Notes on Implementation of Virtual Site Visits

Preamble

In accordance with Higher Education Quality Evaluation System, higher education institutions (hereinafter referred to as "HEIs") in Macao and external quality assurance agencies (hereinafter referred to as "EQAAs") must comply with related Evaluation Guidelines and regulations on conducting evaluations. Nevertheless, site visits to local institutions by non-local experts in person remain uncertain in the foreseeable future, the Education and Youth Development Bureau (hereinafter referred to as the "DSEDJ") in the following prescribes the basic requirements of virtual site visits based on the principle of "equivalence of evidence", after consultation with the Quality Evaluation Panel, as a temporary alternative to site visits under the current exceptional circumstances.

1   This set of requirements applies to HEIs and EQAAs when conducting virtual site visits, including the procedures of preparation and implementation, as well as the matters needing attention.

2   In the event of natural disaster or public health crisis (e.g. a pandemic) or other exceptional circumstances, EQAAs and HEIs may after risk assessment consider physical site visits not being possible and negotiate adoption of virtual site visits for conducting the evaluation. The decision in that regard will have to be made prior to signing a service agreement.

3   In the event of force majeure in the midst of an evaluation, virtual site visits may be adopted as an alternative. However, HEIs must request prior approval from DSEDJ for this alteration.

4   In regard to situations of items 2 and 3, EQAAs should demonstrate, in the evaluation plan, their previous experience in conducting virtual site visits when providing evaluation services, as well as offer relevant measures and procedural documents on their processes for the conduct of virtual site visits.

5   <u>Visit method</u>

5.1   It is suggested that a "hybrid method" should be adopted as the preferred choice when circumstances allow. In such cases, EQAAs should assign at least one expert from the panel, on the prerequisite that no conflicts of interest exist, to physically visit the local institutions. The expert could visit campus facilities and inspect teaching equipment and so on. Through the hybrid method, the expert can assist in addressing concerns of the Panel and reviewing evidence, thus making up for deficiencies in the adoption of predominantly virtual site visits.

5.2   Apart from the hybrid method prescribed in item 5.1, regarding meeting with stakeholders and paying an official visit to campus, video conferences and live-stream tours are acceptable approaches. Generally, for the sake of making an interactive observation of the campus environment and facilities, a live-stream tour is superior to a pre-recorded one.

5.3   Due to certain environmental constraints, access to some facilities/venues may be denied, and a live-stream tour may not be given. In such cases, HEIs can resort to a pre-recorded tour; however, the related situations and rationale shall be described when making an application for approval of the evaluation exercise

6   <u>Preparation and Support</u>: Both EQAAs and HEIs shall facilitate the implementation of virtual site visits by holding preparatory meetings in advance, and shall particularly consider the following issues:

6.1   In terms of schedule planning, EQAAs and HEIs should consider extending the duration of the visit, such that the time spent on the implementation of a virtual visit (e.g. procedures of the online meetings and live-stream tours) should be comparable to that spent on a physical site visit. Additionally, both parties should be prepared to consider special arrangements for suspension and resumption of a virtual visit in case of any extreme and unforeseen events, and report it to the DSEDJ.

6.2   While adopting a prerecorded tour, HEIs shall provide up-to-date video recording (recorded within one month before the date of conducting the virtual visit). In terms of a live streaming tour, staff of the HEIs shall check the network speed and stability and confirm the accessibility to the campus areas such as faculty office areas, classrooms and libraries.

6.3   Prior to the formal online meetings, both EQAAs and HEIs shall fully test their technology facilities and support services to ensure that they can provide a secure internet environment, in which a fully engaged, real-time interactive virtual site visit can be carried out.

6.4   Both EQAAs and HEIs shall brief the panel members and external participants (e.g. employers, graduates) about the participation notes for the online meetings, as well as provide them with related training or a user manual for the online meeting software, if any.

6.5   Both EQAAs and HEIs shall prepare contingency plans and assign contact persons to solve urgent technical and logistical problems that may occur during the course of virtual site visits.

7   Implementation of the virtual site visit

7.1   For efficient time management, the secretary of the panel should coordinate the availability to attend the online meeting with all participants located in different time zones. When scheduling an online meeting, the least time zone difference among all participants should be aimed for. In general, virtual meetings should be scheduled for no longer than 6 hours per day, with a reasonable break in between the meeting sessions.

7.2   The virtual conference platform should provide the panel members with private chat rooms for "closed-door discussions". In addition, the platform should offer entry into meeting rooms where "one to one", "one to multiple" or both modes of meetings in parallel may occur. Waiting rooms should be offered to interviewees before allowing

entry into the official meeting rooms.

7.3 If the interviewees can attend the virtual visit on campus, HEIs shall separate the interviewees inside campus into different meeting venues. If the interviewees are unable to be on campus to participate in the online meetings, HEIs shall ensure that the interviewees outside campus can install applicable virtual meeting software.

7.4 EQAAs shall check the identity of the interviewees prior to the online meeting. During the meeting, the interviewees shall have their webcams turned on.

7.5 Both HEIs and EQAAs should assign interpreters to facilitate the communication process if needed.

8 **Confidentiality**

8.1 Basically, HEIs and EQAAs shall abide by Annex 4.4 Terms of Confidentiality of Guideline of EQAAs (April 2020 version). Both parties should establish or reinforce the mechanism for preventing information disclosure when conducting virtual site visits. For instance, all participants of the evaluation (including those from HEIs and EQAAs, external stakeholders and so on) shall sign a non-disclosure agreement to keep all information obtained during different evaluation procedures confidential and such information cannot be disclosed to the third parties.

8.2 In accordance with the stipulation about final evaluation data handling prescribed in Annex 4.4 of the above-mentioned Guideline (the panel members must destroy all relevant information after completing the evaluation). HEIs and EQAAs, when adopting virtual site visits, are also required to delete/destroy all video or audio recording files (if any) at the same time.

8.3 In addition to the above-mentioned requirements, HEIs and EQAAs must ensure that all procedures of collecting, processing and transmitting personal information during evaluation process abide by Law No. 8/2005 the Personal Data Protection Act and relevant regulations of the Macao SAR government.

9 EQAAs have to state in the final evaluation report that the evaluation has been conducted in a virtual manner.

10 DSEDJ reserves the right to revise, supplement and interpret the terms and conditions in this set of requirements.