

External review of the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic & Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE

October 2019

1. Background and Context

Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic & Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) is applying for the external evaluation of the agency's quality assurance activities, as listed under point 2.1 of this document, against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). HKCAAVQ does not seek membership in ENQA nor registration on European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). The review is undertaken by the agency as a process to stimulate trust in quality assurance and quality of its higher education, and to support and add to the legitimacy of the agency as an internationally recognised external quality assurance agency.

Key Information of HKCAAVQ

- HKCAAVQ is an independent statutory body established in 1990 providing quality assurance and assessment services to education and training institutions, course providers and the general public. In addition to its statutory roles, HKCAAVQ also provides advisory and consultancy services in education qualifications and standards to government bureaux and other organisations in Hong Kong and the Asia-Pacific region.
- The vision of HKCAAVQ is to be a nationally and globally recognised independent quality assurance body in education and training, dedicated to high quality accreditation, assessment and consultancy services.
- The mission of HKCAAVQ is to safeguard the credibility of qualifications under the Qualifications Framework and enhances the quality of education and training in Hong Kong through provision of efficient and effective quality assurance services.
- The four-year Strategic Plan ([2015-2019](#)) builds on the Vision and Mission with implementation of the Plan monitored through annual progress reports from the Secretariat to the Council.
- In Hong Kong, accreditation by HKCAAVQ is mandatory for local programmes offered by non-self-accrediting institutions carrying the award titles of Associate Degree, Higher Diploma, Bachelor Degree or other higher degrees. Non-self-accrediting institutions that wish to operate programmes at Bachelor degree level or above are required to seek registration under the *Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance* (Cap 320). HKCAAVQ conducts Institutional Review (IR) for institutions that wish to seek registration under Cap 320 as a consultant.
- In 2009, HKCAAVQ started to extend its accreditation services to non-local programmes

(NLPs) which are registered under/exempted from registration under the *Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance* (Cap 493). Accreditation of NLPs is voluntary.

- In 2016, HKCAAVQ also started to conduct IR for institutions that wish to seek private university title. After a successful IR, institutions can apply for the granting of private university title to the Chief-Executive-in-Council. HKCAAVQ also conducts this work as a consultant.
- Under Section 4(2)(a) of the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 1150), HKCAAVQ may, subject to the prior approval of the Secretary for Education, conduct accreditation tests outside Hong Kong. This includes non-QF accreditation service for accredited Hong Kong Operators offering learning programme outside Hong Kong, primarily in Mainland China; as well as institutional and programme reviews for higher education institutions outside Hong Kong, primarily Macao.

2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

This review will evaluate the way in which and to what extent the core quality assurance activities of HKCAAVQ meet the ESG. The outcomes of the review will not be considered for the membership of HKCAAVQ in ENQA nor as the registration of the agency on EQAR. The review panel is not expected to make any judgements as regards granting membership in ENQA.

2.1 Activities of HKCAAVQ within the scope of the ESG

This review will analyse the core quality assurance activities of HKCAAVQ that are within the scope of the ESG, i.e. reviews, audits, evaluations or accreditation of higher education institutions or programmes that relate to teaching and learning (and their relevant links to research and innovation).

The following Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (QF) related accreditation activities of HKCAAVQ will be addressed in the external review:

- Academic accreditation (Four-stage Quality Assurance Process under QF)
 - Initial evaluation
 - Learning programme accreditation and re-accreditation
 - Programme area accreditation
 - Periodic Institutional review
- Accreditation of non-local programmes
- Accreditation for online programmes

3. The Review Process

The process is designed in the light of the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews*.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation of the Terms of Reference and protocol for the review;
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel;
- Self-assessment by HKCAAVQ including the preparation of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to HKCAAVQ;
- Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report by the review panel;
- Scrutiny of the final evaluation report by the ENQA Review Committee;
- Analysis of the scrutiny by the ENQA Board;

- Follow-up of the panel's and/or ENQA Board's recommendations by the agency, including a voluntary progress visit.

3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members

The review panel consists of five members: two quality assurance experts, an academic employed by a higher education institution, student member, and an additional member with knowledge and understanding of the context of higher education and quality assurance in Hong Kong. One of the members will serve as the chair of the review panel, and another member as a review secretary. For ENQA Agency Reviews at least one of the reviewers is an ENQA nominee (most often the QA professional[s]). At least one of the reviewers is appointed from the nominees of either the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), and the student member is always selected from among the ESU-nominated reviewers. The additional member may be drawn from the large number of UK academics that have worked in Hong Kong or other European academics that have had experience in higher education or quality assurance of higher education in Hong Kong.

In addition to the five members, the panel will be supported by the ENQA Secretariat review coordinator who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA expectations are met throughout the process. The ENQA staff member will not be the Secretary of the review and will not participate in the discussions during the site visit interviews.

Current members of the ENQA Board are not eligible to serve as reviewers.

ENQA will provide HKCAAVQ with the list of suggested experts with their respective curriculum vitae to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The experts will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement as regards HKCAAVQ review.

3.2 Self-assessment by HKCAAVQ, including the preparation of a self-assessment report

HKCAAVQ is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-assessment process and shall take into account the following guidance:

- Self-assessment is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;
- The self-assessment report is broken down by the topics of the evaluation and is expected to contain, among others: a brief description of the national HE and QA system; background description of the current situation of the Agency; an analysis and appraisal of the current situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a SWOT analysis; each criterion (ESG part II and III) addressed individually. The agency's QA activities as listed under point 2.1 of this document will be described and reflected upon to what extent do they meet the ESG.
- The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which HKCAAVQ fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG.
- The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat who has four weeks to pre-scrutinise it before forwarding the report to the panel of experts. The purpose of the pre-scrutiny is to ensure that the self-assessment report is satisfactory for the consideration of the panel. The Secretariat will not judge the content of information itself but whether the necessary information, as stated in the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews, is present. In case the self-assessment report does not contain the necessary information and fails to respect the requested form and content, the ENQA Secretariat reserves the right to reject the report and ask for a revised version within four weeks. In such cases, an additional fee of 1000 EUR will be charged to the agency.
- The report is submitted to the review panel a minimum of six weeks prior to the site visit.

3.3 A Site Visit by the Review Panel

HKCAAVQ will draw up a draft proposal of the schedule for the site visit to be submitted to the review panel at least two months before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule includes an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the site visit, the duration of which is 2,5 days. The approved schedule shall be given to HKCAAVQ at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The review panel will be assisted by HKCAAVQ in arriving in 10 Siu Sai Wan Road, Chai Wan, Hong Kong.

The site visit will close with a final de-briefing meeting outlining the panel's overall impressions but not presenting the findings on whether the agency's activities as listed under point 2.1 of this document meet the ESG.

3.4 Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report

On the basis of the review panel's findings, the review secretary will draft the report in consultation with the review panel. The report will take into account the purpose and scope of the evaluation as defined under articles 2 and 2.1. It will also provide a clear rationale for its findings with regards to each ESG. A draft will be first submitted to the ENQA review coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity and language and it will be then submitted to HKCAAVQ within 11 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If HKCAAVQ chooses to provide a statement in reference to the draft report it will be submitted to the chair of the review panel within two weeks after the receipt of the draft report. Thereafter the review panel will take into account the statement by HKCAAVQ, finalise the document and submit it to ENQA.

The report is to be finalised within three months of the site visit and will not exceed 40 pages in length.

4. Follow-up Process and Publication of the Report

HKCAAVQ will consider the expert panel's report and will publish it on its website once the ENQA Board has made its decision. The report will also be published on the ENQA website, regardless of the review outcome and decision by the ENQA Board. HKCAAVQ commits to preparing a follow-up plan in which it addresses the recommendations of the review panel and to submitting a follow-up report to the ENQA Board. The follow-up report will be published on the ENQA website, in addition to the full review report and the Board's decision stating to what extent the agency's activities as listed under point 2.1 of this document meet the ESG.

The follow-up report will be complemented by a small-scale visit to the agency performed by two members of the original panel (whenever possible). This visit will be used to discuss issues, based on the ESG, considered as of particular importance or challenge by HKCAAVQ. Its purpose is entirely developmental and has no impact on the decision stating to what extent the agency's activities as listed under point 2.1 of this document meet the ESG. Should the agency not wish to take advantage of this opportunity, it may opt out by informing the ENQA Review Coordinator about this.

5. Use of the report

ENQA shall retain ownership of the report. The intellectual property of all works created by the expert panel in connection with the review contract, including specifically any written reports, shall be vested in ENQA.

The review report is used by the Board of ENQA for the purpose of reaching a conclusion on whether HKCAAVQ has met the ESG. The review report is to be considered final only after being approved by the ENQA Board. Once submitted to HKCAAVQ and ENQA and until it is approved by the Board the report may not be used or relied upon by HKCAAVQ, the panel and any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. HKCAAVQ may use the report at its discretion only after the Board has approved of the report.

6. Budget

HKCAAVQ shall pay the following review related fees:

Fee of the Chair	4,500 EUR
Fee of the Secretary	4,500 EUR
Fee of the 3 other panel members	6,000 EUR (2,000 EUR each)
Fee of 2 panel members for progress visit	1,000 EUR (500 EUR each)
Administrative overhead for ENQA Secretariat	7,000 EUR
Experts Training fund	1,400 EUR
Approximate travel and subsistence expenses	20,600 EUR
Travel and subsistence expenses for progress visit	7,000 EUR

This gives a total indicative cost of 52,000.00 EUR VAT excl. for a review team of 5 members. In the case that the allowance for travel and subsistence expenses is exceeded, HKCAAVQ will cover any additional costs after the completion of the review. However, the ENQA Secretariat will endeavour to keep the travel and subsistence expenses in the limits of the planned budget, and will refund the difference to HKCAAVQ if the travel and subsistence expenses go under budget.

The fee of the progress visit is included in the overall cost of the review and will not be reimbursed in case the agency does not wish to benefit from it.

In the event of a second site visit required by the Board and aiming at completing the assessment of compliance (i.e. the extent to which the agency's activities as listed under point 2.1 of this document meet the ESG), and should the agency accept a second visit, an additional fee of 500 EUR per expert, as well as travel and subsistence costs are recoverable from the agency.

7. Indicative Schedule of the Review

Agreement on terms of reference	October 2019
Appointment of review panel members	May 2020
Self-assessment completed	15 August 2020
Pre-screening of SAR by ENQA coordinator	August/September 2020
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	September 2020
Briefing of review panel members	October 2020
Review panel site visit	Late-November 2020
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	Late-January 2021
Draft of evaluation report to the agency	February 2021
Statement of the agency to review panel if necessary	March 2021
Submission of final report to ENQA	April 2021
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board	May 2021
Publication of the report	May 2021