



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

GUIDELINES ON
SUBSTANTIAL CHANGE FOR OPERATORS
WITH IR OR RE-IR STATUS

November 2007

Guidelines on Substantial changes (For Operators with IR or Re-IR Status)

Preamble

1. These Guidelines are intended to serve as general reference for operators which have been granted an accreditation status upon satisfactory completion of an Institutional Review / Re-Institutional Review by the Hong Kong Council of Academic Accreditation (HKCAA). The HKCAA has been renamed as the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) (the Council hereunder) with effect from 1 October 2007.
2. These Guidelines supersede any previously published guidance notes, guidelines and handbook(s) on the same matters. As the Council has assumed its new accreditation role under the Qualifications Framework (QF), these Guidelines will also cover quality assurance requirements to underpin the QF, for operators which wish to have their learning programmes recognised under the QF.
3. Whilst the Council endeavours to ensure the accuracy of these general guidelines, no statement, representation, warranty or guarantee, express or implied, is given as to its accuracy or appropriateness for use in any particular circumstances. The Council reserves the right to delete, suspend or edit all information at any time in its absolute discretion without prior notice.
4. For clarification or further information, please contact the Council at Telephone number 3658 0000 or info@hkcaavq.edu.hk

Introduction

1. An operator accredited at institutional level has been evaluated to determine whether it has an overall appropriate academic environment, including appropriate institutional structure and processes, resources, quality assurance mechanisms and academic plans suitable for the conduct of learning programmes at specified level(s) within the approved validity period. Should there be any substantial changes in the aforesaid scopes of

operation that may have an impact on the accreditation status of the operator, prior approval should be obtained from the Council.

2. The accreditation status of the operator will lapse if substantial changes introduced are not approved by the Council. The IR status is a prerequisite for the operation of accredited learning programmes recognised by the Council. The accreditation status of all current approved learning programmes will therefore automatically lapse with effect from the lapse of the validity of the IR status of the operator.

Substantial Changes

3. Examples of substantial changes are given below:
 - a) Changes in the purpose/status/structure of the operator (e.g. private or public character, ownership, legal status, merging of operators, creation or change in the component division which is responsible for academic development, engagement of other local or non-local partners in programme planning/delivery).
 - b) Change in the academic model of the operator such as a change which leads to significant revisions in the operator's orientation and programme objectives, leading to a different mode of operation , e.g. from a predominately face-to-face delivery to a distance learning mode.
 - c) Change in the campus plan/finance model of the operator.

Processing of Change Proposals

4. Operators should communicate with the Council at a sufficiently early time when they plan to introduce substantial changes at the organisational and/or programme level. Ideally, formal substantial change proposal should be submitted to the Council **four months prior to the planned implementation date** but it is acknowledged in some cases a shorter period of notice can be unavoidable or that in an extreme case retroactive approval might become necessary. However, in order to protect quality and to discourage the deliberate avoidance of obtaining prior approval, as a matter of principle, the steps to be followed in such cases must stay as close as possible to the normal process.

5. The basic information required in the submission includes the following:
 - a) A description of the change with particular reference to the scale and scope of the change.
 - b) Discussion of the rationale for the change and the internal approval process that has been undertaken by the operator for the change.
 - c) Relationship and implication of the change to the operator and/or its academic development activities.
 - d) Justifications that the operator continues to possess the necessary academic environment including but not limited to quality assurance processes, human, financial and physical resources to manage the change without affecting its ongoing conduct of the learning programmes at specified level(s) meeting the QF standard(s).
6. If the operator plans to offer new programme(s) at level(s) outside the approved accreditation scope, it is very clear that these changes are substantial changes and will be processed via the conduct of a standalone programme validation exercise.
7. Where the substantial changes are at the organisational level, an assessment will be made to determine the impact of the change. Whilst 'peer review' should remain the main approach for accreditation, for practical and cost considerations, HKCAA Secretariat professional staff, based on the records of the original IR / re-IR exercise and their knowledge of the operator, will conduct a first assessment of the proposed changes to decide whether the changes can be accommodated within the current IR / re-IR approval. If it is decided that the proposed changes indeed require examination by peers, an appropriate Panel exercise will be organised in consultation with the operator concerned.
8. Where deemed necessary, an approval for change may be subject to pre-conditions or requirements.

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Attachment 1

Checklist for Preparing a Substantial Change Proposal

All substantial change proposals should receive prior HKCAAVQ approval before implementation. In preparing the proposal, sufficient time has to be allowed for the Council to complete the process which may include panel review and normally takes about 3 to 6 months. The operator is therefore advised to make an **early consultation with the Council at the initial planning stage** and **submit the change proposal at least 4 months prior to the implementation date for the change.** While the Council will strive to process the change in good time, the Council will not be held responsible for any consequences in the circumstances that the change cannot take effect according to the operator's preferred timeframe.

The operator should prepare a comprehensive, self-contained proposal on the substantial change, making reference to the following guidelines.

Content of a Substantial Change Proposal

The following guidelines offer some general advice on required information for a substantial change proposal. Operator should include any other information and supporting evidence deemed relevant to its proposal:

For changes in the organisational structure of the operator in aspect(s) pertaining to ownership, control, legal status, financial model, strategic development or creation/integration of component division(s) of the organisation responsible for the quality and standards of the programmes covered under the IR/Re-IR status of the operator, the following should be provided:

- New information on *relevant* items in the following list should there be consequential changes affecting the governance and/or organisational structure
 - ✧ New organisational management
 - ✧ Updated mission statement and strategic plan

- ✧ Academic development plan
- ✧ Financial model and evidence of its viability
- ✧ Programme approval, monitoring and review processes
- ✧ Staffing policies
- ✧ Quality assurance policies and procedures
- ✧ Resources and support services

For changes in the academic model of the operator (such as the change in delivery mode of the programmes from a predominately face-to-face to distance learning or vice versa), or change in the fundamental orientation of the programmes, *relevant* information in the following list should be provided:

- The implications for the operator's governance and organisational structure
- Description of how new delivery systems and modes of instructions are designed and how their effectiveness and satisfaction of students' need will be assessed
- Evidence that the operator is capable to provide adequate human, administrative, financial and physical resources and processes to initiate, maintain and monitor the new delivery mode and to assure that the teaching and learning activities undertaken can be accomplished with the requisite QF standard at the specified level
- Resource plans for equipment acquisition and maintenance and staff training programmes

For changes in the operator's campus plan such as the acquisition of a new campus or additional campus site, the following should be provided:

- Campus location, size, teaching and other special teaching provisions, space and provisions for students' physical, cultural and developmental activities
- Evidence of official approval for its acquisition (e.g. copy of lease/assignment, legal document from the appropriate authority to use the campus for the stated purpose), operating budget, minutes of Board/Committee meeting showing action to approve the new campus

- In the case of a *replacement new* campus, description of how the operator has identified the suitability of the new campus for its strategic development and the specific needs for services and learning resources of students with due regard to the approved scope of the approved IR/Re-IR status.
- For the acquisition of an *additional* campus, the following should be supplemented:
 - ◇ Evidence of sufficient fiscal and physical resources to support the additional location, on areas such as course delivery, assessment, staff deployment, staff/student communication
 - ◇ Changes in quality assurance system to align with the new physical setting of the campuses
 - ◇ Description of how the additional campus can help meet the operator's strategic development and the specific needs for learning resources and services of students, with due regard to the approved scope of the approved IR/Re-IR status
 - ◇ Revised student intake and enrolment plan for all campuses and changes in student admission and associated policies, if any.

For changes involving the extension of the IR/Re-IR approval (including the offer of programmes at a qualification level outside the scope of the approved accreditation status), the operator has to provide the following information:

- A description of the planning process which has led to the request for change, including:
 - ◇ The educational purposes of the change and its relationship with and effect on the operator's overall strategic directions
 - ◇ The experience of the operator in planning and managing programmes within the proposed QF level.
- A list of proposed new programmes and the projected student intakes for the next 3 years
- The admission requirements, intended learning outcomes of the proposed programmes and a definitive programme document of one sampled programme within each proposed QF level

- A description of the teaching/learning and assessment strategies specific for the proposed learning programmes leading to the delivery of learning outcomes at specified QF level
- Evidence of sufficient resources to support the on-going development of programmes at the proposed new areas/QF levels, including qualified staff to steer and manage programme development
- Evidence of adequate and appropriate equipment and facilities, including library, computing and other learning resources to support the proposed learning programmes at the proposed QF level for the next 3 years
- A description of any specific aspects of quality assurance relevant to ensure the outcome standards of learning programmes at the proposed QF level
- Other relevant documents as that required for considering application for the proposed accreditation status.

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