



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

Guidelines

on

the Four-stage Quality Assurance

Process under

the Qualifications Framework

Version 2.1

March 2015

Preamble

1. The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) was established under HKCAAVQ Ordinance (Cap 1150) and may perform functions stipulated under section 4 therein viz., conducting accreditation tests generally or as authorised under any other local enactment. HKCAAVQ performs also the statutory roles of the Accreditation Authority and the Qualifications Register (QR) Authority under the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (AAVQO) (Cap 592).
2. HKCAAVQ has made rules to provide for the methods and procedures for accreditation (the “**Rules**”) and in order to implement these Rules has developed a Four-stage Quality Assurance Process (the “**Process**”) for Operators who wish to seek accreditation service under the Qualifications Framework (QF).
3. These Guidelines have been produced pursuant to and in accordance with the Rules and developed within their ambit. The purpose of these Guidelines is to provide an overview of the whole Process for Operators. Accreditation criteria and standards for the individual stages of the Process are documented in the respective sets of guidance notes on each stage. These Guidelines supersede any previous guidelines on the Process but are by no means exhaustive.
4. For special information on accreditation of non-local programmes, users can refer to HKCAAVQ website at <http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk>.
5. As the QF evolves, these Guidelines will from time to time be expanded and in order to implement the Rules. Whilst HKCAAVQ endeavours to ensure the currency of the information contained in these Guidelines, HKCAAVQ reserves the right to delete, suspend or edit any information at any time in its absolute discretion without prior notice. To obtain the most up-to-date information, users may look up the electronic version of these Guidelines on HKCAAVQ website at <http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk>.
6. For enquiries, please contact HKCAAVQ at info@hkcaavq.edu.hk or by phone at 3658 0000.

Abbreviation

AAVQO	<i>Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap 592)</i>
EDB	<i>Education Bureau</i>
GLD	<i>Generic Level Descriptors</i>
HKCAAVQ	<i>Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications</i>
IE	<i>Initial Evaluation</i>
LPA	<i>Learning Programme Accreditation</i>
PAA	<i>Programme Area Accreditation</i>
PR	<i>Periodic Review</i>
Process	<i>Four-stage Quality Assurance Process</i>
QA	<i>Quality Assurance</i>
QF	<i>Qualifications Framework</i>
QR	<i>Qualifications Register</i>
Re-LPA	<i>Learning Programme Re-accreditation</i>
RPL	<i>Recognition of Prior Learning</i>
SCS	<i>Specification of Competency Standards</i>

1. What is the role of HKCAAVQ in the Qualifications Framework?

- 1.1 The QF, launched by the Education Bureau (EDB) on 5 May 2008, is a hierarchy of recognised qualifications in academic, vocational and continuing education as well as qualifications attained by employees through the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) scheme. It contains three key features:
- **Level**, which reflects the depth and complexity of learning leading to the qualification;
 - **Award title**, which reflects the nature, area of study and hierarchy of the qualification; and
 - **Credit**, which indicates the volume or size of learning leading to the qualification.
- 1.2 There are seven levels in the QF, characterised by outcome-based Generic Level Descriptors (GLD) that describe the common features of qualifications at the same level.
- 1.3 HKCAAVQ's role in the QF is to assure the quality of learning programmes so that the qualifications they lead to can be entered into the QR (<http://www.hkqr.gov.hk>) and recognised under the QF.
- 1.4 The QR is the public face of the QF and contains all qualifications that have been assured for quality under the QF. For a quality assured learning programme to be entered into the QR, the following requirements need to be fulfilled:
- (a) The learning programme should carry an award (i.e. a qualification) as a formal recognition of the achievement of the learning programme. The award title should follow the Award Titles Scheme policy laid down by the EDB (<http://www.hkqf.gov.hk>).
 - (b) The learning programme should be accessible to learners of Hong Kong.
 - (c) The learning programme should include formal assessments to ascertain that learners have achieved the specified learning outcomes of the programme.
 - (d) The learning programme should contain properly assigned QF credits in line with the policy of the EDB (<http://www.hkqf.gov.hk>) and correspond to an assigned QF level in accordance with GLD.

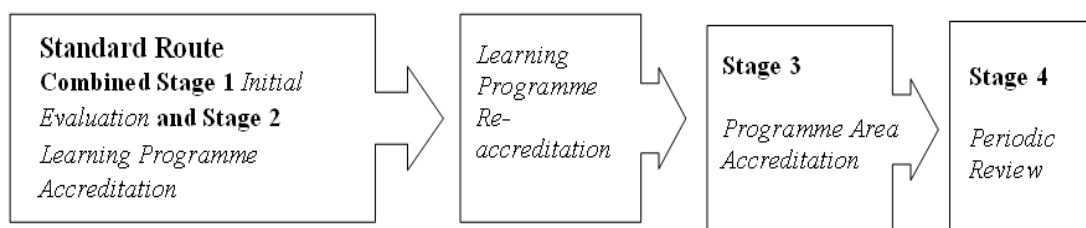
2. Why are there four stages in the Process?

- 2.1 The four stages are designed to progressively develop Operators' competency in self-review, self-monitoring and enhancement of their internal quality assurance capacity. The external accreditation exercises help Operators develop internal mechanisms to improve the quality of their institutional operations and learning programmes.
- 2.2 A Facilitating Phase has been incorporated into Stage 1 and Stage 2 to (a) help Operators who are new to the Process so that they are aware of the accreditation requirements; and (b) bring together information about the track records of accredited Operators to assist in HKCAAVQ's identification of accreditation focus(es).
- 2.3 Each stage builds on the previous one and allows Operators to demonstrate their maturity in developing and operating accredited programmes over time and to construct a track record of successful accreditation.
- 2.4 The four stages allow room for the growth and development of Operators, leading to the opportunity to gain self-accrediting status in programme areas of proven strength and quality assurance capacity.
- 2.5 By design, Stage 3 and its sequel, Stage 4, enable a successfully accredited Operator to independently operate its learning programme(s) and enter these qualification(s) into the QR within the approved programme area(s) at the approved QF level or below during the validity period.

3. What is the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process?

- 3.1 It is a quality assurance (QA) process with four stages, which underpins the QF. The four stages are: *Initial Evaluation (IE)*, *Learning Programme Accreditation (LPA)*, *Programme Area Accreditation (PAA)* and *Periodic Review (PR)*. The Process is outlined in the following diagram.

THE FOUR-STAGE QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESS



- 3.2 Stage 1, *Initial Evaluation* (IE), forms the means for HKCAAVQ to assess whether Operators are able to achieve their stated objectives, and to operate learning programmes that meet the stated QF standards. Operators must have valid IE status to operate accredited learning programmes. **IE status is linked to the approved QF level or below and is valid for two years.** Within this two-year period, Operators must apply to have at least one learning programme accredited under *LPA*. Accredited Operators who have yet to apply for *LPA* after the end of the two-year validity period will need to apply for an extension of their IE status. Only one extension of IE status will normally be allowed. If Operators continue to gain successful accreditation for their learning programmes, their IE status will remain valid.
- 3.3 Stage 2, *Learning Programme Accreditation* (LPA), is an accreditation exercise through which HKCAAVQ can assess whether the learning programmes meet the required standards to achieve the stated objectives, and deliver the intended learning outcomes that meet the QF standards. When a learning programme is successfully accredited, the qualification can be entered into the QR for the approved validity period upon fulfilment of any conditions and payment of the fee as determined by the QR Authority.
- 3.4 The combined Stage 1 and Stage 2 (standard route) enables Operators to demonstrate their operational competency through the learning programmes under accreditation. Accreditation criteria for both stages can be reviewed by the same Accreditation Panel in the same exercise to streamline the procedure.
- 3.5 *Learning Programme Re-accreditation* (re-LPA) is the cyclical evaluation of an accredited learning programme, which determines whether the learning programme continues to meet the stated objectives, and delivers the learning outcomes that meet the QF standards as determined at the previous LPA. The Operator is expected to demonstrate continuous improvement as a result of its internal QA procedures over the validity period.
- 3.6 If a learning programme is successfully re-accredited, the programme can stay on the QR for the approved validity period upon the fulfilment of any conditions and payment of the fee as determined by the QR Authority.
- 3.7 The validity period for LPA and re-LPA is linked to programme quality and programme duration. Under normal circumstances, the validity period is $N + 1$ years, where N is the programme duration.

3.8 Stage 3, *Programme Area Accreditation* (PAA), is an accreditation step that determines whether Operators have well balanced and robust internal quality assurance systems to self-monitor and accredit their own programmes, given their track records of self-monitoring and assuring the standards of their accredited learning programme(s). Operators may apply for a PAA exercise in the area of study / training of their accredited learning programme(s), subject to the following eligibility criteria:

- (a) Seven years of operation after (a) successful LPA / re-LPA by HKCAAVQ, or (b) successful accreditation by a QA body recognised by HKCAAVQ; or
- (b) Five years of operation after successful LPA / re-LPA by HKCAAVQ, with no pre-conditions nor requirements concerning the quality aspects of an outcome-based learning programme, including:
 - (i) Achieving the programme objectives and delivering the intended learning outcomes that meet the QF standard, with reference to GLD.
 - (ii) Aligning the curriculum as well as teaching and learning strategies and procedures with programme objectives for the purpose of delivering the intended learning outcomes for the target students.
 - (iii) Adopting valid and reliable assessment strategies and procedures in measuring the students' standard of learning.
 - (iv) Ensuring the outcome standard of the programme via an effective internal quality assurance system.

With PAA status, an Operator may develop and operate a learning programme(s) within **an approved scope of a programme area** at the specified QF level(s) or below within the five-year validity period, and enter the qualifications of the relevant learning programme(s) into the QR without going through LPA or re-LPA by HKCAAVQ.

3.9 Stage 4, *Periodic Review* (PR), is an external review exercise conducted every five years to determine whether an Operator with a valid PAA status continues to maintain robust internal quality assurance systems to self-monitor and ensure that their operation meets their stated objectives, and whether their learning programmes meet the QF standards in the specified programme area(s).

4. What are the guiding principles of the Process?

- 4.1 The Process is learner-centred, as HKCAAVQ plays an important gatekeeping role in the QF to ensure the quality of the accredited learning programmes. HKCAAVQ follows four guiding principles for accreditation in conducting the Process:
- Threshold standard
 - Peer review
 - Fitness for purpose
 - Evidence based
- 4.2 The accreditation is conducted based on a 'threshold standard', which means that an Operator must demonstrate that it can operate programmes that meet the QF standards, and that a learning programme must meet a particular QF standard for entry onto the QR. The QF standards are set out in the Generic Level Descriptors (GLD) of the QF.
- 4.3 The principle of 'peer review' is enacted through the engagement of sector / industry experts who have the expertise and experience in the discipline / industry / quality assurance to form the Accreditation Panel. The role of the Accreditation Panel is to assess the quality of Operators and their learning programmes, collect and evaluate evidence, and form a judgment as to whether the Operators and their learning programmes meet the required standards and stated aims. Details of the roles and responsibilities of Accreditation Panel Members in the Process are listed in Annex 1.
- 4.4 'Fitness for purpose' means that the accreditation is based on the Operators' stated objectives and the scope and level of the learning programmes they offer.
- 4.5 The accreditation is evidence based. 'Evidence based' means the Accreditation Panel conducts the review and forms a judgment by reference to the evidence provided by Operators to support their claim that they meet the threshold accreditation standards and their own objectives. Further detail regarding the evidence to be provided by Operators is set out at paragraphs 5 and 7 below and in the relevant individual guidelines.
- 4.6 As Operators are different in size, complexity of operation and scope of expertise, HKCAAVQ will take these differences into account. The minimum standards that must be met by all Operators remain the same, but the type of evidence they are required to present may differ.
- 4.7 The Accreditation Panel's assessment will be guided by the criteria and standards set out in the individual guidance notes on each of the four stages and will be in line with the requirements of GLD and any other relevant documents such as the common descriptors for Associate Degree (AD) and Higher Diploma (HD) programmes.

Transparency in Accreditation

- 4.8 Accreditation is also undertaken using a transparent approach throughout the Process so that all parties involved (i.e. the Operator and the Accreditation Panel) have a common understanding of the Process and relevant issues that may arise. Throughout the accreditation process, the Operator is required to respond to any questions / concerns raised by the Accreditation Panel and provides evidence to support its responses to such questions / concerns.
- 4.9 The rationale for the Accreditation Panel's recommendations regarding the accreditation determination and decisions together with the supporting evidence collected by the Accreditation Panel throughout the accreditation process are documented in an accreditation report that is prepared by the Panel Secretary and confirmed by the Panel. HKCAAVQ finalises the accreditation report following consideration of the Accreditation Panel's recommendations and makes the accreditation determination and decisions. Accreditation Panels or Operators may seek clarification regarding the accreditation determination and decisions contained in the accreditation report from the Heads of the Accreditation Areas at HKCAAVQ. HKCAAVQ now also publishes the summary accreditation reports for the IE, LPA and re-LPA of local accredited programmes on its website.

5. What are the accreditation criteria, standards and required evidence?

- 5.1 Each stage in the Process has a specific purpose and therefore requires relevant evidence corresponding to the accreditation criteria and standards. The information required and the possible types of evidence that should be submitted for the various stages of the Process, along with the accreditation criteria and standards, are listed in the respective sets of individual guidance notes available on HKCAAVQ website.

6. How long does the Process take?

- 6.1 The timeline for accreditation at each stage will depend on the QF level of the learning programmes, the number of learning programmes being accredited, and the scope and complexity of the exercises (e.g. single or multiple programmes by one Operator or collectively for a number of Operators in the same industry / discipline). The time required to complete each stage (from receipt of the accreditation document to the issuance of the accreditation report) would normally be 14 to 20 weeks for combined

Stage 1 IE and Stage 2 LPA, and 20 to 24 weeks for Stage 3 PAA and Stage 4 PR.

6.2 This indicative timeline is derived on the assumption that all information required by HKCAAVQ for the accreditation exercise(s) is submitted in a timely manner by the Operators. The schedule for an exercise will be agreed upon with the Operator and recorded in the Service Agreement. The Service Agreement is entered into by the parties at the outset of an accreditation exercise and sets out the Terms of Reference for a particular task. Further details in respect of the Service Agreement are set out in the table at paragraph 7.2 below.

7. How is the Process conducted?

7.1 Operators are required to present evidence that they meet the required standards as specified in each stage of the Process. The evidence should be presented in the accreditation document with supporting documentation, through meetings at HKCAAVQ office and/or during a site visit organised by HKCAAVQ with the Accreditation Panel. HKCAAVQ will assess the evidence presented and related findings to judge whether the accreditation status being sought (in respect of the Operator or the programme(s)) can be granted.

7.2 The following table outlines the main steps for IE / LPA:

Operators' Workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operators are strongly encouraged to attend the Operators' Workshop before requesting service.
Statement of Intent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operators indicate their intention to seek accreditation by returning a signed Statement of Intent.
Service Agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HKCAAVQ will issue a Service Agreement. After signing the Service Agreement and making payment for the initial / full accreditation fee, Operators are required to submit the accreditation document on or before the date specified in the Service Agreement.
Facilitating Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Facilitating Phase (a) helps Operators who are new to the Process, and (b) brings together information about the track records of accredited Operators to assist in HKCAAVQ's identification of accreditation focus(es).

Panel formation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accreditation Panel Members are nominated. • The Panel Secretary is also a member of the Accreditation Panel. • The appointment of Accreditation Panel Members is confirmed after checking for conflict of interest with Operators in writing.
Panel's initial comments and Operator's response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Accreditation Panel provides initial comments on the accreditation document and requests additional information as needed. • Operator provides response to the Accreditation Panel's initial comments. • Further information/clarification from the Operator may be needed.
Site visit or meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site visit by the Accreditation Panel or meeting at HKCAAVQ office between the Operator and the Accreditation Panel. • Post-visit or post-meeting follow-up, if applicable.
Report writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HKCAAVQ finalises the accreditation report following consideration of the Accreditation Panel's recommendations. HKCAAVQ has the right to make the final decision.
Notification of outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issuance of accreditation report
Follow-up actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If pre-conditions and / or requirements are imposed by HKCAAVQ in respect of the granting of accreditation, Operators must provide evidence of having fulfilled them by the specified deadlines.

7.3 Pursuant to the terms of the Service Agreement signed by the Operator and HKCAAVQ for any exercise, HKCAAVQ has a discretion to terminate the accreditation exercise under certain circumstances. In particular, HKCAAVQ may decide to terminate the accreditation exercise if HKCAAVQ has come to the conclusion, 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 that the Panel will be able to conduct a meaningful accreditation exercise. Clause 4 of the Service Agreement includes the specific provisions governing early termination. In the event that the accreditation exercise is terminated pursuant to the Service Agreement, no relevant accreditation tests will be conducted and no accreditation report will be produced or issued by HKCAAVQ.

7.4 Details of the expected roles and responsibilities of Operators in accreditation are listed in Annex 2.

8. What are the possible outcomes of the Process?

8.1 In the capacity of the Accreditation Authority as provided for under the AAVQO (Cap 592) and HKCAAVQ Ordinance (Cap 1150), HKCAAVQ makes an accreditation determination after considering the Accreditation Panel's recommendation(s) and taking into account the Terms of Reference of the accreditation exercise as specified in the signed Service Agreement and the available evidence. The possible determinations of the Process are:

- Approval
- Approval with conditions (i.e. pre-condition(s) and / or requirement(s))
- Non-approval

Where approval is granted, a validity period will also be specified along with the accreditation decision in the accreditation report.

8.2 Any pre-condition(s) that forms part of the determination is / are to be fulfilled prior to the commencement of the validity period imposed on an accreditation status. Requirement(s) is / are to be fulfilled by the stipulated deadline(s) within the validity period. Fulfilment of the pre-condition(s) and / or requirement(s) is **mandatory in the course of obtaining and maintaining a valid accreditation status**.

8.3 Restrictions such as those laid down on the scope of the approved programme area(s) may be specified in the determination. Under such circumstances, the Operator is expected to comply with the restriction(s) on an on-going basis unless otherwise advised by HKCAAVQ.

Appeal

8.4 An Operator who is aggrieved by a determination and/or decision(s) of the Accreditation Authority made in an accreditation report can lodge an appeal to the Appeal Board against the accreditation determination or decision(s) (i.e. the validity period of the determination, the condition(s) or restriction(s)) as stated in the accreditation report.

8.5 A decision to terminate the accreditation exercise pursuant to the Service Agreement is not subject to appeal.

8.6 Details of the Appeal Procedure are laid down in section 13 of the AAVQO and can be accessed from the QF website at <http://www.hkqf.gov.hk>.

9. What is the Operator required to do during and upon expiry of the validity period?

Substantial Changes to Accreditation Status

- 9.1 It is the responsibility of the Operator to inform HKCAAVQ of any substantial change(s) to its accreditation status that might impact its competency to continue meeting the relevant accreditation standards before any change is implemented. In case of doubt, the Operator should consult HKCAAVQ on the need for approval on substantial change(s) as soon as is feasible, and prior to implementing any change(s). An accreditation status may lapse if a substantial change(s) has / have been introduced without HKCAAVQ's prior approval.
- 9.2 The possible outcomes of an application for substantial change are approval or non-approval. Where deemed necessary, HKCAAVQ may stipulate pre-condition(s) or requirement(s) to an approval for substantial changes.
- 9.3 The *Guidance Notes on Substantial Change to Accreditation Status* are available on HKCAAVQ website at <http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk>.

Expiry of Validity Period

- 9.4 A learning programme may lose its accreditation status if the validity period expires before it can successfully complete a re-LPA. Likewise, an Operator may lose its PAA status if the validity period expires before it can successfully complete a relevant PR. The maintenance of an IE status is specified in paragraph 3.2 of these Guidelines above.

10. What are other possible follow-up actions for the Operator?

Entry of Qualifications of Accredited Learning Programmes into the QR

- 10.1 Information on how to enter the qualification(s) of an accredited learning programme(s) into the QR is available on the QR website at <http://www.hkqr.gov.hk>.

Advertisements Relating to the QF and QR

10.2 The Operator is required to comply with section 18 of the AAVQO when publishing advertisements that relate to the QF and the QR. The *Guidance Notes for Promoting Accredited Programmes and Programmes undergoing Accreditation* are available on HKCAAVQ website at <http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk>.

11. How is feedback collected?

11.1 HKCAAVQ seeks feedback on its services. Feedback is usually collected via the following formal means with respective stakeholders, with a view to continuously enhancing HKCAAVQ's services:

- (a) Accreditation Panel's opinion survey after the issuance of accreditation report or outcome letter of each accreditation exercise.
- (b) Annual survey of Operators using the accreditation services.
- (c) Meeting with the Operators on various occasions, e.g. focus groups and Operators' consultations, Operators' briefings, or meetings to clarify points made in the accreditation report.
- (d) Online collection of public comments and suggestions at HKCAAVQ website: <http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/contact-us/comments-and-suggestions>.

12. What are the fees?

12.1 HKCAAVQ is a statutory, not-for-profit, self-financed body. Accreditation fees are levied on a full cost recovery principle. HKCAAVQ's accreditation fee schedule, as approved by the Secretary for Education, is available on HKCAAVQ website at <http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk>. The fee level reflects the QF level of the learning programmes run by the Operator as well as the scope and complexity of the accreditation exercise. The exact accreditation fee for a specific exercise will be specified in the Service Agreement.

Roles and Responsibilities of Accreditation Panel Members / Finance and Corporate Governance Expert

Accreditation Panel

1. Under the 'peer review' principle, accreditation determination and decisions are made by HKCAAVQ after consideration of recommendations made by peers involved in the exercise as members of an Accreditation Panel.
2. The role of the Accreditation Panel is to assess the quality of Operators and their learning programmes in accordance with the accreditation criteria and required standards of the respective stages of the Process; and to collect and evaluate evidence and form a judgment as to whether the Operators or their learning programmes meet the required accreditation standards and stated aims. The Accreditation Panel works according to the principles set out within the relevant Guidelines and guidance notes for the fulfilment of the Terms of Reference specified in the signed Service Agreement for the accreditation exercise.
3. In order to perform their duties effectively and efficiently, Panel Members are required to do the following: attend training and / or a briefing session(s), familiarise themselves with HKCAAVQ accreditation requirements and procedures, thoroughly read the accreditation document and supporting documentation supplied by the relevant Operator(s), make initial comments on the accreditation document and supporting documentation against the required evidence, accreditation criteria and standards, participate in the site visit; and share views and put forward recommendations to HKCAAVQ as an Accreditation Panel. Accreditation Panel Members are also expected to share their views on the draft accreditation report as well as on the fulfilment of the pre-condition(s) / requirement(s) by the Operator(s) as and when appropriate.
4. The respective roles of the Accreditation Panel Chair, the Accreditation Panel Members and the Accreditation Panel Secretary are outlined below:

4.1 Accreditation Panel Chair

- (a) To lead the Panel in the accreditation exercise.
- (b) To advise on the site accreditation visit programme.
- (c) To make any necessary adjustments to the site visit programme.
- (d) To receive the expert opinion of the Finance and Corporate Governance Expert (if appointed for the case in point) via the Accreditation Panel Secretary on issues relating to financial management and corporate governance; and to relay the information to the Accreditation Panel for consideration when making a judgment on the accreditation outcome.

- (e) To chair the pre-visit meeting and any meetings of the Accreditation Panel.
- (f) To direct the flow of discussion in all meetings and to maintain a focus on the issues in hand.
- (g) To provide overall guidance in order to satisfactorily complete the exercise.
- (h) To lead the Accreditation Panel deliberation on the accreditation outcome for recommendation to HKCAAVQ.
- (i) If required, to put the matter to the vote; where votes are tied, the Panel Chair shall have a second vote.
- (j) In addition to the above, to perform all other roles required of Accreditation Panel Members.

4.2 Accreditation Panel Members

- (a) To make preparations for the accreditation exercise in good time.
- (b) To comply with all relevant guidelines and guidance notes of HKCAAVQ, and Code of Conduct for Accreditation Panels.
- (c) To provide observations and findings throughout the accreditation exercise including but not limited to providing initial comments, participating in site visit and sharing views during Accreditation Panel meetings.
- (d) To deliberate on the accreditation outcome and make recommendation to HKCAAVQ.
- (e) To provide comments on the draft accreditation report and determine the fulfilment of any pre-condition(s) / requirement(s).

4.3 Accreditation Panel Secretary (i.e. HKCAAVQ Case Officer)

- (a) To be a member of the Accreditation Panel.
- (b) To perform the following roles:
 - (i) To assist the Accreditation Panel to understand HKCAAVQ's accreditation policies, QF standards and practices, local educational system and development, special features of the accreditation exercise at hand, and any precedents that may be relevant to the exercise.
 - (ii) To provide professional support in the conduct of the accreditation exercise, and preparation of accreditation reports.

Finance and Corporate Governance Expert (Expert)

5. A specialist(s) with expertise in finance and corporate governance may be engaged as an Expert(s) in an accreditation exercise by HKCAAVQ to advise on the financial viability and sustainability of the Operator / learning programme under accreditation. The Expert only provides expert opinion to the Accreditation Panel Chair via the Accreditation Panel Secretary on related issues and is not part of the Accreditation Panel. Therefore, he / she does not participate in the Accreditation Panel's decision-making process and shall not attend the site visit, unless considered necessary by the Accreditation Panel Chair on the advice of the Accreditation Panel Secretary. If necessary, the Expert may be invited by the Operator to pay a pre-visit to facilitate triangulation and evidence collection as an alternative to a purely paper based approach.

Code of Conduct

6. Accreditation Panel and the Expert are subject to the same code of conduct and compliance with confidentiality applicable to all HKCAAVQ Panel Members. Before finalisation of the Accreditation Panel and / or the Expert, there is a clearance of conflict of interest with the Operator as declared in writing by potential Accreditation Panel members and / or the Expert.

Roles and Responsibilities of Operators in Accreditation

1. Accreditation is voluntary and initiated at the request of the Operator(s). The Service Agreement signed by both HKCAAVQ and the Operator provides terms and conditions, including the roles and responsibilities of the parties. Upon signing the Service Agreement, the Operator is expected to cooperate with HKCAAVQ and its Accreditation Panel so as to ensure that accreditation process proceeds as smoothly as possible.
2. Accreditation is conducted on a trust basis. Under the evidence-based principle, it is the responsibility of the Operator(s) to provide evidence to demonstrate their compliance with the accreditation standards as well as any applicable statutory requirements in Hong Kong. The Operator(s) is responsible for the full and frank disclosure of all relevant documents required for assessment by HKCAAVQ throughout the accreditation process. Limited disclosure will therefore be considered by the Accreditation Panel as insufficient evidence. HKCAAVQ understands that some of the information requested may be sensitive and of a confidential nature and will keep such information confidential. All Accreditation Panel members will be required to sign a confidentiality statement and any confidential information will be treated as such by the Accreditation Panel.
3. Operators are expected to perform the following responsibilities in the accreditation exercise:
 - (a) To submit an accreditation document of a self-evaluative nature (or an application form for Operators with learning programmes at QF levels 1 – 3) to demonstrate that the Operator / learning programme meets the standards promulgated in the accreditation guidelines relevant for the exercise.
 - (b) To attach to the accreditation document (or application form, as appropriate) supporting documentation as evidence in respect of its application.
 - (c) To provide additional information / documentation at the Accreditation Panel's request, including information requested before and during any site visit.
 - (d) To prepare for the site visit, in line with the requirements stipulated in the relevant set of guidance notes as well as on further advice by HKCAAVQ Secretariat. This includes ensuring that all persons that the Accreditation Panel has requested to interview and sufficient numbers as specified by the Panel are available to meet with and be interviewed by the Accreditation Panel during the site visit. To prepare the interviewees for meaningful discussions with the Accreditation Panel, the Operator is to adequately brief to them in advance of the interview. The Operator may be invited to provide

input to the planned programme for the site visit prior to finalisation. If deemed necessary, the Accreditation Panel may make changes to the programme during the site visit.

- (e) To participate in the interview sessions and engage in the discussions with the Accreditation Panel during the site visit.
- (f) To ensure that there are suitable facilities available to the Accreditation Panel during the site visit, including availability of a private meeting room with sufficient space for the Accreditation Panel and the interviewees, access to documentation, and the provision of reasonable refreshments in accordance with the administrative guidance notes for site visits.
- (g) To provide feedback on the factual accuracy of the draft accreditation report.
- (h) To comply with all requirements that underpin the Process, the QF and the QR.
- (i) To provide feedback during the Annual Operators' Feedback exercise.

Glossary

Term	Definition
Accreditation Authority (AA)	HKCAAVQ specified in Part 1 of Schedule 1 of the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (AAVQO) (Cap 592) to accredit Operators and learning programmes for the purpose of entering their qualifications into the Qualifications Register (QR), for recognition under the Qualifications Framework (QF).
Accreditation Document	Prepared by the Operator to substantiate its claim of meeting the required standards when undertaking any stage(s) of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process. For Operators acquiring accreditation status at QF level 3 or below, the document is presented in the Application Form available at HKCAAVQ website.
Accreditation Panel	A panel consisting of specialists with expertise in the relevant discipline / industry / quality assurance issues. It is formed to assess the Operator / learning programmes in each stage of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process under the guiding principle of 'peer review', with a HKCAAVQ staff member serving as the Panel Secretary.
Accreditation Report	A report issued by HKCAAVQ pursuant to section 5 of the AAVQO on completion of any stage of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process after conducting the relevant accreditation tests.
Accreditation Standards	The standards specified for the respective accreditation criteria, listed in the relevant sets of guidance notes on individual stage(s) of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process.
Appeal	The process under the AAVQO that gives an Operator aggrieved by the accreditation determination and decision(s) stated in an accreditation report the right to appeal to the Appeal Board appointed by the Secretary for Education.
Condition	A condition forms part of the accreditation decision(s), to be fulfilled by the Operator prior to the start of the validity period of the accreditation status (pre-condition), or by a specified deadline(s) during the validity period (requirement).
Criteria	The elements for consideration in an accreditation exercise, as specified in the relevant set of guidance notes on individual stages of the Four-stage Quality Assurance

Process. Each stage in the Process has a specific purpose and therefore requires relevant evidence corresponding to the respective accreditation criteria and standards.

Evidence Based	One of the guiding principles of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process, by which the Accreditation Panel makes accreditation judgments based on evidence under a philosophy of independent, consistent and fair judgment. The onus of proof lies with the Operator.
Facilitating Phase	The quality assurance process in IE, LPA and re-LPA that commences upon the signing of the Service Agreement and ends upon the commencement of the accreditation process. It is time-bound and subject to fees chargeable.
Fitness for Purpose	One of the guiding principles of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process under which the Accreditation Panel determines whether and to what extent the Operator or learning programme is achieving its stated purpose (mission).
Four-stage Quality Assurance Process (the Process)	The Process is a quality assurance mechanism with four stages, i.e. <i>Initial Evaluation</i> (IE), <i>Learning Programme Accreditation</i> (LPA), <i>Programme Area Accreditation</i> (PAA) and <i>Periodic Review</i> (PR). It forms the means through which HKCAAVQ evaluates Operators and their learning programmes under the QF.
Initial Evaluation (IE)	The first stage of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process. It assesses the institutional competency of Operators to effectively manage and provide adequate resources for the development, delivery, assessment and quality assurance of their learning programmes and educational services in order to meet their claimed objectives and QF standards.
Learning Programme	A programme of study or training defined by a curriculum (which may consist of one or more modules, units, subjects or courses or any combination of those elements) that includes, where the context permits, any proposed programme of such studies or training.
Learning Programme Accreditation (LPA)	The second stage of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process. It evaluates a learning programme to ensure that the standards of the stated programme objectives are met, and learning outcomes are delivered commensurate with the claimed QF level of competency, with reference to the Generic Level Descriptors (GLD).

Learning Programme Re-accreditation (Re-LPA)	The cyclical re-evaluation of an accredited learning programme. It ascertains whether the learning programme continues to meet the standards of the claimed objectives, and delivers the learning outcomes commensurate with the claimed QF level of competency as determined at the preceding LPA.
Learning Outcome	The knowledge, skills and application ability attained by a student as a result of completing the learning programme.
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 programme or any part of a learning programme.
Peer Review	One of the guiding principles of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process, under which accreditation determinations and decisions are made by HKCAAVQ after the consideration of the recommendations put forth by the relevant Accreditation Panel. The Panel comprises 'peer specialists', including a HKCAAVQ staff member who serves as the Panel Secretary.
Pre-condition	A pre-condition forms part of the accreditation determination, to be fulfilled by the Operator prior to the start of the validity period of the accreditation status.
Programme Area Accreditation (PAA)	The third stage of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process. It determines whether the Operator has well-balanced and robust internal quality assurance systems in place to self-monitor, as well as to ensure that operations meet their claimed objectives, and that learning programmes meet the QF standards in the specified programme area(s).
Periodic Review (PR)	The fourth stage of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process. It periodically monitors and reviews Operators with valid PAA status, and is conducted at an interval of five years.
Qualification	A formal award given in recognition of the skills, knowledge and experience acquired by an individual upon the satisfactory completion of a learning programme that meets specified QF standards. It is granted on the basis of formal assessment. The award title should follow the policy laid down by the EDB (http://www.hkqf.gov.hk), and should not include a Statement of Attendance.

Qualifications Framework (QF)	A hierarchy of recognised qualifications in academic, vocational and continuing education as well as qualifications attained by individuals through the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) scheme in Hong Kong. It is characterised by three key features: level , which reflects the depth and complexity of learning leading to the qualification; award title , which reflects the nature, area of study and hierarchy of the qualification; and credit , which indicates the volume or size of learning leading to the qualification. There are seven levels in the QF.
Qualifications Framework Level	Under QF, each qualification is assigned a level to indicate its position in the hierarchy relative to others. The level of a qualification is determined in accordance with a set of GLD which specifies the outcome standards expected of the qualification at each level.
Qualifications Framework Standards	The skills, knowledge or experience acquired upon the completion of the learning programme that are commensurate with the requirements under the specified level of the QF.
Qualifications Register (QR)	The public face of the QF containing all qualifications that have been quality assured under the QF. HKCAAVQ is specified in Cap 592 as the QR Authority.
Qualifications Register Authority	HKCAAVQ specified in Part 2 of Schedule 1 of the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (AAVQO) (Cap 592) is responsible for maintaining the Qualifications Register (QR).
Requirement	A requirement forms part of the accreditation determination, to be fulfilled by the Operator by the specified deadline(s) during the validity period of the approved accreditation status.
Restriction	Any restriction that may be imposed in HKCAAVQ's determination and subject to which the determination is to have effect.
Service Agreement	A contract between HKCAAVQ and an Operator to undertake an accreditation exercise.
Site Visit	A visit to the Operator's learning centre / campus used for the purpose of delivering the learning programme(s) under study. This is an integral part of an accreditation exercise, conducted primarily to collect evidence for evaluating whether the accreditation criteria are met.

Statement of Accreditation Approval	An official document issued by HKCAAVQ confirming the granting of accreditation status to an Operator. It is issued together with the accreditation report for approved cases, or upon satisfactory fulfilment of all pre-condition(s) in cases for which pre-condition(s) are set.
Substantial Change	Any changes that may impact an Operator's competency to continue meeting the relevant accreditation standards. For details, please refer to <i>Guidance Notes on Substantial Change to Accreditation Status</i> , available on HKCAAVQ website.
Terms of Reference	The Terms of Reference set out the services that will be provided to an Operator, the fee and the conditions under which the services will be provided.
Threshold Standard	The minimum standards required of an Operator and learning programme in accreditation, as provided for in the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (AAVQO).
Transparency in Accreditation	One of the guiding principles of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process, providing all parties involved (i.e. the Operator and the Accreditation Panel) with a common understanding of the Process and the relevant Guidelines and guidance notes.
Validity Period	The period of time in which an approved accreditation status is effective as stipulated in the accreditation report. The validity period for Stage 1 IE is standardised as two years subject to conditions; the validity period for Stage 2 LPA and re-LPA is linked to programme quality and duration; and the validity period for Stage 3 PAA and Stage 4 PR is five years.