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HOW TO ADAPT INTERNATIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE APPROACHES TO HONG KONG?

A diary-based approach to analyse quality assurance approaches of quality assurance bodies

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ABSTRACT

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Hong Kong has witnessed the booming developing of the self-financed higher education sector in the last two decades. Quality issue perceived by the public still remains uncertain. Meanwhile, as a result of the policy change, the Continuing Education Fund courses by private training providers are required to seek accreditation to have the programmes quality-assured by the quality assurance agency in Hong Kong. Against this backdrop, the changing landscape in both the academic and the vocational and professional education and training sectors in Hong Kong is expected to impact the roles performed by the sole quality assurance agency in Hong Kong and the quality assurance approaches that have been implemented.

A wealth of literature suggests the relationship among quality assurance, trust and accountability (Abebe, 2021; Massy, 2011; Stensaker & Harvey, 2011a; Stensaker & Harvey, 2011b; Stensaker & Massen, 2015; Yingqiang & Yongjian, 2016; Trow, 1996). This study aims to evaluate the quality assurance approaches adopted by different quality assurance agencies to determine whether these approaches can be adapted to Hong Kong. The study is conducted using diary-based approach according to which thematic diary entries are documented with review and analyses.

This study is expected to benefit the quality assurance agency in Hong Kong with regards to ways of adopting international quality assurance approaches. On a personal level, the author is able to acquire an overview of quality assurance agencies that are set up with diverse purposes, scope of review, methods of review and how their quality assurance approaches are associated with the notion of trust and accountability.

Keywords: Quality, quality assurance, quality enhancement, trust, accreditation, quality assurance agency

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1 INTRODUCTION

This section sets the stage for the study of how to adapt international quality assurance approaches to Hong Kong. The first part will provide a brief background for this research. Then, the second part will be a discussion of the need for this research. The next section will describe my personal interests for this research while the last section will outline the research questions.

1.1 Background

The issues concerning quality, quality assurance and quality enhancement in higher education attract discussions and interests from numerous international organisations (Elassy, 2015). For example, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation exhibits concerns with quality assurance in education (Elassy, 2015). Besides, quality assurance bodies such as International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) has been established to provide a platform supporting other quality assurance agencies around the world. The emergence of other regional quality assurance bodies such as European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA) or similar bodies in Asia indicates the significance of quality issues (Elassy, 2015).

The education and training landscape in Hong Kong has witnessed significant changes with rapid developments of the self-financed post-secondary sector¹ since 2000, largely driven by the Government's policy of giving secondary school leavers more opportunities to receive post-secondary education (Task Force on Review of Self-financing Post-Secondary Education Consultation Document, 2018). This is also aligned with the Government's support of 'parallel development' of the publicly-funded and the self-financed sectors (Task Force on Review of Self-financing Post-Secondary Education Consultation Document, 2018). According to this report (2018), In spite of the booming developments alongside the efforts made in this sector, the quality issue as perceived by the public remains uncertain regarding the long-term prospect of the self-financed institutions in this sector.

¹ Self-financed post-secondary institutions refer to institutions that do not receive recurrent public subvention for their operation. These institutions include Caritas Institute of Higher Education, Centennial College, Chu Hai College of Higher Education, Gratia Christian College, Hang Seng Management College, HKCT Institute of Higher Education, Hong Kong Nang Yan College of Higher Education, Hong Kong Shue Yan University, Technological and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong under the Vocational Training Council, The Open University of Hong Kong, and Tung Wah College (Task Force on Review of Self-financing Post-Secondary Education Consultation Document).

According to the Review of Self-financing Post-secondary Education by the Task Force set up by the Government (2018), the discussion centered on whether the Government should play a more proactive role in regulating how the self-financed sector develops. The other discussion focuses on whether the Government should take proactive actions to enhance their quality and governance to promote public recognition (Task Force on Review of Self-financing Post-Secondary Education Consultation Document, 2018).

In the vocational and professional education and training sector, it is a market with lots of small to medium private training providers, partially driven by the Continuing Education Fund (CEF)² initiated by the Government to subsidise learners for lifelong learning. With the implementation of the enhanced measures by the Labour and Welfare Bureau of the Government, all CEF courses are subjected to accreditation to guarantee course quality (LC Paper of Review of Continuing Education Fund and Proposed Funding Injection, 2017). As a result of these enhanced measures, all Continuing Education Fund courses registered under the Qualifications Register are quality-assured by the appropriate accreditation authorities, that is by Hong Kong Accreditation Council of Academic and Vocational Qualifications³ (HKCAAVQ) or self-accrediting universities (LC Paper of Review of Continuing Education Fund and Proposed Funding Injection, 2017). It is estimated that around 1,800 CEF courses that are registered by non-self-accrediting institutions need to undergo accreditation for registration under QR before they are eligible for continuing to be registered as CEF courses within a transitional period of 4 years. It is expected that there is a surge in the number of VPET training providers seeking accreditation by HKCAAVQ in the coming few years.

The changing landscape in both the academic and the vocational and professional education and training (VPET) sectors in Hong Kong is expected to impact the roles performed by HKCAAVQ and the quality assurance approaches that have been implemented. Since the launch of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process in 2008, HKCAAVQ promulgated the standards and criteria of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process⁴ which set out the minimum requirements in relation to

² The Continuing Education Fund (CEF) is set up by Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) of the Government in Hong Kong to subsidise adults with learning aspirations to pursue continuing education and training (CEF website).

³ Established since 1990, HKCAAVQ is the statutory body that provides authoritative advice on academic standards of degree programmes in higher education institutions in Hong Kong (HKCAAVQ website).

⁴ In Hong Kong, HKCAAVQ adopts a Four-Stage Quality Assurance (QA) Process to accredit operators (or training providers) and their learning programmes under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (QF). The four stages are Initial Evaluation (IE), Learning Programme Accreditation (LPA), Programme Area Accreditation (PAA) and Periodic

training providers and learning programmes for entry into the Qualifications Register (QR), with reference to the outcome-based Generic Level Descriptors (GLD) of the HKQF. Reviewed is initiated in response to the changing market landscape, the last of which was 2013 with a complete review of Four-stage Quality Assurance Process.

Against such backdrop, a study will be conducted to evaluate the quality assurance approaches adopted by a few quality assurance bodies in different regions and analyse how these approaches are linked to the dimensions of trust (Abebe, 2021). The last part of the study will highlight the evaluation of how and whether these quality assurance approaches can be adopted in Hong Kong and what the potential challenges may be.

1.2 The rationale for conducting this research

A wealth of studies suggest that trust occupies a core place in higher education, higher education institutions and quality assurance systems (Stensaker & Gornitzka, 2009; Stensaker & Maassen, 2015; Trow, 1996; Vidovich & Currie, 2011; Yingqiang & Yongjian, 2016; Zalec, 2013). It is also widely argued that quality assurance brings positive impacts through restoring and consolidating stakeholders' trust on higher education and higher education institutions (Elassy, 2015; Huber 2013; Van Damme, 2002; Yingqiang & Yongjian, 2016).

Trust is also theorised to be a significant component of any quality assurance system and process (Stensaker & Massen, 2015; Yingqiang & Yongjian, 2016). Hence, it is essential to maintain trust between the major stakeholders of quality management processes in order for quality assurance to function effectively in an institution (Abebe, 2021).

The review of the literature suggests that topics such as governance (e.g. issues of accountability, management and leadership) (e.g. Aasen & Stensaker, 2007; De Boer, 2002; Hansen et al., 2019), quality assurance (e.g. Bergan, 2012; Huber, 2013; Stensaker & Massen, 2013) as well as the interaction between higher education institutions and stakeholders (e.g. government, the public, the industry, market and media as well as issues of student loyalty and university brand) (e.g. Bok, 1992; Perin et al., 2012; Trow, 1996). However, the discussion of trust

Institutional Review (PIR)(HKCAAVQ website). It starts with an institutional approach followed by programme-level approach which sets itself apart from the other QA bodies (HKCAAVQ website).

in quality assurance has not been well-established (Abebe, 2021). This research may shed light on the discussion of trust that is linked to quality assurance.

1.3 My person interests in this research

With close to four years devoted to undertaking accreditation at HKCAAVQ, I have been conducting a variety of accreditation exercises. In terms of the nature of the accreditation exercises, they range from initial evaluation⁵, learning programme accreditation⁶, and learning programme accreditation⁷ to non-QF accreditation⁸ from diverse industries such as interior design, banking, immigration services, correctional services to racing, mental health, cycling, property management. The scope of my work focuses mostly in the context of Hong Kong. Hence, being well-versed with the four-stage quality assurance Process as well as the accreditation standards is a must for performing my roles and responsibilities.

However, given my practical experience on accreditation alongside my wealth of experience in the education sector from self-financed institution, to edtech startup and statutory body, and in multiple capacity, there is a much stronger need for me to grow professionally moving forward to understand how quality assurance is practiced by other quality assurance bodies in other regions and the principles guiding those practices and the diverse approaches. Besides, my current involvement in a consultancy project also makes it necessary for me to review the different quality assurance bodies in terms of their set-up, governance structure, internal and external quality assurance.

Hence, this research will allow me to build the bigger picture of the world of quality assurance as well as understanding the key concepts associated with quality assurance.

⁵ IE is an evaluation of whether a programme provider has the organisational competency to effectively manage and provide adequate resources for the development, delivery, assessment and quality assurance of its learning programmes and educational/training services (HKCAAVQ website).

⁶ LPA is an overall evaluation of a learning programme to determine whether its planning and management, syllabuses, delivery arrangements and assessment methods, are able to achieve its claimed objectives and deliver its intended learning outcomes (HKCAAVQ website).

⁷ Learning programme re-accreditation is the re-accreditation of programmes before the expiry date of their learning programme accreditation (previously known as "programme validation") validity period (HKCAAVQ website).

⁸ 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. HKCAAVQ has decided to introduce a non-QF accreditation service for accredited Hong Kong Operators offering learning programme outside Hong Kong, primarily in Mainland China. The accreditation certifies the quality of the programme and does not infer any recognition of the qualification(s) issued by the operator under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework or in Mainland China (HKCAAVQ website).

1.4 Research Questions

- to identify the different approaches adopted by quality assurance bodies to evaluate quality assurance agencies and/or training providers
- to analyse how these approaches are linked to the dimensions of trust
- to evaluate how these approaches can be adapted in Hong Kong and to identify the potential challenges

2 THE CONTEXT FOR RESEARCH

After providing an overview of the background of this study and the research purpose, this section will describe the research context. The first section will briefly introduce the company the author works for as well as the education landscape in Hong Kong. Section two describe the major stakeholders and their significance to the work of HKCAAVQ. The next two sections will outline the author's role and responsibilities as well as the competence requirements. The author's stage of professional development and development needs will also be described setting the stage for later diary entries and analysis. The last section will be the literature review of the body of literature covering key concepts including quality, quality assurance, quality enhancement, the concept of trust and accountability.

2.1 Introduction of Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) and the research context

Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ), formerly known as the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA), was established in 1990 by the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (Government) as an independent statutory body to provide advice on academic standards of degree programmes in higher education institutions in Hong Kong. Following the reconstitution of HKCAAVQ in 2007 under the HKCAAVQ Ordinance Chapter 1150, a few changes to its roles have taken place (HKCAAVQ website).

- HKCAAVQ is also responsible for the accreditation of the vocational and professional education and training sector in Hong Kong.
- HKCAAVQ also assumes the statutory roles as the Accreditation Authority and Qualifications Register Authority under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework under the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Chapter 592)(HKCAAVQ website)

The spectrum of services provided by HKCAAVQ include:

- accreditation of vocational qualifications in the vocational, professional education and training sector;
- assessment services (e.g. of the Continuing Professional Development CPD of Hong Kong Insurance Authority);
- assessment services of individual qualifications;
- research and training;
- advisory and consultancy services in education qualifications and standards to government bureaux and other organisations in Hong Kong and the Asia-Pacific region

2.1.1 List of ordinances governing HKCAAVQ's work and authority

The accreditation work is governed by a list of ordinances that outline clearly the scope of HKCAAVQ's major work and authority (see table 1).

TABLE 1. List of ordinances⁹ outlining the scope of work and authority of HKCAAVQ

Ordinance	Purpose	Scope of HKCAAVQ's Major Work and Authorisation
Cap. 1150 "Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance"	Reconstitution of HKCAA to include accreditation of vocational qualifications to form HKCAAVQ	Being a statutory quality assurance body <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Conduct accreditation tests generally and as authorised under any other enactment b. Conduct accreditation tests in relation to individuals c. Conduct accreditation and consultancy services in HKSAR and, subject to the approval of Secretary for Education conduct accreditation tests and consultancy services outside of HKSAR

⁹[https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/files/about-us/about-hkcaavq/List of ordinances in HKSAR related to HKCAAVQ Eng 20.8.2015.pdf](https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/files/about-us/about-hkcaavq/List%20of%20ordinances%20in%20HKSAR%20related%20to%20HKCAAVQ%20Eng%2020.8.2015.pdf)

Cap. 592 “Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance”	Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications; and Establishment of Qualifications Framework (QF) and Qualifications Register (QR)	<p>a. As the Accreditation Authority: subject to the direction of the Secretary for Education, develop and implement the standards and mechanism for academic or vocational qualifications accreditation (4-Stage QA Process); conduct accreditation tests</p> <p>b. As the QR Authority: maintain QR</p>
Cap. 592A Appeal Rules for Cap. 592	Appeal provisions under Cap. 592	An operator, assessment agency or granting body aggrieved by HKCAAVQ's determination or decision under section 11(1) of Cap. 592 may appeal to the Appeal Board
Cap. 320 “Post Secondary Colleges Ordinance”	Registration and control of certain post-secondary colleges and their consequent exemption from the provisions of the Education Ordinance (Cap. 279)	The Education Bureau requests post-secondary colleges to commission HKCAAVQ to undertake Institutional Review (IR) for Cap. 320 registration purpose
Cap. 493 “Non-Local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance”	Regulation of courses of higher and professional education leading to the award of non-local qualifications conducted in Hong Kong	Appointed HKCAAVQ as the adviser by the Registrar of Non-local Higher and Professional Education Courses to provide advice on registration of courses and annual returns etc.

2.1.2 HKCAAVQ organisation and structure

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 (see figure 1) (ENQA Agency Review Report, 2021).

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 (ENQA Agency Review Report, 2021).

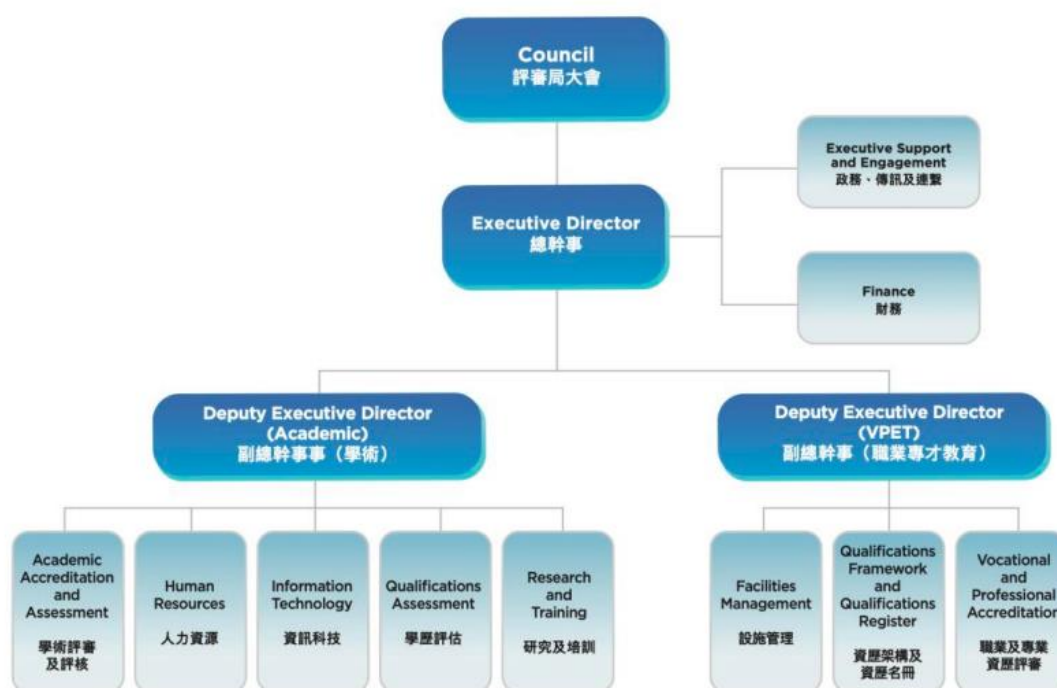


FIGURE 1. Organisational structure of HKVAAVQ (ENQA Agency Review Report, 2021)

2.1.3 HKCAAVQ funding

The HKSAR Government does not provide any recurring funding to HKCAAVQ except for the maintenance of the Qualifications Register (QR). However, the HKSAR 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. HKCAAVQ is primarily financed through charging fees for accreditation services and assessment/advisory/consultancy services rendered to the institutions (ENQA Agency Review Report, 2021).

2.1.4 Higher education and quality assurance system of HKCAAVQ

2.1.4.1 Higher education system in Hong Kong

In Hong Kong, the Education Bureau (EDB) of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (the Government) is responsible for formulating, developing and reviewing the education policies of all levels.

Hong Kong is characterised by 12 years of free primary and secondary education. Primary and secondary education is mandatory for those aged six till fifteen. Upon completing secondary education, students will sit the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE).

At the post-secondary/tertiary level, both the publicly-funded and the self-financing sectors provide a variety of higher education programmes. According to the Government's policy, they support the parallel development of the publicly funded and self-financing sectors in broadening and diversifying study opportunities (Education Bureau website).

The publicly funded sector includes eight self-accrediting universities funded by University Grants Committee (UGC), the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (HKAPA), and the Vocational Training Council (VTC) (Education Bureau website). In the self-financed sector, there are 22 higher education institutions which use the accreditation services of HKCAAVQ.

2.1.4.2 Quality assurance system in Hong Kong

Publicly-funded higher education institutions (funded by University Grants Committee and with self-accrediting authority) and their programmes are subject to quality audits by Quality Assurance Council (QAC), a semi-autonomous non-statutory body under UGC. These quality audits are not conducted or fall under the responsibilities of HKCAAVQ.

Except for all self-accrediting universities, all other higher education institutions must be registered under the Post-Secondary Colleges Ordinance (Cap. 320) as registered post-secondary colleges in order to award degrees. Any registered post-secondary colleges which

plans to offer a new degree programme needs to seek academic accreditation by HKAAVQ or through Programme Area Accreditation status granted by HKCAAVQ before being considered by the Chief Executive in Council under the Post-Secondary Colleges Ordinance.

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 authority of HKCAAVQ (HKCAAVQ website).

Besides, 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 or exemption from registration. The Non-Local Courses Registry (NCR), which is a unit of the Education Bureau (EDB) that enforces Cap. 493, usually seeks advice from HKCAAVQ on academic matters relating to registration of these degrees (HKCAAVQ website).

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

In Hong Kong, the accreditation is underpinned by the Hong Kong Qualifications Frameworks (HKQF), standards and processes of which are developed by HKCAAVQ. Launched in 2008 by the EDB of the Government, HKQF is a seven-level hierarchy covering qualifications in the academic, vocational, professional and continuing education sectors (QFS website). It aims to promote and support lifelong learning as well as continuously enhancing the quality, professionalism and competitiveness of the work force in a globalised and knowledge-based economy (HKQF website). Qualifications that are recognised under the HKQF are quality-assured and level-rated according to the objective and well-defined standards (HKQF website). The Qualifications Register (QR) is a centralised online database that is accessible and visible to the public which contains information of quality-assured qualifications and their training providers (QFS website).

In accordance with the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (AAVQO) (Cap. 592), HKCAAVQ also performs the statutory roles of the Accreditation Authority

and the Qualifications Register (QR) Authority. HKCAAVQ is responsible for safeguarding the quality and the standards of the learning programmes recognised under the HKQF. Hence, qualifications must be accredited by HKCAAVQ (besides those qualifications of the self-accrediting universities) before they are eligible for being entered into the QR. Under the AAVQO (Cap. 592), HKCAAVQ performs the dual roles of a gate-opener and a gate keeper (HKCAAVQ website).

As a gate-opener, HKCAAVQ supports training providers in understanding the minimum accreditation requirements through the provision of information and training about the accreditation standards and process (HKCAAVQ website). HKCAAVQ also performs its gate-keeping role through the accreditation process to ensure that HKQF-recognised programmes and qualifications are meeting the HKQF standards under the specified level of the HKQF (HKCAAVQ website)

2.2 Stakeholders of HKCAAVQ and their interests in accreditation

Stakeholder is defined as ‘an individual or group who can affect the achievement of an organisation’s objectives or who is affected by the achievement of an organisation’s objectives’ (Freeman & Reed, 1983, p, 91). It is understood that organisations have relationship with its stakeholders whose competing interests in an organization may put an organisation at stake (Hult et al., 2011). As a result of such competing stake, organisations may strive to achieve an equilibrium in navigating along these relationships (Hult et al., 2011). Quality assurance agencies such as HKCAAVQ are held accountable to diverse stakeholders to demonstrate that the quality assurance processes conducted are credible, objective and the outcome is reliable (INQAAHE QAP Graduate Programme Materials, 2011). A diverse number of stakeholders have interests in the scope of work of HKCAAVQ (see table 2).

TABLE 2. Summary of major stakeholders of HKCAAVQ

Stakeholder	Their interests in the scope of work of HKCAAVQ
HKCAAVQ Council (Council)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor and review the work of the Secretariat
HKCAAVQ Secretariat (Secretariat)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement the accreditation work

Education Bureau (EDB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • formulate and implement education policies in Hong Kong
Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • responsible for employment, labour development, manpower, human resources management, poverty reduction and social welfare in Hong Kong
Specialists of HKCAAVQ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engaged as the panel during accreditation • provide expertise and deliberate accreditation decision during accreditation • specialists with a spectrum of expertise and diverse background
Qualifications Frameworks Secretariat (QFS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • executive arm of EDB • develop, implement and promote the Qualifications Frameworks (HKQF)
Training Providers (both private and public)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • private/public training providers seek accreditation of their organisation and/or learning programmes • variety of training providers from vocational institutions (e.g. Vocational Training Council), self-financing academic institutions (e.g. Caritas Bianchi College of Careers, Hong Kong College of Technology) to corporates of diverse industries and sectors (e.g. disciplinary units, banking, nongovernment organisations, retailers, healthcare organisations)
Teaching Faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teaching faculty involved in programme management and programme delivery of the accredited programmes
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • students who plan to study or are studying the accredited learning programmes • being awarded the accredited qualifications upon completing an accredited programme
Licensing Authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review, approve and recognise accredited learning programmes linked to professional licenses • For example, Nursing Council, Social Welfare Department
Professional Bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review, approve and recognise accredited learning programmes linked to professional licenses • For example, Hong Kong Institute of Bankers

Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • employers to trust accredited qualifications of potential employees • the Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITAC) set up by the EDB on industry or sector basis to serve as a platform for stakeholders to put the QF into implementation and to exchange views on the training needs and manpower development for respective industries or sectors.
Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the public to trust the credibility of accredited qualifications
Overseas Quality Assurance Bodies (QA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognise the accreditation by HKCAAVQ • benchmarking of QF levels • benchmarking of qualifications in respective jurisdiction

2.2.1 The HKCAAVQ Council (Council)

As HKCAAVQ is governed by the Council while the Secretariat executes the functions, policies and decisions of the Council, the Council has strong interests in the work of HKCAAVQ through overseeing its work. Given the competing interests of various stakeholders, the Council has to ensure the quality work of the Secretariat and that the diverse interests are addressed in a balanced manner.

2.2.2 The HKCAAVQ Secretariat (Secretariat)

The Secretariat has a strong stake in the work of HKCAAVQ as they are responsible for executing the scope of work governed by the ordinances. The different teams of HKCAAVQ have to collaborate to accomplish the goals and objectives of HKCAAVQ. It is their responsibility to perform their statutory role accordingly

2.2.3 Government bureaux

The other major stakeholders are government bureaux which includes Education Bureau (EDB) and Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB).

EDB is responsible for formulating and implementing education policies in Hong Kong whereas LWB is responsible for employment, labour development, manpower, human resources management, poverty reduction and social welfare in Hong Kong (Education Bureau website). Hence, any change in the education policies as well as employment and labour policies may be closely associated with or influence the scope of work of HKCAAVQ.

HKCAAVQ is commissioned by LWB to perform responsibilities including advising LWB on the registration of courses to be included in the list of reimbursable courses under the Continuing Education Fund (CEF), and monitoring the quality of courses after CEF registration, as required by LWB (HKCAAVQ website).

For example, in Hong Kong, the Government has set up Continuing Education Fund (CEF) since June 2002 which subsidises adults with learning aspirations to pursue continuing education and training against the backdrop of transitioning Hong Kong to a knowledge-based economy and adapting to an increasingly globalized world (HKCAAVQ website). HKCAAVQ also conducts onsite inspection visits as surprise audit visits and scheduled inspections of classes of course providers to evaluate whether the courses providers comply with the CEF registration criteria and whether any imposed conditions under the CEF terms are fulfilled (HKCAAVQ website).

Before April 2019, reimbursable courses of course providers are registered within the eight specified domains of CEF and listed on the QR database after an assessment by HKCAAVQ. With the goal of quality assuring courses and safeguarding the interests of learners, starting from April 2019, course providers who wish to include their courses to be registered as reimbursable courses under the 'Reimbursable Course List' must seek accreditation of their courses from HKCAAVQ (HKCAAVQ website).

2.2.4 The Specialists

Under the peer review principle of accreditation by HKCAAVQ which stands at the heart of the quality assurance process of HKCAAVQ, peers, also referred to as specialists, are engaged in the accreditation exercise (HKCAAVQ website). Specialists have relevant experience and expertise in their respective disciplines who may come from established networks such as ITACs, trade unions, trade associations, industry training organisations (HKCAAVQ website). Specialists

are engaged in accreditation exercises, and other assessment and consultancy work. They have a stake in the work of HKCAAVQ as they deliberate the determination of accreditation.

2.2.5 Qualifications Frameworks Secretariat (QFS)

Initially set up by the EDB, the Qualifications Framework Secretariat (QFS) is the executive arm of EDB to develop, implement and promote the Hong Kong Qualifications Frameworks (HKQF). The major roles of QFS includes implementing the QF in various industries and sectors as well as enhancing the recognition of QF and QF-recognised qualifications locally and internationally (QFS website). All programmes seeking accreditation from HKCAAVQ must be pitched at a QF level (i.e. QF Levels 1 to 7).

QFS is also liaising with the Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs) to draw up competence standards (being referred to as the Specification of Competency Standards (SCS) regarding key functional areas of the industries concerned. These SCSs are then adopted into the learning programmes developed by training providers which seek accreditation from HKCAAVQ (QFS website).

QFS also works closely with the ITACs to advise the Government on the development of a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism in different industries to recognise the experiences and competencies acquired by practitioners at the workplace (QFS website). The Assessment Agencies responsible for implementing the RPL will seek accreditation from HKCAAVQ.

2.2.6 Training providers

The Hong Kong market is a segmented training market that is made up of many and mostly small to medium-sized private training providers. They range from vocational institutions, self-financed academic institutions to corporates of diverse industries and sectors (e.g. disciplinary units, banking, nongovernment organisations). Training providers are major stakeholders as they will seek accreditation of their institutions and/or their learning programmes to be quality-assured by HKCAAVQ. Programmes that are accredited give learners confidence of its quality.

2.2.7 Teaching faculty

Teaching faculty is considered as one of the stakeholders as they are responsible for delivering the accredited learning programmes. The quality of the delivery is closely associated with the quality outcomes of learners. Teaching faculty plays a crucial role in the teaching and learning activities as well as assessment of a programme.

2.2.8 Students

Students (young adults/adults) enrolled in vocational learning programmes are one of the major stakeholders for several reasons. First, on selected learning programmes, accredited programmes give credibility and trust in terms of the programme quality as these programmes have been quality assured by HKCAAVQ, an independent statutory body. That makes the role of accreditation crucial. Second, the interests of students are protected in the way that accredited training providers are to deliver their promises to students in terms of helping them achieve the programme objectives and programme intended learning outcomes.

2.2.9 Licensing authorities

Licensing authorities also have a stake in the accreditation of HKCAAVQ. In Hong Kong, programmes that lead to awards in certain professions such as nurses, social workers, healthcare workers are regulated by licensing authorities. Accredited programmes would need to seek accreditation and recognition and/or accreditation from the different licensing authorities such as Nursing Council of Hong Kong, Social Welfare Department, etc.

2.2.10 Professional bodies

Similar to licensing authorities, professional bodies also have a stake in the accreditation of HKCAAVQ. Professional bodies are concerned about quality as they set the educational standards for membership (INQAAHE QAP Graduate Programme Materials, 2011). For example, one such case is the Hong Kong Institute of Bankers which seeks accreditation of some of their learning programmes that also lead to professional qualifications.

2.2.11 Industry

Employers are key stakeholders for two reasons. Employers may verify the qualifications of potential employees and criticise the quality of graduates. Accredited qualifications generate credibility. Hence, training providers are motivated to seek accreditation of their learning programmes to prepare graduates for seeking employment in future.

The ITACs has been formed by EDB which consists of employers, employees, professional bodies and regulatory bodies of the different industries. These ITACs also serves as a platform for stakeholders to put the QF in implementation and to share views on the training needs and manpower development of different industries (HKQF website) as well as promoting QF in different industries.

2.2.12 The Public

The public has a strong stake in the accreditation work of HKCAAVQ. They place trust in HKCAAVQ in performing their gate-keeping role on quality assuring training providers and their learning programmes. Accredited programmes which have been quality-assured are all listed in the QR databased online which is accessible by the public.

2.2.13 Overseas Quality Assurance (QA) Agencies

Seeking external reviews of HKCAAVQ is part of their strategic plan to quality assure their quality assurance mechanism against the standards and guidelines of international quality assurance bodies (HKCAAVQ website). Therefore, some of the external quality assurance bodies such as INQAAHE and ENQA also have a stake in the work of HKCAAVQ.

2.3 The author's tasks and the competence requirements

The author works in the Vocational and Professional Accreditation (VPA) Team of the Secretariat of HKCAAVQ as Registrar. VPA is one of the two accreditation teams responsible for conducting accreditation and assessment of organisations.

As a Registrar of VPA of HKCAAVQ, my major responsibilities fall into three major areas:

- (1) Conduct accreditation and assessment exercises for Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPET) sector;
- (2) Undertake projects related to quality assurance of education and training programmes in Hong Kong;
- (3) Provide professional advice about the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), liaise with training providers, government bureaux, licensing bodies and professional bodies, overseas QA bodies and develop procedures and guidelines to facilitate development of HKCAAVQ's services.

In terms of conducting accreditation for the VPET sector, the author is assigned of conducting accreditation exercises from evaluating the organisation (i.e. initial evaluation), learning programme accreditation (LPA), learning programme re-accreditation (re-LPA) to programme area accreditation (PAA), periodic institutional review (PIR). The processes involved in an accreditation exercise includes forming the panel of specialists, reviewing accreditation documents submitted by the training provider seeking accreditation, gathering panel's observations and initial comments, sharing panel's initial comments with training provider, hosting panel's meeting, hosting the site visit with training provider as well as compiling panel's deliberations in an accreditation report.

The type of training providers seeking accreditation comes in a wide variety from self-financed vocational institutions to corporates from a range of industries such as banking, non-government organisations, disciplinary units (e.g. Fire Services Department, Immigration Department, Correctional Services Department), finance, professional body, cycling, diving, mental health, etc.

Although programme types also vary hugely, they are all vocational-oriented which are all designed to equip learners with skills and knowledge that are necessary for their career. They range from interior design, banking, finance, insurance, healthcare, mental health to fire services, immigration services, racing, non-racing, farriery, catering, food science, etc. The programmes are either offered as in-house training or public programmes.

In addition to conducting accreditation exercise, the author is also tasked with other responsibilities. One of the other projects is to conduct quality assurance visits of the Applied

Learning (ApL) courses offered to senior secondary students in Hong Kong as HKCAAVQ has been commissioned by Education Bureau to conduct these QA visits. The processes involved in these QA visits generally are similar to those of an accreditation exercise discussed above.

As mentioned earlier in the previous subsections, in working with the ITACs, Qualifications Framework Secretariat draws up the competence standards (i.e. SCS) regarding key functional areas of the industries as well as training packages for different industries. Hence, the author is also tasked with moderating these SCSs as well as training packages developed by different industries for the use by training providers. The moderation process involves reviewing whether the SCS have been developed according to the appropriate QF level.

On liaising with overseas quality assurance bodies, the author is the team leader for conducting regular exchanges with the Korean counterpart, Korea Skills Quality Authority (KSQA) about accreditation work in both jurisdictions. The sharing sessions cover a range of topics from an overview of the landscape of vocational and professional training, accreditation principles, philosophy to accreditation standards, accreditation processes, etc. The insights and experiences shared can enhance the accreditation work at HKCAACQ.

Communication with various stakeholders such as Qualifications Framework Secretariat, Education Bureau, etc. is maintained on a regular basis. For example, the moderation of SCS and training packages also involves discussion with Qualifications Framework Secretariat on the observations and recommendations. Besides, on completing the Quality Assurance visits of the ApL courses, the author would also need to compile visit reports to be submitted to Education Bureau for review, comments and approval. The process involves moderation of such reports with Education Bureau.

The competence requirements for my role as Registrar of HKCAAVQ are:

- Solid experience in the education and training sector with experience in quality assurance work;
- First degree comparable to HKQF Level 5;
- strong project management skills, ability to critically analyse and synthesise information leading to logical and evidence-based judgment;
- excellent written and spoken English and Chinese (including Putonghua);
- good presentation and communication skills;

- proactive, reflective, independent as well as a team player.

2.4 The author's stage of professional development and development needs

This paper aims to study the quality assurance approaches adopted by quality assurance bodies in other regions and evaluate how these approaches can be adapted by quality assurance agency in Hong Kong Hence, a review of the literature covering major concepts related to quality assurance will be performed.

The author is well-versed with the accreditation standards and accreditation process after conducting accreditation for almost four years. Her accreditation work involves accrediting training providers of various scale of operations (small, to well-established) and learning programmes of a variety of disciplines (e.g. banking, interior design, fire services training, immigration services training, racing, non-racing, management and leadership, cycling).

In terms of the need for professional development, the author should further expand her scope of understanding quality assurance beyond the context of Hong Kong. By investigating the quality assurance approaches developed and implemented by different quality assurance bodies, the author would form a bigger picture of the domain of quality assurance and how this is implemented in different parts of the regions. These insights can be beneficial to her career advancement and professional growth in the education sector.

The author is also involved in a consultancy project about accreditation with a partner in mainland China. Hence, it would be necessary for the author to conduct research on different quality assurance bodies in terms of their governance structure, internal and external quality assurance as well as the accreditation standards and their quality assurance approaches.

2.5 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section aims to study the quality assurance approaches adopted by quality assurance agencies in other regions and evaluate how these approaches can be adapted by quality assurance agency in Hong Kong Hence, a review of the literature covering major concepts related to quality assurance will be performed.

This chapter is grouped into six sections. The first section examines the different definitions of quality, in particular, in the context of higher education (HE). The second section will then describe what quality assurance is. Section three discusses the relationship of quality assurance and quality enhancement. In section four, concepts of trust and accountability will be discussed. The last two sections will be a review of the dimensions of trust and trust in HE and quality assurance.

2.5.1 Understanding quality in higher education (HE)

The concept of quality attracted much attention in HE in the 1980s which was an era characterised by the emphasis on assuring and enhancing quality (Vroeijenstijn, 1995). Quality was perceived as 'lofty and abstract terms' (Perry, 1991) when it first emerged in the 1980s due to the high level of consensus about the issue of academic quality. The 1990s witnessed an increasing amount of efforts being placed on defining, operationalising, measuring and customising the concept of quality. As indicated by the literature of this period (Harvey, 2002; Vroeijenstijn & Acherman, 1990), research was conducted about the performance indicators and statistical indicators as ways to operationalise quality. According to Adams (1993), Cheng and Tam (1997), Green (1994) and Harvey and Green (1993), one of the major elements defining quality during this period was the demand for regulatory and accountability (Cheng, 2003; Elassy, 2014).

The concept of quality has been conceptualised in the context of HE by many academics (Harvey, 2006; Harvey & Green, 1993; Green, 1994; Schindler et al., 2015; Van Kemenade et al., 2008; Newton, 2002, 2000). Neither academic nor practitioners have reached a consensus on a universally accepted definition of quality, and on the mechanisms that can assure quality and enhance the development of quality. Quality is a relative concept and its meanings varies depending on the context in which it is used (Elassy, 2015). For example, HE has a diverse range of stakeholders from students, graduates, faculty members, management, to employers, government, quality assurance agencies, funding bodies, and the public. Not only do they perceive quality differently, but they may also have conflicting interpretations of what quality entails. Despite these conflicting interpretations of quality, the definition of quality should satisfy major stakeholders such as government bodies/funding bodies, HEIs (faculty, staff, administrators), recipients (students) and employers (Schindler et al., 2015).

Despite the challenges in defining quality, academics consider it crucial to conceptualise quality in order to assure and enhance quality. One of the most widely cited works in terms of conceptualising quality is that of Harvey and Green (1993) and Green (1994). Harvey and Green (1993) argue that quality is conceptualised as excellence, perfection or consistency, fitness for purpose, value for money and transformation. Such definition provides an academic perspective to understanding what quality is, the focus of which lies in students' learning, skills and knowledge, as well as the continuous improvement in teaching (Mussawy & Rossman, 2018). This definition of quality is aligned with the roles of academics (Houston, 2008; Mizikaci, 2006). Similar to this conceptualisation, Green (1994) defines quality in higher education using five approaches:

- 1) quality as the conformance to standards;
- 2) quality as fitness for purpose;
- 3) quality as effectiveness in achieving institutional goals;
- 4) quality as meeting customers' stated needs; and
- 5) the traditional concept of quality being seen as exceptional.

Schindler (2015) offers another perspective of interpreting quality. Quality falls into two broad categories: 'standards-driven' or 'stakeholder-driven' (Schindler et al., 2015). 'Standards-driven' definitions imply a set of pre-set criteria while 'stakeholder-driven' definitions satisfy users as well as giving accountability to individuals or organisations (Schindler et al., 2015). Owalia and Aspinwall (1996) also conceptualise quality according to six dimensions, all of which are of either stakeholder-based or customer-based nature, to evaluate quality in higher education. These six dimensions are tangibles, competence, attitude, content, delivery and reliability (Aspinwall, 1996).

A more comprehensive conceptualisation of quality proposed by Harvey (2006) states that 'quality in higher education is a multi-dimensional, multi-level, and dynamic concept that is related to the contextual settings of an educational model, to the institutional mission and objectives, as well as specific standards within a given system, institution, program, or discipline' (p.2).

Other disciplines have also conceptualised the concept of quality from multiple perspectives ranging from understanding what quality means by incorporating moral values and ethics (Prisacariu & Shah, 2016), perceiving knowledge, power and meanings which shape the

perspectives on quality continuously (Houston & Paewai, 2013), perceiving quality agenda as pressure group politics (Filippakou & Tapper, 2008), and power and politics (Lemaitre, 2002) which leads to colonising universities using foreign ideology.

Quality can also be defined from the perception of stakeholders. Stakeholders can be understood as the parties 'who have an interest in, an impact on, or are users of' the functions of HEIs (Shanahan & Gelber, 2004). The perception of quality by two types of stakeholders who are academics and students are discussed.

According to the two prominent research about academics' perception of quality (Newton, 2002, p.46), in general, academics perceive quality as 'ritualism and tokenism, as impression management, as a burden, as a failure to close the loop, as suspicion of management motives, as a discipline and technology, as frontline staff resistance, as lack of mutual trust, as a culture of getting by and as constraints on teamwork'.

Some academics argue that quality should be perceived from the eyes of the user which refers to the students, instead of the producer which is HEIs (Wilkinson et al., 1998). Gatfield (2000) has developed one of the major studies regarding perception of students towards the concept of quality. Gatfield (2000) suggests the need to focus on a customer-driven scale that identifies different quality variables about how students perceive their university experience. According to Gatfield (2000), recognition and the academic instruction has been identified as the most important variables in the eyes of students. The result concluded from this research is found to be aligned with another research by Hill et al. (2003). It is theorised that students perceive quality of their lecturers as essential and elements such as teaching, learning and how lecturers perform are crucial elements in the eyes of students when measuring quality. In conclusion, quality can be interpreted through different perspectives instead of aiming to achieve a unified definition (Elassy, 2015).

2.5.2 Understanding quality assurance

In the literature, some academics argue that when the concept of quality is clearly defined, this will make it simpler to interpret what quality assurance is (Bornmann, Mittag, & Daniel, 2006; Dill, 2007; Schindler et al., 2015; Usmani & Khatoon, 2016). It is theorised that quality is different from quality assurance as quality is the process whereas the latter denotes checking the quality of a

process or outcomes (Harvey, 2006). Given quality assurance being key to the HE policy (El-Khawas, 2013), many studies have defined the quality assurance concept (Elassy, 2015). In general, on understanding quality assurance, academics emphasise the 'processes, policies, or actions performed externally by quality assurance agencies and accrediting bodies or internally within the institution' (Schindler et al., 2015). Harvey (2006) states that the major purposes of quality assurance are 'compliance, control, accountability and improvement' which are implemented through quality, the conceptual tool and the quality assurance methodology. Quality sets the foundation for the quality assurance processes (Harvey, 2006, p.1).

Furthermore, Schindler et al. (2015) proposes a conceptual model according to which quality assurance should be "purposeful, exceptional, transformative and accountable" (Schindler et al., 2015; p.7). For example, improvement in teaching and learning experience is considered as measure of quality as well as an indicator of transformation (Hill et al., 2003).

Quality assurance can also be understood in terms of three different paradigms (Cheng, 2003) which are 'internal', 'interface' and 'future' quality waves. 'Internal quality assurance' deals with the improvement of the internal environment and processes in order to ensure that teaching and learning is effective to accomplish the goals that have been planned (Cheng, 2003). 'Interface quality assurance', on the other hand, is about fulfilling the needs of stakeholders with the education services and being accountable to the public (Cheng, 2003). 'Future quality assurance' looks into the future of making sure that the aims, content, practice and outcomes of education are all relevant to the future generations (Cheng, 2003).

These three paradigms go in line with the conceptualisations of quality of Green (1994) described in the previous subsection. 'Internal quality assurance' is in line with the first approach to quality as conforming to standards as well as the effectiveness in accomplishing goals at the institutional level (Elassy, 2015). 'Interface quality assurance', in contrast, is aligned with the approach of viewing quality as satisfying the needs of customers (Elassy, 2015). Cheng (2003) perceived the last paradigm, 'Future quality assurance' as developing contextualised multiple intelligence of the whole process of globalisation, localisation as well as individualisation in education.

Biggs (2001) has also categorised quality assurance into retrospective quality assurance and prospective quality assurance. The emphases of these two quality assurance perspectives are differentiated in the sense that retrospective quality assurance emphasises accountability more

than enhancement while prospective quality assurance deals with the concept of improvement. The retrospective quality assurance is aligned with the first approach of Green (1994) in defining quality as 'conformance to standards' as it is concerned with what has been done and forming a judgement against the external standards (Elassy, 2015). Hence, retrospective quality assurance is associated with the definition of quality being easily measurable with a list of external standards (Elassy, 2015). On the contrary, prospective quality assurance focuses on assuring that teaching and learning will still fit the purpose of an institution. This perspective of looking at quality assurance goes in line with another approach of Green (1994) in defining quality with the aim to ensure that teaching and learning 'fit the purpose'.

Similar to Cheng's (2003) approach to quality assurance, Harvey (2011) places emphasis on interpreting quality assurance using a stakeholder's perspective. Harvey (2011) argues that in the context of HE, quality assurance is described as 'a process of establishing stakeholder confidence that provision (input, process and outcomes) fulfils expectations or measures up to threshold minimum requirements' (Harvey, 2011, p.14).

2.5.3 Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement

As quality was seen to be associated heavily with accountability in the 1990s, improvement was not much associated with such concept (Newton, 2010, p.51). Against this backdrop, quality assurance is perceived to be a 'diagnostic' process while quality enhancement is considered to be the 'treatment' process that allows the development of the limitations which quality assurance has identified (Gibbs, 2011). Hence, quality enhancement is seen to enhance quality (Elassy, 2015). However, in recent years, much emphasis has been shifted to focusing on quality enhancement instead of quality assurance (Elassy, 2015).

Some researchers (e.g. Lomas, 2004; Brink, 2010) argue that the concept of quality enhancement is often associated with quality assurance. Both concepts are perceived as part of a continuum (see figure 2). According to Lomas (2004), both quality assurance and quality enhancement are described as the key approaches to quality improvement. In terms of differentiating these two concepts, quality assurance is concerned with prevention instead of curing as well as the effectiveness of the educational process (Brink, 2010, p.142). As a diagnostic process, quality assurance aims to evaluate quality in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of HEIs (Elassy, 2015). On the other hand, as a curing process, quality

enhancement aims to improve quality of those limitations that have been identified during the quality assurance process while developing the strengths of HEIs (Elassy, 2015). Therefore, with quality assurance and quality enhancement forming a continuum, quality assurance is conducted when assessing an institution and/or a process while quality enhancement is carried out if the goal is to improve an institution and/or a process (Elassy, 2015).



FIGURE 2. The continuum of quality (quality assurance and quality enhancement) (Elassy, 2015)

The concepts of quality assurance and quality enhancement are perceived to be two different concepts as revealed in some literature (Elassy, 2015; Filippakou & Tapper, 2008; Lomas, 2004; Biggs, 2003), the differences of which are summarised in Table 3. To summarise, quality enhancement is theorised to be dealing with improving the learning and teaching experiences whereas quality assurance focuses on reporting, self-assessment, as well as performance indicators. Quality, when combined with 'assurance' is often considered to be about what concerns administrators rather than academics (Elassy, 2015). On the contrary, quality, if considered in the form of 'improvement', is related to improving teaching and learning processes (Elassy, 2015) even though this process does not seem to be an easy process (Newton, 2010).

TABLE 3. Differences between quality assurance and quality enhancement (Elassy, 2015)

Quality Assurance	Quality Enhancement
Focus on the past	Focus on the present and the future
A summative process	A formative process
A quantitative performance	A qualitative performance
Move from top to lower level	Move from lower to top level

Tend to be associated more with assessment and accountability	Tend to be associated more with improvement and development
Less freedom (follow absolute rules)	More freedom (use flexible and negotiated ways)
Give a greater space to administrator	Give a greater space to academics
Meet external standards	Meet internal standards
Give insufficient weight to the teaching/learning processes	Give considerable weight to teaching/learning processes

As discussed in the previous subsections, quality can also be interpreted using the stakeholder's perspective. By adopting the stakeholder's perspective, on the concept of quality, students perceive it to be about quality enhancement whereas academics relates quality to quality assurance more than quality enhancement as evidenced by a few studies (Iacovidou et al., 2009; Gatfield, 2000). For example, a case study was conducted by Iacovidou et al. (2009) about the quality of a university with the use of dimensions of quality perceived by students and staff. According to this study, students were found to perceive programmes and courses of study offered by an HEI as well as the teaching and learning processes to be the most important dimensions of quality. Cheng (2011), however, identifies a gap that exists between students' perception of quality as 'passing examinations' and academics' viewing quality as 'transformation' which may enhance students' learning. On concluding the above discussions of these two concepts, it is believed that both quality assurance and quality enhancement are necessary for HEIs since quality assurance procedures should be in place in order to reach quality enhancement (Elassy, 2015).

2.5.4 The concepts of trust and accountability

This section aims to provide a review of the conceptualisations of trust and accountability discussed in literature.

It is theorised that trust and accountability both perform a key role in the relationship between government and the HEIs. Hence, understanding trust and accountability issues will be essential in understanding trust between HEIs and quality assurance agencies. It is believed that trust and accountability are inter-related. In the context of HEIs, the presence of trust implies that the HEIs are trusted to have the intentions and competence to perform responsibly without needing external instruments for monitoring and regulations (Trow, 1996). Strict control mechanisms are

not needed if HEIs achieve higher trust among stakeholders (Stensaker & Gornitzka, 2009). Hence, trust is perceived to be a substitute for control even though there are divided discussions about the relationship of trust and control (Bijlsma & Koopman, 2003; Costa, 2003). The presence of trust engages the governments to take risks resulting from not having the oversight (Abebe 2021). Zalec (2013) argues that accountability is unnecessary due to the existence of trust.

Accountability is theorised to be about the obligation to give explanation, raise questions, clarifications as well as justifications, form judgements and impose consequences (Bovens, 2007; Zumera, 2011). Applied in the context of the relationship between government and HEIs, there are accountability measures such as legislative regulations, evaluation and reporting of performance, quality audit and accreditation requirements as well as other implicit and explicit external supervision (Kivistö, 2007; Trow, 1996). Therefore, trust and accountability are perceived to be contradictory. It implies that less control is necessary while placing the accountability on the other when trust exists. In contrast, there is a need for more accountability in cases whereby trust level is low.

Trust, quality and instrumentality are thought to be essential for evaluating the concept of accountability in HE (Stensaker & Harvey, 2011a). Hence, it is believed that trust and quality provide the conceptual foundation for accountability in HEIs. Some academics argue that the accountability processes may either drive 'a virtuous circle of trust enhancement' or different levels of 'compliance, resistance and subterfuge that produce a vicious circle that undermines trust' (Massy, 2011, p.232). This explains what accountability is in the form of trust (Massy, 2011; Stensaker & Harvey, 2011b).

Accountability also brings about positive impacts such as trustworthiness, fostering the development of trustful attitude (Stensaker & Harvey, 2011b; Sztompka, 1999). Besides, some literature also suggests that trust can be fostered via power and control that is executed at an optimal level (Bachmann, 2001; Bachmann & Inkpen, 2011; Stensaker & Gornitzka, 2009; Stensaker & Maassen, 2015). Consistent with these views, the use of monitoring and sanctioning instruments may discourage a breach of trust and hence fostering trustworthiness (Sztompka, 1999). It is worth noting that trust and accountability has a unique relationship in the sense that both tension and mutual support involved in these two approaches and how these two approaches interplay may depend on the contexts (Trow, 1996).

A review of the literature indicates that there is a lack of consensus on the meaning and the definitions of trust. Nevertheless, four recurring themes are commonly identified across the majority of the different conceptualisations of trust (Cook & Well, 1980; Gabarro, 1987; Luhmann, 1988; Swan et al., 1988; Tway, 1994; Mayer et al., 1995; Cumming & Bromiley, 1996; Lane, 1998; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999; Kramer, 1999; Hardin, 2002; Schoorman, Mayer & Davis, 2007; Migliore & DeClouette, 2011).

- (1) **The relational aspect of trust** – Trust is thought to exist and develop in relationships that include two or more actors. The actors are performing either the role of trustee or trustor.
- (2) **The elements of vulnerability, perceived risk and uncertainty in trust** – The elements of perceived risks have been one of the areas of concern among actors of trust.
- (3) **The willingness of the trustor to take perceived risks** – this is about the decision of the trustor to trust and hence assuming the perceived risks.
- (4) **Interdependence between a trustor and a trustee**

On the relational aspect of trust, Hardin (2002) and Schoorman et al. (2007) consider it essential to understand trust as an aspect in a relationship. Hence, Kramer (1999) suggests the value of interpreting trust as a relational and social orientation. Trust exists in a relationship that one has with another, directly or indirectly (Hardin, 2002).

Besides, some academics (Jalava, 2006; Mayer et al., 1995) proposed that vulnerability, perceived risks and uncertainty are core elements of trust which involves the possibility of risk-taking. The risk implies a possibility that the trustee may not act in our interests nor meet our expectations (Abebe, 2021). The elements of uncertainty and risk are encapsulated in the conceptual foundations of trust (Hardin, 2002; Kramer, 1999). The vulnerability aspect can be understood in the way that the trustor transfers some level of control to the trustee which implies that the act of trusting often involves risks and decreased level of control over the trustee (Abebe, 2021).

In associating with taking risks and vulnerability in trust, the willingness of the trustor to trust the trustee is also crucial regardless of the amount of monitoring on the behaviours of a trustee (Abebe, 2021). Pope (2004) suggested this as 'consensual dependence' (p.76). On the decision to trust and whether the trustor is willing to trust and assume perceived risks, it is related to

rational and calculative thinking or shared norms, values, expectations, and identity and along the continuum between these two explanations (Abebe, 2021).

Another common theme identified in most definitions of trust is about the interdependence relationship between a trustor and a trustee (Abebe, 2021). When trusting a trustee, this relationship already implies that the trustor is willing to assume certain levels of risk involved in the interaction and hence trust is seen as the tool to address such risk and uncertainty as well as the trustor's vulnerability (Lane, 1998).

Trust is seen as a three-part relationship in which trustor is defined as a party that is trusting whereas trustee as the party to be trusted (Mayer et al., 1995). Trust is also perceived as a context-specific in nature (Abebe, 2021). If applied in the context of HE, quality assurance agencies assume the role of trustor and HEIs are trustees with quality and quality assurance in HE as the object of trust (Abebe, 2021).

2.5.5 The conceptual dimensions of trust

There are some researchers who have identified different dimensions of trust depending on the specific context of relationship being investigated (Butler, 1991; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Mayer et al., 1995). In the analytical framework developed by Mishra (1996), trust is seen in four dimensions which are competence, concern, openness, and reliability. Trust is perceived as one party's willingness to be vulnerable based on the competence, concerned, openness and reliability of the other party (Mishra, 1996, p.5).

In this study, the modified set of dimensions of trust (Abebe, 2021) (see Figure 3) that is based on Mishra's (1996) conceptualisations of trust has been chosen. These dimensions of trust have been adopted by many academics in matters related to the issues of trust (e.g. McKnight et al., 1998; Pope, 2004). In the context of HE, trust plays a central role in quality assurance as HEIs are depended upon quality-assuring their institutions in order to maintain quality standards of HE by quality assurance agencies (Abebe, 2021). The dimensions of trust provide the backbone for the discussion and analysis of the different quality assurance approaches adopted by international quality assurance agencies in the sections that follow.

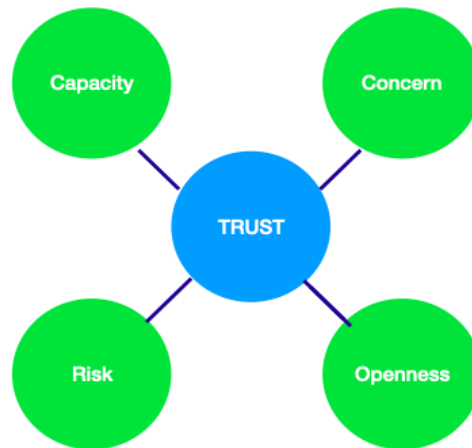


FIGURE 3 – conceptual dimensions of trust (Mishra, 1996)

In the modified set of dimensions of trust, risk, as a new dimension, is adopted to replace reliability while the other three dimensions of Mishra’s (1996), capacity, concern, and openness, are retained (Abebe, 2021).

2.5.5.1 Concern

The dimension of concern states that in a trusted relationship between the trustor and trustee, it is believed that to avoid any actions that harm the expectations of the trustor, a trustee will endeavour to fulfil their expectations in a given context (Mishra 1996). Aspects such as expectations, concerns, motives as well as intentions are to be evaluated in order to build trust between parties (De Boer, 2002; Ellis & Shockley-Zalabak, 2001; Leimeister et al., 2005; Ruokonen, 2018; Stensaker & Gornitzka, 2009). Despite the self-interests of a trustor, a trustee will strike a balance between their self-interests and the welfare of trustor (Hardin, 2002; Mishra, 1996).

In the context of this study, trust may be constituted between a quality assurance agency and those HEIs or training providers who are concerned and are devoted to enhancing the quality standards of their operations (Abebe, 2021). The level of trust by a quality assurance agency on HEIs or training providers is shaped by how well an HEI or a training provider acts positively or negatively to the quality assurance requirements and procedures (Abebe, 2021).

2.5.5.2 Capacity

Capacity forms a key foundation of trust (Ruokonen, 2018). As another dimension of trust, capacity is also referred as competence (Butler, 1991; Ellis & Shockley-Zalabak, 2001; Hardin, 2002; Leimeister et al., 2005; McKnight et al., 1998; Mishra, 1996; Swan et al., 1998; Typer, 2003) and ability (Mayer et al., 1995). According to this dimension, it is theorised that a trustor may assess the competence and capacity required for a trustee to fulfil their expectations. These competences include knowledge, skills, expertise, as well as other resources necessary for meeting the expectations of a trustor (Abebe, 2021). The level of competence impact whether a trustor will trust the trustee (Gabarro, 1987; McKnight et al., 1998; Migliore & DeClouette, 2011; Swan et al., 1988).

In the context of this study, building trust on the institutional capacity of the HEIs or training providers is necessary for the proper monitoring of their quality operations by quality assurance agencies (Abebe, 2021). Quality assurance's external quality evaluations are thought to be supported by the internal procedures and process at HEIs or training providers for accountability and effective improvement of quality assurance (Colling & Harvey, 1995; Genis, 2002; Thune, 1997).

In the context of the relationship between HEIs or training providers and quality assurance agencies, this dimension theorizes that the trust of quality assurance agencies on HEIs or training providers will depend on evaluating the competence and credibility of the training providers regarding fulfilling quality requirements and standards in their institutions (Abebe, 2021). Given the diversity of HEIs or training providers, quality assurance agencies will assess capacity of institutions to identify the differences in the performance level in quality assurance across institutions of different shapes and sizes (e.g. established versus young institutions; public versus private; universities versus colleges) (Abebe, 2021).

2.5.5.3 Openness

Another dimension is openness which is defined as the honesty of a trustee (Ellis & Shockley-Zalabak, 2001; Gabarro, 1987; Leimeister et al., 2005; McKnight et al., 1998; Mishra, 1996). Open communication as well as exchanges are perceived as essential elements for building trust (Cummings & Bromiley, 1996; De Boer, 2002; Ellis & Shockley-Zalabak, 2001; Leimeister et al.,

2005). The presence of trust is believed to lower the chances of withholding information and intentional exchange of dishonest and deceiving information and hence contributing to a more trusted and open sharing of undistorted information (Mishra, 1996). It has been revealed in the literature that the feedback mechanisms support trust-building which allows trustor and trustee evaluate each other's intentions and behaviour, consistency between words and actions as well as the reliability in future (Hardin, 2002, p. 145-150).

In the context of this study, the level of trust of quality assurance agencies in a given HEI or training provider is associated with how open and honest the HEI or training provider is in terms of engaging in internal and external quality assurance processes as well as in the relationship with the quality assurance agencies (Abebe, 2021).

2.5.5.4 Risk

The dimension of risk plays a key role in understanding trust. Risk is associated with uncertainty of outcomes, extreme consequences as well as the difficulties in accomplishing goals (Sitkin & Pablo, 1992; Slovic, 1993). It is believed that the level of trust is influenced by the risk level as well as uncertainty level in a given interaction (Abebe, 2021). Some measures such as regulations, guarantees, legal recourse may be used by a trustor to minimise some perceived risks especially at the beginning when the relationship has been newly developed with incomplete information about the trustee (McKnight et al., 1998, p.479).

In this study, the level of trust of a quality assurance agency in the HEIs or training providers depends on evaluating the perceived risks (e.g. government interests, interests of quality assurance agencies and other stakeholders). Additionally, the willingness of HEIs or training providers to operate responsibly and maintain the quality standards of their operation also contributes to understanding risk and uncertainty (Abebe, 2021). In scenarios whereby risk level remains high with the HEIs or training providers, the level of trust constituted by quality assurance agencies may be reduced resulting in more control mechanisms in place (Abebe, 2021). Hence, a 'lighter-touch quality accountability' will be implemented by 'less-risky' HEIs (King, 2015, p.496). In the literature, it is argued that trust is established based on the perception of quality (Bergan 2012). This suggests that HEIs which the public believe to provide quality education and research is associated with more trust than those HEIs that are considered to be of lesser quality (Bergan,

2012). Hence, this suggests that 'perception of quality may inform trust in the context of HE (Abebe, 2021).

It is argued in the literature that the conceptual dimensions of trust are multidimensional by nature (Costa, 2013; Hardin, 2002; Kujala et al., 2016; Li et al., 2012) and combining these four dimensions can achieve an overall evaluation of trust (Abebe, 2021). Adopting this approach in this study will allow the researcher to understand how trust is associated with the quality assurance approaches adopted by international quality assurance agencies. The four dimensions are thought to be inter-related in the way that the dominance of some dimensions may affect the overall level of trust.

2.5.6 Trust in higher education (HE) and quality assurance

The notion of trust occupies a core place in HE, HEIs and quality assurance systems (Stensaker & Gornitzka, 2009; Stensaker & Massen, 2015; Trow, 1996; Vidovich & Currie, 2011; Yingqiang & Yongjian, 2016; Zalec, 2013). In the context of HE, trust is understood to be trust in 'an education system, a higher education institution, a study or research programme, a given qualification, the academic community of scholars and students, and an individual teacher, researcher, graduate or student' (Bergan, 2012, p.53). The importance of trust underpins the notion that HEIs are functioning properly and interact properly with their stakeholders (Abebe, 2021). To ensure the relationship with the stakeholders are long-lasting and fruitful, there has to be trust in a relationship between HEIs and their stakeholders (Abebe, 2021). Perin et al. (2012) argues that students' trust in HEIs impact positively on their commitment and loyalty to the institution.

Trust is also perceived as a core element to any quality assurance system and process (Stensaker & Maassen, 2015; Yingqiang & Yongjian, 2016). Therefore, the effective functioning and institutionalisation of quality assurance is dependent on developing and maintaining trust between major stakeholders of the quality management processes (Abebe, 2021). Given that HEIs have complex organisational and functional structure, the implementation of a thorough and accurate evaluation and monitoring poses challenges (Kivistö, 2007). As a result, building and maintaining trust contributes to quality control and regulation (Abebe, 2021). Ruokonen (2018) also states the positive impact of trust on reducing such a need for monitoring while freeing up resources for other matters that need attention in HEIs. Quality assurance is thought to perform the function of restoring and consolidating the trust of stakeholders on HE and HEIs (Elassy,

2015; Huber, 2013; Van Damme, 2002; Yingqiang & Yongjian, 2016). Performing internal quality assurance and external quality reviews contributes to building trust in these HEIs (Abebe, 2021).

3 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

In the previous section, there is a discussion of the key concepts related to this research covered in the body of literature. The first section will introduce the research questions and describe the learning objectives of this study. The second section will outline the reporting plan of the diary entries as well as the focus on the diary entries.

3.1 The research

The research is conducted via secondary research of analysing the secondary resources found on the websites of the different quality assurance agencies.

3.1.1 The research questions

- To identify the different quality assurance approaches adopted by quality assurance bodies to evaluate higher education institutions and quality assurance
- To analyse how these quality assurance approaches are linked to the dimensions of trust
- To evaluate how these approaches can be adopted in Hong Kong and to identify the possible challenges

3.1.2 The purpose

The purpose of this paper is to review the quality assurance approaches of different quality assurance bodies in the regions, to evaluate how to adopt these approaches in Hong Kong, and to identify the potential challenges.

3.1.3 The learning objectives

The learning objective is to review and analyse the different international quality assurance approaches adopted by quality assurance bodies. So evaluation can be made on how these frameworks can be adopted in Hong Kong given it is market with different higher education, and

vocational and professional training developments and with varying levels of maturity in terms of quality assurance.

3.1.4 The rationale for choosing the particular QA agencies as the focus of the diary entries

This study involves the analysis of a host of quality assurance agencies. The rationale for selecting European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) is because these two agencies are well-established and well-recognised in the field of quality assurance. It would be beneficial to understand their approaches to quality assurance. In addition, two country-specific quality agencies, Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) as well as Skillsfuture Singapore (SSG) are selected due to their specific regulatory role in regulating the vocational and education training sector.

3.2 Timeframe of the diary entries

To align the goals of this study with the tasks related to the current role of the author, the diary entries are documented in 11 weeks spread across February to May 2022.

3.3 Diary reporting plan

The diary entries are documented in such a way which is aligned with the current role of the author as well as the professional development and professional needs of the author as described in earlier sections.

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

Weeks - Weeks 1-2 (28 February to 13 March)

The review and analysis is conducted on the quality assurance frameworks adopted by European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) which is established to maintain and enhance the quality of European higher education and to act as the driving force for developing quality assurance across all Bologna Process signatory countries (ENQA website).

International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE)

Weeks - Weeks 3-4 (14 March to 27 March)

Following analysis of Weeks 1-2 is the review and analysis of the quality assurance frameworks adopted by the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). Established since 1999, INQAAHE is a world-wide association of 300+ organisations active in the theory and practice of quality assurance in higher education (INQAAHE website). As a QA community, INQAAHE provides a forum through which their members can share interests, a common language and an understanding of how things are done related to QA and also discuss global issues (INQAAHE website).

Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA)

Weeks - Weeks 5-6 (28 March to 10 April)

After analysing the case of INQAAHE, the focus will be shifted to reviewing the quality assurance frameworks adopted by the Australian counterpart, Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA). As the national regulator for vocational education and training (VET), ASQA aims to ensure quality education and training in order for students, employers, governments and the community to have confidence in the integrity of qualifications issued by training providers (ASQA website).

SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG)

Weeks 7-8 (11 April to 24 April)

The next is centered around the quality assurance frameworks adopted by SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) based in Asia. As a statutory board under the Ministry of Education (MOE), SSG aims to drive and coordinate the implementation of the national SkillsFuture movement, promote a culture and holistic system of lifelong learning through the pursuit of skills mastery, and strengthen the ecosystem of quality education and training in Singapore. (SkillsFuture Singapore website).

Implementation in Hong Kong

Weeks 9-11 (25 April to 15 May)

The process concludes by studying how the various quality assurance approaches currently implemented by the different quality assurance bodies, namely ENQA in Europe, INQAAHE, ASQA in Australia, and SSG in Singapore can be adopted in the context of Hong Kong.

4 DIARY ENTRIES AND DISCUSSION

In the previous section, the reporting plan and diary entries are discussed. This section will outline the diary entries in the form of topic-based report with detailed analysis.

4.1 The diary entries

Given the nature of the review and analysis, the section outlines the diary entries in the form of topic-based report. Below is a summary of the diary entries across 11 weeks.

4.1.1 Review of the quality assurance frameworks of European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

The diary entry of Weeks 1 to 2 centered around studying the quality assurance frameworks of European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The purpose of the study is to understand the principles behind adopting these quality assurance approaches and how these approaches are implemented and to obtain insights into how and whether some practices can be adopted by my organisation.

4.1.1.1 Introduction

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) is established to maintain and enhance the quality of European higher education and to act as the driving force for developing quality assurance across all Bologna Process signatory countries. As a membership association, ENQA serves and represents its members at the European level and internationally (ENQA website). ENQA is the primary provider of external reviews of agencies in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (ENQA website).

ENQA members comprises quality assurance (QA) organisations from the EHEA based in Europe and operating in the field of higher education. To be qualified as an ENQA member, agencies must demonstrate their compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) every five years. Hence, ENQA agency

reviews are designed for membership applications of ENQA as well as registration of European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) which is stated in the Bologna Process Communiqué of London, 2007 (Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews). EQAR is responsible for publishing and managing a register of quality assurance agencies that substantially comply with ESG in order to provide the public with clear and trusted information on quality assurance agencies operating in Europe.

ENQA agency reviews are also used for different purposes other than the ones stated above. Such review is used by an agency which needs to demonstrate that it complies with the ESG in different national contexts or for enhancement purpose covering those agencies outside of EHEA with the objective of aligning themselves with the European practice in quality assurance (Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews).

In the ENQA agency reviews, ESG provides the framework for quality assurance as well as the point of reference in the EHEA (Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews). The reviews are executed based on the ESG that describe how an agency should organise their quality assurance activities (Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews).

The impact of the ENQA external reviews lies not only in the eligibility for ENQA membership or registration of ENAR but also the credibility and quality of an entire external review system and even the higher education system of a country or region (Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews).

ENQA agency review is rooted in the following principles (Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews):

- **Evidenced-based.** Implemented by a panel of independent experts, the ENQA review is an evidence-based process.
- **Information provided being factually correct.** It is assumed that the information provided by the agency is factually correct unless evidence points to the contrary.
- **Verify information.** The review process verifies information provided in the self-assessment report (SAR) as well as other documentation and explores any issues that are not covered in the documentation.

- **Transparency.** The review process is transparent while the outputs of the review are published.
- **Overall compliance.** It is expected that an 'overall compliance' instead of rigid compliance of the ESG that is needed for ENQA membership is achieved by the agency.

4.1.1.2 Methods of review

It is understood that ENQA external reviews have three types which are full review, partial review, and targeted review. Each of these reviews serves different purposes.

As stated in the ENQA's Statutes and Rules of Procedure, all ENQA member agencies are required to go through an external review at least once every five years (ENQA website). The first review will be a full review.

The targeted review serves as a basis for member agencies who wish to reapply for ENQA membership or renew registration in EQAR. The purpose of targeted review is to provide agencies that have previously successfully had two full ESG reviews with another way to evaluate their compliance against the standards and procedures of ESG (Guidelines for ENQA targeted reviews). This review focuses on the remaining challenges (i.e. standards with partial compliance in the previous review, new external QA activities and substantial changes) in reaching ESG compliance (Guidelines for ENQA targeted reviews). It aims to help support the agencies in furthering their efforts to continuously review and enhance their work (Guidelines for ENQA targeted reviews).

4.1.1.3 Criteria for review - Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)

The ENQA external reviews are conducted against agencies' compliance of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The ESG spells out eight criteria which are, each of which is followed by guidelines that provide more information about the good practices and explain in detail the importance of such criterion

(ENQA website). The criteria include review of activities, official status, resources, mission statement, independence, EQA criteria and processes used by the members, accountability procedures, as well as miscellaneous.

4.1.1.4 Methods and outcomes of review

The below explains the methods of review adopted by ENQA as well as the outcomes concluded upon completing the review.

Setting the stage. An agency initiates the ENQA agency review which seeks to apply for or renew ENQA membership. ENQA may accept such request for reviews. Each review is then assigned to an ENQA Secretariat staff member as the review coordinator who serves as the main contact point for the agency and the review panel through the review process. There are also the terms of reference of the review to be agreed upon by ENQA and the agency under review.

Self-assessment. The process starts with an analytical self-assessment report (SAR) produced by the agency under review (ENQA website). The agency needs to follow the guide of content in the ENQA guidelines when compiling the SAR which is submitted to ENQA. It is noted that the SAR should be analytical and also covers recommendations from the previous review and include the substantial changes and developments since last review (Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews). Once the SAR is properly prepared, it will be sent to the review panel before the site visit and published on ENQA's website (ENQA website).

External evaluation. The next stage of review is conducted by a panel of independent reviewers consisting of a review chair, review secretary and two (and in some exceptional cases, three) more panel members (ENQA website) commissioned by ENQA Agency Review Committee.

The review panel is mandated to evaluate the activities of the agency and sharing their views on the compliance of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (ENQA website). Such role is executed through evaluating the self-assessment report (SAR) alongside additional materials as well as a site visit to the agency. The site visit schedule is proposed and finalised by the review secretary upon consulting the agency. Besides helping the review panel to expand on the information provided in the SAR, the site visit

also provides an opportunity for the agency to discuss the activities and development (ENQA website).

Review report. Upon gathering information from documentation as well as site visit, the external review report (ERR) is drafted for ENQA Secretariat. The ERR documents the panel's judgement on compliance for each standard according to the grading of compliant, partially compliant, and non-compliant. The report will be reviewed by review coordinator for completeness, consistency, clarity and language and then factual check by the agency. The external review report will then be finalised by the review panel, scrutinised and validated by the Agency Review Committee to ensure that the guidelines are met, and the consistency with other reports produced through the ENQA agency reviews. The final report is published on ENQA website which the agency can use for applying for ENQA membership or ENQR listing (Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews).

Follow-up. There is a follow-up stage whereby all agencies need to submit a follow-up report at the latest two years after the validation of the final external review report. It is considered to be an integral process of a review that supports the agency in continuously reflecting on and further developing its work. The report should document the recommendations made in the review report being addressed and other significant changes or development made by the agency. ENQA may conduct an optional progress visit to the agency to foster a stronger and enhancement-oriented dialogue with the agency on topics relevant to their context. This normally may be conducted two to three years after the original review panel.

4.1.2 Review of the quality assurance frameworks of International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE)

The diary entries of Weeks 3 to 4 will involve a study of the quality assurance frameworks of International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). The purpose of the study is to understand the principles behind adopting these quality assurance frameworks and how these frameworks are implemented as well as obtaining insights into how and whether some practices can be adopted by my organisation.

4.1.2.1 Introduction

INQAAHE was established in 1991 as the first ever international network of QA bodies (INQAAHE website). As an umbrella quality assurance organization for quality assurance providers and accreditors worldwide, INQAAHE provides a global quality enhancement platform for both the internal and external quality assurance in tertiary education (INQAAHE website). The platform gives the QA bodies the opportunity to share good practice and improve the professionalisation of the field of QA in higher education and explore global issues in higher education, and QA (INQAAHE website).

The Guidelines of Good Practice (GGP) review is rooted against a set of principles (INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice Procedural Manual 2018), namely:

- **Evidence-based.** It is an evidence-based review which is conducted by independent reviewers.
- **Information being factually correct.** The agency provides information that is factually correct unless the evidence points to the contrary.
- **Verify information.** It is a process of verifying information that is provided in the self-evaluation report (SER) as well as other documentation and exploring any issues that are not included in the documentation.
- **Transparency.** The review is designed as a transparent process and the outputs are published

INQAAHE offers a membership category that consists of GGP-aligned members, full members, associate members and affiliate members. There are a set of membership criteria and processes for membership. Quality assurance agencies who are applying for GGP-aligned membership would need to undergo GGP review.

Three pathways are available for member quality assurance agencies to demonstrate GGP alignment which are review, joint review, and recognition. The first pathway involves external review conducted by INQAAHE while the second pathway involves an external review by

INQAAHE as well as another reputable QA body specialised in comparable practice (INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice Procedural Manual 2018). In the last pathway, the applicant agency is required to apply for acceptance of the agency's alignment with GGP through demonstrating that it has already been reviewed against a set of standards or criteria by a reputable, external organisation which are considered substantially equivalent to or exceed the requirements set forth in the GGP (INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice Procedural Manual 2018).

4.1.2.2 Criteria for review - INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice (GGP) recognition standards

The criteria of INQAAHE GGP are used for the self- and external-evaluation of the external quality assurance agencies (EQAAs) (INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice Procedural Manual 2018). The criteria are the external quality assurance agency (EQAA), accountability of the EQAA, the EQAA's framework for external review of quality in higher education institutions, EQAA review and its relationship to the public, the external quality assurance agency, decision making and the quality assurance of cross-border higher education.

4.1.2.3 Methods of review

An internal review is conducted by the INQAAHE Membership/Member Services Committee to determine the degree of compliance against the membership criteria. The Committee may ask additional questions upon reviewing the application. the INQAAHE Membership/Member Services Committee will determine whether the membership criteria are met through voting (INQAAHE website). The Secretary will also act as a liaison for the Membership/Member Services Committee to communicate the decision to the applicant (INQAAHE website).

The GGP-alignment review involves slightly different processes. A panel of at least three members comprising a chair, the secretary and one additional reviewer are invited by the INQAAHE Secretariat to join the review panel in all three pathways mentioned earlier. The applicant quality assurance agency is then required to submit a self-evaluation report (SER) providing the basis for the site visit to be conducted by the panel. The panel will conduct a thorough review of the SER as well as other documentation before the site visit. Site visit will be conducted which aims to verify the information in the SER and acquire first-hand knowledge of

the quality assurance agency under review (INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice Procedural Manual, 2018).

Following the completion of site visit, the report written by the panel will be submitted to the quality assurance agency under review for factual check (INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice Procedural Manual, 2018). The INQAAHE Secretariat will forward the panel report to the Recognition Committee for review and recommendation regarding the quality assurance agency's alignment to GGP. The full documentation will be forwarded to entire INQAAHE Board for a final decision (INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice Procedural Manual, 2018).

According to the decision of the INQAAHE Board, the agency under review would need to follow up on the recommendations made in the final report that outlines positive progress towards addressing the recommendations for improvement within a specific timeframe (INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice Procedural Manual, 2018).

4.1.3 Review of the quality assurance frameworks of Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA)

The diary entries of Weeks 5 to 6 center around analysing the quality assurance frameworks of Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA). The purpose of the study is to understand the principles behind adopting these quality assurance frameworks and how these frameworks are implemented as well as obtaining insights into how and whether some practices can be adopted by my organisation.

4.1.3.1 Introduction

Australian Skills Quality Authority is the quality assurance body based in Australia that is responsible for regulating Australian vocational education and training (VET) providers (ASQA website).

The overarching principle relates to creating and maintain a national system of vocational education and training (VET) based on national industry competency standards (Misko, 2015).

Some of the other key principles of the regulatory and quality assurance frameworks for VET are (Misko, 2015):

- Registration of public and private providers to deliver accredited and nationally recognised training and issue nationally-recognised qualifications and statements of attainment
- Mutual recognition of nationally recognised qualification and training outcomes delivered by registered training organisations within and across states and territories, with decisions made by state and territory registering bodies
- Recognition of prior learning (RPL)
- Employ appropriately qualified and competent staff
- Protect students' funds
- External review

The regulatory practice performed by ASQA include RTO registration, and VET course accreditation.

All ASQA Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) or applicants seeking registration on National Register as RTOs must comply with the Standards for Registered Training Organisations (ASQA website).

The types of RTOs regulated by ASQA are (ASQA website):

- Training providers that deliver VET qualifications and courses to students in Australia or offer Australian qualifications overseas;
- Providers that deliver VET courses to people living in Australia on student visas;
- Some providers delivering English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS).

On accreditation role, ASQA accredits vocational education and training (VET) course that must be delivered by RTOs to make sure these courses meet nationally approved standards according to the industry, enterprise, education, legislative and community needs (ASQA website).

Performance assessment (audit) is also conducted by ASQA in order to understand the training provider performance.

4.1.3.2 Criteria for review - VET Quality Framework

The VET Quality Framework of ASQA aims to achieve national consistency in registering and monitoring registered training organisations (RTO) and enforcing standards in the VET sector. The VET Quality Framework consists of (ASQA website):

- **Standards for Registered Training Organisations (the Standards).** These standards outline the requirements that an organisation needs to meet in order to be registered as a training provider (RTO). There are eight standards that fall under three major categories, training and assessment, obligations to learners and clients, as well as RTO governance and administration.
- **Fit and Proper Person Requirement.** This requirement spells out the suitability requirements of individuals who are involved in operating a registered training organisation
- **Financial Viability Risk Assessment Requirements.** These requirements deal with the financial viability of training organisations.
- **Data Provision Requirements.** These requirements demand registered training organisations to provide ASQA with data upon request as well as submitting quality indicator data every year.
- **Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF).** This framework is the national policy for regulated qualifications in Australian education and training.

4.1.3.3 Regulatory-based regulation

To achieve ASQA's strategic objective of ensuring quality training outcomes for students, an integrated, risk-based approach to managing risk is adopted for regulating training providers and accredited course (ASQA website).

This risk-based regulation employs a variety of methods and strategies to monitor compliance as well as identifying risks. This approach is rooted in strong education and the return to compliance focus.

Against this backdrop, ASQA uses a Regulatory Risk Framework to identify and respond to risk in the vocational education and training (VET) sector. ASQA manages risks using different strategies. First, the regulatory processes are integrated for managing risks for performance assessments (audits), registration application, education and compliance. Besides, there are other tools employed to identify those non-compliant providers that pose a risk. Intelligence is gathered while data is used for making decisions. Providers will also be assessed for exposing to risks.

The types of risks to be managed are provider risk as well as systemic risk. Provider risk is about training providers not meeting the quality of training outcomes while systemic risk is concerned more about the risk posed to the entire sector of many training providers.

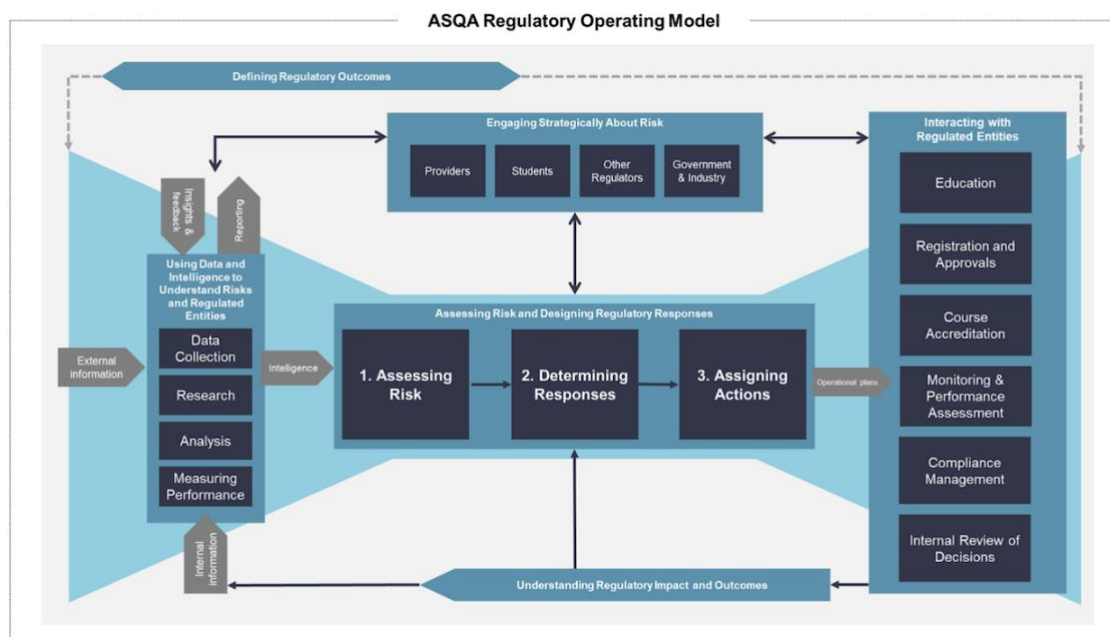


FIGURE 4. ASQA Regulatory Operating Model (ASQA website)

4.1.3.4 Methods for review

The below details the different methods of review adopted by ASQA for registration of training providers and course accreditation.

(a) RTO registration. The application stages include the initial completeness check, risk assessment (to review fit and proper person declaration as well as financial risk assessment tool). Once the risk assessment stage has been passed, the assessment process commences with an audit checks (include a desk and validation component) to ensure the organisations meet all the requirements. The decision will be finalised by ASQA.

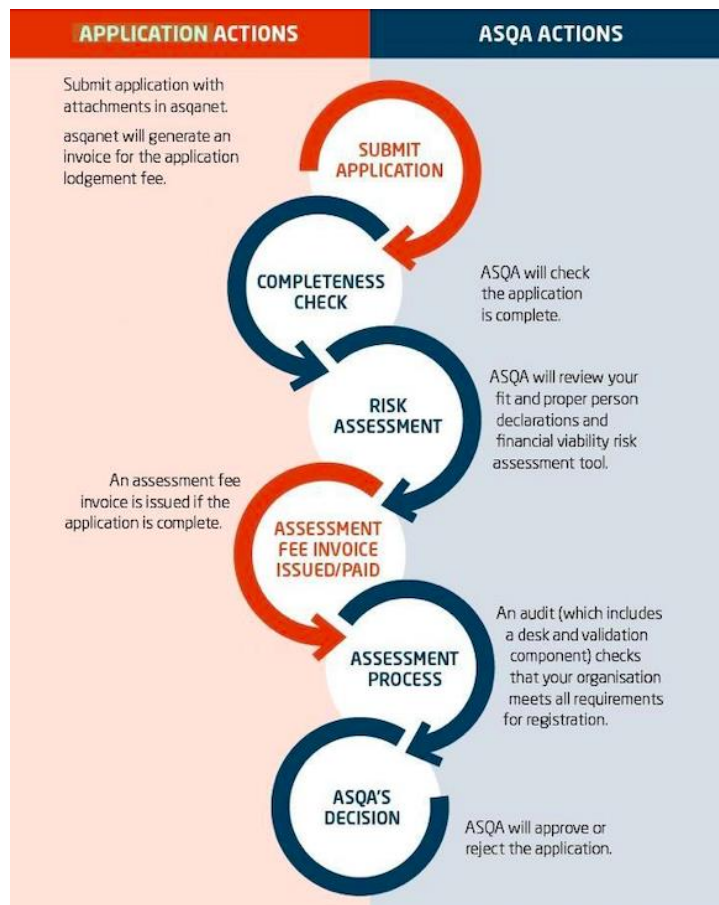


FIGURE 5. Overview of assessment stages (ASQA website)

(b) Course accreditation. Course accreditation involves five stages outlined below (ASQA website)

Stage 1 – VET course concept. At this stage, a VET course concept should be submitted to ASQA to demonstrate that key stakeholders have been consulted and that industry, enterprise, education, legislative or community need is established for course development.

Stage 2 – Course development. The VET course needs to demonstrate that it complies with Standards for VET Accredited Courses 2021 and Australian Qualifications Framework. Besides, during course development, consultation with stakeholders is necessary.

Stage 3 – Course submission. The course documents should be submitted at this stage for course accreditation.

Stage 4 – Application assessment. ASQA will evaluate the accreditation application adopting a rigorous assessment. The assessor may prepare an assessor report detailing the compliance or non-compliance against each standard.

Stage 5 – Decision. ASQA will finalise the decision.

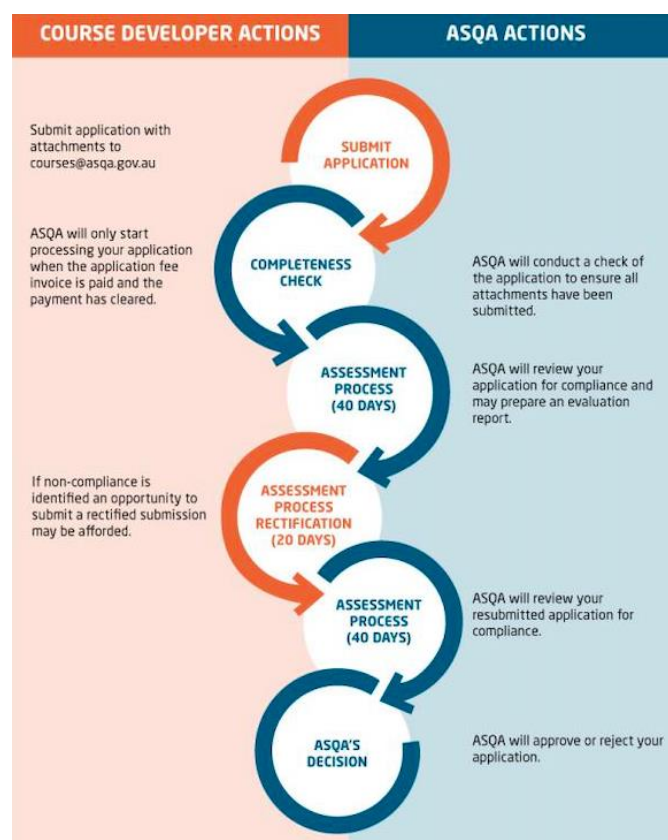


FIGURE 6. Overview of assessment stages – initial accreditation (ASQA website)

4.1.4 Review of the quality assurance approaches of SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG)

The diary entries of Weeks 7 to 8 center around analysing the quality assurance approaches of SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) from Singapore. The purpose of the study is to understand the principles behind adopting these quality assurance approaches and how these approaches are implemented as well as obtaining insights into how and whether some practices can be adopted in Hong Kong.

4.1.4.1 Introduction

As a statutory board under the Ministry of Education (MOE), SSG aims to drive and coordinate the implementation of the national SkillsFuture movement, promote a culture and holistic system of lifelong learning through the pursuit of skills mastery, and strengthen the ecosystem of quality education and training in Singapore (SkillsFuture Singapore website). Acts and legislations are put in place to govern SSG-funded training providers as well as private education institutions (Training Partners Gateway website).

The Singapore Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) is a national credential system which aims to train, develop, evaluate and certify skills as well as competencies for the workforce (SkillsFuture Singapore website). Launched in 2016, the WSQ adopts the skills and competences in the Skills Frameworks. WSQ programmes are funded and quality-assured by SkillsFuture Singapore that awards the WSQ certifications (SkillsFuture Singapore Website). WSQ is underpinned by a robust quality assurance framework whereby stringent criteria are applied to ensure the necessary standards and delivery of the programmes (Training Partners Gateway website).

There are different levels of WSQ qualifications from Certificate, Higher Certificate, Advanced Certificate, to Diploma, Specialist Diploma and Graduate Diploma. A host of sectors have WSQ qualifications covering either technical skills and competences or generic skills and competences. Sectors in which technical skills and competences are applicable include aerospace, food and beverage, clinical research, creative industries, logistics, etc. Generic skills and competencies are applicable to other sectors such as employability skills - executive development and growth for excellence, employability skills - workplace skills series, business management, leadership and people management, etc. (Training Partners Gateway website).

4.1.4.2 Funding and WSQ course accreditation

WSQ course accreditation is available for training providers who wish to conduct WSQ course. WSQ course accreditation status and funding support both start from the date that the course is approved (Training Partners Gateway Website). First-time training organisations applying for course accreditation is required to fulfill organisation registration requirements. Besides, non-WSQ broad-based courses and non-WSQ certifiable courses are also eligible for funding if fulfilling all the specific criteria. There are acts and regulations governing SSG-funded training providers and private education institutions.

4.1.4.3 Methods of review

The methods of review used by SSG are course accreditation, organisation registration as well as post-approval quality check (PQC).

(a) Organisation registration. SSG requires organisation registration for training providers (TPs) who seek to offer both SSG funded courses as well as private education (PE) courses.

There are two types of training providers. First, TPs seeking organisation registration (OR) as SSG funded training providers need to fulfill the legislative obligations before seeking organisation registration (Training Partners Gateway website). Second, for TPs who seek to apply for Enhanced Registration Framework (ERF) as a Private Education Institution (OR-PEI), they need to meet all the ERF standards through mandatory registration requirements (Training Partners Gateway website).

Organisation registration of SSG funded training providers involves two stages outlined below (see figure 7).

Stage 1 involves the evaluation of legal entity, legal entity name, organisation/management staff, financial records as well as training track records.

To proceed to Stage 2, TPs need to fulfil the pre-requisites in Stage 1. Stage 2 assesses the disclosure of information of TPs such as course information, senior management staff and trainers, organisational structure, facilities and equipment. Other requirements include evaluation

of the organisational chart of TPs and the role and responsibilities of management team and staff, premises, student contracts, as well as conducting a half-day on-site assessment by SSG officers (SkillsFuture Singapore website).

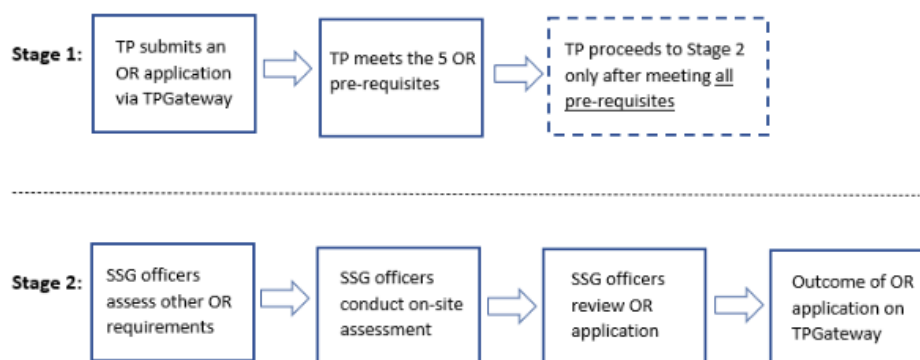


FIGURE 7. Overview of the application process of organisation registration (Training Partners Gateway website)

Besides, the Enhanced Registration Framework (ERF) is used for evaluating Private Education Institution (OR-PEI) in terms of their corporate governance and quality of their provisions as well as transparency of their information (Training Partners Gateway website). There are also registration requirements for OR-PEI that includes evaluation of corporate status, name of PEI, the brand name, premises, PEI managers, academic board, examination board, courses, teachers, and course administration (Training Partners Gateway website).

(b) WSQ course accreditation. Course accreditation for training providers who wish to conduct WSQ course while first-time training organisations applying for course accreditation is required to fulfill organisation registration requirements. There are a set of WSG course accreditation criteria for evaluating WSG courses. Approved courses are entered into the course listing in TPGateway. These criteria comprise the following (Training Partners Gateway website):

- Alignment of the course title with coverage of course contents;
- Technical skills and competences (TSC) and/or critical core skills (CCS) under the Singapore Skills Framework or other reference documents (e.g. competency standards) as stipulated by SSG have to be covered in the course contents;
- Alignment of the curriculum design with the teaching, learning and assessment methods as well as the intended learning outcomes;

- Include at least two assessment methods that are aligned with the teaching and learning activities;
- Have at least one qualified trainer/assessor and one backup trainer/assessor for the course
- All proposed adult educators (AEs) must fulfil the WSQ AE Qualification Requirements
- Use at least a mix of two of the learning modes (i.e. classroom learning, workplace learning, technology-enabled learning, and work-based learning) for WSQ full qualifications

All training providers that offer SSG approved courses will be subjected to post-approval quality check (PQC) at least once every 2 to 4 years (SkillsFuture Singapore website). PQC aims to form part of the continuous efforts made by SSG to assist training providers for further enhancing their robustness and course quality post approval at the delivery stage (SkillsFuture Singapore website). This is implemented through quality assurance processes as well as systems for continuous improvement.

4.2 Issues identified related to quality assurance in the context of Hong Kong

This section outlines the issues identified related to performing quality assurance in the academic and vocational and professional education and training sectors in Hong Kong impacted by the changing education landscape in Hong Kong. The discussion will center around analysing how these issues are linked to the theories on trust and accountability discussed in the previous sections.

As discussed in earlier sections, Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) is the statutory body that provides quality assurance and assessment services to training providers in both academic and vocational and professional education and training sectors (VPET) in Hong Kong. It is worth pointing out the characteristics of the accreditation services provided by HKCAAVQ. First, accreditation is entirely voluntary and is initiated by the training providers unlike that of other QA agencies such as those discussed in the previous subsections (Manual for the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework). Besides, among most of the other quality assurance agencies in different regions such as Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, it is not common for a quality assurance agency to oversee both the academic (that is higher education in the context of Hong

Kong) as well as the VPET sectors. Lastly, the same set accreditation standards are applicable to accreditation in both sectors.

4.2.1 The potential growth in the number of training providers in the vocational and professional education and training (VPET) sector seeking accreditation from HKCAAVQ

The number of training providers seeking accreditation for initial evaluation for the period from 2019/20 to 2020/21 indicates that the number remains stable at 21 (see table 5 and table 6). However, it represents a significant increase by 25% from the period of 2018/19 which can be attributed to a change in the policy of the Government. In general, training providers in the vocational and professional education and training sector seeking accreditation of their institution and/or their learning programmes are driven by the need to have their programmes quality-assured and HKQF-recognised.

TABLE 4. Breakdown of vocational and professional programme accreditation and re-accreditation (2020-2021) (Annual Report 2020-2021 of HKCAAVQ)

QF Level	Number of Initial Evaluation (IE)		Number of Learning Programme Accreditation (LPA)		Number of Learning Programme Re-accreditation (LPA)	
	2019/20	2020/21	2019/20	2020/21	2019/20	2020/21
QF Level 1	3	8	12	22	3	18
QF Level 2	2	2	13	20	17	46
QF Level 3	6	6	33	19	29	37
QF Level 4	7	2	17	15	5	18
QF Level 5	3	3	4	5	-	2
QF Level 6	-	-	2	-	-	-
TOTAL	21	21	81	81	54	121

TABLE 5. Breakdown of vocational and professional programme accreditation and re-accreditation (2019-2020)(Annual Report 2019-2020 of HKCAAVQ)

QF Level	Number of Initial Evaluation (IE)		Number of Learning Programme Accreditation (LPA)		Number of Learning Programme Re-accreditation (LPA)	
	2018/19	2019/20	2018/19	2019/20	2018/19	2019/20
QF Level 1	3	3	10	12	75	3
QF Level 2	-	2	23	13	90	17
QF Level 3	9	6	33	33	60	29
QF Level 4	3	7	14	17	19	5
QF Level 5	1	3	2	4	4	-
QF Level 6	-	-	-	2	-	-
TOTAL	16	21	82	81	248	54

With the launch of Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) and Qualifications Register (QR) in 2008, all new courses seeking registration under Continuing Education Fund (CEF) are required to be recognised under HKQF and registered in Qualifications Register (QR) (LC Paper of Review of Continuing Education Fund and Proposed Funding Injection, 2017). With the implementation of the enhanced measures by the Labour and Welfare Bureau of the Government, all CEF courses are subjected to accreditation to guarantee course quality (LC Paper of Review of Continuing Education Fund and Proposed Funding Injection, 2017).

As a result of these enhanced measures, all Continuing Education Fund (CEF) courses registered under the Qualifications Register (QR) are required to be quality-assured by the appropriate accreditation authorities, that is HKCAAVQ or self-accrediting universities (LC Paper of Review of Continuing Education Fund and Proposed Funding Injection). It is estimated that around 1,800 Continuing Education Fund courses that are registered by non-self-accrediting institutions need to undergo accreditation for registration under QR before they are eligible for continuing to be registered as Continuing Education Fund courses within a transitional period of 4 years. And a validity of registration of 4 years will be imposed for every Continuing Education Fund course or until the respective Qualifications Register registration expires (Item for Finance by Labour and Welfare Bureau of the Government). To support Continuing Education Fund course providers of such initiative, the Accreditation Grant Scheme under Qualifications Framework Fund has been set up to provide partial or full accreditation grant for course providers of self-financing programmes for application by course providers of CEF courses.

Against this backdrop, it is expected that there may be a surge in the number of self-financed training providers (or course providers), both currently operating Continuing Education Fund course or new Continuing Education Fund course providers who seek accreditation of their organisations and/or their learning programmes by HKCAAVQ. The question is how HKCAAVQ can cope with the potential growth in the number of training providers, in particular, those providers with less-experienced and less maturity level of quality assurance competence at the organisational level and programme level which implies a higher level of risks.

It is understood that reviewing new applicants for approving them as educational institution can be both sensitive and time-consuming processes for a quality assurance agency. In cases whereby such a case is deliberated as non-approval could embarrass it publicly. So approval requires extra work on both the training providers applying for review as well as the quality assurance agency (INQAAHE GQP graduate programme materials, 2011).

The issues are two-fold. First, these course providers, majority of which belong to the vocational and professional and education training sector, are mostly self-financed organisations which are relatively new to accreditation and whose level of quality assurance competence and maturity is expected to be lower than those other training providers (e.g. those training providers with programme area accreditation status or those in the academic sector). Second, the market to which these course providers belong is highly segmented which means there are many small-to-medium-sized training providers with varying scale of operation and competence.

As discussed in the earlier sections, trust is perceived to be a substitute for control though there are divided discussions about the relationship of trust and control (Bijlsma & Koopman, 2003; Costa, 2003). In the context of addressing the issue of growing number of training providers in the vocational and professional education and training sector, the implementation of the enhancement measures of requesting Continuing Education Fund course providers to seek accreditation can be perceived as one approach for control in order to guarantee quality. The level of trust in these Continuing Education Fund course providers is relatively lower than the level of trust in other training providers which may be the self-financed continuing education arms of the UGC-funded universities with self-accrediting status, some of which are also Continuing Education Fund course providers. Accreditation is also perceived to be one of the accountability

measures in place. When trust level is lower, similar to this context, there is a need for more accountability.

The four dimensions of trust is to be applied in such context. According to the dimension of concern, it states that in a trusted relationship between the trustor and trustee, it is believed that to avoid any actions that harm the expectations of the trustor, a trustee will endeavour to fulfil their expectations in a given context (Mishra, 1996). In this context, Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) of the Government is the trustor while CEF course providers of self-financed organisations are the trustee. The possibility of whether the trustee will endeavour to fulfil the trustor's expectation is probable though this may be associated with whether the course can be listed as Continuing Education Fund reimbursable course. Continuing Education Fund courses may potentially be able to attract more learners who are in turn subsidised by the Government. This may drive the Continuing Education Fund course providers to act positively to the quality assurance requirements and procedures even though they are new to accreditation and whose level of quality assurance competence and maturity may not be as high as those in the academic sector and those who have already been granted the programme area accreditation status.

On the dimension of capacity, a trustor may assess the competence and capacity required for a trustee to fulfil their expectations as the level of competence impact whether a trustor will trust the trustee (Gabarro, 1987; McKnight et al., 1998; Migliore & DeClouette, 2011; Swan et al., 1988). Competences include knowledge, skills, expertise, as well as other resources necessary for meeting the trustor's expectations.

Considering this context of Continuing Education Fund course providers, they are relatively diverse in terms of their competence, in particular, their quality assurance competence while most of them are self-financed organisations which have varying levels of quality assurance competence. The level of competence may not be as high as those course providers who are the continuing education arms of the UGC-funded universities, hence, resulting in lower level of trust and more control in the form of accountability measures is needed to be put in place.

In terms of the dimension of openness which is defined as honesty of a trustee (Ellis & Shockley-Zalabak, 2001; Gabarro, 1987; Leimeister et al., 2005; McKnight et al., 1998; Mishra, 1996), it is theorised that open communication as well as exchanges are perceived as essential elements of building trust (Cummings & Bromiley, 1996; De Boer, 2002; Ellis & Shockley-Zalabak, 2001;

Leimeister et al., 2005). In this context, the level of trust is associated with how open and honest the Continuing Education Fund course providers are in terms of engaging internal and external quality assurance processes. As discussed earlier, these Continuing Education Fund course providers, diverse and all self-financed, may be new to accreditation and probably quality assurance without much experience in implementing internal and external quality assurance processes. Hence, the level of trust is perceived to be lower compared to those course providers who are the extension arms of the UGC-funded universities with self-accrediting authority and established quality assurance mechanism and policies in place.

The level of risk, as one of the essential dimensions of trust, is theorised to influence the level of trust (Abebe, 2021). In such context of requiring all Continuing Education Fund course providers of self-financed organisations to seek accreditation from HKCAAVQ to guarantee course quality, given the level of risk for these CEF course providers is higher than for those who are a part of the UGC-funded universities, more control mechanisms such as accreditation are used by the trustor, LWB of the Government to minimise some perceived risks (Abebe, 2021).

The other challenge poses to HKCAAVQ is how to manage and minimise risks posed by these training providers with less mature level of quality assurance competence and internal quality assurance mechanism.

4.2.2 Increased level of quality assurance competence and maturity at the organisational level of training providers

As discussed earlier, the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) has been launched for over 14 years while HKCAAVQ is also responsible the accreditation of the vocational and professional education and training sector in Hong Kong since 2007 for about 15 years. The four-stage quality assurance process is also designed in such a way to facilitate training providers' development of competence and to recognise their track records. Moving from Stage 1, to Stage 3 of Programme Area Accreditation (PAA) gradually requires training providers to exhibit higher level of competence in quality assurance and quality improvement.

Based on the four-stage quality assurance process of accrediting training providers and learning programmes, PAA is the second last stage of the quality assurance process (HKCAAVQ website). Training providers with a PAA status may develop and operate learning programmes

within an approved programme area at the approved QF level or lower levels without going through programme accreditation and re-accreditation by HKCAAVQ (HKCAAVQ website). Qualifications developed within the approved programme area at the approved QF level or lower level can be entered into the Qualifications Register (QR) during the validity period.

TABLE 8. List of training providers with Programme Area Accreditation (PAA) status¹⁰

List of training providers with Programme Area Accreditation (PAA) status
<p>Chu Hai College of Higher Education</p> <p>The Education University of Hong Kong (formerly known as The Hong Kong Institute of Education)</p> <p>The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong (formerly known as Hang Seng Management College)</p> <p>Hong Kong Design Institute, Vocational Training Council</p> <p>Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education, Vocational Training Council</p> <p>Hotel and Tourism Institute, Vocational Training Council</p> <p>Chinese Culinary Institute, Vocational Training Council</p> <p>International Culinary Institute, Vocational Training Council</p> <p>Maritime Services Training Institute, Vocational Training Council</p> <p>Hong Kong Shue Yan University</p> <p>The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts</p> <p>Employees Retraining Board</p> <p>Youth College, Vocational Training Council</p> <p>Hong Kong Police College</p> <p>Caritas Institute of Higher Education</p> <p>Tung Wah College</p>

The level of quality assurance competence and maturity at the organisational level of some training providers has increased in recent years. First, this is evidenced by the number of training providers being granted the PAA status (see table 8) upon accreditation. Second, it is also reflected by the outcomes of accreditation. This also demonstrates the maturity of their internal quality assurance system and effective operation.

¹⁰[https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/files/services/accreditation/List of Operators awarded PAA Status English 20210325.pdf](https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/files/services/accreditation/List%20of%20Operators%20awarded%20PAA%20Status%20English%2020210325.pdf)

The implementation of the differentiation approach¹¹ also reflects the maturity of the quality assurance competence of training providers. Currently the differentiation approach is adopted by HKCAAVQ to recognise the training providers with good track records at both organisational and programme levels. The approaches comprise use of paper-based review accreditation; customised accreditation process; longer validity period or a mix of these approaches (HKCAAVQ website).

On applying the different dimensions of trust, the third stage of the four-stage accreditation process, the PAA status conferred on training providers, is also perceived to be associated with an increased level of trust with less control through accountability measures. In relation to the four dimensions of trust, namely, concern, capacity, openness, and risk (Abebe 2021), the trustees who are the relatively more experienced training providers such as the ones listed above are trusted to endeavour to fulfil their expectations in the sector utilising their competence and capacity. There is also openness in the way information is communicated from trustee to the trustor, the QA agency in this context. And the risk level is perceived to be relatively lower compared to other training providers such as those providers providing Continuing Education Fund (CEF) courses as these training providers have better quality assurance competence level and relatively higher maturity level in quality assurance at the organisational level. Given the level of trust is perceived to be higher, those training providers with PAA status are given the self-accrediting status within the approved programme area at the approved QF level or lower level. The self-accrediting ability, though restricted compared to the self-accrediting status of the UGC-funded universities and their extension arms of training providers, is a good indication of the level of trust in association with control and accountability measures.

In his presentation during a recent International Conference¹², the Executive Director of HKCAAVQ has also highlighted and emphasised the changing role of a quality assurance agency from quality assurance to quality enhancement, and from quality enhancement to quality excellence and how HKCAAVQ supports such an evolving role as well (HKCAAVQ website). Hence, on moving forward, it would be worth considering the strategies for paving the way to performing the role of quality enhancement to quality excellence.

¹¹ https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/file/page/1738/Four-stage_Manual_EN_20201109.pdf

¹² <https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/assets/pdf/HKCAAVQ%20-%20Mr%20Albert%20Chow.pdf>

4.2.3 Training providers shifting their delivery online

The academic and vocational and professional education and training sectors have witnessed a shift in the delivery mode, albeit some temporary while some permanent. Many training providers have shifted their delivery online mostly prompted by the coronavirus pandemic. As a result of the coronavirus pandemic, there was lockdown, and school closures. However, many training providers are making efforts to continuing operating their learning programmes for learners. Hence, there has been a shift to online delivery. Many of these training providers are far from being experienced with online learning, from the initial set-up of the learning management system, to planning the learning and teaching activities online, delivering the online learning activities and designing the online assessments, etc.

During the coronavirus pandemic in the past two years, training providers have sought temporary arrangement for online delivery of their learning programmes. However, it is evident that they may not have full knowledge of online learning from planning online learning, to online student support, student engagement and online training and assessment. These are only some of the issues they encounter. The challenge is for HKCAAVQ to consider how to perform its role in safeguarding quality of training providers and providing education and guidance to the sectors as well as training providers with insights on online learning.

4.2.4 Insights from the diary entries

This section highlights the insights identified from the diary entries documented through analysing the different quality assurance approaches of ENQA, INQAAHE, ASQA and SSG in the previous section.

The first insight goes back to the fundamental question of quality assurance: the nature and purpose of quality assurance which sets the stage for quality assurance. It is theorised that the quality assurance procedures aim for accountability or improvement (Kis, 2005). Vroeijenstijn (1995a) argues the imbalance and incompatibility of these two purposes. It is understood that different approaches to external quality assurance is adopted by different countries and different quality assurance agencies. The purpose or the nature of quality assurance shapes the scope of quality assurance as well as the methods and the tools utilised for approaching quality assurance by quality assurance agencies.

Quality assurance for accountability purpose aims to reinforce external insights and control as well as take corrective actions (Vis, 2005) based on criteria which are laid down by external institutions (Kis, 2005). Accountability measures include legislative regulations, evaluation and reporting of performance, quality audit and accreditation requirements alongside other implicit and explicitly external supervision (Kivistö, 2007; Trow, 1996). Conversely, quality assurance for improvement serves the purpose of promoting future performance instead of making judgements on past performance with the emphasis on quality improvement rather than control (Kis, 2005).

ENQA and INQAAHE are differentiated from ASQA and SSG in terms of the purpose of quality assurance which can also attribute to their distinct roles in their respective jurisdictions. The purpose of quality assurance for ENAQ and INQAAHE is improvement based on the analysis whereas the purpose of quality assurance of ASQA and SSG is considered to be accountability which is associated with their regulatory role and the accountability measures used which are regulations. Both ASQA in Australia and SSG in Singapore use regulatory approach to quality assurance. In both Australia and Singapore, there are acts and regulations in place to regulate the training providers in the VET sector that is linked to government funding. Regulatory practice is closely associated with government funding. In applying one of the dimensions of trust, structural assurances and safeguards such as regulations, guarantees, and legal recourse may be used by the trustor, ASQA and SSG in this context, to manage some perceived risks (Abebe, 2021).

The second insight is concerned with the level of quality assurance review. The debate on whether to adopt a programme-oriented or institutional-oriented approach to quality review still remains a major agenda item. According to an international comparison of regional quality assurance practices, it has been concluded that efforts 'vary in size, shape, design and structures, but they nonetheless share the same basic quality assurance DNA' (Wells, 2014, p.21). Both ENQA and INQAAHE adopt the institutional approach to quality assurance which may be explained using the level of trust.

The institutional approach evaluates the institution as a whole whereas the programme-based approach focuses on accrediting the quality of the programmes offered by institutions. The focus of the institutional approach lies in the overarching issues surrounding how the institutions operate as an institution instead of looking at the minute details of the learning programmes

(INQAAHE QAP Graduate programme materials, 2011). The institutional-based approach is thought to give flexibility to institutions in terms of the structure, content as well as implementing the study programmes (ENQA Workshop Report). With a focus on autonomy and holding the institutions accountable for their quality, this approach is adopted for striking a balance between preserving autonomy and meeting the need for accountability (ENQA Workshop Report). In contrast, the programme-based approach is best suited for examining the programme contents of an institution in detail. The criticism for this approach includes high labour costs, extra bureaucracy and the discussion about the limited effect on an institution's teaching and learning quality.

The level of quality review adopted is linked to the different dimensions of trust (Abebe, 2021), one of which is risk. Risk is associated with uncertainty of outcomes, extreme consequences as well as the difficulties in accomplishing goals (Sitkin & Pablo, 1992; Slovic, 1993). It is believed that the level of trust is influenced by the risk level as well as uncertainty level in a given interaction (Abebe, 2021). In terms of the dimension of risk, the willingness of quality assurance agencies or higher education institutions to operate responsibly and maintain the quality standards of their operation also contributes to understanding risk and uncertainty (Abebe, 2021). In the case of ENQA and INQAAHE, the quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions are well-established with a relatively mature quality assurance system, hence implying a lower risk level and higher level of trust. Hence, the institutional level of quality review is adopted. As another dimension of trust, the level of competence also impacts whether a trustor will trust the trustee (Gabarro, 1987; McKnight et al., 1998; Migliore & DeClouette, 2011; Swan et al., 1988). So in the context of ENQA and INQAAHE, the institutional approach also gives quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions more autonomy which indicates a trust in their maturity level of quality assurance competence.

Both ASQA and SSG adopt a similar level of quality assurance review which is a mix approach of requiring training organisation registration and programme-level quality assurance review. In terms of performing their regulatory role, both quality assurance agencies have sets of standards which training providers are required to meet before being qualified as registered training providers.

After analysing the nature and purpose of quality assurance and the level of quality assurance review, the quality assurance approaches will be reviewed and can be broadly categorised into

accreditation, assessment and audit (Kis, 2005). Woodhouse (1999) states that there are different approaches to quality assurance adopted by quality assurance agencies depending on the contexts such as the education systems and traditions. In terms of differentiating these approaches, their perspectives vary in the sense that both accreditation and assessment is concerned with monitoring the quality of teaching and learning whereas audit places emphasis on the internal procedures adopted by higher education institutions for reaching its objectives (Kis, 2005).

With regards to ENQA and INQAAHE, accreditation is adopted for quality assuring quality assurance agencies. With accreditation as the main purpose, there are usually a set of accreditation standards that provide the framework for external quality assurance (ENQA European Standards and Guidelines). In the case of ENQA, ENQA agency review aims to review quality assurance agencies against the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (ENQA European Standards and Guidelines). As indicated by ENQA, these standards are designed to provide guidance that includes areas which are crucial for successful quality provision and learning environments in higher education (ENQA website).

In the case of ASQA and SSG uses a mix of accreditation, assessment, and audit. Both accreditation and assessment are utilised by ASQA. Performance assessment (audits) aims to evaluate training provider performance with regards to whether they are compliant. It is designed to assess whether training provider is meeting the standards¹³ and legislation¹⁴. ASQA also provides accreditation to courses delivered by registered training organisations (RTOs) to evaluate whether the course meets the standards¹⁵ and are nationally recognised and meets an established industry, enterprise, educational, legislative or community need (ASQA website). SSG also implements post-approval quality check on registered training providers of their accredited courses.

¹³ Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015; National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018; ELICOs Standards 2018.

¹⁴ National Vocational Education and Training Regulation Act 2011 for RTOs; Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000 (ESOS Act) for providers registered on CRICOs or ELICOS.

¹⁵ Standards for VET Accredited Courses 2021

4.3 Recommendations

The previous section summarises the insights generated through the diary entries of documenting the analysing of different quality assurance bodies. This section will outline the recommendations for the organisation I work for in terms of how to adapt these approaches to quality assurance agency in Hong Kong.

4.3.1 Strategies for rewarding and incentivising training providers

The first recommendation is about developing strategies to reward and incentivise training providers who are capable of demonstrating higher level of maturity in quality assurance and improvement in quality assurance.

On reviewing the quality assurance practiced by both ENQA and SSG, training providers are commended on their exemplary performance to reinforce their capability in quality improvement and quality enhancement. For example, SSG organises the Skills Future Employers Awards to give national recognition to exceptional employers as well as giving employers the opportunity to share best practices among each other. Such process may further drive quality enhancement in the quality assurance. Although the practices are different in the context of ENQA, similar approach to recognise the performance and good practices of agency under review is adopted. During ENQA agency review, agency under review will be commended on their good practices which are documented in the agency review report. This public recognition of good practices demonstrate the recognition of the quality enhancement of the agencies and/or the training providers and can motivate them to move along the spectrum of quality enhancement.

Under the current four-stage quality assurance process of HKCAAVQ in quality-assuring training providers in both academic and vocational and professional education and training sectors, training providers are able to move from Stage 1 of seeking institutional accreditation, then Stage 2 of seeking programme-level accreditation or re-accreditation to Stage 3 of programme area accreditation (PAA) and Stage 4 of periodic review. Stage 3 and Stage 4 are stages whereby training providers are capable of exhibiting a higher level of maturity in quality assurance. Hence, at Stage 3, self-accrediting ability in specific programme area(s) is given to training providers. With this four-stage quality assurance process, training providers are only rewarded and incentivised through moving to higher stages (i.e. Stage 3 and Stage 4) of the quality assurance

process. The benefits are two-fold: first, there are implications of cost-savings without the need to seek accreditation of their programmes every 2 to 3 years depending on the validity period as accreditation incurs accreditation fees¹⁶. Secondly, the other implication is about the reduction of administrative costs of training providers in orchestrating human and physical resources in their organisation in preparing for the accreditation which normally takes about 10 to 12 weeks.

In terms of sharing good practices, Quality Assurance Online Knowledgebase¹⁷ (QAOK) has been set up to be an information platform for both local as well as overseas institutions which aim to enhance their quality assurance as well as for HKCAAVQ to further improve its practice in quality assurance (Quality Assurance Online Knowledgebase website). QAOK also serves as a repository of good practices that have been drawn from HKCAAVQ accreditation reports and processes or that have been reproduced from Quality Audit reports by the Quality Audit Council (QAC) of the University Grants Committee (ENQA report). The good practices cover 9 topics being identified from HKCAAVQ reports (from student assessment to academic leadership) and 20 topics from the QA reports of the QAC. This platform brings positive benefits of fostering the quality-enhancement culture among training providers through sharing of good practices, whether through this platform or the Quality Assurance Council (QAC) reports submitted by UGC-funded universities.

Drawing on the experiences of ENQA and SSG, given quality assurance and quality enhancement forms part of the continuum of quality (Elassy, 2015), HKCAAVQ should consider introducing tools for recognising training providers in accomplishing quality improvement and quality enhancement. First, recognition can be made in the form of commendations which can be documented in the accreditation reports that will be published on the HKCAAVQ website. These commendations can also be considered as a way to reinforce the positive impact of quality enhancement made by training providers.

In addition to commendations in the report, HKCAAVQ may consider organising awards to recognise training providers with exceptional performance in quality enhancement. Public recognition, on one hand, can give credits to training providers on their exceptional accomplishment in quality assurance but can also help foster a stronger culture of quality enhancement in the academic and vocational and professional educator sectors. This strategy

¹⁶ https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/files/services/policies/Accreditation_Fees_e_Final_Jul2020.pdf

¹⁷ The Quality Assurance Online Knowledgebase (QAOK), which was launched in February 2017, is an electronic resource for the higher education sector in Hong Kong and abroad. <https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/qaok/about>

also goes in line with the developments of HKCAAVQ. In his presentation during a recent International Conference¹⁸, the Executive Director of HKCAAVQ has also highlighted and emphasised the changing role of a quality assurance agency from quality assurance to quality enhancement, and from quality enhancement to quality excellence and how HKCAAVQ supports such an evolving role as well (HKCAAVQ website).

4.3.2 Adoption of risk-based approach to quality assurance

The second recommendation is the adoption of a risk-based approach to quality assurance. Dimension of risk forms one of the key dimensions of trust and the level of trust is influenced by the level of risk (Abebe, 2021). The higher the risk level of the training providers, the lower the level of trust the trustor, the quality assurance agency, has on the trustee, which is the training provider. Given the significance of risks, quality assurance agencies should adopt ways to manage risks, and even minimise risks.

As mentioned in the earlier section, ASQA adopts an integrated, risk-based approach to managing risks in order to regulate training providers and accredited course to ensure quality training outcomes for students (ASQA website). ASQA has developed an ASQA Regulatory Framework¹⁹ to manage the risks in the vocational and professional training sector as well as with training providers. This framework is used for two purposes: first, it helps ASQA to prioritise their efforts in compliance, and to identify and take enforcement measures to addresses cases of non-compliance (ASQA website). Besides, this approach is also devised to help ASQA evaluate how efficient and effective the regulatory actions and outcomes are for continuous improvement.

The context in which such risk-based regulatory practice is implemented should also be taken into consideration, in particular, the recommendation made in the rapid review of ASQA's regulatory practices and processes 2020²⁰ (ASQA website). According to the recommendations, ASQA should aim to move its regulatory practice from prescriptive and processed-based compliance to focusing broadly on self-assurance by training providers as well as excellence in the training outcomes. As a result of this regulatory practice, training providers are supported to achieve continuous improvement without undue regulatory intervention. ASQA has acknowledged

¹⁸ <https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/assets/pdf/HKCAAVQ%20-%20Mr%20Albert%20Chow.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://www.asqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-07/regulatory-risk-framework.pdf>

²⁰ Rapid Review of ASQA's Regulatory Practices and Processes, 2020 MPConsulting
<https://www.asqa.gov.au/working-together/rapid-reviewrecommendations>

that not all risks or even the factors that affect non-compliance can be entirely removed through the risk-based regulatory practice. Despite such acknowledgement, ASQA is committed to engaging stakeholders as well as the regulatory community actively and collaboratively with the ultimate goal of elevating VET quality (ASQA website).

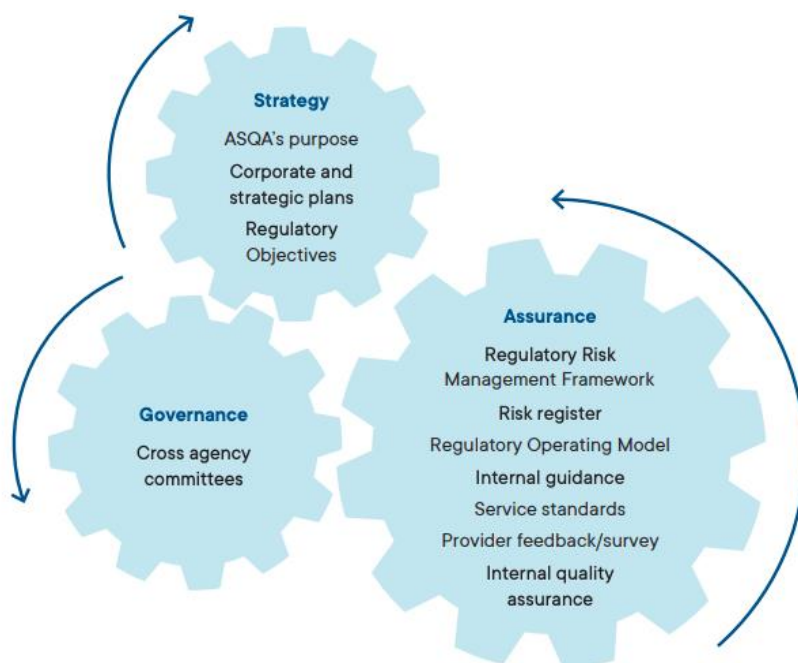


FIGURE 9. Integrated Elements of ASQA's Regulatory Risk Framework²¹ (ASQA website)

With regards to managing risks, the approach adopted by HKCAAVQ is implemented at three levels: before training providers seek accreditation of their institution and/or programmes, during the accreditation process, as well as after the accreditation process.

Before accreditation, the facilitation phase²² is put in place in Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the four-stage quality assurance process of HKCAAVQ to enhance the awareness of the training providers of the accreditation requirements as well as to facilitate their preparation for accreditation. HKCAAVQ also adopts the differentiation approach which is considered as a risk-based approach to quality (ENQA Agency Review Report, 2021). The differentiation approach²³ is considered essential which benefits training providers in reducing their burden of managing external quality assurance. It also helps to motivate training providers to improve their quality

²¹ <https://www.asqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-07/regulatory-risk-framework.pdf>

²² https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/file/page/1738/Four-stage_Manual_EN_20201109.pdf

²³ Differentiation approach is adopted by HKCAAVQ to recognise the track record of training providers in the form of a paper-based review without site visit, a customised approach, a longer validity period or a combination of these options.

(ENQA Agency Review Report, 2021). To familiarize training providers with accreditation process and accreditation requirements, regular training workshops are provided. In terms of managing risks, a transparent approach²⁴ is utilised during the accreditation process so all parties, the training providers as well as the accreditation panel, involved in the accreditation process achieve a common understanding of the accreditation process and the issues that arise (HKCAAVQ website).

Throughout the accreditation process, training providers need to address question or issues that are raised by the accreditation panel with evidence as support. Towards the end of the accreditation process, HKCAAVQ makes determinations after considering the panel's recommendations which include approval, approval with conditions or non-approval. In cases whereby critical gaps still exist, training providers need to fulfil the conditions to meet the accreditation standards (HKCAVQ website) which is an approach to managing and even minimising risks.

Drawing on the experience of ASQA, HKCAAVQ may consider developing an integrated risk-based approach to quality assurance. The risk-regulatory framework of ASQA is designed as an integrated approach integrating major elements in their strategy, governance as well as assurance (see figure 9). As discussed earlier, there are risk-management approaches implemented. However, drawing on the experience and approach of ASQA, there could be an integrated approach of managing risks and possibly a risk-based management framework orchestrating different elements of managing risks, and minimising risks. The benefits of this approach include efficient use of resources by the quality assurance agency and training providers as well as fostering a positive risk culture among all stakeholders, training providers and the sector.

On developing a risk-based approach, the first issue is related to how this approach is embedded at the organisational level in the strategic planning process to ensure its implementation. The next deals with the question of how to operationalise this risk-based approach. ASQA's Regulatory Operating Model provides a good reference point. This approach can be developed in terms of the planning, implementation and control processes.

²⁴ https://www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/file/page/1738/Four-stage_Manual_EN_20201109.pdf

On planning process, there should be methods and tools for data collection, research, and analysis. Following the analysis, evaluating the risks and design responses and actions is crucial to manage and minimise risks. Given there are many stakeholders (e.g. the Government, Education Bureau, training providers, students), engaging them properly about managing risks is also necessary. Another aspect about risk-based approach is also about how to foster positive risk culture within the organisation and in the academic and vocational and professional education and training sectors. The success of such risk-based approach is attributed to all the stakeholders being collaborative in quality assurance.

The implementation of such an integrated risk-based approach is not without challenges. First, this approach has to be developed at the strategic level of integrating it into the governance and management of quality assurance agency. It needs a thorough study and analysis of how to best approach this risk-management model considering the educational and vocational context in Hong Kong. Second, it needs to orchestrate the efforts and commitment of all stakeholders from internal stakeholders to external stakeholders which can be challenging. The last challenge is about fostering a positive risk culture among all stakeholders in the academic and vocational and professional education training sectors. Much efforts need to be made in educating all stakeholders about the risk culture.

The third recommendation is about undertaking a review of the opportunities and risks of online learning in the academic as well as the vocational and professional education and training sectors.

ASQA is undertaking a strategic review of the online learning to ensure their regulatory approaches are effective in maintain programme quality and quality learning outcomes (ASQA website). It also aims to identify the opportunities and risks brought by online learning which is defined as learning that is enabled by technology (ASQA website). This review involves diverse stakeholders through public consultation, focus groups and interviews, direct consultation with key stakeholder groups, advice from ASQA's Provider Roundtable and Stakeholder Liaison Group (SLG). Other initiatives for this review include conducting research, providing education and guidance materials, delivering webinars and insight papers, etc. (ASQA website).

Currently HKCAAVQ has implemented the accreditation for online learning programmes since 2018. Online learning programme is defined as programme, both local programmes and non-local

programmes, that comprises more than 50% of instruction delivery online which is a digital learning platform. The same set of accreditation standards are used for programmes delivered through face-to-face mode or online learning programmes. When undertaking accreditation of online learning programmes, training providers are required to provide more evidence for online delivery. However, some training providers, especially those in the vocational and professional education training sector, have incorporated some components of online learning in their learning programmes though the online instruction takes up go below 50%. Providing education and guidance to training providers is considered essential.

As mentioned earlier, many training providers have shifted their delivery online mostly prompted by the coronavirus pandemic. One of the challenges for HKCAAVQ is how to ensure our approach is effective in responding to the changing environment in the education sector whereby online learning is gradually integrated into learning programmes, be it academic or vocational. Drawing on the experience of ASQA, in addressing the changing mode of delivery by training providers, HKCAAVQ should undertake a review of online learning.

To start, similar to ASQA, there should be proper definitions for different terms associated with online learning such as e-learning, blended learning, fully online learning, synchronous online learning, asynchronous online learning, distance learning, etc. Achieving a consistent understanding of these terms is necessary to align the practices in the sectors. Besides providing a clear and structured definition to all these terms for the sectors in Hong Kong, it would be most beneficial to analyse the opportunities and risks associated with online learning, in particular, related to accreditation and assessment. This may have implications for accreditation and assessment in terms of evaluating the effectiveness of the teaching and learning activities in relation to the learning and assessment mode. The last step would be the education process whereby there could be a series of seminars, guidance materials as well as insights paper to education, provide guidance to and support the sectors.

5 REFLECTION

This section highlights the author's reflection on conducting this research, the applicability of the research and the future research possibility. The section will conclude with the author's reflection on this learning journey of utilising the diary-based approach.

In terms of the applicability of the research, the theoretical framework provides the foundation for the review of the quality assurance approaches and the regulatory approaches adopted by some quality assurance agencies. In particular, the quality assurance approaches are closely linked to the four dimensions of trust, concern, openness, capacity and risk, as well as control and accountability. However, the concept of quality and quality assurance is not easy to define (Elassy, 2015).

In terms of the learning journey, the diary approach has provided the author with the opportunity to document the learning relevant to the author's current work and the organisation in the form of a diary entry. The research process is relatively intense in such a way that review needed to be conducted on a weekly basis spanning across more than two months.

Despite the intensity of the research journey, the benefits brought by the research are numerous and come at two levels, organizational level as well as personal level. At the organisational level, developing an integrated risk-based approach to quality assurance can be examined by the quality assurance agency in Hong Kong. In accreditation, risk and trust are some of the key considerations in terms of the control and accountability measures used. A proper risk-based approach being put in place allows the quality assurance to safeguards quality outcomes in the academic and vocational and professional education and training sectors in Hong Kong. A review of online learning may also benefit the quality assurance agency given the current developments in the sectors and the prevalence of online delivery by many training providers in Hong Kong. As the sole accreditation authority in Hong Kong, it would be necessary to set the stage for online learning and to education and provide guidance and support to the sector for long-term development.

On the personal front, first, by analysing some of the more established quality assurance bodies in different regions allows the author to achieve a better understanding of the most common

quality assurance approaches and in particular, the principles guiding these different approaches. During the research process, the author was able to deep-dive into the subject of quality assurance by reviewing a wealth of literature about quality, quality assurance, and dimensions of trust. The questions that are worth pondering is 'what is quality', 'how to conceptualise quality' and 'which stakeholder's definition of quality should be adopted'.

Secondly, it is understood that not one single quality assurance approach is better than the other approach. Some quality assurance agencies may adopt a mix of different quality assurance approaches that are most appropriate for their specific contexts. In fact, a quality assurance agency should decide the fundamental question of what is guiding their quality assurance (e.g. control, compliance, regulation, autonomy, decentralisation). A quality assurance agency should also decide what quality assurance approach works best in their own local, regional, or national context taking into consideration of the local developments in the education and training sectors, the culture, the learners, etc.

In this research, the study focuses on understanding the relationship of quality assurance approaches and dimensions of trust. Future research can be conducted to understand the implications of the extent to which a quality assurance agency trusts the training providers with the use of quality assurance management models which can be integrated with the model of dimensions of trust (Abebe, 2021).

There are some limitations to this research. This paper is conducted using a desk-top analysis of the information of some quality assurance bodies that can be accessed easily through websites as well as publications. Though accessing information on their practices and developments via these tools is direct, we should also consider the fact that the frameworks, processes, policies, guidelines, standards published on the websites may not be most comprehensive, updated or complete. The interpretations of what is being intended or what actually takes place may be compromised. In spite of the limitations, this paper provides insights into the different quality assurance approaches adopted by quality assurance agencies in some regions such as Europe, Australia and Singapore

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