HONG KONG COUNCIL FOR ACCREDITATION OF ACADEMIC AND VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS (HKCAAVQ)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report results from an external review assessing the compliance of the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (評審局 or HKCAAVQ) against the 2015 Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

This is the first review of HKCAAVQ against the ESG and it is fully voluntary and enhancement oriented, as HKCAAVQ does not aim at ENQA membership or EQAR registration as a result of this review. A prior external review of the agency was based on INQAAHE GGP, consequently it had no focus on shared European understandings of QA in HE. The assessment of HKCAAVQ seeks to apply the ESG in the context of the higher education system and traditions of Hong Kong.

This external review report is based on the review process that primarily used HKCAAVQ's self-assessment report, a virtual site visit of the ENQA appointed review panel using ZOOM, and published information available on HKCAAVQ's website as well as websites of providers.

HKCAAVQ is the sole accreditation body of Hong Kong for self-financed higher education institutions. Passing the reviews of HKCAAVQ is a prerequisite to list a qualification in the Hong Kong Qualifications Register, which is supported and funded by the government of Hong Kong and managed by HKCAAVQ.

HKCAAVQ has a twofold mission, on the one hand to safeguard the credibility of qualifications under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) and on the other hand to facilitate the continuous quality enhancement and excellence of education and training in Hong Kong and the region through accreditation, assessment, quality audits and consulting service. HKCAAVQ charges its accreditation services to the operators it works for and receives governmental support only for operating the Qualifications Register.

The discussions with stakeholders during the interviews confirmed the impression already gained from the SAR that HKCAAVQ is a well-established and respected institution in the HE system of Hong Kong which cooperates trustfully with institutions and stakeholders. Structurally well implemented is the involvement of international perspectives by systematically involving international experts in its review panels as well as in HKCAAVQ's Council.

The panel wishes to underline that the fair assessment of the agency required the contextualization of the clear and focussed requirements of the ESG with the non EHEA context of the higher education system of Hong Kong including its culture and tradition. Consequently, the panel understands that some of the listed findings – particularly reflections on the role of students in QA and peer reviews – may be rooted in different traditions and culture of the region. At the same time the panel believes that a transparent assessment forms the baseline for HKCAAVQ's future development and continuous enhancement.

The panel found HKCAAVQ's level of alignment with the ESG to be the following:

Fully compliant with the following ESGs – 3.2, 3.3, 3.5, 3,6, 3.7, 2.2, 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7
Substantially compliant with the following ESGs – 3.1, 2.1, and 2.3
Partially compliant: 3.4 and 2.4

In light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the review panel is satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, HKCAAVQ is in substantial compliance with the ESG.

The panel believes that HKCAAVQ has initiated an enhancement-oriented development over the past years to establish and develop its role not only as a gatekeeper of the Qualifications Register but also

as a partner in supporting the quality enhancement of self-financing higher education institutions. The panel hopes that its analyses and recommendations will support HKCAAVQ in continuing to do so.

INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (評審局 or HKCAAVQ) with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). It is based on an external review conducted from May 2019 to July 2021.

BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW AND OUTLINE OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

ENQA's regulations require all member agencies to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years, in order to verify that they act in substantial compliance with the ESG as adopted at the Yerevan ministerial conference of the Bologna Process in 2015. However, HKCAAVQ has requested ENQA to perform a review against the ESG on a voluntary basis without the intention to gain or renew ENQA membership. It is a fully voluntary review aiming at enhancement and the provision of an external perspective based on the ESG.

As this is HKCAAVQ's first external review against the ESG (after a review against INQAAHE's Guidelines of Good Practice in the past), the panel is expected to pay particular attention to the policies, procedures, and criteria in place.In addition, the panel put particular attention on assessing an agency from outside the EHEA against the ESG.

REVIEW PROCESS

The 2020/2021 external review of HKCAAVQ was conducted in line with the process described in the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference. The panel for the external review of HKCAAVQ was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

- Achim Hopbach (Chair), quality assurance expert, independent consultant; previous Managing Director AQ Austria, Austria, (ENQA nominee);
- Ronny Heintze (Secretary), quality assurance expert, Commissioner for International Affairs, AQAS, Germany, (ENQA nominee);
- Jordi Villà-Freixa, Universitat Internacional de Catalunya , Spain, (EUA nominee);
- Rowena Pelik quality assurance expert; Independent consultant; previously Director Nations and International, QAA, UK, (ENQA nominee);
- Alexandra Raijmakers, M.Phil candidate in 'Higher Education' at University of Oslo, Norway (ESU nominee).

Goran Dakovic coordinated the review on behalf of the ENQA Secretariat. The panel is thankful to the support delivered by Goran Dakovic, allowing the panel to process the review in a well-structured way.

The review followed the generally practiced sequence which includes the agency producing a self-assessment report (SAR) that is then reviewed by a nominated panel of international experts who use a (in this case virtual) site visit to interview relevant stakeholders. The interviews aim at clarifying and gathering additional evidence. Based on the SAR, the information captured during the interviews together with additional information presented to the team, the panel produced the following review report.

SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT

Following the approval of the HKCAAVQ Council in May 2019, a project team was set up to start a self-assessment process and make preparations for the review against the ESG. It was governed by a Project Charter with a defined schedule and a gap analysis in meeting the ESG. The team was made up of staff with relevant expertise and knowledge of the HKCAAVQ Secretariat. Prior to finalising the draft of the SAR 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 (in line with HKCAAVQ terminology this report uses the term "operator" for Higher Education Institutions that fall under HKCAAVQ responsibility) as part of the self-assessment process.

The SAR also incorporated the inputs and comments by HKCAAVQ Council Members.

The panel considers that the SAR was informative and very comprehensive including self-reflecting elements pointing at identified areas for future development during the self-assessment process. The SAR explained well the different context of the agency as it is not situated in the EHEA.

SITE VISIT

The site visit was originally planned for November 2020 and HKCAAVQ had produced and delivered all documents on time. Due to global travel restrictions and the impact of COVID 19 the site visit was postponed to April 2021 and with the continuing limitations of travel in January 2021 it was decided to adjust the visit format to a virtual visit. In addition to the comprehensive SAR and extensive annexes, the panel of experts requested additional documents as evidence prior to the site visit and HKCAAVQ delivered the documentation well in advance of the visit. The site visit took place in a virtual format from 12-16 April 2021 following an initial meeting of the panel with the agency resource person on 9 April 2021. Due to the time difference between panel and agency, daily interview times were reduced to half days extending the total duration of the site visit. The initial day was used for an internal meeting of the panel to discuss and agree on issues that required further discussion and clarification during the interviews.

Starting on 12 April, there were 15 meetings with different stakeholders with relevance to the activities of HKCAAVQ. These meetings included sessions with the:

- · Executive Director and Deputy Executive Directors of HKCAAVQ,
- · Chairman of the HKCAAVQ Council
- · HKCAAVQ staff for evaluations,
- · Hong Kong Education Bureau
- · HKCAAVQ Council members,
- · Rectors, Pro-Rectors and Presidents of reviewed operators,
- · QA directors and officers of reviewed operators,
- · Members of external reviewer's pool,
- · Student part of liaising activities,
- · Stakeholders and Liaising committee.

A full list of meetings which all used English language, including the names of interviewees, can be found in Annex 1 to this report.

While the meetings followed the virtual format the majority of interviewees was present in a meeting room at HKCAAVQ reducing the number of cameras/screens during the site visit. Following the seventh meeting the panel recognised that HKCAAVQ offered technical assistance by a HKCAAVQ

staff member in the room during all interviews. Upon request by the panel and to assure independence of the interview situation this practice was adjusted and no HKCAAVQ staff remained in the room for the following interviews. No technical issues arose.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY

HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. The Education Bureau (EB) 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.

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. 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. In 2019, 54,642 candidates took part in the HKDSE.

At the post-secondary/tertiary level, there are publicly funded and self-financing sectors providing a range of higher education programmes. As stated in the SAR 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. In the 2018/19 academic year, publicly funded undergraduate programmes offered about 15,200 first-year intake places, while self-financing undergraduate programmes offered about 9,400 places.

The publicly funded sector includes eight self-accrediting universities funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC), the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (HKAPA), and the Vocational Training Council (VTC). The SAR lists 22 self-financing higher education institutions that use the accreditation services of HKCAAVQ.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

For all publicly funded higher education institutions (funded by UGC) and their programmes the Quality Assurance Council, a semi-autonomous non-statutory body under the UGC, conducts quality audits. These activities are not linked to HKCAAVQ.

All self-accrediting universities are established under their own ordinances. All other institutions must be registered under the Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance (Cap. 320) 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.

Furthermore, 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) through a system of registration/exemption from registration. The Non-Local Courses Registry (NCR), a unit of the EB that enforces Cap. 493, usually seeks advice from HKCAAVQ on academic matters relating to registration of these degrees.

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.

An important feature of the QA system of Hong Kong is the HKQF - a seven-level hierarchy covering qualifications in the academic, vocational, professional, and continuing education sectors. The publicly visible application of the HKQF is the Qualifications Register (QR) which is a centralised online database containing information on quality assured qualifications and their operators. Under the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (AAVQO) (Cap. 592), HKCAAVQ is named as the Accreditation Authority and the QR Authority. HKCAAVQ takes 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 processes underpinning the HKQF.

HKCAAVQ

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). HKCAAVQ takes on statutory roles as the Accreditation Authority and QR Authority under the HKQF under the AAVQO (Cap. 592).

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. When referencing the Council this report addresses the Council of HKCAAVQ, while references to the organisation itself (including its Council) will indicate HKCAAVQ.

HKCAAVQ is a founding member of the INQAAHE as well as the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN).

HKCAAVQ's ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE

The HKCAAVQ Council comprises 15-21 members appointed by the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. Members are appointed to the HKCAAVQ Council based on their expertise and experience in QA, education and training and industry and serve on the Council in their personal capacity. Four to seven of them normally come from outside Hong Kong.

The Council meets three times a year, and its work is supported by three standing committees:

- Qualifications and Accreditation Committee;
- Finance Committee; and
- Personnel and Administration Committee.

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. As of April 2021, the Secretariat has 87 full-time staff members spread across different units which include four income generating units including Academic Accreditation and Assessment (AAA), Vocational and Professional Accreditation, Qualifications Assessment, and Qualifications

Framework and Qualifications Register. The Academic Accreditation and Assessment Unit of the Secretariat is the key business unit undertaking academic accreditation activities subject to this external review by ENQA. The full organisational chart as presented in the SAR reads as follows:
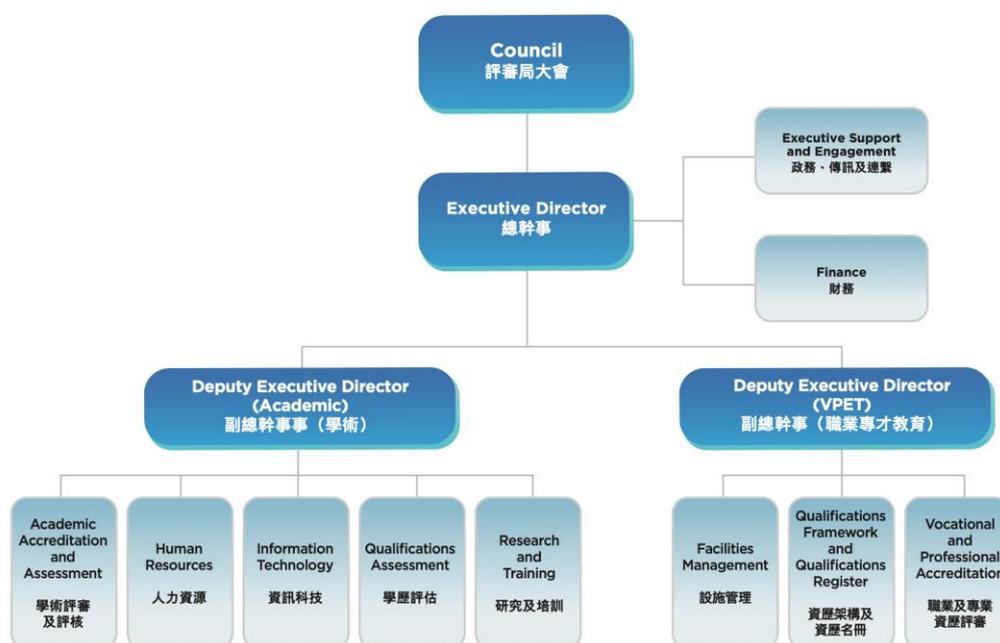
HKCAAVQ'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES

As the Accreditation Authority for the self-financing sector in Hong Kong, HKCAAVQ developed and implements the standards and mechanisms for accreditation. The HKCAAVQ accreditation standards are based on the Hong Kong Qualification Framework (HKQF).

HKCAAVQ's main aim is to ensure a minimum threshold for programmes offered by operators in operating and ensuring the quality of their learning programmes. To this end, the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process (Process) has been developed. The Process addresses the delivery of programmes and internal quality assurance by the operators in different stages, and in no way aims to replace the internal QA of operators. Additionally, the Process also aims to encourage operators' progressive development of organisational competence for continuous enhancement.

There are three categories of HKQF-related QA activities of HKCAAVQ that fall within the scope of this review: (1) Academic Accreditation (Initial Evaluation (IE), Learning Programme Accreditation(LPA), Programme Area Accreditation(PAA), Periodic Review(PR)/Periodic Institutional Review(PIR)); (2) Accreditation of Non Local Programmes (IE, LPA), and (3) Accreditation of Online Learning Programmes (IE, LPA). The latter one is not a frequent practice and only took place once in 2017 as a pilot procedure.

The above-mentioned Process, its accreditation domains and accompanying standards, is described in the Manual for the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (Manual). Amongst other things, it explains that operators must fulfil the first two stages (IE and LPA) of the process before qualifications can be recognised under the HKQF. The following diagram explains how the four stages of HKCAAVQ quality assurance build on each other:
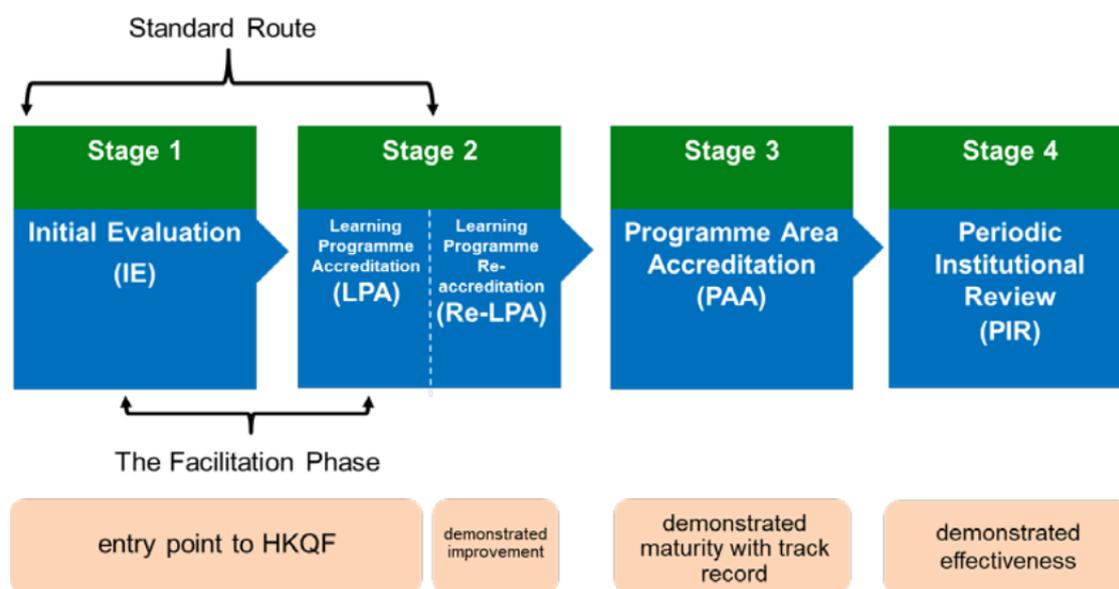
While decisions regarding accreditations are taken by the Council of HKCAAVQ, it is important to recognise that the decision-making power was delegated to the Deputy Executive Director in order to enable timely decision-making processes. As such, the Secretariat is in charge of running the daily operations as delegated by the Council. Regular reports on the activities are delivered to the Council so monitoring and supervision can take place.

HKCAAVQ'S FUNDING

The SAR explains that HKCAAVQ does not receive any recurrent funding from the Government except for the maintenance of the QR. It explains that 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 with an annual amount of about HK$25 million. HKCAAVQ is primarily financed through the charging of fees for accreditation services and assessment/advisory/consultancy services rendered to the institutions.

The past years show a positive development of the accumulated reserves. After a deficit in 2014/15 the past years show a surplus of 5% (2015/16) with a positive development towards 15% (2018/19). Based on the presented numbers HKCAAVQ describes its financial situation as very healthy.

The EB and Housing Authority allocated vacant school premises for use by HKCAAVQ at a nominal monthly rent of HK$1. Additionally, the EB provides an annual subsidy of HK$4.7 million to HKCAAVQ in its capacity as the QR Authority under the AAVQO (Cap. 592) to cover the costs of maintenance and regular upgrading of the QR.

The SAR furthermore explains that HKCAAVQ is actively pursuing business opportunities to extend fee-based activities. Since the launch of the accreditation service for non-local programmes under the HKQF in 2010, HKCAAVQ explains it is working closely with other international 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 reimbursable courses provide further revenues to HKCAAVQ.

FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF HKCAAVQ WITH THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (ESG)

ESG PART 3: QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

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.

Evidence

HKCAAVQ's mission statement is published on the web site, with special emphasis on the explicit goals regarding their QA activities. In particular, the agency states that "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." Both mission and vision are defined by the Council, with implementation delineated in the Strategic Plan which is reviewed every four years (SAR 8.1.2).

The 2019 Strategic Plan of HKCAAVQ, which is also available on its website, outlines a clear set of objectives and strategic priorities. As the panel learned during the interviews the plan was set up / updated with participation of local and international stakeholders, including students, institutions and international QA agencies and it drives the development of the business plans of HKCAAVQ's different business units. As explained during the interviews the Council annually evaluates the strategy and its implementation. Finally, the Secretariat submits a report on major activities at four-month intervals to the Council via the Qualifications and Accreditation Committee (QAC). The programme of activities conducted by HKCAAVQ is included in the annual reports, which are also published on the web site of the agency.

Among the 9 business units of the HKCAAVQ, four are income generating units including Academic Accreditation and Assessment, Vocational and Professional Accreditation, Qualifications Assessment, and Qualifications Framework and Qualifications Register. Other units enable HKCAAVQ operations by managing facilities, providing human resources, implementing training and research, as well as managing the finances.

HKCAAVQ is the only statutory body in Hong Kong empowered to conduct external quality assurance processes for non-self-accrediting operators. Interviews showed that relevant external stakeholders are aware of this fact.

The membership of the Council and its Standing Committees included five non-local members at the time of the review and as outlined in Annex 2 and Annex 3 of the SAR, respectively.

Following the information provided in the SAR in 2019 the Academic Accreditation and Assessment unit conducted two Initial Evaluations (IE) for non-local programmes, as well as 79 Evaluations and

Re-evaluations of Learning Programme Accreditation (61 for local and 18 for non-local programmes). In all cases, the activities were conducted in accordance with the Manual, following the approval authorities governed by the Secretariat's delegation schedule and pre-coded in the Quality Management System (QMS). The different accreditations give approval for a specific period of time, indicating the regularity of HKCAAVQ's accreditation activities.

The agency's further development and strategic planning as well as priorities were discussed during the site visit with the different internal and external stakeholders. Discussions outlined that the agency carefully pays attention to a consistent and efficient implementation of their methodology.

Analysis

The panel found that, based on the information on the numbers of procedures conducted, there is no doubt that HKCAAVQ regularly performs QA procedures. This happens based on plausible and clear objectives that are published and part of its mission statement. In that sense, the objectives are translated in the everyday life of the agency and the work of its bodies and staff. The daily work of the agency complies with the mission and goals, and the development of tools, such as their state-of-the-art Quality Management System, help in the deployment of their tasks.

The panel found consistent confirmation from different interview groups that in practical work, the main activity the agency conducts is focused on the qualifications and their registration. This is fully in line with the mission of the organisation. The interviews, furthermore, supported the impression that HKCAAVQ strives to increase efficiency of the implementation of its methodology and undertakes initiatives for further development in this field. With a very strong focus on the professional and procedural content of these activities, the panel recognises that obviously this focus does expose a certain gap when it comes to the development of quality enhancement activities. With a strong and almost procedurally formal focus on assuring the quality of entries in the register, the agency barely recognises and utilises its role and procedures for the development of quality enhancement procedures to improve the teaching and learning of the accredited institutions. With HKCAAVQ's unique position in the Hong Kong higher education system the panel is convinced that adding aspects of quality development and enhancement in the formal procedures of the agency's quality assurance procedures will complement the otherwise very well-developed processes for quality assurance of the agency.

The panel found good evidence (SAR chapter 10) on stakeholder involvement through several ways and channels, including a regular invitation of their opinions, which was also confirmed in the interviews during the virtual site visit. The panel particularly recognises the frequent and regular inclusion of international members in its committees and panels. At the same time the panel recognises that the presence of students neither in panels nor the Council clearly points to work that still needs to be done. Based on all interviews the panel recognises that the idea of student involvement in quality assurance is not widely spread and that there are different understandings of what role students might have. Their involvement in general activities of the agency clearly offers room for improvement as currently the idea of student involvement does focus more on students as recipients of information than students as stakeholders that are part of the educational process and thus providers for relevant input. While respecting the cultural context of the agency, the panel believes that HKCAAVQ should increase its efforts to develop a culturally sound approach of student involvement in its work and government.

Panel recommendations

1. The panel recommends HKCAAVQ to develop a culturally sound approach towards the inclusion of students in the work and governance of the agency.

2. The panel recommends HKCAAVQ to complement its quality assessment activities represented by accreditations with quality enhancement activities.

Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

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.

Evidence

Under the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (AAVQO) (Cap. 592), HKCAAVQ is the Accreditation Authority and Qualifications Register Authority. In 2007, HKCAAVQ was constituted under the HKCAAVQ Ordinance (Cap. 1150). It is the only QA body governed by a statute in Hong Kong. The legislation defines the functions and powers of HKCAAVQ. HKCAAVQ currently takes on its statutory quality assurance role to safeguard the quality and standards of learning programmes recognised under the HKQF. All qualifications (other than those of the self-accrediting universities) must be accredited by HKCAAVQ before they are recognised under the HKQF and entered into the Qualifications Register. As the Accreditation Authority, HKCAAVQ develops the accreditation standards and processes underpinning the HKQF.

Analysis

Following a careful review of the legislative situation the panel finds a clear and well-established legal basis for the operations and responsibilities of HKCAAVQ. The regulations in the ordinance are clear and practice over the past years have also identified no room for misperception or doubt regarding the recognition of the agency.

Interviews with the Education Bureau also identified full support and an operationally collaborative approach from both sides. The panel heard about formal but also less formal exchanges between the EB and HKCAAVQ indicating a good cooperation based on well-established structures and recognition of the role and position of the agency in the Hong Kong higher education system.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

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.

Evidence

Considering the legal framework, the HKCAAVQ Ordinance (Cap. 1150) and AAVQO (Cap. 592) allow HKCAAVQ to exercise its power under the direction of the HKCAAVQ Council and to perform its functions independently. The Ordinance grants full organisational independence to HKCAAVQ and does not foresee any interference by any other organisations including higher education institutions, government, and stakeholder organisations. It mandates the HKCAAVQ Council to make all decisions in relation to the performance of HKCAAVQ's functions and duties.

Operationally HKCAAVQ takes accreditation decisions in the accreditation report after considering the Accreditation Panel's recommendation(s) and the available evidence against the accreditation standards in the Manual. The Deputy Executive Director is mandated by the Council of HKCAAVQ to approve the selection of accreditation panels and the accreditation reports including the accreditation decisions. The SAR explains that hereby defined accreditation standards, processes and procedures are implemented and free from interference from any stakeholders. Should the Deputy Executive Director intend not to follow the recommendation of an accreditation panel, prior approval by the Executive Director and notification to the QAC Chair are required. The SAR explains that over the past five years, there were no such cases.

Considering finances, HKCAAVQ receives funding from the Government only for the maintenance of the Qualifications Register. HKCAAVQ is primarily financed through the charging of fees for accreditation services and assessment/advisory/consultancy services rendered. The SAR explains that in the last five years HKCAAVQ has maintained a very healthy financial position and accumulated reserves. Interviews during the virtual site visit with the management and also the Education Bureau reconfirmed this statement. Although the agency's budget has to be approved by the Secretary of Education this is a rather formal act without actual budget negotiations taking place; this was also confirmed by the representatives of HKCAAVQ senior management as well as the Education Bureau.

Analysis

Regarding independence the panel took a very careful approach analysing the legal situation, considering operational implementation, checking on safeguards against outside interference with regard to the decision-making process as well as checking implicit risks for the independence of the Council. Besides relying on the presented evidence as part of the SAR and its annexes, the panel raised questions on the issue of independence of operations in different interviews with different focus, in order to crosscheck and triangulate the responses. This included potential interferences resulting from the agency's consulting activities.

Based on the legal framework and the implementation of the regulations, the agency is set up in a way to act independently, and its legal structure and governance setup support its independence. The panel discussed independence with both the EB as well as representatives of institutions and was assured of the independent character of HKCAAVQ as an institution but also about its operations.

A potential area of concern about operational independence was the appeals procedure that is reserved to the EB. While the procedure will be discussed under ESG 2.7, the panel learned from the interviews that particularly considering the independence of the procedure appeals were retained under supervision of the EB. The intention is to run the appeal as independent as possible from the original procedure. The panel concluded that – independent from any ESG requirement – the concept of independent procedures and separation of responsibilities are put into practice at HKCAAVQ.

A structural risk for independence in the chosen organisational arrangement is the financial dependence on services that are charged to the institutions. While it brings independence from governmental funds, it creates a special relation between the accreditor and the operator, as it is the operator that pays HKCAAVQ. This setup carries the risk of the agency being too close to operators and developing a tendency to keep clients / institutions happy. With that risk in mind the panel very carefully interviewed operators, agency staff as well as members of the Council and found no evidence of that risk being realised. It is a shared understanding that the Council safeguards the quality and independence of the procedure and the independent acting of the members of the Council safeguards this approach. Consequently, the panel concludes that the agency navigates this

potential conflict well and that existing instruments are appropriate to balance between financial independence and quality of the procedure. The fact that HKCAAVQ managed to build some financial reserves over the last years is an additional indicator for the financial independence as even in case of conflicts these reserves will help the agency in following its procedures.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Standard:

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

Evidence

The SAR discusses extended examples of activity that the agency describes as achieving the purpose of contributing to reflection on, and the improvement of, quality assurance policies and processes. Relevant reports were provided with the SAR or in supplementary material requested by the panel. The topic of thematic analyses was explored in interviews with agency staff, with representatives of operators and of the EB.

The Council acknowledges in the SAR that the format used 'may not be exactly the same as the thematic analysis and reporting conducted by other QA agencies' (SAR p. 44). The first detailed example presented (SAR, pp.44-48) is the review of the agency's accreditation standards which is an example of designing and updating methodologies fit for purpose [ESG 2.2]. As described in the SAR, the review was thorough, involving stakeholders and analytical activity and resulted in a range of changes to the Accreditation Standards and evaluation methodology. It followed its purpose to revise the external review methodology.

The second example detailed in the SAR (SAR, pp.48-49), concerns differentiation in approaches in accreditation. The agency uses review outcomes as a basis for differentiation in its approach to accreditation. As the SAR describes, early work in this area was externally presented at conferences in 2017 and 2018. This has been followed by more extensive work leading to an initial internal report late in 2020, shared with the panel at its request. This initial report provided the outcomes of a desktop review of the implementation of differentiation in accreditation alongside surveys of the views of both internal staff and of staff in relevant higher education operators.

The panel learned during the interviews that a first report on differentiation should be produced for publication in late spring 2021 and a second report by the end of the year. In discussion with senior staff, it was indicated that a primary purpose was to ensure consistency in differentiation decisions, as part of a robust approach to internal quality assurance, as well as to identify whether there was scope to further the benefit for operators. The importance of differentiation in HKCAAVQ's approach was emphasised: it is an example of a risk-based approach to quality, it benefits operators by reducing the burden of external quality assurance and it acts as motivation to improve.

The SAR states HKCAAVQ feels ready to move to thematic analyses and subsequent material requested by the panel provided information that, towards the end of 2022, a report on student engagement should be published, once the two further reports on differentiation are completed. The panel identified during the interviews that there was little awareness of the plans around thematic analysis beyond the senior staff and none by the representatives of operators.

A third example as evidence of this standard is given in the SAR (SAR, p.49), this is the Quality Assurance Online Knowledgebase of HKCAAVQ (QAOK). This is a repository of good practices drawn from HKCAAVQ accreditation reports and processes or reproduced from Quality Audit reports by the Quality Audit Council (QAC) of the University Grants Committee. It is organised by topic: 9 topics (ranging from student assessment to academic leadership) are drawn from HKCAAVQ reports and 20 topics from the Quality Audit reports of the QAC. Whilst the QAOK enables the ready access of examples of practice, and is organised by topic, it does not feature an analytical part or chapter.

Reference is also made to Quality Enhancement Support Scheme (QESS) funded projects and to consultancy projects (not detailed in the SAR). The QESS is funded by the Education Bureau. Funding has been used to enable the HKCAAVQ to capture basic and factual information from accreditation processes including on outcomes (Supporting information p.1441). To date, tools such as qualitative analysis software or the database have not been used to capture details of general findings to enable the interrogation of information in reports to help identify trends in terms of good practice and areas of challenge. However, the panel was told that the next stage of development of the workflow and management information system will incorporate this kind of functionality.

Analysis

The examples outlined in the SAR and given in meetings demonstrate that HKCAAVQ seeks to review and revise its approaches and to do so in ways that involve thorough analysis, stakeholders, and consultation. The focus to date has been on information gathering and analysis of its own procedures and their impact, to a certain extent it is primarily internally oriented even though it has considered external quality assurance methods and efficiency for operators were motivating factors. Examples seen, and the planned extension of analytical work to the end of 2021, do not meet the definition in the standard or even a broader interpretation. The work does not analyse the general findings of external quality assurance activities. The examples provided do, however, demonstrate reflective and analytical work, the determination to ensure internal rigour and to drive improvement.

Activity falling under this standard more typically looks across the detailed outcomes of external quality assurance reports, identifying common themes, be it examples of good or effective practice, examples of shared challenges or recurring areas for development and action. Analyses of this type are primarily externally oriented; they use the outcomes of EQA, mining information in reports, to help the higher education sector gain insights into ways to address issues or to build on effective practice.

As described above, the extension of the internal management information system is planned to enable more interrogation of the details in the findings of institution and programme level accreditation. The panel is convinced that this will also enable the identification of themes and commonalities for analysis. With typically around 80 accreditations being carried out each year, the panel believes that there is also a relevant quantitative source for analysis. However, the value of already existing data, and that which will emerge over the period before the extension of the information system, is currently being underused. As full reports from accreditations only began to be published in October 2020, operators as a sector have not had any real opportunity to benefit from the work and consideration of external reviewers captured in full reports. It was clear from the interviews that representatives from operators would welcome the availability of greater insight into effective practice and areas for development in order to help them to improve quality and practice.

The report planned for 2022 on student engagement was identified by HKCAAVQ as an area where there is room for improvement in the sector. Student engagement as a topic is likely to be of wide interest and benefit. As there is not yet any general analysis of common matters arising across reports, the process for selecting and prioritising topics is not transparent. In the longer term HKCAAVQ intends to engage stakeholders in the identification of topics and issues and the panel clearly encourages HKCAAVQ in this intention. The early general analysis of common topics across reports over the most recent academic sessions would enable these plans to be progressed at greater pace and it is recommended that HKCAAVQ finds interim ways to achieve this in advance of its planned systems development. There is a wealth of valuable information in accreditation reports that can be used to support quality enhancement across the higher education sector for which HKCAAVQ is responsible, that information and its potential to drive improvement is currently underused and under-available to the sector.

Panel commendations

The panel commends the thoroughness of analytical activity of HKCAAVQ with regards to the continuous improvement of their own operations.

Panel recommendations

The panel recommends HKCAAVQ to advance and extend plans for the publication of the analysis of the findings of its external quality assurance activity, producing regular, timely reports that identify trends, areas of good practice, common challenges and persistent difficulty together with more detailed analysis of selected topics.

The panel recommends the immediate development of ways to make fuller use of the findings of accreditation activity in advance of the extension of HKCAAVQ's sophisticated Management Information System.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

The panel suggests that HKCAAVQ advances stakeholder involvement in thematic analysis alongside the production timescale.

Panel conclusion: partially compliant

ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

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

Evidence

HKCAAVQ has two main sources of revenue: fee-based activities as the main source and recurrent funding from the government for the agency's statutory role as designated authority for the Qualifications Register at a substantially smaller scale. During three of the last five financial years the agency also received project funding from the government for the development and implementation of the quality management system, the e-portal, the i-portal, the intranet and the human resources information system. (SAR, p. 23/24)

In general, the agency operates almost completely on a self-funding basis which is demonstrated by the figures for the five financial years preceding this review: Fee-based activities generated more than 90% of revenues, the recurrent government funding catered for approximately 4%, the project-based funding amounted to 5% at an average. It is worth noting that the agency receives a non-cash benefit from the government through a symbolic lease for its office premises of 1 HK$. (SAR, p. 23/24) Over the last five financial years annual income of the AAA unit was between 44.6 and 48.4 million HK$ whereas expenditure of the AAA unit amounted to between 34.4 and 37.8 million HK$. Resulting from this the AAA unit generated annual surpluses of between 10.2 and 11.4 million HK$ which equals almost 10% of the agencies total income and which was added to the agency's reserves at 97.7 million HK$ in 2018/19. (SAR, p. 24) The panel also learned that the accreditation activities within the scope of this evaluation count for a bit less than one third of the total sales and are the main generator of surplus for HKCAAVQ. (annex 55)

During the interviews with HKCAAVQ senior management and the Education Bureau the panel learned that, with regards to prospects, neither HKCAAVQ nor the Education Bureau expect major changes in the accreditation system. This creates some stability for operations and implementation also creates some financial predictability. Nonetheless, the agency expects a difficult business environment because of uncertainties resulting from negative economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, the agency intends to diversify streams of income mainly with regards to consulting services to the government and the wider public sector as well as education institutions in the region, including outside Hong Kong.

As a statutory body HKCAAVQ must seek approval of the annual budget from the Secretary for Education. Five months prior to the beginning of a fiscal year the agency submits the budget to the Education Bureau. (Annex 55, p. 1017) The panel was informed by HKCAAVQ and EB that the approval is a formal act without actual budget negotiations taking place.

With regard to estimates of income generated by academic accreditation the panel was informed during the site-visit that the agency uses various instruments to form a basis as solid as possible: First of all, the agency can predict due dates of cyclical re-accreditation procedures; with regard to new programmes the agency conducts regular surveys among providers which are supplemented by information gathered through staff who, in their capacity of liaison, keep the Secretariat up to date with upcoming applications for accreditation. The management confirmed that this forms a reasonably reliable basis for making financial forecasts. The forecasts are reviewed twice between the initial draft budget and the actual beginning of the financial year.

The agency has a Secretariat that prepares and implements the decisions by the Council and the Executive Director. At the time of the review the Secretariat has 87 full time staff and is divided into five professional units (Academic Accreditation and Assessment; Vocational and Professional Accreditation; Qualifications Framework and Qualifications Register; Research and Training) and four corporate units (Corporate Communications; Facilities Management; Finance; Human Resources and IT).

Based on the information in the SAR and annexes the Academic Accreditation and Assessment unit is the second biggest unit and comprises 24 staff members. According to its staffing policy, the agency employs full time staff on two- or three-year contracts. The registrars and some assistant registrars serve as secretary-cum-panel members which includes the responsibility of drafting the accreditation reports. Organisational functions throughout the entire procedure are covered by assistant registrars and executive officers.

The turnover rate in the last three years was at an average of approx. 20% (SAR p. 50). During the discussions in the interviews the panel was informed that one major reason for the turnover rate is the attractive professional profile of the staff for providers, who at the same time tend to pay competitive salaries. To address this situation the agency is currently formulating talent development plans mainly at two levels, i.e. from executive assistant / executive officer to assistant registrar; and from assistant registrar to senior registrar.

The agency uses an extensive set of measures and tools for staff induction, staff development and staff promotion which are mainly based on the Policy and Procedures for Staff Development (Annex 53) and which were available to the panel for review. (Annexes 32, 33, 40, 41, 49, 50, 51, 52)

The HR department conducts on an annual basis staff performance appraisals and development reviews that result in performance improvement plans; these activities follow detailed guidelines. As a particular feature that addresses turnover in the AAA unit the Accreditation Apprenticeship Programme for Assistant Registrars was introduced. Comprising components such as knowledge transfer and shadowing, this programme supports upskilling assistant registrars with the aim of promotion to registrars. During the site-visit the panel learned that during the last year around 20% of staff were promoted. Furthermore, numerous HR policies regulate the conduct of daily operations and administrative arrangements. (Annexes 30, 31, 34-39, 42, 44-48)

Analysis

The panel considered the financial situation and concluded that HKCAAVQ has a stable financial situation with adequate financial resources to perform its accreditation activities. Because they are implicitly compulsory (as they are a precondition for entry in the QR), accreditation procedures cater for sufficient and stable income and even allow for building up substantial reserves. The agency applies a thorough and robust approach to financial forecast and budgeting. Based on the interviews the panel also concludes that the management of the agency is mindful of potential business risks outside the accreditation activities.

The panel considered the staffing situation and concluded that HKCAAVQ applies a thorough staff planning policy on an annual basis that guarantees appropriate staffing in order to be able to conduct the accreditation procedures. To some extent predictable case numbers in a midterm perspective supports proactive staff planning. The panel also found that the agency applies a comprehensive staff development policy and was reassured of its effectiveness. From the panel's point of view this policy reflects the big emphasis that the agency places on the high quality conduct of the accreditation procedures. Especially the Accreditation Apprenticeship Programme for Assistant Registrars is to be considered a good and effective response to the competitive market situation regarding registrars. The panel affirms HKCAAVQ's efforts to develop internal career opportunities in order to keep turn-over rate at an acceptable level and underlining the importance of retention of qualified and well-trained staff.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

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.

Evidence

With regard to the activities covered by this review, the SAR outlines that HKCAAVQ applies processes for internal quality assurance that consist mainly of four components:

(1) The agency uses a Quality Management System (QMS) which is an IT-based pre-coded workflow that, based on definition of procedural steps, responsibilities, tools, documents, and timelines ensures consistent and correct implementation of the accreditation procedures. During the site-visit the panel received a detailed introduction to the QMS. The panel was informed that the agency is currently looking into ways of automatisation of some of the pre-defined activities which would also contribute to a standardised conduct of reviews in addition to its main purpose to reduce workload of staff.

(2) The agency applies no-conflict-of-interest policies that apply to staff (Code of Conduct in Performing HKCAAVQ duties), members of the Council (Code of Conduct for Council Members), as well as to panel members (Code of Conduct for Panels; also, a specific code for observers Policy and Guidelines on Observing Accreditation Site Visit) that identify in detail principles for professional conduct, reasons for partiality and how to process cases of concern. As described in the SAR and confirmed during the interviews panel members as well as the operators under review must declare that there is no conflict of interest. The process of reporting and processing any perceived or potential conflict of interest are regulated in detail. (SAR, p. 54)

(3) The implementation of the strategy which is based on KPIs and its monitoring through progress reports to the HKCAAVQ Council. (SAR, p.55)

(4) Furthermore, the agency conducts various feedback surveys. Feedback from providers is sought on an annual basis through an external agency in order to guarantee impartiality and confidentiality. The items included in the survey are, among others, the manual, the differentiation approaches in accreditation, communication with HKCAAVQ, and support to operators. Feedback from panel members and case officers is sought after each procedure with similar items. (SAR, p. 55/56)

As part of the SAR the agency also presents feedback and its analysis received from panel members: more than 95% of them rate the quality of the processes high or very high; items among others were: guidance for panel members, accreditation process in general, Secretariat support and support to non-local members; also comments in open-text sections confirmed the high ratings. (SAR p. 93). Based on similarly good response rates of 62% (providers) and 73% (case officers) the results revealed similarly positive impressions. With regard to the differentiation approach, which was assessed positively in general, some remarks were made that it might be helpful to further elaborate on the criteria for eligibility for differentiation approach in accreditation. (SAR p. 98). However, regarding providers feedback is not sought on a specific process but collected on an annual basis through an independent research agency.

In addition to what the agency presents in its SAR as processes for internal quality assurance procedures, it is to be mentioned that the Research and Training Unit regularly evaluates its training activities. (SAR, p. 95) During the site-visit the panel was informed that HKCAAVQ is currently developing quality indicators for accreditation procedures that shall widen the perspective from mainly process-related items to items that address the quality of the programmes as well. (SAR, p. 100)

During the interviews the panel also learned about the involvement of different stakeholders during the review of the accreditation standards in 2016 which was described as a thorough process that

included inviting stakeholders' opinions (with the exception of students). Staff, experienced reviewers, and operators explained that based on a detailed analysis the agency revised its standards.

Analysis

The panel analysed the material provided on the internal quality assurance processes and the information on its implementation that was also an important element of the discussions during the site-visit. The panel very positively recognises the implemented Quality Management System that is data driven and offers a significant reduction of bureaucracy of the process which was confirmed in different interviews with providers. It can be emphasised that HKCAAVQ focuses strongly on the correct implementation of its defined procedures by preparation of and guidance for individuals involved in its procedures and by standardizing processes through IT-solutions. The panel concludes that the accreditation procedures are managed very professionally and that the pre-coded workflow is an effective instrument to assure that accreditation processes proceed as intended.

At the same time, however, the panel wants to emphasise that it would be worth considering widening the approach and to take the other mechanisms that are relevant for the quality of internal processes into account as equally important features. The fact the pre-coded workflow is called 'the' QMS whereas other instruments such as the feedback-surveys, monitoring the implementation of the strategy, and even instruments that are not mentioned in this context at all, such as staff development and training activities, gives evidence of the predominant focus on the process with less emphasis on other relevant factors. Also, through the strong focus on the QMS, interrelations between the various relevant instruments might move out of sight. Consequently, the panel affirms the current steps by HKCAAVQ to identify quality indicators which would support a comprehensive approach to internal quality assurance and encourages the agency to continue its efforts as part of further development of the organisation.

With regard to collection of feedback, that panel understands the intention of the agency to avoid 'evaluation fatigue' and hence collecting feedback from providers on an annual basis but not related to a specific case. At the same time, it might be a missed opportunity because triangulation of feedback from providers, panels and case officers is not possible. Also, provider representatives confirmed in the interviews that this might be a relevant feature of internal quality assurance. The panel is aware that a negative result of an accreditation procedure might affect the feedback; however, this can be mitigated by transparent selection of questions that refer to the result and to the conduct of the process. Opening structured channels for specific and short feedback might be a valuable addition to the internal quality assurance of HKCAAVQ.

With regard to assuring ethical standards and professional conduct the panel considered the material of the processes and the feedback from individuals involved and came to the conclusion that the processes are state of the art and effective.

Panel commendations

The panel commends HKCAAVQ for the sound and participatory process of revising the accreditation standards.

The panel commends the implementation of the QMS providing simplification of the bureaucracy associated with accreditation procedures.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

HKCAAVQ might reconsider its practice to collect feedback from providers only annually and identify ways for structured feedback on a case-by-case basis closer to an individual procedure.

HKCAAVQ might reconsider its understanding of internal quality assurance and add explicitly other instruments such as the feedback-surveys, monitoring the implementation of the strategy, staff development and training activities with view to a more holistic approach to its quality.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

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.

Evidence

HKCAAVQ undertook an external review to demonstrate its compliance with the ESG for the first time. In 2015 the agency undertook an external review by INQAAHE against the Guidelines of Good Practice. While external evaluations are not a legal requirement the HKCAAVQ explains in its SAR as well as during the interviews that it is part of the agency's strategy to undergo external reviews by international organisations as part of their ambition to enhance structures and processes by engaging an external perspective and benefit from outside opinions.

Analysis

Being based in Hong Kong and not in the EHEA, HKCAAVQ is consequently not a member of ENQA, and at this time does not intend to be listed in EQAR. Consequently, there is no requirement for undergoing an external review against the ESG. The panel was informed through the SAR and during the site-visit that HKCAAVQ chose to do this review deliberately for two reasons: Firstly, the external review is an important complement to internal quality assurance measures. Professional feedback from respected international organisations is deemed important. Secondly, the decision to opt for ENQA instead of a second review by INQAAHE links to the Comparability Study of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework and the EQF which was completed in 2016. Hence, the review against the ESG gave HKCAAVQ another opportunity to follow up on the analysis of approaches and procedures with regard to European examples.

The follow-up activities after the INQAAHE review and the willingness of HKCAAVQ to learn from this review which the panel felt assured about during the site-visit demonstrate that the agency takes external reviews seriously and as an opportunity of further development. Although this is the first external review against the ESG the panel concludes that HKCAAVQ is in full compliance with this standard because of the regular nature of external reviews and the fact that HKCAAVQ is not situated in the EHEA.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

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.

Evidence

HKCAAVQ mapped their standards against the ESG part 1 in nine tables indicating detailed references to the standards in the four different procedures. The mapping includes accreditation of Non-Local Programmes (NLP) and accreditation for Online Learning Programmes (OLP) in the stages IE and LPA. These stages are the same for all programmes that undergo accreditation. Operators are expected to demonstrate a higher level of competence in internal QA moving across the four stages under the Process. (SAR, p. 61 ff)

The standards differentiate 'minimum requirements', 'matters for consideration' and 'special considerations'. The interviews during the virtual site visit with agency staff as well as reviewers indicated these items are always part of a review process whenever relevant. The main difference is that 'minimum requirements' are always relevant for all accreditation procedures.

In addition to HKCAAVQ's alignment tables, the panel also considered the following evidence: the Manual; a sample of review reports; a sample of operators' websites; oral testimonies during the site visit; and the Code of Good Practices on Governance and Quality Assurance for the Self-financing Post-secondary Education Sector (Code) by the EB.

The panel chose to present a combined alignment table that represents a compilation of the nine tables presented by HKCAAVQ and the mentioned additional evidence.

	Activities of HKCAAVQ within the scope of the ESG			
ESG Standards Part 1	**Respective Standard in Initial Evaluation (stage 1)**	**Respective Standard in Learning Programme Accreditation (stage 2)**	**Respective Standard in Programme Area Accreditation (stage 3)**	**Respective Standard in Periodic Institutional Review (stage 4)**
1.1 Policy for Quality Assurance	**IE-4** Organisational Quality Assurance	**LPA-7** Programme Approval, Review and	**PAA-4** Organisational Quality Assurance and Enhancement	**PIR-5** Organisational Quality Assurance and Enhancement
1.1 additional evidence	The Code states that good governance includes transparency and accountability to the public. The Code includes requirements towards publishing quality assurance policy, strategy papers and other relevant publications. The panel learned during interviews that the Code itself is not mandatory. The published review reports indicate that operators adhere to the code. When interviewing review panel members, the panel was informed that during the peer review the availability of information on operators' websites is considered. Documentation and interviews did not provide any evidence regarding student's active involvement in the IQA process of operators.			
1.2 Design and approval of programmes	**IE-4** Organisational Quality Assurance	**LPA-1** Programme Objectives and Learning	**PAA-5** Programme Area Development and Management	**PIR-3** Programme Area Development and Management

		Outcomes **LPA-3** Programme Structure and Content		
1.2 additional evidence	Criteria for designing and approving of programmes are defined for all four activities. Different stakeholders confirmed during the virtual site visit that qualifications are specified and communicated in line with the standards. Learning outcomes align with the GLD's of the HKQF, which have been mapped against the QF-EHEA. The student workload is defined in credits comparable to the ECTS. External stakeholders are involved with development of the programme and its objectives in different ways. The panel could not find any evidence for student involvement in the design of programmes.			
1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	--	**LPA-4** Learning, Teaching and Assessment	**PAA-6** Learning, Teaching and Assessment	**PIR-3** Programme Area Development and Management
1.3 additional evidence	During the interviews with operators the panel perceived a great interest of operators in catering to the needs of students, receiving feedback from students and providing flexible learning.			
1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	--	**LPA-2** Learner Admission and Selection **LPA-3** Programme Structure and Content **LPA-4** Learning, Teaching and Assessment	**PAA-6** Learning, Teaching and Assessment	--
1.4 additional evidence	During interviews the panel found confirmation that the processes include operators having clear regulations covering the student 'life cycle' which they consistently publish. Sessions with staff, operators and panel members showed that the agency is working on ways to improve recognition of non-formal and informal learning in the context of the issue being raised in the higher education community in Hong Kong as it is not an issue that is yet addressed on the systemic level.			
1.5 Teaching staff	**IE-3** Organisational Staffing	**LPA-5** Programme Leadership and Staffing	**PAA-7** Staffing and Staff Development	**PIR-2** Organisational Leadership and Staffing
1.5 additional evidence	The Process' standards and published accreditation reports both show that operators are assessed with attention to fair and transparent processes for recruitment and development of teaching staff. Standards put the focus on teaching while acknowledging the importance of scholarly activities.			
1.6 Learning resources and student support	**IE-2** Financial Viability and Resources	**LPA-6** Learning, Teaching and Enabling	**PAA-8** Programme Area Resources and	**PIR-4** Management of Resources and

	Management	Resources / Services	Services	Services
1.6 additional evidence	The listed standards cover funding for learning and teaching activities as well as availability and access to learning resources. Published accreditation reports and the interviews with students indicate that resources are assessed as part of the procedures. PAA-6 Learning, Teaching and Assessment explicitly mentions in the 'matters for consideration' that "The learning, teaching and assessment policies successfully create a high-quality learning and teaching environment, physical or virtual, that fosters inquisitive learning and demonstration of competencies, for different learning styles and capabilities" (the Manual, p.44).			
1.7 Information management	**IE-1** Organisational Governance and Management **IE-4** Organisational Quality Assurance	**LPA-7** Programme Approval, Review and Quality Assurance	**PAA-2** Strategic Planning and Development	**PIR-1** Organisational Effectiveness and Planning
1.7 additional evidence	Standards and published accreditation reports show that the procedures assess how operators collect, analyse, and use relevant information in the management of their programmes and other activities.			
1.8 Public information	--	**LPA-1** Programme Objectives and Learning Outcomes **LPA-2** Learner Admission and Selection	--	--
1.8 additional evidence	Meetings with HKCAAVQ staff show a consistent picture with regards to the assessment of operators to what extent they publish relevant information about activities and programmes on-line. Students confirm that they can find all relevant information regarding programmes on the operator's website. The mapping of ESG 1.8 also refers to the Government's Code of Good Practices on Governance and Quality Assurance to encourage institutions to make institutional and programme-specific information publicly accessible (SAR, p.70).			
1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	**IE-4** Organisational Quality Assurance	**LPA-7** Programme Approval, Review and Quality Assurance	**PAA-4** Organisational Quality Assurance and Enhancement	**PIR-5** Organisational Quality Assurance and Enhancement
1.9 additional evidence	The standards require monitoring and reviewing the programme periodically while including relevant stakeholders, as well as continuous improvement of the programmes. The panel could not find any requirement for operators to communicate (planned) actions that result from these processes to those involved.			
1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance	HKCAAVQ explains that this standard is not applicable as reviewed operators do not adopt ESG (SAR, p. 73) At the same time the panel recognises that operators undergo reviews on a cyclical basis. Accreditation standards show a higher level of maturity expectation as operators move through the process.			

Table: combined alignment table for ESG part 1 vs HKCAACQ standards

Analysis

The panel considered the ample evidence and standards from the HKCAAVQ process and compared them to the agency's mapping in tables 4-12a of the SAR. To allow an assessment on the detailed level of the individual ESG the panel first presents detailed analysis at individual level before offering a more generic analytical assessment.

	Activities of HKCAAVQ within the scope of the ESG
ESG Standards Part 1	**Analysis of Standard alignment**
1.1 Policy for Quality Assurance	ESG 1.1 is largely covered by the 'minimum requirements' and 'matters for consideration' in the Process. The standards connect IQA to the operator's strategy. They also ensure that a substantial proportion of internal stakeholders participate in quality assurance processes and activities across the institution. An exception to this is students, who do not take any part in development of quality assurance policies or processes. The panel recognises that although it is not mandatory, operators are committed to the transparency reflected in the Code.
1.2 Design and approval of programmes	The purpose of the Process is to underpin the HKQF, it's mapping shows that ESG 1.2 is also largely covered by the specified "Domains of Competence" and accompanying standards. The panel recognises how clear and strong the link between the standards and the HKQF is and how well the implementation of this standard was reflected by the interviewed reviewers and operators. The exception being involving students in designing the programmes which is absent.
1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	The HKCAAVQ standards cover most aspects of ESG 1.3 with their 'minimum requirements' and 'matters for consideration'. Although HKCAAVQ standards emphasise a learner-centred approach in their wording, students seem to be centred as consumers. In the panel's view, involving learners in QA and AE is essential for student-centred learning as described in the ESG.
1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	ESG 1.4 is mostly covered by the referred standards of the four stage Process. Admission and progression are well reflected while little to no focus can be found in the field of recognition of prior and non-formal as well as informal learning. As the panel learned this is a point of development for the higher education sector of Hong Kong itself the panel encourages HKCAAVQ to continue developing plans to assist the sector in this area.
1.5 Teaching staff	The panel assesses that HKCAAVQ standards fully cover ESG 1.5 with their 'minimum requirements' and 'matters for consideration'.
1.6 Learning resources and student support	The standards in the four step Process cover ESG 1.6. Student centred learning is present as part of the assessment, however, the panel believes that the shift to student-centred learning could be even furthered by including the needs of a diverse student population (such as mature, part-time, employed, international students as well as students with disabilities) more explicitly at an earlier stage in the Process.
1.7 Information management	ESG 1.7 is fully covered by the referenced points, taking into account the 'matters for consideration'.

1.8 Public information	The LPA domains cover the publication of all relevant information regarding learning programmes and related activities in an accessible and usable way. For publication of broader activities in programme areas and institutional activity the agency refers to the Code. However, during the visit the panel saw that although operators seem to stand behind the Code, they do not often connect the value of the voluntary Code in relation to IQA practices and the Process. HKCAAVQ could consider underpinning the importance of the Code by emphasising transparency and publication of information in stage 3 (PAA) and especially stage 4 (PIR).
1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	Most of ESG 1.9 is reflected in the standards. While operators might already communicate what they do with the feedback to those involved, HKCAAVQ might increase ESG alignment by including a standard or matter for consideration for communicating plans or actions taken as a result of monitoring and review processes to all those concerned.
1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance	The panel recognises that operators of HKCAAVQ do not adopt the ESG. However, operators do undergo cyclical review by HKCAAVQ as part of the four step Process, which can be considered the core of this Standard. As operators move through the steps of the Process, a higher maturity of IQA is expected from the operators. This is reflected in the HKCAAVQ standards. The panel notices that the external quality assurance process asks operators to provide a considerable amount of evidence.

Table 2: Panels assessment of ESG alignment per individual standard

Though ESG part 1 has not been used as a basis for designing the accreditation standards, the panel's analysis shows that most aspects of Part 1 of the ESG are represented in the HKCAAVQ Process. It is the panel's view that external quality assurance by HKCAAVQ supports operators in developing internal quality assurance mechanisms and thereby the quality of the programmes they offer. The panel also believes that it seems reasonable that the different stages – addressing different maturity levels – also result in a different level of ESG part 1 reflection in the standards as the focus of the procedures gradually shifts and builds on evidence that was delivered at prior stages.

In the analysis in table 2, two key issues arise when comparing the HKCAAVQ standards to the ESG part 1: the Code in relation to the Process standards / Public information and transparency in the process; and student involvement in internal quality assurance.

<u>Public information and transparency in the Process</u>

In analysing the Manual, Process and accompanying standards, the panel notices standards regarding transparency and publication of information are scarce. At the same time the panel sees ample evidence in review reports, operators' websites and oral testimonies that operators publish relevant information regarding their programmes, submission procedures, activities and IQA system in a clear and consistent manner.

The panel finds that HKCAAVQ relies on the Code when addressing aspects regarding transparency on policies and publishing information as described in ESG part 1. The panel understands this is likely the case because the HKCAAVQ standards were not based on the ESG, but developed in a different context. The panel suggests integrating relevant aspects of the Code into the standards to further

align the internal and external quality assurance of operators as well as the HKCAAVQ standards with the ESG part 1.

<u>Student involvement in internal quality assurance</u>

The second key issue is that HKCAAVQ's standards do not require or encourage operators to involve students in their internal quality assurance processes. During the site visit both staff and stakeholders mentioned that there were cultural reasons for not including students in operators' IQA processes. Student surveys and in some cases student sounding board groups concerning (the quality of) teaching and learning were presented as implemented and culturally acceptable alternatives. While the panel recognises the importance of gathering feedback from students regarding their study experience as a valuable source in IQA, the panel finds no way to interpret this as being involved in the development and implementation of policy and processes.

The panel recognises that Hong Kong and the European Higher Education Area do not share the same cultural and social context. At the same time it might be worth mentioning that even within the EHEA cultural and social diversity lead to many different approaches towards student involvement in Quality Assurance activities. All of these diverse approaches implement the concept of the ESG that students are, as adult members of the post-secondary education community, essential and valued internal stakeholders. As members of this community students are expected to engage in internal quality assurance processes at all levels of an institution. In line with the ESG, this is something external quality assurance processes should support.

The panel believes that the international context of Hong Kong and its higher education system will be a facilitating factor for HKCAAVQ to develop a culturally sound approach to enhancing its standards by integrating students as an internal stakeholder who participates in the internal quality assurance structures and processes of operators.

Panel commendations

The panel commends HKCAAVQ on the clearly defined criteria for design and approval of programmes in relation to the HKQF, which operators highly appreciate.

Panel recommendations

The panel recommends HKCAAVQ to address student engagement in operators' internal quality assurance processes in the agency's accreditation standards.

The panel recommends including a standard on accessible learning resources and student support for a diverse student population more explicitly at stage 1 or 2 of the Process.

The panel recommends integrating relevant aspects of the Code into the accreditation standards of relevant stages in order to further align internal and external quality assurance, as well as the ESG Part 1 and the HKCAAVQ standards.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

HKCAAVQ should consider including a standard for communicating actions planned or taken as a result of monitoring and periodic review of programmes to all those concerned.

HKCAAVQ should continue to assist the sector in developing standards for the recognition of prior, non- formal as well as informal learning.

Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

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.

Evidence

The different accreditation activities from programme to institutional level, for local, non-local and online programmes, have been described above in the section concerning HKCAAVQ's activities under the ESG. In order to determine their fitness for purpose, it is vital to identify the aims of external quality assurance.

The Manual states that HKCAAVQ performs the dual roles of a gate-opener and a gatekeeper. As a gate-opener the agency supports the understanding of the accreditation requirements while the gatekeeper role is put into practice through the accreditation processes ensuring programmes and qualifications meet the HKQF standards (Manual, page 4).

This understanding of the double role of HKCAAVQ was also confirmed during the site visit interviews with external stakeholders, from ministry representatives to representatives of operators. When asked about HKCAAVQ's role, they first and foremost name benchmarking and registration or recognition as the most important aspects. Some representatives of operators also voiced that the HKCAAVQ process helped them develop and enhance their internal quality assurance.

The SAR describes the Process as maintaining a minimum level of requirements, as well as allowing institutions to demonstrate a higher level of competence in terms of delivery and QA of their programmes as they move through stages of the process. However, during the visit HKCAAVQ executive and staff clearly stated that in recent years, since the new executive director started in 2018, HKCAAVQ has initiated a shift from minimum requirements towards a more enhancement-oriented approach. In fact, the purpose of each stage of the process is defined as the following:

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.

Table: Purpose Statement of each stage of the Process by HKCAAVQ, (SAR p.74)

The above listed four stage approach applies to all three types of activity under review: (1) Academic Accreditation, (2) Accreditation of Non Local Programmes, and (3) Accreditation of Online Learning Programmes. The SAR section 9.2 and the Manual describe how the process takes into account the development and demonstrated maturity by operators. In addition to the four stages, the agency applies the Differentiation Approach (Manual, p.15-16) in which the operator is given certain leeway and lightens the costs and workload by adapting the process based on recognition of track record by the operator. (see ESG 3.4 for further explanation on the Differentiation Approach)

Analysis

The panel analysed the evidence in the SAR and Process as well as the interviews with HKCAAVQ staff and stakeholders and found that the documents, procedures, and processes generally are in line with the defined purposes of the agency's activities derived from its purpose statement. The official role of the agency, the accreditation standards, and purposes of the Processes' four stages fit together very well and clearly reflect the HKCAAVQ's role as gate-opener and gatekeeper to ensure a minimum threshold for operators who offer HKQF-recognised programmes and qualifications. The panel learned that the 'matters for consideration' and 'special considerations' in the Process' standards are always considered when relevant to the context of the type of accreditation. Representatives of the reviewer pool confirm that depending on the context of the

review, the Process allows for different emphasis. With this purpose in mind, the panel sees the Process as a well-defined, well designed and a flexible system.

At the same time the panel recognised a certain level of ambiguity when considering the output of the interviews with the documented policies and evidenced implementation. During the interviews the panel found that HKCAAVQ had a strong emphasis on quality enhancement as an objective of external quality assurance. This was also supported when operators explained about their discussion with HKCAAVQ staff. At the same time policies and standards are strongly oriented towards compliance, which is a sound approach to implement the documented aims of the procedures. The panel learned, when discussing this potential contradiction, that the shift towards enhancement within HKCAAVQ is the result of initiatives and new lines of thinking in recent years. Although the oral discussions show that the agency aspires to also focus on the enhancement-based approach, this is not (yet) reflected in the Process, accreditation standards and the evidence operators are requested to provide during a review. As several representatives of operators voiced, they are ready and would appreciate a stronger focus on quality enhancement. The review panel encourages HKCAAVQ to broaden this support base and work together with stakeholders in adapting the methodologies to pursue a stronger enhancement-based approach in their Process.

The panel concludes that the four-stage Process allows institutions to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance and show improvement throughout the stages as well as with every new round of accreditation. In addition, the differentiation approach and adaptations to the process made after the 2016 review, lowered the level of workload for operators substantially. Even though this reduction has taken place, the panel noticed the amount of requested evidence and accompanying workload during a review is still quite high. Stakeholders do emphasise they are satisfied with the Process and do not see the workload disproportional. They are also satisfied with the clearly defined and for them useful outcomes of the accreditation exercises.

Panel commendations

The panel commends HKCAAVQ for introducing the Differentiation Approach following feedback from operators.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

The panel suggests HKCAAVQ to work together with stakeholders in adapting the methodologies to pursue a stronger enhancement-led approach also documented in their Process.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

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

Evidence

The SAR documents steps and procedures of implementation of external quality assurance processes for the following activities of HKCAAVQ:

- Academic Accreditation (Four-stage quality assurance process under HKQF) which consists of
    - Initial Evaluation,
    - Learning Programme Accreditation and Re-accreditation,
    - Programme Area Accreditation, and
    - Periodic Institutional Review.
- Accreditation of non-local programmes.
- Accreditation of online programmes.

The SAR explains that procedures of Academic Accreditation follow the regulations set out in the Manual of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process under the Manual which contains the predefined accreditation standards and the defined procedural steps. The procedures of accreditation of non-local programmes and accreditation of online programmes follow the first two steps of the Four-stage Model, the last two steps are not applicable.

All procedures within the scope of this review follow the same scheme:

- The HEI submits an accreditation application which is based on a self-evaluation that refers to the relevant accreditation standards and further matters for consideration.
- The agency appoints a panel of experts.
- The panel prepares for the review and compiles initial comments and questions for further clarification. These are sent to the HEI which submits an answer.
- The panel conducts a site visit.
- The agency compiles a report based on the findings and recommendations by the panel.
- The council makes a decision. For degree programmes offered by institutions under cap 320, the decision needs approval from the chief executive.
- The agency issues the accreditation decision including the report.
- If the accreditation is conditional the agency assesses the fulfilment of the conditions before publication of the report.

HKCAAVQ applies the Differentiation Approach (Manual, p. 15/16) which provides the agency with a certain leeway to lighten the process based on recognition of the track record of the provider. Possible modifications include the sole use of a paper-based review without site-visit, a customised accreditation process, longer validity period or a combination of these options.

The Manual provides detailed information about responsibilities and roles of all parties involved, about the standards and steps of the procedure and gives guidance for consistent implementation.

Consequently, the first three steps mentioned in the standard are in place in all procedures concerned; with regard to a formalised follow-up this applies only to those procedures that lead to a conditional accreditation. It was confirmed during the interviews that in case no conditions are implemented, there is no follow-up procedure. Discussing this aspect with the senior management of the agency the panel was informed that HKCAAVQ is considering strengthening the follow-up; detailed deliberations were not yet presented. The requirement of approval of substantial changes to accredited programmes was presented as activity that might also contribute to a follow-up.

The implementation is based on the pre-coded workflow, that defines more than 160 activities and steps to be taken during an accreditation process. During the site-visit the panel was informed that the agency is about to assess how the use of artificial intelligence could standardise the implementation of the procedures and reduce the administrative workload.

Analysis

The panel considered the implementation of the defined procedures in terms of reliability, usefulness but also in light of consistent application. The interviews with stakeholders, primarily operators but also review panel members confirmed that the implemented process strictly follows the steps defined in the Manual and the panel learned from staff interviews that the workflow is facilitated but also assured by the pre-coded workflow. The yet published reports also demonstrate clear focus on relevant standards and refer to the presented documents. Some published reports outline conditions that the operator has to meet indicating that the agency applies its methodology as predefined.

The panel didn't find any systematic implementation of a follow-up procedure so far, apart from the compulsory assessment of the fulfilment of conditions. The panel believes that the agency has implemented a strong tool for follow up with the option of conditions. At the same time, besides conditions, there are many procedures that do end with unconditional decisions and consequently without consistent follow up. Implementing a systematic follow-up will also allow HKCAAVQ to strengthen an enhancement component of the agency's accreditation activities. During the site-visit the panel learned that in the last years the agency had put more emphasis on quality enhancement in addition to the primary purpose of accreditation (which is the confirmation that programmes comply with standards and consequently the qualifications can be uploaded on the QR). Although not yet being part of defined procedures, these efforts were already appreciated by stakeholders, notably by representatives from operators.

The panel emphasises that the generally high appreciation of HKCAAVQ's activities by operators and in particular the high appreciation of the agency's responsiveness and collaboration forms a good basis for a more enhancement-led approach of the agency's activities as a whole, not just the accreditation procedures. A consistent follow-up might be an important feature of a more comprehensive approach of the agency towards enhancing the quality of higher education in Hong Kong with the accreditation procedures being only one part of activities.

Emphasis should be given to the high level of satisfaction operators expressed for the quality of the site-visits which they consider very helpful in terms of discussing their programmes and receiving helpful information and suggestions even beyond the purpose in the narrow sense. Representatives from operators highlighted that the discussions during the site-visits help them to understand better recommendations made subsequent in the accreditation reports. This perception aligns with the understanding of the panel that, particularly with regard to the current efforts to strengthen the quality enhancement component of the processes, the site-visits bear a huge potential which is not necessarily to be exploited through regulations but rather through the conduct in practical terms. Based on respective training and briefing of expert panels the various interviews during site-visits can be very beneficial to the operators in terms of aspects where they can learn to improve the programmes, even if in aspects that might only indirectly address compliance with the accreditation standards.

Differentiation approach

With regard to the professional and consistent implementation of the procedures the panel emphasises that the Manual is detailed and provides reliable information for all parties involved, the

providers, the expert panels, the case officers, the management and the Council. Furthermore, the pre-coded workflow assures a consistent conduct of the accreditation processes. At the same time the panel also considers to what extent striving for perfection of processes creates limitations and rigid structures with a high level of micro-definitions that might hamper flexibility that might be advisable at certain points. During the site-visit the panel learned the meticulously designed process of searching, proposing and appointing panel experts as well as other procedural steps requires repeated approval decisions by superiors, even if changes made by case-officers are very small. This might just be one example of the suggestion of the panel for the agency to reconsider the detailed pre-coded workflow with a view to assure a balance between workload generated by capturing all possible events on the one side and contribution to a high quality of the whole process on the other side. The panel is aware of discussions within HKCAAVQ targeting this important balance and fully encourages the council to continue this internal dialogue to find a compromise that best meets the requirements of the organisation as well as its stakeholders.

It is to be emphasised that operators and experts expressed their satisfaction with the consistency of the implementation of the accreditation processes (with regard to consistent application of the accreditation standards see also ESG 2.5) and emphasised that supporting measures such as seminars and briefings are effective. It is also worth noting that discussions with review panel members revealed a high level of satisfaction of reviewers with the support they received by case-officers in terms of respecting their reviewer position while supporting in terms of consistency.

With the limitation of the need of a more consistent follow up the panel is impressed with the work of HKCAAVQ in terms of reliability, consistency and level of pre definition of the implementation of its procedures.

Panel recommendations

The panel recommends HKCAAVQ to implement consistent follow-up procedures or instruments in all accreditation procedures irrespective of the result.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

The panel suggests HKCAAVQ to elaborate on the potential of follow up activities to strengthen the enhancement orientation of its procedures.

Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

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).

Evidence

As regulated in chapters 3.2, 4.33 and appendices 3 and 4 of the Manual all external quality assurance procedures within the scope of this review are based on peer review. Based on these rules and depending on the type of procedure and the individual case a panel includes typically three or more members which include one or two overseas academics, one or two local academics and one practitioner from relevant industries. In cases of sub degree programmes there is normally no international member. The Manual does not foresee any role for student reviewers and the SAR

explains that currently review panels do not include student members while HKCAAVQ has introduced student liaison meetings since 2017 with the intention that this form of engagement of student stakeholders would enable student representatives to have a better understanding of QA. (SAR, p. 81/82)

The SAR describes that panel members are selected from a register of specialists that is maintained by the agency and that lists subject specialists for various academic fields and specialists in finance and governance. Based on a formalised Policy on Specialists Appointment and Management (SAR p. 80 with link to the policy) potential panel members can be nominated by staff or externally. The appointment to the register is done by the Specialist Selection Committee which comprises a Council member as chairperson and senior staff of the Secretariat. The policy regulates in detail appointment to and maintenance of the register. The policy also regulates and defines roles and responsibilities of panel chairs, members, and secretaries, who usually are case officers of HKCAAVQ.

The SAR also explains a dual confirmation procedure to avoid conflicts of interest of the nominated experts. First, potential panel members are required to read the Code of Conduct for Panels and the Manual and sign a declaration form to declare any interest and undertake to abide by the relevant guidelines. Secondly, 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. (SAR, p.54)

The agency supports (future) panel members in two ways:

(1) Future panel members who are included in the register participate in various training activities; these start with an induction course for new specialists on the register that consists of basic knowledge about the HKQF standards and level determination, the guiding principles, the Four-stage quality assurance model, and assessment techniques. Furthermore, specialists are also invited to attend refresher seminars after having served on panels. These refresher seminars are also used for mutual learning. Specific training is provided for future panel chairs. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the training activities are conducted online since March 2020. (SAR p. 30; Policy on Specialists Appointment and Management) During the virtual site visit experts informed the panel that invitations by the agency to participate in seminars and training provide ample opportunity for mutual learning and this opportunity is highly appreciated.

(2) One staff member of HKCAAVQ, usually a registrar and sometimes also an assistant registrar is the designated case-officer who also joins the panel as member and secretary. The case officer provides the panel with relevant material and provides a briefing meeting. During the interviews with reviewers, they confirmed that the briefing meetings are important and effective. They also highlighted the big volume of preparatory material in addition to the operators' application which often is helpful, while sometimes also overwhelming.

Analysis

The panel carefully reviewed the implemented policies and processes for selecting and supporting panels and particularly discussed the issue of stakeholder and student involvement with different groups.

The presented initiatives and activities in the field of expert training are manifold, address the needs of the reviewers, and also use different formats like luncheons for short and more tailored presentations. The panel believes that the implemented measures for training are well designed and

enable the reviewers to perform their task. Clearly the guidance of the case officer acting as a secretary contributes to management of the peer group.

An issue that HKCAAVQ implements very well and as a standard in their procedures is the involvement of international experts in their panels. Clearly this external perspective adds additional quality to the review while at the same time it speaks for the intention not only of the review but also the education to meet and compete with international standards. The involvement of international experts is a standard procedure for HKCAAVQ and the interviews with reviewers showed that the mix in the groups is also appreciated by the peers as well as operators.

The selection and appointment of panels is well described and follows standardised procedures which include mechanisms of no-conflict-of-interest.

Within this very positive assessment regarding the work of HKCAAVQ with its peer review experts, the obvious lack of student involvement requires differentiated reflection. The panel recognised that HKCAAVQ addressed this issue with great openness in all interviews with regard to the explanation of the status quo and the undertaken initiatives. The panel was informed about HKCAAVQ's activities to engage and address students in its operations, notably the introduction of the student liaison committee. To contextualise the work of HKCAAVQ the panel recognised a consistent pattern whenever discussing the issue of student involvement across different interview groups. There was consensus in the interviewees that student involvement is not part of the cultural traditions in Hong Kong and the region, which are significantly different from European traditions. Also, the panel recognised throughout the site-visit that a core aspect of the current involvement of students in quality assurance is that students learn about quality assurance, learn how to present 'their' study programmes, and learn how to reply to questions of expert panels which is everything but an active role as expert. Students are perceived as learners, and the idea of seeing students as contributors to the quality assurance processes that offer an important input for enhancement was not found in any of the interviews. On the contrary, practical reasons preventing students from participation were presented such as students would need to be trained, students would not have time as they would have to follow their own curriculum. The panel understood these concerns well as the need for training and making time is a valid argument for all peer reviewers which HKCAAVQ manages to address very well so they cannot be reflected upon students only.

The panel recognises that HKCAAVQ is set in a cultural context that does not perceive students as equal stakeholders in the educational / quality assurance process and that acceptance of practice by stakeholders is a dimension that the HKCAAVQ has to consider as well. Moving forward with increasing student participation requires thoughtful but thorough action. Consequently, HKCAAVQ should develop a culturally sound approach to student involvement in the review panels and continue and intensify its activities to engage students. Clearly the panel recognises that the future role of students in panels will require discussion and piloting within the higher education community of Hong Kong. The case of the positive innovation to publish full reports can be an encouraging example that different traditions must not be a reason to prevent change. The international setting and particularly the high number of non-local programmes from countries and close collaboration with providers from Europe offers great opportunities for HKCAAVQ to advance student involvement. Respecting the concerns brought forward by HKCAAVQ as well as stakeholders, the panel does not share them.

Panel commendations

The panel commends HKCAAVQ for its strong and systematic engagement of international reviewers in its review panels.

Panel recommendations

The panel recommends HKCAAVQ to involve students in review panels.

Panel conclusion: partially compliant

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.

Evidence

The SAR describes that for all external quality assurance procedures covered by this review accreditation standards and possible outcomes are defined and published in the *Manual*. The possible decisions by HKCAAVQ are: (a) approval, (b) approval with condition(s) and/or restriction(s); or (c) non-approval. The Manual serves as the single point of reference for the whole procedure, avoiding any contradictions in documentation. The standards are complemented by minimum requirements that describe essential features of operators or programmes respectively. (SAR, p. 83)

The agency applies various instruments and processes to support consistency in the application of the standards. First and foremost, the minimum requirements guide the panels to come to conclusions. They describe essential features and consequently are part of every review. An important position for the sake of consistency is the case officer who supports the panel during the whole process, from briefing to writing the report. Furthermore, after the completion of the report, more support measures are applied within the Secretariat: meetings of case officers where they can share experience and discuss questions around interpretation of standards; cases of precedence provided in the pre-coded workflow. Finally, all reports have to be approved by the unit head and finally by the Deputy Executive Director. (SAR, p. 83)

During the site-visit the panel was informed that it usually doesn't happen at all that the Deputy Executive Director or the Executive Director deviates from the panels' proposals. If issues arise the case-officer uses the various internal consulting opportunities and the panel learned that this cooperative feedback is an effective tool to navigate individual cases efficiently. Consistent application of the criteria was also confirmed during the interviews by representatives from operators. They also reported that HKCAAVQ was very responsive in case of uncertainties with regard to interpretation of standards which helps avoid problems in the first place.

Analysis

The panel considered very carefully the various accreditation standards and the means of assuring consistent application. With the clearly defined options of potential outcomes and the implementation of a pre-coded workflow consistency and comparability are facilitated. The panel also believes that the role of the case officer is key in achieving consistency in the interpretation of the standards and also recommendations by the review panel as they know more than just the individual procedure. Respecting the individual character of each procedure the panel believes that the described meetings of case officers to discuss current issues are as helpful a tool as automatisation and pre coded procedures cannot replace the reflection on an individual case with its specific characteristics.

Furthermore, the move of HKCAAVQ to publish the full reports of the reviews has increased transparency and allows for an easy recognition of consistent application of standards as cases, assessments and decisions become visible and also comparable for the interested public.

The panel consequently concludes that standards are predefined and public, well communicated to operators and stakeholders and that effective means are in place to assure consistent application.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

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.*

Evidence

The SAR states (SAR, p.85) that summary reports have been published on HKCAAVQ's website since September 2013. In 2017 HKCAAVQ began considering the publication of full reports, a move that was described as marking a change in culture for the self-financing higher education sector. Progress towards full publication has, therefore, been measured involving extensive activity in 2017 to both collect views (through consultation, surveys, and discussions) and to establish an evidence base with an international benchmarking exercise. Following this the decision was made, in January 2018, to move towards the publication of full reports. (SAR, p.85)

Full reports from Initial Evaluations of local learning programmes initiated after April 2019 were to be published first, although no such exercises had taken place before the submission of the SAR. Full reports from all other academic accreditation exercises under the Four-Stage QA Process initiated after April 2020 followed, with the first of these published, as anticipated, in October 2020. Since then five other full reports have been published (HKCAAVQ website April 2021). The SAR noted (SAR, p.86) that, in line with existing practice, reports from non-approval cases are not published. It indicates that reports from accreditations where the decisions include pre-conditions are only published after the pre-conditions have been met; and also confirms that the reports, when published, include the pre-conditions and information regarding how they have been fulfilled. (SAR, p.86) During the interviews case officers stressed how they have ensured that operators and all those involved have understood that reports are now published in full and when discussing the issue with review panel members they confirmed to be aware of this adjusted practice and explaining their perception.

Information gained from meetings with HKCAAVQ staff, reviewers and representatives from operators, together with supplementary information requested by the panel, clarified matters concerning the drafting and approval of reports. There are detailed report templates for each of the principal report types: Initial Evaluation (Stage 1); Learning Programme Accreditation and Learning Programme Re-accreditation (Stage 2); Programme Area Accreditation (Stage 3); and Periodic Institutional Review (Stage 4) (Supplementary material annexes 22-25). These aim to ensure consistent structure, including guidance notes and all required information, for example about the determination, period of validity, HKCAAVQ's right to revise a determination, and the operator's right to appeal.

The HKCAAVQ case officer is responsible for drafting the report. The workflow (Supplementary material annex 26) details up to 40 steps in the writing up and publication of reports with the process managed through the Quality Management System. The involvement of the panel in the development of the interim report is detailed in the workflow; the (pre)final report is sent to the panel for final comments prior to it being sent to the operator to check for factual accuracy. Approvals are required at multiple levels in the process (via the Head of section by the Deputy Executive Director) including prior to sending it to panel members and, after any consequent revisions, prior to sending to the operator to check on factual accuracy. The steps involved in following up pre-conditions, requirements and/or restrictions is, similarly, set out in the workflow and managed through the QMS. Where there are pre-conditions, requirements or restrictions the panel is consulted as part of the process to confirm that these have been fulfilled.

During the interviews accreditation panel members and the panel chairs confirmed that they are actively engaged in the production of reports, commenting on and suggesting revisions to the text. International reviewers felt that their experience could be especially valuable in the way reports were phrased with relevant non-local programmes because these would be considered in the 'home' country as well as by the local operator. Operators confirmed that they are able to comment on matters of factual accuracy. They confirmed that they found the pre-conditions or recommendations in reports very clear and knew what action was expected. During the interviews with operators the panel learned that they found HKCAAVQ staff very helpful in providing guidance also during this phase of the procedure.

Heads of institutions stated that accreditation reports were very useful, identifying where improvement was needed and what had to be improved before approval. They noted that reports may include positive comments and felt that it would be helpful if good practice was identified. The panel heard from operators how highly HKCAAVQ staff are regarded in terms of the assistance and guidance they give; it was equally clear that this was managed in a way that did not compromise impartiality and the rigour of the process. Operators felt able to raise queries and discuss interpretations (an example was given regarding how staff student ratios are calculated).

Based on provided numbers the outcome of most accreditation exercises is positive although a significant proportion have pre-conditions, requirements, or restrictions.

Analysis

Based on what is available on the website of HKCAAVQ the panel can confirm that reports are published and reflecting the yet low number of available full reports also reconfirmed the practice to publish during the interviews. Reports from accreditation procedures initiated after April 2020 are published in full; those with pre-conditions are published after conditions have been met and, in line with established practice, non-approvals are not published. The panel very carefully discussed the impact of the practice not to publish non-approvals and considered the guidelines explaining that a published report "provides information to society regarding the activities of an institution". For HKCAAVQ non-approvals (or not meeting the pre-conditions) result in a programme not entering the market, consequently a report would not provide information about any activities because these activities would not take place. Hence the panel - after thorough deliberation - concluded that the non-publication does not impact the assessment of this standard in this case. The panel also found that recent summary reports have been more detailed with recommendations and advised actions clearly set out. The full reports contain additional depth of detail and information. All are clear, accessible and contain the conclusions and decisions.

The panel commends two aspects of work under this standard. HKCAAVQ has worked to move reporting practice to meet international norms with the publication of full reports. Given that it works with self-financed operators the approach was appropriately consultative and measured. It has been accepted by operators, despite the potential for reservations of which the panel is fully aware also based on the interviews. The panel considers this to have been well managed for the economic and cultural context within which HKCAAVQ works.

HKCAAVQ's QMS supports the workflow and makes full use of technology to support the processes around report production, approvals, milestones and interactions. The report templates help ensure consistent outputs from accreditation processes. HKCAAVQ has successfully balanced its regulatory role, to ensure that standards are met and maintained, with a supporting role, advising and guiding operators to navigate accreditation processes effectively. It is respected for both its rigour in gatekeeping and its helpfulness in supporting.

To date (April 2021) HKCAAVQ has not received feedback on the early published full reports. Heads of institutions were cautiously positive about the move. There is concern about how weaknesses may be seen and that comparisons might be made with the publicly funded sector to the disadvantage of self-financing operators. The panel agrees with the views expressed about the desirability of including the identification of good practice, while acknowledging that 'commendations' and 'good practice' are not part of the Four-stage process and that efforts will be needed to introduce changes. The addition of formally identified positive practice would, however, help drive enhancement i.e. to develop quality above the baseline for approval, adding to the quality enhancement dimension that was already strengthened over the past years.

Panel commendations

The panel commends HKCAAVQ for the well organised and consistent report production process, that is supported by a detailed written and automated workflow, clear report templates and close working between case officers, panels, and institutions to ensure reports that are well phrased and accurate, and which are accepted and understood by operators.

The panel commends the commitment of HKCAAVQ to change reporting practice to align with international norms and to take its sector with it through the careful and measured way in which the move to the publication of full reports has been introduced.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

The panel encourages HKCAAVQ to negotiate to further the potential of accreditation processes to enhance quality by seeking ways to identify examples of good and effective practice and/or to make commendations as part of their procedures. This would be especially beneficial now with fully published reports and is highly likely to be welcomed by operators.

Panel conclusion: Fully compliant

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.

Evidence

The SAR (p89) defines a complaint as dissatisfaction with HKCAAVQ services. An online complaints form is readily available on the HKCAAVQ website as part of the 'Contact Us' page. Although information about the procedure for complaints is not detailed on the website, it is clear that any complaints are acknowledged and processed. It was also clear in meetings that operators were fully aware of their right to raise a complaint. The SAR (SAR, p. 89) indicates that there is a complaint handling process. It also indicates that an inquiry panel may be established involving three members of staff including a member of the directorate plus a secretary. The process for reporting on complaints to the HKCAAVQ's Council is explained in the SAR which also outlines the number of complaints between 2014/15 and 2018/19 which is zero (SAR, p.89-90).

The complaints process was reviewed in May 2020 and took effect in July that year. HKCAAVQ considers that substantive improvements have been made including greater clarity in definition, the addition of a review mechanism to enable outcomes to be contested, improved clarity in the procedure, including a flowchart (SAR, p.90). The Principles and Procedures place appropriate stress on impartiality, escalation and Council oversight (SAR supporting information pp.1730-1737). The procedures are flexible, with responses ranging from immediate remedial action to full investigations; there are appropriate links to, for example, Disciplinary Procedures. The revised procedures include a mechanism to deal with lower levels of dissatisfaction, described as causes of concern, by the relevant business unit.

During the virtual site visit in meetings with operators it was evident that they understood that they were able to make complaints but indicated that the collaborative nature of HKCAAVQ's approach and the opportunity to raise queries during the process meant that they had no call to raise a complaint. Also during the interviews HKCAAVQ staff indicated that they put emphasis on communication throughout the accreditation processes to ensure that there are no surprises and outcomes are robust; they explain outcomes and support institutions to regard outcomes as ways to improve.

The SAR explains that the appeal mechanism is set out in Sections 9 to 17 of the AAVQO [Cap.592 and Cap.592A]. It is fully independent from HKCAAVQ. The appeal board comprises a chair, deputy chair and panel members, all of whom are appointed by the Minister (and the names of appointees published). The chair selects between 2 and 6 individuals from the panel to serve on the Board considering an appeal. Operators have 30 days in which to appeal, and the appeal is made directly to the EB. A staff member of the EB acts as the secretary to the appeal. Appeals may be considered on the basis of written submissions, any that are heard are heard in public unless deemed otherwise. The grounds for appeal are not specified in the legislation beyond the appellant being aggrieved by a decision of the agency, however any appellant must state their grounds for appeal.

HKCAAVQ has report templates for the different aspects of the Four-stage QA process, each of which includes information about the right to appeal, the timeframe and location of further

information (Supplementary material annexes 22 to 25). It was evident in meetings that institutions are aware of the right to appeal and mechanism for doing so. The SAR sets out data on appeals between 2014/15 and 2018/19 (SAR, p.89); during that time one appeal was made that was subsequently withdrawn by the appellant and one dismissed as a non-appealable case.

Analysis

The panel reviewed the complaints principles and procedures and considers them to be appropriately detailed and clear. The recent review of complaints handling procedures were explained to have increased transparency and integrity and, from the presented flowchart, the panel agrees with this interpretation. The process review, given the absence of complaints in recent years, illustrates the commitment of HKCAAVQ to ensuring its processes are, nevertheless, kept under review and are well designed. While historically there have been few complaints, transparency would be greatly furthered if the webpage with the complaints form included prominent links to the procedure and connected flowchart.

The appeals process is fully independent and conducted directly by the EB. Appeals are rare nevertheless it was clear that institutions are aware of the opportunity to appeal and relevant information is included in all reports.

As the number of cases show, neither appeals or complaints are often made. The panel identified two factors contributing to that fact. The primary reason is the detail with which HKCAAVQ's standards and processes are set out for operators and the systematic and professional way accreditations are conducted, with detailed workflows, extensive accreditation documentation from operators and detailed work by review panels. A second significant reason is the way in which HKCAAVQ seeks to work with operators. There are designated liaison officers and case officers work in a rigorous but also an enabling manner. Operators spoke of the collaborative way of working and the opportunity to raise queries with the agency be it with case officers, registrars, or more senior staff. They also referred to the competence and professionalism of HKCAAVQ, stressing that there was no flexibility when it came to demonstrating achievement against the standards.

It was evident in data requested that a significant proportion of LPA reviews result in approvals with pre-conditions (i.e. actions that must be fulfilled before approval) or, to a lesser extent, with requirements. Thus, the panel's view is that HKCAAVQ's approach to good communication and collaborative working tends to ensure that there is shared understanding of decisions, even though many include pre-conditions or requirements and are not straightforward approvals, leading to the low number of appeals and complaints.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

The panel suggests that the complaints handling process and flowchart are made available through prominent links on the webpage with the complaints form.

Panel conclusion: Fully compliant

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

The panel commends the thoroughness of analytical activity of HKCAAVQ with regards to the continuous improvement of their own operations.

The panel commends HKCAAVQ for the sound and participatory process of revising its accreditation standards.

The panel commends the implementation of the QMS providing simplification of the bureaucracy associated with accreditation procedures.

The panel commends HKCAAVQ on the clearly defined criteria for design and approval of programmes in relation to the HKQF, which operators highly appreciate.

The panel commends HKCAAVQ for introducing the Differentiation Approach following feedback from operators.

The panel commends HKCAAVQ for its strong and systematic engagement of international reviewers in its review panels.

The panel commends HKCAAVQ for the well organised and consistent report production process, that is supported by a detailed written and automated workflow, clear report templates and close working between case officers, panels, and institutions to ensure reports that are well phrased and accurate, and which are accepted and understood by operators.

The panel commends the commitment of HKCAAVQ to change reporting practice to align with international norms and to take its sector with it through the careful and measured way in which the move to the publication of full reports has been introduced.

OVERVIEW OF JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ESG 3.1 -substantially compliant

The panel recommends HKCAAVQ to develop a culturally sound approach towards the inclusion of students in the work and governance of the agency.

The panel recommends HKCAAVQ to complement its quality assessment activities represented by accreditations with quality enhancement activities.

ESG 3.2 - fully compliant

ESG 3.3 - fully compliant

ESG 3.4 - partially compliant

The panel recommends HKCAAVQ to advance and extend plans for the publication of the analysis of the findings of its external quality assurance activity, producing regular, timely reports that identify trends, areas of good practice, common challenges and persistent difficulty together with more detailed analysis of selected topics.

The panel recommends the immediate development of ways to make fuller use of the findings of accreditation activity in advance of the extension of HKCAAVQ's sophisticated MIS.

ESG 3.5 – fully compliant

ESG 3.6 - fully compliant

ESG 3.7 - fully compliant

ESG 2.1 - substantially compliant

The panel recommends HKCAAVQ to address student engagement in operators' internal quality assurance processes in the agency's accreditation standards.

The panel recommends including a standard on accessible learning resources and student support for a diverse student population more explicitly at stage 1 or 2 of the Process.

The panel recommends integrating relevant aspects of the Code into the accreditation standards of relevant stages in order to further align internal and external quality assurance, as well as the ESG Part 1 and the HKCAAVQ standards.

ESG 2.2 - fully compliant

ESG 2.3 -substantially compliant

The panel recommends HKCAAVQ to implement consistent follow-up procedures or instruments in all accreditation procedures irrespective of the result.

ESG 2.4 - partially compliant

The panel recommends HKCAAVQ to involve students in review panels

ESG 2.5 - fully compliant

ESG 2.6 -fully compliant

ESG 2.7 - fully compliant

In light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the review panel is satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, HKCAAVQ is in substantial compliance with the ESG.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The panel suggests that HKCAAVQ advances stakeholder involvement in thematic analysis alongside the production timescale.

HKCAAVQ might reconsider its practice to collect feedback from providers only annually and identify ways for structured feedback on a case-by-case basis closer to an individual procedure.

HKCAAVQ might reconsider its understanding of internal quality assurance and add explicitly other instruments such as the feedback-surveys, monitoring the implementation of the strategy, staff development and training activities with view to a more holistic approach to its quality.

HKCAAVQ might consider including a standard for communicating actions planned or taken as a result of monitoring and periodic review of programmes to all those concerned.

HKCAAVQ might continue to assist the sector in developing standards for the recognition of prior, non-formal as well as informal learning.

The panel suggests HKCAAVQ to work together with stakeholders in adapting the methodologies to pursue a stronger enhancement-led approach also documented in their Process.

The panel suggests HKCAAVQ to elaborate on the potential of follow up activities to strengthen the enhancement orientation of its procedures.

The panel encourages HKCAAVQ to negotiate to further the potential of accreditation processes to enhance quality by seeking ways to identify examples of good and effective practice and/or to make commendations as part of their procedures. This would be especially beneficial now with fully published reports and is highly likely to be welcomed by operators.

The panel suggests that the complaints handling process and flowchart are made available through prominent links on the webpage with the complaints form.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

Day 0 – 9 April 2021 (Friday)			
Session	**Timing (CET* – GMT + 2)** **(HKT** – GMT + 8)**	**Topic**	**Persons for interview**
1	09:00 – 11:00 CET 15:00 – 17:00 HKT	Review panel's kick-off meeting and preparations for day 1	
2	11:00 – 11:15 CET 17:00 – 17:15 HKT	Review panel's private discussion	
3	11:15 – 12:15 CET 17:15 – 18:15 HKT	A pre-visit meeting with the agency contact person to clarify elements related to the overall system and context (if requested)	• Mr Albert Chow, Project Mentor and Project Owner of ENQA Review Project Team; Executive Director/ HKCAAVQ • Dr Joe Hong, Deputy Executive Director (Academic)/ HKCAAVQ • Dr Alan Wu, Head of Research & Training/ HKCAAVQ • [Presence of the agency staff for technical support: Claudia Lam, Executive Manager (Corporate Communications)]
End of Day 0 Programme			

Day 1 – 12 April 2021 (Monday)			
Session	**Timing** **(CET* – GMT + 2)** **(HKT** – GMT + 8)**	**Topic**	**Persons for interview**
4	09:30 – 10:15 CET 15:30 – 16:15 HKT	Meeting with the Executive Director and the chair of the Board (or equivalent)	● Ir Dr Alex Chan, Council Chairman/ HKCAAVQ ● Mr Albert Chow, Executive Director/ HKCAAVQ ● [Presence of the agency staff for technical support: Claudia Lam, Executive Manager (Corporate Communications)]
5	10:15 – 10:30 CET 16:15 – 16:30 HKT	Review panel's private discussion	
6	10:30 – 11:15 CET 16:30 – 17:15 HKT	Meeting with the team responsible for preparation of the self-assessment report	● Mr Albert Chow, Project Mentor and Project Owner of ENQA Review Project Team; Executive Director/ HKCAAVQ ● Dr Joe Hong, Deputy Executive Director (Academic)/ HKCAAVQ ● Dr Alan Wu, Head of Research & Training/ HKCAAVQ ● Mr Sam Ho, Registrar of Research & Training/ HKCAAVQ ● Ms Cindy Chan, Head of Executive Support & Corporate Communications/ HKCAAVQ ● Mr Kenny Lock, Executive Officer of Research & Training/ HKCAAVQ

			• [Presence of the agency staff for technical support: Claudia Lam, Executive Manager (Corporate Communications)]
7	11:15 – 11:30 CET 17:15 – 17:30 HKT	Review panel's private discussion	
8	11:30 – 12:15 CET 17:30 – 18:15 HKT	Meeting with representatives from the Senior Management Team	• Mr Albert Chow, Executive Director/ HKCAAVQ • Dr Joe Hong, Deputy Executive Director (Academic)/ HKCAAVQ • Dr Sau-Mee Chiu, Deputy Executive Director (VPET)/ HKCAAVQ • Ms Cindy Chan, Secretary of HKCAAVQ Council • [Presence of the agency staff for technical support: Claudia Lam, Executive Manager (Corporate Communications)] •
9	12:15 – 12:45 CET 18:15 – 18:45 HKT	Wrap-up meeting among panel members and preparations for Day 2	
End of Day 1 Programme			

Day 2 – 13 April 2021 (Tuesday)			
Session	**Timing (CET* – GMT + 2)**	**Topic**	**Persons for interview**

	(HKT** – GMT + 8)		
10	08:30 – 09:00 CET 14:30 – 15:00 HKT	Internal panel preparation	
11	09:00 – 09:45 CET 15:00 – 15:45 HKT	Meeting with key staff of the agency/staff in charge of evaluations	- Dr Eric Li, Deputy Head & Registrar, Academic Accreditation & Assessment/ HKCAAVQ - Dr Fiona Lock, Deputy Head & Registrar, Academic Accreditation & Assessment/ HKCAAVQ - Dr Clara Chong, Registrar, Academic Accreditation & Assessment/ HKCAAVQ - Ms Virginia Tsin, Registrar, Academic Accreditation & Assessment/ HKCAAVQ - Mr Pun-Chi Wong, Assistant Registrar, Academic Accreditation & Assessment/ HKCAAVQ - Dr Daniel Lee, Assistant Registrar, Academic Accreditation & Assessment/ HKCAAVQ - Ms Janice Leung, Executive Officer, Academic Accreditation & Assessment/ HKCAAVQ [Presence of the agency staff for technical support: Claudia Lam, Executive Manager (Corporate Communications)]

12	09:45 – 10:00 CET 15:45 – 16:00 HKT	Review panel's private discussion	
13	10:00 – 10450 CET 16:00 – 17:00 HKT	Meeting with ministry representatives (where relevant) / Education Bureau	• Mr Kasper Ng, Principal Assistant Secretary (Further Education)/ Education Bureau, HK • Mr Martin Wong, Assistant Secretary (Further Education)/ Education Bureau, HK • Mr Steve Lai, General Manager/ Qualifications Framework Secretariat, Education Bureau, HK • [Presence of the agency staff for technical support: Claudia Lam, Executive Manager (Corporate Communications)]
14	10:45 – 11:15 CET 17:00 – 17:15 HKT	Review panel's private discussion	
15	11:15 – 12:15 CET 17:15 – 18:15 HKT	Meeting with HKCAAVQ Council members	• Mr Rock Chen, Council Vice-chairman/ HKCAAVQ • Prof Isabella Poon, Qualifications and Accreditation Committee Chair/ HKCAAVQ • Ir Francis Cheng, Finance Committee Chair/ HKCAAVQ • Mr Anthony Chan, Personnel and Administration Committee Deputy Chair/ HKCAAVQ

			- [Zoom] Prof Bjørn Stensaker, Council Member/ HKCAAVQ - [Zoom] Prof James Calleja, Council Member/ HKCAAVQ - [Presence of the agency staff for technical support: Claudia Lam, Executive Manager (Corporate Communications)] -
16	12:15 – 12:45 CET 18:15 – 18:45 HKT	Wrap-up meeting among panel members and preparations for Day 3	
End of Day 2 Programme			

Day 3 – 14 April 2021 (Wednesday)			
Session	**Timing** **(CET* – GMT + 2)** **(HKT** – GMT + 8)**	**Topic**	**Persons for interview**
17	08:30 – 09:00 CET 14:30 – 15:00 HKT	Internal panel preparation	

18	09:00 – 10:00 CET 15:00 – 16:00 HKT	Meeting with heads of some reviewed HEIs/HEI representatives	- Dr Kim Mak, President/ Caritas Institute of Higher Education, HK - Prof Sally Chan, President/ Tung Wah College, HK - Dr Cheuk-Hay Chan, President/ Hong Kong College of Technology & HKCT Institute of Higher Education, HK - Prof Ronald Chung, Dean of School of Continuing Education/ Hong Kong Baptist University, HK; Chairman of Federation of Self-financing Tertiary Education, HK - Ms Vanessa Bourne, President/ University of Wollongong College Hong Kong, HK - Prof Chiu-Kay Tang, Vice-President (Academic)/ Chu Hai Institute of Higher Education, HK [arrived a bit later] Dr John Leung, Deputy Director, School of Continuing and Professional Education/ The City University of Hong Kong, HK [Presence of the agency staff for technical support: Claudia Lam, Executive Manager (Corporate Communications)]
19	10:00 – 10:15 CET 16:00 – 16:15 HKT	Review panel's private discussion	
20	10:15 – 11:00 CET 16:15 – 17:00 HKT	Meeting with quality assurance officers of HEIs (academic accreditation)	- Dr Albert Cheuk, Director of Quality Enhancement and Learning & Teaching/ Vocational Training Council, HK - Prof Lilian Vrijmoed, Vice-President (Academic)/ University of Wollongong College Hong Kong, HK - Dr Dennis Law/Vice-President (Academic & Quality Assurance)/ Caritas Institute of Higher Education, HK - Dr Benny Chiang, Director/ Hong Kong College of Technology & HKCT Institute of Higher Education, HK

			● Ms Carrie Tam, Quality Assurance Manager, School of Continuing and Professional Education/ The City University of Hong Kong, HK ● [Presence of the agency staff for technical support: Claudia Lam, Executive Manager (Corporate Communications)] ●
21	11:00 – 11:15 CET 17:00 – 17:15 HKT	Review panel's private discussion	
22	11:15 – 12:15 CET 17:15 – 18:15 HKT	Meeting with representatives from the reviewers' pool	● [Zoom] Prof Bruce Brown, Research Professor/Royal College of Art, UK ● [Zoom] Prof Anne Boddington, Pro Vice Chancellor, Research, Business and Innovation/ Kingston University, UK ● [Zoom] Dr Gloria Ge, Director, Master of International Business/ Griffith University, Australia ● [Zoom] Prof Rob Law, University of Macau Development Foundation Chair Professor of Smart Tourism in Asia-Pacific Academy of Economics and Management (designate), University of Macau, Macau; Professor of Technology Management, School of Hotel and Tourism Management/ The Polytechnic University of Hong Kong, HK ● [Zoom] Prof Phyllis Mo, Professor of Department of Accountancy/The City University of Hong Kong, HK
23	12:15 – 12:30 CET 18:15 – 18:30 HKT	Review panel's private discussion	

24	12:30 – 13:15 CET 18:30 – 19:15 HKT	Meeting with quality assurance officers of HEIs (non-local programme accreditation / online programme accreditation)	● Dr Siu-Kau Cheung, Academic Registrar, University of Wollongong College Hong Kong, HK ● Mr Lupin Yiu, Deputy Director, Quality Enhancement and Accreditation Office, Vocational Training Council, HK
25	13:15 – 13:45 CET 19:15 – 19:45 HKT	Wrap up meeting among panel members and preparations for Day 4	

Day 4 – 15 April 2021 (Thursday)			
Session	**Timing (CET* – GMT + 2) (HKT** – GMT + 8)**	**Topic**	**Persons for interview**
26	08:30 – 09:00 CET 14:30 – 15:00 HKT	Internal panel preparation	
27	09:00 – 09:45 CET 15:00 – 15:45 HKT	Meeting with stakeholders, such as employer representatives, students, local community…	● Prof Jimmy Lee, Member of HKCAAVQ Liaison Panel for Academic Accreditation; Former Director (Professional Standards) of Hong Kong Computer Society; Associate Dean (Education), Faculty of Engineering, Division Head of Graduate Division of Finanical Technology/ The Chinese University of Hong Kong, HK ● Prof Agnes Tiwari, Member of HKCAAVQ Liaison Panel for Accreditation of Vocational and Professional Education and Training; Chairperson/ Nursing Council of Hong Kong, HK

			● Dr Homer Tso, Member of HKCAAVQ Liaison Panel for Academic Accreditation; Chairman of Supplementary Medical Professions Council, HK ● Mr Jonathan Ng, Member of HKCAAVQ Liaison Panel for Academic Accreditation; Executive Director, Qualification & Education/ Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants, HK ● Ir Dr Louis Ma, Member of HKCAAVQ Liaison Panel for Academic Accreditation; Vice President (Professional & Career Development) & Honorary Secretary of Hong Kong Computer Society: Director, School of Continuing and Professional Education/ The City University of Hong Kong, HK ● Ms Carrie Leung, Former Member of Steering Committee on Qualifications Framework Fund; Member of Banking Industry Training Advisory Committee; Chief Executive Officer/ The Hong Kong Institute of Bankers, HK ● Mr Hermann Kwan, Graduate/ Gratia Christian College, HK; Representative from 2017/18 cohort of Student Liaising Meeting ● Mr Davy Tsui, Graduate/ De Montfort University
28	09:45 – 10:00 CET 15:45 – 16:00 HKT	Review panel's private discussion	
29	10:00 – 10:45 CET 16:00 – 16:45 HKT	Meeting with stakeholders: students part of liaising activities	● Mr Jason Tam, Graduate/ Centennial College, HK (2018/19 cohort of Student Liaising Meeting) ● Ms Angel Chan, Student/ Hong Kong Shue Yan University, HK (2019/20 cohort of Student Liaising Meeting) ● Mr Michael Lo, Student/ HKU School of Professional and Continuing Education, HK (2020/21 cohort of Student Liaising Meeting) ●

29a	10:45 – 11:15 CET 16:45 – 17:15 HKT	Demonstration on Quality Management System by staff	● Dr Joe Hong, Deputy Executive Director (Academic) ● In attendance, Mr Albert Chow, Executive Director
30	11:15 – 11:45 CET 17:15 – 17:45 HKT	Meeting among panel members to agree on final issues to clarify	
31	11:45 – 12:15 CET 17:45 – 18:15 HKT	Meeting with CEO to clarify any pending issues	● Mr Albert Chow, Executive Director/ HKCAAVQ
32	12:45 – 13:15 CET 18:45 – 19:15 HKT	Wrap-up meeting among panel members and preparations for Day 5 and provisional conclusions	

Day 5 – 16 April 2021 (Friday)			
Session	Timing (CET* – GMT + 2) (HKT** – GMT + 8)	Topic	Persons for interview
33	09:00 – 11:00 CET 15:00 – 17:00 HKT	Private meeting among panel members to agree on the main findings	

	11:00 – 11:10 CET 17:00 – 17:10 HKT	Meeting with CEO to clarify any pending issues	• Mr Albert Chow, Ex-officio Council Member and Executive Director/ HKCAAVQ • Dr Joe Hong, Deputy Executive Director (Academic)/ HKCAAVQ • Dr Sau-Mee Chiu, Deputy Executive Director (VPET)/ HKCAAVQ • Ms Cindy Chan, Secretary of HKCAAVQ Council
34	11:10 – 11:30 CET 17:10 – 17:30 HKT	Final de-briefing meeting with staff and Council/Board members of the agency to inform about preliminary findings	• Mr Albert Chow, Ex-officio Council Member and Executive Director/ HKCAAVQ • Dr Joe Hong, Deputy Executive Director (Academic)/ HKCAAVQ • Dr Sau-Mee Chiu, Deputy Executive Director (VPET)/ HKCAAVQ • Ms Cindy Chan, Secretary of HKCAAVQ Council
End of Day 5 Programme			

ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW

External review of the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic & Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE

October 2019

1. Background and Context

Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic & Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) is applying for the external evaluation of the agency's quality assurance activities, as listed under point 2.1 of this document, against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). HKCAAVQ does not seek membership in ENQA nor registration on European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). The review is undertaken by the agency as a process to stimulate trust in quality assurance and quality of its higher education, and to support and add to the legitimacy of the agency as an internationally recognised external quality assurance agency.

Key Information of HKCAAVQ

- HKCAAVQ is an independent statutory body established in 1990 providing quality assurance and assessment services to education and training institutions, course providers and the general public. 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.

- The vision of HKCAAVQ is to be a nationally and globally recognised independent quality assurance body in education and training, dedicated to high quality accreditation, assessment and consultancy services.

- The mission of HKCAAVQ is to safeguard the credibility of qualifications under the Qualifications Framework and enhances the quality of education and training in Hong Kong through provision of efficient and effective quality assurance services.

- The four-year Strategic Plan (2015-2019) builds on the Vision and Mission with implementation of the Plan monitored through annual progress reports from the Secretariat to the Council.

- In Hong Kong, accreditation by HKCAAVQ is mandatory for local programmes offered by non-self-accrediting institutions carrying the award titles of Associate Degree, Higher Diploma, Bachelor Degree or other higher degrees. Non-self-accrediting institutions that wish to operate programmes at Bachelor degree level or above are required to seek registration under the *Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance* (Cap 320). HKCAAVQ conducts Institutional Review (IR) for institutions that wish to seek registration under Cap 320 as a consultant.

- In 2009, HKCAAVQ started to extend its accreditation services to non-local programmes (NLPs) which are registered under/exempted from registration under the *Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance* (Cap 493). Accreditation of NLPs is voluntary.

- In 2016, HKCAAVQ also started to conduct IR for institutions that wish to seek private university title. After a successful IR, institutions can apply for the granting of private university title to the Chief-Executive-in-Council. HKCAAVQ also conducts this work as a consultant.

- Under Section 4(2)(a) of the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 1150), HKCAAVQ may, subject to the prior approval of the Secretary for Education, conduct accreditation tests outside Hong Kong. This includes non-QF accreditation service for accredited Hong Kong Operators offering learning programme outside Hong Kong, primarily in Mainland China; as well as institutional and programme reviews for higher education institutions outside Hong Kong, primarily Macao.

2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

This review will evaluate the way in which and to what extent the core quality assurance activities of HKCAAVQ meet the ESG. The outcomes of the review will not be considered for the membership of HKCAAVQ in ENQA nor as the registration of the agency on EQAR. The review panel is not expected to make any judgements as regards granting membership in ENQA.

2.1 Activities of HKCAAVQ within the scope of the ESG

This review will analyse the core quality assurance activities of HKCAAVQ that are within the scope of the ESG, i.e. reviews, audits, evaluations or accreditation of higher education institutions or programmes that relate to teaching and learning (and their relevant links to research and innovation).

The following Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (QF) related accreditation activities of HKCAAVQ will be addressed in the external review:

- Academic accreditation (Four-stage Quality Assurance Process under QF)
    - Initial evaluation
    - Learning programme accreditation and re-accreditation
    - Programme area accreditation
    - Periodic Institutional review
- Accreditation of non-local programmes
- Accreditation for online programmes

3. The Review Process

The process is designed in the light of the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews*.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation of the Terms of Reference and protocol for the review;
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel;
- Self-assessment by HKCAAVQ including the preparation of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to HKCAAVQ;
- Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report by the review panel;
- Scrutiny of the final evaluation report by the ENQA Review Committee;
- Analysis of the scrutiny by the ENQA Board;
- Follow-up of the panel's and/or ENQA Board's recommendations by the agency, including a voluntary progress visit.

3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members

The review panel consists of five members: two quality assurance experts, an academic employed by a higher education institution, student member, and an additional member with knowledge and understanding of the context of higher education and quality assurance in Hong Kong. One of the

members will serve as the chair of the review panel, and another member as a review secretary. For ENQA Agency Reviews at least one of the reviewers is an ENQA nominee (most often the QA professional[s]). At least one of the reviewers is appointed from the nominees of either the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), and the student member is always selected from among the ESU-nominated reviewers. The additional member may be drawn from the large number of UK academics that have worked in Hong Kong or other European academics that have had experience in higher education or quality assurance of higher education in Hong Kong.

In addition to the five members, the panel will be supported by the ENQA Secretariat review coordinator who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA expectations are met throughout the process. The ENQA staff member will not be the Secretary of the review and will not participate in the discussions during the site visit interviews.

Current members of the ENQA Board are not eligible to serve as reviewers.

ENQA will provide HKCAAVQ with the list of suggested experts with their respective curriculum vitae to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The experts will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement as regards HKCAAVQ review.

3.2 Self-assessment by HKCAAVQ, including the preparation of a self-assessment report

HKCAAVQ is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-assessment process and shall take into account the following guidance:

- Self-assessment is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;
- The self-assessment report is broken down by the topics of the evaluation and is expected to contain, among others: a brief description of the national HE and QA system; background description of the current situation of the Agency; an analysis and appraisal of the current situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a SWOT analysis; each criterion (ESG part II and III) addressed individually. The agency's QA activities as listed under point 2.1 of this document will be described and reflected upon to what extent do they meet the ESG.
- The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which HKCAAVQ fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG.
- The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat who has four weeks to pre-scrutinise it before forwarding the report to the panel of experts. The purpose of the pre-scrutiny is to ensure that the self-assessment report is satisfactory for the consideration of the panel. The Secretariat will not judge the content of information itself but whether the necessary information, as stated in the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews, is present. In case the self-assessment report does not contain the necessary information and fails to respect the requested form and content, the ENQA Secretariat reserves the right to reject the report and ask for a revised version within four weeks. In such cases, an additional fee of 1000 EUR will be charged to the agency.
- The report is submitted to the review panel a minimum of six weeks prior to the site visit.

3.3 A Site Visit by the Review Panel

HKCAAVQ will draw up a draft proposal of the schedule for the site visit to be submitted to the review panel at least two months before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule includes an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the site visit, the duration of which is 2,5 days. The approved schedule shall be given to HKCAAVQ at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The review panel will be assisted by HKCAAVQ in arriving in 10 Siu Sai Wan Road, Chai Wan, Hong Kong.

The site visit will close with a final de-briefing meeting outlining the panel's overall impressions but not presenting the findings on whether the agency's activities as listed under point 2.1 of this document meet the ESG.

3.4 Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report

On the basis of the review panel's findings, the review secretary will draft the report in consultation with the review panel. The report will take into account the purpose and scope of the evaluation as defined under articles 2 and 2.1. It will also provide a clear rationale for its findings with regards to each ESG. A draft will be first submitted to the ENQA review coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity and language and it will be then submitted to HKCAAVQ within 11 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If HKCAAVQ chooses to provide a statement in reference to the draft report it will be submitted to the chair of the review panel within two weeks after the receipt of the draft report. Thereafter the review panel will take into account the statement by HKCAAVQ, finalise the document and submit it to ENQA.

The report is to be finalised within three months of the site visit and will not exceed 40 pages in length.

4. Follow-up Process and Publication of the Report

HKCAAVQ will consider the expert panel's report and will publish it on its website once the ENQA Board has made its decision. The report will also be published on the ENQA website, regardless of the review outcome and decision by the ENQA Board. HKCAAVQ commits to preparing a follow-up plan in which it addresses the recommendations of the review panel and to submitting a follow-up report to the ENQA Board. The follow-up report will be published on the ENQA website, in addition to the full review report and the Board's decision stating to what extent the agency's activities as listed under point 2.1 of this document meet the ESG.

The follow-up report will be complemented by a small-scale visit to the agency performed by two members of the original panel (whenever possible). This visit will be used to discuss issues, based on the ESG, considered as of particular importance or challenge by HKCAAVQ. Its purpose is entirely developmental and has no impact on the decision stating to what extent the agency's activities as listed under point 2.1 of this document meet the ESG. Should the agency not wish to take advantage of this opportunity, it may opt out by informing the ENQA Review Coordinator about this.

5. Use of the report

ENQA shall retain ownership of the report. The intellectual property of all works created by the expert panel in connection with the review contract, including specifically any written reports, shall be vested in ENQA.

The review report is used by the Board of ENQA for the purpose of reaching a conclusion on whether HKCAAVQ has met the ESG. The review report is to be considered final only after being approved by the ENQA Board. Once submitted to HKCAAVQ and ENQA and until it is approved by the Board the report may not be used or relied upon by HKCAAVQ, the panel and any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. HKCAAVQ may use the report at its discretion only after the Board has approved of the report.

6. Budget

HKCAAVQ shall pay the following review related fees:

Fee of the Chair	4,500 EUR
Fee of the Secretary	4,500 EUR
Fee of the 3 other panel members	6,000 EUR (2,000 EUR each)
Fee of 2 panel members for progress visit	1,000 EUR (500 EUR each)
Administrative overhead for ENQA Secretariat	7,000 EUR
Experts Training fund	1,400 EUR
Approximate travel and subsistence expenses	20,600 EUR
Travel and subsistence expenses for progress visit	7,000 EUR

This gives a total indicative cost of 52,000.00 EUR VAT excl. for a review team of 5 members. In the case that the allowance for travel and subsistence expenses is exceeded, HKCAAVQ will cover any additional costs after the completion of the review. However, the ENQA Secretariat will endeavour to keep the travel and subsistence expenses in the limits of the planned budget, and will refund the difference to HKCAAVQ if the travel and subsistence expenses go under budget.

The fee of the progress visit is included in the overall cost of the review and will not be reimbursed in case the agency does not wish to benefit from it.

In the event of a second site visit required by the Board and aiming at completing the assessment of compliance (i.e. the extent to which the agency's activities as listed under point 2.1 of this document meet the ESG), and should the agency accept a second visit, an additional fee of 500 EUR per expert, as well as travel and subsistence costs are recoverable from the agency.

7. Indicative Schedule of the Review

Agreement on terms of reference	October 2019
Appointment of review panel members	May 2020
Self-assessment completed	15 August 2020
Pre-screening of SAR by ENQA coordinator	August/September 2020
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	September 2020
Briefing of review panel members	October 2020
Review panel site visit	Late-November 2020
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	Late-January 2021
Draft of evaluation report to the agency	February 2021
Statement of the agency to review panel if necessary	March 2021
Submission of final report to ENQA	April 2021
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board	May 2021
Publication of the report	May 2021

ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

AAA	Academic Accreditation and Assessment Unit
AAVQO	Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance
APQN	Asia-Pacific Quality Network
EB	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
GGP	Guidelines of Good Practice in Quality Assurance
Government	Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
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
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
Manual	Manual for the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process
NCR	The Non-Local Courses Registry
NLP	Non-local learning programmes
OLP	Online learning programmes
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
QMS	Quality Management System of HKCAAVQ
QR	Qualifications Register
Re-LPA	Learning Programme Re-accreditation of Four-stage Quality Assurance Process
SED	Secretary for Education
SSC	Specialists Selection Committee of HKCAAVQ
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
TNE	Transnational Education
UGC	University Grants Committee
VTC	Vocational Training Council

ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW

DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY HKCAAVQ

- Annex 1: An Overview of Hong Kong's Higher Education Landscape
- Annex 2: Membership of the HKCAAVQ Council
- Annex 3: Membership of the Standing Committees under the HKCAAVQ Council
- Annex 4: Membership of the Liaison Panel for Academic Accreditation
- Annex 5: Code of Conduct in Performing HKCAAVQ Duties
- Annex 6: Stages of the Accredited Institutions by HKCAAVQ
- Annex 7: Profile of the Register of Specialists
- Annex 8: Risk Register
- Annex 9: Annual Risk Management Return
- Attachment I: Manual for the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework
- HKCAAVQ Strategic Plan 2019-2023
- The Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China
- Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance (Cap. 320)
- Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 592)
- Full report of the Comparability Study of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework and the European Qualifications Framework
- The Chief Executive's 2017 Policy Address: We Connect for Hope and Happiness
- Task Force on Review of Self-financing Post-secondary Education Review Report: "Parallel Development, Promoting Diversity"
- Legislative Council Panel on Education – Review of Self-financing Post-secondary Education
- Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 1150)
- Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Cap. 592)
- HKCAAVQ Annual Reports (including Financial Reports)
- Evidence Guide for Academic Accreditation
- Guidance Notes on Substantial Change to Accreditation Status
- HKCAAVQ Strategic Plan 2019-2023
- HKCAAVQ Annual Reports
- Review of the Accreditation Standards under the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process: Summary of Findings
- Review of Accreditation Standards and Criteria: Consultation Document
- Revised Accreditation Standards under the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process
- Development of a Differentiated Approach in Accreditation (paper presented at New Developments of Teaching and Learning Quality Assurance in Higher Education, Macao)
- Differentiation in Accreditation (presentation delivered at HKQF International Conference 2018)
- Code of Conduct for Panels
- Declaration Form (Panel Member)
- Declaration Form (Operator)
- Policy and Guidelines on Observing Accreditation Site Visit
- Declaration Form for Observers
- Declaration of Conflict of Interests (for HKCAAVQ staff)
- Report on the outcomes of the collection of feedback from operators and panel members

- Report on the External Review of Compliance with the Good Practice Guidelines of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAAHE)
- Progress Report: INQAAHE External Review
- Common Descriptors for Associate Degree and Higher Diploma Programmes under the New Academic Structure
- Revised Generic Level Descriptors with Explanatory Notes under Hong Kong Qualifications Framework
- Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance (Cap. 320)
- Policy on Specialists Appointment and Management
- HKCAAVQ Newsletters
- Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (Appeal) Rules (Cap. 592A)
- Principles and Procedures for Handling Complaints about HKCAAVQ
- Code of Conduct for Panels
- Survey reports for training activities
- HKCAAVQ Business Model

OTHER SOURCES USED BY THE REVIEW PANEL
HKCAAVQ website

ENQA AGENCY
REVIEW 2021

THIS REPORT presents findings of the ENQA Agency Review of the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ), undertaken in 2021.

enqa.

European Association for
Quality Assurance in Higher Education