



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

Guidance Notes on Substantial Change to Accreditation Status

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 The *Guidance Notes on Substantial Change to Accreditation Status* (Guidance Notes) is intended to serve as a general reference for accredited Operators under the Four-Stage Quality Assurance Process who plan to seek approval from HKCAAVQ for changes introduced at institutional/organisational and/or learning programme levels. The Guidance Notes aims at providing details of the categorisation of change including substantial change, minor change and significant departure, and the corresponding application and approval procedures. The information is not meant to be exhaustive. Operators should discuss their proposed changes with HKCAAVQ before submission of application. HKCAAVQ will make the final decision on the category of change and the handling procedures of the application.

2. The Relationship between Accreditation Status and Substantial Change

- 2.1 The provisions of the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 592) and Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 1150) specify that HKCAAVQ may vary or withdraw an accreditation report if an Operator and/or its learning programme is no longer competent to meet the standards and/or objectives as claimed.
- 2.2 HKCAAVQ may vary or withdraw the accreditation status of an Operator and/or its learning programme(s) at any time during the validity period if there has/have been substantial change(s) introduced by the Operator without prior approval obtained from HKCAAVQ.
- 2.3 An Operator is required to seek approval from HKCAAVQ before implementing any substantial change at institutional/organisational level and/or programme level. The purpose of obtaining prior approval from HKCAAVQ for any substantial change is to ensure that an Operator or a learning programme can continue to meet the accreditation standards after implementing the change, and thus the accreditation status can be maintained.
- 2.4 Based on information provided by the Operator, HKCAAVQ will determine the category of the proposed change. For substantial change, HKCAAVQ will advise the scope of assessment, the handling procedures and the schedule.
- 2.5 Operators are advised to consult HKCAAVQ before submission of an application for substantial change.

3. Principles for Processing Substantial Change

3.1 HKCAAVQ follows the following principles for processing substantial change proposed by an Operator.

Continuous improvement and quality enhancement

3.2 An Operator granted an accreditation status is expected to be engaged in an on-going process of review, evaluation and self-improvement. The process may lead to changes at different levels. HKCAAVQ will assess the substantial change applications in light of the expectation on the Operator for continuous improvement and quality enhancement.

Meeting accreditation standards

3.3 An Operator and/or a learning programme shall continue to meet the accreditation standards after the implementation of the proposed substantial change.

Fitness for purpose

3.4 The fitness for purpose principle will be taken into consideration when HKCAAVQ assess the substantial change applications, with due attention paid to:

- (a) scope, nature and magnitude of the proposed change;
- (b) capacity of an Operator continue to achieve the objectives as claimed; or
- (c) capacity of a learning programme continue to meet the accreditation standards and/or objectives as claimed.

4. Categories of Change and Handling Procedures

4.1 There are three categories of change with different handling procedures:

Categories of Change	Handling Procedures
Substantial change Change that leads to modification of the approved scope and/or nature of the accreditation status of an Operator or a learning programme.	Assessment
Significant departure Change that leads to significant departure from the approved scope and/or nature of the accreditation status of an Operator or a learning programme.	New accreditation
Minor change Change that does not have impact on the approved scope and/or nature of the accreditation status of an Operator or a learning programme.	Nil (Informing HKCAAVQ is not required, but proper QA procedures should be kept. If in doubt, please consult HKCAAVQ.)

4.2 Examples of substantial change, significant departure and minor change are provided in Sections 5-7. The examples are provided for reference only and by no means exhaustive. HKCAAVQ will make the final decision on the category of change and the handling procedures.

5. Substantial Change

- 5.1 Substantial change refers to change introduced at institutional/organisational and/or learning programme levels leading to modification of the approved scope and/or nature of the accreditation status of an Operator or a learning programme. The Operator needs to demonstrate its competency to continue meeting the accreditation standards after implementation of the change.
- 5.2 An Operator is required to seek approval from HKCAAVQ prior to the implementation of substantial change.
- 5.3 The following are examples of substantial change. These examples are indicative and by no means exhaustive. After considering the initial information provided by the Operator, it is at HKCAAVQ's discretion to determine if a proposed change should be considered as substantial change and will be handled with the assessment procedures.

(a) Change at Institutional / Organisational level

Change on governance and planning

- mission / business nature of an Operator
- governance / organisational / management structure of an Operator
- academic / strategic goals which has impact on the institutional philosophy or mission of an Operator
- scope of training services, e.g. from provision of in-house training to public training
- academic / training model, e.g. from predominately face-to-face teaching/training to a blended mode of face-to-face and online teaching/training

Change on resources and facilities

- previously approved campus development plans
- campus site / training venue where a learning programme is delivered
- funding model or resource distribution policy

Change on management and administration

- policy and/or mechanism of quality assurance
- School(s) / Department(s) / Unit(s) under the Operator responsible for delivering the learning programme(s)

(b) Change of a learning programme

Change on programme positioning, curriculum and syllabus

- title of a learning programme and/or a qualification

- aims/objectives of a learning programme and/or the Programme Intended Learning Outcomes (PILOs)
- Modules Intended Learning Outcomes (MILOs) which have an impact on the programme aims/objectives and the PILOs
- addition / deletion / combination of module(s)
- practicum or internship
- QF Level of individual module(s) which does not affect the approved QF level of the learning programme
- addition of a new minor / elective stream but not leading to new qualification
- conversion to a Specification of Competency Standards (SCS) programme
- change in programme / module content leading to a variation of 10% or more of the total QF credits of the learning programme within the validity period (for vocational programmes)
- QF credit(s) of individual modules where changes lead to a variation of 10% or more of the total QF credits of the learning programme within the validity period (for academic programmes)
- reduction of programme length by 30% or more of the approved duration (for vocational programmes)

Change on programme delivery, assessment and support

- delivery mode of the learning programme, e.g. addition of a part-time mode or a different language mode
- adoption of online learning platform to provide structured teaching, learning and assessment for less than 50% of the instruction and supervised learning
- assessment strategy at programme level, e.g. assessment scheme, weighting on written and/or practical assessments, continuous and/or final assessments
- learning and teaching support of a learning programme, e.g. reduction in specialised teaching facilities and/or out-sourced teaching facilities
- requirements on graduation
- teaching/training venue at which a learning programme is delivered and/or assessed

Change on admission

- requirements on admission
- add / change of credit accumulation and transfer policy (e.g. exemption or advanced standing)
- more than 10% increase in the approved number of enrolment per year or the approved maximum number of new students/learners per year
- more than 10% increase in the maximum number of learners per class (for vocational programmes)

Change on staffing

- appointment criteria of programme development and teaching staff
- staff deployment plan of a learning programme, e.g. shift to predominant use of part-time teaching staff (for academic programmes)
- add or change of outsourcing arrangements for the delivery of certain modules

6. Significant Departure

- 6.1 Significant departure refers to change that leads to significant impact on the approved scope and/or nature of the accreditation status of an Operator or a learning programme, e.g. changes where majority of the domains of competence are affected.
- 6.2 These changes are to be processed by full scale accreditation as appropriate and the relevant accreditation guidance notes and accreditation fee will apply.
- 6.3 The following are examples of significant departure. These examples are indicative and by no means exhaustive. It is at HKCAAVQ's discretion to determine if a proposed change is considered as a significant departure and will be processed by accreditation.

(a) Change at Institutional / Organisational level

- legal status, ownership or form of control
- IE status, e.g. an Operator with IE status at QF Level 3 will need to undergo another IE exercise if it intends to operate learning programmes at a higher QF Level
- partnership or collaboration arrangements for a non-local programme or a local joint programme
- extension of PAA status to other programme areas or higher QF Levels
- extension of the PAA status to a subsidiary

(b) Change of a learning programme

- Area of Study and Training
- QF Level
- addition of a new minor or elective stream leading to a new qualification
- addition of an intermediate exit award leading to a new qualification
- change to an online learning programme (i.e. more than 50% of the instruction are delivered through an online learning platform)
- QF credit(s) of core modules leading to a variation of 20% or more of the total QF credits of a learning programme within the validity period (for academic programmes)
- programme content and/or QF credits leading to a variation of 20% or more of the total QF credits of a learning programme within the validity period (for vocational programmes)

7. Minor Change

- 7.1 Minor change refers to change that does not have impact on the approved scope and/or nature of the accreditation status of an Operator or a learning programme.
- 7.2 An Operator can implement minor change without informing HKCAAVQ. However, the Operator is required to retain documentary evidence that such change has gone through the internal QA process. The documentary records of minor change should be included in the submission for re-accreditation.
- 7.3 The following are examples of minor change. These examples are indicative and by no means exhaustive.
- a module title or re-coding of a module without affecting the programme aims, objectives, PILOs or MILOs
 - sequence of modules of the same subject which does not affect the PILOs, progression within the learning programme and the credit points in a semester
 - addition / change of prescribed textbooks and recommended reading list of a module without affecting the programme aims, objectives, PILOs or MILOs
 - learning and teaching activities of a module without affecting the programme aims, objectives, PILOs or MILOs
 - extension of programme length or reduction in programme length by less than 30% of the approved duration (for vocational programmes)
 - update of programme / module content leading to a variation of less than 10% of the total QF credits of the learning programme within the validity period (for vocational programmes)
 - QF credit(s) of individual modules where changes lead to a variation of less than 10% of the total QF credits of the learning programme within the validity period (for academic programmes)
 - External Advisors / Examiners without affecting the appointment criteria
 - Programme development and teaching staff without affecting the appointment criteria
 - addition of staff development schemes and activities
 - addition of student support services
 - student record management system without affecting integrity, security, accuracy and currency of the records
 - company director / Head of Operator without impact on the ownership and governance of an Operator

8. Assessment Process for Substantial Change

- 8.1. Operators should submit application for substantial change *via the e-portal* with relevant and sufficient supporting documents to HKCAAVQ **at least three months prior to the implementation date of the proposed substantial change**. Under special circumstances (e.g. change in student/learner number), this required timeframe may be shortened and each special request will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- 8.2. Upon receipt of the application for substantial change and the required supporting documents, HKCAAVQ will determine whether the proposed change is considered as a substantial change.
- 8.3. The Operator is required to provide documentation evidence that all proposed changes have gone through its internal QA mechanism.
- 8.4. HKCAAVQ will decide whether the substantial change will be assessed by means of paper-based review, or together with a meeting or site visit.
- 8.5. HKCAAVQ may engage specialist(s) who have the expertise and experience in the discipline / industry / quality assurance to review the substantial change.
- 8.6. HKCAAVQ will inform the Operator the handling procedures, including the assessment scope, the timeframe for completing the process and the assessment fee, in the Service Agreement to be signed between HKCAAVQ and the Operator. The Operator may be required to provide additional information in the assessment process.
- 8.7. It normally takes 6-14 weeks to complete the assessment procedure after the Operator has returned the signed Service Agreement and the fee. The actual processing time may vary with the scope and/or nature of the proposed change.

Differentiation Approach

- 8.8. During the accreditation process, in recognition of the good track records of an Operator at both institutional/organisational and programme levels, an accredited Operator may be eligible for differentiation approach to accreditation, e.g. paper-based review accreditation. Similarly, HKCAAVQ may decide whether the differentiation approach is also applicable to the substantial change application in consideration of the nature, scale and scope of the proposed change.
- 8.9. For Operators who are eligible for the differentiation approach, the assessment will normally takes 3-4 weeks to complete after the Operator has returned the signed Service Agreement and the fee. The actual processing time may vary with the scope of the proposed change.
- 8.10. The differentiation approach is not applicable for some changes. For example:

Institutional / Organisational level	Substantial change to governance and management of the Operator or new teaching venue(s)
Programme level	Substantial change to programme title, aims, objectives, learning outcomes or qualification title

8.11. HKCAAVQ will make the final decision on the assessment procedures and the application of differentiation approach.

9. Possible Outcomes

- 9.1. The possible outcomes are approval or non-approval. Where deemed necessary, HKCAAVQ may stipulate condition(s) (i.e. pre-condition(s) and/or requirement(s)) and/or restriction(s) to an approval for substantial change.
- 9.2. The validity of the approval for substantial change will align with the validity period of the accredited programme. Implementation of the approved substantial change will be subject for review in the re-accreditation of the learning programme.
- 9.3. HKCAAVQ shall inform the Operator of the outcome according to the time schedule stated in the Service Agreement.

10. Fees

- 10.1. HKCAAVQ is a statutory, not-for-profit self-financed body. HKCAAVQ's fee schedule is published on the HKCAAVQ website at <http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk>.
- 10.2. The fee for the assessment of the substantial change will be determined by scope and /or nature of the assessment in terms of the accreditation standards under the domains of competence and the costs with reference to the accreditation fee charged for a regular accreditation exercise at a particular QF level. HKCAAVQ reserves the right to determine the number of domains of competence to be assessed.
- 10.3. The fee for substantial change will be set out in the Service Agreement.

11. Points to Note

- 11.1. The Guidance Notes supersedes any previously published guidance notes, guidelines and handbook(s) on the same matters. The Guidance Notes is also subject to refinement and revisions from time to time and the most updated version of the Guidance Notes is available on the HKCAAVQ website at <http://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk>.
- 11.2. Operators may seek advice from HKCAAVQ for preparing their substantial change documents. To facilitate the assessment of the application within the suggested timeline, Operators should ensure the application and all required documents are submitted in a timely manner.
- 11.3. For enquiries, please contact HKCAAVQ at info@hkcaavq.edu.hk, or by phone at (852) 3658 0000.

Flowchart for Handling Change Application

