香港學術及職業資歷評審局
Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of
Academic & Vocational Qualifications

Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ)

Self-Assessment Report

Presented to

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

August 2020

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List of Abbreviations

AAA	Academic Accreditation and Assessment Unit
AAVQO	Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance
APQN	Asia-Pacific Quality Network
CAT	Credit Accumulation and Transfer
CBQAN	Cross-border Quality Assurance Network
CSIPM	Case-Specific Invited Panel Member
CSPE	Committee on Self-financing Post-secondary Education
EDB	Education Bureau
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
FC	Finance Committee of HKCAAVQ Council
GGP	Guidelines of Good Practice in Quality Assurance
GLD	Generic Level Descriptors under Hong Kong Qualifications Framework
Government	Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
HKAPA	Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts
HKCAA	Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation
HKCAAVQ	Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications
HKDSE	Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination
HKQF	Hong Kong Qualifications Framework
HKSYU	Hong Kong Shue Yan University
HRA	Human Resources and Administration Unit
HSUHK	The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong
IE	Initial Evaluation of Four-stage Quality Assurance Process
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LPA	Learning Programme Accreditation of Four-stage Quality Assurance Process
LPAA	Liaison Panel for Academic Accreditation of HKCAAVQ
LPVPET	Liaison Panel for Accreditation of Vocational and Professional Education and Training of HKCAAVQ
Manual	Manual for the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process
NCR	The Non-Local Courses Registry
NLP	Non-local learning programmes
OBE	Outcome-based Education
OLP	Online learning programmes
OUHK	The Open University of Hong Kong
PAA	Programme Area Accreditation of Four-stage Quality Assurance Process
PAC	Personnel and Administration Committee of HKCAAVQ Council
PIR	Periodic Institutional Review of Four-stage Quality Assurance Process
PR	Periodic Review of Four-stage Quality Assurance Process
Process	The Four-stage Quality Assurance Process of HKCAAVQ
QA	Quality assurance
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
QAC	Qualifications and Accreditation Committee of HKCAAVQ Council
QAOK	Quality Assurance Online Knowledgebase of HKCAAVQ
QBBG	Quality Beyond Boundaries Group
QESS	Quality Enhancement Support Scheme
QMS	Quality Management System of HKCAAVQ
QR	Qualifications Register
Re-LPA	Learning Programme Re-accreditation of Four-stage Quality Assurance Process
RT	Research and Training Unit
SED	Secretary for Education

SOLP	Specialist Online Learning Platform of HKCAAVQ
SSC	Specialists Selection Committee of HKCAAVQ
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
TNE	Transnational Education
UGC	University Grants Committee
UK	The United Kingdom
VPET	Vocational and Professional Education and Training
VTC	Vocational Training Council

Executive Summary

In line with its strategic directions, the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) submits for external review for the benefit of benchmarking, as well as continuous quality enhancement. In view of the initiative of the Education Beareau of the Hong Kong Special Adminstrative Region for referencing Hong Kong Qualifications Framework with the European Qualifications Framework, HKCAAVQ considered the next external review to be conducted by the European Association for Quaity Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in meeting the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (the Review) most appropriate and beneficial.

Over the years of its operation, HKCAAVQ has developed robust governance and management systems for systemic and consistent implementation of its accreditation standards and processes. Feedback collection and stakeholder engagement are integral elements of HKCAAVQ's culture of on-going review and improvements. These accumulated efforts have laid a solid foundation for HKCAAVQ's preparation for the external review by ENQA, and are delineated in this submission under the respective ESG standards.

Chapters 8 and 9 form the core of this submission as they present the information and/or narrative as evidence of meeting the respective ESG standards. Under each of the standards in the ESG, a summary is provided as a self-assessment of to what extent HKCAAVQ is meeting the specific standard, based on the evidence presented. In most of the ESG standards, this submission also provides reflections for continuous quality enhancement following the respective self-assessment. In this connection, HKCAAVQ believes that it is an established quality assurance agency with well implemented systems and processes for delivering its accreditation services.

HKCAAVQ sincerely looks forward to receiving the Review Panel of ENQA during their site visit and having a collegial exchange with them to show how HKCAAVQ can continuously enhance its systems, standards and processes underpinning its accreditation activities.
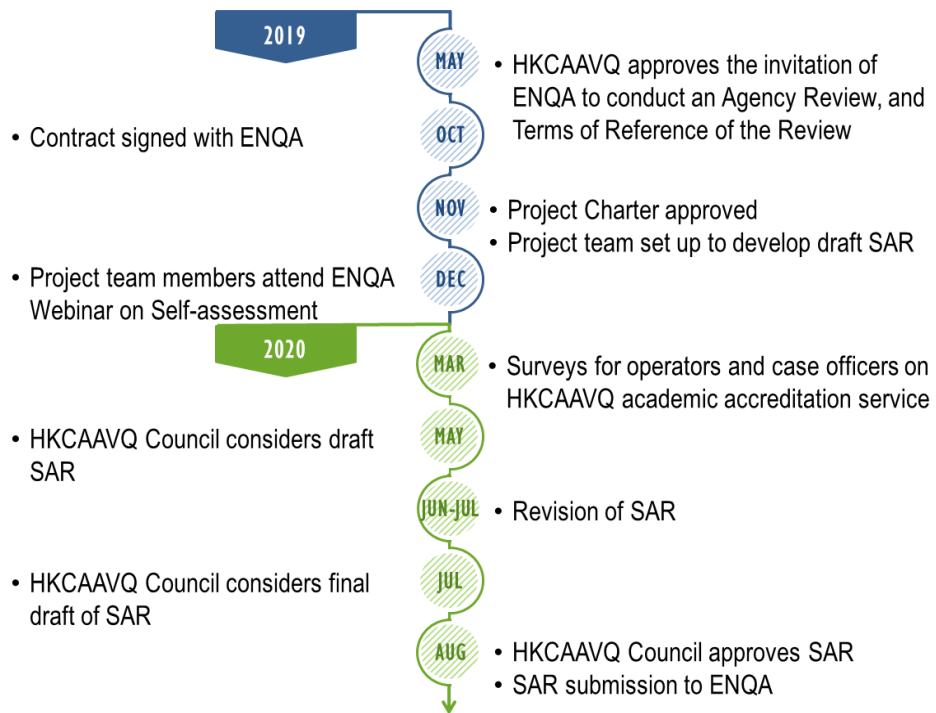
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1   Built on the progress made in the past years, the Strategic Plan 2019-2023 of HKCAAVQ outlines its strategic directions, objectives and strategies for the coming four years. One of the strategic objectives of HKCAAVQ is to be a globally recognised and leading regional quality assurance (QA) agency. A key action to support this direction is to undergo external reviews at regular intervals. The last external review, conducted by the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), confirmed that HKCAAVQ comprehensively adheres to the Guidelines of Good Practice in Quality Assurance (GGP) developed by INQAAHE, with a validity period until 9 October 2020.

1.2   HKCAAVQ, as the appointed Accreditation Authority under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), considers that a review by the ENQA would provide an excellent opportunity for continuous quality enhancement of its systems, standards and processes underpinning its accreditation activities. HKCAAVQ, however, does not intend to seek ENQA membership or registration on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education.

1.3   According to the agreed Terms of Reference, the Review 'will evaluate the way in which and to what extent the core quality assurance activities of HKCAAVQ meet the ESG'. The following HKQF-related accreditation activities of HKCAAVQ will be addressed in the Review:

   (a)   Academic accreditation (Four-stage Quality Assurance Process under HKQF)
   - Initial Evaluation
   - Learning Programme Accreditation and Re-accreditation
   - Programme Area Accreditation
   - Periodic Institutional Review
   (b)   Accreditation of non-local programmes
   (c)   Accreditation of online programmes

1.4   This Self-Assessment Report has been prepared to enable ENQA to evaluate the way in which and to what extent the above-mentioned HKQF-related accreditation activities of HKCAAVQ in higher education meet the ESG. This submission details areas of development for HKCAAVQ since the last external review conducted by INQAAHE in July 2015 and future quality enhancement plans.

1.5   HKCAAVQ sincerely looks forward to receiving the Review Panel of ENQA during their site visit and having a collegial exchange with them.

Chapter 2: Development of Self-Assessment Report

2.1   On the approval of the HKCAAVQ Council in May 2019, a project team was set up to develop this submission and make preparations for the Review. It was governed by a *Project Charter* with a clearly defined schedule and a gap analysis in meeting the ESG. The team was made up of staff with relevant expertise and knowledge of the Secretariat (the project team listed in Attachment II refers). Prior to finalising the draft of this submission for consideration and approval by the HKCAAVQ Council in May 2020 and August 2020 respectively, the team collected views on academic accreditation from relevant staff and operators as part of the self-assessment process. This submission also incorporated the inputs and comments by HKCAAVQ Council Members.

2.2   Reference was made to the guide of content provided by the ENQA Secretariat when developing this submission.   In December 2019, members of the project team also attended the ENQA Webinar on Self-assessment.

2.3   **Figure 1** below summarises the key milestones for the development of this submission.

Figure 1: Key Milestones for the Development of Submission

2019

MAY • HKCAAVQ approves the invitation of ENQA to conduct an Agency Review, and Terms of Reference of the Review

OCT • Contract signed with ENQA

NOV • Project Charter approved
• Project team set up to develop draft SAR

DEC • Project team members attend ENQA Webinar on Self-assessment

2020

MAR • Surveys for operators and case officers on HKCAAVQ academic accreditation service

MAY • HKCAAVQ Council considers draft SAR

JUN-JUL • Revision of SAR

JUL • HKCAAVQ Council considers final draft of SAR

AUG • HKCAAVQ Council approves SAR
• SAR submission to ENQA

Chapter 3: Hong Kong Higher Education and Quality Assurance

Hong Kong Higher Education System

3.1   Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China[1]. The Education Bureau (EDB) of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (Government) is responsible for formulating, developing and reviewing policies in respect of education at all levels[2]. In 2019, Hong Kong has a population of around 7.5 million. In the 2018/19 financial year[3], the Government's total expenditure on education was 20.6% of the total government expenditure.

3.2   School education (primary and secondary) is compulsory from the age of six until the age of fifteen. Children in public sector schools in Hong Kong attend 12 years of free primary and secondary education up to secondary six. Upon completion of the secondary education, they will take the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE), which is administered by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority[4]. In 2019, 54,642 candidates sat for the HKDSE. A table of student enrolment by level of education is provided below:

						Thousands
	School/Academic year					
Level of education	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Kindergarten[2]	178.1	187.2	185.8	183.0	176.2	176.3
Primary[3]	332.5	340.9	352.5	365.7	376.3	377.2
Secondary[3][4]	394.0	371.9	357.2	349.1	341.4	343.5#
Post-secondary[5]	332.8	331.3	326.3	323.6	324.7	324.1#

The above superscripts correspond to explanatory notes in the source.
Source: https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/about-edb/publication-stat/figures/enrol-by-level.xlsx

According to the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA), in 2019, a total of 32,600 day school candidates obtained

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1   Details of the governance in Hong Kong can be found at:
      https://www.gov.hk/en/about/govdirectory/govstructure.htm
2   https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/index.html
3   In Hong Kong, each financial year starts from 1 April and ends on 31 March in the following year.
4   http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/en/hkdse/introduction/

level 2 or above in five subjects in HKDSE, including Chinese Language and English Language. This represents 71.8% of day school candidates. These candidates are eligible to apply for local sub-degree programmes. The percentage of day school candidates who have met the general entrance requirements for local undergraduate degree programmes is 42.2%. These 19,728 day school candidates obtained level 3 or above in both Chinese Language and English Language, and level 2 or above in Mathematics Compulsory Part and Liberal Studies.

3.3   At the post-secondary/tertiary level, there are publicly-funded and self-financing sectors providing a full range of higher education programmes (including Associate Degree[4a], Higher Diploma[4a], Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree, and Doctoral Degree). It is the Government's policy to support the parallel development of the publicly-funded and self-financing sectors in broadening and diversifying study opportunities for secondary school leavers[5]. In the 2018/19 academic year[6], publicly-funded undergraduate programmes offered about 15,200 first-year-first-degree intake places, while self-financing undergraduate programmes offered about 9,400 places. There were also about 5,000 publicly-funded senior-year undergraduate places and about 9,400 self-financing top-up degree places, mainly for sub-degree graduates. At sub-degree level, about 21,500 self-financing and 10,600 publicly-funded intake places were available.

Publicly-funded and self-financing institutions

3.4   The publicly-funded sector includes eight self-accrediting universities funded by the University Grants Committee[7] (UGC), the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (HKAPA), and the Vocational Training Council (VTC). The Quality Assurance Council, a semi-autonomous non-statutory body under the UGC, conducts quality audits of UGC-funded universities and their programmes. The Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK) is self-accrediting but it is self-financing. As

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4a.   Common Descriptors for Associate Degree and Higher Diploma Programmes:
      https://www.cspe.edu.hk/en/Resources-CommonDesc.html
5   https://www.cspe.edu.hk/en/Overview-GovPolicy.html
6   In Hong Kong, each academic year usually consists of two semesters, the fall semester from early September to late December and the spring semester from mid-January to May. Senior year intake refers to admission to the third-year of four-year degree programmes.
7   University Grants Committee is a non-statutory advisory body responsible for advising the Government on funding and development of higher education, and providing assurance to the Government and the community on the standards and cost-effectiveness of the operations of its eight funded universities.

OUHK is self-financing, it does not come under the auspice of the Quality Assurance Council of UGC. OUHK regularly seeks external review by HKCAAVQ.

3.5   Hong Kong Shue Yan University (HKSYU) and The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong (HSUHK) acquired their university title in December 2006 and October 2018 respectively. Unlike the publicly-funded universities and OUHK which enjoy full self-accrediting status, HKSYU and HSUHK are self-financing institutions with quality assurance matters falling under the purview of HKCAAVQ.

3.6   Established in 1984 by statute, HKAPA is a publicly-funded institution for the performing arts. HKAPA is a non-self-accrediting institution with quality assurance matters falling under the purview of HKCAAVQ.

3.7   VTC is a publicly-funded statutory vocational and professional education and training provider and is a non-self-accrediting institution. It is the main provider of Higher Diploma programmes, through its member institution, the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education. It also operates a number of self-financing degree programmes. Its member institution, the School for Higher and Professional Education, offers mostly top-up degree programmes for sub-degree graduates leading to the awards of non-local institutions[7b]. Another member institution, Technology and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong, provides degree programmes leading to the award of a Bachelor's Degree. Quality assurance matters of VTC fall under the purview of HKCAAVQ.

3.8   All non-self-accrediting institutions awarding Associate Degree, Higher Diploma, Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree, and Doctoral Degree with recognition under the HKQF fall under the purview of HKCAAVQ. The accreditation standards in the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process (the Process) of HKCAAVQ will be used to accredit programmes leading to the awards of Associate Degree, Higher Diploma, Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree, and Doctoral Degree. Financial subsidies of the Government and recognition by employers provide good incentives to seek accreditation by HKCAAVQ.

3.9   **Annex 1** provides an overview of the current higher education landscape in Hong Kong, together with a summary of the enrolment figures of the institutions in 2019/20.

[7b]   A non-local institution, according to Cap. 493, means an institution which is established and mainly operates outside Hong Kong.

Regulation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance (Cap. 320)

3.10 All self-accrediting universities, HKAPA, OUHK and VTC are established under their own ordinances. All other institutions must be registered under the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance (Cap. 320)[8] as registered post-secondary colleges in order to award degrees. A new degree programme proposed by a registered post-secondary college needs to go through academic accreditation by HKCAAVQ or through the Programme Area Accreditation status granted by HKCAAVQ before it is considered by the Chief Executive in Council under the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance.

Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance (Cap. 493)

3.11 All programmes conducted in Hong Kong which lead to the award of non-local higher academic qualification or professional qualifications are regulated by the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance (Cap. 493) [9] through a system of registration/exemption from registration. Exemption is applicable if the local partner is one of the self-accrediting universities, HKAPA or HKSYU. The Non-Local Courses Registry (NCR), a unit of the EDB that enforces Cap. 493, normally seeks advice[9a] from HKCAAVQ on academic matters relating to registration.

3.12 After successful registration or exemption from registration under Cap. 493, a non-local programme may seek accreditation by HKCAAVQ and recognition under the HKQF on a voluntary basis.

Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 592)

3.13 The Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (AAVQO) (Cap. 592)[10] provides the legal framework for the underpinning QA mechanism of the HKQF. The HKQF was launched in May 2008. The formulation of policy, strategy and direction on the development of the HKQF is under the ambit of the EDB.

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[8] https://www.elegislation.gov.hk/hk/cap320
[9] https://www.elegislation.gov.hk/hk/cap493
[9a] HKCAAVQ provides advice on the compliance with the legal requirements under Cap. 493 for the purpose of registration.
[10] https://www.elegislation.gov.hk/hk/cap592

3.14 The HKQF is a seven-level hierarchy covering qualifications in the academic, vocational, professional, and continuing education sectors. The HKQF contains the following key features[11]:

(a) Level, which reflects the depth and complexity of learning leading to a qualification;

(b) Award Title, which reflects the nature, area of study and hierarchy of a qualification; and

(c) Credit, which indicates the volume or size of learning of the qualification.

The public face of the HKQF is the Qualifications Register (QR) which is a centralised online database containing information on quality assured qualifications and their operators[12].

3.15 In November 2014, the EDB and the European Commission undertook the Comparability Study of the HKQF and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The Study was completed in March 2016, and the report of the Study has been promulgated in the official portals of the EDB and the European Commission[13]. It is expected that the Study will facilitate mutual understanding of qualifications between Hong Kong and European countries whose national qualifications frameworks are referenced to the EQF.

3.16 Under the AAVQO (Cap. 592), HKCAAVQ is named as the Accreditation Authority and the QR Authority. HKCAAVQ currently takes on its statutory quality assurance role to safeguard the quality and standards of learning programmes recognised under the HKQF. All qualifications have to be accredited by HKCAAVQ (other than those of the self-accrediting universities) before they are recognised under the HKQF and entered into the QR. As the Accreditation Authority, HKCAAVQ develops the accreditation standards and process underpinning the HKQF. Schedule 3 of the AAVQO (Cap. 592) provides descriptions of the qualifications that may be entered into the QR.

3.17 As the QR Authority, the functions of HKCAAVQ include:

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[11] https://www.hkqf.gov.hk/en/KeyFeatures/index.html
[12] Operator' is the legal term referring to the entity operating a programme, for example, a higher education provider. In this document, this term is used interchangeably with 'institution' depending on the context.
[13] https://www.hkqf.gov.hk/en/perspective/index.html

<ol type="a" start="1">
(a) determining the entry or removal of a qualification into/from the QR;
(b) maintenance and development of the QR; and
(c) monitoring advertisements relating to the HKQF.

Recent Developments in Higher Education

Review of Self-financing Post-secondary Education

3.18 The Chief Executive (of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region) announced in her 2017 Policy Address to set up several task forces to carry out in-depth reviews on eight key areas of education, amongst which self-financing post-secondary education is one. The Task Force on Review of Self-financing Post-secondary Education was subsequently established in October 2017 to consider the overall role and function of the self-financing post-secondary education sector in serving the long-term education and manpower needs of Hong Kong, and review major issues pertinent to the development of the self-financing sector.

3.19 HKCAAVQ was commissioned by EDB to study international practices, models and trends of post-secondary education in nine other economies (including Australia, Germany, Japan, Mainland China, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, and the United States) to facilitate the Task Force in conducting the review. The Task Force submitted a Review Report to the Government in December 2018. The Government's first-stage follow-up actions were submitted to the Legislative Council in March 2019[14], as highlighted in the document of Attachment II.

3.20 In October 2019, the Government announced the new composition and functions of the revamped Committee on Self-financing Post-secondary Education (CSPE) with effect from 1 November 2019. The revamp is to implement the recommendation in the review report of the Task Force on Review of Self-financing Post-secondary Education that the CSPE should provide strategic and policy advice on the development of the self-financing post-secondary education sector, including advice on measures to promote, facilitate and coordinate such development in terms of scope of operation, quality and governance. The Chairman of the HKCAAVQ Council is a member of the CSPE[15]. HKCAAVQ will work with CSPE in aligning the standards of quality assurance between

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[14] https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr18-19/english/panels/ed/minutes/ed20190301.pdf
[15] https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201910/22/P2019102100688.htm

the self-financing institutions under its purview and UGC-funded
institutions.

Chapter 4: Profile, Organisation and Activities of HKCAAVQ

Legal Status of HKCAAVQ

4.1   HKCAAVQ, formerly known as the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA), was established in 1990 as an independent statutory body to provide authoritative advice on academic standards of degree programmes in higher education institutions in Hong Kong. In 2007, HKCAA was reconstituted under the HKCAAVQ Ordinance (Cap. 1150)[16]. HKCAAVQ takes on statutory roles as the Accreditation Authority and QR Authority under the HKQF under the AAVQO (Cap. 592).

4.2   Under the HKCAAVQ Ordinance (Cap. 1150), HKCAAVQ is governed by a Council comprising local, non-local and ex-officio members. The Executive Director is the principal executive officer of the Council. Under the direction of the Council, the Executive Director leads the Secretariat which is the executive arm of the HKCAAVQ Council in the implementation of its policies, functions and decisions.

4.3   In addition to its statutory roles, HKCAAVQ also provides advisory and consultancy services in education qualifications and standards to government bureaux and other organisations in Hong Kong and the Asia-Pacific region.

Regional and International Activities of HKCAAVQ

4.4   As a founding and active member of the INQAAHE as well as the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN), HKCAAVQ has attained significant recognitions in the QA arena. First, HKCAAVQ comprehensively adheres to the GGP developed by INQAAHE, with a validity period until 9 October 2020. Second, HKCAAVQ has been the recipient of two APQN Quality Awards[17, 18].

4.5   HKCAAVQ has built formal partnerships with some ten international QA agencies with agreements covering exchange of information, staff development, and nomination of each other's reviewers and so on. In

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[16]   https://www.elegislation.gov.hk/hk/cap1150
[17]   https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/news/hkcaavq-wins-the-apqn-quality-awards
[18]   https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/news/hkcaavq-wins-the-apqn-quality-award

2019, HKCAAVQ and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), the United Kingdom (UK), conducted a joint review of UK universities that offer degree programmes in Hong Kong while some of these non-local programmes were undergoing accreditation/re-accreditation by HKCAAVQ. QAA concludes that with HKCAAVQ's peer-review panels and the use of the HKQF, QAA can confidently rely on HKCAAVQ's accreditation decisions for UK Transnational Education (TNE) provision in Hong Kong. This means that QAA is able to recognise HKCAAVQ accreditation decisions, avoiding the need in the future to review UK TNE provision accredited by HKCAAVQ[19]. In the Memorandum of Cooperation signed between HKCAAVQ and Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) in November 2019, the two QA agencies agreed to work towards mutual recognition.

4.6 HKCAAVQ is one of the founding members of the Cross-border Quality Assurance Network (CBQAN) since its inaugural general assembly held in December 2016 at the International Forum on Cross-border Education in Haikou of Hainan Province. CBQAN was initiated by China Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development Center and its founding members comprised 15 QA and qualification recognition institutions from 12 countries and regions. HKCAAVQ also actively participates in the "Quality Beyond Boundaries Group" – a forum initiated by the Knowledge and Human Development Authority in Dubai for the countries/economies that are active in QA of transnational education. The group is working towards the development of a network for sharing of information, QA practices and reviewers, and to facilitate QA of TNE provision. HKCAAVQ is committed to building and maintaining strong ties with other QA agencies in an effort to promoting the good practices in QA and recognition of qualifications.

4.7 In March 2018, HKCAAVQ delivered its first Professional Training Workshop in Quality Assurance. It was the first of its kind in the region. The overwhelming enrolment with participants from not only the local community but also QA practitioners and professionals from overseas, including Australia, Singapore, Mauritius and Oman, proved the importance of exporting our knowledge and practical experience in QA to fellow counterparts in and outside Hong Kong[20].

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[19] https://www.qaa.ac.uk/international/transnational-education-review/review-of-tne-in-hong-kong

[20] https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/services/training/professional_training_workshop/2018_highlights

Organisation of HKCAAVQ

4.8   The HKCAAVQ Council under the HKCAAVQ Ordinance comprises 15-21 members appointed by the Chief Executive.   The Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall be elected by a broadly representative Election Committee in accordance with the Basic Law and appointed by the Central People's Government. The membership of the HKCAAVQ Council includes 4-7 members from outside Hong Kong. Members are appointed to the HKCAAVQ Council based on their expertise and experience in QA, education and training and industry.   Members serve on the HKCAAVQ Council in their personal capacity.   Membership of the Council (**Annex 2**) and biographical information about members of the HKCAAVQ Council are available from the website of HKCAAVQ.[21]

4.9   The HKCAAVQ Council meets three times a year, i.e. in January, May and September. Its work is supported by three standing committees:

(a)   Qualifications and Accreditation Committee (QAC);
(b)   Finance Committee (FC); and
(c)   Personnel and Administration Committee (PAC).

Memberships of the QAC, FC and PAC are at **Annex 3**. HKCAAVQ Council Members cover a wide range of profiles from academic, vocational, professional, continuing education and non-local quality assurance communities.

4.10   The Council's approved policies are disseminated to stakeholders through the HKCAAVQ website, newsletters, briefing sessions and training workshops.

4.11   The Secretariat implements the Council's policies and decisions after they go through the process of formulation by the Secretariat, deliberation by the respective Standing Committee(s) and approval by the Council. The Secretariat currently has 87 full-time staff members. The organisation chart of the Secretariat is shown in the Annual Reports of HKCAAVQ made available on its website[22].

4.12   Currently, HKCAAVQ has a total of nine units which include four incoming generating units including Academc Accreditation and Assessment (AAA), Vocational and Professional Accreditation,

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[21]   https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/about-us/the-council-membership-list
[22]   https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/publications/annual-reports

Qualifications Assessment, and Qualifications Framework and Qualifications Register. The Academic Accreditation and Assessment (AAA) Unit of the Secretariat is the key business unit undertaking academic accreditation activities subject to this external review by ENQA.

Vision, Mission and Strategic Plan

4.13 In consideration of its statutory roles and functions, HKCAAVQ defines its Vision and Mission statements. Guided by the Vision and Mission statements, HKCAAVQ develops its Strategic Plan at four-year cycles. The implementation of its Strategic Plan is monitored regularly by the Council during the four-year cycles to ensure progress against the strategic objectives. For details of the strategic plan monitoring and reporting process, please refer to **Chapter 11** of this submission.
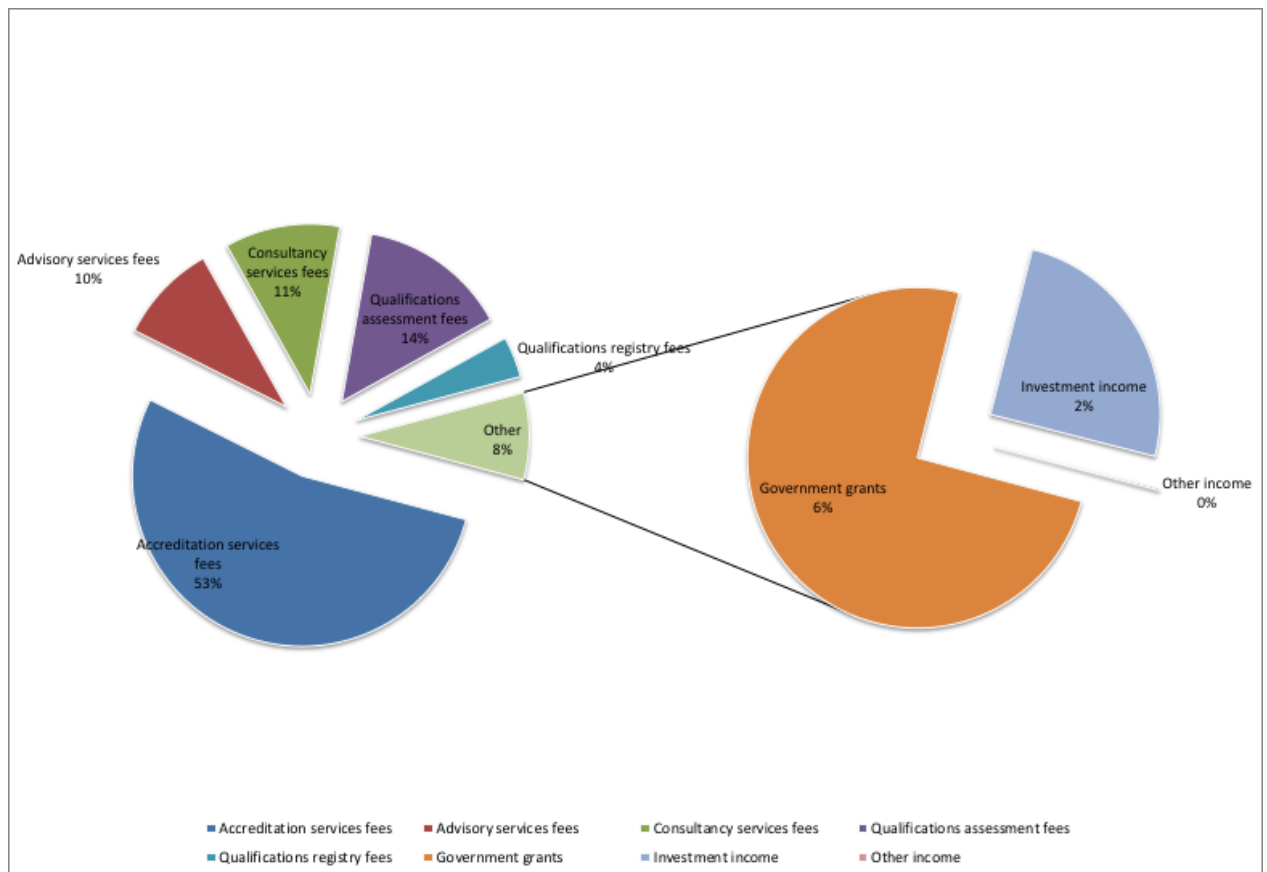
Financial Position

4.14 HKCAAVQ does not receive recurrent funding from the Government except the maintenance of the QR. The Government provides funding support to institutions to meet the accreditation fees of the institutions and their programmes through the Accreditation Grant Scheme funded by the Qualifications Framework Fund and the annual amount is about HK$25 million. HKCAAVQ is primarily financed through the charging of fees for accreditation services and assessment/advisory/consultancy services rendered. In the last five years, HKCAAVQ maintains a very healthy financial position and accumulated reserves.

4.15 The income statements of HKCAAVQ over the last five years are shown as follows:

Table 1: Income statement of HKCAAQ over the last five years

HK$M	Financial Year (FY) 2014/15	FY 2015/16	FY 2016/17	FY 2017/18	FY 2018/19
Revenue	74.8	94.6	95.7	96.7	98.5
Expenditure	79.7	89.4	88.7	83.1	84.2
Surplus/(Deficit)	(4.9)	5.2	7.0	13.6	14.3
Accumulated Reserves	54.2	56.9	65.9	83.0	97.7

(Source: HKCAAVQ Annual Reports)

(Financial Year 2018/2019 - Sources of Income)

4.16   HKCAAVQ maintains a very good financial position over the years. With sustainable strategies for development and prudent plan of staff establishment and deployment, sustainable annual surplus and accumulative surplus are recorded over the past five years.

4.17   Apart from fees charged for services provided, HKCAAVQ also receives government support and funding in various aspects. With a view to supporting the continued development of HKQF, the EDB and Housing Authority allocated vacant school premises for use by HKCAAVQ at a nominal monthly rent of HK$1. The EDB, through the QR Subsidy Scheme funded by the Qualifications Framework Fund, provides an annual subsidy of HK$4.7 million to HKCAAVQ in its capacity of QR Authority under the AAVQO (Cap. 592) to cover the costs of maintenance and regular upgrading of the QR. The QR Subsidy Scheme also cover the fees for registering and hosting qualifications and the associated programmes in the QR, with an annual subsidy of about HK$5.8 million to HKCAAVQ.

In addition to the support on the premises and maintenance of the QR, the Quality Enhancement Support Scheme (QESS) had provided about HK$12 million funding support for the development of HKCAAVQ's

Quality Management System (QMS), e-Portal, i-Portal, Intranet and Human Resources Information System (HRIS). The QMS, e-Portal and i-Portal have been very important management system and platforms for the Secretariat in managing accreditation and assessment services, while the Intranet and the HRIS have been instrumental in improving internal controls.

4.18 HKCAAVQ is actively pursuing business opportunities so as to extend fee-based activities. Since the launch of the accreditation service for non-local programmes under the HKQF in 2010, HKCAAVQ has been working closely with other QA agencies on possible collaborations of QA activities, particularly in the context of TNE. The provision of advisory and assessment services to Continuing Education Fund (CEF) reimbursable courses provide further revenues to HKCAAVQ. In addition, HKCAAVQ has established good working relationship with the higher education stakeholders in Macao Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China in terms of its programme review services. All of these activities contribute to the stable source of income to the AAA Unit.

4.19 The following table shows the income and expenditure of the AAA Unit over the last five years:

Table 2: Income and expenditure of the AAA Unit over the last five years

HK$M	FY 2014/15 Actual	FY 2015/16 Actual	FY 2016/17 Actual	FY 2017/18 Actual	FY 2018/19 Actual
Revenue					
Income	32.3	45.3	48.4	46.2	44.6
Grant/others	0.2	0.7	0.8	0	0
Total Revenue	**32.5**	**46.0**	**49.2**	**46.2**	**44.6**
Expenditure					
Direct Cost	20.6	23.2	23.9	22.7	21.0
Overhead	11.5	12.1	13.9	12.5	13.4
Total Expenditure	**32.1**	**35.3**	**37.8**	**35.2**	**34.4**
Surplus/(Deficit)	**0.4**	**10.7**	**11.4**	**11.0**	**10.2**

4.20 The Financial Reports of HKCAAVQ can be found in the Annual Reports of HKCAAVQ[23].

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[23] https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/publications/annual-reports

Activities of HKCAAVQ

Activities within the scope of ESG

4.21 Activities of HKCAAVQ that fall within the scope of the ESG are the HKQF-related accreditation activities in higher education, including both local and non-local programmes. These activities are further described in **Chapter 5** of this submission. The numbers of these activities conducted in the past five years are summarised below:

Category	Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Academic Accreditation	**IE**	1	2	0	0	0
	(Re-)LPA	47	56	50	33	61
	PAA	2	2	3	2	1
	PR/PIR	0	1	0	1	1
Accreditation of Non-local Programmes	**IE**	2	4	2	1	2
	(Re-)LPA	23	52	22	45	18
Accreditation of Online Learning Programmes	**IE**			1[*]	0	0
	(Re-)LPA			1[*]	0	0

* A pilot exercise.

Activities outside the scope of this Review

4.22 In its capacity as the Accreditation Authority under the AAVQO (Cap. 592), HKCAAVQ provides the accreditation service to the vocational sector, which includes public organisations, private education/training institutes, non-government organisations, and commercial corporations. Apart from that, HKCAAVQ also supports the development of the HKQF through provision of accreditation services for institutions, organisations or other bodies for the purpose of serving as appointed assessment agencies under the AAVQO (Cap. 592).

4.23 Under the HKCAAVQ Ordinance (Cap. 1150), HKCAAVQ conducts Institutional Review for non-self-accrediting institutions that wish to seek registration by the Government under Cap. 320. Furthermore, HKCAAVQ conducts Institutional Review for Private University Title for

the purpose of making an application for university title for consideration by the Chief Executive in Council[24].

4.24   Under the HKCAAVQ Ordinance (Cap. 1150), HKCAAVQ also provides a range of assessment services for the general public, organisations and government bureaux/departments. For details, please refer to the website of HKCAAVQ[25].

4.25   Under the HKCAAVQ Ordinance (Cap. 1150), HKCAAVQ may, subject to the prior approval of the SED, conduct accreditation and provide consultancy outside Hong Kong.

4.26   Following the promulgation of the Macao Administrative Regulation No. 17/2018, effective from 8 August 2018, the Higher Education Quality Evaluation Scheme and its timetable for programme review was established. HKCAAVQ is currently providing programme review services to the University of Macau, and Macau University of Science and Technology as an External Quality Assurance Agency under the said laws.

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[24] https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/files/services/non_QF_related_accreditation_services/institutional_review/IR_Manual_for_Private_U_Title.pdf

[25] https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/services/assessment

Chapter 5: Quality Assurance Activities of HKCAAVQ in Higher Education

Quality Assurance of Higher Education Institutions and Programmes

5.1   There are three categories of HKQF-related QA activities of HKCAAVQ that fall within the scope of the current external review.

Academic Accreditation[26]

5.2   This category covers both sub-degree and degree programmes of the higher education sector in Hong Kong. The definitive document of HKCAAVQ for accreditation under the HKQF is the *Manual of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework* (the Manual). The Manual stipulates the set of accreditation standards for all programmes seeking accreditation. There are different evidence requirements depending on the nature of a programme or its operator. For further guidance to operators, the Evidence Guide for Academic Accreditation [27] is provided which should be read in conjunction with the Manual. This approach ensures that all qualifications recognised under the HKQF have been determined to meet the same standards as required by the AAVQO (Cap. 592). A copy of the Manual is included as **Attachment I**.

5.3   The conceptual framework underpinning the design of the Process is explained under **Chapter 9** of this submission. Currently, there are 14 institutions offering 240 academic programmes accredited by HKCAAVQ.

Accreditation of Non-local Programmes

5.4   Accreditation of non-local learning programmes (NLP) is conducted in accordance with the first two stages of the Process. The same set of accreditation standards are applied to local and non-local programmes. The Evidence Guide also provides guidance on the evidence requirements for NLP accreditation. In this context, the notion of 'operator' is applied to describe a partnership normally between the

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26   https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/services/accreditation/academic-accreditation
27   Evidence Guide for Academic Accreditation can be found in the HKCAAVQ website.

non-local awarding body and a local partner, with a legally binding agreement setting out the rights and obligations of the partnership.

5.5   An operator can seek accreditation by HKCAAVQ for its non-local programme (NLP) upon being registered or exempted for registration with the NCR. NLP accreditation is a quality assurance process that assures an NLP against the standards in the Manual to ensure the learning programme meets the standard under the HKQF. Currently, there are 36 partnerships offering about 130 NLPs accredited by HKCAAVQ.

Accreditation of Online Learning Programmes

5.6   In January 2018, HKCAAVQ Council approved the implementation of an accreditation service for online learning programmes. This service is applicable to both local and non-local online learning programmes (OLP) seeking recognition under the HKQF. Similar to NLP, accreditation of OLP is conducted in accordance with the first two stages of the Process. The same set of accreditation standards are applied to local and non-local programmes. The Evidence Guide also provides guidance on the evidence requirements for OLP accreditation. A learning programme is considered as an online learning programme if more than 50% of its instruction is delivered online through a digital learning platform.

5.7   Currently, there is one partnership offering an OLP accredited by HKCAAVQ.

Capacity Building

Training[28]

5.8   Providing relevant training on the HKQF and accreditation activities is one of the statutory functions of HKCAAVQ. Through training, HKCAAVQ endeavours to promote a quality culture, and to encourage stakeholders to continuously enhance their internal QA capability and awareness of quality matters. In addition, training and capacity building activities are provided to specialists and staff of HKCAAVQ.

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[28]   https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/services/training

(a) Regular Training Activities

5.9 To progressively develop institutions' competency in self-review, self-monitoring, understanding of the HKQF and enhancement of their internal QA capability, HKCAAVQ runs regular training activities for institutions in preparation for accreditation under the HKQF.

In 2019, 25 regular workshops were conducted which were attended by 670 participants. In addition, six regular workshops were conducted for specialists and panel chairs. The following were the main topics:

- Induction Course (via the HKCAAVQ Specialist Online Learning Platform);
- Refresher Seminar;
- Chairing an Accreditation Panel;
- Luncheon Seminar for Financial Experts; and
- Questioning Techniques.

(b) Thematic Training Activities

5.10 From time to time, HKCAAVQ conducts thematic workshops on different topics to enhance institutions' competency in QA. The following topics were conducted between 2015 and 2019:

- LPA and Re-LPA of Associate Degree and Higher Diploma Programmes;
- Development and Accreditation of Specifications of Competency Standards-based Programmes under the HKQF;
- Use of QF Credit under the HKQF;
- Developing Statements of Learning Outcomes;
- Credit Accumulation and Transfer;
- Preparation for Programme Area Accreditation;
- Preparation of Quality Accreditation Document;
- Revised Accreditation Standards under the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process;
- Accreditation of Online Learning Programmes;
- Accreditation of Non-local Learning Programmes; and
- Academic Governance in Higher Education.

In 2019, four thematic workshops were conducted which were attended by 102 participants. In addition, four thematic workshops were conducted for staff of HKCAAVQ in the past two years and they were as follows:

- Statutory Functions of HKCAAVQ;
- Revised Accreditation Standards under the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process – Programme Area Accreditation and Periodic Institutional Review;
- Use of Big Data in Education and Training; and
- Academic Governance in Higher Education.

(c)   Tailor-made In-house Training for Institutions

5.11   In addition to offering regular training activities, HKCAAVQ also offers tailor-made training to meet the particular training needs of institutions. Content and themes of training are generally related to QA and accreditation under the HKQF, such as outcome-based education and training. The format of training delivery is flexible, and can be through briefings, seminars or simulation workshops etc. In general, the duration of the training activity is half-day or longer, and the activities are primarily charged on a cost-recovery basis.

In 2019, HKCAAVQ was commissioned by 11 operators to provide 14 in-house training workshops.

(d)   Professional Training Workshop in Quality Assurance

5.12   The Professional Training Workshop in Quality Assurance is a five-day workshop aiming at providing a systematic integration of the 'know-how' and 'know-why' of QA. With the developments of qualifications frameworks in different parts of the world, this Professional Training Workshop has an emphasis on capacity building for staff from institutions and QA agencies.

The workshop was offered in 2018 and 2019 attended by 58 participants from eight countries/regions in total. The workshop originally scheduled for 2020 was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

(e)   Training for Panel Chairs and Specialists

5.13   To prepare Specialists for their roles and to keep them up-to-date, workshops are held on a regular basis.

5.14   In January 2019, the HKCAAVQ Specialist Online Learning Platform (SOLP) was launched. Since then, the Induction Course is hosted on

the SOLP so that all newly-appointed Specialists can attend induction training anywhere anytime. The Induction Course has knowledge tests that are linked to four key competencies of newly-appointed Specialists:

- Familiarised with the HKQF standards including level determination;
- Understood the importance of the guiding principles for accreditation for serving on the Accreditation Panel in the future;
- Had a basic understanding about the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process; and
- Able to apply evidence-based judgement when evaluating whether the Operator and its programme(s) are meeting the accreditation standards and the stated objectives.

5.15   Specialists are invited to attend refresher seminars after having served on accreditation panels. During the refresher seminars, Specialists are encouraged to share their experiences and clarify any issues relating to the accreditation process and standards. In the past two years, some of the Specialists asked for an opportunity to sharpen their questioning techniques. In 2019, the workshop was revamped to incorporate more scenarios and practice-based activities.

5.16   Training for Panel Chairs is primarily conducted by an experienced Specialist/Panel Chair who can highlight the dos and don'ts in a more collegial and practical manner.

(f)   Feedback collection and recent development

5.17   For all the training activities, feedback is collected from participants for continuous improvement purposes. (Please refer to **Sections 10.17-10.19**)

5.18   Starting from March 2020, most of the training activities for operators have been made available via live webinars.

Quality Assurance Online Knowledgebase

5.19   The Quality Assurance Online Knowledgebase (QAOK)[29] went live in February 2017. It was supported by QESS under the Self-financing Post-secondary Education Fund [30]. The QAOK is a user-friendly knowledgebase which contains examples of good practices in QA

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[29]   https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/qaok/
[30]   https://www.cspe.edu.hk/en/qess-project.page

drawn from the post-secondary education sector locally and internationally mostly through workshops and forums hosted by local and overseas QA agencies and higher education networks. Its aim is to serve as an information portal for institutions seeking to improve their internal QA processes and to disseminate the good practices to a wider community. The QAOK covers a broad spectrum of topics including institutional governance, programme development and student support services. Currently, there are over 200 entries in the database organised into more than 20 categories.

Chapter 6: HKCAAVQ's Internal Quality Assurance

HKCAAVQ's Internal Quality Assurance

6.1   HKCAAVQ has a set of internal quality assurance measures in place to support its continuous improvement and ensure accountability to its stakeholders.

    (a)   Pre-coded workflow in the QMS provides a solid foundation on the consistent implementation of internal controls. (Please refer to **Sections 8.1.4, 8.6.2, 9.3.2**)

    (b)   Continuous enhancements are made based upon the feedback of stakeholders. (Please refer to **Chapter 10**)

    (c)   External review provides further opportunities of quality enhancement in view of benchmarking in meeting relevant standards. (Please refer to **Section 8.7**)

Chapter 7: Regional and International Activities of HKCAAVQ

Regional and International Activities of HKCAAVQ

7.1   Please refer to **Sections 4.4-4.7 and 4.25-4.26**.

The regional and international activities of HKCAAVQ strategically support its role and positioning in the QA community around the world and its pursuance of relevant objectives in the strategic plan.

Chapter 8:
Self-Assessment in meeting Part 3 of European Standards and Guidelines

8.1.   ESG 3.1: Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

> **Standard: Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.**

8.1.1   HKCAAVQ is the only statuary body in Hong Kong empowered to conduct accreditation for non-self-accrediting operators, either generally under the HKCAAVQ Ordinance (Cap. 1150), or as the Accreditation Authority under the AAVQO (Cap. 592) underpinning the HKQF. External stakeholders, in particular the institutions seeking accreditation are fully aware that accreditation by HKCAAVQ is a statutory base external quality assurance process. It is stipulated in the HKCAAVQ Ordinance (Cap. 1150) that HKCAAVQ is set up as a body corporate with Council Members appointed by the Chief Executive. The membership of the Council and its Standing Committees including five non-local members can be found in **Annex 2** and **Annex 3** respectively.

8.1.2   The Vision and Mission of HKCAAVQ are defined by the Council, with implementation delineated in the Strategic Plan which is reviewed every four years. The current Vision and Mission are:

> **Vision**
>
> We aim to be a globally recognised and leading regional independent quality assurance body in education and training.
>
> **Mission**
>
> We safeguard the credibility of qualifications under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) and facilitate the continuous quality enhancement and excellence of education and training in Hong Kong and the region through our accreditation, assessment, quality audit and consulting services.

8.1.3   The Strategic Plan[31] of HKCAAVQ, supported by a set of objectives and strategies, drives the development of business plans of different business units. The development of Strategic Plan involves the engagement of stakeholders locally and internationally, and of students,

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[31]   https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/about-us/HKCAAVQ-Strategic-Plan-2019-23

institutions and QA agencies. Progress under the strategies and objectives of the Strategic Plan is reported to the Council annually. In addition, the Secretariat submits a report on major activities at a four-month interval to the Council via the QAC. The programme of activities conducted by HKCAAVQ is also included in the Annual Reports which is accessible to the public.

8.1.4 For HKQF-related QA activities, the AAA Unit conducted the following number of accreditation activities in 2019:

Table 3: Accreditation activities conducted by the AAA Unit in 2019

Category	IE	(Re-)LPA	PAA	PR[32]/PIR
Academic Accreditation	0	61	1 (1 Programme Area)	1 (2 Programme Areas)
Accreditation of Non-local Programmes	2	18	N/A	N/A
Accreditation of Online Learning Programmes	0	0	N/A	N/A

All these accreditation activities were conducted in accordance with the Manual, following the approval authorities governed by the Secretariat's delegation schedule and pre-coded in the QMS. For IE, the validity period is two years. For (Re-)LPA, the validity period is not more than N+2 years (where N is the duration of the programme). For PR/PIR, the validaty period is normally five years. These parameters are built into the Process and therefore determine the regularity of HKCAAVQ's accreditation activities.

8.1.5 The involvement of stakeholders at the governance level is mainly through the appointment of Council Members from the relevant sectors. On the major reviews, the Council will engage stakeholders at both the governance level and work level. For example, in the review of the Four-stage QA Process and review of accreditation standards, relevant stakeholders were engaged. On the accreditation processes of HKCAAVQ, the Liaison Panel for Academic Accreditation (LPAA) is engaged which provides a forum for dialogue with representatives of the main stakeholders of academic accreditation to discuss the parameters within which HKCAAVQ operates and topics of mutual interest relating to the latest development in QA. The Liaison Panel meets once a year. Extra meetings will be held on a need basis. The

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[32] Periodic Review (PR) (now known as PIR) refers to: periodically monitor and review Operators with valid PAA status, and is conducted at an interval of five years.

membership of the LPAA is publicised in the HKCAAVQ website and can be found in **Annex 4**.

8.1.6   At the operational level, operators' feedback is collected annually to gauge the satisfaction and suggestions of operators for continuous improvement in accreditation. Satisfaction and suggestions in relation to operators' training is measured and collected after each training event. All of the feedback is regularly reported to the Council via the QAC. (Please refer to **Chapter 10** of this submission.)

Summary of self-assessment against ESG 3.1

8.1.7   HKCAAVQ has clearly defined Vision and Mission, as well as a framework governing the conduct of its QA activities, approved by the Council. The effectiveness of the framework is regularly monitored by the Council through extensive regular reporting covering all the major activities and stakeholders' feedback. Strategic and business planning processes require the involvement of senior executives of the Secretariat and ensure the vertical alignment of activities across HKCAAVQ.

Reflections for continuous quality enhancement

8.1.8   In addition to all the monitoring under the strategic plan and operation reviews through various feedback processes, the Council is going to form a Task Force on Governance and Management Review to further reflect and improve on the monitoring and controls at strategic, governance and management levels.

8.2.   ESG 3.2: Official status

> **Standard: Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.**

8.2.1   HKCAAVQ is a body corporate established under the HKCAAVQ Ordinance (Cap. 1150)[33]. It is the only QA body governed by a statute in Hong Kong. The legislation defines the functions and powers of HKCAAVQ.

8.2.2   In accordance with the AAVQO (Cap. 592)[34], HKCAAVQ is specified as the Accreditation Authority and the QR Authority. It is tasked with the responsibility of assuring the quality of qualifications recognised under the HKQF and the administration of the QR. The legislation requires that all non-self-accrediting institutions and their programmes have to be accredited by HKCAAVQ before they can be entered into the QR and recognised under the HKQF. As the Accreditation Authority, one of the functions is to develop and implement the standards and mechanisms for accreditation to underpin the HKQF. EDB commissions and entrusts HKCAAVQ to conduct institutional review for operators seeking to be registered post-secondary colleges under Cap. 320 and applying for private university title. (**Section 4.23** refers)

8.2.3   Internationally, HKCAAVQ comprehensively adheres to the GGP developed by INQAAHE, with a validity period until 9 October 2020.

8.2.4   The cooperation between HKCAAVQ and QAA in the most recent joint review in 2018 is regarded as an example of good practice in international cooperation as outlined in the Quality Assurance of Cross-Border Higher Education (QACHE) Toolkit for QA agencies - *Cooperation in Cross-Border Higher Education*[35]. (**Section 4.5** refers)

8.2.5   As evidenced in the last external review of HKCAAVQ conducted by INQAAHE, HKCAAVQ is recognised by its peers as a leading, professional and internationally-oriented agency.

8.2.6   HKCAAVQ serves as an External Quality Assurance Agency for programme reviews in Macao under the Higher Education Quality Evaluation Scheme of Macao SAR. (**Section 4.26** refers)

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[33]   https://www.elegislation.gov.hk/hk/cap1150
[34]   https://www.elegislation.gov.hk/hk/cap592
[35]   https://enqa.eu/indirme/papers-and-reports/occasional-papers/QACHE%20Toolkit_web.pdf

Summary of self-assessment against ESG 3.2

8.2.7 It is considered that HKCAAVQ has full legal status and recognition in the regional and international QA community.

Reflections for continuous quality enhancement

8.2.8 In addition to the legal status currently enjoyed by HKCAAVQ, substantive efforts are made in securing support from the Government in appointing HKCAAVQ as the Accreditation Authority in conducting institutional reviews and programme accreditations under the revamped Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance (Cap. 320). This will further enhance the legal status of HKCAAVQ in conducting accreditations in the self-financing sector in Hong Kong.

8.3.   ESG 3.3: Independence

> **Standard: Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third-party influence.**

Organisational Independence

8.3.1   The HKCAAVQ Ordinance (Cap. 1150) and AAVQO (Cap. 592) allow HKCAAVQ to exercise its power under the direction of the Council to independently perform its functions. Under the said Ordinance, HKCAAVQ has full organisational independence and free from interference by any other organisations including higher education institutions, government and stakeholder organisations.

8.3.2   The HKCAAVQ Council makes all decisions in relation to the performance of HKCAAVQ's functions and duties. The Secretariat operates under a schedule of delegation approved by the HKCAAVQ Council on accreditation decision-making.

Operational Independence

8.3.3   HKCAAVQ makes an accreditation determination in the accreditation report after considering the Accreditation Panel's recommendation(s) and the available evidence against the accreditation standards in the Manual.   Under the schedule of delegation, the relevant Deputy Executive Director has the final authority to approve the formation of Accreditation Panels and the accreditation reports including the accreditation determination, except for the scenario depicted in **Section 8.3.5**. The possible determinations by HKCAAVQ are:

(a) Approval;
(b) Approval with condition(s) and/or restriction(s); or
(c) Non-approval.

HKCAAVQ has well defined accreditation standards, processes and procedures that are robust and free from interference from any stakeholders. Details are provided in **Sections 8.6, 9.2 and 9.3**. While facilitation is built into the Process, the facilitation phase ends when the accreditation process starts.

8.3.4 Specialists who serve as panel members in accreditation visits are nominated under a mechanism managed by the Secretariat. A nomination for appointment as a specialist is normally made by a staff of the Secretariat, in consultation with the respective Unit Head and endorsed by the Specialists Selection Committee (SSC), for final approval by Executive Director. Details are provided in **Sections 9.4.1-9.4.5**. The nomination of specialists, who often serve as panel members in accreditation activities, is also free from interference by any stakeholder organisations. Details are provided in **Section 9.4**.

Independence of Formal Outcomes

8.3.5 Every four months, the Secretariat submits to the Council via the QAC a report listing the outcomes of the completed accreditation exercises. Prior approval by the Executive Director and notification to the QAC Chair are required in the event that the Deputy Executive Director does not accept the Accreditation Panel's recommendations in its entirety. Cases where the accreditation determination deviates from the Accreditation Panel's recommendation are included in the regular report to the Council via the QAC. Over the past five years, there were no such cases for academic accreditation, accreditation of non-local programmes, and accreditation of online learning programmes.

Finally, the HKCAAVQ retains its ultimate authority to make accreditation determinations, and **Sections 8.3.3 and 8.3.5** provide the details.

8.3.6 Accreditation determinations of HKCAAVQ under the AAVQO (Cap. 592) are subject to an appeal mechanism. Appeals are free of charge to the appellant and are handled by an independent Appeal Board. The Appeal Board consists of individuals who are not members of the HKCAAVQ Council, and they are appointed by the SED with the EDB as the Secretariat. Over the past five years, one withdrawal case and one dismissal case were recorded by the Appeal Board and details are further described in **Sections 9.7.1-9.7.5**.

Summary of self-assessment against ESG 3.3

8.3.7 The HKCAAVQ Council is the ultimate governing body and the Secretariat operates with delegated authorities from the Council. All the decision-making mechanism and the nomination mechanism for specialists support the independence in the performance of its functions and decisions by HKCAAVQ.

Reflections for continuous quality enhancement

8.3.8 Further considerations are given to developing an enhanced mechanism to deal with the cases in which the Accreditation Panel's recommendations are not accepted in its entirety. An enhanced mechanism within the Council of HKCAAVQ is to be developed to further improve the existing system.

8.4.   ESG 3.4: Thematic analysis

> **Standard: Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.**

8.4.1   HKCAAVQ considers it a good practice to share information and relevant general findings summarised from accreditation activities through appropriate formats. As explained in the ESG 2015, the purpose of conducting thematic analysis is to "contribute to the reflection on and the improvement of quality assurance policies and processes in institutional, national and international contexts". Two important examples are provided here to demonstrate how HKCAAVQ achieves this purpose, even though the format adopted may not be exactly the same as the thematic analysis and reporting conducted by other QA agencies. There are also other activities which are relevant to achieving this purpose.

Review of Accreditation Standards under the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process

8.4.2   In 2016, HKCAAVQ initiated a comprehensive review of the accreditation standards under the Process, after eight years' experience of accreditation activities underpinning the HKQF. The objective of the review was to consolidate the accreditation experience from the past years, and to ensure that the accreditation standards are not only up-to-date but also upkeep relevancy in context before the next review. The review was overseen by a taskforce[36] with current or past Council Members and Executive Director of HKCAAVQ. An Advisory Panel[37] was also appointed comprising members from the relevant stakeholder groups.

8.4.3   Through desktop research, focus group meetings and surveys, the review collected three main categories of input:

(a)   Stakeholders' opinions
(b)   Past accreditation outcomes
(c)   Contemporary QA theories and practices

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[36] Membership of the Taskforce: https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/services/review-of-standards/Governance

[37] Membership of Advisory Panel: https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/services/review-of-standards/Governance

The findings of the review were published in the Summary of Findings[38], in which 14 issues were identified under nine different themes:

Research Theme	Issue Statement
Presentation of Standards	1. More context-sensitive guidance should be provided to facilitate consistent interpretation and application of standards (and criteria).
	2. To strengthen a systematic approach of applying the Generic Level Descriptors in accreditation.
New Forms of Delivery	3. More guidance should be provided to facilitate consistent interpretation and application of standards (and criteria) in the context of online or blended delivery.
	4. To review the neutrality of standards with respect to operating models or delivery modes.
Measuring Outcomes	5. The standards (and criteria) should articulate the expectations in relation to learner-centered approach and outcome-based education (OBE), at both institutional and programme level.
	6. The standards should be able to encourage progressive demonstration of effective implementation of OBE through the Process, from programme to institutional level.
Maturity of Operators	7. The standards (and criteria) should articulate a clear and progressive expectation of moving from compliance to enhancement, beyond meeting the threshold standards.
	8. There should be some minimum requirements for ensuring that an accredited operator is capable of self-improvement.
Institutional vs. Programme Accreditation	9. To rationalise and articulate the focuses of different accreditation exercises within the Process.
LPA vs. Re-LPA of Four-stage QA Process	10. To develop Re-LPA standards with a focus on effectiveness of implementation, changes and improvements.
Disclosure of Information	11. To consider to what extent information disclosure is relevant in different stages of the Process.
Academic vs. VPET Accreditation	12. To better articulate how different evidence can be used to demonstrate meeting the same standards with respect to the nature of operators and/or programmes.
CAT[39] and VPET Developments	13. More contextual guidance should be provided to facilitate shared understanding of work-based, workplace, non-formal and informal learning, and how they should be assessed in accreditation.
	14. The standards (and criteria) should articulate the expectations in relation to relevant government guidelines and policies where appropriate.

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[38]   Summary of Findings: https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/files/services/review-of-standards/Summary_of_Findings/Summary_of_Findings__2018.2.2__Eng__clean_formatted_.pdf

[39]   Credit Accumulation and Transfer. https://www.hkqf.gov.hk/en/KeyFeatures/cat/index.html.

8.4.4 Responding to the above findings, the task force of the review deliberated on the issues and how they were addressed in the revised accreditation standards are summarised below:

Issue Statement	How it is addressed in the revised accreditation standards
1. More context-sensitive guidance should be provided to facilitate consistent interpretation and application of standards (and criteria).	Explanatory notes are provided for each standard to help operators and accreditation panels in assessing whether a standard is met.
2. To strengthen a systematic approach of applying the Generic Level Descriptors in accreditation.	There are references from the accreditation standards and explanatory notes to the Generic Level Descriptors where appropriate.
3. More guidance should be provided to facilitate consistent interpretation and application of standards (and criteria) in the context of online or blended delivery.	The revised accreditation standards are neutral in terms of models and modes of delivery. Evidence requirements for specific models or modes have been provided.
4. To review the neutrality of standards with respect to operating models or delivery modes.	The revised accreditation standards are neutral in terms of models and modes of delivery. Specific considerations, for example, collaboration provisions, are provided where appropriate.
5. The standards (and criteria) should articulate the expectations in relation to learner-centered approach and OBE, at both institutional and programme level.	The revised accreditation standards clearly differentiate different types of outcomes at learner, programme and/or organisational levels.
6. The standards should be able to encourage progressive demonstration of effective implementation of OBE through the Process, from programme to institutional level.	The revised accreditation standards are designed to drive the alignment of outcomes at learner, programme and/or organisational levels.
7. The standards (and criteria) should articulate a clear and progressive expectation of moving from compliance to enhancement, beyond meeting the threshold standards.	The Purpose Statements clearly show a progression from meeting minimum competence requirements to a focus on improving effectiveness of actual implementation.
8. There should be some minimum requirements for ensuring that an accredited operator is capable of self-improvement.	All operators are expected to have internal quality assurance system capable of monitoring performance and making enhancements.
9. To rationalise and articulate the focuses of different accreditation exercises within the Process.	A Purpose Statement is defined for each stage, showing the different focuses of different accreditation exercises.

Issue Statement	How it is addressed in the revised accreditation standards
10. To develop Re-LPA standards under the Four-stage QA Process with a focus on effectiveness of implementation, changes and improvements.	The Purpose Statement of LPA/Re-LPA clearly articulates a requirement on continuous improvement based on actual outcomes of implementation.
11. To consider to what extent information disclosure is relevant in different stages of the Process.	The revised accreditation standards require that learners enrolled in a learning programme are provided with accurate and up-to-date information about the programme and the qualifications that the programme may lead to.
12. To better articulate how different evidence can be used to demonstrate meeting the same standards with respect to the nature of operators and/or programmes.	Evidence Guides have been published with consideration of the nature of operators and/or programmes.
13. More contextual guidance should be provided to facilitate shared understanding of work-based, workplace, non-formal and informal learning, and how they should be assessed in accreditation.	The revised accreditation standards are neutral in terms of models and modes of delivery. Evidence requirements for specific models or modes have been provided.
14. The standards (and criteria) should articulate the expectations in relation to relevant government guidelines and policies where appropriate.	Special considerations relevant to government guidelines and policies are provided where appropriate.

8.4.5 Addressing all the necessary refinements, a completely new presentation format on the revised accreditation standards was adopted allowing more guidance and contextual information to be included, so that operators can better assess their readiness and identify any gaps in meeting the standards.

8.4.6 The revised accreditation standards and additional guidance using the new presentation format were released as a consultation document in June 2017. The consultation was completed on 31 August 2017. More than half of the accredited institutions, representing more than 96% of the qualifications on the QR under the purview of HKCAAVQ, and members of the public participated in the consultation. Overall, the findings of the consultation clearly indicated that the issues identified for exploration were comprehensive, and the proposed directions of change were supported by the stakeholders. Given the positive outcomes, the revised accreditation standards were submitted ahead of schedule to the HKCAAVQ Council for consideration and approval in

January 2018. The final version of the revised accreditation standards under the Process was published on 1 April 2018.

8.4.7 The entire review methodology and findings were documented in a dedicated webpage accessible by the public[40]. The final deliverable of the review was incorporated into the Manual for Four-stage Quality Assurance Process under the HKQF, which is the definitive document of the accreditation standards and process, used by the operators, accreditation panels, case officers and all other stakeholders.

8.4.8 In summary, the review was conducted in a highly engaging and transparent manner, with strong participation and endorsement from stakeholders including the operators, and provided information to operators and relevant stakeholders for strengthening their QA policies and processes under various contexts.

Differentiation Approaches in Accreditation (Sections 4.29-4.32 of the Manual refers)

8.4.9 With the launch of the HKQF in 2008, institutions in Hong Kong are gaining more and more experience in accreditation as well as in operating learning programmes recognised under the HKQF. The maturity of their internal QA system and effectiveness of their operation are reflected in the decreasing number of conditions set in accreditation exercises. By making use of data captured in the HKCAAVQ's QMS, maturity of an institution can be assessed for an appropriate differentiation approach in accreditation. The initial experience of HKCAAVQ in implementing the differentiation approach in accreditation was presented in a conference paper in Macao in 2017 and published on HKCAAVQ's website [41]. Further results were presented in the HKQF International Conference 2018[42].

8.4.10 At the recent meeting of the LPAA in November 2019, members were informed of the implementation details of differentiated approach in accreditation. Members appreciated this positive move and wish to see more systematic reports.

8.4.11 Following the above, the Secretariat would conduct a review to holistically evaluate the impact of applying differentiation in

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[40]   https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/services/review-of-standards/background

[41]   https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/files/publications/others/Development_of_a_Differentiated_Approach_in_Accreditation.pdf

[42]   https://www.hkqf.gov.hk/filemanager/common/conference2018/pdf/Albert-Chow.pdf

accreditation, and the effects on the internal QA of the institutions. The review would be conducted in a manner similar to the review of accreditation standards under the Process and is expected to be completed by September 2020, albeit at a smaller scale. At the time of preparing this submission, HKCAAVQ was collecting feedback from operators and case officers through online surveys. This will be the first thematic analysis report to be published. HKCAAVQ plans to publish one to two reports annually.

Sharing of Good Practices with Local and Non-local Institutions

8.4.12 HKCAAVQ launched the QAOK in February 2017 with the support of the QESS. The QAOK provides an electronic repository of good practices. It serves as a user-friendly and resourceful information portal for both local and non-local institutions seeking to enhance their internal QA measures as well as for HKCAAVQ in further improving its accreditation practice.

8.4.13 HKCAAVQ considers that, with its experience in undertaking the QESS-funded projects and other consultancy projects, it is ready to proceed one step further in turning findings from external QA activities into regularly published reports, in the form of thematic analysis.

Summary of self-assessment against ESG 3.4

8.4.14 It is considered that HKCAAVQ has continued to devote on-going efforts to systematically review and enhance its quality assurance approaches and practices and publicise the results for improvement of QA policies and processes. HKCAAVQ is committed to publishing one to two thematic analysis reports annually from September 2020. Although the format adopted may not be exactly the same as stipulated in the ESG, the activities as described above are in no doubt contributing to the reflection on and the improvement of QA policies and processes in institutional, national and international contexts.

Reflections for continuous quality enhancement

8.4.15 As an initial attempt to publish thematic analysis reports, HKCAAVQ is mindful of how our stakeholders perceive the use of these reports and a detailed feedback survey will be conducted for continuous improvement purposes.

8.5. ESG 3.5: Resources

> **Standard: Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.**

Human Resources

8.5.1 HKCAAVQ Council undertook the organisational development review and remuneration structure review in 2019 to reflect the appropriate organisational structure and remuneration system for HKCAAVQ amid the evolving needs of the education and training sectors in Hong Kong. The major enhancements are as follows:

(a) Allow the provision on the appointment of Deputy Heads where appropriate to support the operations of business units.

(b) Strengthen the support of corporate services by introducing Head of Human Resources and Administration position, and re-organise the support of IT services.

(c) Talent management plan by introducing succession planning and talent development from Executive Assistant grade to Assistant Registrar grade and from Assistant Registrar grade to Senior Registrar grade.

8.5.2 The new organisational structure is gradually taking shape from 2020. HKCAAVQ believes the new structure is conducive to supporting the increasingly diverse business developments, to ensuring medium- to long-term financial sustainability, and to enabling talent development and succession. The AAA Unit currently has 24 staff members.

8.5.3 Under the human resources policy approved by HKCAAVQ Council, HKCAAVQ adopts an effective and efficient staffing structure subject to regular monitoring by the HKCAAVQ Council. HKCAAVQ employs full-time staff on two- or three-year contracts; and/or enters into contract for services where appropriate. The turnover rate of HKCAAVQ in 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20 was 25.3%, 16.7% and 20.7% respectively, with an average of 20.9%.

8.5.4 Through the conduct of annual risk assessment and business model update, HKCAAVQ Council ensures that the operational efficiency, financial position, and staffing structure are justifiably in good shape. Renewal of staff contracts is timely considered in line with the organisational business planning.

8.5.5 Reporting to the Deputy Executive Director, the AAA Unit is led by a Unit Head at the rank of Senior Registrar. The AAA Unit provides the following accreditation services:

(a)   academic accreditation;
(b)   accreditation of non-local programmes;
(c)   accreditation of online learning programmes; and
(d)   assessment of substantial changes to the accreditation status.

8.5.6 Accreditation is the core business and is conducted by Registrars and Assistant Registrars. Consultants are engaged for emerging projects within the scope of work of the AAA Unit to provide further support on the work.

8.5.7 In terms of accreditation, Registrars and in some cases, Assistant Registrars, acting as Secretary-cum-Panel Member, liaise with the institution and panel members, draft the site visit programme, consolidate the initial comments made by the individual members of the accreditation panel, and draft the accreditation report.

8.5.8 In addition, Assistant Registrars provide professional on-site support to accreditation exercises that involve different stages of the Process and/or more than one programme, such as liaising with the institution and panel members, organising the site visit, and taking notes during the site visit.

8.5.9 Executive Officers and Executive Assistants provide a range of logistical support to accreditation exercises. Their duties include making travel and accommodation arrangements for non-local panel members, liaising with the institution for the logistics of the site visit, and keeping records of major accreditation activities.

Staff Induction, Development and Performance Management

8.5.10 The Secretariat has an intranet with a designated area that provides induction materials for new staff.

8.5.11 The AAA Unit has in place an induction programme for new staff. Supplemented by latest update on the new policies and practices, the induction programme is re-run by assigned mentor(s).

8.5.12 In 2018/19, the AAA Unit introduced the Accreditation Apprenticeship Programme for Assistant Registrars, with reference to the ENQA's competency framework after necessary contextual adaptations as

reported to the PAC in January and September 2018, with an aim to induct and develop staff for understanding the roles and responsibilities in accreditation.

8.5.13 The Secretariat has in place a system of annual performance appraisal and review. The Human Resources and Administration (HRA) Unit consolidates the staff development needs identified through annual performance appraisal and review completed by business units and reports to the Directorate. Appropriate capacity building activities for staff are organised by the HRA Unit and the Research and Training (RT) Unit in accordance with the annual budget of the respective units. The staff development participation are reviewed during mid-term and annual performance appraisal and review.

As a reflection, HKCAAVQ will develop an organisation culture and structure which support talent management and development with recognition of leadership. In addition, HKCAAVQ will review and revamp its performance management mechanism to provide better incentive and motivation for performance.

Financial Resources

8.5.14 Please refer to **Sections 4.14-4.20**.

Summary of self-assessment against ESG 3.5

8.5.15 In general, HKCAAVQ is maintaining a very good financial position with sustainable resources allocated to support the long-term development of the organisation. In particular, the AAA Unit is able to generate comfortable surpluses from accreditation services. Income earned by the AAA Unit is in general more than sufficient to cover the expenditure incurred. Over the years, these surpluses are utilised and converted to the overall development of the whole organisation, including the development of the AAA Unit and new service areas and enhancements.

Reflections for continuous quality enhancement

8.5.16 In view of the COVID-19 pandemic and global economic development, it is anticipated that the business environment, including that of the education sector, will be subject to considerable impact in the coming three years. In this connection, further diversification of income portfolios in the areas of consulting service to the Government and public sector, consulting service to education institutions in Macao and

Greater Bay Area will be pursued and developed in attaining a even better position in terms of medium- to long-term financial sustainability. The senior management of HKCAAVQ will continue to closely monitor the manpower provisions taking account of the short-term and long-term development of the economy and the education sector.

8.6.   ESG 3.6: Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

> **Standard: Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.**

Policies and Procedures

8.6.1   The Secretariat has an intranet where staff can access prevailing policies and procedures.

8.6.2   The workflow followed by the AAA Unit in conducting accreditation exercises and assessing substantial changes to the accreditation status is pre-coded in the QMS, in particular the key milestones of an accreditation exercise, with well-defined approval authorities. The pre-coded workflow is reviewed from time to time to ensure alignment with prevailing policies and procedures.

Avoiding Potential Conflicts of Interest

8.6.3   The Secretariat has mechanisms in place to safeguard potential conflict of interest. A dual confirmation procedure is adopted for avoiding conflict of interest in accreditation exercises. First, potential panel members are required to read the *Code of Conduct for Panels*[43] and the Manual, and sign a declaration form to declare any interest and undertake to abide by the relevant guidelines. The importance of declaration of conflict of interest and upholding confidentiality as stated in the Code of Conduct are specifically emphasised during the Panel First Meeting as well. Second, operators are required to sign a declaration form as a testament to the clearance of any conflict of interest in relation to the nominated panel members prior to the commencement of the respective accreditation exercise.

8.6.4   In case a potential panel member declares any perceived or potential conflict of interest, the case officer will make recommendation for endorsement by the Unit Head and approval by the Deputy Executive Director. The case officer will take the required follow-up action(s) including communicating the decision made to the respective panel member and/or substituting with a replacement potential panel member.

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[43]
https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/files/services/policies/Code_of_Conduct_for_Panels_v1.2__Aug_2018_.pdf

8.6.5 Observers are also required to read the *Code of Conduct for Panels* and the *Policy and Guidelines on Observing Accreditation Site Visit*[44] and sign a declaration form to declare any interest and undertake to abide by the relevant guidelines. Over the past five years, individual Council Members and EDB representatives were arranged to observe site visits in order to understand the work of HKCAAVQ.

8.6.6 For staff of HKCAAVQ, they are required to comply with the *Code of Conduct in Performing HKCAAVQ Duties*[45]. In addition, staff are required to submit a declaration form on conflict of interest annually and in particular case of exercises.

Strategic Plan and KPIs

8.6.7 Strategies and KPIs, which are developed based on the strategic directions set out in the Strategic Plan, are considered effective means to measure and monitor progress relevant to individual functional areas under the Secretariat against the strategic objectives.

8.6.8 The submission of the Strategic Plan progress reports enables the HKCAAVQ Council to keep under view the effectiveness of HKCAAVQ's operations and take appropriate and timely actions for improvement where deemed necessary. As in the past, the implementation of the *Strategic Plan 2019-2023* will be monitored through submission of progress reports by the Secretariat to the HKCAAVQ Council. For details of the Strategic Planning process, please refer to **Chapter 11** of this submission. For a specific example about the internal quality assurance of HKCAAVQ, please refer to the review of accreditation standards in **Section 8.4** for details.

Regular Feedback from Stakeholders

8.6.9 Forming part of the internal quality assurance process, the Secretariat has two regular mechanisms for gathering feedback in relation to accreditation services:

(a) Feedback from operators

The survey is conducted with operators on a yearly basis, rather than immediately upon the completion of an accreditation

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[44]

https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/files/services/policies/Policy_and_Guidelines_on_Observing_Accreditation_Site_Visit.pdf

[45] Code of Conduct in Performing HKCAAVQ Duties is at **Annex 5**.

exercise, to minimise possible influence that any accreditation outcome may have on the validity of the survey. The Secretariat engages an independent external research agency to conduct the survey in order to preserve impartiality, uphold confidentiality and maintain anonymity. Feedback is also collected through operators' training.

(b)   Feedback from panel members

The RT Unit of the Secretariat conducts a survey with panel members approximately one month after each accreditation exercise, and is responsible for analysing the results and sharing the findings with the relevant units for follow-up actions.

Analyses of the feedback collected are provided in **Chapter 10**.

8.6.10 Reports on the outcomes from the surveys are reviewed by the HKCAAVQ Council via the QAC. Findings and follow-up actions are shared with the respondents through various means, such as the website of HKCAAVQ, the Liaison Panel meetings and training workshops.

Summary of self-assessment against ESG 3.6

8.6.11 HKCAAVQ has an established framework and mechanism for ensuring the quality and integrity of its activities, which are operationalised through policies, standards, procedures and practices. The effectiveness of the operations is monitored through formal feedback mechanism at various levels on a regular basis.

Reflections for continuous quality enhancement

8.6.12 The current framework and mechanism for the internal quality assurance are well in place and operationalised. The senior management of HKCAAVQ will continue to closely monitor all feedback collected and track the actions taken in addressing the feedback and implementing enhancement.

8.7. ESG 3.7: Cyclical external review of agencies

> **Standard: Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.**

8.7.1 It has always been part of HKCAAVQ's Strategic Plans to seek external review of the QA process of HKCAAVQ with internationally accepted standards with a view to achieving continuous quality enhancement of its system, standards and processes underpinning the accreditation activities of HKCAAVQ.

8.7.2 In 2015, HKCAAVQ was reviewed by an external expert panel in meeting the GGP developed by the INQAAHE to benchmark our QA process against these international standards. Following a critical self-review and the expert panel review, the external review report was submitted to the INQAAHE Board, and the INQAAHE Board in October 2015 confirmed that HKCAAVQ comprehensively adheres to the GGP developed by INQAAHE, with a five-year validity period.

8.7.3 The Panel also made recommendations for improvement to the operations of HKCAAVQ in quality assurance of higher education. HKCAAVQ subsequently published its Progress Report [46] that summarises the follow-up actions taken since September 2015 in response to the recommendations made in the External Review Report[47] and the recommendations identified from the self-assement of HKCAAVQ.

8.7.4 HKCAAVQ has not undertaken an ENQA Agency Review in meeting the ESG previously. Following the completion of the Comparability Study of the HKQF and the EQF in March 2016, HKCAAVQ, being the appointed Accreditation Authority under the HKQF, considers that a review by the ENQA is an excellent opportunity for continuous quality enhancement. HKCAAVQ however does not intend to seek ENQA membership or registration on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education.

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[46] https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/files/about-us/Internal_Quality_Assurance/Progress_report__INQAAHE_external_review_.pdf

[47] https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/files/about-us/Internal_Quality_Assurance/INQAAHE_-_GGP_Review_of_HKCAAVQ_-_Report_-_Final.pdf

Summary of self-assessment against ESG 3.7

8.7.5 Undertaking external review is identified as a strategy for self-review and continuous quality enhancement. HKCAAVQ takes it seriously on the review and is committed to taking actions in achieving continuous quality enhancement in line with the recommendations and self-reflection coming up from the Review. In addition, HKCAAVQ appreciates that the reports and follow-up actions are accessible by the public.

Reflections for continuous quality enhancement

8.7.6 The senior management of HKCAAVQ will take it seriously and make sure that the actions mentioned in **Section 8.7.5** will be followed up leading to further enhancement.

Chapter 9:
Self-Assessment in meeting Part 2 of European Standards and Guidelines

9.1   ESG 2.1: Consideration of internal quality assurance

> **Standard: External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.**

9.1.1 Part 1 of the ESG describes the standards and guidelines for internal QA. The Manual serves the purpose to address the accreditation standards and processes. The Manual provides a description of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process (the Process). The Process is illustrated in **Figure 2**. As a minimum, an operator must have met the standards of Stages 1 and 2 before its qualifications can be recognised under the HKQF. Operators are expected to demonstrate a higher level of competence in internal QA moving across the four stages under the Process. The Process is explained in detail under **Section 9.2** for ESG 2.2. Stages 1 and 2 of the Process are applicable to NLP and OLP as explained in **Sections 5.5-5.6**. Therefore, all analyses or narratives provided in this chapter are also applicable to NLP and OLP.

Figure 2: Four-stage Quality Assurance Process of HKCAAVQ
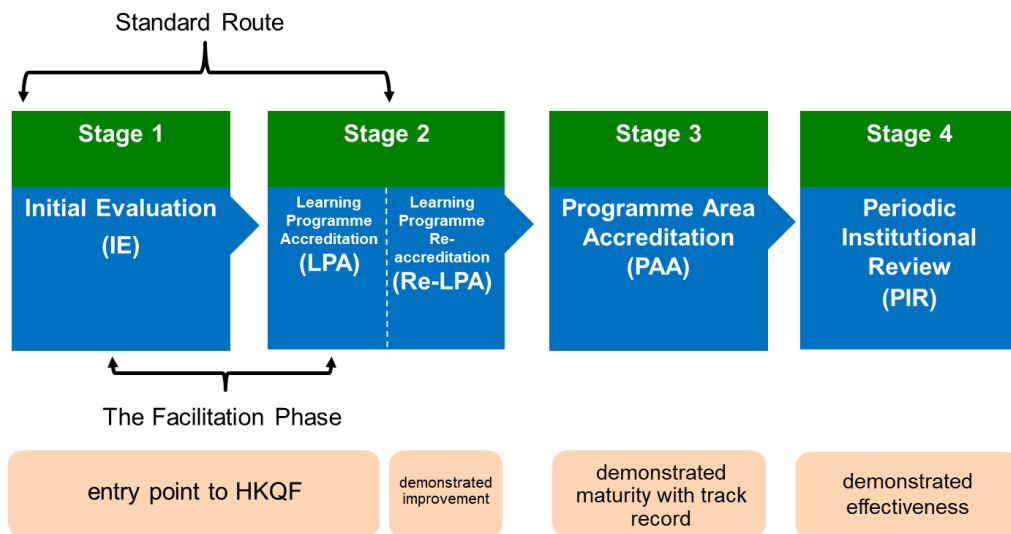
Each stage has a set of domains of competence. Operators are expected to demonstrate a higher level of competence moving across the four stages under the Process.

9.1.2 To illustrate the progression along the Process, mappings of the standards under each stage against Part 1 of the ESG are provided in **Tables 4-12a** below, with a comparison between the two set of standards:

<u>Table 4: A mapping of the Process in meeting ESG 1.1</u>

	Standards
ESG 1.1 Policy for quality assurance	**Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.**
Stage 1 IE of Four-stage QA Process	IE-4 Organisational Quality Assurance The Operator must have an internal quality assurance system that can support effective management and monitoring of the quality of its learning programme(s) in delivering learning outcomes that align with the Generic Level Descriptors (GLDs) of the HKQF, to meet its educational/training objectives.
Stage 2 LPA/Re-LPA of Four-stage QA Process	LPA-7 Programme Approval, Review and Quality Assurance The Operator must monitor and review the development and performance of the learning programme on an on-going basis to ensure that the programme remains current and valid and that the learning outcomes, learning and teaching activities and learner assessments are effective to meet the programme objectives.
Stage 3 PAA of Four-stage QA Process	PAA-4 Organisational Quality Assurance and Enhancement The Operator must have established an effective internal quality assurance system with well-defined policies and procedures in place to determine and monitor the quality and standards of its learning programmes, and to ensure alignment with its educational/training objectives and the stated HKQF level(s).
Stage 4 PIR of Four-stage QA Process	PIR-5 Organisational Quality Assurance and Enhancement The Operator must demonstrate its on-going maintenance of an effective quality assurance system for ensuring the quality and standards of its learning programmes at the stated HKQF level(s) in the approved programme area(s), aligning with its educational/training objectives.

	Standards
Comparison	According to the guidelines of ESG 1.1, the focus of ESG 1.1 is on having a formal internal quality assurance which is made public. In HKCAAVQ's Process, the structure of a formal internal quality system is examined at the stage of IE, and then the actual operation and effectiveness are evaluated at the programme level and finally at the institutional level with regard to organisation objectives when progressing across the four stages under the Process. The Government has promulgated the *Code of Good Practices on Governance and Quality Assurance* for full implementation by self-financing institutions which participate in the Non-means-tested Subsidy Scheme (to provide financial assistance by the Government in the form of annual subsidy to eligible students to settle tuition fees of full-time locally accredited local and non-local self-financing undergraduate programmes in Hong Kong). The Code requires the participating institutions to have clear and transparent QA mechanism to all stakeholders. HKCAAVQ works with the EDB to assist institutions' appreciation and implementation of the Code.

Table 5: A mapping of the Process in meeting ESG 1.2

	Standards
ESG 1.2 Design and approval of programmes	**Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.**
Stage 1 IE of Four-stage QA Process	IE-4 Organisational Quality Assurance The Operator must have an internal quality assurance system that can support effective management and monitoring of the quality of its learning programme(s) in delivering learning outcomes that align with the GLDs of the HKQF, to meet its educational/training objectives.

	Standards
Stage 2 LPA/Re-LPA of Four-stage QA Process	**LPA-1 Programme Objectives and Learning Outcomes** The learning programme must have objectives that address community, education and/or industry needs, with learning outcomes that meet the relevant HKQF standards, for all exit qualifications from the programme. **LPA-3 Programme Structure and Content** The structure and content of the learning programme must be up-to-date, coherent, balanced and integrated to facilitate progression in order to enable learners to achieve the stated learning outcomes and to meet the programme objectives.
Stage 3 PAA of Four-stage QA Process	**PAA-5 Programme Area Development and Management** The Operator must substantiate the proposed programme area by its track record of operation of HKQF-recognised learning programmes in relevant discipline or industry areas, in alignment with organisational objectives and planned resources.
Stage 4 PIR of Four-stage QA Process	**PIR-3 Programme Area Development and Management** The Operator must demonstrate that the processes for programme approval, development, review, as well as the formulation of strategic plans at both the organisational and programme area levels, are linked and continue to remain effective to meet its educational/training objectives within the approved programme area(s).
Comparison	The purpose of the Process is to underpin the HKQF. Therefore, the design of learning programmes that can meet the requirements of HKQF and community needs is an important theme running through the whole Process. Moving along the four stages under the Process, more emphasis is given from programme design to effectiveness of delivery, and finally to actual impacts in the community/industries/disciplines, as well as the evidence of continuous improvement.

	Standards
ESG 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	**Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.**
Stage 1 IE of Four-stage QA Process	-
Stage 2 LPA/Re-LPA of Four-stage QA Process	LPA-4 Learning, Teaching and Assessment The learning, teaching and assessment activities designed for the learning programme must be effective in delivering the programme content and assessing the attainment of the intended learning outcomes.
Stage 3 PAA of Four-stage QA Process	PAA-6 Learning, Teaching and Assessment The Operator must have developed and implemented effective policies for the development of learner-centred strategies for achievement of learning outcomes through alignment of educational/training objectives, learning experiences, assessment, and learning support.
Stage 4 PIR of Four-stage QA Process	PIR-3: Programme Area Development and Management The Operator must demonstrate that the processes for programme approval, development, review, as well as the formulation of strategic plans at both the organisational and programme area levels, are linked and continue to remain effective to meet its educational/training objectives within the approved programme area(s).
Comparison	The learner-centric focus is manifested in all the three stages after IE. At the programme level, this is related to admission requirements, programme design and assessments. At the organisational level, emphasis is put on the strategies to provide a holistic learning experience for learners.

Table 7: A mapping of the Process in meeting ESG 1.4

	Standards
ESG 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	**Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student "life cycle", e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.**
Stage 1 IE of Four-stage QA Process	-
Stage 2 LPA/Re-LPA of Four-stage QA Process	LPA-2 Learner Admission and Selection The minimum admission requirements of the learning programme must be clearly outlined for staff and prospective learners. These requirements and the learner selection processes must be effective for recruitment of learners with the necessary skills and knowledge to undertake the programme. LPA-3 Programme Structure and Content The structure and content of the learning programme must be up-to-date, coherent, balanced and integrated to facilitate progression in order to enable learners to achieve the stated learning outcomes and to meet the programme objectives. A matter for consideration ■ There is a definitive programme document describing the programme structure and content, as well as the rules for progression. LPA-4 Learning, Teaching and Assessment The learning, teaching and assessment activities designed for the learning programme must be effective in delivering the programme content and assessing the attainment of the intended learning outcomes.

	Standards
Stage 3 PAA of Four-stage QA Process	PAA-6 Learning, Teaching and Assessment The Operator must have developed and implemented effective policies for the development of learner-centred strategies for achievement of learning outcomes through alignment of educational/training objectives, learning experiences, assessment, and learning support. PAA-6.5 All learners have access to accurate and complete information about the fees, admission and completion requirements, and the award(s) to be granted upon successful completion of a learning programme.
Stage 4 PIR of Four-stage QA Process	-
Comparison	All of the above indicate that all phases of learner life cycle are properly assessed and communicated to the stakeholders.

Table 8: A mapping of the Process in meeting ESG 1.5

	Standards
ESG 1.5 Teaching staff	**Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff.**
Stage 1 IE of Four-stage QA Process	IE-3 Organisational Staffing The Operator must be able to engage staff who are competent to manage its operations, to lead programme planning and development, and to support the delivery of learning programme(s) up to the claimed HKQF level(s). IE-3.3 The Operator has set up formal and transparent human resources policies and procedures for recruitment, induction, performance review and staff development, which align with its educational/training objectives.

	Standards
Stage 2 LPA/Re-LPA of Four-stage QA Process	**LPA-5 Programme Leadership and Staffing** The Operator must have adequate programme leader(s), teaching/training and support staff with the qualities, competence, qualifications and experience necessary for effective programme management, i.e. planning, development, delivery and monitoring of the programme. There must be an adequate staff development scheme and activities to ensure that staff are kept updated for the quality delivery of the programme.
Stage 3 PAA of Four-stage QA Process	**PAA-7 Staffing and Staff Development** The Operator must have a suitably qualified and competent workforce which is capable to develop and deliver learning programmes in the proposed programme area, and can ensure sustainable development of the proposed programme area.
Stage 4 PIR of Four-stage QA Process	**PIR-2 Organisational Leadership and Staffing** The Operator must demonstrate that it continues to have a sufficient number of qualified and competent programme leaders, teaching and support staff, as a result of effective staff planning and development, and that these arrangements align with the development of the programme area(s).
Comparison	The mapping above indicates that competence of teaching staff, and staff recruitment and development processes are assessed with higher expectations when moving along the Process.

Table 9: A mapping of the Process in meeting ESG 1.6

	Standards
ESG 1.6 Learning resources and student support	**Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided.**
Stage 1 IE of Four-stage QA Process	IE-2 Financial Viability and Resources Management The Operator must have adequate financial and physical resources to achieve its educational/training objectives, with well-defined systems and processes to manage its finances to support the quality and effectiveness of its operation.

	Standards
Stage 2 LPA/Re-LPA of Four-stage QA Process	**LPA-6 Learning, Teaching and Enabling Resources/Services** The Operator must be able to provide learning, teaching and enabling resources/services that are appropriate and sufficient for the learning, teaching and assessment activities of the learning programme, regardless of location and mode of delivery.
Stage 3 PAA of Four-stage QA Process	**PAA-8 Programme Area Resources and Services** The Operator must have implemented a well-managed approach to its provision of learning, teaching and enabling resources which aligns with the current and planned development of the proposed programme area.
Stage 4 PIR of Four-stage QA Process	**PIR-4 Management of Resources and Services** The Operator must demonstrate that, within the approved programme area(s), the mechanisms for management and deployment of resources and services continue to be effective to meet the educational/training objectives, as a result of implementing organisational resource allocation policies and financial budgets.
Comparison	The Process requires that an institution must be financially viable to plan and manage its programmes and to provide the necessary enabling resources (including student support) for the attainment of learner outcomes programme outcomes, and organisational outcomes. Moving along the four stages under the Process, more emphasis is given from resources available to effective planning and finally to allocation of resources.

Table 10: A Mapping of the Process in meeting ESG 1.7

	Standards
ESG 1.7 Information management	**Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.**

	Standards
Stage 1 IE of Four-stage QA Process	**IE-1 Organisational Governance and Management** The governing body of the Operator has clearly defined and appropriate educational/training objectives, and has implemented a management structure to realise those objectives, for the delivery of learning programme(s) that fall within the scope of the HKQF level(s) sought. A matter for consideration ▪ The Operator has developed a strategic plan which has identified educational/training objectives, and is supported by implementation plan(s) with measurable performance indicators. **IE-4 Organisational Quality Assurance** The Operator must have an internal quality assurance system that can support effective management and monitoring of the quality of its learning programme(s) in delivering learning outcomes that align with the GLDs of the HKQF, to meet its educational/training objectives. IE-4.4 The Operator systematically collects evidence of attainment of learning outcomes to support evaluation and enhancement of the effectiveness of its learning programme(s).
Stage 2 LPA/Re-LPA of Four-stage QA Process	**LPA-7 Programme Approval, Review and Quality Assurance** The Operator must monitor and review the development and performance of the learning programme on an on-going basis to ensure that the programme remains current and valid and that the learning outcomes, learning and teaching activities and learner assessments are effective to meet the programme objectives.
Stage 3 PAA of Four-stage QA Process	**PAA-2 Strategic Planning and Development** The Operator must have formal processes at organisational level for developing its strategic plan, which are effective in driving achievement of educational/training objectives. The strategic plan should focus on the analyses, decisions and actions needed to sustain and enhance the operation of its learning programmes.

	Standards
Stage 4 PIR of Four-stage QA Process	PIR-1 Organisational Effectiveness and Planning The Operator must demonstrate that it is meeting its educational/training objectives, aligned with its vision and mission, and informed by comprehensive review of organisational effectiveness and implementation of strategically planned initiatives. PIR-1.2 The Operator is able to substantiate its attainment of educational/training objectives within the approved programme area(s), using information such as organisational outcomes and/or performance indicators. PIR-1.4 The Operator has used evidence-based practices to improve educational/training offerings and services.
Comparison	Throughout the Process, operators are expected to use information collected from actual operation to monitor and improve the quality of provisions. Towards PAA and PIR, the Process highlights the importance of achievement of organisational outcomes.

Table 11: A mapping of the Process in meeting ESG 1.8

	Standards
ESG 1.8 Public information	**Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible.**
Stage 1 IE of Four-stage QA Process	-

	Standards
Stage 2 LPA/Re-LPA of Four-stage QA Process	LPA-1 Programme Objectives and Learning Outcomes The learning programme must have objectives that address community, education and/or industry needs, with learning outcomes that meet the relevant HKQF standards, for all exit qualifications from the programme. LPA-2 Learner Admission and Selection The minimum admission requirements of the learning programme must be clearly outlined for staff and prospective learners. These requirements and the learner selection processes must be effective for recruitment of learners with the necessary skills and knowledge to undertake the programme.
Stage 3 PAA of Four-stage QA Process	-
Stage 4 PIR of Four-stage QA Process	-
Comparison	HKCAAVQ's standards focus on providing programme-specific information to prospective learners. The Government has promulgated the *Code of Good Practices on Governance and Quality Assurance* for full implementation by self-financing institutions which participate in the Non-means-tested Subsidy Scheme. The Code encourages institutions to make institutional and programme-specific information publicly accessible. HKCAAVQ works with the Government to assist the institutions' appreciation and implementation of the Code.

Table 12: A mapping of the Process in meeting ESG 1.9

	Standards
ESG 1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	**Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.**

	Standards
Stage 1 IE of Four-stage QA Process	**IE-4 Organisational Quality Assurance** The Operator must have an internal quality assurance system that can support effective management and monitoring of the quality of its learning programme(s) in delivering learning outcomes that align with the GLDs of the HKQF, to meet its educational/training objectives.
Stage 2 LPA/Re-LPA of Four-stage QA Process	**LPA-7 Programme Approval, Review and Quality Assurance** The Operator must monitor and review the development and performance of the learning programme on an on-going basis to ensure that the programme remains current and valid and that the learning outcomes, learning and teaching activities and learner assessments are effective to meet the programme objectives.
Stage 3 PAA of Four-stage QA Process	**PAA-4 Organisational Quality Assurance and Enhancement** The Operator must have established an effective internal quality assurance system with well-defined policies and procedures in place to determine and monitor the quality and standards of its learning programmes, and to ensure alignment with its educational/training objectives and the stated HKQF level(s).
Stage 4 PIR of Four-stage QA Process	**PIR-5 Organisational Quality Assurance and Enhancement** The Operator must demonstrate its on-going maintenance of an effective quality assurance system for ensuring the quality and standards of its learning programmes at the stated HKQF level(s) in the approved programme area(s), aligning with its educational/training objectives.
Comparison	Accreditation by HKCAAVQ is designed to confirm and enhance internal QA of the institution. In this aspect, the Process focuses on the effectiveness of internal QA to achieve programme outcomes, and eventually to achieve and continuously improve organisational outcomes.

Table 12a: A mapping of the Process in meeting ESG 1.10

	Standards
ESG 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance	**Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis**
	Not applicable as operators of HKCAAVQ do not adopt ESG and hence ESG 1.10 is not applicable for this Review.

Summary of self-assessment against ESG 2.1

9.1.3 HKCAAVQ recognises that organisational competence takes time to fully develop and demonstrate. Moving along the Process, higher levels of competence of internal quality assurance are expected at each stage and these expectations are articulated in the accreditation standards.

Reflections for continuous quality enhancement

9.1.4 In the next review of HKCAAVQ accreditation standards, further alignment of HKCAAVQ standards will be made with reference to ESG 2.1.

9.2   ESG 2.2: Designing methodologies fit for purpose

> **Standard: External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.**

9.2.1   In designing its QA approach, HKCAAVQ recognised that there is no one-size-fits-all approach because of the diverse nature of operators and programmes that come under its purview. The principle of fit-for-purpose is adopted to allow operators at different stages of development to progress through continuous improvement after undergoing the accreditation by HKCAAVQ. The accreditation by HKCAAVQ is in accordance with the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process under the HKQF. The Process maintains a minimum level of competence requirements when an institution first seeks to undergo Stages 1 and 2 of the Process. The Process then allows the institution to demonstrate higher levels of competence in terms of effective delivery and QA of their programmes.   The different stages in the Process are illustrated in **Figure 2**. Accreditation by HKCAAVQ is not designed to replace the internal QA of the institution, but rather works to confirm and enhance the internal QA mechanism of the institution.

9.2.2   The purpose of each stage is clearly defined by a Purpose Statement as follows:

Table 13: Purpose Statement of each stage of the Process

Stage	Purpose Statement
Initial Evaluation of Four-stage QA Process	To ascertain whether an Operator is competent to operate learning programme(s) that meet HKQF standards up to a certain HKQF level.
Learning Programme Accreditation/ Re-accreditation of Four-stage QA Process	The purpose is twofold: To ascertain whether a learning programme (proposed or accredited) meets an HKQF standard to achieve the claimed objectives. To ascertain whether the Operator of a learning programme is competent to continuously monitor and improve the effectiveness of its programme operation to achieve the claimed programme objectives.

Programme Area Accreditation of Four-stage QA Process	To ascertain whether an Operator is competent to quality assure its learning programme(s) within a programme area up to a certain HKQF level, as demonstrated from the track record of its operation of accredited learning programmes in a particular discipline or industry area, and its capacity to enhance its organisational effectiveness to achieve the educational/training objectives.
Periodic Institutional Review of Four-stage QA Process	To ascertain whether an Operator continues to be effective in achieving its vision and mission by systematically enhancing the quality of its operation by formulating and implementing actions based on evidence.

9.2.3 The Process naturally takes into account the development of and the maturity demonstrated by an operator. Certain levels of power and flexibility are given to operators in Stages 3 and 4 of the Process. In addition, the application of the differentiation approach in accreditation would provide an incentive for the continuous improvement on the part of the operators. Please refer to **Sections 8.4.9-8.4.11** of this submission and Sections 4.29-4.32 of the Manual for details.

9.2.4 Furthermore, the facilitation phase is available to facilitate operators' preparation for the accreditation exercises. The details are in Appendix 2 of the Manual. This will help to support operators to improve quality and reduce subsequent workload on both the operators and HKCAAVQ.

9.2.5 The purpose statement of each stage drives the development of the respective accreditation standards under that stage. HKCAAVQ adopts an outcome-based approach in the design of its accreditation standards. There is a hierarchy of outcomes considered in the design:

(a) student outcomes – learning outcomes attained by a student after successful completion of a programme. Student outcomes are reflected by assessments;

(b) programme outcomes – performance of a programme in relation to its programme objectives. Programme outcomes are typically assessed by analysing information such as stakeholders' feedback and employment data; and

(c) organisational outcomes – performance of an institution in relation to achieving its vision and mission through effective governance and management. Internally, an institution typically develops relevant performance indicators to assess its

organisational outcomes. Effectiveness is a commonly used indicator in this regard.

9.2.6 These outcomes are intrinsically interlinked. The vision and mission of an institution guides the design of its programmes and the identification of learning outcomes, and the learning outcomes achieved by the students contribute to the measurement of the effectiveness of the institution. The effectiveness of the institution hinges on whether there are processes in place to check and maintain the alignment between activities at different levels. Notwithstanding, this kind of organisational competence takes time to fully develop. As such, HKCAAVQ requires institutions to maintain a minimum level of competence requirements for meeting the HKQF standards when an institution first undergoes the accreditation by HKCAAVQ under the Process. The Process then allows the institution to demonstrate higher levels of competence in terms of effective delivery and internal QA of their programmes. A full description of the Process can be found in the Manual.

9.2.7 Under the relevant domains, the applicable regulations are included where appropriate. For example, the following considerations are included under LPA-1:

(a) For Associate Degree and Higher Diploma programmes, the programme objectives, learning outcomes and exit qualifications comply with the latest version of the Common Descriptors for Associate Degree and Higher Diploma Programmes under the New Academic Structure promulgated by the EDB; and

(b) The use of titles for qualifications obtainable from the learning programme complies with the Award Titles Scheme under the HKQF.

This approach has the advantage that the users of the Manual understand where the relevant regulations are taken into account, and removing the need to revise the Manual when such regulations, normally issued by relevant authorities outside HKCAAVQ, are updated.

9.2.8 **Annex 6** summarises the stages that the accredited institutions have gone through.

Summary of self-assessment against ESG 2.2

9.2.9 HKCAAVQ's objective of providing a system that embodies the "fit-for-purpose" principle is fully manifested in the design of the Process, by assessing the ability of an operator to meet its own objectives,

complying with applicable regulations at the same time. This ability takes time to develop and demonstrated through actual outcomes. The Process allows operators to build up their track record and in return they can enjoy greater autonomy from accreditation by HKCAAVQ. Stakeholders' involvements in the design and review of the Process are described in **Section 8.4**.

Reflections for continuous quality enhancement

9.2.10 HKCAAVQ keeps in view the fitness-for-purpose of its accreditation design methodologies and conducts regular reviews on its system and accreditation standards. The implementation of differentiation approach in accreditation is the most recent major enhancement on the methodologies. The next major enhancement will be made after fully taking into account the outcomes of the review of differentiation approach in accreditation under the thematic analysis.

9.3   ESG 2.3: Implementing processes

> **Standard: External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include**
> **- a self-assessment or equivalent;**
> **- an external assessment normally including a site visit;**
> **- a report resulting from the external assessment;**
> **- a consistent follow-up.**

9.3.1 The major steps of the accreditation process extracted from the Manual are outlined below:

Table 14: Major steps of the accreditation process

Step	Description
Preparation of Accreditation Document	• To prepare the Accreditation Document, the Operator is advised to conduct a self-evaluation making reference to the respective accreditation standards and matters for consideration, and the respective Submission Guides/Forms (if applicable).
Panel Formation	• The Panel Members are nominated by HKCAAVQ and appointment is confirmed after checking for conflict of interest with the Operator in writing.
Accreditation Panel's Initial Comments on Accreditation Document and Operator's Response	• The Accreditation Panel provides initial comments on the Accreditation Document and requests additional information as needed. • The Operator provides response to the Accreditation Panel's initial comments. • Further information/clarification from the Operator may be needed.
Site Visit/Meeting	• There is a site visit conducted by the Accreditation Panel or meeting(s) held at HKCAAVQ office between the Operator and the Accreditation Panel. • There may be post-visit or post-meeting follow-up, if applicable.
Preparation of Accreditation Report	• HKCAAVQ issues an interim report based on the Accreditation Panel's recommendations (if applicable). • HKCAAVQ finalises the accreditation report after considering the Accreditation Panel's recommendations. HKCAAVQ makes the final determination for accreditation exercises under the AAVQO (Cap. 592). • For degree programmes offered by institutions under Cap. 320, approval from the Chief Executive in Council has to be sought.

Notification of Outcome	• HKCAAVQ issues the accreditation report.
Follow-up	• If the accreditation report includes conditions, the approval determination by HKCAAVQ has effect subject to those conditions being fulfilled. • HKCAAVQ stipulates requirements as necessary to follow up on areas of major concerns. • HKCAAVQ may also give recommendations based on Accreditation Panel's observations to operators on further improvements to the operation or the programme(s) seeking accreditation. • operators are asked to submit any substantial changes that may have an impact towards maintaining relevant accreditation standards during the validity period and follow-up review actions will be made.

Detailed description of each of these steps can be found in the Manual.

9.3.2 Not only are all the steps published in the Manual, they are also implemented in accordance with the procedures pre-coded in the QMS, stipulating the approval authorities. The service agreements signed with the operators also stipulated that they must observe the accreditation process.

Summary of self-assessment against ESG 2.3

9.3.3 There are clearly defined steps in the accreditation process, which are published and implemented in accordance with the procedures pre-coded in the QMS.

Reflections for continuous quality enhancement

9.3.4 Currently, all the steps in accreditation process are captured through the QMS. HKCAAVQ is in the process of converting the respective steps into the form of robotic process automation to make it even better in respect of compliance and risk management.

9.4   ESG 2.4: Peer-review experts

> **Standard: External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).**

9.4.1   Peer review is one of the guiding principles and is at the heart of the QA process of HKCAAVQ. HKCAAVQ engages Specialists with relevant expertise and experience in the discipline/industry/QA sector to be members of an Accreditation Panel.

9.4.2   For this purpose, HKCAAVQ maintains a Register of Specialists. HKCAAVQ publishes a policy on the appointment and management of Specialists[48]. Following the policy, a nomination for appointment as specialist is normally made by a staff of the Secretariat, in consultation with the Unit Head, and endorsed by the SSC for final approval by the Executive Director. The membership of the SSC is as follows:

(a)   a Council Member appointed by the Council Chairman as the Chair
(b)   Heads of the following units as members:
    (i)   AAA;
    (ii)   Vocational and Professional Accreditation;
    (iii)   RT; and
(c)   the subject officer (Specialists) of the RT Unit as the Secretary.

A summary of the profile of the Register can be found in **Annex 7**.

9.4.3   An accreditation panel typically includes three or more Specialists, including one to two overseas academics, one to two local academics and one practitioner from relevant industry. In the case of the accreditation of sub-degree (Higher Diploma and Associate Degree) programmes, an accreditation panel typically comprises a mix of local academics and practitioners. To facilitate the formation of accreditation panels, the QMS contains a Register of Specialists for case officers to search on the database using different criteria. If a more suitable candidate is identified by case officers who is currently outside the Register, a Case-Specific Invited Panel Member (CSIPM) proposal may be made. The final list of panel membership is endorsed by the Unit Head and approved by the Deputy Executive Director via the QMS.

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[48]
https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/files/specialists/policy_on_specialists_appointment_and_management/Policy_on_Specialists_Appointment_and_Management_October2019_.pdf

9.4.4 Besides Specialists relevant to the operator/programme being accredited, Specialists with relevant financial and corporate governance expertise and experience may be engaged as Finance and Corporate Governance Experts to provide written expert opinion to the Panel Chair on issues relating to financial management and corporate governance.

9.4.5 Specialists are supported by relevant training and the details are in **Sections 5.13-5.16**.

Engagement of Students in the Quality Assurance Activities of HKCAAVQ

9.4.6 At the moment, the accreditation panels of HKCAAVQ do not include student members. It is of the view that students on panels need to demonstrate commitment and sustainability and be trained before they could effectively take up the role of Accreditation Panel members. In addition, the culture and practice in this part of the world apparently are not ready for this move and hence more time is required for preparation.

9.4.7 To prepare students and to provide them with the knowledge and training in QA of academic programmes, HKCAAVQ invited institutions to nominate up to two representatives from their student body (student union/association/society) to attend student liaison meetings since 2017. Students selected are current students with a general interest in the higher education sector and/or experience in representing students in the activities of the respective institutions.

9.4.8 Six meetings were held in the 2017/18 and 2018/19 academic years with student representatives from more than 16 institutions.

Table 15: Student Liaison Meetings held

Academic Year	Date	Representing institutions	Attendance
2017/18	27 October 2017	16	27
	16 March 2018	10	17
	6 July 2018	15	23
2018/19	14 December 2018	13	24
	26 April 2019	16	25
	5 July 2019	15	23
		Cumulative Total	**139**

9.4.9 The student representatives were invited to apply for and offered the places of HKCAAVQ summer internship programme in 2018 and 2019. Coupled with the Student Liaison Meetings, it is anticipated that this form of engagement of student stakeholder group would enable student representatives to have a better understanding of QA and advocate among their peers the potential role of students towards the QA of academic programmes.

Summary of self-assessment against ESG 2.4

9.4.10 Peer review is one of the guiding principles and at the heart of HKCAAVQ's accreditation, with documented policy and criteria for appointment and management of Specialists of HKCAAVQ and procedures pre-coded in the QMS for the formation of accreditation panels. Although currently having a student member on the accreditation panel is not the norm in the Hong Kong context, HKCAAVQ has been making significant effort in engaging and preparing students as a stakeholder group with a view to moving towards this direction.

9.5   ESG 2.5: Criteria for outcomes

> **Standard: Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.**

9.5.1   The Manual serves as a single point of reference covering the accreditation process as well as the accreditation standards. Chapter 6 of the Manual clearly defines the different possible determinations and outcomes of accreditation.

9.5.2   Under each accreditation standard, there are minimum requirements which describe essential features of an institution or a programme. They are included to provide guidance to institutions on how to meet the accreditation standards, and also to assist Accreditation Panels in making an holistic judgement as to whether the accreditation standards have been met or not. As such, when appropriate, they may also provide an indication of where the setting of conditions and/or restrictions is necessary.

9.5.3   The rationale for the Accreditation Panel's recommendation regarding the accreditation determination is based on the assessment of evidence collected by the Accreditation Panel through the accreditation process against the accreditation standards, which is presented in the accreditation report.

9.5.4   In the Secretariat, the following support measures are in place to help achieve consistency in the process of arriving at an accreditation determination:

(a)   Case Officers meetings are regularly organised for sharing of accreditation issues and how they are addressed.
(b)   QMS provides a complete database in support of consistency of decision-making.
(c)   Endorsement/approval by Unit Head, and final approval by Deputy Executive Director / Executive Director include consistency considerations.

Summary of self-assessment against ESG 2.5

9.5.5   It is considered that HKCAAVQ has fully committed to the requirements of ESG 2.5 given the above measures in place.

Reflections for continuous quality enhancement

9.5.6   In addition to all the mechanisms and processes in place, further thematic training will be conducted on a regular basis to keep all professional staff abreast on consistency issues arisen.

9.6   ESG 2.6: Reporting

> **Standard: Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.**

9.6.1 To increase the transparency of the accreditation outcomes to stakeholders, HKCAAVQ has been publishing summary accreditation reports on its website since September 2013. Although full accreditation reports providing accreditation determinations and further details of the accreditation exercises were not published, summary accreditation reports provide accreditation determinations and key programme information to all stakeholders.

9.6.2 Since publication, the summary accreditation reports attracted much interest from stakeholders as well as the general public, with the relevant webpage recording over 40,000 page views. As of 31 March 2020, 1,078 summary accreditation reports were published on the HKCAAVQ website. Regular updates on the number of summary reports published is also shared with all the stakeholders through the HKCAAVQ Newsletters[49].

9.6.3 In line with international good practices, HKCAAVQ began considering the publication of full accreditation reports since 2017. In preparation for publication of full accreditation reports, HKCAAVQ has conducted the following:

(a)   Consultation with the LPAA and the Liaison Panel for Accreditation of Vocational and Professional Education and Training (LPVPET) of HKCAAVQ in August 2017.

(b)   Surveys to collect feedback from different stakeholders including accredited operators, Specialists and the general public in October and November 2017.

(c)   A desktop benchmarking study on international practice of publishing accreditation reports in October 2017.

(d)   Focus group meetings with accredited operators in November 2017.

(e)   Announcement of the approved implementation strategies and timelines for publication of full accreditation reports to all stakeholders in January 2018.

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[49] https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/publications/newsletters

9.6.4 In light of the outcomes of the above-mentioned surveys, focus groups and benchmarking exercise, the HKCAAVQ Council approved in January 2018 the implementation for publication of full accreditation reports for academic accreditation exercises under all the four stages of the Process. A two-step approach was adopted to publish full accreditation reports as follows:

(a) Full accreditation reports would be published for IE exercises under the Four-stage QA Process for operators offering local learning programmes with submission of accreditation documents from 1 April 2019.

(b) Full accreditation reports would be published for accreditation exercises of both local and non-local academic programmes under the Four-stage QA Process with submission of accreditation documents from 1 April 2020.

Announcement on the approved implementation strategies and timelines for publication of full accreditation reports was made to all stakeholders in January 2018. As of 31 March 2020, there was no full accreditation report published for IE exercises under the Four-stage QA Process as no operator submitted for only IE exercises since then. It is expected that the first report following (b) will be published no later than October 2020.

9.6.5 Following the existing practice on the publication of summary reports, full accreditation reports to be published will not include non-approval cases. In cases where pre-conditions are stipulated, the full accreditation reports will be published after the pre-conditions have been fulfilled. The pre-conditions, along with a statement that the pre-conditions have been fulfilled by the operators concerned and how they have been fulfilled, will be published in the full report on the HKCAAVQ website.

9.6.6 In the interim year between the publication of summary and full accreditation reports (2019 to 2020), more details have been added to the summary reports for LPA and Re-LPA exercises under the Four-stage QA Process such as information on teaching and learning activities and learner support services.

9.6.7 This phased approach to the publication of full accreditation reports is a response to increasing transparency and accountability to stakeholders about the work of HKCAAVQ. It also aims to help operators to gradually get prepared for the publication of full accreditation reports on HKCAAVQ website.

Summary of self-assessment against ESG 2.6

9.6.8 It is considered that HKCAAVQ has fully committed to meeting the requirements of ESG 2.6.

Reflections for continuous quality enhancement

9.6.9 It is envisaged that a feedback survey to stakeholders will be conducted after 18-month experience in publishing the full accreditation reports to gauge stakeholders' further feedback on our practice and to seek further improvement in the quality and consistency of reports.

9.7   ESG 2.7: Complaints and appeals

> **Standard: Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.**

Appeals

9.7.1   HKCAAVQ has in place an appeal mechanism as provided under Sections 9 to 17 of the AAVQO (Cap. 592) for institutions to appeal against accreditation decisions made by HKCAAVQ for HKQF-related accreditation exercises. This appeal mechanism is managed by the EDB to provide an independent avenue for aggrieved parties to review the decisions of HKCAAVQ as the Accreditation Authority.

9.7.2   HKCAAVQ makes public the appeal mechanism promulgated by the EDB on its website [50], including the terms of reference of the independent Appeal Board, its membership, the flowchart of the appeal mechanism, contacts and relevant ordinances.

9.7.3   Handling of appeals lodged by institutions which have undergone accreditation of their learning programmes seeking recognition under HKQF is governed by the legislative requirements and procedures stipulated in Sections 9 to 17 of the AAVQO (Cap. 592) and relevant appeal rules under Cap. 592A [51] made available on the aforesaid website.

9.7.4   All cases of appeal are handled by an independent Appeal Board appointed by the SED under Section 10(1) of the AAVQO (Cap. 592). The Secretary to Appeal Board is a designated staff member of the EDB to ensure impartiality and compliance with all the legislative requirements and procedures. Under Cap. 592, an Appeal Board consists of a chairman, one or more persons as the deputy chairman or deputy chairmen, and a panel of persons when a specific board is formed for a particular case.

9.7.5   Information on the numbers of appeals against decisions by HKCAAVQ on accreditation of higher education over the last five years can be found in the table below.

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[50]   https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/services/accreditation/appeal
[51]   https://www.elegislation.gov.hk/hk/cap592A?xpid=ID_1438403496298_005

Table 16: Appeals pertaining to the relevant provisions under Cap. 592
over the last five years

FY	Number	Decision
2014/15	1	Withdrawal by Appellant
2015/16	0	N/A
2016/17	1	Dismissal by Appeal Board on the ground of non-appealable case
2017/18	0	N/A
2018/19	0	N/A

Complaints

9.7.6 The Secretariat has in place a complaint handling mechanism to address any complaint of services provided by HKCAAVQ.

9.7.7 Complaints are regarded as dissatisfaction with services provided by HKCAAVQ and are separate from dissatisfaction with accreditation decisions made by HKCAAVQ.

9.7.8 Complaints are acknowledged, processed and responded to in accordance with the complaint handling mechanism by the Head of Executive Support, or any other staff member(s), or an inquiry panel assigned by the Executive Director independently. An inquiry panel is appointed when there is a prima facie case and a panel consists of a directorate member, two other staff members, and a secretary. Processing of complaints would also provide opportunities for considering any improvement measures required.

9.7.9 The range of means for lodging complaints about services of HKCAAVQ and the relevant important notice are made available to stakeholders on the HKCAAVQ website[52].

9.7.10 The number of complaints received and processed, summary of each complaint case, actions taken and timeframe for response are reported by the Head of Executive Support to the HKCAAVQ Council three times a year to maintain governance, accountability and transparency.

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[52] https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/contact-us/complaints-form

9.7.11 Information on the numbers of complaints received from the higher education institutions seeking accreditation by HKCAAVQ over the last five years can be found in the table below.

Table 17: Complaints from higher education institutions over the last five years

FY	Number received	Number responded to	Decision
2014/15	0	N/A	N/A
2015/16	0	N/A	N/A
2016/17	0	N/A	N/A
2017/18	0	N/A	N/A
2018/19	0	N/A	N/A

Summary of self-assessment against ESG 2.7

9.7.12 It is considered that HKCAAVQ has an independent appeal mechanism stipulated in the legislation, as well as a complaint handling mechanism put in place with regular reporting to the HKCAAVQ Council.

Reflections for continuous quality enhancement

9.7.13 HKCAAVQ recently reviewed its complaint handling mechanism in May 2020. The revamped mechanism took effect in July 2020. Substantive improvements are made to the complaint handling mechanism as approved by the Council of HKCAAVQ which include:

(i)   Improved clarity on the definition of a complaint;
(ii)   Introduced a review mechanism for complainant to contest against the outcome of complaint;
(iii)   Better defined the process of handling a complaint; and
(iv)   Enhanced clarity on the procedure by the use of a flowchart.

HKCAAVQ will review the use of the newly revamped mechanism after 18 months of operation with a view to seeking further improvement on the mechanism in terms of its applicability, objectivity and efficiency.

Chapter 10: Opinions of Stakeholders

10.1   HKCAAVQ regularly engages its stakeholders in the development or review of policies, processes and standards, to ensure that stakeholder perspectives are taken into consideration.

10.2   In addition to the review of accreditation standards (**Section 8.4**), there are regular mechanisms for gathering feedback from institutions/organisations and panel members on the academic accreditation service (including accreditation of non-local programmes and accreditation of online learning programmes).

10.3   As part of the self-assessment process of the current external review, the Secretariat had additionally collected views from operators and case officers on the accreditation services.

Regular Collection of Feedback from Institutions

10.4   Feedback on the academic accreditation service is collected by an external vendor annually by means of an online survey that covers:

(a)   Experience of using the e-Portal, an online platform for submission of applications and documents launched in 2016; and

(b)   Experience of undertaking accreditation, and the support HKCAAVQ provided during the accreditation process.

In addition to the collection of quantitative feedback using a five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), open-ended questions enable participating organisations to provide qualitative feedback.

10.5   Survey findings and follow-up actions are reviewed by the HKCAAVQ Council on a yearly basis.

Key Findings in Recent Years

10.6   The questionnaire on academic accreditation was responded by an average of 12 organisations between 2016 and 2018. The response rate was between 55% and 65%.

10.7 In relation to the experience of using the e-Portal, the responded organisations generally found the e-Portal user-friendly. They commended the smooth uploading of documents and the provision of adequate support for using the e-Portal. **Table 18** below shows the mean scores for overall user-friendliness of the e-Portal between 2016 and 2018:

Table 18: Mean score for overall user-friendliness of the e-Portal

Year	Mean Score (out of 5.0)
2016	3.80
2017	4.10
2018	3.92

10.8 As a whole, the responded organisations are satisfied with HKCAAVQ's academic accreditation service. **Table 19** summarises the mean scores of the relevant questionnaire items between 2016 and 2018.

Table 19: Mean scores on academic accreditation service

Item	Mean Score (out of 5.0)		
	2016	2017	2018
Overall speaking, our organisation was satisfied with the service provided by HKCAAVQ.	4.09	4.08	3.83
Evidence collected during the exercise(s) was relevant to the accreditation criteria and standards.	3.91	4.00	3.75
The questions raised by the Accreditation Panel(s) were relevant to the accreditation criteria and standards.	3.91	3.75	3.75
The accreditation report(s) provided well-justified determinations.	3.82	3.92	3.67

10.9 The responded organisations also consistently commended the case officers being helpful and responsive to their needs by, for example, providing clear response and answering enquiries in a professional manner.

10.10 Meanwhile, on the basis of the feedback collected, the AAA Unit has identified areas for continuous improvement and developed corresponding measures as follows:

(a) Sharing of accreditation knowledge and skills among case officers/staff

The AAA Unit has in place a two-year Accreditation Apprenticeship Programme (**Section 8.5.12**). The Programme aims to equip Assistant Registrars with the core competencies to discharge the role as Secretary-cum-Panel Member. The QMS, the intranet and the Unit's shared drive folders are also used as the wealth of information for the purpose of effective transfer of knowledge and skills to professional and support staff.

(b) Composition of Accreditation Panels

Due attention has been given to ensure that the composition of each Panel has a good mix of knowledge and expertise in quality assurance and relevant subject matters. Any concerns expressed by operators prior to the confirmation of the Panel composition are documented and carefully considered by the Secretariat with reference to the guiding principle of 'peer review' and the *Code of Conduct for Panels.*

(c) Strengthening engagement and communication with operators

The Manual, which took effect in April 2019 as a single point of reference replacing the now obsolete Guidelines on the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process and the set of Guidance Notes for each stage, provides significantly more information to operators on assessing their readiness and to prepare for accreditation. The refined training model of the RT Unit to engage case officers in conducting specific workshops for operators facilitates sharing of practical accreditation experience with operators. The briefings conducted by the AAA Unit and RT Unit under the steering of the Directorate have also strengthened the engagement and communication with operators about the accreditation standards.

Regular Collection of Feedback from Panel Members

10.11 Feedback from panel members is collected by means of an in-house online survey. Approximately one month following the conclusion of an accreditation exercise (i.e. issuance of accreditation report to the operator), the Secretariat invites the panel members concerned to complete the survey. The survey collects both quantitative and qualitative feedback.

10.12 Survey findings and follow-up actions are reviewed by the HKCAAVQ Council via the QAC on a yearly basis.

Key Findings in Recent Years

10.13 The vast majority of the responded panel members are satisfied with various aspects of the accreditation exercises. More than 95% of them indicated "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" when asked about their satisfaction with aspects of accreditation exercises such as:

(a)   guidance to panel members;
(b)   accreditation process;
(c)   secretariat support; and
(d)   support to non-local members.

10.14 There is a consistently high level of overall satisfaction among the responded panel members, as indicated by their high mean scores for standard summary statements in Table 20 below:

Table 20: Overall satisfaction among panel members^

Statement Period	Accreditation exercise met the stated objectives.	Accreditation exercise was conducted in an orderly and effective manner. *	Response rate
Jan-Jun 2017	4.73	4.78	79%
Jul-Dec 2017	4.75	4.79	80%
Jan-Jun 2018	4.64	4.70	81%
Jul-Dec 2018	4.63	4.65	82%
Jan-Jun 2019	4.66	4.69	84%

^   A five-point scale was used.
*   This statement was reworded in January 2018 following a review of the survey questionnaires.

10.15 In the open-ended section of the questionnaires, panel members consistently commended the professionalism of the Secretariat in areas such as:

(a)   the guidance and support they obtained throughout the accreditation exercises
(b)   case officers' responsiveness and attention to details
(c)   good teamwork of the Accreditation Panels

10.16 Some panel members also provided suggestions for continuous improvement. Below are some examples, along with the follow-up actions:

(a) Honorarium falling short of being satisfactory

The Council approved the Secretariat's proposal that the established level of honorarium be adjusted every five years based on the consumer price indices during the period. Since the last adjustment effective from 1 October 2014, the new level of honorarium for panel members, panel chairs and Financial Experts took effect for new Panel formations from 1 October 2019 onwards.

(b) Difficulties in downloading and reading electronic copies of accreditation documents

Case officers/support staff have been equipped with appropriate software support to assist the panel members' access to electronic files of accreditation documents.

(c) Provision of more detailed information to the Panels during Re-LPA exercises under Four-stage QA Process

In the implementation of differentiation approach in accreditation, case officers have been compiling more information for the Panels' reference on the analysis of the track record of operators in Re-LPA exercises.

(d) Provision of more detailed information on travel arrangements for non-local panel members

More training is provided to support staff in handling travel arrangements for non-local panel members while complying with the relevant policies and procedures.

Feedback for Training Activities and the Use of this Information

10.17 As a standing practice, the RT Unit conducts evaluation of the training it delivers. Survey reports are reviewed by the trainers, the Head of the RT Unit, the Directorate, and the Council via the QAC.

10.18 Evidently, the mean scores on the quality of the training activities for specialists and operators over the years are consistently above 4.0 on

a five-point scale, demonstrating that the training activities have been meeting the needs of specialists and operators (**Figures 3 and 4**).
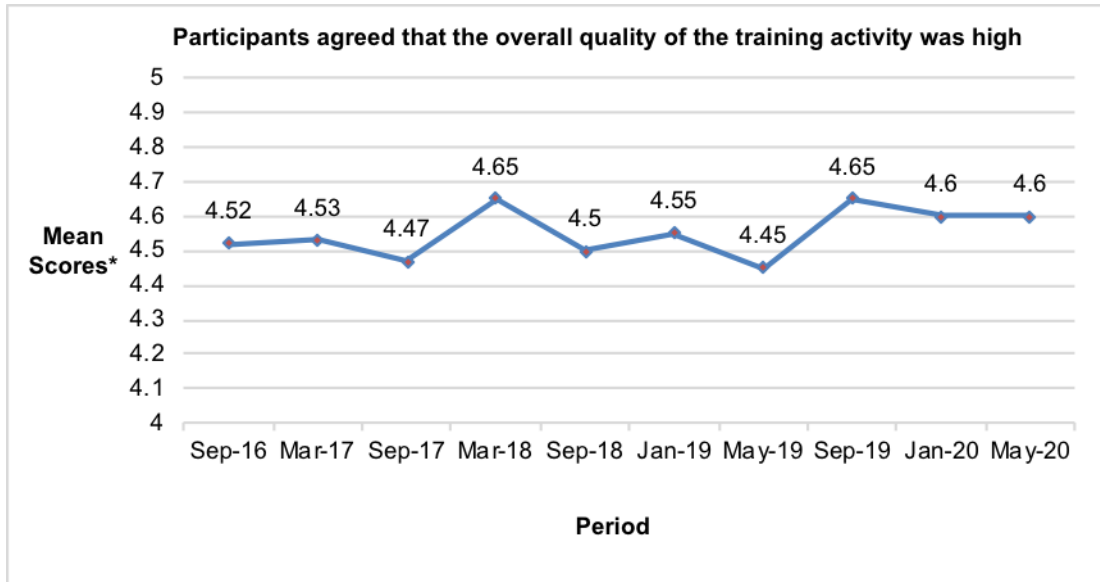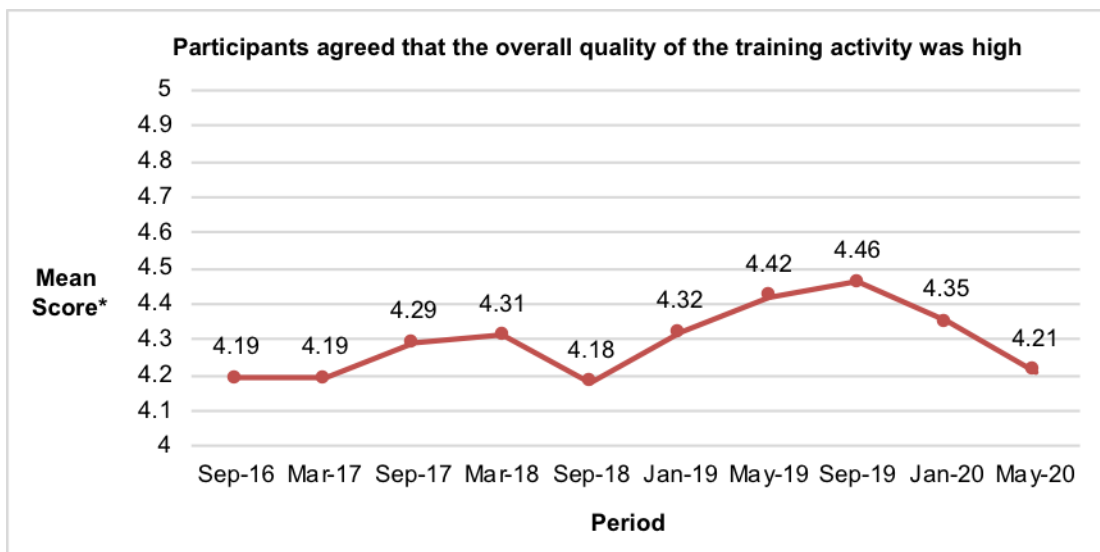
Figure 3: Capacity Building Activities for Specialists

Participants agreed that the overall quality of the training activity was high

Figure 4: Capacity Building Activities for Operators

Participants agreed that the overall quality of the training activity was high

10.19 Since July 2018, case officers of the AAA Unit and the Vocational and Professional Accreditation Unit were engaged as trainers to conduct regular and thematic training activities for operators. This was a response to an on-going observation that operators welcome more sharing of practical experience and up-to-date good practices.

10.20 As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic development, all face-to-face briefing and workshops for operators have been converted into

live webinars from March 2020. The RT Unit is in the process of consolidating the experience from the engagement of case officers and the use of online mode. These include the development and update of training material that will make use of case experience and the edge of online mode. It is expected that continuous improvement will be made following the use of this approach.

Collection of Views from Operators and Case Officers on Academic Accreditation for the Self-Assessment Purposes

10.21   In March 2020, operators and case officers were invited to participate in online surveys, which seek to understand their views on the following aspects in relation to the academic accreditation service:

(a)   The Manual
(b)   The Differentiation Approaches in Accreditation
(c)   Accreditation Panels
(d)   Student Voice in Accreditation
(e)   Communication with HKCAAVQ (for operators only)
(f)   Support to Operators (for case officers only)

10.22   The Secretariat received 27 valid responses as follows:

Table 21: Participation of Operators and Case Officers in the Surveys

Target Respondents	Invitations Sent	Valid Return	Response Rate
Operators	26	16	62%
Case Officers	15	11	73%

Key Findings

10.23   As a whole, the responded operators and case officers find the Manual clear in the following aspects:

(a)   Articulating the accreditation requirements
(b)   Developing a self-evaluation report
(c)   Following the accreditation process
(d)   Collecting and evaluating accreditation evidence

There is a suggestion on providing more details about accreditation of online learning programmes in the next revision of the Manual.

10.24 In relation to the differentiation approach in accreditation, operators see the benefit in terms of lessened evidence load and, on some occasions, longer validity period. From the perspective of responded case officers, the differentiation approach in accreditation contributes to some saving in the time and workload spent on the day(s) of site visit, and more focused discussion between the Accreditation Panel and the operator during site visit on key areas of concern. Three of the 16 operators and one case officer remarked that it would be more helpful to further elaborate on the criteria for eligibility for differentiation approach in accreditation.

10.25 The responded operators and case officers are in general agreement that most accreditation panels are well-versed in applying the accreditation standards and the accreditation process as set out in the Manual.

10.26 The responded operators and case officers also agree that the current measures in capturing student voice in accreditation, such as operators' reporting on feedback from students and graduates and panel's meeting session(s) with student and/or graduate representatives during site visits are adequate. No views were expressed in relation to including a student member on the accreditation panels.

10.27 The responded operators find the existing channels of communication with HKCAAVQ satisfactory.

10.28 In relation to supporting the continuous quality enhancement and excellence of operators, five of the eleven responded case officers remarked that it is crucial for HKCAAVQ to maintain close communication with operators through means such as training activities and sharing of good practice.

Chapter 11: Strategic and Business Plan Development and Monitoring

Strategic and Business Planning

11.1 HKCAAVQ adopts a 4-year strategic plan on a rolling basis, with the current plan runs from 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2023.

11.2 The HKCAAVQ Business Model is updated annually using the Boston Consultancy Group growth-share matrix prototype. Having factored in the latest market situations for the range of accreditation, assessment and consultancy services offered by HKCAAVQ, the Directorate reports to the Finance Committee of the HKCAAVQ Council an updated business model for short to medium-term strategic planning. HKCAAVQ considers this is fit-for-purpose as the business planning facilitates the decision-making on appropriate levels of resources for the business lines to support the strategic plan implementation.

11.3 Formulation of strategic plans is led by Directorate of HKCAAVQ, under the steering of a Task Force set up by the HKCAAVQ Council. The membership of the last Task Force comprised Council Vice-chairman cum Finance Committee Chair, three Council Members, and Executive Director of HKCAAVQ. In formulating the strategic plan, the Task Force engaged all staff via the senior executives of HKCAAVQ, the HKCAAVQ Council, and the key stakeholder groups. The key stakeholder groups comprised the representatives from higher education institutions, training institutes, industry leaders and employers, professional bodies, regulatory authorities, government departments, subject specialists, overseas quality assurance agencies, career masters, learners, etc. After the close of the stakeholder consultation, the feedback were presented to the Task Force, and reflected in the final strategic plan presented to and approved by the HKCAAVQ Council.

11.4 In the strategic planning process, reflections were conducted on: (a) the past performance of the strategic plan implementation as contained in the annual progress reports to the HKCAAVQ Council; and (b) the previous updates to the business model. The following highlights the progresses made and the opportunities / challenges ahead:

	Progress / On-track
1.	Information sharing and transparency are fully supported with the use of HKCAAVQ Quality Management System (QMS) supplemented by regular team meetings and thematic sharing sessions. – Performance pledges are met.
2.	Engagement of different clients and stakeholders is achieved through training, accreditation and assessment and facilitation activities.
3.	Business model is subject to continuous review and revamp where appropriate to support financial sustainability of the organisation.
4.	INQAAHE confirmed in October 2015 that HKCAAVQ's processes are comprehensively aligned with the Guidelines of Good Practice.
5.	Standards underpinning the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process had been revised and new standards have been implemented since 1 April 2019.
6.	New accreditation services have been launched for operators e.g. Vocational Qualifications Pathway, Accreditation of Professional Qualifications, Accreditation of Online Learning Programmes.
7.	Regular briefings, facilitation, regular and thematic training to operators, subject specialists, and HKCAAVQ professional staff.
8.	Continuous monitoring and review of staff development plan through performance review process.
9.	Regular communication with stakeholders on policy development through briefings, workshops, meetings, newsletters, etc.
10.	Continuous recruitment of quality specialists and review of specialists' profile.
11.	QMS provides useful and holistic information in the conduct of accreditation and assessment.
12.	Further applications are being developed on QMS, e.g. the implementation of differentiation approach in accreditation through the use of QMS and its data repository information.
13.	Quality indicators are being developed for the purpose of accreditation process.
14.	e-Portal and e-Platform systems for clients and specialists have been launched and evaluation surveys suggested they are put to good use and enhancement of efficiency is achieved through the use of the systems.
15.	HKCAAVQ has signed 12 MoUs with QA agencies and 3 MoUs are under discussion.
16.	Actively collaborate with and support the Hong Kong SAR Government's policy in terms of quality assurance of education and training, examples include: accreditation of professional qualifications, Continuing Education Fund enhanced scheme, etc.
17.	Actively participate in the Quality Beyond Boundaries Group (QBBG)

	and hosted the QBBG meeting in 2017 and collaborated with QAA on joint review of programmes leading to outcomes that QAA could rely on our accreditation decisions in TNE provisions.
18.	Actively collaborate with QFS of EDB in promoting HKCAAVQ's role in underpinning QF, examples include: co-organisation of HKQF international conference 2018, development of vocational qualifications pathway, continuous engagement with Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs), accreditation of professional qualifications, etc.

Opportunities / Challenges Ahead	
1.	Apply the Four-stage QA process and the corresponding standards in an innovative manner to underpin the development of HKQF and the needs of academic and VPET sector: e.g. accreditation of micro-credentials, work-based accreditation.
2.	Develop strategic collaboration with QA agencies with a view to establishing recognition of accreditation decisions and joint review.
3.	Continue to conduct periodic external review with a view to achieving wider recognition in the international community.
4.	Establish strategic partnership with the Government in supporting the implementation of Government's policies concerning development of HKQF and Qualifications Register
5.	Develop an organisational culture and structure which support talent management and development, and recognition of leadership.
6.	Use of staff development and talent management system in assisting staff retention and succession planning.
7.	Enhance staff development and talent management system by adopting more systematic and holistic approach to staff development.
8.	Further enhance the stability of our income portfolio with more diversified businesses and income sources.
9.	Strengthen engagement of operators by supporting their capacity building in quality assurance and quality enhancement.
10.	Enhance delivery modes of training and capacity building activities to operators, specialists and staff.
11.	QAOK has been launched and in full use. Further enhancements on the use of the knowledgebase are being developed, e.g. examples of good practices from accredited programmes with no pre-conditions.
12.	Expand the use of QMS to include data analytics to inform accreditation decision making, operators analysis and sector analysis.
13.	Further enhance all e-Platforms, improving effectiveness and user-friendliness.
14.	Develop quality indicators to promote and advocate quality enhancement of operators.

15.	Strengthen engagement of specialists and operators in the sharing of good QA practices in education and training and accreditation via the online knowledgebase.
16.	Support the implementation of the Government's policies concerning self-financing post-secondary education.
17.	Engage in the support for development of quality assurance mechanisms and activities in the Mainland China, in particular the Greater Bay Area.

Monitoring and Review

11.5 The HKCAAVQ Council receives annual progress reports on the strategic plan implementation. The progress reports listed out the performance against the key performance indicators and targets, and any mitigation measures and actions taken for the areas of work which required attention.

11.6 HKCAAVQ conducts a mid-term review at the end of the second year of a 4-year strategic plan. This was achieved through self-review on the progresses made and the outcomes of any mitigation measures and actions taken. The outcome of the mid-term review led to adjustments or changes to the strategies and actions plan, as well as KPIs for the strategic plan.

11.7 Effective from the 2019/20 Annual Report of HKCAAVQ, a separate section would be included in the annual report to inform all our stakeholders how HKCAAVQ performs on the strategic plan implementation.

Risk Management

11.8 The risk management framework as approved by the Council governs the annual conduct of risk assessment and updating of risk register of HKCAAVQ. The risk register serves as a management tool to formalise the consideration of risks across business units and stipulation of accountabilities by action parties for on-going monitoring, mitigation and evaluation of effectiveness of the controls and mitigation plans. The on-going monitoring of the risk management is by Directorate with input from the senior executives. The risk register is at **Annex 8**.

11.9 Annual risk management returns are submitted by Unit Heads for consideration by Directorate and then Executive Director. The outcomes of the annual risk assessment are presented to the three

Standing Committees and finally to the Council. The updated risk register after deliberations at the Standing Committees and the Council is shared with the senior executives to support the on-going risk identification, assessment and controls in their decision-making and oversight of respective areas of operation. An annual risk management return is at **Annex 9**.

Independent Audit of HKCAAVQ Financial Reports

11.10 The Council received an audited financial report through the Finance Committee every September after independent audit by the external auditor as approved by the Council.

11.11 After the Council's approval, the audited financial report is subsequently submitted to the Chief Executive and tabled in the Legislative Council for public scrutiny.

11.12 The audited financial report with the external auditor's opinions is included in the HKCAAVQ Annual Report published in its website[53].

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[53] https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/publications/annual-reports

Chapter 12: Current Challenges and Areas for Future Development

Challenges and Areas for Future Development

12.1   Please refer to **Section 11.4** for details. Among all the challenges and opportunities mentioned, the following are highlighted:

(a)   Develop strategic collaboration with QA agencies with a view to establishing recognition of accreditation decisions and joint review.

(b)   Further enhance the stability of our income portfolios with more diversified businesses and income sources.

(c)   Develop an organisational culture and structure which support talent management and development, and recognition of leadership.

(d)   Develop quality indicators to promote and advocate quality enhancement of operators.

Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Accreditation Authority	HKCAAVQ is specified in Part 1 of Schedule 1 of the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (AAVQO) (Cap. 592) to accredit Operators and learning programmes for the purpose of entering their qualifications into the Qualifications Register (QR), for recognition under the HKQF.
Accreditation Document	Prepared by the Operator to substantiate its claim of meeting the required standards when undertaking any stage(s) of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process.
Accreditation Panel	A panel consisting of specialists with expertise in the relevant discipline/industry/quality assurance issues. It is formed to assess the Operator/learning programmes in each stage of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process under the guiding principle of 'peer review', with a HKCAAVQ staff member, who is also a Panel Member, serving as the Accreditation Panel Secretary.
Accreditation Report	A report issued by HKCAAVQ pursuant to section 5 of the AAVQO (Cap. 592) on completion of any stage of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process after conducting the relevant accreditation tests.
Accreditation Standard	The level of competence or quality that an Operator or a learning programme has to demonstrate in an accreditation test, for operation of learning programmes that meet HKQF standards.
Appeal	The process under the AAVQO (Cap. 592) that gives an Operator aggrieved by the accreditation decision(s) stated in an accreditation report the right to appeal to the Appeal Board appointed by the Secretary for Education.
Chief Executive	The head and representative of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and head of the Government of Hong Kong.

Term	Definition
Chief Executive in Council	The Chief Executive of Hong Kong acting after consultation with the Executive Council. The Executive Council is an organ for assisting the Chief Executive in policy-making.
Collaboration Provision	A learning programme leading or contributing to the award of credit or a qualification that are delivered, assessed or supported through an arrangement involving more than one parties.
Condition*	Part of the accreditation determination which is to be fulfilled by an Operator prior to the start of the validity period of the accreditation status (pre-condition), or by the specified deadline(s) during the validity period (requirement).
Differentiation	The approach with which track record of good performance of an Operator is being recognised for consideration of customised treatments in individual accreditation exercise.
Domain of Competence	An aspect of organisational competence to be assessed in a stage of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process. Under each domain, an accreditation standard is developed to describe the level of competence required in relation to the purpose of that stage.
Evidence-based	One of the guiding principles in accreditation that accreditation judgement is to be made on the basis of evidence provided by the Operator to support its claimed attainment of the accreditation standards and its own objectives.
Facilitation Phase	A step incorporated in Initial Evaluation (IE), Learning Programme Accreditation (LPA) and Re-accreditation (re-LPA) of Four-stage Quality Assurance Process that helps Operators to familiarise themselves with the accreditation requirements and process.

Term	Definition
Finance and Corporate Governance Expert	Specialists with relevant financial and corporate governance expertise and experience to provide written expert opinion on issues relating to financial management and corporate governance.
Fitness for Purpose	One of the guiding principles in accreditation that the stated objectives and scope of an Operator are to be taken into consideration in assessing whether the learning programme(s) meet(s) the claimed HKQF level(s).
Four-stage Quality Assurance Process (the Process)	A quality assurance mechanism with four stages, i.e. Initial Evaluation (IE), Learning Programme Accreditation (LPA) and Re-accreditation (re-LPA), Programme Area Accreditation (PAA) and Periodic Institutional Review (PIR). It forms the means through which HKCAAVQ evaluates Operators and their learning programmes under the HKQF.
Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF)	A seven-level hierarchy covering qualifications in the academic, vocational and continuing education sectors with level, credit and award title as the key features.
Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) Level	A level assigned to a qualification to indicate its position in the hierarchy relative to others under the HKQF. The level is determined in accordance with a set of Generic Level Descriptors (GLD) which specifies the outcome standards expected of the qualification at that level.
Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) Standards	The skills, knowledge or experience acquired upon the completion of the learning programme that are commensurate with the requirements under the specified level of the HKQF.
Initial Evaluation (IE)	The first stage of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process that ascertains whether an Operator is competent to operate learning programme(s) that meet HKQF standards up to a certain HKQF level.

Term	Definition
Institutional Review (IR) for Private University Title	An accreditation test as provided for in the HKCAAVQ Ordinance (Cap. 1150) for the institution to assess (i) the institutional effectiveness in achieving its missions and objectives and assuring the quality of its educational provision; and (ii) whether the institution has put in place a well-managed academic environment with implemented systematic and transparent processes and successful outcomes, so as to meet the IR standards underpinned by the requirements as laid down in the Roadmap for Becoming a Private University, for the purpose of making an application for university title for consideration by the Chief Executive in Council.
Institutional Review (IR) for Seeking Cap. 320 Registration	An accreditation exercise for establishing evidence of an institution's competence to operate programmes at Bachelor degree level while meeting the standards at QF level 5 in accordance with Schedule 3 of Cap. 592 and for the purpose of seeking registration under the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance (Cap. 320).
Learner Outcome	The competence attained by a learner after successful completion of a learning programme which is reflected through assessments.
Learning Outcome	The knowledge, skills and application ability attained by a learner as a result of completing the learning programme.
Learning Programme	A programme of study or training defined by a curriculum (which may consist of one or more modules, units, subjects or courses or any combination of those elements) that includes, where the context permits, any proposed programme of such studies or training.

Term	Definition
Learning Programme Accreditation (LPA)	The second stage of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process, the purpose of which is twofold: (i) to ascertain whether a learning programme (proposed or accredited) meets an HKQF standard to achieve the claimed objectives; and (ii) to ascertain whether the Operator of a learning programme is competent to continuously monitor and improve the effectiveness of its programme operation to achieve the claimed programme objectives.
Learning Programme Re-accreditation (Re-LPA)	The cyclical re-evaluation of an accredited learning programme which shares the same purpose and standards of LPA, but with a focus on improvements and demonstrated outcomes since the LPA or the last re-LPA under the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process.
Matters for Consideration	A set of consideration that sets out important considerations for determining whether a standard has been met, which should be applied within the particular context of an Operator or learning programme.
Minimum Requirements	A set of essential features of an Operator or learning programme to assist making an holistic judgement as to whether an accreditation standard has been met or not. The minimum requirements are not meant to be used as checklists.
Non-local Learning Programme (NLP)	A learning programme that is registered/exempted under the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance (Cap 493).
Online Learing Programme (OLP)	A programme delivered through a digital learning platform to provide structured teaching, learning and assessment, and the programme has more than 50% of instruction delivered online.
Operator	A person, school, institution, or organisation or other body, the whole or part of the business of which includes the operation of any learning programme or any part of a learning programme.

Term	Definition
Organisational Outcome	The performance of an Operator in relation to achieving its vision and mission through effective governance and management.
Outcome-based Approach	An educational paradigm based on the learner-centred model focusing on what learners can actually do. The HKQF is underpinned by the outcome-based approach, which also set the context of the design and development of HKCAAVQ's accreditation standards and process.
Partnership	The collaborating Operators (local and non-local) responsible for the collaborative provision of a non-local learning programme of the non-local Operator.
Peer Review	One of the guiding principles in accreditation that experts with the expertise and experience in the discipline/industry/quality assurance are engaged to form an Accreditation Panel to collect and evaluate evidence to form an accreditation judgement on the quality of an Operator and its learning programmes.
Periodic Institutional Review (PIR)	The fourth stage of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process that ascertains whether an Operator continues to be effective in achieving its vision and mission by systematically enhancing the quality of its operation by formulating and implementing actions based on evidence.
Pre-condition*	Part of the accreditation determination which must be fulfilled by the Operator prior to the start of the validity period of the accreditation status.
Procedure	A well-defined sequence of operations.
Process	A set of connected or interacting activities designed to deliver the desired outputs given the inputs.

Term	Definition
Programme Area	A defined scope of area of the programme(s) applying for Programme Area Accreditation (PAA). A programme area can be an Area of Study and Training, a Sub-area in full or a Sub-area in part, one subject matter or a combination of subject matters under the same Sub-area, but not a combination of Areas of Study and Training or Sub-areas.
Programme Area Accreditation (PAA)	The third stage of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process that ascertains whether an Operator is competent to quality assure its learning programme(s) within a programme area up to a certain HKQF level, as demonstrated from the track record of its operation of accredited learning programmes in a particular discipline or industry area, and its capacity to enhance its organisational effectiveness to achieve the educational/training objectives.
Programme Outcome	The performance of a learning programme in relation to its objectives, which is typically assessed by analysing information such as stakeholders' feedback and employment data.
Qualification	A formal award given in recognition of the skills, knowledge and experience acquired by an individual upon the satisfactory completion of a learning programme that meets specified HKQF standards. It is granted on the basis of formal assessment. The award title should follow the policy laid down by the Education Bureau (www.hkqf.gov.hk), and should not include a Statement of Attendance.
Qualifications Register (QR)	The public face of the HKQF containing all qualifications that have been quality assured under the HKQF.
Qualifications Register (QR) Authority	HKCAAVQ is specified in Part 2 of Schedule 1 of the AAVQO (Cap. 592) to maintain the Qualifications Register.

Term	Definition
Recommendation*	Part of the accreditation determination which has a continuous improvement purpose and is directly related to the accreditation standards. It is non-binding in nature but an Operator should explain if/how the recommendations have been addressed at the time of re-accreditation or PIR.
Requirement*	Part of the accreditation determination which must be fulfilled by an Operator by the specified deadline(s) during the validity so as to maintain the accreditation status.
Restriction*	Part of the accreditation determination which is to be complied with by an Operator by the specified deadline(s) before the validity period and/or to be complied with during the validity period.
Service Agreement	A contract between HKCAAVQ and an Operator to undertake an accreditation exercise.
Site Visit	A visit by the Accreditation Panel to the Operator's learning centre/campus used for the purpose of delivering the learning programme(s) undertaking accreditation. This is an integral part of an accreditation exercise, conducted primarily to collect evidence for evaluating whether the accreditation standards are met.
Specialist	Peers from universities and industry who provide informed opinions on quality issues including but not limited to accreditation, assessment and consultancy. For accreditation, Specialists normally participate in accreditation exercises as panel members.
Student Outcome	Learning outcome attained by a student after successful completion of a programme, typically reflected by assessments.
Substantial Change	Any significant modification to an Operator or a learning programme that may impact an Operator's competency to continue meeting the relevant accreditation standards.

Term	Definition
System	A framework of policies, processes and procedures to achieve particular purpose(s).
Track Record	A record of performance of an Operator against relevant accreditation standards.
Validity Period	The period of time in which an approved accreditation status is effective as specified in the accreditation report.

* The term is explained in the context of accreditation reports.