



ADVISORY NOTE NO. 1/2024

INTERNATIONAL ACCREDITATION

INTRODUCTION

1. International accreditation has become increasingly significant because it enhances the global reputation of higher education institutions and ensures the delivery of high-quality education that meets the international standards, thereby attracting students and academic collaborations from all over the world.
2. However, in the global higher education accreditation marketplace, there are all kinds of accreditation service providers, including those which are unrecognised and have dubious records. This Advisory Note is intended to inform and educate higher education institutions about the diversity of accreditation services and providers so that the institutions that are seeking International Accreditation Providers (IAPs) are aware of both the benefits and risks to their institutional reputation.

DEFINITION

3. An international accreditation can be defined as a voluntary assessment of the quality of an institution or subinstitution, discipline, programme, mode of delivery and other institutional or learning arrangements by an authorised and recognised accreditation service provider from inside and outside the home country of the Higher Education Providers (HEPs) to demonstrate the commitment to quality assurance (QA) and continuous quality improvement by the institutions concerned. The international accreditation provides cross border external validation to the institution and programmes based on the established QA criteria and standards of the International Accreditation Providers (IAPs).
4. Although the terms accreditation and recognition are used interchangeably, they are used with specific meaning by the QA community of practice. Accreditation refers to a judgement by a panel of trained experts that a programme or institution satisfactorily meets the established standards or requirements. On the other hand, recognition refers to the status or rights conferred by other users of the accreditation outcome, for instances by regulators (which license HEPs), employers (who hire graduates), funding bodies (which provide financial support to students), other HEPs (which admit students), etc.

BACKGROUND

5. In addition to the accreditation exercise conducted by national accreditation bodies such as the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), local HEPs are also actively seeking accreditation and recognition from IAPs. Among possible benefits that the international accreditation brings to local HEPs include:
 - 5.1 enriches quality insights with regard to the institutional or programme arrangements;
 - 5.2 enhances the international reputation and recognition of the institution and programme competitiveness;
 - 5.3 attracts more local and international students, academics, partnerships and networking; and
 - 5.4 enhances the employability and mobility of graduates within their respective fields of study.
6. In principle, the international accreditation is additional to and are not substitute for the local accreditation requirements that must be complied with based on domestic requirements. HEPs need to ensure that the requirements set by IAPs do not conflict with the domestic requirements. In the event of any such conflicts, the HEPs must ensure that domestic requirements continue to be complied with.

CATEGORIES OF INTERNATIONAL ACCREDITATION

7. IAPs can be categorised by the nature of their establishment, the scope of their accreditation services, and the specific type of accreditation services provided.
8. The nature of establishment of the IAPs includes the following:
 - 8.1 Public agency, i.e., an agency established by the national governments to accredit higher education or further education at the national or sectoral level. Some examples include the MQA, Malaysia, Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT), Taiwan, and Board of National Accreditation for Higher Education (BAN-PT), Indonesia.
 - 8.2 Academic community-based agency, i.e., an agency established by universities and colleges to provide accreditation services with the aim to strengthen confidence in their education services and to establish common good practices. Two examples include the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), UK and the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities (PAASCU), Philippines.

- 8.3 Professional accreditation agency, i.e., an agency recognised in their home country as accreditor of professional programmes (e.g. engineering, architecture, medicine, dentistry, accounting) which is accepted by the regulators or licensing bodies for professional practice. Some examples include The Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET), USA, Institute of Food Technologists (IFT), US, Engineering Accreditation Board, UK and Australian Medical Council.
- 8.4 Private independent entities, i.e., entities established as profit or non-profit bodies that provide accreditation services to higher education institutions. These entities also include private entities established by individuals to provide accreditation services.
9. IAPs can also be categorised by the scope of the accreditation services provided. The scope may encompass:
 - 9.1 institution;
 - 9.2 discipline;
 - 9.3 programme; and
 - 9.4 mode of delivery [i.e., Conventional, Open and Distance Learning (ODL), Work-Based Learning (WBL)]
10. IAPs can also be categorised by the focus of accreditation services provided, which can be broadly described as follows:
 - 10.1 Comprehensive: To affirm that the curriculum and the internal quality assurance (IQA) developed, implemented, and improved conforms to good principles or minimum standards or requirements. Typically, a certificate of accreditation is issued for this type of accreditation based on the recommendations of a panel of subject matter and QA experts; and
 - 10.2 Thematic/Partial: To affirm that the IQA formulated, executed, and enhanced adheres to good principles or minimum standards or requirements. This type of accreditation does not include the curriculum and is typically issued with a certificate of assessment or review based on the recommendations of a panel of QA experts.
11. Some of the IAPs may not focus on curriculum or focus on very specific aspects of the curriculum. Therefore, HEPs must exercise utmost diligence in communicating the accreditation to diverse stakeholders.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF INTERNATIONAL ACCREDITATION PROVIDERS

12. The following criteria are useful guidelines to HEPs looking at possible international accreditation of their institutions or programmes or mode to further enhance the quality and reputation of their institutions and programmes:
 - 12.1 public or non-profit entities;
 - 12.2 recognised in the country or region of origin by the relevant regulatory authority;
 - 12.3 accredited to widely recognised global and regional standards (GGP - INQAAHE, ESG - ENQA, AQAF - AQAN, etc);
 - 12.4 accreditation standards and criteria, as well as processes are clearly defined, reviewed, and made public (e.g., principles and standards include self-review, peer-review, and evaluation report) with mechanisms in place to prevent conflict of interests;
 - 12.5 should provide added value to the programmes, academics, or graduates;
 - 12.6 qualified and competent assessors with the necessary knowledge, skills, and expertise to conduct evaluations effectively;
 - 12.7 should produce actionable reports and accreditation results that are published for public reference, highlighting commendations, conditions, and areas for improvement;
 - 12.8 national regulations and requirements are adequately satisfied in addition to their own requirements;
 - 12.9 accreditation confers the same rights and privileges to the institution or programmes; and
 - 12.10 should possess and adhere to robust data protection policies and procedures.
13. HEPs are advised to exercise due diligence in making their choice of IAPs by considering the matters stated in items 12.1 to 12.10.

COMMUNICATING INTERNATIONAL ACCREDITATION

14. HEPs use international accreditation to indicate higher quality and reputation to local and international students. In communicating the additional accreditation obtained, HEPs must adhere to the guidelines issued by the respective IAPs. Typically, these guidelines include:
 - 14.1 use of the proprietary logo without alteration;
 - 14.2 clearly stating the accreditation reference number for verification by interested parties, if need be;
 - 14.3 displaying or using the accreditation logos that reflect the defined scope of the accreditation; and
 - 14.4 not mis-stating or misrepresenting the type and scope of accreditation received.

SUMMARY

15. HEPs are advised to pursue additional international accreditation in an appropriate and strategic manner to enhance the quality of their programme(s) and reputation of their institution. The international accreditation can be part of the internationalisation agenda to attract local and international students, as well as partners. To this end, this Advisory Note provides guidance to HEPs in understanding the IAPs in terms of their establishment, type of accreditation, scope of their accreditation, and how these accreditations should be used in general communication with the public.
16. HEPs are encouraged to remain current on the status of the IAPs and to avoid what may be accreditation mills that put the institution and its programmes at risk.
17. The international accreditation serves as a supplement to and not as a substitute for the local accreditation, which is a requirement under domestic requirements.

Please note that the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) does not provide confirmation of any international accreditation. This includes, but is not limited to, the validity, credibility, or recognition of such accreditations. Reference can be made to the website of reputable International Organizations Network, for instances the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), and Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

Any further inquiries can be directed to MQA through the Enquiry and Complaint Management System at <https://www2.mqa.gov.my/sppav2/>.

MALAYSIAN QUALIFICATIONS AGENCY (MQA)
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NOTE:

This Advisory Note was also shared with relevant stakeholders to gather their input and feedback, which were instrumental in refining and finalising this document.