

Accreditation of Non-local Learning Programmes

Frequently Asked Questions

Registration vs Accreditation

1. What are the benefits of seeking accreditation of non-local programmes which are already legally permitted to be offered in Hong Kong under the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance (Cap 493)?

The qualifications of accredited non-local programmes may be entered into the Qualifications Register (QR) for recognition under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), in accordance with the terms and procedures stipulated by the QR Authority. The Education Bureau (EDB) has introduced various funding schemes under the HKQF to support quality assurance of programmes offered by education and training providers and to encourage them to register the qualifications in the QR. Students holding qualifications that appear on the QR will be recognised as meeting the standard of a particular qualification obtained in Hong Kong. For needy full-time students studying locally-accredited self-financing post-secondary education courses (including non-local programmes) in Hong Kong, they may apply for grant and low interest loan under the Financial Assistance Scheme for Post-secondary Students.

2. Will registration and accreditation of non-local programmes co-exist?

Yes. Registration (including exemption from registration) and accreditation are under different ordinances (the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance, Cap 493 and the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance, Cap 592 respectively) and administered by different authorities. For registration, assessment is conducted on comparability with the home course of the home country system. Accreditation is to benchmark the learning programme against the local system including the HKQF. The introduction of the voluntary process of accreditation of non-local programmes offered in Hong Kong will not affect the function or the process for registration (including exemption from registration).

3. Will operators be required to submit annual returns after successful accreditation of the non-local learning programmes?

Yes. As registration (including exemption from registration) and accreditation of non-local programmes are different processes, the annual returns required under the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance (Cap 493) will remain unchanged.

Accreditation Model

4. What is accreditation of non-local learning programmes?

Accreditation of non-local learning programmes is a quality assurance process that underpins the QF. It comprises two stages.

The first stage is Initial Evaluation for collaborative provision which is an upfront quality test to determine whether the collaborating operators are able to achieve their objectives as claimed and to operate the learning programmes (under the collaborative partnership) that meet the claimed QF standards.

The second stage is Programme Validation. It is an overall evaluation of the non-local learning programme to determine whether the learning programme meets the required standards and achieves its claimed objectives as well as delivers the intended learning outcomes commensurate with the competency standards prescribed in the Generic Level Descriptors (GLD) published by the Education Bureau (QF standards). The GLD is available at <http://www.hkqf.gov.hk>.

5. What kinds of learning programmes can be validated under the Accreditation of Non-local Learning Programmes? Can purely distance learning programmes be subject to accreditation of non-local learning programmes?

The accreditation exercise is designed for registered / exempted non-local courses under the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance (Cap 493) intended to be entered into the QR for QF recognition. Accreditation services will only be provided to registered and exempted courses required to be regulated under Cap 493. Purely distance learning programmes are excluded from the registration requirement under Cap 493 and are therefore not within the remit of the Accreditation of Non-local Learning Programmes.

6. What constitutes collaborative provision of a non-local learning programme?

Collaborative provision of a non-local learning programme involves a Hong Kong operator (local operator) delivering a programme of learning in Hong Kong, which leads to a qualification awarded by a non-local operator. The local operator and the non-local operator are treated as acting jointly as the operators of the learning programme to be accredited.

7. What is a partnership?

In the Guidelines on Accreditation of Non-local Learning Programmes, “partnership” is used to refer to the partnership between the collaborating operators. “Local operator” refers to the operator whose base of operation is in Hong Kong (including the local offices of a non-local educational institution), and “non-local operator” to the partner whose base of operation is outside Hong Kong. Where the local operator is a branch campus of the non-local operator (whether or not established as a separate legal entity), the partnership refers to the relationship between the branch campus and its parent institution.

8. If one non-local operator has three different partners in Hong Kong, will it be required to undergo three different Initial Evaluation (IE) exercises?

Yes as IE is per partnership at specified QF Level and evaluates the collaborative provision. Each partnership is unique and their terms of collaboration may be different from one another.

9. How will the different types of collaboration be handled in accreditation of non-local programmes?

Under the principle of “fitness for purpose”, the onus of proof lies with the partnerships to demonstrate that the quality assurance system and mechanism under the collaborative arrangements as presented is sufficient for the non-local programme under accreditation and is effective to ensure compliance with the HK requirements.

10. How is the notion of outcome-based education (OBE) embodied in accreditation?

The QF level of a programme has to be determined by pitching the learning outcomes against the Generic Level Descriptors of the HKQF. The HKCAAVQ considers OBE underpinned by quality indicators such as curriculum coverage, admission requirements and assessment, delivery and student learning experience which form the basis of Programme Validation.

11. If an operating non-local programme was not designed as outcome-based programme at first, how can they undergo accreditation?

All learning programmes must have assessment as evidence of what students know and can do at the end of the learning experience provided by the learning programmes. It is the responsibility for the non-local operator and its Hong Kong partner to discuss and see how evidence can be provided during the programme validation exercise to demonstrate to the panel that the learning programme delivers learning outcomes that meet the HKQF standards as prescribed under the Generic Level Descriptors.

Accreditation Process

12. How is the process of accreditation of non-local learning programmes conducted?

Accreditation of non-local learning programmes is to be conducted in a Collective Approach by subject area / discipline. The purpose of the Collective Approach is to make available accreditation services in an efficient, cost effective and consistent way so as to handle a large quantity of accreditation requests in a shorter period without compromising quality.

13. What can we do if we are interested in participating in the accreditation process?

Interested partnerships with non-local learning programmes in the discipline being considered for accreditation application should return a signed Statement of Intent to the HKCAAVQ indicating that they are ready to undergo the Initial Evaluation and Programme Validation of their collaborative non-local learning programmes. In the Statement of Intent a person / representative should be nominated jointly by the local and the non-local partners as the authorised liaison point with the HKCAAVQ on all matters related to the accreditation in point.

14. Will Initial Evaluation and Programme Validation be conducted in parallel?

No. Initial Evaluation is a pre-requisite of Programme Validation but they can be conducted back to back if there are savings on time and cost.

15. Is it a must for personnel of the non-local partner to attend the on-site visit in Hong Kong?

Yes. Personnel from the partnership attending the visit should include representatives of the local and the non-local operators. Such representatives should be persons with decision-making authority in and being familiar with the non-local learning programmes, in relation to the collaboration.

16. Will there be any meeting to debrief the operator of the panel's decision(s) at the end of the on-site visit?

The panel will organise an exit meeting with the senior management representatives of the partnership. The exit meeting will however not be an oral feedback session at the end of the visit in view that the panel may need to consider all accreditation cases under the same Collective Approach on completion of all on-site visits.

17. How can the partnerships tell whether they have prepared well for the accreditation exercise or not?

Through the Operators' Briefing Session and Operators' Workshop as well as with reference to the Guidelines on Accreditation of Non-local Learning Programmes, the operators would be aware of the accreditation criteria and standards for preparation of accreditation documents, documentary evidence and the on-site visit. In the course of the accreditation exercise, the panel will give Initial Comments on the submitted accreditation documents and interact with the operators during the on-site visit. The partnerships may take the interactive opportunity to demonstrate to the panel their competency in meeting the required accreditation standards. Such arrangements are in line with the "no surprise" principle of the HKCAAVQ in conducting accreditation exercise.

Accreditation Document

18. Is there a specific format for accreditation document?

The HKCAAVQ does not request a specific format for the accreditation document. It is the responsibility of the collaborating partners to provide sufficient and appropriate documentary evidence in the accreditation process to enable the HKCAAVQ to make an accreditation decision. Possible sources of evidence to be provided by the collaborating partners are outlined in Appendices 1 and 2 to the Guidelines on Accreditation of Non-local Learning Programmes. The possible sources of evidence are indicative of what will be required; it is up to the partnership to offer other evidence that is relevant in demonstrating that an accreditation criterion has been met. When preparing the accreditation document, the partnerships are only expected to enclose what they have been using on a daily operational basis and / or for planning and decision-making purposes.

Accreditation Standards

19. What are the differences between accreditation of local and non-local learning programmes?

The principles for Programme Validation of non-local learning programmes are the same as those for local learning programmes, as all learning programmes, regardless of origin and nature must meet the stated objectives and the standards for the HKQF before their qualifications can be entered into the Qualifications Register. For Initial Evaluation of partnership of non-local learning programmes, the panel would focus on the collaboration between the non-local operator and the Hong Kong operator.

20. What is the impact of 3+3+4 on accreditation standards?

The current system is still 5+2+3 and hence the HKCAAVQ will benchmark the programmes under accreditation against the prevailing local education system, the HKQF and any other relevant government policies, specifications, guidelines and common descriptors, etc. With the advent of 3+3+4, operators should also provide information supported by documentary evidence of the strategic and action plans for phasing in the learning programmes in the new education system.

21. Since the curriculum of the non-local learning programme is owned by the overseas institution, the Hong Kong operator may not have the rights to revise it for the purpose of meeting the accreditation standards in Hong Kong. What is the option to the Hong Kong operator in order to be able to participate in non-local programme accreditation?

Accreditation is a voluntary exercise. The partnership should understand that both the home course requirements (under the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance, Cap 493) and the requirements of the local education system (under the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance, Cap 592) should be met if it wants to obtain both registration (including exemption from registration) and accreditation status for the non-local learning programmes.

22. How will the non-local learning programme be assessed in terms of programme length and volume of study?

Local benchmark would be used as reference. By local benchmark, it refers to both the HKQF and the prevailing local education system. It is the responsibility of the partnership to provide evidence to the effect that the learning programme as designed with the stated programme length and in the study mode meets the claimed objective and the claimed QF standard.

23. Is there any requirement on the study mode and location for a non-local learning programme undergoing accreditation?

The HKCAAVQ does not prescribe the study mode and location of regulated non-local learning programmes (i.e. pure distance learning programmes not included) to be accredited as long as they fulfil the accreditation criteria for the purpose of the QF, the

registration requirements under Cap 493 as well as the following general requirements and the local benchmark so that the qualifications obtained after completion of the programmes can be entered into the QR:

- The learning programme should carry an award (i.e. a qualification) as a formal approval of the achievement of the learning programme.
- The learning programme should be accessible to learners of Hong Kong.
- The learning programme should include formal assessments to ascertain that learners have achieved the specified learning outcomes of the programme.
- The learning programme should correspond to an assigned QF level in accordance with the Generic Level Descriptors.

Accreditation Outcome

24. What can be the accreditation outcome?

The accreditation outcome will be one of the following. Conditions and restrictions may be specified.

- Accreditation is approved at specified QF level(s) within a stipulated validity period without any pre-conditions and/or requirements to be met by the partnership; or
- Accreditation is approved at specified QF level(s) within a stipulated validity period subject to the fulfillment by the partnership of certain pre-conditions and/or requirements by the stipulated deadline(s); or
- Accreditation as sought is not approved.

25. How is the accreditation outcome released?

A Statement of Accreditation confirming the granting of the accreditation status to the partnership and the non-local learning programme(s) concerned will be issued together with the Accreditation Reports for approval cases, or upon satisfactory fulfilment of all of the pre-condition(s) for relevant cases with pre-condition(s). In the latter case, the validity period will only commence after satisfactory fulfilment of the pre-condition(s).

26. Is it necessary to apply for Initial Evaluation again at the end of the validity period?

Initial Evaluation is per collaboration at specified approved QF level(s) and is valid for two years. Within the two-year validity period, the collaborative partners must have at least one non-local learning programme accredited at the approved QF level in order to continue to be entitled to the Initial Evaluation status. If partnerships continue to have the learning programmes validated their Initial Evaluation status will not expire.

27. What is the implication if the outcome of the accreditation exercise is non-approval?

The partnership and / or the learning programme concerned will not be granted an accreditation status. In other words, the qualification of the learning programme cannot be entered into the Qualifications Register (QR) for recognition under the QF. However, since accreditation and registration are separate exercises under different ordinances, a non-approval accreditation outcome will not affect the status and operation of the non-

local learning programme concerned under the Non-Local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance (CAP 493).

28. Will the HKCAAVQ provide the rationale for non-approval in an accreditation exercise?

Yes. Evidence and reasons for the HKCAAVQ to make accreditation decisions will be stipulated in the Accreditation Report. This is to help the operators to reflect upon their operation so as to enhance quality of education provision.

29. If one non-local operator has two different partners in Hong Kong and each of these two partnerships participates in the accreditation exercise. If the outcome for the first one is approval but the other is non-approval, how can the award issued by the same non-local operator be distinguished as 'accredited' and 'not accredited'?

Qualifications of successfully validated learning programmes entered into the QR are associated with the operators (i.e. the local operators) and granting bodies (i.e. the non-local operators). The partnership with the local partner that is not successfully accredited in an IE will not meet the pre-requisite for proceeding to programme validation and hence the local partner's name will not be identified in the QR as the operator of the learning programme concerned.

Accreditation Fee

30. What is the cost of accreditation?

The prevailing fee schedule for accreditation of local learning programmes will be adopted for the pilot study. Discount may be considered for bulk programme validations per partnership under the collective approach on a full cost recovery basis.

31. Will the fees be different for validation of learning programme in both the full-time and part-time modes from validation of learning programme in a single mode?

Accreditation fees are levied under the principle of full cost-recovery, the HKCAAVQ will be able to advise on the exact accreditation fee for learning programmes in both the full-time and part-time modes after receiving details of the learning programme via the Statement of Intent (SoI) submitted by the partnership.

32. Do the subsidies provided under the Qualifications Framework Support Schemes (QFSS) also apply to private institutions?

The QFSS are for non-profit-making organisations only. Details are available on the HKQF website at <http://www.hkqf.gov.hk/guie/QFSS.asp>.

Pilot Study

33. What is the rationale for selecting the Computing and Information Technology (CIT) Discipline for the pilot study?

The selection of the CIT discipline was based on the statistical analysis conducted in house for the purpose of enabling the HKCAAVQ to understand the characteristics

relevant to non-local learning programmes in Hong Kong in the pilot study. The criteria for selection are

- a. a balance between registered and exempted courses in the discipline
- b. a balance between operators with a large number of courses and operators with a small number of courses
- c. a balance between partnership comprising local operators working with overseas partners and partnership of overseas partners working with their local branch campus representatives
- d. availability of subject specialists in the selected discipline.

34. What types of learning programmes belong to the Computing and Information Technology Discipline?

On the basis of the examples of subject areas under the Computing and Information Technology (CIT) Area of Study and Training listed in the List of 21 Areas of Studies and Training (http://www.hkqr.gov.hk/hkqr/welcome.do?return_from=internal), learning programmes fully covering the following areas are considered within the CIT discipline: Computing Studies, Information Technology, Internet Technology, Multi-media Studies, Computer Support, Telecommunications, Games and Entertainment Technology, Systems Development and Administration. The HKCAAVQ has also added Information Systems and E-Commerce (with IT technology as the orientation) in the pilot exercise in view of the nature of the areas. For the purpose of being more focus in the current pilot exercise, learning programmes where CIT is only one of the minors / streams such as library and information management, e-commerce engineering with law are not included.

35. Is there a schedule for the accreditation of non-local learning programmes using the collective approach?

The HKCAAVQ will take the opportunity of the pilot study to test out the accreditation processes and related matters for the collective approach. The feedback of this pilot study will inform the HKCAAVQ how the scheduling of non-local learning programme accreditation should be planned. More information in this regard will be available by the end of 2009.

36. If the number of non-local learning programmes in a discipline to be accredited is large, will some of them be accredited first while others will be accredited later?

If the number of the non-local learning programmes in a discipline undergoing the collective approach is too large to be handled by one panel, the HKCAAVQ may set up additional panels in parallel. Nonetheless, the accreditation outcome of non-local learning programmes in the same discipline will be announced at the same time in order to facilitate the entry of the qualifications of successfully validated learning programmes into the QR at the same time.