

EDB updates Revised Common Descriptors for Associate Degree and Higher Diploma Programmes and increases quotas on non-standard entries for sub-degree and degree programmes

The Education Bureau (EDB) today (July 4) promulgated the updated Revised Common Descriptors for Associate Degree (AD) and Higher Diploma (HD) Programmes, and announced an increase in the quotas for institutions to admit applicants on special considerations to sub-degree and degree programmes that are subject to accreditation by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ).

An EDB spokesman said, "The EDB has concluded the review of and updated the Common Descriptors, which serve as the guidelines for the development and operation of AD and HD programmes, so as to more sharply reflect the respective positioning of these two types of programmes, thereby enabling our society to have clearer and more realistic expectations of them. The HD qualification is more specialised and serves as a main pillar in the Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPET) pathway to provide graduates with a solid foundation and specialised knowledge and skills for either immediate employment at the para-professional level or articulation to specialised degrees. At the same time, HD programmes should be more inclusive to give due recognition to relevant learning and working experience, including applied learning subjects in secondary schools. The AD qualification on the other hand is more generic, with the primary purpose of providing appropriate opportunities for articulation to general degrees for AD graduates with suitable capabilities and aspirations. The updated Common Descriptors will come into effect in the 2024/25 academic year."

Major updates to the Common Descriptors are as follows:

- (1) the differentiation in the positioning of AD and HD is set out;
- (2) for AD programmes:
 - (i) institutions are required to publish more specific information about articulation pathways to assist prospective students in making an informed decision;
 - (ii) institutions are required to keep track of their AD graduates articulating to degree programmes; and
 - (iii) in the course of accreditation and re-accreditation, institutions are required to ascertain their proposed targeted articulation pathways and explain any gaps between the targeted and actual articulation outcomes; and
- (3) for HD programmes:
 - (i) the articulation pathways and positioning characteristics should be reflected by the award titles;

(ii) institutions are encouraged to give due recognition to Applied Learning subjects that are relevant to the programme (e.g. by giving bonus points for the results of the Applied Learning subjects) for admission purposes;

(iii) institutions are encouraged to be more inclusive to allow in-service and experienced applicants to be admitted through Recognition of Prior Learning and credit accumulation and transfer arrangements;

(iv) institutions are encouraged to use work-based learning, project-based learning, etc to help students familiarise themselves with real-world situations; and

(v) institutions are encouraged to engage industries, professions and trade associations in the design, delivery and assessment of the programmes.

The Common Descriptors to be effective from the 2024/25 academic year and the 2023/24 academic year are available in Annex A and Annex B respectively.

In addition, to encourage post-secondary institutions to admit students from more diverse backgrounds, including those who demonstrate non-academic achievements, and provide them with further articulation opportunities, the quota levels for institutions to admit applicants on special considerations to sub-degree and degree programmes that are subject to accreditation by the HKCAAVQ will be adjusted upwards with effect from the 2023/24 academic year. For local programmes, the relevant quota levels will be adjusted from 5 per cent of the total intake on a programme basis and 3 per cent on an institutional basis to 15 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. For non-local programmes, the relevant quota level will be adjusted from 5 per cent of the total intake on a programme basis to 10 per cent (Note). The adjustments relevant to sub-degree programmes will be reflected in the Common Descriptors. The HKCAAVQ will inform the relevant post-secondary institutions of the above adjustments, and will closely monitor the implementation to ensure that the quality of programmes complies with the accreditation standards.

In view of the recommendations from the Task Force on Review of Self-financing Post-secondary Education and the Task Force on Promotion of VPET, the Government appointed the HKCAAVQ as the consultant to review the differentiation between AD and HD qualifications, and the enhancement of the positioning of HD in the VPET pathway, among others.

Note: Non-local degree programmes are offered through a partnership comprising a local operator and a non-local degree-granting institution, hence there is only a quota on a programme basis, while the quota on an institutional basis is not applicable.