



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

**Code of Practice for Non-local Courses**  
**recommended by**  
**the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of**  
**Academic and Vocational Qualifications**

(December 2007)

## **PREAMBLE**

This Code of Practice for Non-local Courses recommended by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) is for the information and consideration of institutions and operators who offer courses leading to academic qualifications in an off-shore and/ or off-campus environment. It is the intention of the Code to recommend good practices pertaining to the setting of institutional policies and the operation of programmes so as to ensure the quality of the programmes and the quality of the student learning experience. The Code has no mandatory effect and institutions should be able to put in place policies and guidelines to reflect their own mission and philosophy.

The HKCAAVQ is a quality assurance body committed to the promotion of quality in all forms of education. The formulation of this Code is part of the Council's activities to achieve this objective. It should be pointed out that this Code bears no relationship to the legal requirements for the registration of non-local courses in Hong Kong.

Please send enquiries and suggestions to the following address:

Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of  
Academic and Vocational Qualifications  
10/F. & 23/F., Cambridge House  
Taikoo Place  
979 King's Road  
Quarry Bay  
Hong Kong

**Code of Practice for Non-local Courses recommended by  
The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of  
Academic and Vocational Qualifications**

- I. Collaborative Arrangements**
- II. Institutional Policy**
- III. Programme Approval**
- IV. Programme Design**
- V. Programme Delivery, Teaching and Assessment**
- VI. Staffing**
- VII. Teaching/ Student Support**
- VIII. Programme Administration and Promotion**
- IX. Quality Assurance**

## **I. Collaborative Arrangements**

1. There should be clear contractual arrangements, including the financial arrangements for the programmes, between the institution and its collaborative partners regarding the respective rights, duties and obligations.
2. Where the collaborative partner is entrusted with areas of work involving academic decisions, such as student selection, recruitment of tutors etc, the capability and suitability of its staff to undertake such tasks should be carefully evaluated.
3. The resources which are to be provided by or through the collaborative partner to students should be carefully assessed, in particular where such resources, including personnel and library resources, are to be shared with students of other programmes for which the collaborative partner has responsibility.
4. There should be regular monitoring and review of the effectiveness of the collaborative arrangements and their implication for the quality of the programmes.
5. Regular communication and feedback channels should be established with the collaborative partner.

### **Franchised Model**

6. Where the awarding institution has developed its own franchised models to offer off-shore and/or off-campus programmes, the model adopted in a particular place should be a result of thorough understanding of the environment and needs of that place.
7. The institution has the responsibility to monitor if the franchised organisation has realized all the terms and requirements stipulated in the agreement.
8. In any case, the awarding institution should undertake the final responsibility of quality assurance of the programme and award that the programme leads to.

## **II. Institutional Policy**

### **The Awarding Institution**

1. Before any off-shore and/or off-campus programme of study is launched, the awarding institution should have developed detailed and comprehensive policies governing the offer of these types of programmes and selection of collaborative partners.
2. The statutory/ legal requirements, academic expectations and educational needs where the off-shore and/or off-campus programme is to be offered should be observed.
3. These institutional policies should be approved by the authorities at the central level through the established mechanisms. Such authorities should maintain powers of control and monitoring over the implementation of these policies.
4. Policies governing off-shore and/or off-campus programmes should ensure that these programmes are maintained at a comparable standard to same on-campus programmes through quality assurance mechanisms. Procedures should be in place to monitor the effectiveness of such mechanisms and for enhancement as appropriate.
5. Institutional policy should require that only those programmes are currently run are offered in off-shore and/or off-campus mode. If schools or faculties wish to deviate from this policy, the institution should ensure that there is sufficient academic justification as well as means to ensure that appropriate expertise is procured for the conduct of the programme.
6. In making decisions to offer any particular programmes off-shore or off-campus or to enter into any collaborative arrangements with other parties, the institution should allow academic considerations and concerns for academic quality to take precedence over other considerations and maintain sufficient academic control over the quality of programmes.

### **The Collaborative Partner**

7. The collaborative partner should ensure there is sufficient understanding of the background, status and educational aims of the awarding institution so as to ascertain that the cooperation is in line with its mission and philosophy, and its policies for academic quality.
8. Before entering into any agreement, there should be full understanding of the proposed programme to be offered, including but not limited to aims and objectives, target student group, entry requirements and advanced standing policies, teaching and assessment practices, graduation requirements and expected student support. If any aspect of the programme differs significantly from the same programme offered in the awarding institution on-campus, the collaborative partner should be fully aware of any implications this may have on the quality of the programme. Full institutional support and approval for the offer of the programme in its proposed format should be secured from the awarding institution.
9. The collaborative partner should apply the same quality assurance system of the awarding institution to the proposed programme. It should keep regular, if not frequent communication with the awarding institution with regard to the operation of the programme, situations pertaining to academic standards, as well as legal and professional requirements.

### **III. Programme Approval and Validation**

1. Proposed programmes to be offered in the off-shore and/or off-campus mode should be subject to the established internal or external validation/ approval procedures with the following considerations:
  - The same criteria and standards should apply.
  - People who have experience or special knowledge of off-shore and/or off- campus delivery and people with experience and understanding of the environment where the programme is to be delivered should be involved.
  - The nature of any collaborative arrangements including academic, administrative, and financial aspects with collaborative partners should be examined to ensure that such arrangements are appropriate and able to safeguard the quality of the programmes and the interests of the students.
  - Special arrangements are made to compensate for any inadequacies in teaching support or other support which may compromise the quality of such programmes in view of the different operational environment.
  - There are channels for regular monitoring of the programme and for feedback to be communicated to the appropriate levels.
2. There should be stipulations for regular re-approval/ revalidation, if any, of these programmes. It is particularly important that at the time of re-approval/ revalidation there is adequate examination of the effectiveness of quality assurance mechanisms and any feedback received on the quality of such programmes.

## **IV. Programme Design**

1. Awarding institutions should design their off-shore and/or off-campus programmes at a comparable quality and standard to their on-campus programmes, by taking full account of the nature of any support tendered by the collaborative partner, in terms of staffing, resources and student support, and their ability to underpin the quality of the programme.
2. It is desirable to take into consideration the expectations of educational quality in the place where the programme is offered and to avoid situations where the off-shore and/or off-campus programmes are perceived to be of lower quality.

### **Programme Adaptation**

3. Where the awarding institution offers off-shore and/or off-campus programme with adaptation by incorporating local features to suit local needs, this should be a conscious and considered decision based on:
  - valid academic reasons;
  - local educational, professional and community needs with full investigation of the situations; and
  - full understanding of the nature of similar or comparable local programmes available in that place.
4. It would be desirable to obtain the views or assistance of other relevant local parties such as professional organisations and qualified local academics in the relevant discipline of the programme to be offered.

### **Mode and Duration of Studies**

5. Off-shore and/or off-campus programmes should normally be subject to the same set of regulations, with regard to the maximum and minimum periods of study as that for an equivalent on-campus programme. The institution should carefully consider the impact of any proposed differences, and their implication for the quality of the student learning experience.
6. There should be due consideration for the quality of the learning experience

and the ability of the awarding institution or collaborative partner to provide the academic support for the changed mode of delivery, e.g. from part-time distance-learning mode to full-time face-to-face mode, and issues such as the pace of learning and progression.

### **Entry Requirements**

7. Entry requirements, in terms of the local qualifications awarded in the place that the programme to be offered, should mirror those stipulated for an equivalent programme in the awarding institution.
8. Detailed criteria for admission, including specific criteria for advanced standing/ exemption should be published. Policies for advanced standing/ exemption should correspond to those at the awarding institution.
9. Where certain local qualifications such as sub-degree qualifications are accepted for entry into top-up programmes, the nature and standard of these local qualifications should be thoroughly understood.
10. Candidates for admission should be competent in the language of instruction and the awarding institution should have clear, well defined guidelines on its language requirements.

## **V. Programme Delivery, Teaching and Assessment**

### **Methods of Provision**

1. When a mode of delivery different from the one for the on-campus programme is used, e.g. from part-time distance-learning mode to full-time face-to-face mode, the chosen mode should be pedagogically sound with respect to careful design or adaptation, and underpinned by appropriate learning support.

### **Language of Instruction**

2. Off-shore and/or off-campus programmes should ensure that those enrolled have the level of language skills and understanding required to embark upon the relevant programme.
3. If the language of instruction for off-shore and/or off-campus programme is not the official language of the awarding institution, the institution should very carefully consider its ability and competence to assure the quality of provision and the academic standards of the programme conducted in that language. Special attention should be paid to ensure comparability of the standard of the teaching materials/ textbooks in that language.

### **Conduct of Student Assessment**

4. Assessment regulations and requirements should be the same as those for the on-campus programme including methods of assessment, criteria, and weighting for different types of assessment, and any differences should be sufficiently justified by academic reasons.
5. Awarding institution offering off-shore and/or off-campus programmes will need to provide effective measures to ensure:
  - the integrity of the examination and assessment process as a whole;
  - the security of examination papers and scripts and the integrity of assessment events through off-shore and/or off-campus invigilation;
  - the integrity of continuous assessment procedures;
  - the consistency in assessment criteria and standards through the provision of suitable guidelines to teachers/ examiners of off-shore

and/or off-campus programmes who are qualified to conduct the assessment; and/or through direct participation in some part of the actual assessment by staff of the institution; and

- moderators' and external examiners' knowledge and understanding of the programme and its operation.

6. Awarding institution should ascertain that provisions are made to offer timely feedback on assessments to students regarding their academic progress.

## **VI. Staffing**

1. To enable staff to carry out effectively the tasks for which they are allocated responsibility, awarding institutions should provide adequate induction, supervision and training appropriate to the different levels of involvement and responsibility among staff with particular reference to the off-shore and/or off-campus teaching environment.
2. Where an off-shore and/or off-campus programme is offered through a collaborative partner, the awarding institution should satisfy itself that the staff appointed by the collaborative partner are –
  - properly qualified with teaching experience and research experience comparable to that of its staff teaching the same/ similar programme;
  - fully competent and have suitable development opportunities;
  - fully cognizant of all aspects of the programme and their role on the programme; and
  - able to interact and communicate with all other staff involved in the programme.

## **VII. Teaching / Student Support**

1. Access to learning resources is key to students' successful completion of study. The awarding institution should allow students to have online access to all campus facilities and online retrieval of learning resources such as library databases. If possible, library provisions in the place that the off-shore and/or off-campus programmes to be offered should be arranged.
2. Before admitting students to research degree programmes, the awarding institutions should clarify the research area concerned with the students. The institutions should ensure that the required supervision and facilities will be available for the duration of candidature and make appropriate arrangements for students' access to ancillary support such as laboratory, computing and library facilities. The students should be informed of the nature of supervision and facilities available.
3. Institutions should ensure that students can receive the information and materials on time, that there are swift responses to enquiries and applications from students and ensure that all necessary documentation is sent at the earliest possible time.
4. Awarding institutions should acknowledge that off-shore and/or off-campus programmes will seldom have the same institutional environment and learning support available to students. Compensatory measures to create a supportive environment such as workshop for study and language skills, formation of tutorial/ study groups and provision of professional counselling services, should be a conscious academic decision made in line with institutional policy and formulae for quality assurance.

### **Internship/ Placement**

5. If the programme has internship or placement requirement, the awarding institution and its collaborative partner should secure adequate places from the training agencies.
6. Teaching staff of the awarding institution responsible for the internship or placement should conduct training and/or induction to the internship supervisors of the training agencies and have regular contact with the students to discuss matters relating to the arrangements.

## **VIII. Programme Administration and Promotion**

### **Financial Arrangement**

1. The awarding institution should have due consideration on the financial viability of the off-shore and/or off-campus programmes, including in case of low enrolments and phase-out of the programme. The institution should commit itself to support students to complete the study.

### **Fees and Refunds**

2. For collection and refund of fees, there should be policies for safeguarding the interests of students, with compliance with the statutory requirements of the place where the programme will be offered.
3. The awarding institutions should provide prospective students with accurate information covering
  - cost of programmes and other compulsory/ optional charges;
  - method of payment;
  - policy on increase to fees;
  - procedures for dealing with exceptional cases related to the payment or refund of fees; and
  - procedures for cancellation of enrolment and obtaining refund of fees.

### **Promotion and Publicity**

4. Clear and precise information of the programme, such as its nature, curriculum, graduation requirements, student support available and the award that it leads to, should be provided to prospective students.
5. Any publicity materials should observe the legal requirements governing advertisements of such programmes in the place where they are offered and be scrutinized to avoid confusing or misleading information. Care should be taken with regard to the inclusion of any statement purporting to the recognition of the programme for professional or employment or other specific purpose, to ensure that only factual statements are included.

## **IX. Quality Assurance**

1. Mechanisms and procedures for monitoring and improving the quality of the off-shore and/or off-campus programmes in the course of programme approval/ validation and re-approval/ revalidation which are regularly conducted by the awarding institution should be in place.
2. In addition, the awarding institution, having considered the input and comments from staff/ personnel of the collaborative partner, if any, should design and implement the quality assurance mechanism of the off-shore and/or off-campus programmes.
3. Monitoring of standard should include a review of existing teaching and learning processes relating to the off-shore and/or off-campus programmes to ensure that the stated policies and practices are adhered to, especially where implementation is partially or wholly delegated to personnel of collaborative partner. The awarding institution should have established channels including face-to-face interaction to collect feedback from students and personnel of the collaborative partner.
4. Careful evaluation of student use of learning resources in an off-campus/ distance learning environment should be ongoing.
5. Established mechanisms for follow-up action to be taken on problems and issues identified in the monitoring process should be in place.
6. The suitability of these policies and practices for ensuring quality, including teaching and learning practices, entry requirements, assessment methods and criteria, staff and resources, should be examined against standards and criteria set for the same programme in the awarding institution. This is especially important where the off-shore and/or off-campus programme has been adapted for delivery or where the regulations or admission criteria of such programmes have been adjusted.