air, Sea, Land transportation, Warehousing, Supply-chain Management, Logistics Studies, etc

**Guidance Notes on the Preparation of Accreditation Documents
through a Self-Evaluation Process**

Preamble

1. These Guidance Notes are for the reference by operators who plan to take part in an accreditation exercise of the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ).
2. These Guidance Notes provide specific reference to the preparation of Accreditation Documents, building on the good practices of a self-evaluation process for the purpose of continuous quality enhancement and development.

Self-evaluation and Quality Assurance

3. Effective management of any business involves a cycle of planning, implementation and evaluation; evaluation of what has been done is essential in ensuring that activities remain fit for purpose, and that continuous improvement occurs. Evaluation is primarily an internal process; hence it is often referred to as self-evaluation.
4. Self-evaluation lies at the heart of quality assurance processes, whether at the level of institutional systems, programme area management or individual programmes. The primary context for these Guidance Notes is the preparation of an Accreditation Document as a first step in the process of accreditation by HKCAAVQ. However, such preparation will be a lot easier if it is built on a practice of regular internal self-evaluation of systems and programmes. These Guidance Notes are primarily intended to assist the preparation of an accreditation document based on the good practices of internal self-evaluation.

The Purpose of a Self-evaluation Process

5. A self-evaluation process involves making an assessment of whether an operator its programme area or a programme of learning is fit for purpose. As such, the process has three main functions.
6. First, it enables the operator to evaluate the quality of its systems, its quality assurance mechanisms, its management or of the learning opportunities offered to students and the outcomes achieved by them. It provides an opportunity to reflect on ‘what do we do?’, ‘why do we do it’, ‘why do we do it in the way that we do?’ and ‘how do we know if we are succeeding?’ A good self-evaluation process will

- include careful self-analysis. This should involve an evaluation of perceived strengths, with reference to the evidence which justifies the statements made; and of weaknesses, where these are recognised.
7. Where weaknesses are acknowledged, these should be discussed, together with the steps being taken to bring about improvements. Acknowledgement of a weakness, so long as effective improvement measures are in hand, should be welcomed. An unacknowledged weakness is more likely to result in an adverse judgement by a review team; it suggests that either the operator is unaware of the weakness, or that nothing has been done about it.
 8. Second, the self-evaluation process provides a framework for a process of review. Review is based on the testing and verification of statements made in the self-evaluation document. The document should reflect on current provision in a manner that evaluates both strengths and weaknesses, indicate the changes that have taken place since any earlier review, and consider what changes may be necessary in the future.
 9. A self-evaluation process should be constructively self-critical in discussing both strengths and weaknesses of provision, as perceived by the operator. It is an opportunity for the operator to demonstrate how the strengths of the provision identified in previous reviews have been built upon, and how any weaknesses identified have been addressed. Where weaknesses remain, plans for addressing these should be summarised. Credit will usually be given for appropriate remedial plans that address effectively any acknowledged weaknesses.
 10. A high quality, reflective process draws upon robust evidence is more likely to lead to a positive outcome. An inadequate process that is poorly organised and which is based on description rather than being evaluative, is less likely to produce a successful result.
 11. The self-evaluation should indicate where supporting evidence may be found, e.g. within other documentation. This allows such documents to be called for if needed, and avoids the need for merely descriptive material to be included in an evaluative document.
 12. Thirdly, the self-evaluation process provides the input for the self-evaluation document in the case of an internal exercise, and or the basis of an accreditation document to HKCAAVQ as part of an external exercise. If used as an accreditation document, it will usually be necessary to augment the document to include some of the factual material required by HKCAAVQ, and it may be helpful for operators to structure the document so as to address each of the accreditation criteria in the order in which they appear in the relevant HKCAAVQ Guidelines for accreditation. In particular, the document should reflect on the threshold standards specified in the Guidelines.

Preparing An Accreditation Document for PAA

13. A good accreditation document will address each of the criteria for accreditation of operators and relevant programme area(s) specified in respective accreditation guidelines, which are available on the HKCAAVQ website.
14. Under each heading of the accreditation document, it will discuss the matters raised in the Accreditation Criteria and Standards, set out in the Guidelines.
15. Some of the information required is largely factual. What differentiates a good Accreditation Document from one that is not so good is the extent to which there is genuinely evaluative commentary, as opposed to mere description. The following are some of the areas where it is possible to include the type of evaluative commentary that will make the difference between a good and a not-so-good document.
16. A good accreditation document will explain how the operators are effective in developing outcome-based learning programmes that deliver learning outcomes commensurate with the specified QF level(s) and meet their objectives. A not-so-good document would merely describe the operators' policy and systems, without explaining why they work, or discussing strengths and possible areas for enhancement.
17. A good accreditation document will explain how the education and training services provided by the operators in specified programme area(s) are consistent with the wider mission of the operator(s). A not-so-good document would not explain why the operators wish to provide educational opportunities in the way as claimed / planned.
18. A good accreditation document will discuss the decision making process within the operators, explaining how decision making takes account of such factors as internal control and external accountability, including but not limited to how to quality assure the learning programmes to meet the QF standards. An accreditation document would address also the effectiveness and efficiency of the mechanisms used for programme approval and review, including the extent to which learning outcomes are delivered at the claimed QF level(s) supported by appropriately designed student assessment as evidence. A not-so-good document would merely describe the decision making powers, process and division of responsibility, without providing any rationale for it, or evaluating its effectiveness.
19. A good accreditation document will identify the measures used to assess the success of the operation, explaining why each measure is important, before

presenting relevant figures. A not-so-good document would offer statistics alone, without adequate explanation of the significance of them.

20. A good self-evaluation document should identify **supporting information** that can be made available if required. This can include both quantitative data and qualitative feedback.
21. Quantitative data might include:
 - statistics on student achievement in all forms of summative assessment;
 - profile of students' entry qualifications;
 - progression and completion rates;
 - first employment destinations and employment rates.Qualitative data might include:
 - student feedback;
 - staff feedback;
 - external verifiers' and examiners' reports;
 - employers' views on the competency of the graduates whom they have recruited;
 - accreditation and monitoring reports by any professional body with an interest in all or part of the programme;
 - internal reports on the approval, monitoring and review of the programme;
 - Internal reports on remedies / enhancement made to the programme area(s) / learning programme(s) on the basis of feedback collected.

What is a Quality Accreditation Document?

22. An accreditation document should contain adequate information to address each of the accreditation criteria of an accreditation exercise. However, a document that is too long will lose focus. Not all of the factual information may need to go into the accreditation document. The document can refer the reader to other information that is available. As a rule of thumb, the document should be self-contained, include key facts and make cross references to data in supporting documents with clear indication of the reference drawn from relevant parts of the supporting documents. It should be **evaluative**, rather than merely descriptive. It should give the reader a clear picture of what the institution, or the programme area, or a programme is like in a succinct, precise and concise manner.
23. Within these broad Guidelines, succinct, concise, self-contained and evaluative is always better than long and descriptive.

Possible Sources of Evidence for Programme Area Accreditation

Preamble

The onus of providing sufficient and appropriate documentary evidence for accreditation decision lies with the operator. The following suggested information / documents are for reference and are not meant to be exhaustive. When preparing the accreditation document, the operator is only expected to enclose what it has been using for management purpose and / or on a daily operational basis and support the claims made in the accreditation document.. As operators are diverse in nature and operational mode, it is likely that some may have different written / printed documentation from others.

For a PAA exercise, the operator is expected to demonstrate that it has quality assurance and management capabilities to meet the QF standards in the approved programme area(s). With this in mind, the documentary evidence under each of the accreditation criteria should also address the review procedures and mechanisms employed for continuous improvements.

Institutional Review

1. Governance and Institutional Structure

- Regulations, statutes or other instruments that govern the institution
- Terms of reference for and membership of relevant governing bodies / academic board and major committees responsible for academic/management/finance decisions, membership composition, appointment criteria and procedures, governance and management structure
- Annual report (or other official publications) of the institution
- strategic plan outlining the blueprint for institutional development in general and for the programme area (discipline) under consideration in particular for at least the next 3 years

2. Overall Institutional Management

- Organisational structure and charts, duty statements of the senior management / personnel, resources allocation policy, decision making bodies and associated processes, financial plans and control mechanisms

3. Academic Development Plan

- Academic planning process, academic development plan and/or developmental blueprint of the operator's academic provision for at least the next 3 years (with details about the academic model including but not limited to programme objectives, programme structure, principles underpinning decisions for programme delivery, curriculum design and assessment policies and intended learning outcomes)

4. Financial Viability and System

- Budgets and estimates for at least the next 3 years
- Audited financial accounts for the last 3 years, and evidence of endowment funds, loans or equivalent
- Managerial accounts including resource allocation to various programme areas, fund raising strategies, schedule of fees, examples of funding support by mother company / government bureau and contingency plan, financial contingency plan
- Management information on e.g. projected student intake and unit cost per student at programme and institutional levels, breakeven student numbers at various levels, direct cost and indirect cost, projected staffing and resource plans, projected sources of income, planned attrition rate / employment rate and progression rate, etc.

5. Quality Assurance including Programme Approval, Monitoring and Review

- Quality assurance policy and handbook
- Information on structure and terms of reference of committees/boards/departments, appointment criteria of members and procedures for the relevant committees involved in quality assurance and programme approval
- Policy and processes for stakeholders' feedback, including external advisors/external examiners' reports
- Policy and processes for programme approval/validation, review and monitoring at both the institutional and programme area levels
- Policy and processes for programme and curriculum design,
- Policy and processes for assessment
- Policy and process for QF level determination

6. Staffing Policies

- Staff Planning and Policies
 1. Staffing plans for at least the next 3 years
 2. Policy and procedures for the appointment, appraisal, promotion and dismissal, appeal of staff
 3. Staff statistics and staff profile (e.g. curriculum vitae with information on qualifications/teaching and other work experience/quality assurance experience/publications and scholarly activities and profile summaries),
 4. Policy on teaching load in terms of assigned teaching duties, teaching duty weighting and staff student ratio
 5. List of administrative/support staff and their duty statements

- Staff Development
 1. Policy on staff engagement in scholarly / professional activities and staff development
 2. Lists of selected publications of staff
 3. Staff development activities of the last 3 years and planned staff development activities for at least the next 3 years
 4. Staff handbook

7. Resources and Support Services

- Overview of teaching and learning facilities, student amenities, student services such as counselling, financial aid, facility replenishing plan and budget in tandem with the strategic and academic development plans for at least the next 3 years
- Policy on workplace attachment and list of workplace attachment partners, if applicable, guidelines to partners for supervising students, partner selection, assessment criteria, evaluation procedures, policies for discontinuation of partner contracts

Discipline Review

1. Discipline-level Management

- Organisational and management chart within the programme area / discipline, terms of reference and appointment criteria for and membership of management committees, samples of agenda and notes of meetings at the programme area / discipline level.
- Statements on roles/duties of department heads, course leaders, etc.
- Financial plans for the programme area / discipline, control mechanisms

2. Strategic Plan

- The academic model and the long-term programme development plan in the relevant programme area(s), the number and title of the learning programmes to be included in the programme area, the normative programme length and the common programme structure, the target students and intended learning outcomes at exit level, the core study, electives, streams of study including but not limited to majors, minors, streams, specialisation, the roadmap for the launch of programmes, not yet being offered.
 1. For all new programmes intended to be introduced under the approved PAA status during the validity period, the information provided should also include programme specification and internal validation reports, if available; or programme outlines and action plans for implementation depending on stages of development. Samples of the various aspects and QA process of the programmes on the basis of which the claim PAA status is being considered will serve as useful reference
 2. Updated accounts on improvements made to programmes validated by the HKCAAVQ since the last revalidation.

3. Programme Development and Management

- Programme development processes adopted by the discipline (programme area) and the monitoring processes
- Programme development plan at programme area level for at least the next 3 years
- outcome-based programme design tools, QF level determination mechanisms

4. Admission, Progression and Assessment

- Student admission policy, record of applicants' admission data and selection procedures, student records reflecting progression and graduation, student statistics
- Assessment papers / marking schemes and marked students' scripts for capstone modules of sampled programme(s) within the applied programme area(s)*.

5. Teaching and Learning Policies

- Teaching and Learning policy, programme specifications of sampled programme(s) from the programme area(s) under consideration
- Teaching plans, sample teaching materials, student handouts and relevant guidelines to teachers and students.

6. Scope of Programme Area

- Overall strategic plan mentioned under 1 (IR), the academic development plan under 3(IR) and the strategic plan at discipline level in 2 (DR)

7. Justification of QF Level

- Samples of assessments from capstone modules of the sampled learning programme(s) from the programme area / discipline, sample assessment papers, marking schemes and representative samples of students' marked assessments over a full spectrum of the grade

8. Discipline-level Staffing and Staff Development

- Staff profile at discipline (programme area) level as against the institutional appointment criteria for each staff rank, their curriculum vitae, examples of scholarly and developmental activities undertaken over the last 2 to 3 years and planned activities in the coming 3 years, duty lists, workload and teaching load per rank, staff-to-student ratio

9. Discipline-level Resources and Support Services

- Facilities and support services available to the students of the programme area(s) / discipline(s), including but not limited to teaching and learning facilities, student amenities, student services such as mentor scheme, class tutor scheme,.

- Policy for workplace attachment, list of partners who have contractual commitment to the workplace attachment arrangement as well as related information regarding workplace attachment, including but not limited to guidelines to partners for supervising students during workplace attachment, selection and assessment criteria and guidelines on workplace attachment,
- Student handbooks

Roles of Accreditation Panel Members

1. Accreditation is conducted under the “peer review” principle. By peer review, accreditation decisions are made by the HKCAAVQ on the basis of recommendations put forth by peers involved in the exercise as members of an accreditation panel. Therefore panel members are important assets of the Council and play a significant part in the formulation of accreditation decisions.
2. The panel members are academic and professional experts with expertise and experience in areas relevant to the accreditation exercise, such as institutional management, programme delivery and management, quality assurance and QF matters. A professional staff member of the HKCAAVQ performs the role panel secretary but is also a full member of the panel.
3. The panel is expected to provide expert advice to the HKCAAVQ in an accreditation exercise according to the accreditation guidelines, accreditation standards and procedures as well as the code of conduct stipulated by the HKCAAVQ and the Terms of Reference of the exercise as specified in the Service Agreement.
4. The role of the panel is to assess the institutional capability and capacity of the operators and the quality of the learning programme(s) of relevant programme area(s) under consideration, evaluate evidence and form a judgement as to whether the operators and the programme area(s) meet the required accreditation standards.
5. In order to perform their duties effectively and efficiently, panel members are expected to be able to afford the time to make the necessary preparation for the accreditation exercise, including but not limited to attending relevant training and briefing session(s), making themselves familiar with HKCAAVQ accreditation requirements and processes, reading thoroughly the accreditation documents and materials supplied by the operators, making initial comments on the accreditation documents and materials against the required evidence, accreditation criteria and standards, participating in the whole on-site visit, sharing views and putting forward recommendations to the HKCAAVQ as an accreditation panel. Panel members are also expected to share their views on the draft Accreditation Report as well as on fulfilment of pre-condition(s) / requirement(s) by the operator(s) as and when appropriate.

6. The panel chairman as the leader of the panel is also expected to provide overall guidance in order to achieve a satisfactory completion of the exercise. It is the Panel Secretary cum Member's duty in consultation with the panel chair to ensure that all pertinent issues relevant to the accreditation are fully addressed during the visit and that decisions/ recommendations made by the panel are consistent within the HKCAAVQ.
7. Accreditation is also conducted under the principle of "fitness for purpose". It is understood that operators differ in nature, size, operational complexity and scope of expertise. Therefore, there is no one single model that fits all in quality assurance. Accordingly the panel members are expected to respect academic autonomy while making judgement and recommendations on the basis of evidence-based accreditation standards and requirements so as to maintain professional standards in accreditation.
8. Accreditation has a dual purpose. On the one hand an accreditation exercise should ensure that minimum standards are met and on the other hand provide input to the continuous improvement of the operators and their learning programmes. An open mind and a supportive attitude are part of the professional behaviour expected of panel members without compromising quality. Furthermore the panel should work under the "no surprise" principle, by giving the operator adequate opportunity to present its evidence and supplement evidence to bridge any identified gap.

Roles and Responsibilities of Operators in Accreditation

1. Accreditation is voluntary and initiated at the request of the operators. The service agreement signed by both the Council and the operators provides the terms and conditions including the roles and responsibilities of the parties. The operators among others accept to participate in the accreditation exercise thus cooperate with the HKCAAVQ and its panel so as to ensure that the process is as smooth as possible.
2. Accreditation is conducted on a trust basis but is evidence-based with the onus of proof lying with the operators. It is the responsibility of the operators to provide evidence to demonstrate that they meet the accreditation standards as well as any statutory requirements in Hong Kong. The operators are responsible for the full and frank disclosure of all relevant documents as requested for assessment by the Council, throughout the accreditation process. Limited disclosure will therefore be considered by the panel as lack of evidence. The Council understands that some of the information requested may be sensitive and of a confidential nature. All panel members sign a confidentiality statement and any confidential documents will be treated as such by the panel.
3. The operators are expected to perform the following responsibilities in the exercise:
 - To submit an accreditation document of a self-evaluative nature and that addresses the standards promulgated in the accreditation guidelines relevant for the exercise.
 - To provide with the accreditation document supporting documents as necessary as well as additional documents at the panel's request before and during the on-site visit.
 - To prepare the on-site visit, in line with the stipulated requirements as contained in these Guidelines as well as under further advice by the HKCAAVQ Secretariat. This responsibility includes making the necessary meeting arrangements for the on-site visit including but not limited to the invitation and briefing of the proposed representatives whom the panel will be meeting. The requirements and arrangements will be stipulated by the accreditation panel, before and during the on-site visit as deemed appropriate. As the discussions during the on-site visit form part of the evidence underpinning the accreditation exercise, the operators are required to ensure that all the requested interviewees in sufficient numbers are available for the panel to meet. The operator(s) will be invited to give an input to the visit programme prior to finalisation.

- To participate in the interview sessions and engage in the discussions with the panel during the on-site visit.
- To provide the basic protocol and logistical support including making meetings room available which are big enough to accommodate the number of people to be interviewed at any given time, reasonable refreshments, car parking facilities, if any. Details will be put forth to the operator(s) by the HKCAAVQ Secretariat before the on-site visit.
- To provide feedback on factual accuracy of the draft Accreditation Report.

Appendix 6

Indicative Timeline of A Programme Area Accreditation Exercise

Initial Consultation

- An operator consults the HKCAAVQ at least six months before submitting formal application.
- The operator attends relevant Providers' Seminar, Operators' Workshop run by the HKCAAVQ.
- The operator confirms its intention to apply for PAA by submitting a Statement of Intent
- The HKCAAVQ will then issue a Service Agreement.
- After signing the Service Agreement and making payment as specified in Service Agreement, the operator should send in the accreditation document on or before the date specified in the Service Agreement.
- The HKCAAVQ panel members for both the IR and DR are nominated for clearance of conflict of interests.
- The cleared panel(s) is / are formed.

	<u>Weeks</u>	
Initial Examination	1 – 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ HKCAAVQ’s initial examination of the adequacy of the accreditation document and state of readiness of the operator to confirm that the accreditation can proceed.
Panel’s Initial Comments and Operators’ Responses	4 – 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ The panel(s) preliminarily assess the accreditation submission with the supporting documents. □ The panel(s) provide/s initial comments to operators and requests additional evidence or information as needed. □ The operator provides requested evidence or information. □ The operator and the HKCAAVQ make on-site visit arrangement.
On-site Visits	10 – 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ On-site visit on IR □ On-site visit(s) on DR □ Post-visit or post-meeting follow-up, if applicable
Report Writing	14 – 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Preparation of accreditation reports
Notification of Outcome	27 – 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Checking of factual accuracy. □ Notification of outcome to the operators in the form of an accreditation report
Follow-up Actions	30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Release of Accreditation Report □ If pre-conditions and/ or requirements were imposed, the operator provides evidence of meeting them by specified timeframe.

Glossary

Term	Definition
Accreditation Document	A self-evaluative document, with supporting evidence, prepared by an operator to address the accreditation criteria.
Accreditation Panel	A panel consisting of experts with the requisite profiles and expertise formed for the purpose of the IR and DR of a PAA exercise. A HKCAAVQ staff member will play the role of the Panel Member cum Secretary.
Condition	A condition is part of the accreditation decisions to be fulfilled by the operator in Programme Area Accreditation prior to the start of the validity period of the accreditation status (pre-condition) or by specified deadline(s) during the validity period (requirement).
Criteria	The elements for consideration during an accreditation exercise. These elements are related to the “input”, “process”, “output”, “context” and “outcome” of the subject of accreditation (i.e. the operator in the IR procedure and the programme area in the DR procedure) and are expressed as the seven areas for accreditation assessment under IR and nine areas for accreditation assessment under DR in Section 7.
Discipline Review (DR)	The DR is the sequential procedure after successful Institutional Review of a PAA exercise. DR scrutinises the operator’s QA competency in practice, on the basis of a focused study of the programme area concerned. The quality and standards of the learning programmes as well as the effectiveness of the programme monitoring and review mechanisms within the programme area under consideration will provide reference to the operator’s competency to ensure and determine whether the learning programmes under the programme area(s) concerned meet the standards as required under the QF.
Evidence-based	It is one of the principles of accreditation which means that accreditation decisions are to be made on the basis of evidence provided by the operators to support their claim that they meet the accreditation standards stipulated in these Guidelines.

Fitness for Purpose	It is one of the principles of accreditation which means that the operator and the programme area(s) are accredited on the basis of their stated objectives, in view that operators are different in nature, size, operational complexity and scope of expertise.
Institutional Review (IR)	The IR is the pre-requisite to Discipline Review of a PAA exercise. IR examines an operator's overall governance, institutional structure, management, resources, academic environment and quality assurance. Through IR, the operator demonstrates that it is competent to run an educational and training operation that meets its purpose as well as the quality requirements underpinning the QF via its systems, capacity and capability.
Learning Programme	A programme of studies or training defined by a curriculum (which may consist of one or more modules, units, subjects or courses or any combination of those elements) and includes, where the context permits, any proposed programme of such studies or training.
Learning Outcome	A student's attained knowledge, skills and application ability as a result of completing the learning programme.
List of 21 Areas of Study / Training and Programme Areas	This is the reference document for determining the programme area title to be considered under a PAA exercise. It is in Appendix 1.
On-site Visit	A visit to the partnership's premises in Hong Kong which is an integral part of an accreditation exercise conducted primarily to collect evidence for evaluating whether the accreditation criteria are met.
Operator	A person, school, institution, or organisation or other body, the whole or part of the business of which includes the operation of any learning programmes or any part of a learning programme.
Peer Review	It is one of the principles of accreditation which means involving academic and professional experts with relevant expertise and experience as panel members in the accreditation.

Pre-condition	A pre-condition is part of the accreditation decisions to be fulfilled by the partnership prior to the start of the validity period of the accreditation status.
Programme Area Accreditation (PAA)	The <i>Programme Area Accreditation</i> (PAA) process is the third stage of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process adopted by the HKCAAVQ to underpin the QF. Upon successful PAA, an operator may develop and operate learning programmes within an approved scope of programme area (breadth) at specified QF level(s) (depth) for an approved period of time (validity period) and have the qualifications of its learning programmes entered into the QR for QF recognition without going through the normal route of prior programme validation or revalidation by the HKCAAVQ.
Periodic Review (PR)	The PR process is the fourth Stage in the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process adopted by the HKCAAVQ to underpin the QF. Operators with granted PAA status in specified programme area(s) at approved QF Level(s) must proceed with <i>Periodic Review</i> to maintain its PAA status, if successful. PR is to ascertain whether the internal quality assurance processes of an operator with the PAA status continues to be effective and sound.
QF Level	The level of the learning programme pitched against the Generic Level Descriptors (GLD) published by the Government at http://www.hkqf.gov.hk/guie/HKQF_GLD.asp .
QF Standards	In respect of a learning programme, the skills, knowledge or experience acquired on the completion of the learning programme that commensurate with the requirements under the specified level of the QF.
Qualification	A formal award in recognition of the skills, knowledge and experience acquired by an individual on satisfactory completion of a learning programme which meets specified QF standard and which is granted on the basis of formal assessment. It does not include Statement of Attendance.
Requirement	A requirement is part of the accreditation decisions to be fulfilled by the partnership by specified deadline(s) during the validity period of the approved accreditation status.

Restriction	A restriction is a limit set to the accreditation status within which the status will continue to be effective within the validity period as specified in the accreditation report.
Scope of Programme Area	The core area of study operated by the operator for a specified programme area under accreditation. This will form the boundary of the intended programme area.
Standards	The qualitative or quantitative benchmarks under individual accreditation criteria for the panel's assessment as to whether the accreditation subject (i.e. the operator / programme area) meets the quality requirements. The standards can refer to QF standards, competency standards, learning programme standards, academic / vocational standards, educational standards, accreditation standards in context. They are expressed in greater details under each accreditation criterion in Section 7.
Statement of Accreditation	It confirms the granting of the accreditation status to the operator. It 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).
Substantial Change	Any changes which may have an impact on meeting the criteria for accreditation. For details, please refer to <i>Guidelines on Substantial Change to Accreditation Status</i> available on the HKCAAVQ website.
Threshold Standard	It refers to the minimum quality requirements stipulated in these Guidelines and to prevailing requirements for operating relevant learning programmes in Hong Kong such as the Generic Level Descriptor in the QF as well as any other relevant policy intention / regulations / guidelines / common descriptors / specification of competency standards (SCS) promulgated by the Hong Kong SAR Government.
Validity Period	The period of time in which an approved accreditation status is effective as stipulated in the accreditation report.