



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

Thematic Analysis of Trends in Academic Accreditation

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Executive Summary

This thematic analysis draws on information gathered through HKCAAVQ's accreditation work to analyse developments and trends in programmes across the post-secondary education sector. Through an analysis of academic accreditation activities¹ conducted under the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process for programmes pitched at QF Level 5 or above over the five-year period from 2021/22 to 2025/26, the report identifies trends of academic accreditation activities and programme characteristics. It provides evidence-based insights into sector development and resource planning for post-secondary education institutions. The key findings include:

- **Growth in New Programme Accreditation and Changing Re-accreditation:** The overall composition of accreditation activities shifted during the period, with Learning Programme Accreditation (LPA) increasing from 25.5% of academic accreditation conducted in 2021/22 to 44.4% in 2025/26, indicating continued new programme development across the sector. Re-accreditation of Learning Programme (Re-LPA) remained a major component of academic accreditation throughout the period, reaching its highest share in 2022/23 before decreasing to 25.9% in 2025/26. This may reflect the cyclical nature of re-accreditation arising from programme validity periods, and may also reflect operators'² efforts to respond to emerging manpower needs and changing social and economic priorities through programme replacement, revision or discontinuation.
- **Growth in Postgraduate Programme Accreditation:** QF level 5 remained the largest component of programme-level academic accreditation over the five-year period, although the annual number of exercises varied. Accreditation for programmes at QF Level 6 increased from 26.8% in 2021/22 to 47.4% in 2025/26, indicating increased accreditation activity relating to postgraduate provision.
- **Predominance of Local Programme:** Local programmes accounted for 64.6% of all LPA and Re-LPA exercises during the period. The proportion of local programmes was higher in LPA exercises (72.9%) than in Re-LPA exercises (59.6%), indicating a stronger presence of local programmes in new programme accreditations.
- **LPA in selected areas of study and training:** Four areas of study and training, namely *Business and Management*, *Computer Science and Information Technology*, *Social Sciences*, and *Arts, Design and*

¹ Throughout this report, the unit of analysis refers to accreditation activities conducted under the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process. Specifically, it refers to the number of evaluations for Initial Evaluation (IE); the number of individual programmes for Learning Programme Accreditation (LPA) and Learning Programme Re-accreditation of (re-LPA); and the number of programme areas under accreditation or review for Programme Area Accreditation (PAA) and Periodic Institutional Review (PIR).

² According to the *Manual for the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework*, "operator" refers to 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.

Performing Arts, together accounted for 55.1% of all LPA exercises during the period, suggesting that new programme development was particularly evident in selected areas of study and training.

- **Growth in *Computer Science & Information Technology* and *Social Sciences*:** Although *Business and Management* accounted for the largest share of programme-level academic accreditation over the five-year period, programme accreditation in *Computer Science and Information Technology* and *Social Sciences* showed signs of recent growth, particularly in new programme accreditation. In *Computer Science and Information Technology*, 76.9% of LPA exercises were conducted in 2024/25 and 2025/26, reflecting operators' response to emerging manpower needs, particularly in areas such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence and data science. In *Social Sciences*, LPA activity increased notably in 2025/26, accounting for half of the area's LPA activity over the five-year period, particularly in areas such as social services and psychology.

The findings of this thematic analysis provide useful insights for the post-secondary education sector. For operators, the growth in new programme accreditation and postgraduate provision highlights the importance of effective resource planning, including appropriate academic leadership, sufficient staffing and learning resources, robust internal quality assurance, and meaningful engagement with industry, professional bodies and other relevant stakeholders. The findings may also inform HKCAAVQ's ongoing planning for specialist engagement and training initiatives, particularly in response to growth in emerging areas and postgraduate provision. For government bureaux and departments and professional bodies, the findings may serve as a useful reference for policy development and manpower planning, thereby supporting Hong Kong's development into an international education hub and enhancing the quality, relevance and competitiveness of the post-secondary education sector.

SECTION 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and Purpose

HKCAAVQ performs the statutory roles as the Accreditation Authority and the Qualifications Register (QR) Authority under the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (AAVQO) (Cap. 592). In its capacity as the Accreditation Authority, HKCAAVQ conducts accreditation tests that underpin the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), including those under the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process.

The Four-stage Quality Assurance Process is the mechanism under the HKQF to ensure that operators possess the competence required to operate the learning programmes and to encourage the progressive development of organisational competence for continuous enhancement. It comprises Initial Evaluation (IE), Learning Programme Accreditation and Re-accreditation (LPA and Re-LPA), Programme Area Accreditation (PAA) and Periodic Institutional Review (PIR). In line with Standard 3.4 of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG), this report draws on HKCAAVQ's external quality assurance activities arising from academic accreditation over a five-year period to analyse the trends and programme characteristics, with a view to informing sector development and supporting continuous quality enhancement.

1.2 Scope of the Thematic Analysis

This thematic analysis moves beyond the scope of individual accreditation exercises and examines trends in academic accreditation across the post-secondary education sector over the five-year period from 2021/22 to 2025/26. The analysis covers academic accreditation exercises conducted between 2021/22 and 2025/26 for programmes pitched at QF Level 5 or above. The dataset comprises completed accreditation activities³ and covers the following dimensions:

- **Categories of accreditation:** Initial Evaluation (IE), Learning Programme Accreditation (LPA), Re-accreditation of Learning Programme (Re-LPA), Programme Area Accreditation (PAA), and Periodic Institutional Review (PIR);
- **Programme Characteristics:** Local programmes and non-local programmes (the latter are delivered through partnerships between a local operator and a non-local degree-awarding institution);
- **Areas of Study and Training:** Areas of study and training classified with reference to the Classification of Areas of Study and Training in the QR; and

³ "Completed accreditation activities" here refers to accreditation activities for which HKCAAVQ has completed the site visit during the relevant year.

- **Operators:** 19 post-secondary education institutions.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Data Source

The data used in this analysis were extracted from HKCAAVQ's accreditation records for the period from 2021/22 to 2025/26. For each accreditation activity, the dataset captures the category of accreditation, area of study and training, QF Level, programme type (local or non-local), and operator. The dataset was drawn from HKCAAVQ's academic accreditation activities, of which 84.8% relate to programme-level accreditation activities, namely LPA and Re-LPA, while the remaining 15.2% relate to IE, PAA and PIR.

1.3.2 Analytical Approach

The analysis adopted a quantitative approach, using descriptive statistics, trend analysis, and year-on-year comparisons to examine changes in accreditation activities over the five-year period. A multi-dimensional analysis was also conducted to explore the relationships among accreditation type, QF Level, programme type, and area of study and training, with a view to identifying development patterns and programme characteristics.

SECTION 2: Overview of Academic Accreditation by Exercise Type

2.1 Distribution of Academic Accreditation

Figure 1 presents the percentage distribution of academic accreditation activities by exercise type for the period 2021/22 to 2025/26. Re-LPA represented the largest share of activity, accounting for 53% of all exercises conducted during this period, reflecting established programmes undergoing cyclical re-accreditation prior to the expiry of the programme validity period. LPA accounted for 31.8%, reflecting new programme development across the sector.

IE accounted for 3.3%, reflecting new operators or partnerships as of non-local learning programmes entered the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process, as well as operators seeking to offer learning programmes at a higher QF Level. PAA accounted for 2.7%, reflecting operators' progression towards a higher level of organisational maturity in quality assurance and a good track record in the delivery of accredited programmes within the relevant programme area. PIR accounted for 9.2%, reflecting scheduled institutional reviews conducted as part of the five-year review cycle.

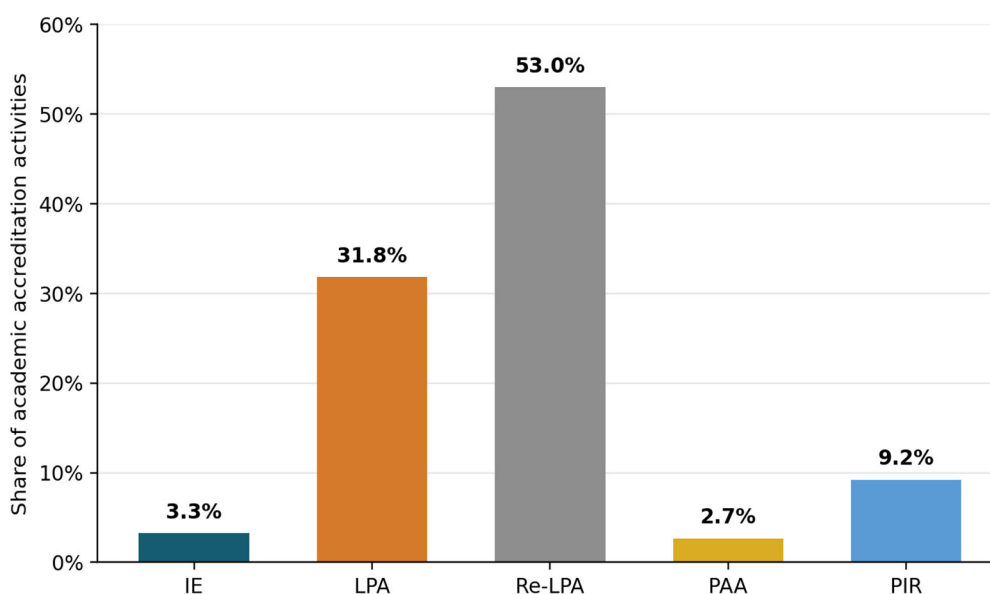


Figure 1: Academic accreditation activities by exercise type (2021/22 to 2025/26)

2.1.2 Category-Specific Trends

A breakdown of academic accreditation activities by exercise type for each year over the five-year period from 2021/22 to 2025/26 is presented in Figure 2. The

composition of activities varied across the period, with Re-LPA remaining a major component of academic accreditation throughout the period. LPA accounted for a larger share of academic accreditation from 2023/24 onwards, reflecting continued new programme development across the sector.

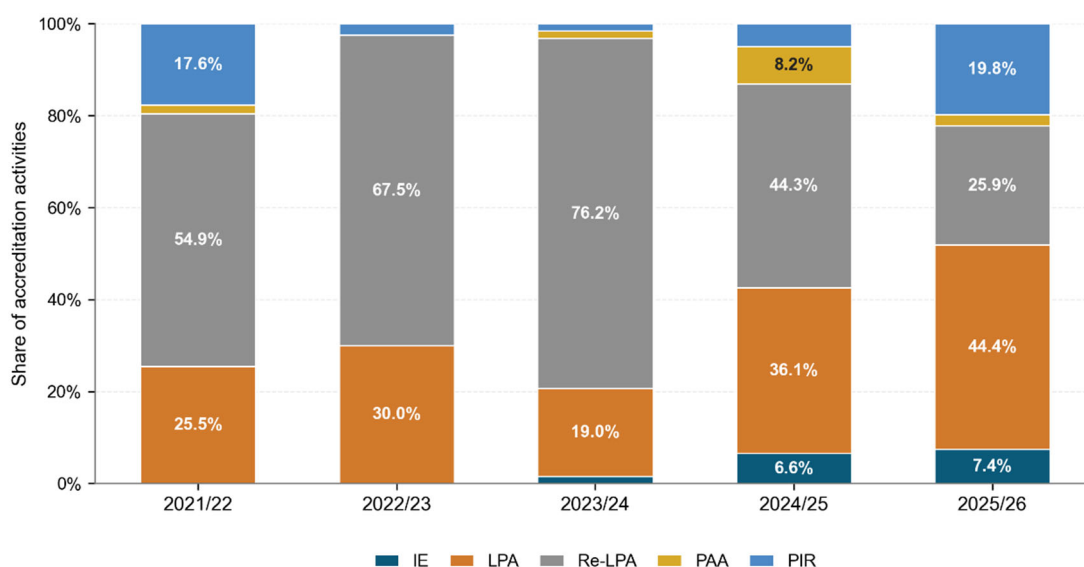


Figure 2: Composition of accreditation activity by exercise type and year

Learning Programme Accreditation (LPA): The share of LPA increased from 25.5% in 2021/22 to 44.4% in 2025/26, indicating continued new programme development across the sector and reflecting operators’ response to changing educational demand, emerging manpower needs and evolving social and economic priorities.

Re-accreditation of Learning Programme (Re-LPA): Re-LPA showed year-on-year variation during the period, reaching its highest share in 2022/23 before decreasing to 25.9% in 2025/26. This pattern should be interpreted with reference to the cyclical nature of re-accreditation arising from programme validity periods.

Initial Evaluation (IE) and Programme Area Accreditation (PAA): Both IE and PAA accounted for a relatively small proportion of academic accreditation activities during the period. While limited in number, these exercises reflect the operators’ development and capacity for progression under the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process.

Periodic Institutional Review (PIR): PIR follows a five-year review cycle, resulting in expected year-to-year variation. The higher PIR shares in 2021/22 and 2025/26 reflect the timing of periodic reviews of institutions and programme areas, depending on their initial PAA accreditation or the timing of the previous PIR.

2.2 Shifting Patterns in Accreditation Activity

The pattern of accreditation activity shifted over the five-year period. The following sections focus on the trends of LPA and Re-LPA, as well as patterns observed in PAA and PIR exercises.

2.2.2 Shift from Re-accreditation towards New Programme Accreditation

Figure 3 shows the percentage distribution of programme-level academic accreditation exercises, namely LPA and Re-LPA, conducted over the five-year period. The proportion of LPA increased from 31.7% in 2021/22 to 63.2% in 2025/26, indicating that new programme accreditation accounted for a significantly larger share of programme-level activity in 2025/26.

Re-LPA exercises peaked in 2023/24 and declined in subsequent years. This may, on the one hand, reflect the cyclical nature of re-accreditation arising from programme validity periods. On the other hand, it may also reflect operators' efforts to respond to emerging manpower needs and changing social and economic priorities, with some existing programmes being replaced, revised or discontinued instead of proceeding to re-accreditation.

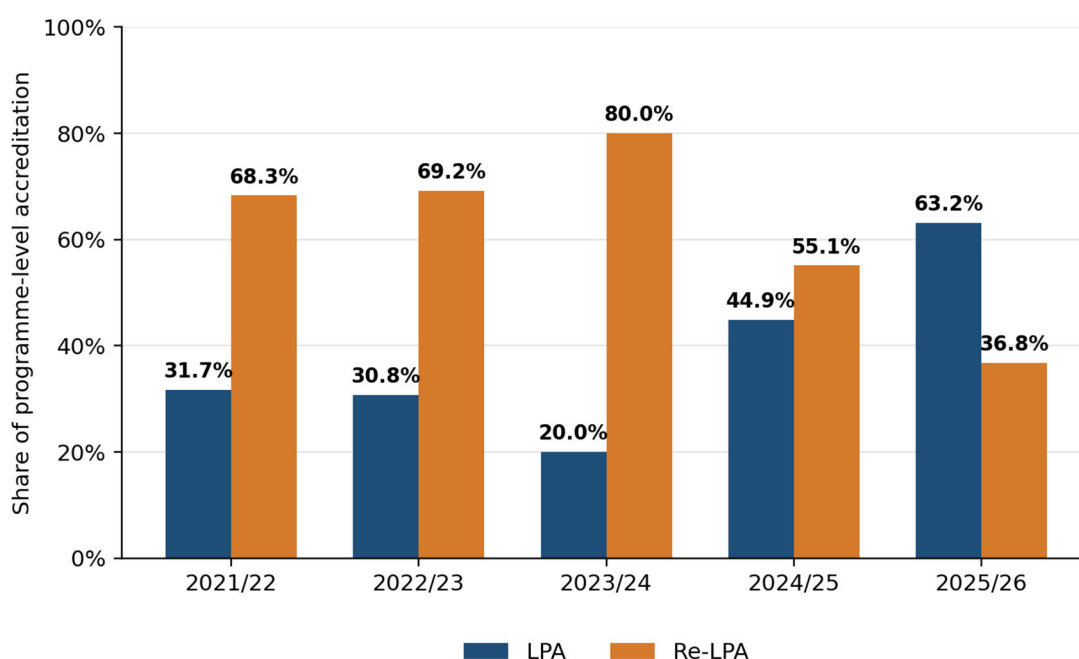


Figure 3: Percentage Distribution of LPA and Re-LPA by Year

2.2.3 PAA and PIR Analysis

PAA and PIR activities covered 12 areas of study and training during the five-year period, namely Architecture and Town Planning; Arts, Design and Performing Arts; Business and Management; Computer Science and IT; Engineering and Technology; Humanities; Language and Related Studies; Mass Media and Communications, Journalism and Public Relations; Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences; Sciences; Services; and Social Sciences.

PAA and PIR activities were more prominent in 2025/26, accounting for 45.0% of all PAA and PIR conducted during the five-year period. This was mainly due to operators reaching the stage for PIR during this period. **Computer Science and Information Technology** was the only area with new PAA exercises recorded in both 2021/22 and 2025/26, indicating active development and programme maturity in this area. The distribution of PAA and PIR across different areas of study and training reflected the diversity and maturity of programme areas among operators.

SECTION 3: Trends of Programme-level Academic Accreditation

3.1 Area of Study and Training

The distribution of programmes by Area of Study and Training over the five-year period is presented in Figure 4. *Business and Management* accounted for the largest share of programme-level academic accreditation activities, representing 21.8% of all exercises conducted during this period, followed by *Social Sciences* at 12.3%, and *Computer Science and Information Technology* and *Arts, Design and Performing Arts*, each at 8.8%.

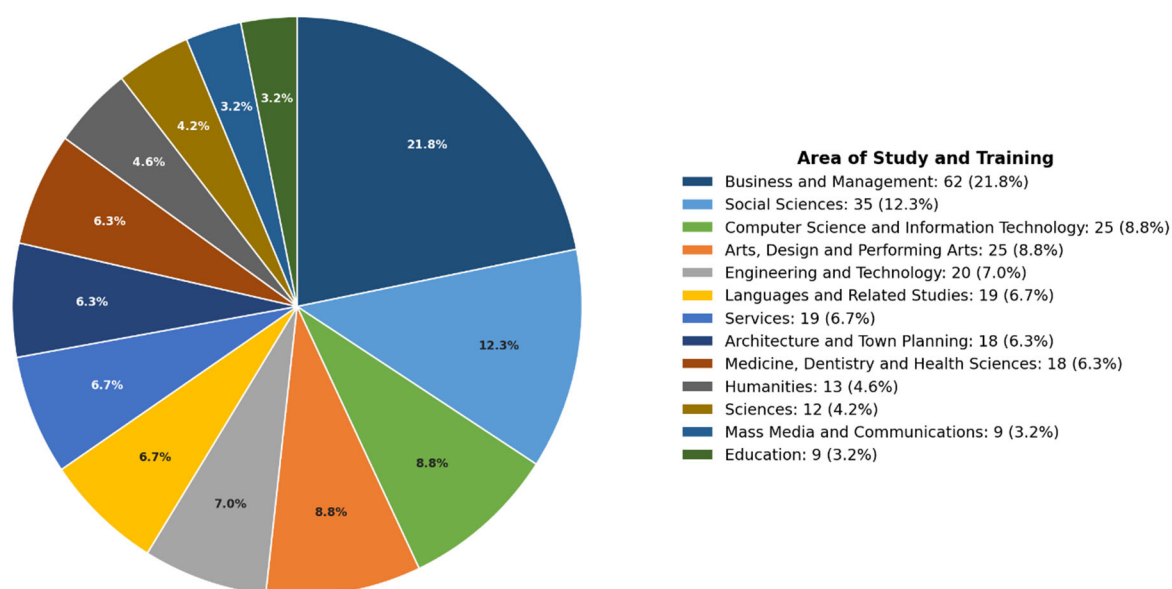


Figure 4: Distribution of programme-level academic accreditation by area of study and training

Note: The figure presents the percentage distribution of LPA and Re-LPA exercises by Area of Study and Training. The area of Law is not included, as no LPA or Re-LPA exercises were recorded during the five-year period.

The breakdown of LPA and Re-LPA exercises by area of study and training is presented in Figure 5, with the key observations set out below:

- Business and Management:** *Business and Management* accounted for the largest share of programme-level academic accreditation over the five-year period. The relatively high percentage (64.5%) of Re-LPA exercises indicates that this is a well-established programme area with a sizeable number of accredited programmes undergoing re-accreditation, while the percentage of LPA exercises (35.5%) indicates continued new programme development in this area.

- **Social Sciences:** Re-LPA predominated in *Social Sciences*, accounting for 65.7% of the area’s programme-level accreditation over the five-year period. At the same time, new programme development became more prominent in 2025/26, with LPA in that year accounting for half of the area’s LPA over the period. This suggests increased operator interest in developing new Social Sciences programmes, particularly in areas such as social services and psychology.
- **Computer Science and Information Technology:** *Computer Science and Information Technology* showed a balanced profile between new programme accreditation and re-accreditation, with LPA accounting for 52.0% and Re-LPA accounting for 48.0% of programme-level accreditation in this area. Among the LPA recorded in the area, 76.9% were conducted in 2024/25 and 2025/26, indicating a recent increase in new programme development. This may reflect operators’ response to emerging manpower needs and continuing demand for technology-focused qualifications.
- **Arts, Design and Performing Arts:** *Arts, Design and Performing Arts* also showed sustained accreditation activity during the period. The balance between LPA and Re-LPA exercises suggests both continued renewal of existing provision and ongoing development of new programmes in creative and performing arts-related disciplines.

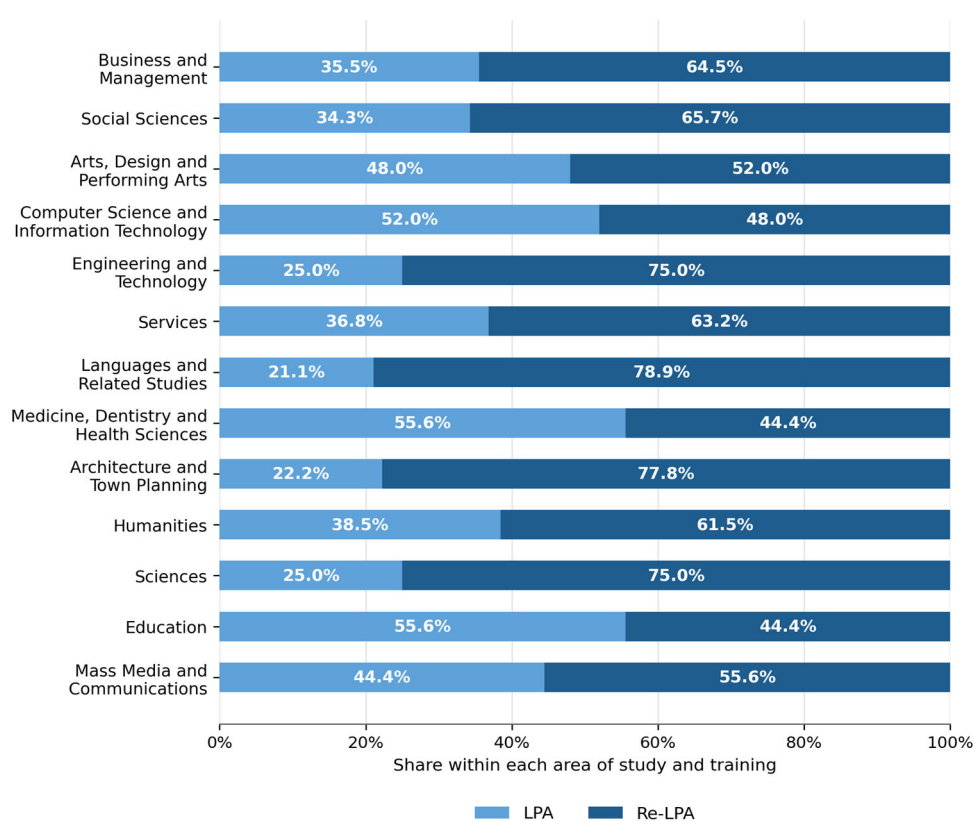


Figure 5: LPA and Re-LPA by area of study and training

A closer look at LPA in Figure 6 showed that new programme accreditation activity was more prominent in four areas of study and training. *Business and Management* recorded the highest number of LPA exercises during the period, followed by *Computer Science and Information Technology*, *Social Sciences*, and *Arts, Design and Performing Arts*. Together, these four areas represented 55.1% of all LPA exercises during the five-year period from 2021/22 to 2025/26, indicating that new programme development was particularly evident in these areas, reflecting operators' response to programme demand, manpower needs and professional development requirements across business-related, technology-related, social science, and creative disciplines.

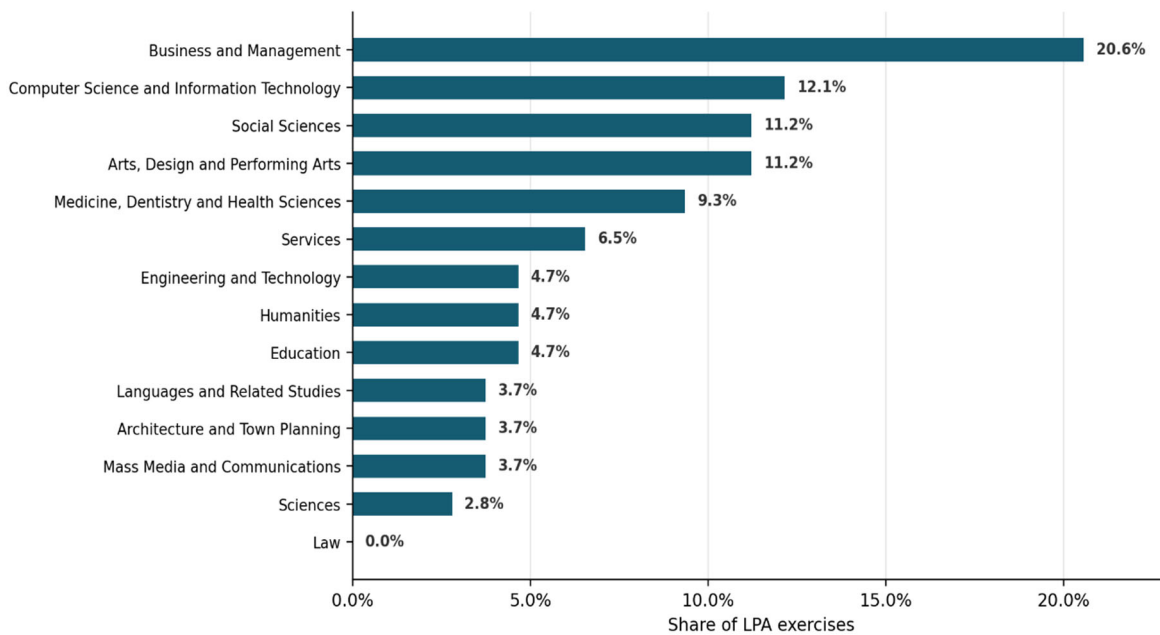


Figure 6: LPA by area of study and training

3.2 Local vs Non-Local Programme Accreditation

The section presents the distribution of local and non-local programmes in accreditation and re-accreditation exercises over the five-year period from 2021/22 to 2025/26.

3.2.1 Overall Distribution

As shown in Figure 7, local programmes accounted for 64.6% of all LPA and Re-LPA exercises during the period, while non-local programmes accounted for 35.4%. Non-local programmes refer to programmes delivered through partnerships between local operators and non-local degree-awarding institutions.

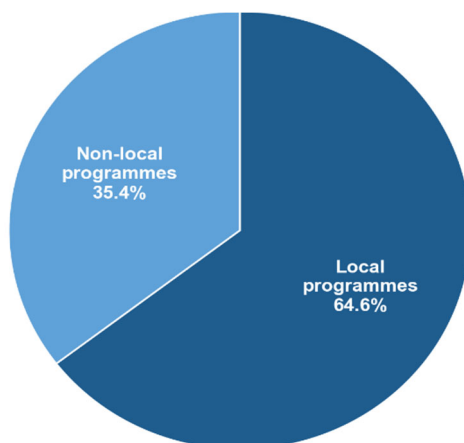


Figure 7: Distribution of local and non-local programmes

The proportion of local programmes was higher among new programme accreditations, accounting for 72.9% of LPA exercises, compared with 59.6% in Re-LPA exercises, indicating a stronger presence of local programmes among new programme accreditations during the period. Non-local programmes accounted for 27.1% of the LPA exercises but 40.4% of the Re-LPA exercises, suggesting that non-local programmes formed a more prominent part of programme re-accreditation rather than new programme accreditation.

3.2.2 Year-by-year Distribution

As shown in Figure 8, local programmes accounted for the majority of programme-level LPA and Re-LPA exercises in most years during the five-year period, with the highest proportion recorded in 2024/25 at 87.8%. For non-local programmes, the year-by-year variation should be interpreted with reference to the timing of non-local programme re-accreditation cycles, as well as the possibility that some existing programmes may have been replaced, revised or discontinued instead of proceeding to re-accreditation.

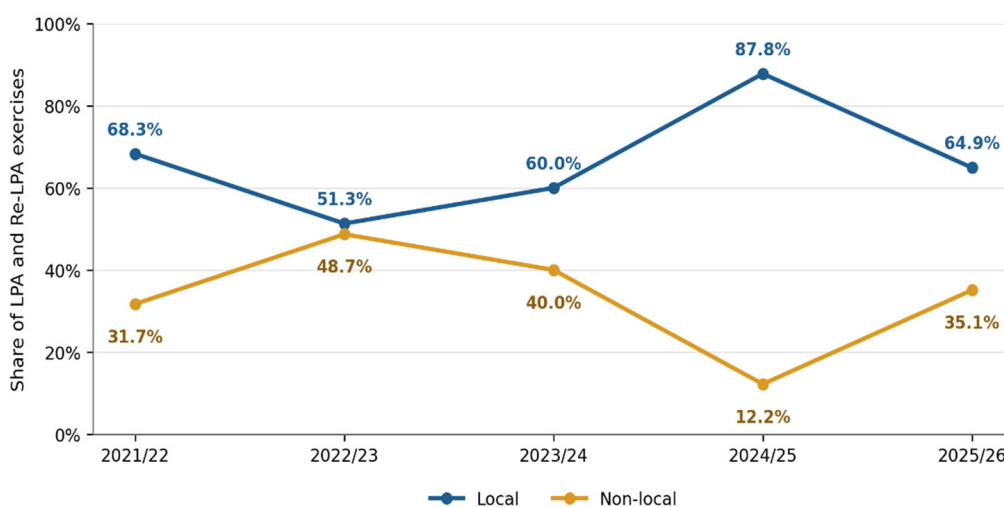


Figure 8: Year-by-Year distribution of local and non-local programmes in LPA and Re-LPA exercises

3.2.3 Area-specific Distribution

The area-specific distribution of local and non-local programmes is presented in Figure 9 based on the analysis of LPA and Re-LPA exercises by area of study and training. As shown in Figure 9, in areas of *Languages and Related Studies* and *Humanities*, all programmes undergone LPA and Re-LPA in the past five years were local programmes. In areas of *Mass Media and Communication*, *Social Sciences*, *Education*, and *Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences*, over 75% were local programmes during the period. The areas of *Engineering & Technology* and *Science* show a balanced distribution (50% local, 50% non-local) during the period.

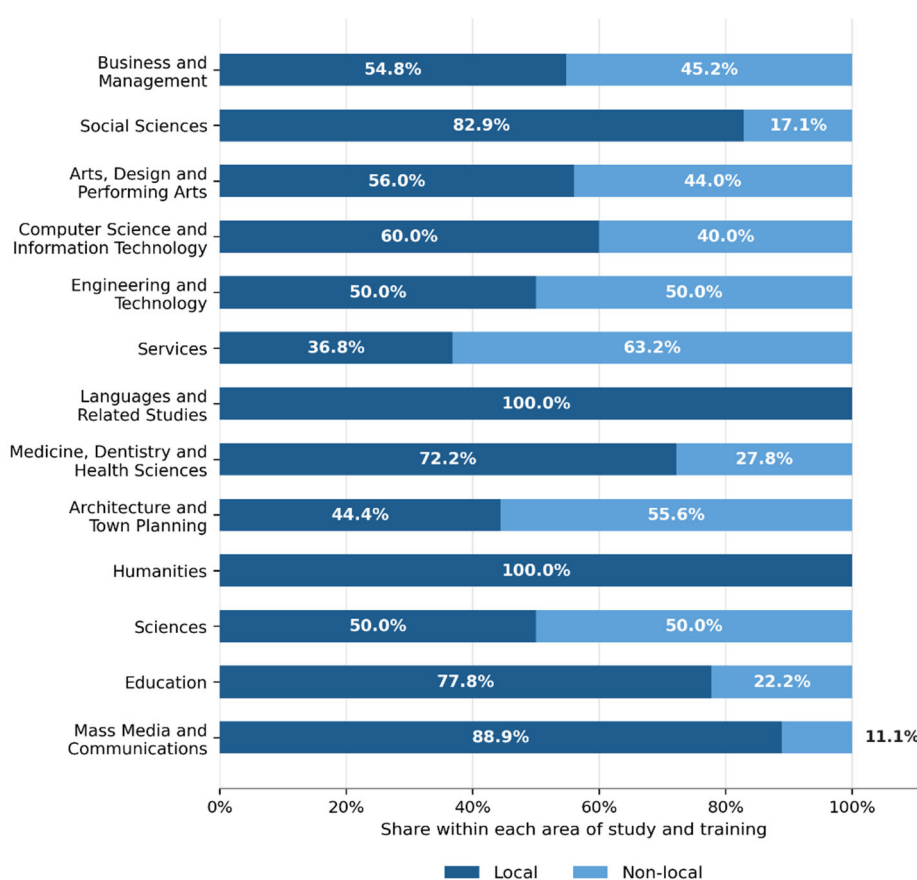


Figure 9: Area-specific Local and Non-local Programme Distribution

3.2.4 Distribution by QF Level

As shown in Figure 10, local and non-local programmes displayed different distributions by QF Level. Non-local programmes were predominantly at QF Level 5, indicating that partnerships with non-local degree-awarding institutions were mainly focused on undergraduate provision. The majority of QF Level 6 and all QF Level 7 programme-level accreditation exercises during the period were local programmes. This pattern suggests that local operators maintained a broader programme portfolio across both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, while non-local provision was primarily concentrated at QF Level 5.

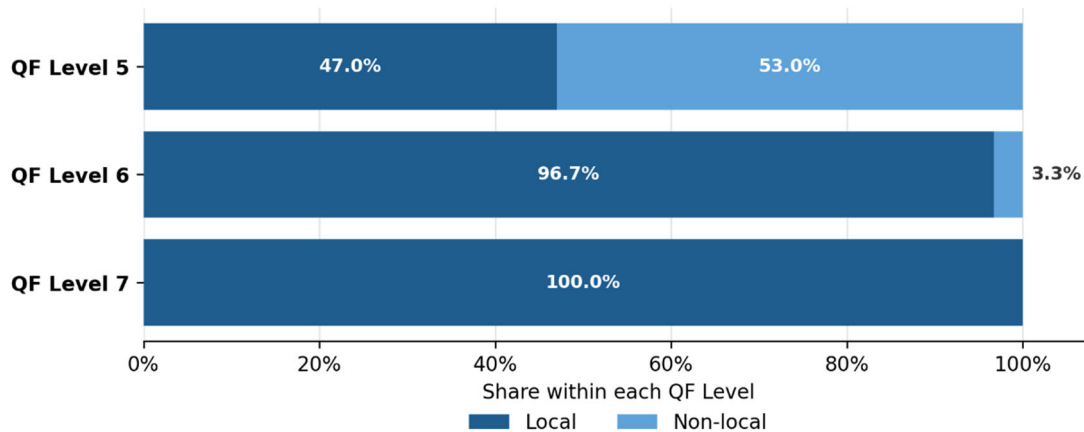


Figure 10: Local and Non-local Programme Distribution by QF Level and

3.3 QF Level Distribution

In terms of the total programme-level academic accreditation exercises conducted during the five-year period by QF Level, QF Level 5 accounted for the majority of programme-level academic accreditation exercises during the five-year period, representing 64.9% of all exercises conducted during this period. QF Level 6 accounted for 31.9%, while QF Level 7 represented a smaller proportion at 3.2%.

As shown in Figure 11, QF Level 5 remained the largest component of programme-level academic accreditation activity over the five-year period, although its annual share varied. Its share increased from 73.2% in 2021/22 to 74.4% in 2022/23, before decreasing to 73.3% in 2023/24 and 49.0% in 2024/25, with a slight increase to 50.9% in 2025/26. The higher level of activity in 2022/23 may be partly attributable to the timing of re-accreditation cycles for existing accredited programmes. The subsequent decrease should therefore be interpreted with reference to the cyclical nature of programme re-accreditation, as well as changes in operators’ programme portfolios.

Over the same period, the share of QF Level 6 activity increased from 26.8% in 2021/22 to 47.4% in 2025/26, indicating increased accreditation activity relating to postgraduate provision. QF Level 7 activity remained limited, reflecting the smaller scale of doctoral-level provision. Overall, while QF Level 5 continued to account for the majority of programme-level academic accreditation exercises, its relative share decreased alongside the growth of accreditation exercises at QF Level 6.

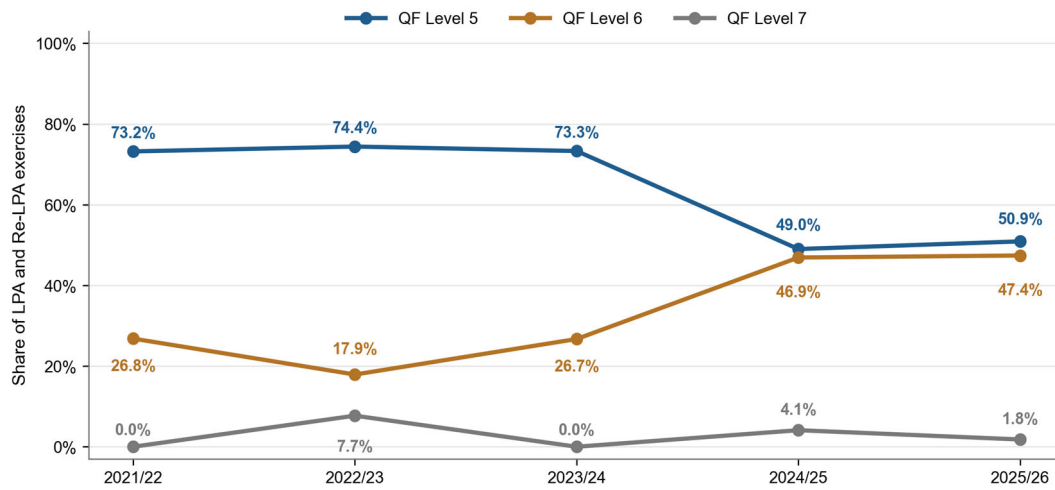


Figure 11: Distribution of programme-level academic accreditation by QF level

SECTION 4: Implications for Operators and HKCAAVQ

4.1 Implications for Operators

4.1.1 Programme Planning and Development

The thematic analysis indicates continued new programme development across the sector, with LPA representing an increasing share of academic accreditation activity over the five-year period. The growth in QF Level 6 activity further suggests increasing development of postgraduate provision, in line with broader sector trends towards higher-level qualifications, workforce upskilling and changing manpower needs. When Operators plan new programmes, particularly at postgraduate level, they should ensure that programme development is supported by appropriate academic governance, clear academic leadership, sufficient staffing, research infrastructure, learning resources, student support, and robust internal quality assurance mechanisms commensurate with the intended QF Level.

The findings also show that new programme development was particularly evident in selected areas of study and training. *Business and Management*, *Computer Science and Information Technology*, *Social Sciences*, and *Arts, Design and Performing Arts* together accounted for over half of LPA exercises during the five-year period from 2021/22 to 2025/26. This suggests the need for operators to adopt a strategic and evidence-based approach to programme planning, with due regard to programme positioning, resource planning, and alignment with sectoral or professional developments.

In *Business and Management*, where accreditation activity remained broad-based and relatively mature, operators should ensure that new programmes are clearly positioned and supported by evidence of demand. In *Computer Science and Information Technology*, the recent increase in LPA and PAA exercises indicates both new programme development and the increasing maturity of provision in this programme area. Operators should ensure that technology-related programmes remain current and responsive to rapidly evolving industry requirements, particularly in areas such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence and data science. In *Social Sciences*, the increase in LPA activity, particularly in areas such as social services and psychology, indicates active programme development in response to societal needs and professional development demand. Operators entering or expanding in this area should give due attention to professional body requirements, practicum or placement arrangements, and the availability of qualified supervisors, where applicable.

4.1.2 Quality Assurance

The growth in postgraduate provision highlights the importance of robust internal quality assurance arrangements appropriate to the level, nature and

scale of the programmes concerned. Operators should ensure that admission requirements, assessment standards, learning and teaching arrangements, student supervision, support and resources are appropriate for the intended QF Level and are consistently implemented. Operators should also monitor students' learning experience and academic performance to ensure achievement of the intended learning outcomes and support continuous enhancement of programme delivery.

4.2 Implications for HKCAAVQ and other Stakeholders

4.2.1 Specialist Engagement

The changing composition of academic accreditation has implications for HKCAAVQ's planning, particularly in relation to specialist engagement, panel formation and capacity building. The increase in new programme accreditation, the growth in QF Level 6 activity, and developments in areas such as *Computer Science and Information Technology* and *Social Sciences* suggest the need to maintain appropriate breadth and depth of expertise among specialists.

HKCAAVQ may continue to review the availability of specialists with relevant academic, professional and industry expertise in emerging and high-demand areas. The growth in postgraduate provision also highlights the importance of engaging panel members with appropriate senior academic experience and subject expertise for reviewing programmes at higher QF Levels. The findings may further inform the development of training initiatives for specialists and panel members, with a view to strengthening understanding of emerging programme developments.

4.2.2 Support for Sector Development

HKCAAVQ will continue to support the quality assurance and enhancement of operators and their programmes through the effective implementation of its accreditation functions, including facilitating the development of new programmes, accrediting programmes at different QF Levels in response to societal needs, and supporting mature operators' progression to PAA where the relevant requirements are met.

In light of the growth in new programme development and postgraduate provision, HKCAAVQ will continue to support operators in upholding relevant standards and strengthening the quality of programme planning, delivery and review. Through LPA and Re-LPA exercises, HKCAAVQ provides a structured mechanism for assuring programme quality, encouraging continuous improvement, and promoting good practices across the sector.

The findings of this thematic analysis may also serve as a useful reference for relevant government bureaux and departments, professional bodies and other

stakeholders in policy development and manpower planning, thereby supporting Hong Kong's development as an international education hub and enhancing the quality, relevance and competitiveness of the post-secondary education sector.

SECTION 5: CONCLUSION

This thematic analysis provides an overview of trends in academic accreditation for programmes pitched at QF Level 5 or above during the five-year period from 2021/22 to 2025/26. The findings show that Re-LPA remained the largest component of academic accreditation activity over the period, reflecting the cyclical re-accreditation of established programmes. At the same time, the increase in LPA exercises indicates continued new programme development across the sector.

The analysis also highlights several programme-level trends, including the growth in QF Level 6 activity, the predominance of local programmes among new programme accreditations, and the prominence of selected areas of study and training in LPA. Recent developments in *Computer Science and Information Technology* and *Social Sciences* show that operators are responding to emerging manpower needs, professional development requirements, and changing social and economic priorities. PAA and PIR activities further reflect the diversity of operators' programme portfolios and the progressive development of institutional competence under the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process.

Overall, the findings provide useful reference for operators, HKCAAVQ, relevant government bureaux and departments, and professional bodies. For operators, the analysis supports evidence-based programme planning, resource allocation and quality assurance enhancement. For HKCAAVQ, the findings inform specialist engagement, training initiatives and ongoing support for sector development. Taken together, the analysis contributes to continuous quality enhancement and supports the relevance, competitiveness and sustainable development of the post-secondary education sector in Hong Kong.