



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

Guidelines
on
Initial Evaluation and
Programme Validation
For Learning Programmes at
QF Levels 1 – 3

Version 1.2

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Preamble

1. These Guidelines are for operators who wish to seek Initial Evaluation and/or Programme Validation status under the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process. These Guidelines also serve as reference for the accreditation panel (panel) which is established by the HKCAAVQ to be responsible for the accreditation exercise. The panel uses its professional judgement according to the principles set out in these Guidelines.
2. These Guidelines are applicable to operators of local learning programmes. Operators with non-local learning programmes wishing to apply for accreditation should refer to the Guidelines on Accreditation of Non-local Learning Programmes available on the HKCAAVQ website at <http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk>.
3. These Guidelines supersede any prior guidance notes, other guidelines or handbook that the HKCAAVQ or the former Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA) has published or issued previously regarding Initial Evaluation and Programme Validation.
4. A general overview about the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process that underpins the Qualifications Framework (QF) is available in the Section entitled Four-stage QA Process on the HKCAAVQ's website.
5. The HKCAAVQ is a statutory, not-for-profit self-financed body and operates on a full cost recovery principle. The standard accreditation fee schedule, approved by the Secretary for Education, is available on the HKCAAVQ website.
6. Whilst the HKCAAVQ endeavours to ensure the accuracy of the information, the HKCAAVQ reserves the right to delete, suspend or edit all information at any time at its discretion without giving any prior notice. To obtain the most up-to-date information, users may refer to the electronic version of these Guidelines from the HKCAAVQ's website. For enquiry, please contact us via email at info@hkcaavq.edu.hk or by phone at (852) 3658 0000.

1. Who should read these Guidelines?

- 1.1 Operators wanting to have their learning programmes recognised under the Qualifications Framework (QF) must apply for *Initial Evaluation* (IE) and *Programme Validation* (PV).
- 1.2 Operators may apply for IE and PV at the same time and accreditation can be conducted concurrently. The whole process will be quicker than going through IE and PV separately.
- 1.3 Operators who have a valid HKCAA Institutional Review (IR) / HKCAAVQ Initial Evaluation (IE) status can proceed directly to PV.

2. What is Initial Evaluation (IE)?

- 2.1 IE determines whether operators are able to achieve their stated objectives and can operate learning programmes that meet the QF standards. Operators must demonstrate that they have the ability to effectively manage and resource the development, delivery, assessment and quality assurance of their learning programmes and educational services.
- 2.2 Operators applying for IE must specify the corresponding QF level at which their learning programmes are intended to be offered. Within QF levels 1-3, an IE status at QF Level 3 can cover programmes at the same level or lower while an IE status at QF Level 2 or 1 can only cover programmes at the approved level. Operators are required to go through IE again if the intended QF level of a programme submitted in PV is not covered by their approved IE status.
- 2.3 IE has a validity period of two years. Within the two-year period, operators must have at least one learning programme (at the approved QF Level of the IE status) validated under PV. Evaluated operators who have not yet undergone PV within the two-year validity period will have to apply to extend their IE status. If operators continue to have their programmes validated the IE status does not expire.

3. What are the procedures and how long do they take?

- 3.1 It normally takes about 10 weeks to complete the IE process after operators have submitted their Accreditation document (i.e. completed Application Form plus supporting materials). The time schedule will be specified in the Service Agreement signed by the HKCAAVQ and the operator.
- 3.2 To help operators evaluate the extent to which they meet the IE accreditation standards, the HKCAAVQ has devised a Self-evaluation Checklist. The

HKCAAVQ also regularly holds Operators' Workshops about accreditation exercises and the preparation required. Operators are strongly encouraged to attend these Operators' Workshops which are organised on a bi-monthly basis. The Operators' Workshop aims to guide participants through the IE Accreditation Criteria and Standards with examples. Information about the Workshops is available on the HKCAAVQ website.

- 3.3 Interested operators should return a signed Statement of Intent to the HKVAAVQ indicating when they are ready to undergo the IE. Furthermore, operators are required to sign a Service Agreement with the HKCAAVQ that sets out the purpose, the time schedule and the fee for the exercise before submitting an accreditation document to the HKCAAVQ.
- 3.4 The HKCAAVQ may conclude upon an initial examination of the accreditation document that the information provided is inadequate and/or the state of readiness of the operator is such that it is unlikely to lead to a meaningful accreditation process according to the scope of the Terms of Reference of the exercise specified in the Service Agreement. In this event, the HKCAAVQ may terminate the accreditation exercise and any unused accreditation fee will be refunded to the operator.
- 3.5 If the HKCAAVQ considers that the operator's accreditation document contains the necessary information to proceed with the accreditation exercise, the operator will be notified of the arrangements for an on-site visit as specified in the Service Agreement. After reviewing the accreditation document, the panel may seek further clarification and/or ask for other supporting documents and information as evidence during the Stage of Initial Comments. The supporting documents and information requested can be made available to the panel either prior to the site visit or on-site, at the discretion of the panel.
- 3.6 The following indicative timeline outlines the main steps for IE.

Operators' Workshop	❖ Operators are strongly encouraged to attend Operators' Workshop before the negotiation of the service required.
Statement of Intent	❖ Operators indicate their intention to seek accreditation by returning a signed Statement of Intent.
Service Agreement	❖ HKCAAVQ will then issue a Service Agreement. After signing the Service Agreement and making payment of

the initial accreditation fee, operators should send in the accreditation document on or before the date specified in the Service Agreement.

	<u>Weeks</u>	
Initial examination of accreditation document	1	<input type="checkbox"/> Accreditation document confirmed as having the necessary information to proceed with accreditation.
Panel formation		<input type="checkbox"/> HKCAAVQ panel members are nominated. <input type="checkbox"/> Panel members confirmed after checking for conflict of interest with operators.
Panel's initial comments and operators' responses	2 – 3	<input type="checkbox"/> Panel provides initial comments to operators and requests additional information as needed. <input type="checkbox"/> Operators provide requested information. <input type="checkbox"/> Preparation for on-site visit or meeting at the HKCAAVQ office.
*On-site visit or meeting	4 – 5	<input type="checkbox"/> *On-site visit or meeting at HKCAAVQ office <input type="checkbox"/> Post-visit or post-meeting follow-up, if applicable
*The need for on-site visit is determined by the HKCAAVQ.		
Report writing	6 – 10	<input type="checkbox"/> HKCAAVQ prepares Accreditation Report on the basis of Panel's recommendations.
Notification of outcome	10	<input type="checkbox"/> Notification of outcome to the operators.
Follow-up actions		<input type="checkbox"/> If pre-condition(s) and/or requirement(s) are imposed, operators provide evidence of meeting them by the specified deadlines.

4. What evidence is required?

4.1 To complete IE successfully, operators have to demonstrate that they meet the standards of Initial Evaluation in the four criteria specified below. The evaluation will be based on the accreditation document and other relevant information gathered through the entire accreditation process, according to the guiding principle of ‘fitness for purpose’.

a. Organisational Management

Operators’ management, including structure, processes and quality assurance arrangements are sufficient to manage their operations to meet the stated objectives.

b. Staffing and Staff Development

Operators have adequate teaching and support staff with qualifications and experience necessary for the effective delivery of their learning programmes at the intended QF Level(s).

c. Financial and Physical Resources

Operators have adequate financial and physical resources for the delivery of their learning programmes.

d. Quality Assurance (including Programme Development and Management)

Operators develop learning programmes by addressing the needs of the community, employers and employees and aligning them with the Generic Level Descriptors (GLD) of QF. Operators also monitor and review the performance of all their learning programmes on an ongoing basis to ensure that the programmes remain current and valid and that the content and design, teaching and learning activities and learner assessments are effective.

5. What comes after submission of accreditation document?

- 5.1 If the HKCAAVQ considers that the accreditation document contains the necessary information to proceed with accreditation, it will establish an accreditation panel comprising sector/subject/QA specialists and a staff member of the HKCAAVQ. The HKCAAVQ has full authority for the arrangement of the on-site visit and the membership of the accreditation panel after seeking views from the operators on any perceived conflict of interest. The HKCAAVQ staff member will liaise with the operator about the arrangement of an on-site visit or meeting at HKCAAVQ office. At the on-site visit or meeting at the office, the panel will typically meet management representatives, other key staff and learners; inspect facilities and examine records and other supporting documents.
- 5.2 The panel will evaluate the evidence submitted in the accreditation document and the information collected at the on-site visit or meeting at the office. It will form a judgement as to whether the operator meets the required standards and identify areas for improvement. After the on-site visit or meeting at the office, the HKCAAVQ will prepare an accreditation report based on the panel's recommendations and send it to the operator to check for factual accuracy. The accreditation outcome will then be finalised by the HKCAAVQ and the outcome will be conveyed in writing to the operator.

6. What are the possible outcomes?

- 6.1 The possible outcomes are approval, approval with pre-condition(s) and/or requirement(s), and non-approval. The accreditation report prepared by the HKCAAVQ will include the following:
- Pre-condition(s) and/or requirement(s), if any, and
 - QF level of the IE status.
- 6.2 Where pre-condition(s) and/or requirement(s) are stipulated, the fulfilment of the pre-condition(s) and/or requirement(s) within a specified timeframe is mandatory to obtain and/or to maintain valid accreditation status.
- 6.3 Pre-conditions are to be fulfilled by the operator prior to the start of the validity period of the accreditation status while requirements are to be fulfilled by the operator by the specified deadline(s) during the validity period.
- 6.4 Restrictions may be specified in the decision. If so, the operator is expected to comply with the restriction(s) on an ongoing basis unless otherwise advised by the HKCAAVQ.

- 6.5 If the operator is aggrieved by the decision of the HKCAAVQ, the operator can lodge an appeal to the Appeal Board against the accreditation decision, the validity period of the decision, the condition(s) or restriction(s) as stated in the accreditation report. Details of the appeal procedure can be accessed on the QF website at <http://www.hkqf.gov.hk>.
- 6.6 A Statement of Accreditation confirming the granting of the IE status to the operator will be issued together with the accreditation report for approval, or upon satisfactory fulfilment of all of the pre-condition(s), if applicable.
- 6.7 It is the responsibility of the operator to inform the HKCAAVQ of any substantial change(s) to the accreditation status before the change is made. In case of doubt, the operator should consult the HKCAAVQ on the need for seeking approval on substantial change(s) as soon as possible, and prior to making any change(s). Guidelines on substantial change to accreditation status are available on the HKCAAVQ website. The IE status of the operator will lapse if substantial changes have been introduced without the HKCAAVQ's prior approval.

7. What to do before the IE validity period expires?

- 7.1 Operators who are accredited for IE must proceed to PV, if they want to operate and enter the qualification of their learning programme into the Qualifications Register (QR). Operators must have at least one learning programme submitted for validation within the two-year validity period of IE.
- 7.2 If operators choose not to or are not yet ready to move to PV, they can apply to extend the IE status at least three months before the two-year validity period expires. A further two-year IE status will only be approved if the operators can demonstrate their capabilities and operational plan to offer QF-recognised learning programmes within the extended period.
- 7.3 An extension will be granted once only. The IE status will automatically lapse when the two-year extended validity period expires if no learning programmes are submitted for validation.

8. What is Programme Validation (PV)?

- 8.1 PV is the second stage of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process, through which the HKCAAVQ assures the quality of learning programmes under the QF. Only qualifications of validated programmes are eligible to be entered into the QR. Therefore, operators must apply for PV for each programme that they wish to enter into the QR.

9. What are the procedures and how long do they take?

- 9.1 It normally takes about 14 weeks after operators have submitted their accreditation document to complete the PV process. The time schedule will be specified in the Service Agreement signed by the HKCAAVQ and the operator.
- 9.2 PV follows similar procedures as IE. Please refer to Paras. 3.2 to 3.5 above. Self-evaluation Checklist, Accreditation Standards for PV and Application Form can be found at the HKCAAVQ **website**.
- 9.3 The following indicative timeline outlines the main steps for PV. The same timeline and steps apply to IE and PV when they are conducted at the same time.

Operators' Workshop		❖ Operators are strongly encouraged to attend the Operators' Workshop before the negotiation of the service required.
Statement of Intent		❖ Operators indicate their intention to seek accreditation by returning a signed Statement of Intent.
Service Agreement		❖ The HKCAAVQ will then issue a Service Agreement. After signing the Service Agreement and making payment of the initial accreditation fee, operators should send in the accreditation document on or before the date specified in the Service Agreement.
<u>Weeks</u>		
Initial examination of accreditation document	1 – 3	❑ Accreditation document confirmed as having all the necessary information to proceed with assessment
Panel formation		❑ HKCAAVQ panel members are nominated

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Panel members confirmed after checking for conflict of interest with operators
Panel's initial comments and operators' responses	4 – 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Panel provides initial comments to operators and requests additional information as needed <input type="checkbox"/> Operators provide requested information <input type="checkbox"/> Preparation for on-site visit or meeting at the HKCAAVQ office.
On-site visit or meeting	8 – 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> On-site visit or meeting at HKCAAVQ office <input type="checkbox"/> Post-visit or post-meeting follow-up, if applicable
*The need for on-site visit is determined by the HKCAAVQ.		
Report writing	10 – 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> HKCAAVQ prepares the accreditation report based on the panel's recommendations
Notification of outcome	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Notification of outcome to the operator
Follow-up actions		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> If pre-condition(s) and/or requirement(s) are imposed, operators provide evidence of meeting them by specified deadlines.

10. What evidence is required?

- 10.1 Operators are to send in an accreditation document for individual programmes. To complete PV successfully, the learning programmes must meet the PV standards in ten criteria specified below. The validation will be based on the accreditation document and other relevant information gathered through the entire accreditation process, according to the guiding principle of 'fitness for purpose'.

a. Financial and Physical Resources for Learning Programmes

Operators have adequate financial and physical resources for the delivery of their learning programmes.

b. Staffing and Staff Development for Learning Programmes

Operators must have adequate teaching and support staff with the qualifications and experience necessary for the effective programme management, planning, delivery and monitoring of their learning programmes. There are adequate staff development activities to ensure that the teaching and support staff are kept updated for the quality delivery of the programmes.

c. Programme Objectives and Learning Outcomes

The learning outcomes reflect the stated programme objectives which should be fit for purpose in the local context. The QF Level of the learning outcomes must correspond to the GLD for the purpose of the QF.

d. Programme Content and Structure

The content and structure of the learning programmes is coherent, integrated and effective to enable learners to achieve the stated learning outcomes and the required standards. The learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities and assessments must be coherent and balanced. The programme enables progression and is pitched at the appropriate level in QF.

e. Admission Requirements and Student Selection

The minimum admission requirements for the learning programmes are clearly stated for learners and staff. These requirements and the learner selection process ensure that learners enrolling in the learning programmes have the knowledge and skills to undertake the learning activities.

f. Teaching and Learning

The teaching and learning activities designed for the learning programmes are effective in delivering the intended learning outcomes and programme content. Appropriate teaching methods are employed to effectively engage learners in the learning process.

g. Workplace Attachment (if any) and Student Support Services

Operators provide learners with clear, accurate information and access to support services and workplace attachment (as appropriate) that give learners optimum opportunity for successful completion of the programme.

h. Student Assessment

Assessments support effective learning and enable learners to demonstrate attainment of the learning outcomes and the required standards. The assessment methods and techniques are valid, reliable, fair and sufficient to reflect the learning outcomes at the stated QF levels.

i. Quality Assurance (including Programme Development and Management)

Operators (i) develop learning programmes by addressing the needs of the community, employers and employees; and (ii) monitor and review the performance of all their learning programmes on an ongoing basis to ensure that the contents remain current, and teaching and learning activities are effective.

j. Student Records and Information Management

Operators have effective management systems and procedures to ensure the integrity, security, accuracy and currency of their records.

11. What comes after submission of accreditation document?

11.1 Similar arrangements as that appear in Paras. 5.1 and 5.2.

12. What are the possible outcomes?

12.1 The possible outcomes are approval, approval with pre-condition(s) and/or requirement(s), and non-approval. The accreditation report prepared by the HKCAAVQ will include the following:

- Validity period
- Pre-condition(s) and/or requirement(s), if any,
- QF level, and
- Learner numbers, if applicable

12.2 Where pre-condition(s) and/or requirement(s) are stipulated, the fulfilment of the pre-condition(s) and/or requirement(s) within a specified timeframe is mandatory to obtain and/or to maintain accreditation status.

12.3 Paras. 6.3 to 6.7 are applicable here.

13. What to do before the validity period expires?

13.1 Operators should apply to have their learning programmes revalidated by the HKCAAVQ at least six months before the expiry date of the validity period. If revalidation is not completed by the expiry date, the accreditation status will automatically lapse and the related qualifications of the learning programmes on the QR will be indicated as expired. The revalidation process is similar to that of PV.