Guidelines of Good Practice (GGP)
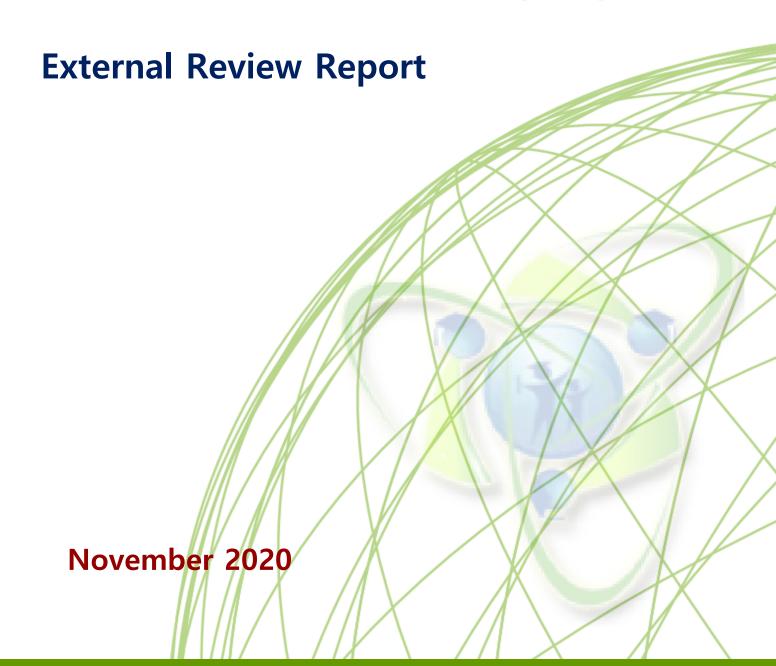
External Review Report

November 2020

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Executive Summary

This external review of the International Network of the Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education INQAAHE (INQAAHE) Guidelines of Good Practice (GGP) alignment is the first application undertaken by the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT).

The review was conducted based on HEEACT's Self-Assessment Report, accompanied by relevant supporting documents, interviews with 48 stakeholders and responses from 61 written submissions. The Review Panel followed closely the GGP External Review Standards in its consideration of the evidence presented during the external review process.

The objective of this review was to assess the level of alignment HEEACT's strategic and operational activities in discharging its responsibilities in accordance to the University Act (§ 2, Section 5), "*To promote the development of every university, the Ministry of Education shall organize an Assessment Committee or commission academic organizations or professional accreditation bodies to carry out regular assessments of universities*."

The Review Panel made its assessment according to INQAAHE GGP standards as described in the following:

1. The structure of the External Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA)
2. The accountability of the EQAA
3. The EQAA's framework for the external review of quality in higher education institutions (HEIs)
4. The EQAA and its relationship to the public
5. Decision-making
6. The quality assurance (QA) of cross-border higher education, and
7. Others

1. The structure of the External Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA)

🐝 HEEACT is a recognized, credible organisation, trusted by the HEIs and the public. It has adequate mechanisms to prevent conflicts of interest in the decisions it makes; its staff has the needed skills to carry out the functions associated with external QA.

🐝 HEEACT has the needed resources to carry out its mission. In carrying out its core charter as a national and professional third-party QA accreditation agency in higher education (HE), and, in enhancing external quality assurance (EQA) as its primary concern, HEEACT has developed a comprehensive mid- and long-term plan as depicted in its 2019-2023 Strategic Plan.

🐝 HEEACT has been established with a clear governance structure which is consistent with its mission and objectives.

🐝 HEEACT has the necessary and appropriate resources (human, physical and financial) to conduct external evaluation effectively and efficiently in accordance with its mission statement and its methodological approach.

2. The accountability of the EQAA

🐝 HEEACT has demonstrated that it has taken on board both international good practice and the feedback of the Taiwanese HE sector in the evolution of its accreditation processes which have developed and improved over each cycle. It has undergone an audit by the Ministry of Education (MOE0 and oversight is provided by its Board of Directors (BOT). HEEACT also collects feedback from its stakeholders through surveys and from its internal staff through surveys and regular meetings.

🐝 HEEACT has displayed its commitment towards internal QA to enhance the quality and integrity of its activities, as well as active linkage to the international community of QA. This is reflected in the number of awards won by HEEACT, including research and innovation, international cooperation in QA, staff capacity building, as well as recognition through Board memberships at the international and regional levels.

- HEEACT has demonstrated active hosting and participation of events locally, regionally and internationally (see SAR, APPENDIX 19 and 20), which enables it to gain insights on the latest trends and developments on QA for the benefits of HE development in Taiwan, the HEIs and staff.

3. **The EQAA's framework for the external review of quality in higher education institutions (HEIs)**

- Throughout its establishment, HEEACT has learned and developed its accreditation processes to meet changing global trends and national requirements. It has adopted a student learning outcome-based QA model to empower institutions to develop internal QA mechanisms. It indicates that "quality" should be the responsibility of HEIs.

- In 2017, the MOE decided that program accreditation would be a voluntary process with institutions able to decide whether to conduct their own self-accreditation or, in line with MOE's provision of diverse channels for institutions to select and conduct program accreditation, and to ask HEEACT or another recognized EQAA to carry out the process.

- HEEACT is proactively engaging with the recent change of policy around program accreditation to ensure its continuing role as a valuable member of the Taiwanese HE sector.

4. **The EQAA and its relationship to the public**

HEEACT maintains a very close relationship with the public, in particular its stakeholders. Consistent with its vision and core values, HEEACT provides full and clear disclosure of its Accreditation Handbooks which contain detailed policies, procedures and criteria. Evaluation Bimonthly has also been used to provide QA-related updates to the public.

Every year HEEACT publishes an annual report which shows all the implementation results and achievements of all types of accreditation. The annual report also includes the annual financial report of the agency and the outcomes of the research projects and staff capacity building and training. Through the annual report, the public can obtain a whole picture of the tasks of QA and accreditation performed by the HEEACT every year.

5. **Decision-making**

HEEACT has policies and procedures in place that ensure a fair and independent decision-making process in the final review of the institution or the program accreditation as well as the recognition process for self-accreditation programs.

HEEACT's accreditation decision-making process is a two-stage procedure involving three key actors, namely: Review Panel, Accreditation Recognition Committee, and BOT.

The recommendation of the external review result is reported to the Accreditation Recognition Committee for decisions. The Accreditation Recognition Committee will then forward the decision to the BOT for approval and final decision. After obtaining BOT's decision, the accreditation results are announced by HEEACT. Should the evaluated institution is not satisfied with the result, they can file an appeal to HEEACT. Decision making process for an appeal follows a separate procedure and the decision is independently made by the Appeal Committee established by the BOT.

6. **The QA of cross-border higher education**

Not applicable. There are no formal criteria for transnational education (TNE) arrangements or cross-border HE in Taiwan. The MOE is responsible for this area and, whilst there is interest in TNE, this has not yet been translated into a formal set of criteria or processes.

7. **Others**

Through active engagements with its international collaborative partners, HEEACT has established an international presence in relation to its core review functions. HEEACT makes the most of all international opportunities – this has allowed it not only to develop a prominent international presence but also to gain access to valuable information and advice to share with the MOE and the HE sector in Taiwan.

Introduction

Higher Education in Taiwan

In Taiwan, higher education (HE) (includes undergraduate and postgraduate programs) is governed by the Department of Higher Education (DHE) and the Department of Technological and Vocational Education (DTVE) under the supervision of the Ministry of Education (MOE), the main body responsible for HE policymaking.

Higher education in Taiwan adopts a dual-track system: general HE (academic) and vocational and technological HE. Institutions from both tracks offer a wide range of programs, which vary significantly in size, ranging from the largest with approximately 30,000 students down to the smallest with fewer than 1,000 students.

According to the MOE, the overall number of higher education institutions (HEIs) was 153 in the 2018–2019 academic year. This included:

- 127 universities
- 14 four-year colleges, and
- 12 two-year junior colleges.

The overall number of students in the HE sector is approximately 1,077,000.

As a result of the dual track system, institutional accreditation is undertaken by two quality assurance (QA) agencies in Taiwan, namely:

1. Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT), and
2. Taiwan Assessment and Evaluation Association (TWAEA).

Institutional accreditation is compulsory for universities. For general (academic) HEIs, HEEACT is the only QA agency responsible for institutional accreditation. TWAEA, on the other hand, is responsible for institutional accreditation of technological and vocational institutions. Commissioned by the MOE with the authority to recognize other local and international QA agencies and accreditors in Taiwan, HEEACT must recognize TWAEA as a professional accreditor.

As for program accreditation, HEIs can seek other recognized professional accreditors for external review, some can even adopt self-accreditation for their programs.

About HEEACT

Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT) was established by the MOE with the contribution from the 153 HEIs, and, in accordance to the University Act (§ 2, Section 5), "*To promote the development of every university, the Ministry of Education shall organize an Assessment Committee or commission academic organizations or professional accreditation bodies to carry out regular assessments of universities.*"

HEEACT identifies itself as "*a professional accrediting body with global recognition and excellence in professional practice*", and, in accordance with relevant regulations, to:

- support the government and HEIs in promoting QA in HE accreditation and evaluation
- conduct HE accreditation and QA research with local and foreign institutes
- promote cooperation and exchanges with overseas QA agencies and international networks
- support Taiwan government's plans and implement various HE projects and initiatives, and
- conduct activities related to the public good and educational affairs that are aligned with HEEACT's mission.

INQAAHE GGP External Review

As part of its ongoing quest for QA enhancement, HEEACT decided, for the first time, to undertake an external review for its compliance with the Guidelines of Good Practice (GGP) of the International Network for Quality

Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) - a tool to support the systems safeguarding standards of higher education's quality assurance. The guidelines are part of INQAAHE's mission and are intended to promote high standards of professional practice by QA agencies.

GGP Review Process

HEEACT submitted its request to INQAAHE for GGP recognition in May 2019. The eligibility for GGP recognition was approved by the GGP Recognition Committee, and, in January 2020, HEEACT submitted the self-assessment report, which was later updated and re-submitted for review on 24 April 2020. The proposed date for the site visit was scheduled to take place from Monday to Wednesday, 16 to 18 September 2020.

Because of the travel constraints due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was no longer possible for the designated Review Panel (*APPENDIX 1*) to conduct a face-to-face site visit in Taipei. With the consensus of HEEACT, the site visit was conducted via virtual platform and re-scheduled to Monday to Thursday, 5 to 8 October 2020 (see *APPENDIX 2* for details).

The application submission portfolio (a total of 486 pages) is comprehensive, comprising a 147 pages Self-Assessment Report (SAR), 40 supporting documents/appendixes, 36 tables, 15 figures, 14 photographs, links to 10 additional documents and a virtual tour video on HEEACT's physical facilities.

Written submission questionnaires were sent to 123 internal and external stakeholders to contribute towards the review process. Individual forms were designed and developed for each of the following interest groups:

1. Ministry of Education (MOE)
2. HEEACT's Board of Trustees (BOT)
3. HEEACT's Internal Staff
4. Universities, Institution-accreditation
5. Universities, Program-accreditation
6. Universities, Self-accreditation
7. Universities, Self-National Collaborative Partners
8. HEEACT's Reviewers
9. International Collaborative Partners
10. Employers

About 61 responses (50%) were received, with the breakdown as follows:

	Sent	Received	Rate
MOE	10	3	30%
HEEACT's BOT	18	8	44%
HEEACT's Internal Staff	24	20	46%
Universities/Institution	10	4	40%
Universities/Program	8	2	25%
Universities/self-accreditation	5	3	60%
HEEACT's Reviewers	17	8	47%
National Partners	10	4	40%
International Collaborative Partners	11	8	73%
Employers	10	1	10%
Total	123	61	50%

During the virtual site visit, the Review Panel spoke to the following 48 interviewees, located throughout Taiwan and in the Asia Pacific region:

- Former President, current President, Executive Director of HEEACT
- BOT members of HEEACT representing the HE and industry sectors
- Directors from the MOE, DHE and DTVE of Taiwan
- Presidents, Professors and Deans from institutions, program and self-accreditation HEIs

- Representatives from international collaborative partners
- Former President of a Student Association, current students and alumni from universities in Taiwan, and
- Reviewers from HEEACT's first and second review cycles.

The Review Panel Chair presented a verbal summary of commendations, affirmations and recommendations to the President of HEEACT's BOT and HEEACT's Executive Director and all staff involved in the GGP recognition project at the end of the virtual site visit. This review report was drafted in the period after the virtual site visit and was subsequently sent to the President of HEEACT's BOT and the Executive Director for fact checking before submission to INQAAHE. It represents the findings and recommendations of the Review Panel, based on the evidence provided through the SAR of HEEACT, the submitted Review Portfolio, written submissions and interviews with stakeholders, and, the Review Panel's own reflections.

Review against INQAAHE GGP Standards

1. The structure of the External Quality Assurance Agency (EQAA)

1.1 Legitimacy and recognition

HEEACT is a recognized, credible organisation, trusted by the HEIs and the public. It has adequate mechanisms to prevent conflicts of interest in the decisions it makes; its staff has the needed skills to carry out the functions associated with external QA. HEEACT has the needed resources to carry out its mission.

1.1.1 The EQAA has an established legal basis and is recognized by a competent external body.

In accordance to Subparagraph 2, Article 5 of the University Act, HEEACT, as a separate, incorporated foundation, national government-funded QA agency for HE accreditation, was established in 2005 by the MOE with the contribution of 153 Taiwanese HEIs.

Its status is further validated by the following written submission responses:

❧ *According to the University Act, Article 5, HEEACT is a government-funded national QA agency responsible for higher education accreditation, which evaluates HEIs regularly, and it supports the government and HEIs in promoting QA in higher education… through implementing accreditation, the HEEACT promotes self-assessment for HEIs. Thus, HEIs can inspect the quality of higher education. (MOE)*

❧ *with the help of HEEACT, higher education QA and accreditation have gradually gained the attention and confidence of the public. At the same time, connecting internationally is an opportunity and a threat to HEEACT. (MOE)*

❧ *the MOE and 153 Taiwanese HEIs contributed to the establishment of the HEEACT, creating a separate, incorporated foundation that is also a government-funded national QA agency responsible for higher education accreditation… through implementing external accreditation, the HEEACT supports Taiwanese HEIs to constantly improve their education quality and really do its job well…. because of HEEACT, Taiwanese HEIs are familiar to many countries and also increases the foreign students. (MOE)*

AFFIRMATION 1

Based on the information gathered during the site visit, the Review Panel affirms that HEEACT is not only established based on a strong legal basis but is also highly regarded by wide ranges of stakeholders such as the MOE, public and private HEIs in Taiwan, business sector, as well as international partners.

1.1.2 The EQAA takes into consideration relevant guidelines issued by international networks and other associations, in formulating its policies and practices.

In addition to HEEACT having a very strong legal basis and is supported by both HEIs and the government of Taiwan, it also engages in various international QA networks for HE such as INQAAHE, Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN), and Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

Following are the reflections and observations of some internal stakeholders:

❧ *QA professionalism, transparency and internationalization are three main principles that HEEACT adhere to over the years. HEEACT has a research team to conduct research in QA standards and processes, and has developed a systematic model for selection, training and assessment of reviewers to ensure quality of review and consistency of review results. It is believed that creditability of accreditation activities relies heavily on professionalism of the review panel, which is considered the core of HEEACT accreditation. (BOT)*

❧ *In order to keep up with current QA trends, HEEACT has actively collaborated with 21 QAAs worldwide and participated in three international QA networks in various ways, including staff*

exchange programs, joint research projects, and undertaking mutual recognitions, etc. HEEACT endeavors to learn from sister international organizations and partner agencies. Recently, HEEACT has been recognized as one of international accreditation bodies by Indonesian government. It serves as an evidence of the quality of HEEACT accreditation that has gained confidence from and recognition by the international QA community. (BOT)

AFFIRMATION 2

The Review Panel would like to affirm that HEEACT actively conducts research on domestic and international QA systems, and takes into consideration guidelines, standards and criteria issued by those networks when developing/formulating its policies and practices.

1.1.3   The EQAA has a clear and published policy for the prevention of conflicts of interest that applies to its staff, its decision-making body, and the external Reviewers.

AFFFIRMATION 3

The Review Panel would like to affirm that HEEACT has a clear and published policy for the prevention of conflicts of interest (see SAR, Appendix 4 to 7, pp. 180-186) that applies to its staff, external reviewers, and its decision-making body. The policy is well understood and respected by staff, reviewers, as well as members of the BOT. Each member of staff, reviewers and BOT must sign the no-conflicts of interest commitment as part of their ethical code of conduct.

1.2   Mission and purposes

1.2.1   The EQAA has a written mission statement and a set of objectives that explicitly provide that external quality assurance of higher education is its major concern, describe the purpose and scope of its activities and can be translated into verifiable policies and measurable objectives.

In carrying out its core charter as a national and professional third-party QA accreditation agency in HE, and, in enhancing external quality assurance (EQA) as its primary concern, HEEACT has developed a comprehensive mid- and long-term plan as depicted in its 2019-2023 Strategic Plan (see SAR, APPENDIX 2, pp. 162-177). The mission and objectives, as well as strategies are developed after taking into account inputs and aspirations of various stakeholders. A set of key performance indicators (KPIs) is clearly defined to measure the attainment of its objectives. The strategic plan also stipulated that HEEACT has expanded its mission from not only conducting institutional and program accreditation for HEIs but also to provide advice on HE policies and services in different education projects for the government.

HEEACT has, undoubtedly, a clear vision statement: to have '*Integrity, Professionalism and Excellence'. It 'endeavors to enhance the higher education accreditation profession and improve the higher education quality assurance (QA) system, therefore, aligning Taiwan's higher education standards with international standards'*.

To achieve '***integrity***', HEEACT endeavors to maintain an unbiased viewpoint in its accreditation and QA services. Additionally, it strives to retain integrity in planning, promotion, and decision-making processes for all accreditation modules and spares no effort in avoiding conflict of interests.

To achieve '***Professionalism***', HEEACT is devoted to improving its professionalism in HE accreditation and QA services. Through research and development, staff capacity building, internal QA systems, and self-improvement, HEEACT has also aligned its higher education QA mechanisms to professional and international standards and is, accordingly, recognized globally.

To achieve '***Excellence***', HEEACT aims to become an outstanding QA agency in the global arena by providing professional accreditation services. It supports the development of domestic HEIs and enables the institutions to strive for excellence, thereby ensuring outstanding teaching, research, and service (e.g. social influences and industry-academia collaborations) performance among the institutions.

AFFIRMATION 4

Such mission and vision statements are also shared by wider members of staff at all levels of the agency as evident from the information gathered during the virtual site visit, which is affirmed by the Review Panel.

1.3 Governance and organisational structure

1.3.1 The EQAA has a governance structure consistent with its mission and objectives, and adequate mechanisms to involve relevant stakeholders in the definition of its standards and criteria.

HEEACT has been established with a clear governance (see SAR, pp. 31 to 35) set up which is consistent with its mission and objectives. The BOT, as the governing body, represents the interest of various stakeholders viz. the government, university-associations, industry and business, and the professional fields of HE and QA, as well as other professions including accounting and law. The following statement by a member of its BOT validates HEEACT's governance:

> *The Board of Trustees and Supervisors of HEEACT governs the operation of HEEACT by varying approaches in an effective manner. The Board evaluates HEEACT's annual plan, budget and financial resources as well as oversees the execution of the plans on a regular basis. In addition, the accreditation results of HEEACT must be approved by the Board before they are made public. As the Board consists of representatives from government, universities and industry, they would provide suggestions to HEEACT administrative team concerning various issues in higher education and the society. (BOT)*

HEEACT's Accreditation standards and criteria are approved by the BOT. Considering the composition of BOT members, it is fair to conclude that relevant stakeholders are involved in the definition of such standards and criteria. It was also conveyed during the session with staff members that HEEACT has solicited inputs from the MOE, universities, and reviewers during the development and revision of its standards and criteria by means of focus group discussions or workshops. However, from the information gathered during the interview, particularly the representatives from universities, reviewers and students, the Review Panel is under the impression that HEEACT could do more to involve a wider range of stakeholders, including students when defining or revising its standards and criteria (see also 3.2.2).

In terms of public accountability, the BOT appoints supervisors who are responsible for auditing the HEEACT's funding management and deposits, supervising financial conditions, and auditing the organization's financial statements. In addition, all decisions regarding accreditation results are made public on HEEACT's website.

In order to assist the BOT in its decision-making, the Board receives or seeks advice and suggestions on specific issues from consultants (see SAR, Table 8, p 36). Such consultants are appointed for the term of three years. Their assignment is however more in the form of ad-hoc manner as they are consulted only on a case-by-case basis.

1.3.2 The composition of the decision-making body and/or its regulatory framework ensure its independence and impartiality.

The BOT is the HEEACT's highest decision-making body. Member selection, holding of meetings, and decision-making processes are in compliance with regulations stated in the Articles of Association (see HEEACT Regulations 2020). It is only on the matter appertaining to the appointment of the HEEACT's President that the BOT's decision shall be consulted and approved by the MOE.

The Articles of Association are available to the public (LINK) which provide clear guidelines for the composition and the appointment or selection of the BOT members. The diverse composition of the BOT, from various university associations, professional fields, and industry to the government, helps ensure the independence and impartiality of the decision-making process. See Table 6 of the SAR for a full list of the 5th or current BOT members (pp. 31-32).

In addition, according to Article 10, the BOT shall appoint three supervisors from the MOE or professional representatives recommended by the MOE. Each supervisor shall serve a term of four years. Supervisors are responsible for auditing the HEEACT's funding management and deposits, supervising financial conditions, and auditing the agency's financial statements.

To achieve administrative efficiency, HEEACT adopts a hierarchical decision-making process. Before submitting any proposal or report to the BOT for discussion and decision-making, the following meetings are taking place:

a) Joint office meetings

- The objective is to discuss and analyze the proposal and report, as well as to collect relevant suggestions.
- The joint office meeting is held monthly, chaired by the Executive Director, and attended by all staff members from every division.
- During such meetings, administrative and accreditation issues, as well as reports are presented. Units and project-based staff members report the implementation status, progress, and outcomes of each project, enabling HEEACT executives and staff members to understand current operations, QA tasks, activities, projects, and general affairs.

b) Executive Team meetings

After the joint office meeting, HEEACT holds an executive team meeting, which is hosted by the Executive Director, with the TMAC Council Chair, Dean of the QA office (now known as the Director of Office of Quality Assurance and Projects), two directors, and researchers as members, to discuss and make decisions on the issues identified during the joint office meetings. Executive meetings are also held on a monthly basis. Upon completion of this process, the decision made in the executive team meeting will be presented to the BOT for approval.

1.3.3 The EQAA's organisational structure makes it possible to carry out its external review processes effectively and efficiently

HEEACT's organizational structure is simple and flat, which makes it possible to carry out its mission effectively and efficiently. HEEACT is internally sub-divided into two main offices, namely the Office of Administration and Research (OAR) and the Office of Quality Assurance and Projects (OQP), with clear distinction of tasks and responsibility. The OAR is chaired by the Executive Director, and the OQP is chaired by the Director. The Executive Director is however in charge of consolidating the two offices and submitting reports to the BOT.

The OQP comprises the Director, QA coordinators, two Division Heads, project coordinators, and administrative staff. The Director is responsible for affairs related to the planning and implementation of the three types of accreditation and projects. Under the supervision of the Director, the director of quality assurance and training is responsible for actual implementation of institutional and program accreditation, recognition of self-accreditation, as well as reviewers' training. The existence of QA coordinators which serves the function of providing support and services to HEIs under review is well-received by all HEIs under review as evident from the information gathered from the questionnaires and during the site visit.

In terms of overall internal management and administration, HEEACT has been holding the ISO9001 and ISO27001 (ISO: International Organization for Standardization) certification since 2008.

COMMENDATION 1

ISO certification demonstrates that HEEACT implements a good standard and operating practices.

1.3.4 The EQAA has a strategic plan that helps assess its progress and plan for future developments

In 2012, in response to university requests for academic autonomy and the establishment of an internal QA system, the MOE announced the self-accreditation policy for program accreditation; furthermore, it announced that program accreditation would not be mandatory. In other words,

universities can apply for program accreditation voluntarily from one of the recognized accrediting agencies by the MOE and the HEEACT.

Consequential and in response to the MOE's announcement of the self-accreditation policy for program accreditation, HEEACT developed its mid- and long-term strategic plans for 2019–2023 (see SAR, APPENDIX 2), which serve as reference for its structural transformation and changing role. The mid- and long-term strategic plans specifically described HEEACT's new focus and social responsibilities for the five-year period. In addition, five main domains were redefined according to its revised Articles of Association (see HEEACT Regulations 2020 – LINK). The document identified 16 goals, 32 strategies, and 71 action plans to facilitate HEEACT's accreditation work, and 55 specific KPIs were developed to serve as the directions and goals for HEEACT staff members to advance and accomplish the operations (see SAR, APPENDIX 2).

All in all, HEEACT's latest strategic plan provides a clear direction for HEEACT's future developments.

1.4 Resources

1.4.1 The EQAA has a well-trained, appropriately-qualified staff, able to conduct external evaluation effectively and efficiently in accordance with its mission statement and its methodological approach.

At the top level, both the Executive Director and Director of OQP are renown experts in HE and QA with a highly convincing portfolio and long track of experiences in higher education quality assurance practices.

Furthermore, HEEACT is supported by a strong and qualified team of staff (67 full-time staff, see SAR, APPENDIX 13, pp. 203-210 for details) who comprise directors, researchers, QA coordinators, and administrative staff.

Particularly for the Office of OQP, which is responsible for accreditation processes, it is staffed by 2 Division Heads, 9 QA coordinators, 36 project coordinators, and one administrative staff. This is adequate to undertake the external evaluation effectively and efficiently.

In addition, HEEACT is also supported by a good pool of reviewers recruited from various institutions. In order to ensure that staff possess appropriate skills and knowledge, professional development programs including training are regularly conducted.

HEEACT's full-time staff members are required to complete hours of general and professional courses annually, which serves as a basis for staff performance reviews. At the end of the year, the HEEACT reviews the capacities, core competencies, and professionalism of HEEACT's staff and makes a new plan for training courses for the following year.

Requirements for training courses vary from staff member to staff member according to the needs of the job. For example:

- All staff members: Must complete 4 hours of environmental education, 3 hours related to governmental policies and information safety education, and at least 6 hours of higher education accreditation and QA courses or administrative management related to the personnel's professional needs annually.
- Cyber security and information staff: Must complete at least 12 hours of cyber security professional courses and training or professional information security competency training annually.
- Full-time administrative assistants: Must complete 4 hours of environmental education and 3 hours on government policies and cyber security annually.
- Part-time staff: Must complete 4 hours of environmental education annually.
- Remote and contract staff: Must complete 4 hours of environmental education and acquire an education training hour annually. The rest of the education training courses shall be arranged by the stationed unit.

All in all, the Review Panel would like to affirm that HEEACT is supported by well-trained and appropriately-qualified staff, which are capable of carrying out HEEACT's mission effectively and efficiently.

1.4.2 The EQAA has the physical and financial resources needed to fulfil its goals and carry out the activities that emerge from its mission statement and objectives.

In term of physical facilities, HEEACT's office is located on the seventh floor of the National Academy for Educational Research (NAER), Taipei branch. The facilities and space encompass an area of 858.78 m^2, including three conference rooms, 6 personal offices, more than 60 partitions (personal working space), and one copy room. In addition, HEEACT has 82.72 m^2 of archive space and storage on the tenth floor of the same building. It also shares an assembly hall and international conference hall with the NAER (see SAR, Photo 4) and has eight meeting rooms on the sixth floor of the building, thereby satisfying the requirements for HEEACT to conduct QA events and activities.

However, due to the current situation of COVID19, the Review Panel was not able to observe the premises directly. The Review Panel therefore appreciates the video clip provided by HEEACT of which the physical environment is very welcoming and suitable for collaboration and capacity building.

Financially, HEEACT is funded by the national government, both in the form of recurrent and development budget. Annually, the MOE allocates around NTD 70 million for operational expenditures and around NTD 40 million for MOE commissioned projects. In addition, HEEACT also charges fees for its services to the universities.

AFFIRMATION 6

The Review Panel would like to affirm that the last three years' financial statements indicate that HEEACT is in a surplus status.

1.4.3 The EQAA provides systematic opportunities for the professional development of its staff.

In accordance with its internationalization policy, HEEACT arranges for and encourages its staff members to participate in English courses during summer breaks to improve their communication skills and language proficiency.

Staff members also participate in the annual international conferences held by HEEACT, during which renowned Taiwanese and international academics are invited as speakers. HEEACT also invites international QA experts and practitioners from Japan, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Mongolia to visit and exchange experiences.

Furthermore, HEEACT has staff exchange programs with its international collaborative QA agency partners (Japan, Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia and Australia), providing HEEACT's staff members with opportunities to develop their professionalism and build QA capacity which displays the competence enhancement curricula for HEEACT staff along with participant numbers. The course names and participation situations are displayed in the SAR portfolio (see SAR, Table 17 Table: capacity building courses and participants, 2017 to 2019 and APPENDIX 15 Course and Participation Situations from 2017 to 2019).

AFFIRMATION 7

The Review Panel affirms HEEACT's professional development activities are appropriate and well-received, supported by the internal stakeholders' responses via written submissions and during the virtual site visit interviews:

> *[HEEACT] has diversity in capacity training programs... one part is on QA – the staff should know the current local and international trends.*

> *[HEEACT] also encourages staff members to attend, and in some cases to present at such international conferences, such as those of INQAAHE. Over the years, we have exchange*

programs for staff to gain experience under different QA context, such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia. It is likened internship for our staff. All HEEACT staff has gained such experience.

Through the staff exchange programs, I have learned how other Higher Education and QA systems work and learn from their experiences and practices. As an individual and part of HEEACT, our capacity building has been strengthened through the staff exchange programs. Additionally, our relationships with our QA agencies are enhanced and especially, I have learned from other good practices that are being implemented. In 2019, I had the opportunity to have a staff exchange program with TEQSA, in Australia. It was a fulfilling experience to learn from the Regulatory QA approach and detailed standards and indicators from TEQSA, their operations and goals to ensure the quality of education in Australia. (HEEACT Staff)

I participated in the HEEACT and JIHEE staff exchange program in 2019. Not only can I understand the evaluation mechanisms and models of other countries, but also through such exchanges, I can learn from each other and serve as a reference for future planning evaluations. (HEEACT Staff)

2. Accountability of the EQAA

2.1 Quality assurance of the EQAA

HEEEACT has displayed its commitment towards internal QA to enhance the quality and integrity of its activities, as well as active linkage to the international community of QA. This is reflected in the number of awards won by HEEACT, including research and innovation, international cooperation in QA, staff capacity building, as well as recognition through Board memberships at the international and regional levels.

2.1.1 The EQAA operates with transparency, integrity and professionalism and adheres to ethical and professional standards.

Based on the SAR and the accompanying handbooks, manuals and forms, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that HEEACT operates with integrity and professionalism, and adheres to ethical and professional standards. HEEACT has adequate mechanisms to prevent conflicts of interest among its stakeholders, which are consistent with its vision and core values (see SAR, APPENDICES 4-7). Evaluation ethics and the aspect of professionalism are covered as part of the content of the training materials for reviewers. This is in addition to the reviewer's manuals for institutional and program accreditation (see SAR, APPENDIX 31).

2.1.2 The EQAA has in place mechanisms that enable it to review its own activities in order to respond to the changing nature of higher education, the effectiveness of its operations, and its contribution towards the achievement of its objectives.

HEEACT has put in place both internal and external QA review mechanisms in line with its vision. Besides the audit by MOE and oversight provided by its BOT, HEEACT also collects feedback from its stakeholders (i.e., satisfaction of on-site review panel on the services provided by QA coordinators and institutions under accreditation) through surveys (see SAR, APPENDIX 16 and 17), and its internal staff through surveys and regular meetings, the outcomes of which helped HEEACT to enhance its accreditation and administration.

One of the KPIs identified in its mid- to long-term strategic plan 2019-2023 is to achieve a minimum overall scale of 3.8 (out of 5) (see SAR, APPENDIX 2, p. 166) in terms of satisfaction of its stakeholders, which have been shown to be achieved through the relevant additional documents provided. The Review Panel is also satisfied with how the survey outcomes have been aggregated, analyzed and strategized for enhancement purposes through the meeting minutes appended.

2.1.3 The EQAA periodically conducts a self-review of its own activities, including consideration of its own effects and value. The review includes data collection and analysis, to inform decision-making and trigger improvements.

HEEACT has undertaken self-assessment in 2009 by inviting external panel members representing QA agencies and institutions of higher learning. Amongst the key recommendations highlighted

included the need for consistency in its processes, to strengthen its training strategy and enhance staff facilities, which have been implemented through a number of actions taken.

HEEACT also works with domestic and international academics on its research projects, as well as collaborates with foreign QA agencies on QA research. The list of projects and descriptions are provided on its website.

One key external QA mechanism is the certification of ISO9001 and ISO27001 (ISO: International Organization for Standardization) obtained by HEEACT since 2008, which have been reviewed in 2020.

2.1.4   The EQAA is subject to external reviews at regular intervals, ideally not exceeding five years. There is evidence that any required actions are implemented and disclosed.

Besides the ISO9001 and ISO27001 certification, HEEACT has also invited external panel members to review its activities and processes (see 2.1.3) where the required actions are implemented.

Together with the current measure to align to INQAAHE's GGP, the Review Panel is satisfied with the efforts on the external reviews taken.

2.2   Links to the QA community
2.2.1   The EQAA is open to international developments in quality assurance and has mechanisms that enable it to learn about and analyse the main trends in the field.

HEEACT has demonstrated active hosting and participation of events locally, regionally and internationally (see SAR, APPENDIX 19 and 20), which enables it to gain insights on the latest trends and developments on QA for the benefits of HE development in Taiwan, the HEIs and staff. This has been vouched during the interviews with HEEACT's staff, the institutions, as well as national and international collaborative partners (see also Section 7: Others).

2.2.2   The EQAA collaborates with other QA agencies where possible, in areas such as exchange of good practices, capacity building, and review of decisions, joint projects, or staff exchanges.

HEEACT has also been very actively contributing to research in QA in HE, including joint research and capacity building projects with different QA agencies, the results of which were presented in conferences and in the form of journal articles (see SAR, Table 19, pp. 74-75, Table 20, pp. 78-79, APPENDIX 21, 22 and 23).

Besides having staff exchange programs (see SAR, Table 21, p. 83, APPENDIX 26), HEEACT has also shown very active international linkages with different QA agencies as evident from the Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) signed with 18 partner agencies (see SAR, APPENDIX 24). Staff of these QA agencies could attend the training organized by HEEACT as observers. HEEACT has also carried out joint international accreditation with the National Center for Public Accreditation (NCPA) (see SAR, APPENDIX 30), signing a Joint Statement of Confidence with the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) (see SAR, APPENDIX 40), as well as a number of research projects, for example, with BAN-PT of Indonesia and the National Institution for Academic Degrees and Quality Enhancement of Higher Education (NIAD-QE) of Japan (see SAR, Table 20, pp. 78-79).

Furthermore, in 2012, HEEACT and MQA (Malaysia) mutually recognized each other's accreditation decisions based on the statement of confidence after a 9-month research project on the comparison of the Higher Education System QA procedures, standards as well as the accreditation results. All the accredited programs and institutions by HEEACT and MQA are presented on the TQID (HEEACT) and MQR (MQA) respectively.

From the interview with the international collaborative partners, the Review Panel is understood that publication of a summary of HEEACT's accreditation reports in English would enhance collaboration with its partner QA agencies, as well as in supporting the agency's journey of becoming an international QA agency (see also Section 7: Others).

RECOMMENDATION 1

Based on the comments received at the interview with the international collaborative partners, the Review Panel recommends HEEACT to translate and publish its accreditation reports in English, at a minimum, the respective executive summary. This could enhance collaboration with its partner QA agencies, as well as in supporting the agency's journey of becoming an international QA agency.

3. The EQAA's framework for the external review of quality in higher education institutions

3.1 The relationship between the EQAA and higher education institutions

3.1.1 The EQAA recognises that institutional and programmatic quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of the higher education institutions (HEIs) themselves, and respects the academic autonomy, identity and integrity of the institutions and programmes.

Throughout its establishment, HEEACT has learned and developed its accreditation processes to meet changing global trends and national requirements. According to the SAR, HEEACT has adopted a student learning outcome-based QA model to empower institutions to develop internal quality assurance mechanisms. It indicates that "quality" should be the responsibility of HEIs.

In 2017, the MOE decided that program accreditation would be a voluntary process with institutions able to decide whether to conduct their own self-accreditation or, in line with MOE provision of diverse channels for institutions to select and conduct program accreditation, and to ask HEEACT or another recognized EQAA to carry out the process. Part of the reason behind the MOE's decision was to promote and increase institutional autonomy.

To support MOE in promoting this policy, HEEACT "took up the responsibility of providing program accreditation services if HEIs choose to commission HEEACT as their external accreditor". For those HEIs that self-accredit their programs, HEEACT will provide support by recognizing both the mechanism and result of the self-accreditation. Such recognition assures the MOE of the quality of self-accreditation conducted by HEIs.

To further recognize and respect the academic autonomy of institutions and programs, HEEACT allows them to add indicators under each standard that take account of their institutional vision, mission and individual features and strengths in order to contextualize the statement on compliance with a particular standard.

Throughout the review process and during the site visit, stakeholders spoke highly of the support that HEEACT provided to them, to the extent that many still choose to apply to HEEACT for accreditation of their programs. Institutions appreciate that the shift in policy towards self-accreditation has manifested itself in a parallel shift in ethos by the HEEACT, which now describes itself as a 'partner' of the institutions. This shift in ethos is made concrete by a visible development in the standards used by HEEACT for its accreditation process. One HEI told the Review Panel that these have developed, in line with ministerial policy, from KPI- and output-driven to focusing more on input.

> *HEEACT helps the departments, graduate institutes, and degree programs to process the self-accreditation based on their particular needs and distinct features. Therefore, these departments, graduate institutes, and degree programs can self-examine based on the SWOT analysis procedure and start up institution's self-accrediting mechanisms. (Universities)*

> *... with the help of HEEACT, higher education QA and accreditation have gradually gained the attention and confidence of the public. At the same time, connecting internationally is an opportunity and a threat to HEEACT. (MOE)*

> *[HEEACT] keeps promoting international recognition of Taiwanese higher education, conducts research into quality assurance in higher education, [and] promotes the*

development or the quality assurance of professional accreditation institutions in Taiwan. (MOE)

HEEACT has played an important role in the development of quality assurance of higher education in Taiwan over the past 20 years. Before the establishment of HEEACT there was no internal mechanism of quality review in the sector of higher education which was under external review on a regular basis of every four or five years, and fully controlled by the Ministry of Education in Taiwan. Since its inception HEEACT has replaced the external review of the Ministry of Education and this has resulted in more professional consideration rather than administrative inspection for the quality improvement of higher education institutions. As a result of this change, an internal review mechanism in each university has appeared and become part of the institution. (Universities)

Over the past three decades, Taiwan's higher education has experienced the period of over-expansion and the loss of students due to the declining birth rate, both of which are severely impacted. Hence, how to reform higher education to meet the needs of Taiwan's social and economic structure and sustainable development has become an urgent issue. However, institutions of higher education or the responsible units themselves cannot make drastic and sufficient reforms based on administrative or other reasons. Therefore, relying on HEEACT, which has social credibility, becomes the most reasonable option. In this regard, the role that HEEACT can play is timely in line with the current needs of Taiwan's society. (Universities)

The Review Panel sought to clarify its understanding of the role of indicators in HEEACT's accreditation processes at meetings with several groups of stakeholders and with HEEACT itself. The Review Panel is satisfied that the use of standards is consistent within and across HEEACT's accreditation methodologies and that the indicators chosen and proposed by the HEIs serve to allow the institutions to demonstrate how they meet the standards within their own individual context.

It was clear to the Review Panel, from discussions with MOE and HEEACT's BOT, that the agency is proactively engaging with the recent change of policy around program accreditation to ensure its continuing role as a valuable member of the Taiwanese HE sector.

COMMENDATION 2

The Review Panel commends HEEACT for its proactivity in approaching changes in ministerial policies to ensure its relevance to the Taiwanese HE sector.

COMMENDATION 3

The Review Panel commends HEEACT for developing a very collegial and excellent relationship with the HE sector as evidenced by the conversations with the institutions, many of whom continue to ask HEEACT to carry out program accreditation. Institutions with self-accredited programs also make reference to the pool of reviewers of HEEACT.

3.1.2 The EQAA promotes the development and appropriate implementation of IQA processes in accordance with the understanding that the primary responsibility for assuring quality resides with the institutions and its programmes.

In line with the MOE's policy for increasing institutional autonomy, HEEACT understands that, as part of this autonomy, HEIs must take responsibility for quality and develop their own, internal QA (IQA) systems. Before conducting site visits for any of its processes, HEEACT requires institutions and programs to submit a SAR through which IQA processes are described and evaluated. HEEACT believes that the development of SARs would not only support the HEIs and programs to identify their strengths and weaknesses, but also establish and improve a well-structured IQA mechanisms. In addition, the handbooks provide institutions and programs with detailed evaluation processes, procedures, and methodologies to support them to set up their IQA step by step. This includes details and checklists for topics such as leadership and management, standard and indicators development, and report writing.

Impressive work. They are very functional, its guidelines are clear, everyone understands his/her job. The reviewers understand the rule and how to review the HEIs. They give us useful and relevant advice. Overall results are good for our university, we appreciate they understand what we do. (Universities)

HEEACT has clear guidelines and conducts face-to-face training workshops on a regular basis. After you have accepted the reviewers, we have to attend workshops. The documents are comprehensive, providing detail info on how to conduct ourselves. (Universities)

Our institution has already completed self-accreditation process. HEEACT plays an important role to guide us. We have never conducted such self-assessment ourselves, HEEACT's experience is most useful and beneficial for us in our first experience. We appreciate HEEACT's help in the process. (Universities)

Excellent work in this point. HEEACT has clear, open, transparent procedure. The data for the institutions are complete. (Universities)

From my point of view, the transparency of the outcomes of HEEACT decisions is very clear in relation to its EQA processes. All the outcomes for the same cycle of Institutional Accreditation can be found in the HEEACT website. (Universities)

The Review Panel was informed by various institutional groups that, indeed, the Handbooks provided by the HEEACT are very useful in providing a structure and guidelines around which to develop an internal system of and processes for QA. Institutional and program representatives also talked to the Panel about the task of writing a SAR and how this required them to describe their QA processes. However, none of these discussions went beyond the drafting of a SAR. At no point did the Panel see or hear any evidence that this drafting exercise had helped internal processes to develop or evolve; the discussions around this topic were not detailed or definitive and the panel had no sense of a clear understanding or sense of direction in relation to IQA.

The Panel understands that policies around autonomy, self-accreditation and IQA are relatively recent. The drafting of a SAR is a good step but simply describing a process is not sufficient to embed a quality culture. There are, perhaps, other preceding steps to be taken and further work to be done with HEIs in this area.

COMMENDATION 4

The Review Panel commends the value of the Accreditation Handbooks for the helpful guidance they provide to institutions.

RECOMMENDATION 2

The Review Panel recommends that HEEACT continue to work with HEIs on strengthening their IQA and that it finds ways to build on the foundations that have been put in place to ensure that IQA is developed, evolves and becomes embedded in the everyday work of each HEI (See also Recommendations 3 and 5, as the role of students will also be important in this regard).

It is the opinion of the Review Panel that, although further work is needed in this regard, HEEACT aligns with the spirit of this standard and has begun to work with the HE sector in Taiwan to develop and embed IQA.

3.1.3   The EQAA bears in mind the level of workload and cost that its procedures will place on institutions, and strives to make them as time and cost effective as possible.

The HEEACT describes, in the SAR, several mechanisms for ensuring that its processes are cost-effective and not burdensome, including:

- Handbooks that are easy to follow and that provide checklists.
- Facilitation of the development of the SAR by adopting institutional data from the national HE database and by limiting the number of pages of the SAR, excluding appendices.
- The establishment of online document review and paperless procedures.

🔖 The factual clarification of the SAR before the site visit to reduce duration and workload.

Institutional representatives that spoke to the Review Panel during the site visit said that they felt that burden had been reduced with each new iteration of accreditation processes. The Panel neither saw or heard evidence to suggest that the HEEACT's procedures are either too costly or over-burdensome.

> *First cycle, quite a burden. Now it is fine. I have seen over the past years, HEEACT has made progress. I can see with the site visit etc, it has alleviated the burden, and it is OK. In the past, when the reviewers went to smaller HEIs, they made judgement the same way as well-established HEIs. Now, the reviewers have learnt to make judgement according to the status of the HEIs. (Universities)*

> *During the First Cycle, HEIs have no options under institutional evaluation. Now, after policy change, HEIs can choose indicators to showcase their specialisations. There is certain level of expectations with HEEACT's standards which HEI have to demonstrate their compliance, and we can use have other judgement tools such as rubrics or indicators to meet those expectations. (Universities)*

> *My university can conduct self-study [self-accreditation]. However, we asked HEEACT because it is more professional, providing us clear guidelines to improve, thus, reducing the burden. (Universities)*

3.2 The definition of criteria for external quality review

3.2.1 The EQAA recognises and values institutional diversity and translates this valuation into criteria and procedures that take into account the identity and goals of higher education institutions.

The HEEACT states that the common framework of standards and procedures provided in its Handbooks is intended to guide institutions in well-established international good practice. In the second round of institutional accreditation, procedures have been further modified to take into account, for example, the size and mission of an institution when agreeing on the duration of the site visit and the size and focus of the accreditation panel.

As mentioned under 3.1.1, the Review Panel clarified the use of institutionally selected indicators to supplement the accreditation standards. The purpose of these indicators is precisely to recognize the diversity of institutions that make up the Taiwanese HE sector. Institutions are given guidance on the kinds of indicators that they might propose.

Institutions that spoke to the Review Panel confirmed that they appreciated both the common framework provided by the accreditation handbooks and the evolution of methodology that takes into account their diversity.

In relation to the indicators proposed by HEIs, one institutional representative that the Panel spoke to during the on-line site visit described these indicators as "providing space" for each HEI to demonstrate its compliance with the standard.

3.2.2 The standards or criteria developed by the EQAA have been subject to reasonable consultation with stakeholders and are revised at regular intervals to ensure relevance to the needs of the system.

In the SAR, HEEACT states that it "has held internal and external discussions, including workshops, forums, consultant meetings, and seminars, and adopted consultation methods to communicate with higher education stakeholders…" It then uses the feedback that it receives on the standards to conduct meta-evaluations after the accreditation process… The HEEACT believes that the consultation and the meta-evaluation processes place it in a good position to revise the accreditation standards and processes of the accreditation cycle. This ensures the development of process nationally and also ensures that the processes are in line with global trends.

Responses to the Review Panel's questions around the topic of consultation on standards were slightly confused. Despite being clear that HEEACT did indeed offer seminars and meetings that HEIs were pleased to attend, nonetheless, there was a lack of clarity among participants as to their involvement in the development and revision of standards and criteria. This may be due to a difference in terminology around the meaning of 'consultation' and 'involvement.' Certainly, HEI representatives that the Panel spoke to were clear about the evolution of the standards (and thus the accreditation process) from a focus on KPIs and outputs to inputs. Trained assessors were generally clearer about their input into the development and revision of standards and criteria.

RECOMMENDATION 3

The Review Panel recommends the involvement of a wider group of stakeholders in the development and revision of QA standards. This includes students. It recommends that the HEEACT is very clear about the focus of its seminars and consultation meetings, to ensure that participants are aware of their role in and the outcomes of the event.

3.2.3   Standards or criteria take into consideration the specific aspects related to different modes of provision, such as transnational education, distance or online programmes or other non-traditional approaches to HE as relevant to the context in which they operate.

In order to help HEIs demonstrate the diversity of their missions and delivery, they are encouraged to:

a)   demonstrate how the institution and program features meet each core indicator and standard, and
b)   add their own indicators to the core standards to help explain how they meet standards in their particular context.

A certain degree of flexibility is permitted in the design of these institutional indicators and institutions are encouraged to propose indicators that will allow them to, for example, present innovative teaching methods and student learning outcomes that ensure the achievement of the institutional mission and goals. The indicators also allow institutions to demonstrate their strengths. (See also 3.2.1).

It was clear to the Review Panel that the ability to develop institutional indicators was appreciated and well-used by institutions who were clear about the aims behind this feature and the process for selection. They were also clear that these were features that allowed them to demonstrate compliance with the core standards, which remain consistent for all accreditations.

The Review Panel heard nothing to suggest that institutions felt that specific aspects of their provision or their context was not taken into account in the accreditation processes.

3.2.4   Standards or criteria explicitly address the areas of institutional activity that fall within the EQAA's scope, (e.g., institutional governance and management, programme design and approval, teaching and learning, student admission, progression and certification, research, community engagement) and on the availability of necessary resources (e.g., finances, staff and learning resources).

According to the SAR, HEEACT's accreditation standards, process, and guidelines were established through feedback from stakeholders and the results of research projects. HEEACT conducted a pilot study for planning the Second Cycle of Institutional Accreditation and released a final report in 2016. It then conducted a meta-evaluation of the process after the second cycle in 2018 and 2019.

The Review Panel's enquiries led it to the conclusion that the HEEACT's standards and criteria match the scope of the accreditations that it carries out and that these are reviewed following each cycle of activity.

3.2.5   Criteria or standards and procedures take into account internal follow up mechanisms, and, provide for effective follow up of the outcomes of the external reviews.

One of HEEACT's standards for both institutional and program accreditation specifically relates to internal improvements and follow-up mechanisms designs. These mechanisms were described in the SAR. Follow-up mechanisms are also designed for use after accreditation results are determined, so as to ensure continuous improvement which is a requirement of the accreditation process.

The Review Panel was able to verify that all accreditation processes (institutional, program and self-accreditation) contain a standard specific to self-improvement and follow up to external review.

The Review Panel was also informed by institutional representatives, assessors and members of HEEACT staff that the follow-up measures/action plans from a previous accreditation would form the starting point for the next accreditation.

3.2.6 The EQAA procedures specify the way in which criteria will be applied and the types of evidence needed to demonstrate that they are met.

The SAR states that the HEEACT employs various methods to ensure that institutions understand how the criteria will be applied and the kinds of evidence that should be provided. These include: seminars to explain the indicators and standards to the evaluated institutions before accreditation, the inclusion of checklists in the individual accreditation handbooks and supporting information for each key point of the review to enable institutions and programs to understand what kind of evidence might be required. The HEEACT also produces a bi-monthly journal for institutions with articles on good practice, accreditation etc.

The Review Panel saw examples of the kinds of checklists that are available. There were some mixed views about these among the institutional representatives that the Review Panel spoke to, with some interviewees finding the checklists very helpful and others finding them a little too detailed. The panel suggests that including institutions more in the drafting of future checklists might help to strike the required balance.

All interviewees mentioned the usefulness of the bi-monthly journal, a number without prompting. The Review Panel believes that this journal and the detailed and straightforward handbooks for accreditation that it saw provide help and support to both institutions and programs whichever kind of accreditation process they are undertaking.

> *HEEACT has many publications. The most valuable ones are the monthly evaluation reports, and eJournals. (Universities)*
>
> *Evaluation Bimonthly, initially published by HEEACT in 2006, is the first professional magazine on higher education evaluation in Taiwan. The issue of "Evaluation Bimonthly" provides a platform to share knowledge of evaluation and helps arouse the awareness of the general public regarding the quality assurance of higher education. (National Partners)*
>
> *The publications some are monthly, bimonthly or annual. They are received not only by presidents, but also all academics. The Manuals cover special improvements of some HEIs, the government encourages the universities to engage in friendly competition, to demonstrate their initiatives in social engagement. If some HEIs have some innovative models e.g., in teaching, students' performance etc. they are encouraged to share (Universities)*

COMMENDATION 4

The Review Panel commends the value of the publications produced, especially the bi-monthly journal and the accreditation handbooks.

3.3 The external review process

3.3.1 The EQAA carries out an external review process that is reliable and based on published criteria and procedures. It follows a self-assessment or equivalent and includes an external review (normally including a site visit or visits), and a consistent follow up of the recommendations resulting from the external review.

All HEEACT accreditation processes involve:

- the preparation of a SAR
- a document review conducted by HEEACT, and
- an onsite visit

Before publishing a report of an accreditation, HEIs are given the opportunity to appeal, and subsequently, the HEEACT holds a result recognition meeting to decide on the accreditation result. It notifies the HEI of the result and publishes it on its website. Processes for follow-up are in place (See 3.2.4).

The Review Panel was assured that the processes described above are applied consistently across all of the HEEACT's accreditation methods.

> *Evaluation work has its own regulations, procedures, committees, public information, and school consultation services, which can maintain a good communication relationship with the school. As well as we have senior staffs here. There is also a response and appeal system, as well as ISO external response management, questionnaire, feedback from the assessed schools and evaluation committees, so we can quickly know what happened. (HEEACT Staff)*

> *We know we can appeal in accordance to the established mechanism, which is very transparent. Before appealing, we conduct self-reflection if we have not done well, and if the decision was correct. (Universities)*

3.3.2 The EQAA has published documents, which clearly state what it expects from higher education institutions, in the form of quality criteria, or standards and procedures, for self-assessment and external review.

HEEACT uses various means to communicates its expectations to HEIs and other stakeholders. These include:

- on its website
- by providing HEIs with criteria to make accreditation preparations
- by disseminating its accreditation handbooks which include review standards, indicators, processes, and the external review methodology, and
- by holding seminars and forums.

As stated under 3.2.5, the Review Panel found the HEEACT's published documents to be clear and accessible, Accreditation Handbooks include information on what is expected of an institution or programme in relation to self-assessment and external review.

In addition, the HEEACT has established a QA Coordinators team, providing support and services to HEIs under review. This service also helps to maintain consistency across accreditations and is very well-received by all representatives from HEIs with whom the Review Panel spoke to.

COMMENDATION 6

The Review Panel commends HEEACT for the establishment of a QA Coordinators team, providing support and services to HEIs under review.

This service is well-received by HEIs and has the additional benefit of helping to maintain consistency across reviews.

3.3.3 The external review process is carried out by teams of experts consistent with the characteristics of the institution/programme being reviewed. Experts can provide input from various perspectives, including those of institutions, academics, students, employers or professional practitioners.

The HEEACT has established regulations for the selection and appointment of reviewers for all three types of accreditation (e.g., *Guidelines Governing the Appointment of Reviewers and Accreditation Recognition Committee Members for Institutional Accreditation)*. The SAR states that, in order to ensure that each panel is made up of members that together are consistent with the characteristics

of the institution or program undergoing accreditation, the HEEACT invites different experts as onsite visit reviewers.

SUGGESTION 1

Whilst the process of invitation will certainly ensure that the HEEACT is able to draw from a pool of reviewers that covers the necessary perspectives, the Review Panel suggests that it may be useful to consider adopting an open call for applications from those suitably qualified individuals from the HE sector (and from other stakeholders) to be reviewers. This has the benefit of further spreading knowledge and understanding of the HEEACT and its work throughout the sector and beyond. Some of the institutional representatives that the panel spoke to suggested that some reviewers were rather old-fashioned in their approach to QA (i.e., some reviewers not taken on board either international trends in QA or, more importantly, the evolution of HEEACT's own review methods); encouraging applications from younger members of institutional staff may help to embed the HEEACT's aim of ensuring that it keeps up with international trends in QA.

Certainly, as work with students develops, there will come a moment in the future when the HEEACT will want to find a mechanism for inviting applications from students to be members of an accreditation panel. Having an application and selection/recruitment mechanism in place will facilitate this process.

3.3.4   The EQAA has clear specifications on the characteristics and selection of external Reviewers, who must be supported by appropriate training and good supporting materials such as handbooks or manuals.

To be appointed as a reviewer (or an Accreditation Recognition Committee member), a reviewer must meet one of the following qualifications:

- "Hold the position of associate professor or above, have a respected reputation within academia or experience in institutional evaluation, and possess previous or current experience as a senior administrator, college dean, or an equivalent position.
- Have a respected reputation within his/her field of expertise or rich experience within industry, and previous or current experience as an executive administrator or equivalent position".

Appointment procedures for reviewers are as follows:

(1) A candidate will be appointed after the approval of the BOT and completion of HEEACT reviewers' training courses
(2) The HEEACT recommends the reviewer to the institution/program undergoing accreditation. The institution or program may highlight any conflict of interest.

All reviewers are required to attend HEEACT's training and are not allowed to take part in an accreditation until they have completed the training. If s/he is unable to attend the training in person, they may complete it on-line.

For institutional accreditation there are two core training courses (Data Collection and Analysis; and Evaluation Ethics). For program accreditation, there are three core courses (Evaluation Ethics and Practices; Report Writing Student Learning Outcomes Assessment). The Review Panel was able to view examples of the training materials.

Reviewers are provided with the relevant accreditation manual at the onsite visit and also a standard checklist for reviewers to help them evaluate and cross verify the evidence, the SAR and interview results. The HEEACT works with reviewers to ensure that they receive documentation in the format that they prefer to work with (online or hard copy) and this is appreciated.

Reviewers' performance is evaluated by the HEEACT and reviewers themselves are asked to evaluate the process in which they have participated.

In relation to the self-accreditation recognition process the HEEACT clearly states it the Self-Accreditation Handbook and also in Standards 2 and 3 of the 'Self-Accreditation Mechanism Recognition', the number and type of reviewers required (e.g. from an external institution). It also

provides expectations in relation to training for reviewers, ethics, conflict of interest and scope of duties. In other words, the HEEACT expects institutions to apply the same levels of professionalism to the appointment and training of reviewers as the HEEACT would.

The HEEACT Self-accreditation Handbook provides information to help HEIs ensure the quality of the reviewers they recruit and to offer adequate training.

The reviewers that the Review Panel spoke with said they felt that they had been well-prepared for their task and appreciated the flexibility that the HEEACT allowed in terms of being able to participate in the training online if they were unable to attend in person. In their written responses to the Review Panel, there was agreement that the training provided the opportunity to develop the necessary skill-set for a reviewer and gave them confidence to carry out the task.

> *The orientation course conducted at HEEACT has been provided to all reviewers before the assessment starts. Through the course, the reviewers can understand the purpose of the assessment, the items to be inspected, the evaluation criteria, and regulations. This is very helpful for me to do good review work. (HEEACT Reviewers)*

> *The professional development courses conducted at HEEACT are very useful and practical. The lecturers are experienced at the topics, which are highly related to the tasks assigned. Case studies and hands on experiences are passed on in the courses and I think that the performance of courses can be enhanced by more illustrations. (HEEACT Reviewers)*

> *We, as reviewers, were required to participate in the mini-conference held by the HEEACT, in which several lectures were given. HEEACT basically went through all the review standards they suggested/prepared in detail. Some practical cases were presented, shared and several reminders were given as well. (HEEACT Reviewers)*

However, both HEEACT staff, in their written responses, and (as mentioned above) institutions that the Review Panel spoke to indicated that there were some problems in relation to sometimes the behaviour of reviewers and/or their approach to and knowledge of the area of QA in HE. The HEEACT will want to ensure that its training is able to highlight and resolve such problems.

> *Although the HEEACT has conducted member study before the evaluation activity, a very small number of review panels are still unfamiliar with the process and cannot describe their opinions in a complete and specific manner. They need to rely on the control and assistance of the QA coordinators. In addition, some colleges and universities do not fully understand the accreditation tasks and relevant benefits, which has caused a number of backlashes. (HEEACT Staff)*

> *Some reviewers may be experts in the areas; however, they should pay more attention to the training HEEACT offers. Maybe HEEACT should provide more specific case study examples to keep the reviewers more up-to-date (Universities)*

Reviewers who spoke to the Review Panel were aware that, following evaluation, they could be removed from the assessor pool if their performance were not good enough.

On the other hand, the representatives from self-accrediting institutions told the Review Panel that they very often chose to ask HEEACT-trained reviewers to participate in their self-accreditation procedures rather than to look for and train their own. This is also almost certainly because they value the quality of the HEEACT reviewers and the training processes they have undertaken but it is also likely that it provides the institution with a more streamlined approach to finding reviewers at a time when it is likely to be very busy.

COMMENDATION 7

The Review Panel commends HEEACT for adapting to an online environment and flexibility in working with reviewers' preferences.

RECOMMENDATION 4

The Review Panel recommends that the HEEACT consider the best way to ensure that reviewers are trained effectively, whether the training is conducted online, face-to-face or blended.

The Review Panel also encourages the HEEACT to work towards involving students in the accreditation panels in the future.

3.3.5 External review procedures include effective and comprehensive mechanisms for the prevention of conflicts of interest, and ensure that any judgments resulting from external reviews are based on explicit and published criteria.

The SAR states that, "To avoid conflicts of interest in the second cycles of institutional accreditation and HEEACT program accreditation, the HEEACT sends formal letters to institutions asking them to recommend reviewers with no conflicts of interest". As explained above in 3.3.4, actually the reviewer is recommended by HEEACT and the institution may highlight any conflict of interest.

Following appointment, reviewers must sign a consent form regarding ethics and conflicts of interest. The same process applied to the reviewers involved in self-accreditation processes.

In relation to judgements, the HEEACT training and pre-accreditation meetings focus on the need for decisions to follow the established standards and key indicators and the QA coordinator is present at the onsite visit and review meeting to ensure that the decision-making process is consistent.

Representatives from HEIs and the reviewers that the Review Panel spoke to were all clear as to the criteria on which judgements are based. None had any problem with consistency and clarity of judgements and all were aware of the measures in place for the avoidance of conflict of interest.

The Review Panel found the HEEACT's processes for ensuring the prevention of conflicts of interest and consistency in basing judgements on explicit and published criteria to be effective.

3.3.6 The EQAA's system ensures that each institution or programme will be evaluated in a consistent way, even if the external Panels, teams, or committees are different.

HEEACT ensures accreditation decisions are impartial, rigorous and consistent by using these following methods:

1) Everyone in the review panel and accreditation committee must take part in the training courses to realize HEEACT program accreditation plans
2) All review panels are assigned a HEEACT QA coordinator.
3) Reviewers all have the accreditation manual to follow and HEEACT assigned one QA coordinator in each review panel to help them.
4) HEEACT appointed one experienced reviewer to be the panel chair to make sure the review panel goes well.
5) Review panels all have the formal checklist to decide on the result.

The accreditation committee will make sure the results in this disciple is impartial, rigorous and consistent, and most important is that one of HEEACT's director, dean or executive director will in the committee and lead the committee's discussion. (HEEACT Staff)

In my experience working here at HEEACT, HEEACT's Board of Trustees is the highest decision-making body that ensures that all the decisions are impartial, rigorous and consistent, the diversity of the Board of Trustees members ensure the independence and impartiality of the decisions that are taken. (BOT)

3.3.7 The EQAA carries out the external review within a reasonable timeframe after the completion of a self-assessment report, to ensure that information is current and updated.

Site visits are conducted within six (6) months of submission of the SAR. The schedule is straightforward and appreciated by institutions and programmes undergoing accreditation.

3.3.8 The EQAA provides the higher education institutions with an opportunity to correct any factual errors that may appear in the external review report

The HEEACT sets out procedures for the opportunity to HEI may submit feedback on factual errors in its regulations. The procedure is also published on its website. Such feedback must be provided within a mandatory duration (i.e., 2–4 weeks after the visit) if the institution or program feels that there are factual errors in the draft, or believes the onsite visit violated procedures.

It was clear to the Review Panel that the HEEACT's procedures in this regard are well thought out and in line with international practice. Institutional representatives that spoke to the Review Panel were very clear about the difference between commenting on factual error and making more substantive comments on the substance of an accreditation report. They said that, in general, the HEEACT did not accept more substantive comments unless they were clearly substantiated.

3.4 The requirements for self-evaluation

3.4.1 The EQAA provides clear guidance to the institution or programme in the application of the procedures for self-evaluation, the solicitation of assessment/feedback from the public, students, and other constituents, or the preparation for external review as necessary and appropriate.

The HEEACT underpins the conduct of its accreditation processes with the principles of providing clear guidance to the institutions and programs. This extends to procedures for self-evaluation, the need to collect external views and preparation for the accreditation process itself. It holds a consultation seminar before publishing its Accreditation Handbooks and designs its standards and indicators with a focus on continuous self- improvement and student learning outcomes.

It was evident to the review panel, both through the documentation that it read and the people that it spoke to, that the HEEACT provides clear and valuable advice and guidance around all aspects of its accreditation processes. However, the role of the self-evaluation document and the solicitation of feedback from stakeholders including students, are elements of a strong internal QA system at an institution. The HEEACT states that one of its goals is to support institutions in developing their IQA systems and that one of the ways it does this is to provide support and guidance on the development of a SAR. All of the institutional representatives that spoke to the Review Panel recognised that the development of the SAR was an important way of highlighting their IQA system but none were able to talk about this in any detail. Nor did they demonstrate an understanding of how and why the SAR is important in this regard.

Equally the Review Panel heard little detail on the importance of stakeholder's feedback. This report has already highlighted the need for the HEEACT to engage more with students, who are one of the key groups of stakeholders for both the agency and the institutions.

In relation to both IQA and the involvement of students, the Review Panel was informed during the site visit that the HEEACT encouraged HEIs to involve students in their IQA systems through the accreditation standards. The panel encourages the HEEACT to use other relevant sections of this report that comments on the standards to ensure that the standards really do provide support to HEIs in this regard.

The Review Panel, therefore, believes that, whilst the HEEACT has begun to work with institutions on their IQA systems, this work is in its infancy and that there is scope to work in much more detail to the benefit of all parts of the Taiwanese HE sector.

RECOMMENDATION 5

The Review Panel recommends HEEACT to continue work with HEIs on strengthening IQA, perhaps finding ways to build on the foundations that have been put in place. (The work with students is also important in this regard). The Review Panel further recommends the involvement of a wider group of stakeholders in the development and revision of QA standards. This includes students.

4. The EQAA and its relationship to the public

4.1 Public reports on EQAA policies and decisions

4.1.1 The EQAA provides full and clear disclosure of its relevant documentation such as policies, procedures and criteria.

From the SAR and relevant evidence provided in the submission portfolio, it is apparent that HEEACT maintains a very close relationship with the public, in particular its stakeholders.

Consistent with its vision and core values, HEEACT provides full and clear disclosure of its Accreditation Handbooks which contain detailed policies, procedures and criteria. Evaluation Bimonthly has also been used to provide QA-related updates to the public. This has been confirmed by the interviewees during the site visit.

4.1.2 The EQAA reports its decisions about higher education institutions and programmes. The content and extent of reporting may vary with cultural context and applicable legal and other requirements.

The accreditation reports and review results are disclosed to the public through its website, as well as the Taiwan Quality Institution Directory (TQID).

4.1.3 The EQAA has mechanisms to facilitate the public a fair understanding of the reasons supporting decisions taken.

Mechanisms exist to provide the public with a fair understanding of the decisions made from the evaluation through the dissemination of handbooks containing policies, procedures and criteria of accreditation.

In the view of the Review Panel, HEEACT aligns with this standard.

4.2 Other public reports

4.2.1 The EQAA discloses to the public the decisions about the EQAA resulting from any external review of its own performance.

In addition to annually undergoing the ISO certification process, in accordance with current regulations, the HEEACT regularly receives MOE evaluations. In 2013, the HEEACT received an "Outstanding" accreditation result from the Education Affairs Foundation Evaluation (see LINK website).

Additionally, the relevant documents are published on the HEEACT website under "public information" category.

4.2.2 The EQAA prepares and disseminates periodically integrated reports on the overall outcomes of QA processes and of any other relevant activities.

HEEACT publishes an annual report every year (http://www.heeact.edu.tw/1216/1272/1274/). The annual report shows all the implementation results and achievements of all types of accreditation. The annual report also includes the annual financial report of the agency and the outcomes of the research projects and staff capacity building and training. Through the annual report, the public can obtain a whole picture of the tasks of QA and accreditation performed by the HEEACT every year.

5. Decision making

HEEACT claims its accreditation and recognition decision-making process is impartial, rigorous, and consistent. The decision-making underlying the HEEACT's accreditation result is a two-stage review process and final decision is made according to the following procedures:

- First, HEEACT announces the Accreditation Handbook, which includes the accreditation process, standards and indicators.
- Subsequently, the reviewers read the institution's SAR and identify issues that must be clarified. After the institution has made its clarifications, the reviewers conduct an onsite visit at the evaluated institution.
- Finally, the reviewers come up with the onsite visit draft report. The accreditation reviewers would recommend the accreditation results through a consensus meeting. The recommendation

of the result will then be reported to the Accreditation Recognition Committee for decisions and the BOT will decide on the approval of the final decisions.

- 🐝 After the accreditation results are announced, the evaluated institution can make appeals if they are not satisfied with the result.

5.1 The decision-making process

HEEACT has policies and procedures in place that ensure a fair and independent decision-making process in the final review of the institution or the program accreditation as well as the recognition process for self-accreditation programs.

In order to improve its administrative efficiency, HEEACT endeavours to establish hierarchical decision-making processes and regulations, which is depicted in Figure 10 of the SAR. The figure also explicates that there are two main flows of decision making based on the categories of the decision.

The decision-making process concerning the outcomes of review and assessment involves three key actors, namely: review panel, Accreditation Recognition Committee, and BOT.

The decision-making underlying the HEEACT's accreditation result is a two-stage review process.

- 🐝 First, the reviewers read the institution's SAR and identify issues that must be clarified. Subsequently, after the institution has made its clarifications, the reviewers conduct an onsite visit at the evaluated institution.
- 🐝 Finally, the reviewers come up with the onsite visit report, based on which the review panel would recommend the accreditation results through a consensus meeting.

The accreditation results will be reported to the BOT Meeting for confirmation. After obtaining BOT's decision, the accreditation results are announced by HEEACT. Should the evaluated institution be not satisfied with the result, they can file an appeal to HEEACT. Decision making process for an appeal follows a separate procedure and the decision is independently made by the Appeal Committee established by the BOT.

5.1.1 The EQAA decisions take into consideration the outcomes of both the institution's self-assessment process and the external review; they may also consider any other relevant information, provided this has been communicated to the HEIs.

The accreditation procedures of the institutional and HEEACT program accreditation processes comprises document review, onsite visit, handling of feedback and suggestions, and the accreditation results. During the document review, the panel reviews the SAR of the institution together with relevant supporting documents such as the institution's strategic plan, internal regulations etc. In case if needed, the review panel may request for additional documents to the institution under review during this stage. Such requests are channelled through HEEACT's staff. During the onsite visit panel holds discussions, conducts group and individual interviews, observes learning process and physical facilities, reviews documents and evidences. After the onsite visit, the review panel completes the initial draft of the onsite visit report, and presents the preliminary results to the HEEACT. The draft will be sent to the institution for feedback and suggestions, to be later on finalized by the review panel. The Accreditation Recognition Committee of both institutional and program accreditation makes the final decision depending on a variety of sources, including the institution's SAR, onsite visit report, feedback and suggestions from the institution under review, and the review panel's responses.

The recognition for self-accreditation is a meta-review which is divided into mechanism review and result recognition stages. In the mechanism review process, reviewers examine the institutions' self-accreditation mechanism and action plan, clarify its matters in the self-accreditation mechanism, and other relevant supporting information to decide if the institution's self-accreditation mechanism and proposal is approved or not. In the second phase of result recognition, the Accreditation Recognition Committee would make a judgement by examining the institution's final report and program review result, the responses to issues addressed by the recognition committee, and other relevant information.

The accreditation/recognition process and required documents for institutional accreditation, program accreditation, and recognition of self-accreditation handbooks are published online on HEEEACT's website.

5.1.2 The EQAA decisions are impartial, rigorous, and consistent even when they are based on the reports of other quality assurance bodies.

HEEEACT's decision-making process is systematic and consistent, and includes the institution's self-assessment, the onsite visit, and peer review. As commented before, the decision-making process involves three major actors, namely: review panel, Accreditation Recognition Committee, and BOT. The three-step decision process helps HEEEACT to ensure that decisions are impartial, rigorous, and consistent.

During the virtual site visit, the Review Panel learned that the decisions made by the BOT always concur with the one proposed by the Accreditation Recognition Committee. The Director of Office for Quality Assurance and Projects and the Executive Director also attended the meetings held by the review panel as well as the Accreditation Recognition Committee. This is to make sure that all standards and procedures are followed during the early stages of decision-making processes. From the representatives of HEIs that are interviewed during the virtual visit, it was also revealed that the decisions made by HEEEACT are always consistent with the published standards and criteria as well as with other QA bodies.

Currently, HEEEACT recognizes the QA agencies of the Taiwan Assessment and Evaluation Association, Chinese Management Association, Institution of Engineering Education in Taiwan, and the Council on Education for Public Health. The decision-making process for the aforementioned associations conforms to HEEEACT's regulations (see APPENDIX 34).

5.1.3 The EQAA decisions are based on published criteria and procedures, and can be justified only with reference to those criteria and procedures.

HEEEACT conducts institutional accreditation, program accreditation, and recognition of self-accreditation results according to the indicators and processes disclosed on its website (http://www.heeact.edu.tw/1216/1244/).

Based on the information gathered from the reviewers and representatives from universities, it was made very clear that HEEEACT decisions regarding accreditation/recognition are always based on the published criteria and procedures and can be justified only with reference to those criteria and procedures.

5.1.4 Consistency in decision-making includes consistency and transparency in processes and actions for imposing recommendations for follow-up action.

In order to ensure consistency and transparency in the review processes, HEEEACT establishes an Accreditation Recognition Committee for the decision on its institutional accreditation, program accreditation, and recognition of self-accreditation. The composition of each committee is clearly shown in HEEEACT's Regulations. The size of the committee depends on the complexity of the process, which ranges from 5 members for program accreditation to 11 members for institutional accreditation.

In the case of follow-up accreditation, the recognition committees will make judgements according to the suggestions given in the follow up accreditation report, as well as the previous onsite visit review. In general, the follow up process will be the same as the previous one.

Based on the information gathered from the interviews with representatives of reviewers and HEIs, it is fair to conclude that accreditation results made by HEEEACT are consistent and transparent, and recommendations from previous review cycle are properly attended during the next review cycle.

5.1.5 The EQAA's reported decisions are clear and precise.

HEEEACT believes that decisions on accreditation are clear, precise and differentiated based on types of accreditation (institution, program, and self-accreditation), both in terms of accreditation status

and period of validity (see SAR, Table 34, pp. 124-125). In case of institutional accreditation, the decision includes Accredited, Conditionally Accredited, and Denied, with the validity period of six years. Decisions for self-accreditation could only either be Recognized or Not Recognized, with a period of validity of six years. The validity period of decision for program accreditation reflects the status, i.e., three years for provisional and six years for full accreditation.

5.2 The EQAA's process for appeals and complaints

5.2.1 The EQAA has procedures in place to deal in a consistent way with complaints about its procedures or operation.

HEEACT established a standard operating procedure for complaint handling and feedback system, which is called 'Procedure of Service Request and External Feedback Management'. It stipulates clearly how such a complaint is handled and responded, which includes the approval by the Executive Committee. Resolution to a complaint is reported to the President.

On the day of the onsite visit for the institutional accreditation and HEEACT program accreditation, the university staff and panel members who participate in the accreditation process are requested to complete a survey over the level of their satisfaction toward the onsite visit. After collecting the responses, the HEEACT analyses the data and examines the results biannually to make necessary improvements. Examples of results from this feedback is that HEEACT learns how to improve accreditation services and procedures from both the universities and review panels.

From the interview with representatives of HEIs, it was clearly revealed that they know exactly the procedure for filing complaints to HEEACT about its procedures or operation.

5.2.2 The EQAA has clear, published procedures for handling appeals related to its external review and decision-making processes.

HEEACT has an established procedure for handling appeals related to its accreditation decisions. Such procedure is disclosed to the public in an official document called HEEACT Regulation 2020, which states that an institution with objections to the accreditation result may submit appeals to the HEEACT within 30 days of the accreditation results being announced. After an appeal application is received, it is submitted to the Appeal Committee for review. If an appeal case is justified, HEEACT shall adjust the accreditation result accordingly. Otherwise, HEEACT shall formally overrule the appeal with a written explanation to the appellant.

According to the Regulations Governing the Review of Appeals of Institutional Accreditation Results and Other Quality Assurance Related Queries, the Appeal Committee is composed of professionals with expertise in law, or in educational evaluation/accreditation, or persons dedicated to social justice. Most of the Appeal Committee members have extensive experience as reviewers themselves, and they must follow the conflict of interest guidelines in any proceedings related to the appeal.

The procedures for handling appeal related to HEEACT decisions on accreditation or recognition results are clear and well understood by HEIs as described by HEI's representative during the interview with the Review Panel. The Appeal Committee established by HEEACT to handle such appeal is independent and competent to make objective and fair decisions.

5.2.3 Appeals are conducted by a Panel that was not responsible for the original decision and has no conflict of interest; appeals need not necessarily be conducted outside the EQAA.

HEEACT establishes an Appeal Committee according to the Higher Education Accreditation and Quality Assurance Affair Feedback Review Regulations. The Appeal Committee includes nine to fifteen members comprising legal and academic experts who are appointed by the BOT. In addition, appeal committee members with conflicts of interest with the evaluated institution should voluntarily recuse themselves from the appointment (see SAR, APPENDIX 37), and they shall not participate in the review of the appeal case to ensure the impartiality and independence of the appeal process. Additionally, the Appeal Committee members are responsible for the confidentiality of the appeal case.

According to the Regulations Governing the Review of Appeals of Institutional Accreditation Results and Other Quality Assurance Related Queries, the Appeal Committee is composed of nine to fifteen members who possess expertise in law, in educational evaluation/ accreditation, or who are dedicated to social justice. The Executive Director will nominate qualified candidates according to their QA experiences and university governance, and then appoint them only upon approval of the BOT.

There is no specific restriction which stipulates that the Appeal Committee members cannot participate in the accreditation process, nor be members of the Recognition Committee. However, if the appeal cases are related to the review process in which a committee member had been involved before, they will need to be excluded in order to avoid any conflicts of interest.

6. The QA of cross-border higher education

Please see section 7 below for information on the HEEACT's international activities.

6.1 Criteria for cross border higher education

6.1.1 The EQAA in a sending country makes clear that the awarding institution is responsible for ensuring the equivalent quality of the education offered, that the institution understands the regulatory frameworks of the receiving countries, and that the institution provides clear information on the programmes offered and their characteristics.

Not applicable.

6.1.2 Students and other stakeholders receive clear and complete information about the awards delivered.

Not applicable.

6.1.3 The rights and obligations of the parties involved in transnational education are clearly established and well known by the parties.

Not Applicable.

6.2 Collaboration between agencies

6.2.1 The EQAA cooperates with appropriate local agencies in the exporting and importing countries and with international networks. This cooperation is oriented to improve mutual understanding, to have a clear and comprehensive account of the regulatory framework and to share good practices.

Not applicable.

6.2.2 The EQAA seeks ways to cooperate in the external quality assurance in transnational education provision, for example through mutual recognition.

Not applicable

7. Others (Optional)

The Review Panel would like to use this section of the report to discuss its findings in relation to the HEEACT's international activities.

There are no formal criteria for transnational education (TNE) arrangements or cross-border HE in Taiwan. The MOE is responsible for this area and, whilst there is interest in TNE, this has not yet been translated into a formal set of criteria or processes.

However, HEEACT has established an international presence in relation to its core review functions through:

- Signing MoUs with other external QA agencies (EQAAs)
- Using international reviewers in the second round of institutional accreditation

- Participating in international research projects and providing the MOE with results and information
- Establishing a website, i.e. TQID which explains Taiwanese HE to overseas applicants
- Planning a joint review model with National Accreditation Agency for Higher Education (BAN-PT),
- Conducting exchanges with other EQAAs
- Conducting a joint overseas accreditation with NCPA (Russia),
- Establishing mutual recognition over the accreditation decisions with MQA based on a joint statement of confidence.
- Collaborating with the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) in a research project entitled: "*The Pilot Study of Higher Education Academic Qualifications between Taiwan and New Zealand*"
- Acting as a NARIC (National Recognition Information Centre) in helping students to "translate" their qualifications across different HE systems.
- Publishing English newsletters and academic journal titled *Higher Education Evaluation and Development (HEED)* with Emerald, as well as an English monograph with Springer.

The MoE informed the Review Panel that it was aiming at increased recruitment of students from other countries in the region and more widely and to develop a regional qualifications framework with other countries in Southeast Asia. Despite a lack of formal policy in relation to TNE, which is often the driving force behind international work for EQAAs, HEEACT has carried out valuable work in ensuring that Taiwan and Taiwanese HE is recognised internationally and responds to the MOE's international goals and aspirations. This work is valued by the MOE, for whom the HEEACT acts as a 'think tank' in presenting what it has learned, the Taiwanese HE sector who recognise the value and benefits of such work in a globalised world and by the HEEACT's international partners who gain from their joint endeavours with the HEEACT and appreciate its contribution to projects and research.

The Review Panel is of the opinion that HEEACT makes the most of all international opportunities – this has allowed it not only to develop a prominent international presence but also to gain access to valuable information and advice to share with the MOE and the HE sector in Taiwan.

COMMENDATION 8

The Review Panel commends HEEACT and its leadership for its international activities. Reasons for this commendation include:

- Recognition by the MOE and HEIs of the value this work brings to Taiwan and the Taiwanese HE sector
- the benefits that the leadership of HEEACT bring to the agency through their work on regional and international umbrella quality assurance networks, such as the Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN) and the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).
- The esteem in which HEEACT is held by its international partners
- The benefits to HEEACT of actively engaging in QA activities and research with peer external quality assurance agencies (EQAA) on a national, regional and international basis.

SUGGESTION 2

The review panel suggests that the HEEACT ensures that its international work is accessible to all the stakeholders. This could be achieved through its communication strategy with a view to ensuring that all stakeholders are aware of publications and their value.

Conclusion

The above represents the Review Panel's collective views on HEEACT as well as its recommendation to the INQAAHE Board for consideration. Based on the above findings, the Review Panel believes and hopes that this evaluation process will confirm to HEEACT what is doing well and highlight some areas around which it can improve and enhance what it is doing. The Review Panel believes that HEEACT is in alignment with GGP requirements and is recommending that HEEACT be recognized by INQAAHE.

Met or Exceeded INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice

APPENDIX 3 summarises the Review Panel's assessment in relation to whether the applicant EQAA complies with the INQAAHE GGP standards:

Met   The guideline has been met with no reservations.

Met (R)   The guideline has been met with some reservations, i.e., the Panel has identified an area which could be further improved.

Exceeded   The guideline has been met with no reservations and there has been commendable good practice.

Summary List of Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations

COMMENDATIONS

1. The Review Panel commends HEEACT the ISO certification, which demonstrates that HEEACT implements a good standard and operating practices.

2. The Review Panel commends HEEACT for its proactivity in approaching changes in ministerial policies to ensure its relevance to the Taiwanese HE sector.

3. The Review Panel commends HEEACT for developing a very collegial and excellent relationship with the HE sector as evidenced by the conversations with the institutions, many of whom continue to ask HEEACT to carry out program accreditation. Institutions with self-accredited programs also make reference to the pool of reviewers of HEEACT.

4. The Review Panel commends the value of the accreditation Handbooks for the helpful guidance they provide to institutions.

5. The Review Panel commends the value of the publications produced, especially the bi-monthly journal and the accreditation handbooks.

6. The Review Panel commends HEEACT for the establishment of a QA Coordinators team, providing support and services to HEIs under review. This service is well-received by HEIs and has the additional benefit of helping to maintain consistency across reviews.

7. The Review Panel commends HEEACT for adapting to an online environment and flexibility in working with reviewers' preferences.

8. The Review Panel commends HEEACT and its leadership for its international activities.

AFFIRMATONS

1. The Review Panel affirms that HEEACT is not only established based on a strong legal basis but also highly regarded by wide ranges of stakeholders such as the MOE, public and private HEIs in Taiwan, business sector, as well as international partners.

2. The Review Panel affirms that HEEACT actively conducts research on domestic and international QA systems, and takes into consideration guidelines, standards and criteria issued by those networks when developing/formulating its policies and practices.

3. The Review Panel affirms that HEEACT has a clear and published policy for the prevention of conflicts of interest that applies to its staff, external reviewers, and its decision-making body.

4. The Review Panel affirms that HEEACT has clear mission and vision statements which are shared by wider members of staff at all levels of the agency.

5. The Review Panel affirms that HEEACT is supported by well-trained and appropriately-qualified staff, which are capable of carrying out HEEACT's mission effectively and efficiently.

6. The Review Panel affirms that the last three years' financial statements indicate that HEEACT is in a surplus status.

7. The Review Panel affirms HEEACT's professional development activities are appropriate and well-received.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Based on the comments received at the interview with the international collaborative partners, the Review Panel recommends HEEACT to translate and publish its accreditation reports in English, at a minimum, the respective executive summary. This could enhance collaboration with its partner QA agencies, as well as in supporting the agency's journey of becoming an international QA agency).

2. The Review Panel recommends that HEEACT continue to work with HEIs on strengthening their IQA and that it finds ways to build on the foundations that have been put in place to ensure that IQA is developed, evolves and becomes embedded in the everyday work of each HEI.

3. The Review Panel recommends the involvement of a wider group of stakeholders in the development and revision of QA standards. This includes students. It recommends that the HEEACT is very clear about the focus of its seminars and consultation meetings, to ensure that participants are aware of their role in and the outcomes of the event.

4. The Review Panel recommends that the HEEACT consider the best way to ensure that reviewers are trained effectively, whether the training is conducted online, face-to-face or blended.

5. The Review Panel recommends HEEACT to continue work with HEIs on strengthening IQA, perhaps finding ways to build on the foundations that have been put in place. (The work with students is also important in this regard). The Review Panel further recommends the involvement of a wider group of stakeholders in the development and revision of QA standards. This includes students.

APPENDIX 1: INQAAHE GGP Review Panel

Members of the INQAAHE GGP Review Panel

Review Panel Chair	Review Panel Secretary	Review Panel Member
Fiona Crozier Independent QA Consultant Former Head of International Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), UK Former Vice President, ENQA	**Dr Eddy Chong Siong Choy** Chief Technical Officer (QA) Finance Accreditation Agency (FAA), Malaysia Former Director, INQAAHE Board Lead assessor, ASEAN University Network-Quality Assurance (AUN-QA)	**Prof. T. Basaruddin (Prof. Chan)** Professor of Computer Science University of Indonesia Director, Executive Board National Accreditation Agency for Higher Education – Indonesia (BAN-PT)

INQAAHE GGP Project Director

	Pauline Tang Former CEO, International Centre of Excellence in Tourism and Hospitality Education (THE- ICE) Immediate Past Vice President INQAAHE Board

APPENDIX 2 - GGP Review Virtual Site Visit Program

高等教育評鑑中心
Higher Education Evaluation and
Accreditation Council of Taiwan

As at 8-Oct-2020

DAY-1: Monday, 5-Oct-2020

Date/Time	Activity/Organization
2:45pm – 3:00pm	Welcome & Opening of Virtual Site Visit
3:00pm - 4:00pm	HEEACT Board of Trustee representatives, HEEACT Executive Team
4:00pm - 5:00pm	Ministry of Higher Education representative
5:00pm - 6:00pm	HEEACT professional staff/reviewers
6:30pm – 6:30pm	*Review Panel Break*
6:00pm - 7:00pm	HEEACT Staff members with experience from accreditation of programmes
7:00pm - 8:00pm	Review Panel discussion
8:00pm	Close

DAY-2: Tuesday, 6-Oct-2020

Date/Time	Activity/Organization
3:00pm - 4:00pm	First institution accreditation HEIs, senior QA representatives
4:00pm - 5:00pm	Program accreditation HEIs, senior QA representatives
5:00pm – 5:30pm	*Review Panel Break*
5:30pm - 6:30pm	Student associations representatives
6:30pm - 7:30pm	Review Panel discussion
7:30pm	Close

DAY-3: Wednesday, 7-Oct-2020

Date/Time	Activity/Organization
3:00pm - 4:00pm	Second Institution accreditation HEIs, senior QA representatives
4:00pm - 5:00pm	Self-accreditation HEIs, senior QA representatives
6:30pm – 6:30pm	*Review Panel Break*
4:00pm - 5:00pm	International collaborative partners representatives
7:00pm - 8:00pm	Review Panel discussion
8:00pm	Close

DAY-4: Thursday, 8-Oct-2020

Date/Time	Activity/Organization
4:00pm - 4:30pm	Call back meeting - HEEACT Executive Director and senior staff
4:30pm - 5:30pm	Review Panel finalise exit report
5:30pm – 6:00pm	*Review Panel Break*
6:00pm - 7:00pm	Verbal exit report - summary of the Review Panel's findings HEEACT Board & senior management

APPENDIX 3: Summary Evaluation of Review Panel

Legends

Met	Met GGP requirement with no reservations
Met (R)	Met GGP requirement with some reservations. The Review Panel has identified an area or areas which could be further improved
Exceeded	The guideline has been met with no reservations and there has been commendable good practice

Standard	INQAAHE GGP	Review Panel Assessment
1.	**THE STRUCTURE OF THE EQAA**	
1.1	**The EQAA's legitimacy and recognition**	
1.1.1	The EQAA has an established legal basis and is recognised by a competent external body.	Met
1.1.2	The EQAA takes into consideration relevant guidelines issued by international networks and other associations, in formulating its policies and practices.	Met
1.1.3	The EQAA has a clear and published policy for the prevention of conflicts of interest that applies to its staff, its decision-making body, and the external reviewers.	Met
1.2	**Mission and Purposes**	
1.2.1	The EQAA has a written mission statement and a set of objectives that explicitly provide that external quality assurance of higher education is its major concern, describe the purpose and scope of its activities and can be translated into verifiable policies and measurable objectives.	Met
1.3	**Governance and Organisational Structure**	
1.3.1	The EQAA has a governance structure consistent with its mission and objectives and adequate mechanisms to involve relevant stakeholders in the definition of its standards and criteria.	Met
1.3.2	The EQAA's composition and/or its regulatory framework ensure its independence and impartiality.	Met
1.3.3	The EQAA's organisational structure makes it possible to carry out its external review processes effectively and efficiently.	Met
1.3.4	The EQAA has a strategic plan that helps it assess its progress and plan for future developments.	Met
1.4	**Resources**	
1.4.1	The EQAA has a well-trained, qualified staff able to conduct external evaluation effectively and efficiently in accordance with its mission statement and its methodological approach.	Met
1.4.2	The EQAA has the physical and financial resources needed to fulfil its goals and carry out the activities that emerge from its mission statement and objectives.	Met
1.4.3	The EQAA provides systematic opportunities for the professional development of its staff.	Met
2.	**ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE EQAA**	
2.1	**Quality Assurance of the EQAA**	

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2.1.1	The EQAA operates with transparency, integrity and professionalism and adheres to ethical and professional standards.	Met
2.1.2	The EQAA has in place mechanisms that enable it to review its own activities in order to respond to the changing nature of higher education, the effectiveness of its operations, and its contribution towards the achievement of its objectives.	Met
2.1.3	The EQAA periodically conducts a self-review of its own activities, including consideration of its own effects and value. The review includes data collection and analysis, to inform decision-making and trigger improvements.	Met
2.1.4	The EQAA is subject to external reviews at regular intervals, ideally not exceeding five years. There is evidence that any required actions are implemented and disclosed.	Met
2.2	**Links to the QA community**	
2.2.1	The EQAA is open to international developments in quality assurance and has mechanisms that enable it to learn about and analyse the main trends in the field.	Met
2.2.2	The EQAA collaborates with other QA agencies where possible, in areas such as exchange of good practices, capacity building, and review of decisions, joint projects, or staff exchanges.	Met/ Met (R)
3.	**THE EQAA FRAMEWORK FOR THE EXTERNAL REVIEW OF QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**	
3.1	**The relationship between the EQAA and higher education institutions**	
3.1.1	The EQAA recognises that institutional and programmatic quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of the higher education institutions themselves, and respects the academic autonomy, identity and integrity of the institutions and programs.	Exceeded
3.1.2	The EQAA promotes the development and appropriate implementation of internal quality assurance processes in accordance with the understanding that the primary responsibility for assuring quality resides with the institutions and its programs.	Exceeded Met (R)
3.1.3	The EQAA bears in mind the level of workload and cost that its procedures will place on institutions, and strives to make them as time and cost effective as possible.	Met
3.2	**The definition of criteria for external quality review**	
3.2.1	The EQAA recognises and values institutional diversity, and translates this valuation into criteria and procedures that take into account the identity and goals of higher education institutions.	Met
3.2.2	Standards or criteria developed by the EQAA have been subject to reasonable consultation with stakeholders and are revised at regular intervals to ensure relevance to the needs of the system.	Met (R)
3.2.3	Standards or criteria take into consideration the specific aspects related to different modes of provision, such as transnational education, distance or online programs or other non-traditional approaches to higher education as relevant to the context in which they operate.	Met

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3.2.4	Standards or criteria explicitly address the areas of institutional activity that fall within the EQAA's scope.	Met
3.2.5	Criteria or standards and procedures take into account internal follow up mechanisms, and provide for effective follow up of the outcomes of the external reviews.	Met
3.2.6	The EQAA procedures specify the way in which criteria will be applied and the types of evidence needed to demonstrate that they are met.	Exceeded
3.3	**The external review process**	
3.3.1	The EQAA carries out an external review process that is reliable and based on published criteria and procedures. It follows a self-assessment or equivalent, and includes an external review (normally including a site visit or visits), and a consistent follow up of the recommendations resulting from the external review.	Met
3.3.2	The EQAA has published documents, which clearly state what it expects from higher education institutions, in the form of quality criteria or standards and procedures for self-assessment and external review.	Exceeded
3.3.3	The external review process is carried out by teams of experts consistent with the characteristics of the institution/program being reviewed. Experts can provide input from various perspectives, including those of institutions, academics, students, employers or professional practitioners.	Met
3.3.4	The EQAA has clear specifications on the characteristics and selection of external reviewers, who must be supported by appropriate training and good supporting materials such as handbooks or manuals.	Met
3.3.5	External review procedures include effective and comprehensive mechanisms for the prevention of conflicts of interest, and ensure that any judgments resulting from external reviews are based on explicit and published criteria.	Met
3.3.6	The EQAA's system ensures that each institution or program will be evaluated in a consistent way, even if the external panels, teams, or committees are different.	Met
3.3.7	The EQAA carries out the external review within a reasonable timeframe after the completion of a self-assessment report, to ensure that information is current and updated.	Met
3.3.8	The EQAA provides the higher education institutions with an opportunity to correct any factual errors that may appear in the external review report.	Met
3.4	**The requirements for self-evaluation**	
3.4.1	The EQAA provides clear guidance to the institution or program in the application of the procedures for self-evaluation, the solicitation of assessment/feedback from the public, students, and other constituents, or the preparation for external review as necessary and appropriate.	Met (R)
4.	**THE EQAA AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE PUBLIC**	
4.1	**Public reports on the EQAA's policies and decisions**	
4.1.1	The EQAA provides full and clear disclosure of its relevant documentation such as policies, procedures and criteria.	Met

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4.1.2	The EQAA reports its decisions about higher education institutions and programs. The content and extent of reporting may vary with cultural context and applicable legal and other requirements.	Met
4.1.3	The EQAA has mechanisms to facilitate a fair understanding of the reasons supporting decisions taken.	Met
4.2	**Other public reports**	
4.2.1	The EQAA discloses to the public the decisions about the EQAA resulting from any external review of its own performance.	Met
4.2.2	The EQAA prepares and disseminates periodically integrated reports on the overall outcomes of QA processes and of any other relevant activities.	Met
5.	**DECISION MAKING**	
5.1	**The decision-making process**	
5.1.1	The EQAA's decisions take into consideration the outcomes of both the institution's self-assessment process and the external review; they may also consider any other relevant information, provided this has been communicated to higher education institutions.	Met
5.1.2	The EQAA's decisions are impartial, rigorous, and consistent even when they are based on the reports of other quality assurance bodies.	Met
5.1.3	The EQAA's decisions are based on published criteria and procedures, and can be justified only with reference to those criteria and procedures.	Met
5.1.4	Consistency in decision-making includes consistency and transparency in processes and actions for imposing recommendations for follow-up action.	Met
5.1.5	The EQAA's reported decisions are clear and precise.	Met
5.2	**The EQAA's process for appeals and complaints**	
5.2.1	The EQAA has procedures in place to deal in a consistent way with complaints about its procedures or operation.	Met
5.2.2	The EQAA has clear, published procedures for handling appeals related to its external review and decision-making processes.	Met
5.2.3	Appeals are conducted by a panel that was not responsible for the original decision and has no conflict of interest; appeals need not necessarily be conducted outside the EQAA.	Met
6.	**THE QA OF CROSS BORDER HIGHER EDUCATION**	
6.1	**Criteria for cross border higher education**	
6.1.1	The EQAA in a sending country makes clear that the awarding institution is responsible for ensuring the equivalent quality of the education offered, that the institution understands the regulatory frameworks of the receiving countries, and that the institution provides clear information on the programs offered and their characteristics.	N/A
6.1.2	Students and other stakeholders receive clear and complete information about the awards delivered.	N/A
6.1.3	The rights and obligations of the parties involved in transnational education are clearly established and well known by the parties.	N/A
6.2	**Collaboration between agencies**	

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6.2.1	The EQAA cooperates with appropriate local agencies in the exporting and importing countries and with international networks. This cooperation is oriented to improve mutual understanding, to have a clear and comprehensive account of the regulatory framework and to share good practices.	N/A
6.2.2	The EQAA seeks ways to cooperate in the external quality assurance in transnational education provision, for example through mutual recognition.	N/A
7.	Other: EQAA's international activities.	Exceeded

APPENDIX 4: Acronyms

APQN	Asia Pacific Quality Network
BAN-PT	National Accreditation Agency for Higher Education (Badan Akreditasi Nasional Perguruan Tinggi), Indonesia
BOT	Board of Trustees
HEEACT	Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan
HEI	Higher Education Institution
INQAAHE	International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
ISO	International Organisation for Standardization
MOE	Ministry of Education
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MQA	Malaysian Qualifications Agency
NARIC	National Recognition Information Centre
NCPA	National Centre for Public Accreditation, Russia
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
SAR	Self-assessment Report
TNE	Transnational Education
TQID	Taiwan Quality Institute Directory
TWAEA	Taiwan Assessment and Evaluation Association
WFME	World Federation for Medical Education

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