

香港學術評審局

HONG KONG COUNCIL FOR
ACADEMIC ACCREDITATION

HKCAA

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Executive Director: Miss WS Wong

**ACCREDIT
NOTE**

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Note from the Editor

We are pleased to announce the launching of the official Web site of the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation. Nowadays, a wide range of information and services could be obtained on the Web because of its interactive and multimedia capabilities. With the increasing popularity of the Web, our Council decided to widen access to our information and services by launching a Web site for the HKCAA, which is now accessible at www.hkcaa.edu.hk. The Web site is intended to achieve several objectives. First, it provides general information about the HKCAA's roles and functions, our consultancy services available, and our publications. It introduces the composition of the HKCAA and our distinguished Council members. Second, it provides electronic access to the HKCAA for clients, which include government and non-government organizations, and members of the public. Third, it incorporates Web links to relevant government bodies, the degree-awarding institutions in

Hong Kong, overseas higher education periodicals and journals, etc. Fourth, it facilitates communication between the HKCAA and local/non-local tertiary institutions and quality assurance agencies. Last but not the least, it is a vehicle of keeping clients and members of the public updated about the HKCAA's current and forthcoming activities.

These days, people probably learn as much from the Web as they do from print. In this connection, HKCAA, as the independent academic accreditation body in Hong Kong providing authoritative advice on the quality of higher education courses, realizes the immense potential of electronic delivery of education but at the same time we should always caution ourselves of the quality issue inherent in web-based courses. We should not be blinded by Web mania. Rather, we should harness the potential of the Web to provide quality education. To achieve all these, more research studies must be carried out with the support of our

subject specialists and advisors, the local tertiary institutions and relevant government bodies.

We are also pleased that at the same time our Council is releasing the second edition of the Academic Programmes Guide. This follows the successful publication of the first edition some years ago which contained information on non-local courses of study offered in Hong Kong. This edition carries those programmes of study, participating on a voluntary basis, which have been registered or exempted under the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance. This will be a useful reference tool for students or for those in employment who wish to pursue further study in Hong Kong through part-time or distance learning mode. The range of courses is very wide, in terms of level and discipline of study; the expected standards and outcome of the programmes are also very diversified. Being a free market which emphasizes consumer choice, Hong Kong does allow a wide choice of educational provisions from both local and non-local institutions. Consumers are invariably guided by a number of factors when making their choice and these may include personal interest, applicability of the knowledge, the financial outlays, the demands of the programme of study in terms of time and effort, its acceptability by employers,

amongst others. As a quality assurance organization, we would always advise that consumers of educational services should regard the quality of the product as a top priority. One should also realise that the road to quality is not an easy one, despite the many facilities and conveniences that are now affordable or made available through electronic or other means. Advances in technologies or breakthroughs in teaching methods may open up new vistas but do not necessarily make for a short or easy route to educational achievement. We hope the Academic Programmes Guide will assist consumers to make an informed and intelligent choice.

W S Wong
Executive Director, HKCAA

COUNCIL MEETING

The Nineteenth Council meeting was held on 4 June 1999. At this meeting, Council reviewed the assessment work in respect of our advisory role to the Registrar of Non-local Higher and Professional Courses.

There were also activity reports on accreditation and qualification assessments. The progress made by the Standing Committee on Qualifications (reported in the February 1999 issue) in dealing with policy and special issues in qualification assessment was also reported.

The meeting considered some new consultancy projects, mainly concerned with establishing comparability between local and non-local qualifications. It also approved the revised budgets and estimates for 1999/2000.



(from left) Mr Edmund Leung, Council member, Mr Joseph Wong, Secretary for Education and Manpower, Dr Andrew Chuang, Council Chairman, and Dr Eddy Li, Council member at Council dinner on 3 June 1999.



HKCAA Council members and staff members at the Nineteenth Council Meeting.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON QUALIFICATIONS

The Council had formed a Standing Committee on Qualifications, primarily to consider and recommend benchmarks and guidelines for the assessment of qualifications. It would also address special cases of assessment which may arise from time to time.

The Committee is chaired by Mr Edmund K H Leung, OBE, JP and members include Council members, Dr Richard M W Ho, JP; Mr Raymond Wong, SBS; Professor David Dunkerley; Professor Peter Dobson; and Executive Director, Miss W S Wong.

Since its formation in December 1998, the Committee has met three times.

ACCREDITATION NEWS

Validation of Bachelor of Education (Honours) (Primary)

The new two-year full-time Bachelor of Education (Honours) (Primary) course was validated in early March 1999. The course was designed to upgrade the qualifications of holders of the Certificate in Primary Education to degree level. It was approved for five student intakes from 1999/2000 to 2003/2004.

UGC Chairman, Dr Alice Lam (second from right) being pictured at the Council dinner with HKCAA Chairman Dr Andrew Chuang (right), member Dr Eddy Li (left), and the Executive Director Miss W S Wong



Validation of the Three-year Part-time Mixed-mode Bachelor of Education (Honours) (Early Childhood Education)

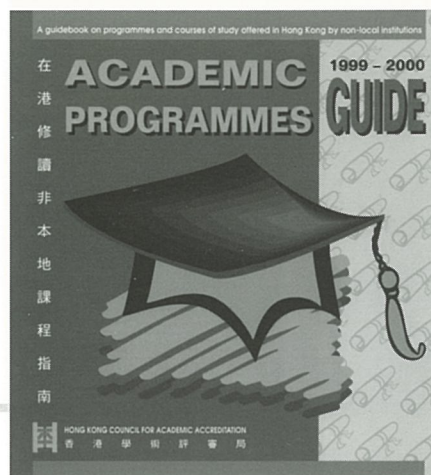
In March 1999, the Council validated the three-year part-time mixed-mode Bachelor of Education (Honours) (Early Childhood Education) degree programme of the Hong Kong Institute of Education. This is a top-up programme for graduates from the Institute's two certificate courses, the Certificate in Kindergarten Education and Certificate in Early Childhood Education.

The proposed programme was approved for implementation for three student intakes from 1999/2000 to 2001/2002.

Validation of PGDE (Technology)

The new two-year part-time Postgraduate Diploma in Education (Technology) programme was validated in April 1999. The programme was the first PGDE in secondary education to be offered by the HKIED as well as the first PGDE programme in technical education in Hong Kong. The programme was approved for three student intakes from 1999/2000 to 2001/2002.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES GUIDE



In Hong Kong there is a continuous demand for post-secondary education. Possibly over 15,000 adults are currently enrolled in some 550 programmes offered by non-local institutions of higher education and professional bodies at sub-degree, degree and post-graduate level. The size of this student body is mammoth and getting near the size of one of our larger local tertiary institutions.

There is immense public interest in information on the full range of educational provisions offered by non-local institutions in Hong Kong. In particular, potential students are concerned about varying academic standards and recognition status in different countries. To address the knowledge gap the HKCAA compiled the second edition of the Academic Programmes Guide to enable those in Hong Kong who

wish to seek such educational opportunities to make an informed choice.

The Guide is a 630-page publication, in English with the introductory parts in Chinese, which covers 246 study programmes/courses offered by 94 non-local institutions of higher education and professional bodies from seven countries. While participation by the institutions was on a voluntary basis, all programmes contained in this Guide must have been registered or exempted under the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance.

The Guide categorizes study programmes according to discipline, content and type (post-graduate, degrees, sub-degrees and so on) and there are cross-references according to countries and institutions. There are also introductory sections providing interpretations of types of programmes, a synopsis of the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance, a user guide (to help readers evaluate the appropriateness of the programmes for their own purposes) and advice about the accreditation process and acceptability of programmes in their respective countries. While the accreditation status of the programmes are stated, the Guide is not a list of programmes or courses recognised by the

HKCAA or employers in Hong Kong. Non-local course operators are now required to include in any advertisement a statement to the effect that "It is a matter of discretion for individual employers to recognise any qualification to which this course may lead".

The HKCAA envisages that the Academic Programmes Guide 1999-2000 will provide the starting point for readers to begin thinking about and comparing prospective programmes of study, but it should also prompt the potential student to make further enquiries and obtain updated information. Part of the purpose of the Guide is to assist the consumer to make the right enquiries before making his choice.

The Guide was officially released on 25 June 1999 and is now available to the public at the cost of HK\$190 per copy by mail order or from the Government Publications Centre, A & P Campus Bookshop, Commercial Press, Joint Publishing and Hon Wing book stores.

THE INTERNATIONAL NETWORK CONFERENCE

The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) held its fifth international conference in Santiago, Chile from May 2-5, 1999. The HKCAA is

the founding member of the Network, having initiated its formation at the first conference of quality assurance agencies held in Hong Kong in 1991. The HKCAA acted as the Secretariat for the Network after its establishment, from 1991 to 1994 and published the Network journal QA. It is therefore very appropriate that at the Conference the HKCAA Executive Director, Miss W S Wong, was elected a member of the Board of the Network, being the only Board member representing Asia.

The Network currently holds biennial conferences and it is planned that the next conference will be held in India. There are

Assurance of Offshore and Distance Learning Courses: Evaluating the Evaluation by Home Institutions" was presented. The presentation summarised the Council's experiences in the assessment of non-local courses for registration under the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance. It was suggested that while many non-local institutions had genuine concern for the quality of their offshore operations, sometimes problems in respect of the maintenance of quality arise. This may be due to the difficulties associated with operating and maintaining control at a distance, the difficulties in understanding the local educa-



also plans to hold smaller conferences/workshops in between the biennial conferences, to cater for the interests and needs of accreditation agencies.

The Council was represented by Professor Y K Fan and Executive Director Miss W S Wong and a paper entitled "The Quality

Members of the Council, Dr Christian Thune (left) and Professor Y K Fan pictured at the INQAAHE Conference at Santiago, with the Executive Director Miss W S Wong.

tional scene, or problems associated with obtaining suitable local resources and support.

The paper also emphasizes

the importance of entrusting the local quality assurance/ accreditation agencies of the importing countries with the role of monitoring the quality of non-local courses of study, as the local agencies have detailed knowledge of the actual operation of the courses. At the same time, the quality assurance agencies of the exporting countries have a similarly important role to play.

The HKCAA presentation generated immense interest among the participants, in particular attendees from South American countries, which are also importers of educational programmes from overseas such as the US and Spanish-speaking countries.

The HKCAA Executive Director visited the Chile Higher Education Council after the Conference and had a fruitful exchange with the Council's Director, Ms María José Lemaitre, who was re-elected as a Board member of the Network. The Chile Higher Education Council was the host organisation for the Network Conference and should be congratulated for the success and smooth operation of the Conference.



(from left) Mr Li Zeng Wu, Mr Felix Leung, Professor Yu Dao Yin, Miss W S Wong, Professor Wang Zhi He and Professor Zhou Qi Gang at the Tianjin University.

VISIT TO TIANJIN

The Council received formal invitations to visit the Tianjin University (天津大學) and Tianjin Normal University (天津師範大學). The Executive Director, Miss W S Wong and Registrar, Mr Felix Leung subsequently visited the universities in June 1999.

The visit began with the Tianjin University. This was arranged through the courtesy of Professor Wang Zhi He, a former senior professor at the University, and Dr Zhou Qi Gang, both of whom are known for their research into education evaluation and accreditation. The HKCAA representatives were met by the

Vice-President, Professor Yu Dao Yin and senior Faculty members of the University. The meeting was followed by a tour of campus and library facilities. Known as Peiyang University (北洋大學) when it was founded in 1895, Tianjin University is a key national university under the Ministry of Education. The University is now a comprehensive university incorporating science, engineering, management, liberal arts and law.



Miss W S Wong, Executive Director of HKCAA, presenting a souvenir to Professor Yu Dao Yin, Vice-President, Tianjin University.



The Executive Director Miss W S Wong speaking at the Tianjin Normal University.

At a forum attended by over 80 academic staff, municipal government officials, and postgraduate students, the Executive Director and Registrar gave presentations in the international trend and development in accreditation systems in higher education; and the roles and functions of the HKCAA respectively. Both topics generated a lot of interest and resulted in stimulating discussions on the different evaluation and assessment approaches. An additional discussion forum was arranged to further exchange views on accreditation policy and practice on the Mainland and Hong Kong and in particular the evaluation for excellence which the University had just experienced and come out with good results. The interactive dialogues were greatly appreciated.

The Tianjin visitation continued at the Tianjin Normal University.

Founded in 1958, the University is a key institution under the jurisdiction of Tianjin Municipal Government. The HKCAA representatives met with the President, Professor Gao Ti and Vice-President, Dr Wang Gui Lin of the University and had fruitful exchange on academic evaluation in higher education institutions, as well as the provision of teacher education and training in the Mainland and Hong Kong.

The Executive Director and Registrar were also requested to give presentations about the work



Professor Gao Ti, President of Tianjin Normal University presenting a souvenir to Miss W S Wong, Executive Director.

of the HKCAA and the international trend and development on quality assurance in higher education. The presentations were well-attended by about 70 teaching staff and postgraduate students. Particular interest was shown in how to apply the HKCAA and other international experiences to the evaluation practice amongst the local institutions of higher education.

The HKCAA representatives greatly appreciated the hospitality given by our Tianjin hosts. The visit paved the way for future exchanges and dialogues with the academic community in northern China.

VISITS TO THE HKCAA

The HKCAA received a number of visitors and delegations from outside Hong Kong in the last few months, some of them being featured below:

1. In January 1999, the Honourable Yeung Yiu-chung, Legislative Counsellor, visited the HKCAA and discussed matters relating to the assessment of qualifications by the HKCAA. Mr Yeung was given an introduction about the Council's work and was informed about principles and criteria used by the Council.
2. Professor Peter Putnis, Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University of Canberra visited

the HKCAA in March to explore the feasibility of the University offering a Postgraduate course in Hong Kong.

3. Members from the Hong Kong Management Association visited the Council in April to give an update on the DMS programme jointly offered by the Association and the Lingnan College.
4. On 13 May, Mr Cheng An-Kuo of the Chung Hwa Travel Service visited the Council and was informed about the work in academic accreditation and qualification assessment undertaken by the HKCAA. Views were also exchanged with respect to academic qualifications from Taiwan, China.
5. In June, representatives from the University of Leeds and Hong Kong Baptist University visited the HKCAA to exchange views on matters pertaining to the offer of the BA (TESOL) programme by the two universities in Hong Kong.
6. In June, the Council received a visit from members of the alumni association of the Jinan University, China.



The Honourable Yeung Yiu-chung (middle), Legislative Counsellor being pictured during his visit to HKCAA with the Executive Director Miss W S Wong.

HKCAA 10th ANNIVERSARY INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE IN 2000

The Council is organising an International Conference on 4 and 5 December 2000 in Hong Kong as one of the key events to mark its 10th Anniversary.

The HKCAA was established in 1990 as an independent statutory body to accredit local degree programmes offered by non-university tertiary institutions. Since then, the Council has witnessed the development and self-accreditation of a number of institutions while at the same time extending its professional services to other new and challenging areas, including the provision of consultancy services to the Government on academic qualifi-

cations and advisory services in relation to the registration of non-local courses in Hong Kong. It is an appropriate time that upon its 10th anniversary next year the Council hosts an international conference both to sum up experiences and to look forward to new developments in quality assurance in the next century.

The Council hosted its first international conference in July 1991 at which the Council initiated the establishment of the *International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education*. The *Network* now has a total of over 100 full and associated members from 50 countries. The main function of this *Network* is to provide a forum for exchanging views, information and experience of quality assurance and related matters in higher education throughout the world.

The theme of the year 2000 conference is "New Millennium: Quality and Innovations in Higher Education" (新紀元高等教育之創新與質量保證). It will offer a forum for educationalists from around the world to explore and exchange views on the following important issues:

- Differences in philosophy and teaching approach among institutions: how these impact on quality assurance.
- Evolving new forms of education such as distance learning

and the use of electronic delivery: what are the new considerations in quality assurance.

- Development of the global student market and the delivery of off-shore courses: how to ensure quality through new strategies.
- Extending quality assurance beyond teaching and learning: other areas of institution management and staff development as new focus of quality.
- Diversity in quality assurance: the rivalry or collaboration between internal and external/government and non-government mechanisms in quality assurance.
- Process or outcome oriented quality.
- Building of quality culture and the pursuit of continuous quality improvement.

The programme of the Conference will include keynote speeches, forum presentations and parallel sessions. Renowned speakers in the higher education sector from overseas and the Mainland have been invited to share their vision and experience with the delegates during the two-day conference. Details will be announced in the next issue of the *Accredit Note* and on the Council's webpage

(www.hkcaa.edu.hk).

Registration forms for the conference will be available around October 1999.

ARTICLES

The following paper was jointly presented by Council Member, Professor Y K Fan and Executive Director, Miss W S Wong at the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education Fifth International Conference in Santiago, Chile (May 2-5, 1999).

THE QUALITY ASSURANCE OF OFFSHORE AND DISTANCE LEARNING COURSES: EVALUATING THE EVALUATION BY HOME INSTITUTIONS

The purpose of this paper is to describe the evaluation process of an external quality assurance body, the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation, in respect of the offshore courses imported into Hong Kong, which in effect amounts to the evaluation of the internal evaluation conducted by the exporting institutions and its effectiveness.

The Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation has a responsibility under the Non-local Higher and Professional (Regulation) Ordinance in Hong Kong to advise the Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region on the

registration of non-local courses offered in Hong Kong by non-local institutions leading to academic and professional awards.

This paper begins with a summary of the work and experience of the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation in its advisory role on the registration of such courses since the implementation of the Ordinance. It then addresses the following questions in relation to the quality and quality assurance of off-shore and distance learning courses:

- What are effective measures to ensure the quality of offshore and distance learning courses?
- What are the problems and limitations faced by institutions in offering offshore courses?
- What is the role of accreditation/quality assurance bodies in the home country and importing country?

It is recognised that there are no definitive answers to the above questions but this paper will attempt to discuss the issues from the perspective of the HKCAA, which has involved in a rather unique role in advising on the quality of non-local courses.

HKCAA

The Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA) was established by

Government in 1990 as an independent statutory body to provide authoritative advice to the Government on the academic standards of tertiary institutions and the standard of degree programmes in the higher education institutions in Hong Kong. It also offers advice in respect of local and non-local academic qualifications and educational standards for organisations and individuals. The Council is a non-profit making organisation.

The role of the HKCAA is

- (a) to provide independent authoritative advice on academic standards in an institution of higher education by carrying out academic accreditation, that is
 - (i) validating or revalidating any degree programme conducted by the institution; and/or
 - (ii) reviewing the general academic standards of the institution;
- (b) to advise on the academic standards of degree programmes and qualifications from within and outside Hong Kong;
- (c) to advise the Registrar of Non-local Higher and Professional Education Courses on the registration of non-local courses;
- (d) to promote good practices of academic accreditation and quality assurance, and to assist in maintaining and monitoring academic standards;
- (e) to issue publications, conduct seminars, conferences and other forms of developmental activity relating to education and quality assurance;
- (f) to establish and maintain relationships with educational bodies and accrediting agencies in other places and to keep under review the education systems and systems of academic accreditation of places outside the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region;
- (g) to advise the Government on matters pertaining to academic accreditation and academic standards; and
- (h) to carry out such other functions connected with academic accreditation and evaluation as may be permitted or assigned to the Council by the Government and the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

The Registration Process and Criteria in Hong Kong

It is important to delineate the purpose of the legislation in Hong Kong for the control of non-local courses, and the HKCAA's role in this. The Ordinance which was implemented in Hong Kong, requires

all courses conducted in Hong Kong, leading to academic and professional awards to be registered before they can operate or advertise legally in Hong Kong. While it is the Government's intention to maintain free trade and the free import of educational services into Hong Kong in order to protect consumer interests, it also considers necessary to introduce a form of legislation to ensure that sub-standard courses do not operate in Hong Kong. The benchmark used is that of the non-local course as operated in its home country.

Thus the main criteria under the Ordinance for registration, for academic courses, include:

- (a) the institution is a recognised non-local institution;
- (b) effective measures must be in place to ensure that the standard of the course is maintained at a level comparable with a course conducted by the institution in its home country leading to the same qualification; and
- (c) this comparability in standard must be recognised by the institution, the academic community in that country and the relevant accreditation authorities in that country (if any).

It should be emphasised that the Ordinance does not set a

local benchmark in academic standard for the registration of non-local courses, but rather, require that courses be maintained at a comparable standard with the home course.

Some Statistics

Our Council has over the past one and half years assessed over 280 non-local courses applying for registration. There are about an equal number of courses which have applied for exemption under the Ordinance, making a total of over 500 such courses.

The majority of the courses seeking registration are in the business and management area. The largest exporter of courses to the Hong Kong market are UK and Australia.

The greatest majority of these courses lead to academic qualifications (degrees, postgraduate degrees, and sub-degree awards) while there are a small number of courses leading to professional qualifications.

Measures for Ensuring Quality

Almost all institutions offering courses in a foreign country would have a declared policy to maintain the standard of offshore courses at comparable standards with the home course. The concern for quality of the home institution is seldom questionable. However, it is a different matter whether institutions have

in place effective measures for ensuring quality, and whether these measures are actually effective in implementation.

There are no set criteria as to what could be deployed as effective measures for maintaining and ensuring the quality of courses offered in another country. Each institution should be able to put in place measures which are in line with its philosophy and practices, and measures which it considers necessary and effective. Broadly speaking, it would be expected that

(a) institutions would have instituted internal procedures and systems for approving, designing, validating and monitoring its offshore operations. In other words, there should be a comprehensive policy and system to deal with the offshore provisions and their quality issues, and these procedures and mechanisms should be vigorous enough to be comparable to procedures for the quality assurance of internal courses. In actuality, these control and monitoring measures might need to be even more vigorous, or more thorough, since control and monitoring is being carried out at a distance.

(b) It would also be expected that the actual operation of the

course in offshore campus demonstrates that there are effective measures to ensure comparability in standard. The usual indicators of standard, as for any academic course of study, would include, inter alia:

- Admission requirements and practice
- Course design and syllabus
- Course delivery and teaching
- Learning support and student support
- Assessment criteria and procedures

The above are generally recognised in the academic world as useful indicators of quality. It is not sufficient that institutions have statements, or stated policies, about the quality assurance procedures of their offshore operation. It is important that the effectiveness of any such measures be demonstrated through the actual operation of the course and the above indicators.

It should be remembered that offshore courses are operated away from the home campus and thus generally without the usual institutional support and academic environment. Effective measures therefore relate to the ways and means by which the awarding institutions attempt to provide alternative

support and an alternative environment for the students on the offshore courses while maintaining a comparable standard.

Very often the offshore courses are also adapted to the local situation, with changes/adaptations in the content and aims of the course; and/or change in the study and delivery mode, such as from a face-to-face to a distance learning or mixed mode; and sometimes with changes in the entry requirements. It is particularly in such situations that it is important that effective measures are in place to ensure that these changes/adaptations do not affect adversely the quality of the course, and that suitable compensations or safeguards are in place to maintain comparability in quality.

Problems Encountered in Maintaining the Quality of Offshore Courses

Due to the nature and special circumstances of offshore operations it is to be expected and it has been found to be case, that there are often problems in connection with the maintenance and monitoring of quality. Generally, the problems may arise due to the following circumstances:

(a) Lack or inadequacy of control measures:

The nature of offshore operations may lead to a very lax system of control and moni-

toring of the offshore operation. Institutions may not realise the need for a full-fledged system of control and quality assurance. Monitoring mechanisms may be delegated to faculties/departments or international offices and there is little control by the central administration. And in many cases even where a vigorous system is put in place, its implementation may be defective. Two often important decisions may be left to local operators/agents in the foreign country who do not follow institutional guidelines even where these exist.

(b) Unfamiliarity with or lack of understanding of the local education system:

Institutions may not have sufficient local knowledge, in particular about the local education system and qualifications. Problems arise in particular when the non-local institutions admit students on the basis of local qualifications and equivalence have to be drawn with the qualifications in the home country.

Unfamiliarity can result in wrong academic decisions being made, not only in setting entry requirements for courses, but also where courses are adapted or tailored made for the local market.

(c) Changed mode of delivery:

To overcome the difficulty posed by operating in a distance country, institutions often change the mode of delivery, and sometimes choose a mode of delivery which is not adopted in the home campus. For instance, an institution which has no experience in distance learning may choose to offer an offshore course in the distance learning mode, or a mixed mode involving distance learning with some face to face tuition.

Unfamiliarity and inexperience with new modes of delivery may often result in a deterioration in standard and a failure to deliver a comparable learning experience for the students on the off-shore course.

(d) Difficulty in obtaining local resources:

One has to remember that when institutions offer offshore courses they are operating in an environment which does not have the same institutional or resource support. They are either unable or unwilling to deploy their home staff to teach the course and may rely heavily on locally recruited staff. This reliance on local resources depend for its success on the availability of adequate and suitable local resources which are not always available. The difficulty arises with other types of resources such as library and computing

facilities and other student support which are taken for granted on the home course.

(e) Non-academic considerations or constraints:

In some cases, either the awarding institutions or the local operations/agents may be constrained by many considerations which may conflict with the academic consideration of offering a quality course. These constraints may be of many types: resource or financial constraints; targets of financial return; limitations in obtaining good local resources in terms of staffing or facilities; the need to promote a course attractive to the local market etc.

Despite the many innate difficulties of distance/off-shore education, none of these are actually insurmountable. However, it is also recognised that it is not possible to expect that a course of study, removed from its home academic environment with all the attendant resourcing and support, can be transported in its entirety to another country without some effect on its original flavour and quality. It is not expected that the student learning experience will be entirely the same but it is expected at least that sufficient compensations be in place to render it comparable.

Evaluating Evaluation

This brings us to the question of

the responsibility for the quality assurance for offshore courses.

These days many countries have relegated responsibility for the quality of programmes and courses to the tertiary institutions. Even where an external quality assurance body exists, it no longer oversees the quality of individual degree programmes. If this is the case in the home institution, there is even less external monitoring of courses conducted overseas, and the responsibility for offshore courses becomes the sole responsibility of the offering institution.

Even in countries and systems where there is an external accreditation authority with a monitoring role at the programme level, the remit of this authority often does not go beyond the home territory. Therefore, in both situations one finds that evaluation of offshore courses is based upon evaluation by the offering institution.

The experience of our Council, in assessing the non-local courses offered in Hong Kong, has shown that the evaluation by the offering institution cannot be relied upon completely for the guarantee of quality and we have discussed various possible reasons for this.

It is possible to argue that sometimes home institutions are not perfect in monitoring the quality of their on-campus courses. This may be true. However, we are not in a position to speculate

whether institutions which have better internal quality mechanisms are better able to monitor the quality of offshore courses. We suspect the correlation is not direct, and that there are many factors which could intervene between good internal systems and the implementation or adaptations of these for an overseas mode of operation.

We have seen from the above that sometimes the awarding institutions are faced by constraints in implementing quality assurance measures, and that there are limitations to their effectiveness. Therefore, there are valid arguments for the responsibility for the quality assurance of offshore provisions to be additionally taken up by either an authority in the importing country, as in the case of Hong Kong. In this case, hopefully this role will result in improved quality assurance measures, and an enhanced awareness by the awarding institutions of defects and limitations.

At the same time, there is a case for the quality assurance or accreditation authority in the awarding institution's home country to take a more active role. This can be in the form of recommended codes of practice, either to be exemplary or mandatory in nature, or in the form of selective audits of overseas provision. There is also a case for these authorities to work with their counterparts in the importing

countries to ensure that quality assurance measures or codes of practice are indeed effective and having an impact on the actual quality of study programmes.

Evaluating Standards

Lastly, we would like to state that the role of our Council, as an external evaluation of non-local/offshore courses, stops at the function of "evaluating evaluation" and that we do not make judgements on academic standards per se. We pass comment on the ability of the non-local institutions in maintaining comparable standards with their home courses and what they claim to be effective measures for so doing. However, bearing in mind that the purpose of the legislation in Hong Kong is to ensure that overseas institutions offer to the students in Hong Kong a comparable course to what they offer to their home students, our Council's role is limited to this purpose. There are pros and cons for these limitations to the role of the external body. The positive side is that it ensures a lively range of educational products on the market and a wide range of consumer choice. The downside is that greater burden is placed on the consumer to evaluate standards themselves.

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The following is an article written by Dr Christian Thune, HKCAA member and Director of the Danish Institute of Evaluation:

DENMARK LAUNCHES A SINGLE ORGANISATION FOR THE EVALUATION OF ALL LEVELS OF EDUCATION

In May this year the Danish parliament passed a law proposed by the government and providing the legal background for a new institution, the Danish Institute of Evaluation. The mandate of the Institute is internationally unique because it is given the task by parliament to undertake systematic and mandatory evaluation of teaching and learning at all levels of the educational system from kindergarten classes to postgraduate programmes.

A major inspiration for this government initiative was the experience of success with external evaluation of teaching and learning in tertiary education.

Denmark was one of the first countries in Europe to set up a national system for the external evaluation of higher education. The Danish Centre for Quality Assurance and Evaluation of Higher Education was established in 1992 with the mandate to evaluate all higher education programmes at university as well as non-university level at a regular and systematic basis.

The Centre was set up for an initial period of seven years and on the condition that the Centre itself would be subject to an evaluation to form the basis for the decision

whether the Centre should obtain status of a permanent body. This evaluation took place in 1998 and a panel with international expert concluded very favourably on the procedures and methodologies applied by the Centre. A Danish consultancy firm did a major survey of the impact of the evaluations on higher education institutions and programmes.

However, the focus of this evaluation changed when the government launched the idea of establishing an evaluation agency not only responsible for the evaluation of higher education but of all sectors of the educational system. Accordingly, the evaluation of the Centre was redefined to concentrate on the lessons learned and to discuss methodological considerations for the future. On the other hand, the government decided to integrate the Centre into the Danish Institute of Evaluation so that this new organisation could during its launch period base itself on the staff and experience of the Centre.

In order to understand the expectations of government and parliament it is necessary to point to two highly visible elements in the recent Danish political debate on education. Firstly there has been much concern about the transition from one level to the next in the educational system whether it be the transition from primary to secondary or from secondary to tertiary education. Secondly OECD surveys during the 90's have identi-

fied surprisingly low skill levels of Danish primary school pupils in elementary reading and mathematics.

The corresponding political focus is reflected in the various provisions in the law for the priorities and activities of the new Institute.

Thus it is stated that evaluations can be horizontal as well as vertical in focus. In other words, evaluations may either cover teaching and learning in mathematics nationwide at the same level or evaluations may cover the development of teaching in this discipline from primary level up to the tertiary level.

The law stresses some specific points that echo the important lessons learned by the Danish Centre of Evaluation. One point is that the primary focus is improvement of the quality of teaching and learning and only the secondary focus is accountability vis-a-vis government. This same perspective can be found in the explicit statement that the new Institute is not going to rank institutions or programmes.

The Danish Centre of Evaluation repeatedly has stressed that of the major elements of evaluation procedures the self assessment by institutions or programmes is the core element. Interestingly enough, this point is reflected in the law which explicitly states that self assessment must be included in all

evaluations.

The new Institute is to be governed by a board with eleven members covering the main levels and sectors of education. Board members are appointed by the Minister of Education but the law is very elaborate in the paragraphs that provides the board with essential independence and integrity.

The board held its first meeting in June and must now during the autumn make very important decisions on priorities and planning. This includes extensive recruitment of new staff. The former Centre of Evaluation had a budget of approximately US\$ 2 million whereas the budget of the new Institute starts out at approximately US\$ 7 million.

In this context, it is important that the mandate of the Institute demands that apart from evaluations the Institute is responsible for analysis and information on central issues in education and responsible for the development of relevant evaluation methods. This latter task will demand considerable resources in that there is little precedence in terms of distinct evaluations of primary and secondary education. In Denmark, as in most countries, government at these levels has based its concern for quality on more inspectorate like procedures.

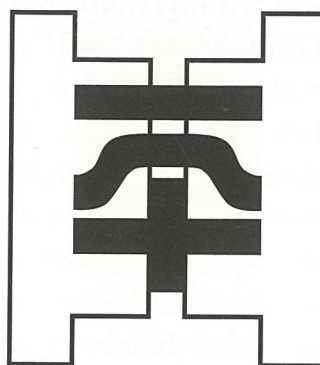
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Institutional News- Lingnan College

In September 1998, the Lingnan College was granted self-accreditation status by the Government. It assumes the responsibility for accrediting its own degree programmes, subject to the normal periodic external reviews of its teaching and learning quality processes and other quality assurance measures undertaken by the funding body.

The very first of this arrangement was the validation of the BA (Hons) Cultural Studies Programme which took place during the period from March to May 1999, marking a milestone in the College's development after its attainment of self-accreditation status, in which new validation procedures are adopted.

At the last sitting of the 1998-1999 session of the Legislative Council in July 1999, Legislative amendments were passed to formally name the College as Lingnan University. The HKCAA wishes to congratulate the University on its new status.



香港學術評審局

Contribution of Articles

Any article (or information) relating to accreditation or quality assurance issues in higher education is welcome. Please send your contribution to the Editor, *Accredit Note*, c/o HKCAA, 14/F., Ruttonjee House, 11 Duddell Street, Central, Hong Kong by **30 November 1999 for the next issue.**

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