

# **Principles, Criteria and Standards for Recognising Qualifications in Social Work**

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**Social Workers Registration Board  
Hong Kong**

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## Foreword

The Social Workers Registration Ordinance, Chapter 505 of the Hong Kong Laws, specifies that unless having satisfied other requirements, a registered social worker (RSW) shall be holder of a degree or diploma in social work recognised by the Social Workers Registration Board (the Board).

The Board is therefore obliged to assess qualifications in social work to ascertain whether to recognise them for the purpose of registration of RSWs. In this regard, the Board has delegated to its Committee on Qualification Assessment and Registration (the Committee), amongst other duties, to:-

- (A) Set, review and recommend to the Board the principles, criteria and standards for recognising qualifications in social work; and
- (B) Establish lists of degree or diploma in social work, conferred in Hong Kong or other countries, recognised by the Board.

Social work is a practice-based profession that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Professional social work practice is guided by social work values and beliefs, and underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge. The Committee sees it as essential that RSW should embrace the following seven professional attributes that are being nurtured throughout the course of their study in the social work programme.

### 1. Demonstrate ethical practice

Social workers adhere to social work values and beliefs. They demonstrate that these values and beliefs are integral to their practice. They uphold their ethical responsibilities and act appropriately when faced with ethical issues and dilemmas.

### 2. Promote human rights and social justice

Social workers believe in human rights and social justice. They are knowledgeable about theories of human need and social justice, and strategies to promote them. They engage in practices that promote human rights and social justice.

### 3. Respect and support diversity and difference in practice

Social workers understand how diversity and difference characterise and shape people's experiences and identity formations. They understand that, as a consequence of difference, people may experience marginalisation, oppression and alienation, as well as privilege, power, and acclaim. Social workers respect and support diversity and difference, and prepare themselves to practise in a responsive and inclusive way.

### 4. Possess knowledge for practice

Social workers have the knowledge required for effective practice. They demonstrate a critical understanding of specific social work theories underpinning social work practice at micro, meso and macro levels for individuals, families, groups, organisations,

communities and societies. They are able to articulate and use knowledge from other academic disciplines.

5. Demonstrate abilities and skills for practice

Social workers demonstrate the abilities and skills, underpinned by theories or evidence, required in practice at micro, meso and macro levels for individuals, families, groups, organisations, communities and societies. They apply these abilities and skills effectively in information collection, engagement, assessment, intervention and evaluation. They demonstrate oral and written communication skills for effective communication and report writing.

6. Engage in policy practice

Social workers understand their role in policy development and implementation within their practice settings. They actively engage in policy practice to effect change within those settings, as well as contribute to development and implementation of more equitable social policies.

7. Commit to professional identity and development

Social workers demonstrate a sense of identity to the profession. They understand and promote the functions of social work in the communities. They commit to ongoing learning through continuing professional development and supervision.

By setting the basic standards in the subsequent sections of this Document, the Board strives for excellence in the professional quality of RSWs. It is also the belief of the Board that by observing these standards, tertiary institutions will train competent social workers to serve the Hong Kong society. Having said so, the criteria and related standards prescribed under each of these are meant to be the baseline, and tertiary institutions are encouraged to develop their programmes at standards higher or more advanced than what are prescribed hereby.

The Committee and Assessment Teams appointed under sub-section 5.2 will base upon these standards and other principles and criteria set out in this Document to conduct assessment or periodical review of pertinent programmes leading to degrees or diplomas in social work for their recognition or continual recognition.

The assessments and reviews are for the purpose of recognising degrees or diplomas in social work for registration of RSWs. They are not intended for social work programmes designed for RSWs' professional enhancement or academic advancement.

Besides the assessments and reviews, the Board reserves the right to visit individual tertiary institutions for the aforesaid purposes when it envisages such a need has emerged.

The Board may add, amend or abandon any criteria and standards, review the mechanisms for qualification recognition, or revise any parts of this Document whenever it considers appropriate. Before any new measures or any substantial changes are put into effect, the Board will duly consult stakeholders before implementation.

## Section 1: Definitions and Abbreviations

1.1 In this document, the following expressions shall have the respective meanings:-

“Board”	Social Workers Registration Board;
“Committee”	Committee on Qualification Assessment and Registration of the Board;
“Conversion Programme”	A bachelor degree programme offered to holders of a recognised qualification led by Diploma Programmes in social work to top up their training and to pursue a recognised bachelor degree in social work; to avoid any doubt, any programme leading to a master degree will not be regarded as a conversion degree programme;
“Designated Staff”	Teaching Staff engaged by Tertiary Institutions to teach courses on subject areas specified in sub-section 4.1.3(a);
“Diploma Programmes”	Including programmes leading to diploma, higher diploma and associate degree;
“Document”	Principles, Criteria and Standards for Recognising Qualifications in Social Work;
“Employing Agency”	Any organisation (excluding Tertiary Institutions as defined below) which has been employing not less than one full-time Registered Social Worker to take up social work post within its establishment;
“Fieldwork Supervisors”	Practice teachers engaged by Tertiary Institutions to provide professional supervision, consultation, guidance and assessment to students during the period of fieldwork placement;
“HKCAAVQ”	Hong Kong Council of Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications;
“Post-degree Professional Practising Experience”	Practising experience in Hong Kong or elsewhere in social work posts, that either provide direct practice with service users or assume job duties related to social welfare policy and management, obtained after having held a recognised social work degree; those who have been, prior to 6 September 2007, a full-time or part-time Designated Staff of any programmes leading to recognised social work qualifications and remain as such on the effective date of this edition of the Document are deemed to have possessed such experience;

“Qualification”	Academic qualification in social work;
“Recognition/Recognised”	Recognition or Recognised for the purpose of registration with the Board as a Registered Social Worker;
“RSW”	Registered Social Worker in Hong Kong;
“Teaching Staff”	Staff engaged by Tertiary Institutions to teach courses on subject areas specified in sub-sections 4.1.3 and 4.1.4; to avoid any doubt, this includes the Fieldwork Supervisors;
“TI”	Tertiary Institution in Hong Kong, governed under its respective ordinance or under the Education Ordinance (Cap. 279) or the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance (Cap. 320) which is to provide degree or diploma programmes;
“UGC”	University Grants Committee;
“Working Day”	A day (excluding Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays) on which banks are generally open for business in Hong Kong.

1.2 In this Document:

- 1.2.1 Words importing one gender only shall include the other gender, and words stated in the singular may apply in the plural or vice versa.
- 1.2.2 Any terms not defined shall have the meaning(s) (if any) set out in the Social Workers Registration Ordinance.

1.3 The interpretation of this Document shall be determined by the Board whose decision shall be final.

## **Section 2: Guiding Principles**

- 2.1 The Board's criteria and standards for qualification recognition are set out in this Document, having regard to the following principles:
  - 2.1.1 Professional standards of social workers are our foremost concern. While this Document provides basic requirements and criteria set for qualification recognition and quality assurance, the Board encourages higher standards of social work education provided by TIs.
  - 2.1.2 The rights, duties and academic autonomy of the TIs are respected.
  - 2.1.3 The uniqueness and variations of various local social work programmes are to be accommodated to the farthest possibility.
  - 2.1.4 Professional standards of social workers are to be enhanced steadily and on a timely manner, with reference to similar or new standards adopted in other countries.
  - 2.1.5 The Board adopts a collaborative approach that emphasises communication and mutual respect between the Board and TIs.
  - 2.1.6 The Board is to make concerted efforts with TIs to continuously upgrade the social work education.

## **Section 3: Applicability and Compliance**

### **3.1 Applicability of the Document**

- 3.1.1 This 8<sup>th</sup> edition of the Document is applicable to qualification recognition assessments or reviews to be conducted at any time after the effective date of this edition as stated.
- 3.1.2 TIs with qualifications that have been assessed or reviewed with reference to earlier editions of this Document are to observe the provisions of those editions until the next review.
- 3.1.3 TIs need not but may apply any new or modified criteria or standards included in this edition to those qualifications until the next review, and by then the Assessment Team will be asking from the TIs for action plan to comply with the new or modified criteria or standards if continual recognition is to be recommended.
- 3.1.4 TIs may opt to apply for using this edition of the Document for qualification recognition assessment to be conducted in between the published date and the effective date of this edition as stated, provided that programme(s) leading the qualification to be assessed will be launched after the said effective date.
- 3.1.5 To avoid any doubt, TIs with qualifications to be reviewed in between the published date and the effective date of this edition should still observe those provisions of that earlier edition as referred to under sub-section 3.1.2 above, but may opt to apply for using this edition of the Document for any new initiatives or development intended to be launched after the said effective date.

### **3.2 Compliance during Period of Programme Provision**

- 3.2.1 Subject to provisions under sub-section 3.3, TIs should ensure that their programmes comply with all the requirements set out in the applicable edition of this Document and those items covered in final report of respective recognition assessment or review at all times during the period of programme provision granted by the Board, so as to maintain the recognition status of the qualifications led by such programmes.
- 3.2.2 Violation of or deviation from, involuntarily or not, the requirements may adversely affect the Board's recognition of the qualification led by the programme as well as the registration of graduates from the programme.

### **3.3 Notification of Changes**

- 3.3.1 Any matters or requirements specified for assessment or review in the following sections or sub-sections are material to the qualification recognition.
- 3.3.2 During the application process, when it has come to notice of the management of the TI any adverse changes to these matters, the TI should notify the Committee in writing within 10 Working Days. For recognized qualification, the TIs should notify the Committee as soon as practicable.



- 3.3.3 Should the change result in non-compliance with any requirement, the TI should report also the remedial measure or rectification taken or to be taken, and the timeline to fix it, where it is expected to be a period of not longer than 3 months. Upon receipt of the report, the Committee may consider and direct if any other action is to be taken by the TI or any relevant party.
- 3.3.4 When the change is substantial to an extent that the Committee considers it necessary, the Committee may direct that the programme is to be subject to an ad hoc review by an Assessment Team and the expenses are to be borne by the TI concerned.
- 3.3.5 TIs should observe this notification requirement once this 8<sup>th</sup> edition of the Document takes effect.

## Section 4: Criteria and Standards

### 4.1 Curriculum Contents and Structure

4.1.1 The programme should be structured in a manner that:-

- (a) The graduates will be competent in practising social work in Hong Kong and in meeting the needs of the Hong Kong society and of service users;
- (b) Its duration should be pedagogically reasonable to provide adequate teaching and supervision for nurturing professional social workers.

4.1.2 The mode of delivery should be on-campus, with the exception of those under the fieldwork which is off-campus by its nature. Subject to the approval by the Board, a pre-defined extent of supplementary mode of delivery, e.g. e-learning platform, is permissible.

4.1.3 The social work subject areas set out below must be included in the curriculum, that their respective components should be adequately covered in a reasonable pedagogical sequence and at the academic level of the programme.

(a) Social Work Practice

(i) Social Work Theories and Practice

- Theory and practice with individuals, groups, families, organisations, communities and societies at micro, meso and macro levels;
- Integrative social work practice;
- Social work skills training;
- Practice-related subjects, compulsory or elective;

(ii) Values and Ethics

- Personal and professional development;
- Social work values and ethics in contexts;
- "Code of Practice for RSWs" prescribed by the Board and its applications;

(b) Core Knowledge related to Social Work

(i) Social Welfare Systems and Social Policies;

- Perspectives and concepts of social welfare;
- Features of social welfare system in Hong Kong;
- Social policies and social services, and their relationship with other public policies;

(ii) Human Behaviour and Social Environment

- Life span development;
- Human behaviour in social environment;
- Human behaviour, diversity and cultural sensitivity;

(iii) Social Administration and Management

- Social planning and development;
- Agency management – models and processes;

- Programme planning, management and evaluation;
- (c) Fieldwork (details as set out under sub-section 4.1.5)
- (i) Pre-placement preparation;
  - (ii) Fieldwork placement.
- 4.1.4 Other subject areas as set out below, unless as specified the otherwise, should also be included in the curriculum, that their respective components should be adequately covered.
- (a) Use of language for social work practice;
  - (b) Self-understanding and interpersonal communication;
  - (c) Basic legal knowledge and perspectives related to social work practice;
  - (d) Sociology, psychology, and other related social sciences and liberal arts knowledge;
  - (e) Hong Kong society;
  - (f) Research and social enquiries (optional for Diploma Programme):-
    - (i) Basic knowledge and skills of research and social enquiries;
    - (i) Utilisation and application of research.
- 4.1.5 Social work programme is practice-based professional training and education, that TIs should ensure adherence to the following requirements in the subject area of fieldwork:-
- (a) Pre-placement preparation
    - (i) Minimum contact hours: 100;
    - (ii) Can be in the form of training workshops, attachments or in-depth visits to welfare agencies, which shall be either organised or recognised by the TIs, with a minimum of 70 % of such training to be organized by TIs;
    - (iii) Can be partially conducted prior to the first placement and shall be fully completed prior to the last fieldwork placement under the programme;
    - (iv) Attendance of credit-earning courses covering subject areas of sub-sections 4.1.3(a), 4.1.3(b) or 4.1.4 shall not be counted into the contact hours under this heading;
  - (b) Fieldwork placement

- (i) Must be of direct social work practice;
- (ii) Minimum contact hours:-
  - Diploma Programme: 700;
  - Degree Programme: 800 (subject to provisions under sub-section 4.1.6);
- (iii) With different exposure to students in terms of nature and background of placement agencies and practice settings;

(c) Supervision

- (i) The supervision time should be as follows:-

For fieldwork placement period of (per week)	Frequency	Supervision time (minimum hours)
3 sessions or less	Every fortnight	1.5
4-6 sessions	Weekly	1.5
7 sessions or more	Weekly	2

- (ii) Mode of supervision
  - At least 50% of the total required supervision time should be individual supervision;
  - Unless the fieldwork placement location is physically or legally not permissible, at least 50% of the total supervision time should be conducted on-site;

- (d) At least one fieldwork placement of not less than half of the required contact hours should be taken place within the Hong Kong territory;

- (e) On-the-job fieldwork placement, i.e. using the work settings of the students in their Employing Agencies as the required fieldwork placements, is permissible, subject to the following requirements:-

- (i) It is not the only fieldwork placement throughout the studying period of each programme;
- (ii) Social work duties in the fieldwork placement are distinctly designated and the period of time of such duties meets the requirement of fieldwork placement hours;
- (iii) The designated social work duties are commensurate with the level of the programme training;
- (iv) A qualified fieldwork supervisor, who is external to the Employing Agency, is assigned by the TI for the fieldwork placement.

4.1.6 In addition to the requirements under previous sub-sections, the TI intending to offer a Conversion Programme should also observe the following requirements:-

- (a) The admission criteria should specify that possession of a qualification led

by Diploma Programmes in social work recognised by the Board is a pre-requisite, and no exemption to this shall be allowed;

- (b) There should be justifications and full account that the aggregate of the learning experience rendered by those Diploma Programmes and of the Conversion Programme is equivalent to those of a similar four-year bachelor degree programme via the first-year entry route;
- (c) Subject to application by the TI, vetting and recommendation by the Assessment Team, the fieldwork may be one of not less than 400 hours' direct fieldwork placement, with or without the pre-placement preparation, and that in case of a singular fieldwork placement being provided to students, the TI should avoid duplication in placement agencies or practice settings with those taken by those students in their study of the Diploma Programmes.

#### 4.2 Minima for Persons Providing Professional Teaching

- 4.2.1 Any TI, whether applying for social work qualification recognition of any kind, or offering any number of such, should always have employed by headcount at least three full-time Designated Staff members for each social work qualification, regardless the TI is offering different programmes (full-time, part-time or mixed modes of delivery) leading to the same social work qualification, but subject always to ratio requirement of full-time engagement by headcount as specified under sub-section 4.2.5(b) or 4.2.6(b).
- 4.2.2 The minimum three full-time Designated Staff members should individually be committing at least two-third of their working hours to the teaching and administration of that social work qualification.
- 4.2.3 These three Designated Staff members shall each satisfy all of the following requirements:
  - (a) Being RSW in Hong Kong or holder of recognised social work professional qualification awarded overseas;
  - (b) Being holder of postgraduate degree in social work or a related discipline; and
  - (c) Possessing not less than 5 years' full-time-equivalent Post-degree Professional Practising Experience.
- 4.2.4 For TIs applying for the recognition, the requirement under sub-section 4.2.1 should be complied with at and after the on-campus visit as specified under sub-section 5.6.3.
- 4.2.5 Designated Staff of Diploma Programme being offered
  - (a) In addition to sub-section 4.2.3, TIs should ensure that all Designated Staff members shall each satisfy all of the following requirements:-

- (i) Being RSW in Hong Kong or holder of recognised social work professional qualification awarded overseas;
  - (ii) Being holder of degree in social work recognised by the Board, whilst those who have been employed by any TI as Designated Staff for a Diploma Programme and remain as such on the effective date of this 8<sup>th</sup> edition of the Document are exempted from this requirement; and
  - (iii) Possessing not less than 5 years' full-time-equivalent Post-degree Professional Practising Experience;
- (b) TIs should ensure that, by headcount, not less than 40 percent of its Designated Staff members are under its full-time engagement;
  - (c) TIs should ensure that not less than 80 percent of its full-time Designated Staff are also holders of postgraduate degree in social work or a related discipline.

#### 4.2.6 Designated Staff of Degree Programme being offered

- (a) TIs should ensure that all Designated Staff members shall each satisfy all of the following requirements:-
  - (i) Being RSW in Hong Kong or holder of recognised social work professional qualification awarded overseas;
  - (ii) Being holder of postgraduate degree in social work or a related discipline; and
  - (iii) Possessing not less than 5 years' full-time-equivalent Post-degree Professional Practising Experience;
- (b) TIs should ensure that, by head count, not less than 40 percent of its Designated Staff members are under its full-time engagement;
- (c) TIs should ensure that, by headcount, not less than 50 percent of its full-time Designated Staff are holders of doctoral degree, with no restriction on the field of concentration.

#### 4.2.7 Fieldwork Supervisors

- (a) Subject to the further provisions below, TIs should ensure that all Fieldwork Supervisors shall each satisfy the following requirements:-
  - (i) Shall be RSWs in Hong Kong; and is
  - (ii) Possessing not less than 5 years' full-time-equivalent Post-degree Professional Practising Experience;
- (b) Those for fieldwork placements outside Hong Kong, TIs should also ensure that all Fieldwork Supervisors are holders of a degree in social work recognised by the Board for registration and a professional qualification or status in social work equivalent to a registered social worker in Hong

Kong;

- (c) All those for fieldwork placements of a master degree programme, TIs should ensure that all Fieldwork Supervisors are also in possession of postgraduate degree in social work or a related discipline;
- (d) If and only if for the reason to enrich social work students' exposure to professional knowledge of other disciplines, TIs may draw on the expertise and experience of other academics and professions by engaging suitably qualified persons with appropriate and relevant training in a particular subject area, such as counsellor, family therapist, play therapist, clinical or educational psychologist and psychiatrist for supervision of students in related setting, subject always to the condition that fieldwork placement under this type of supervision is not the only fieldwork placement of that student under the programme.

#### 4.3 Individual Attention to Students

4.3.1 TIs should provide ample individual attention to its students in nurturing them into professional social workers, that for courses embedded with subject areas specified under sub-sections 4.1.3(a) or 4.1.3(b), regardless of the weight of such subject areas in the courses concerned, small class teaching is required for not less than one-third teaching hours of such courses.

4.3.2 The respective caps on number of students of each and such small class are prescribed as below:-

For courses embedded with subject areas under sub-section 4.1.3(a):

- (a) at 15 for a degree programme;
- (b) at 20 for a diploma programme;

For courses embedded with subject areas under sub-section 4.1.3(b):

- (c) at 20 for a degree programme;
- (d) at 25 for a diploma programme.

4.3.3 When a course being embedded with both subject areas under sub-section 4.1.3(a) and 4.1.3(b), the cap for that of 4.1.3(a) shall prevail.

#### 4.4 Governance and Academic Standards

4.4.1 TIs should be subject to regular quality assurance audit by the Quality Assurance Council of the UGC or periodic institutional review by the HKCAAVQ, and the audit or review is satisfactorily completed.

4.4.2 TIs should be financially sound, both in terms of adequate asset holding to back up its operations, and sustainable cash position and cash flow to run the operation.

4.4.3 The recognisable and distinct academic unit which is responsible for the social work programme should be led by a designated head or director who has

demonstrated both administrative and scholarly competence.

- 4.4.4 That academic unit should be adequately resourced in all respects so as to achieve objectives of the programme, in particular with a stable budgetary allocation to ensure programme planning and sustainability as well as to ensure sustainable academic plan.
- 4.4.5 That academic unit should identify themselves with the social work values as specified in the Code of Practice of the Board.
- 4.4.6 There should be an advisory committee with membership of a wide representation of relevant stakeholders, from which the academic unit may seek advice.
- 4.4.7 TIs offering social work degree programme (bachelor or master) should provide reasonable support to their Teaching Staff to cultivate a vibrant research culture within the academic unit through their involvement in research activities aiming at deliverables beneficial to academic advancement or social work practice.

#### 4.5 Supporting Facilities

- 4.5.1 There should be a reasonable collection of references related to social work, including but not limited to books, refereed journals, and audio-visual references, in hard copy or subscribed online resources, which are readily and conveniently accessible by students via facilities provided by the TIs.
- 4.5.2 There should be skill laboratories adequately equipped to provide training and pre-placement activities to students.
- 4.5.3 There should be adequate facilities in information technology for students to access to and to use.
- 4.5.4 The setting and management of the TIs' campus should allow both Teaching Staff and students sufficient space to organise activities, including but not limited to meetings, seminars, group projects, interviews, consultation and supervision, that there is an enabling environment for student activities and development which are conducive to their understanding and application of social work values.
- 4.5.5 There should be student counselling services adequately and professionally manned and funded for students to access to when in need.
- 4.5.6 There should be adequate resources allocated to support the students with special educational needs.



## Section 5: Mechanisms for Recognition

### 5.1 Local Qualifications versus Offshore or Non-local Qualifications

5.1.1 The mechanisms for recognition outlined in other parts of this section aim at programmes with most of its components delivered on campus and within the territories of Hong Kong, i.e. local qualifications.

5.1.2 For qualifications awarded by TIs domiciled outside Hong Kong, the Board adopts the following approach:-

- (a) The Board has taken the initiative of scrutinising the principles, criteria and standards for accreditation of some overseas well-established accreditation and registration bodies or of institutions, and comparing them with those of the Board. Having been satisfied with theirs, the Board has recognised the qualifications led by the programmes accredited by those bodies and institutions. The details are available and updated whenever appropriate at the website of the Board;
- (b) Besides those referred to under sub-section 5.1.2(a), holders of other qualifications awarded by TIs domiciled outside Hong Kong may apply with the following and at their own cost to the Board for assessment on an individual basis:-
  - (i) an assessment report on the qualification issued by the HKCAAVQ;
  - (ii) a document, preferably in a table form, setting out the due compliance of the programme leading to the qualification under application with the criteria and standards in the relevant edition of this Document;
- (c) The Board may assign the assessment work of such to external assessor appointed at its discretion, and based upon recommendations of the assessor, the Board would decide to recognise the qualification led by the programme or not. The Board may assess the programme without assigning to external assessor but with reference to similar qualifications assessed earlier and recognised by the Board. To avoid any doubt, even when the Board has previously recognised the same qualification, so far as the years of study are different, the Board may assess afresh.

5.1.3 For qualifications awarded offshore by TIs domiciled in Hong Kong, on their own or in partnership with others, even the qualifications bearing the same names as those already recognised by the Board, the Board will not automatically recognise them, that:-

- (a) Holders of these qualifications which were conferred on or before 6 September 2007 (when the Board then introduced this measure) may submit an application for recognition and the Board will deal with these applications on the merits of each case;
- (b) Holders of those qualifications conferred after 6 September 2007 shall

apply according to the protocol as set out under sub-section 5.1.2(b).

## 5.2 Assessment Panel and Assessment Teams

5.2.1 The Assessment Panel is the talent pool from which members of Assessment Teams are appointed for conducting qualification recognition assessments or reviews. The Board may from time to time appoint to it any individuals, who shall not be members of the Board or of the Committee or staff members of the Board office, for a term specified by the Board as it deems appropriate. Nominations may be from different organisations but the appointments are on personal basis of the individuals.

5.2.2 The Panel consists of the following 6 sub-groups, where the appointees, besides having satisfied the respective criteria throughout the period of appointment, shall, with the exception of groups (a), (b) and (c), not be occupying a full-time or part-time post of any kind in TIs awarding social work qualifications recognised by the Board in Hong Kong:-

- (a) **Local academics in social work**, who should be:
  - (i) full-time Teaching Staff members in the rank of Associate Professor (or equivalent) or above of TIs in Hong Kong, teaching Social Work subjects of programme leading to social work qualification recognised by the Board; or
  - (ii) at time of appointment to this group, having retired from the post narrated under (i) above for not more than 5 years;
- (b) **Overseas academics in social work**, who should be:
  - (i) residing in overseas countries and Teaching Staff members in the rank of Associate Professor (or equivalent) or above in social work of tertiary institutions in overseas countries, and possessing recognised professional qualification in social work awarded in their respective countries; or
  - (ii) at time of appointment to this group, having retired from the post narrated under (i) above for not more than 5 years;
- (c) **Fieldwork Supervisors**, who should be RSW (Category 1) in Hong Kong, possessing a master degree in social work (or equivalent) or above and with at least five years' experience in fieldwork teaching/co-ordination or fieldwork supervision;
- (d) **Social work professionals**, who should be RSW (Category 1) in Hong Kong, possessing a master or doctoral degree in social work (or equivalent) or above and with at least ten years' experience in social work practice;
- (e) **Representatives of Employing Agencies**, who should be either members of the board of directors of Employing Agencies, or heads, deputy or assistant heads (or equivalent) of Employing Agencies but need not be RSW;
- (f) **Non-social work professionals**, who should be practitioners of a

profession in Hong Kong which is regulated under statute by a professional or statutory body, where being holders of degree or diploma in relevant discipline is a pre-requisite for membership, registration or licensing.

#### 5.2.3 Members of the Assessment Panel:-

- (a) Are eligible for re-appointment so far as they remain satisfying the criteria for appointment;
- (b) Are entitled to an honorarium (at a rate decided at the discretion of the Board) as a token of appreciation for undertaking assignment of the qualification assessment or review;
- (c) Should inform the Board of any change to their status that may affect the appointment;
- (d) May be required to declare if they are holding any part-time teaching post or of any accreditation or advisory committee of any TIs offering social work qualifications recognised by the Board for conflict check;
- (e) May resign at any time by serving notice in writing to the Board;
- (f) May be with their names removed from the Assessment Panel when it has come to the notice of the Board that they have ceased to satisfy the criteria for appointment.

#### 5.2.4 Assessment Team

- (a) It is a team of six, one from each of the sub-groups of the Assessment Panel, selected by the Board after conflict check for conducting assessment or review of individual or a group of social work qualifications of the same TI, providing that the Board reserves its discretion to determine the actual size and composition of a particular team by selecting any number of members from the sub-groups;
- (b) The Board will decide, upon receipt of the final report from the Assessment Team, to dissolve or to extend the tenure of office of the Team;
- (c) Members of the Team formed shall elect among themselves a convenor to preside meetings of the Team. When the convenor elected is absent or resigns for any reason, the remaining members shall elect another person present to preside the meetings;
- (d) One person from either group (a) or (b) plus any two persons from the remaining groups shall form the quorum to conduct business of the Team. The Team shall deliberate its business by consensus, failing which voting by show of hands. The convenor shall have the casting vote in case of equality in vote;
- (e) In the event that a member of the Team resigns for any reason during the

course of the assessment or review, so far as there remains a valid quorum, the Board need not but may appoint a replacement, and the Team may then decide whether to re-start afresh the assessment or review or to continue with the remaining part of the exercise;

- (f) The Board may assign a professional consultant who is to render all possible assistance to the Team in all respects for conducting the assessment or review in an orderly and timely manner.

### 5.3 Period of Recognition

- 5.3.1 Both the qualification recognition assessment and review are conducted by means of assessing both the pertinent programme and the TIs concerned with reference to the applicable criteria and standards set out in this Document.
- 5.3.2 Qualification assessment means the one conducted on a qualification which is not currently on the list of degree or diploma in social work recognised by the Board.
- 5.3.3 Qualification review means the one conducted on a qualification currently on the aforesaid list.
- 5.3.4 A qualification led by different programmes, e.g. full-time, part-time, or conversion, will be assessed or reviewed in one go, embedded with examination into individual programmes on the pedagogical reasonableness and the synchronisation of different programmes. To avoid any doubt, for those different programmes leading to the same qualification previously having been granted periods of recognition with different end years, the Board will align the periods by granting extension to that with earlier end year of recognition.
- 5.3.5 If recognition is granted after a qualification assessment, unless there are specific conditions imposed that may shorten it, the initial period of recognition will be three years, with the first review to be conducted during the last year of this period.
- 5.3.6 If continual recognition is granted after a qualification review, the continual period of recognition will be another period up to a maximum of eight years, with the next review to be conducted during the last year of this continual period, the Team should consider, but not being limited to, the following factors, to determine the length of such continual period:-
  - (a) Track record of the programme and the TI, in particular the fulfillment with conditions or suggestions made by the earlier Team for assessment or review;
  - (b) Resources of the TI;
  - (c) Quality of Teaching Staff; and
  - (d) Quality of the graduates, if any.

5.3.7 Graduates from the pertinent programme where the corresponding first-year student admission falls within the period of recognition will have their qualifications conferred recognised by the Board for the purpose of registration as RSW in Hong Kong.

#### 5.4 Instigation of Assessment or Review

5.4.1 TIs should apply for recognition of a new qualification in social work in the form prescribed by the Board, submitted together with the supporting documents specified in the following sections.

5.4.2 Qualification review is conducted with the aims to ensure that:-

- (a) The programme leading to the qualification remains delivered at or above the applicable standards;
- (b) In case where there are criteria or standards newly introduced or modified during the interim of the current period of recognition, the TI is prepared to enhance the programme to align with the new set of requirements;
- (c) Either the Board or the TI concerned may initiate the review exercise during the penultimate year of the current period of recognition;
- (d) The TI concerned may apply for the review exercise to be conducted in an earlier year to accommodate any new initiatives of their own on the programme;
- (e) The Board reserves the right to conduct at own expenses a review at any time during a period of recognition when it identifies such a need and by giving reasonable prior notice to the TI concerned.

#### 5.5 Duties of the Tertiary Institutions

5.5.1 TIs are to bear the full cost incurred for conducting the assessment or the review; the Board will communicate the amount of such to the TIs upon receipt of the application for recognition or prior to commencement of the review, and the TIs are to reimburse upfront 30% of the said sum and the balance upon receipt of the final report. The reimbursement paid is non-refundable.

5.5.2 Unless it is a self-accrediting operator in Hong Kong as defined under the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance:-

- (a) For assessment: TIs should get the pertinent programme accredited by the HKCAAVQ before submitting the application to the Board. With the application, TIs are required to submit to the Board the HKCAAVQ's approval documents, including any conditions, requirements, and recommendations imposed on or suggested to the TIs;
- (b) For review: when there have been any review exercises conducted by the

HKCAAVQ during the current period of recognition of the programme, TIs are required to submit to the Board the HKCAAVQ's reaccreditation documents, including any conditions, requirements, or recommendations imposed on or suggested to the TIs.

5.5.3 TIs are to explain in the application for recognition its approach to the programme, or in the case of review, TIs are to report up to the latest possible date in the submission for review any changes of its approach to the programme, including but not limited to:-

- (a) The objectives it is trying to achieve with the programme;
- (b) The basis it is on to set the objectives;
- (c) The methodology to measure achievement of the objectives.

5.5.4 TIs are also to account for and of its activities and deployment of resources towards achieving the objectives and to attain, maintain or surpass the applicable standards prescribed in this Document, or in the case of review, TIs are to do so for the period from the first recognition or the last review up to the latest possible date, including but not limited to:-

- (a) The leadership and management of both the TIs and the programme and their teaching and learning strategies, and that of research if offering a degree programme;
- (b) The policies and procedures on:
  - (i) curriculum design;
  - (ii) recruitment of Teaching Staff;
  - (iii) student admission, including admission other than the first-year entry route (if any), and student taking leave or year off;
  - (iv) student support;
  - (v) assessment and quality assurance;
  - (vi) monitoring and review of the programme;
- (c) The physical, financial and human resources and network (in particular for the fieldwork placements) that have been or will be deployed;
- (d) Any proposed introduction of new initiatives or features to the programme, including but not limited to student admission other than the first-year entry route, and credits transfer or exemption scheme relating to social work subject areas, in particular the fieldwork placement.

5.5.5 TIs are required to send in the narratives and any related supporting documents on the matters as set out in sub-sections 5.5.3 and 5.5.4 above, which may include:-

***For assessment:-***

- (a) The Programme Prospectus or a narrative of the contents and structure of the programme and expected outputs;
- (b) Admission criteria, number of student intake, form of student assessment and evaluation, measures for language proficiency of students, route to the award and mechanism for assuring graduates' professional standard;
- (c) Student support services (e.g. counselling and personal guidance) and supporting facilities (e.g. library, skills laboratory and information technology);
- (d) The structure and profile of Teaching Staff;
- (e) Any plans for further development or innovative practices;

***For review:- (in addition to the above)***

- (f) Report of external assessment or review by UGC or HKCAAVQ, if any;
- (g) Report on the achievements or deliverables in response to conditions or suggestions of the first recognition or of the last review;
- (h) The latest programme prospectus or a narrative of the courses offered and the outputs;
- (i) Number of student intake and attrition in each cohort under review, student profile, the practice and results of student assessment and evaluation, credit transfer or exemptions granted, language proficiency of students, graduates' feedback, the awards conferred and evaluation of graduates' employment status, feedback from employers on their professional standard, if any;
- (j) Deliverables and any enhancement of the student support services and supporting facilities;
- (k) Other development or innovative practice introduced during the period under review as well as anticipated programme changes or action plans, in particular those in response to new or modified criteria or standards adopted by the Board during the interim.

5.5.6 The professional consultant will be in liaison with the Assessment Team and the TI on the format and any number of hardcopy of those information and documents to be provided by the TI for the assessment or review, where the TI shall also file a complete set of such information and documents in pdf file format with an index to the Board for record.

5.5.7 Unless the changes to the programme are upon request of the Assessment

Team, the Committee or the Board, the TI is required to notify the Board as soon as practicable of any changes to the programme after submission of the application or confirmation of conducting the review. Supporting documents in respect of the changes should also be submitted for review by the Assessment Team or the Committee, so that the Team in consultation with the Committee may decide if the assessment or review may continue or it has to be re-started afresh at the cost of the TI.

## 5.6 Protocol for Conducting Assessment or Review

- 5.6.1 Upon receipt of an application for qualification recognition or confirmation of conducting a qualification review, the Board will act upon the following protocol. The TI should take into account the time required for such exercise when planning its admission of the first or the next cohort of the pertinent programme. The Board is not to grant any retrospective recognition.
- 5.6.2 An Assessment Team will be formed by the Board after due conflict and availability checks to take up the task, with a professional consultant assigned and a briefing session for the Team prior to the site visit. The Team may consult the Committee on any matters it considers necessary and at any time in the course of conducting the assessment or review.
- 5.6.3 The Team via the professional consultant will notify the TI of its action plan, typically including the course of action set out below, also depending on the agreed visit schedule with the TI:-
- (a) Peruse the documents submitted by the TI and, where necessary, request for supplementary documents from the TI;
  - (b) Conduct an on-campus visit to the TI and meet with:-
    - (i) the senior management of the TI;
    - (ii) Teaching Staff of the social work school/department;
    - (iii) representatives of placement agencies;
    - (the following two are applicable to review exercise only)*
    - (iv) students and/or graduates of the programmes, where a reasonable number of them should be selected by the Team or the professional consultant on its behalf;
    - (v) representatives of the employers of graduates, if any.
- 5.6.4 The Team shall consult, directly or via the professional consultant, the Committee of its draft interim report before completing it on the qualification assessment or review, which will include but not limited to all items under sub-section 5.6.6;
- 5.6.5 The following is provided as a guide for preparing the interim and final reports:
- (a) The report should be concise and precise, with an expected number of



total pages, including all appendices, not far exceeding 50;

- (b) There should be an executive summary, preferably to be single-page, summarising the key findings of the exercise and the recommendations of the Team;
- (c) There should be separate chapters each for sub-sections 4.1 to 4.5 on due observance and compliance with the Criteria and Standards as set out there under;
- (d) Reproduction of information and documents provided by the TI for the assessment or review in the report (in the text or as appendix) should be refrained to the extent that they are crucial in explaining the due observance and compliance with the Criteria and Standards and the recommendations to be made by the Team, footnotes may be used to make reference to those information and documents.

5.6.6 The Team will send to the TI the interim report which will include:-

- (a) Its findings after the assessment or review has been conducted;
- (b) Its recommendation to or not to:-
  - (i) recognise the new qualification; or
  - (ii) continue the recognition of the qualification, and if in the positive for a specific period of time;
- (c) Any conditions it will recommend that must be fulfilled by the TI within specific timeline and the consequences of non-fulfilment;
- (d) Any suggestions for programme enhancements that their fulfilment may be merits to be taken into account for granting a longer period of continual recognition in next review exercise.

5.6.7 The TI is to respond to the interim report within 20 Working Days; and the Team may follow up with the TI on any matters arising from the TI's responses, re-examine the assessment or the review, meet with any relevant parties, or consult again the Committee before concluding its final report on the qualification assessment or review; when the Team submits formally the final report to the Committee, it shall copy it to the TI simultaneously.

5.6.8 The Committee may follow up with the TI on any matters arising from the final report, seek further advice from the Team, pay own visits to the TI, or meet with any relevant parties, and the Committee will then submit the final report together with its opinions to the Board.

5.6.9 The Board may take any appropriate actions to address any matters arising from the submission of the Committee, and shall formulate and notify the TI in writing its decision, which may be one of the following:-

- (a) The recommendation of the Assessment Team to recognise the qualification or to continue the recognition, with or without any conditions or suggestions, is accepted;

- (b) The recommendation of the Assessment Team to recognise the qualification or to continue the recognition, with or without any conditions or suggestions, is accepted on the basis of:-
  - (i) Inclusion of conditions or suggestions prescribed by the Board;
  - (ii) modification to or removal of conditions or suggestions recommended by the Team;
  - (iii) modification to the period of recognition or continual recognition; or
  - (iv) any two or all of the above;
- (c) The recommendation of the Assessment Team to recognise or to continue the recognition, with or without any conditions or suggestions, is not accepted;
- (d) The recommendation of the Assessment Team not to recognise the qualification or not to continue the recognition is accepted;
- (e) The recommendation of the Assessment Team not to recognise or not to continue the recognition is not accepted, substituting it the Board may recognise or continue the recognition, with or without any conditions or suggestions, and specify the period of recognition;
- (f) The final report of the Assessment Team is abandoned, substituting it the Board shall at its own expenses and as soon as practicable appoint a new Assessment Team to conduct the assessment or review anew.

5.6.10 The TI may appeal in the form prescribed in this Document to the Appeals Panel against the decision of the Board. If no appeal is filed to the Appeals Panel within 20 Working Days after the Board has delivered its notice of decision, or if appeal is filed but subsequently withdrawn, the decision of the Board shall be final. The notice of decision of the Board is deemed to have served on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Working Day after it is sent by courier service to the last known correspondence address of the TI.

5.6.11 The executive summary of the final report including the conditions and recommendations without releasing the business information and the final decision of the Board, or when the decision of the Board has been appealed, the decision of the Appeals Panel as well, will be published on the Board's website in a month's time after all procedures of the recognition assessment or review have been completed (including the appeal procedure, if any) and throughout the relevant period of recognition of the qualification. To avoid any doubt, nothing will be published when recognition or continual recognition is not granted, and nothing other than the aforesaid, even when they are referenced in the report or the decision, will be published.

## Section 6: Appeal Mechanism

- 6.1 TIs or individual applicants for qualification assessment or review who are aggrieved by the Board's decision made in accordance with the provisions in this Document may appeal against such decision to the Appeals Panel.
- 6.2 The appeal should be made in the form prescribed by the Board and filed to the Appeals Panel within 20 Working Days after the Board has delivered its notice of decision in writing. No appeal will be entertained if it is not filed in the prescribed form or within the period for appeal. The postal date stamp on the envelope or the date stamp the Board Office applied on the form, whichever is earlier, shall count.
- 6.3 Upon receipt of an appeal by the Board Office, the Board will within 30 Working Days appoint the Appeals Panel which shall consist of 5 members from the following three categories:-
- (a) not less than 2 who are of the Social Work education sector in Hong Kong;
  - (b) not more than 2 who is of a care profession in Hong Kong, including but not limited to medical doctors, nurses, therapists and psychologist; and
  - (c) not more than 2 who is with profound experience in public administration in government policies, public programmes and services.
- 6.4 The Appeals Panel shall conduct its business in accordance with the Rules as made by the Board in this respect.
- 6.5 The Appeals Panel may reach one of the following decisions:-
- 6.5.1 To uphold the Board's decision;
  - 6.5.2 To quash the Board's decision and substitute with it the Panel's own decision, which may be one of the following:-
    - (a) The qualification is recognised for a specified period of time with or without any conditions imposed, added, modified or removed; or
    - (b) The programme is to be re-assessed or re-reviewed by another Assessment Team (or external assessors) with cost borne by the Board or the TI (or the applicant) or shared at a ratio specified by the Panel, and the relevant protocol to be gone through afresh, providing that the Panel may direct to extend the current period of recognition of an existing qualification for one extra year to facilitate the re-review.
- 6.6 The decision of the Panel made under sub-section 6.5 shall be final.

*(English version prevails over Chinese version if there is any discrepancy.)*