

## **Operational Guidelines on Assessing Equivalence of Qualifications for Taught Postgraduate Programmes**

These guidelines apply to regular and special admissions for taught postgraduate programmes.

### **I. Objectives**

These operational guidelines apply to taught postgraduate programmes and are for programme admission personnel's reference who may need to make assessment on the equivalence of academic qualifications during the admission process. While respecting the diversity and specificity of TPg programmes, the guidelines aim to align the different practices in admission that programmes may adopt so as to ensure that students admitted are qualified for their chosen programmes, and would benefit the most from the programmes given the fitness between the students' quality and qualifications in totality and the demand of the programmes.

### **II. The Guidelines**

The Guidelines cover two broad areas, the equivalence of academic qualifications and the English proficiency tests.

#### **1. The Equivalence of Academic Qualifications**

With the University's focus on internationalization and engagement with the Mainland, more and more international and Mainland applicants apply for a place in our programmes. There are times when colleagues are unfamiliar with the qualifications attained by the applicants, or when the applicants hold a post-secondary qualification that requires further assessment to determine if it is equivalent to the qualifications required, or when programme personnel wish to admit certain applicants in consideration of both qualification and work experience. It is therefore important that the qualifications and quality of the applicants in totality be considered in line with the emphasis of the programmes, be they academic, professional or skills oriented.

##### **1.1. Academic qualifications**

In assessing the equivalence of academic qualifications, colleagues shall consider the following factors:

- Programme learning outcomes
- Programme structure and contents
- Programme duration
- Professional experience during qualification, e.g. internship, placement.

Scrutiny of the award documents and the full transcripts would facilitate the judgment.

In case of queries concerning the credibility of certain institutions, please approach the Graduate School for assistance.

### 1.2 Membership of professional bodies

Admission personnel may consider the following when determining the equivalence or appropriateness of the professional membership/qualifications:

- Relevance of the professional membership/qualification
- Recognition of the professionals in the industry, locally and internationally
- Any benchmarks with similar programmes in other UGC-funded institutions or comparable overseas institutions (e.g. as an admission criterion, course exemption, etc)

### 1.3 Work Experience

In assessing whether the work experience of an applicant could be considered supplementary to his/her academic qualifications thus meeting the basic requirement of the programmes, colleagues are advised to consider the following:

- I. Relevance, including the scope of the work, its breadth and depth
- II. Seniority of the position
- III. Years of experience at different levels

It is desirable that programmes stipulate specific requirements for admission though provision for flexibility shall be maintained to admit equally qualified students with different qualifications and/or experience. Level 5 of the Generic Level Descriptors of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (=bachelor's degree) could be made as a reference point in assessing the competencies of the applicants. (Ref: [http://www.hkqf.gov.hk/media/HKQF\\_GLD\\_e.pdf](http://www.hkqf.gov.hk/media/HKQF_GLD_e.pdf))

## 2. English Proficiency Tests

### 2.1 Threshold Standard for English proficiency

Certain programmes have specified the required scores attained at certain international tests, but some have not. While English language proficiency is an important admission criterion for some programmes, for others, the overall competence or whether the applicant is suitable for certain fields of work may assume a heavier weighting. Notwithstanding the above, for programmes that adopt EMI, it is important that students should have attained a certain level of English proficiency in order that they could follow the classes without difficulty. It is recommended that, unless otherwise specified, the following scores be used as the threshold standard:

#### 2.1.1 International Tests<sup>1</sup>

- I. TOEFL: 550 (Paper-based), 213 (Computer-based), 79 (Internet-based)
- II. IELTS (Academic): Overall Band at 6.5

#### 2.1.2 National Tests<sup>2</sup>

- I. CET-6 (College English Test band 6): 450<sup>3</sup>; or a pass in CET 6 for the old version of CET;
- II. TEM-8 (Test for English Majors Level 8): 60 (Pass grade)<sup>4</sup>
- III. PETS-5 (Public English Test System Level 5): pass in both oral and written exams<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ref: <http://www.northampton.ac.uk/study/international-students/english-language-courses/comparison-of-english-language-test-scores>; Reference has been made to the threshold standard of current TPg programmes in setting the threshold standards for the TOEFL and IELTS scores.

<sup>2</sup> There are quite a number of national English tests. For our admission purpose, only those that reach a level deemed to have satisfied our basic requirements would be considered. Therefore, certain tests such as the national English test for professionals (全国专业技术人员职称外语等级考试) would not to be considered since Grade A of the test is only equivalent to CET-4 level (Ref: <http://baike.baidu.com/view/6246236.htm?fromId=3144902>)

<sup>3</sup> Full marks being 710; (Ref: [http://www.cet.edu.cn/cet\\_concept2.htm](http://www.cet.edu.cn/cet_concept2.htm)); A criterion-related, norm-referenced test (Ref: <http://www.baik.com/wiki/CET-6>). Though no passing marks are prescribed by the authority (Ref: <http://www.99sushe.com/news/2013071107.html>), 450 is considered to be the passing mark generally adopted by the Mainlanders. According to the official comparison chart, 450 marks for CET 6 means that the score the student attained is better than 25% of the candidates taking the same test (Ref: <http://www.cet.edu.cn/cet2011.htm>).

<sup>4</sup> The test is mainly for English majors though other students under certain circumstances could also take the test. The test is therefore considered as of a higher standard.

<sup>5</sup> A test specifically designed for educational exchange between Mainland and the UK. PETS-5 is the highest level, and a test for government-sponsored candidates intending for postgraduate study in an overseas institution. It is believed that a pass in the test would mean the student should satisfy the requirement for a postgraduate degree in a discipline other than the English language. (Ref: <http://baike.baidu.com/view/273485.htm?fromtitle=PETS&fromid=481571&type=syn>)

2.1.3 Students who had successfully graduated from a bachelor's degree programme that adopts English as the medium of instruction

### **3. Points to Note**

3.1 In assessing an applicant's suitability for the programme, programme personnel should refer to the documentary evidence provided, and may also conduct an interview to assess the suitability and verify the facts, and/or set up a special entrance test.

3.2 As far as possible, face-to-face interview is preferred. Interview panel should comprise at least 2 colleagues to maintain objectivity.

3.3 All special cases should be supported with written justification, and approved by Dean of Graduate School.

3.4 Any recommendations for special entry and for admission interviews, the programme personnel involved should make a declaration of any conflict of interest in written form, and the interviews and any forms of assessment should be properly documented.

3.5 For determination of English proficiency, a pass in the interviews in lieu of provision of relevant test documents would **NOT** be accepted.

3.6 It should be noted that any change of admission criteria has to be submitted to the Senate for approval via the TPRC and the QAC before implementation or entering into an agreement with a partner institution

May 2014