

# Chapter 4

## Quality Assurance in Taiwan Higher Education: Regulation, Model Shift, and Future Prospect



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**Abstract** For the past two decades, the quality assurance (QA) system in Taiwan has undergone substantial transformation from an unsystematic approach to a more comprehensive mechanism. As a result of notable university requests for deregulating university governance and management, the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Taiwan decided to launch the self-accreditation policy in 2012 in order to increase university autonomy and build internal QA mechanisms on campus (MOE, 2013). In 2017, the policy was applied to all Taiwan universities. Based on this wider policy context, the purpose of this paper is to better comprehend: (1) governmental policy in constructing a national QA system in Taiwan higher education since 2000; (2) a QA model of Higher Education Evaluation & Accreditation of Council (HEEACT) in Taiwan, and its impact; (3) context of the paradigm shift from a focus on external review to internal QA; (4) future prospects for QA policy and an examination of a new role for the national QA agency. In addition, Olsen's governance model as an analytic framework is applied for examining the relationship between QA agencies, government, and institutions in Taiwan over the past decade.

**Keywords** Quality assurance · Higher education · HEEACT

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## 4.1 Introduction

Higher education has undergone significant and rapid changes due to external driving forces—weak economies, graduate unemployment, and underemployment, internet technology, and social media in particular (Daniel, 2016). In particular, quality has been always the focus of higher education globally. The concept of quality might vary from time to time due to massification, privatization, and emergence of new providers in the rapidly changing landscape of higher education (Harvey & Green, 1993). Traditionally, quality was often defined by policymakers and university administrators and staff. In recent years, the engagement of students, graduates, employers, and society in higher education escalates the level of complexity in quality assurance (QA) system. According to Harvey and Green (1993), quality typically consists of five dimensions due to different purposes, including excellence, perfection or consistency, quality culture, fitness for purpose, value for money, and transformation. For example, most governments may adopt the concept of quality as “value for money” to measure the accountability of higher education providers. In contrast, QA agencies and accrediting bodies that consider the mission diversification of institutions as a major concern would adopt the approach of “fitness for purposes.”

QA is “a process of establishing stakeholder confidence that provision (input, process and outcomes) fulfills expectations or measures up to threshold minimum requirements” (The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), 2018). It consists of two major parts: internal QA and external QA. According to INQAAHE, “internal evaluation” is a “process of quality review undertaken within an institution for its own ends.” Accordingly, development and management of internal QA systems is “at the discretion of the higher education institution, which usually carries out this mandate in the context of available institutional resources and capacities” (Paintsil, 2016, p. 4). This means that with an appropriate policy and mechanism, an institution can ensure that “it fulfills its own purposes and meets the standards that apply to higher education in general, or to the profession or disciplines in particular” (Martin & Stella, 2007, p. 34). Principle One of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) states that “assuring and achieving quality in higher education is the primary responsibility of higher education providers and their staff” (Hou, 2016, p. 7). Higher education providers are thus expected to take primary responsibility for assuring the quality of the programs they offer, through internal QA systems and through the process of engaging faculty members (academic staff) and administrative staff.

On the other hand, external QA agencies (EQA), with a “self-critical, objective, and open-minded” character, undertake third-party review activities of higher education institutions, in order to determine whether the quality of universities meets the agreed or predetermined standards” (Martin & Stella, 2007, p. 34). Normally, internal QA is considered as the part of the external process that an institution undertakes in preparation for an external QA. Both indeed are so much “two sides of the same coin that the activities are inextricably interrelated” (Vroeijenstijn, 2008, p. 1).

The national QA system in Taiwan was not formed until the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT) was established in 2005. With funds from the government and 153 colleges and universities, HEEACT became the first national accreditor, acting as a quality regulator of higher education in Taiwan. The 2005 revised University Act stipulates that universities should periodically undergo self-evaluation on teaching, research, service, counseling, administration, and student engagement (Ministry of Education (MOE), 2019). In addition, the Act commissioned the government to “organize an Assessment Committee or commission academic organizations or professional accreditation bodies to carry out regular assessments of the universities, and it shall make the results public” (MOE, 2019).

HEEACT is mandated as the leading accreditor in Taiwan to ensure the activities of universities in adherence to established quality standards and accountability. Given the fact that all universities and programs are required to be reviewed externally by a professional QA body on a regular basis, HEEACT is requested to operate both institutional and program-based accreditation with a compulsory approach. Over the past 10 years, more than 80 institutions and 3,000 programs were under HEEACT’s review, and their detailed final reports were published on the HEEACT’s official website (HEEACT, 2015).

For the past two decades, the QA system in Taiwan has undergone substantial transformation from an unsystematic approach to a more comprehensive mechanism. As a result of university requests for deregulating university governance and management, the MOE in Taiwan decided to launch the self-accreditation policy in 2012 in order to increase university autonomy and build internal QA mechanisms on campus (MOE, 2013). In 2017, the policy was applied to all universities in Taiwan. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to better comprehend: (1) governmental policy over constructing a national QA system in Taiwan higher education since 2000; (2) the QA model of HEEACT and its impact; (3) the context of the paradigm shift from a focus of external review to internal QA; (4) future prospects for QA policy, and an examination of a new role for the national QA agency. In addition, Olsen’s governance model as an analytic framework is applied for examining the relationship between QA agencies, government, and institutions in Taiwan over the past decade.

## 4.2 QA Concepts, Theories, and Governance Models

Due to marketization, massification, and privatization in higher education, and with deregulation bringing in competition, over the last two decades QA has become a widespread, multipurpose policy tool for reforming higher education systems, assessing higher education providers’ accountability, and pursuing academic excellence (Harvey & Newton, 2007; Jarvis, 2014; Stensaker, 2007; Westerheijden, Stensaker, Rosa, & Corbett, 2014). Since 2000, QA practices, as one of the most effective means of ensuring the quality of higher education institutions (HEIs), have been widely adopted by higher education policymakers and placed in national agendas

(Marginson, 2011; Saunders 2010). Westerheijden et al. (2014) point out that “the adoption of quality assurance schemes becomes a process of copying instruments and policies that exist elsewhere, or to legitimate political action regardless of its actual effect” (p. 3). Shin (2018) argues that “states prefer to use quality assurance as a strong driver to reform higher education while universities prefer to maintain their prestige without strong state influences” (p. 2). National quality assurance schemes are therefore often managed by a commissioned agency with a national mandate; and yet, due to the policy aimed at establishing top-ranked universities, some QA agencies are even commissioned to play the dual roles of accreditor and ranker (Hou, 2012).

It is agreed that the external review processes “have encouraged and convinced HEIs to adopt more robust mechanisms for continuous quality enhancement, more rigorous self-evaluation, increased transparency, and a better understanding of the notion of quality and best practices” (Zoqaqi, 2011, p. 3). Accordingly, Paintsil (2016, p. 26) interprets Olsen’s governance models in higher education and suggests a four-dimensional model of QA management that can “be steered through severing state, institutional, supermarket or the corporate pluralist governance models.” These four QA governance models explain the QA change process and conceptualize the interactive dynamics between internal and external QA systems. Initially, most QA systems were government established. State control was quite prominent to achieve national objectives (Olsen, 2007). A university-led QA approach was widely adopted in developed nations, where higher education providers were given more autonomy to set up a sound internal QA mechanism after few cycles of external reviews’ implementation (Olsen, 2007; Paintsil, 2016).

In addition to the traditional twin purposes of accountability and teaching quality enhancement, corporatist and supermarket approaches are rather appealing in mature systems. The corporatist–democratic QA model emphasizes the respect for the interests of varying internal constituencies and their engagement in the QA process, including faculty, staff, and students. Although this governance model can delay the decision-making process and make institutional changes difficult and ineffective, it reflects the current global trend in regard to power balance among different higher education stakeholders’ engagement in the QA process, particularly employers and students (De Boer & Stensaker, 2007; Olsen, 2007; Paintsil, 2016).

Without direct government involvement, a supermarket governance model is gradually emerging, altering the relationship between QA agencies and HEIs. Under this scheme, accreditation is voluntary, creating the situation whereby accreditors tend to operate as business-like enterprises. Most of them are professional and overseas accreditors (Dobbins, 2012). However, although it is regarded as an effective tool for global competition and global branding, Knight (2015) addresses the negative impact of the model, including the emergence of rogue providers, fake diplomas, and even accreditation mills. Overall, the development of multi-roles and functions in QA agencies is necessary in order to respond to accompanying national policy changes. State control governance models exist in more centralized systems, where the national accreditor is the sole agent undertaking external reviews. In contrast to the centralized QA system, corporatist and supermarket approaches would likely emerge in a

decentralized context. However, a university-led monolithic QA approach usually supports strong institutional leadership to ensure education quality on campus.

### **4.3 Diversification of the National Quality Assurance System in Taiwan and a Recognition Scheme for Local and International Accreditors**

In general terms, there were four main phases to the QA system in Taiwan, including the initial (non-professional) stage, the developmental stage, the professional stage, and the new reform stage. Passing through these stages, a mature QA system has been gradually developed in the higher education system of Taiwan (HEEACT, 2018).

#### ***4.3.1 The 1980s: The Initial (Non-Professional) Phase of QA***

Because the number of Taiwan's HEIs increased dramatically after the 1980s, the public's desire to maintain and increase both quantity and quality has placed tremendous pressure on Taiwan's government. Apart from encouraging institutions to conduct self-assessments on their own, a few professional associations such as the Chinese Management Association (CMA), the Chemical Society, and the Physical Association of the Republic of China were chartered by the MOE to exercise program-based academic assessments, beginning in the 1980s. However, the QA system was still in its initial phase, as there was no professional QA body and national accreditor during this time.

#### ***4.3.2 The 1990s: The Developmental Phase of QA***

In the 1990s, the government of Taiwan, in the face of continuous pressured from the public, began to implement a wide range of comprehensive institutional evaluations with the goal of establishing a nongovernmental professional QA agency, the purpose of which was to conduct compulsory evaluations of HEIs (Hou, 2011). In 1994, the Legislative Yuan passed the University Act, and the national government was allowed to carry out institutional accreditations in order to assure the quality of higher education. During this period of time, the government began to implement a wide range of comprehensive institutional accreditation, with the goal of establishing a nongovernmental professional QA agency whose purpose was to conduct evaluations of HEIs.

### 4.3.3 *The 2000s: The Professional Stage of QA*

In early 2000, the QA system in Taiwan became more professional, but it was also decentralized. Several independent QA agencies were founded in order to carry out professional QA for the higher education system during this period. In 2005, the University Act was amended in order to make it clear that the EQA (External Quality Assurance) system of all HEIs needed to be overseen by the MOE in order to enhance both the quality of teaching and assessments. The Act also stated that an internal QA mechanism was needed to carry out self-evaluation on teaching, research, services, counseling, administration, and student engagement on campus. In general, all HEIs and programs were encouraged to develop measurable learning outcomes, to design a variety of assessment tools at program and institutional level, and to evaluate whether the learning outcomes had been met.

A self-funded accreditor, Taiwan Assessment and Evaluation Association (TWAEA) was the organization chiefly responsible for undertaking institutional and programmatic assessment of Taiwan's technological universities. There are three other Taiwanese professional accreditors, in the areas of medicine, nursing, and engineering. As the oldest professional accreditor, Taiwan Medical Accreditation Council (TMAC), established by the National Health Research Institute in 1999, aims to assess all medical schools. The other professional accreditor, Taiwan Nursing Accreditation Council (TNAC), was set up by the MOE in May 2006 to conduct nursing program evaluations. After the establishment of HEEACT in 2005, TMAC and TNAC were officially moved into the HEEACT office. Founded in 2003, the Institute of Engineering Education Taiwan (IEET) is an independent, nongovernmental, and not-for-profit organization committed to accreditation of engineering and technology education programs in Taiwan. However, there was a strong demand to establish a national accreditor to govern and steer the quality of all HEIs.

Besides this clear statement regarding the external QA and internal QA for all HEIs, the 2005 University Act also established HEEACT as the third-party professional accreditor in order to help conduct EQA and supervise these institutions in developing their internal QA. Since then, HEEACT has acted as a national accreditor in Taiwan, has carried out various QA and accreditation tasks, and has provided training, workshops, and seminars for onsite reviewers and university staff. The MOE also commissions HEEACT to recognize other private and self-funded professional QA bodies. During this period, the Taiwanese QA framework was successfully established.

### ***4.3.4 The 2010s: The Reform Stage of QA***

In order to promote the self-improvement mechanism of universities, and in consideration of requests from various universities, the MOE decided to launch a self-accreditation policy in 2012 in addition to the institutional and program accreditation. This helped to increase university autonomy and build a culture of quality on campus (Department of Statistics, 2019). In general terms, the goal of this self-accreditation policy has the same purpose as the internal QA mechanism stated in the University Act.

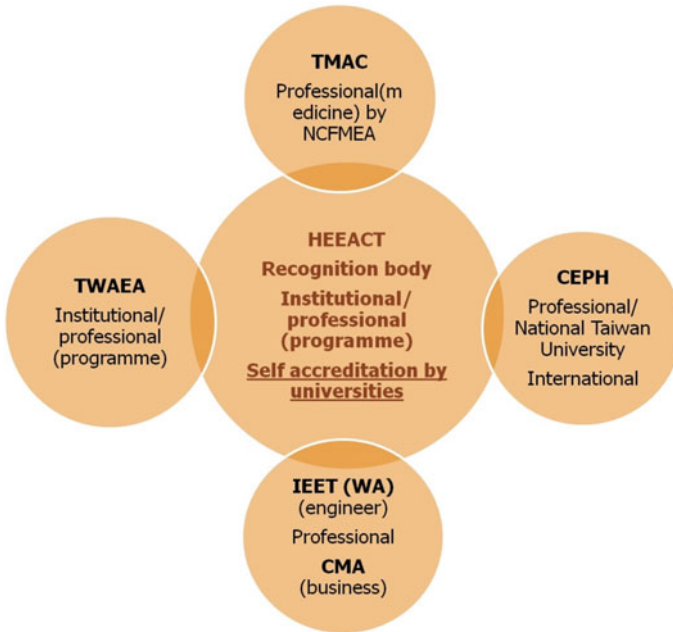
However, according to the 2012 MOE self-accreditation policy, only a limited number of institutions were eligible for self-accreditation status. University applicants should meet one of the three following requirements: (1) they should be awardees of the MOE Development Plan for World-Class Universities and Research Centers of Excellence; (2) awardees of the MOE Top University Project; (3) or awardees of the MOE Teaching Excellence Project granted at least USD 6.7 million over four consecutive years. Sixty universities were eligible for self-accreditation, including 34 general universities and 26 universities of technology; and in 2016, 14 out of the 60 universities fully developed a self-accreditation system and conducted their first self-accreditation process (Hou et al., 2018).

To conclude, a diversified QA framework in Taiwan was formed after 2005 (Hou, 2011; HEEACT, 2020). The difference between local accreditors and HEEACT is that the accreditors are self-funded institutions offering services on a voluntary basis. Those who voluntarily apply for accreditation from the local accreditor have to pay the fees themselves. Up to present, there are six QA agencies and professional accreditors in Taiwan, including one national EQA agency, HEEACT (including its sub-agency TMAC, and four private EQA agencies: CMA, IEET, TWAEA, and one international agency, the Council on Education of Public Health (CEPH). All agencies are recognized by HEEACT (Fig. 4.1).

## **4.4 HEEACT Accreditation Model—Program and Institutional Accreditation**

As a national accreditor, HEEACT operates both institutional and program-based accreditation on a compulsory basis. The external review costs are covered by the MOE. The detailed final reports are published on HEEACT's official website (HEEACT, 2019). Up to present, HEEACT has completed two cycles of program and institutional accreditations, respectively.

In 2006, HEEACT began a five-year, program-based, nationwide accreditation. The standards developed in the first cycle of program accreditation were as follows: (1) goals, features, and self-enhancement mechanisms; (2) curriculum design and teaching; (3) learning and student affairs; (4) research and professional performance; (5) performance of graduates. There were three types of accreditation outcome:



**Fig. 4.1** Diversified QA framework in Taiwan higher education (*Source* by authors)

accredited, accredited conditionally, and denial (HEEACT, 2012). According to HEEACT, the average rate in the first cycle for accredited status among a total of 3120 programs was 87.11%; for conditionally accredited it was 11.5%; and for denied it was 1.3% (HEEACT, 2012).

Following the global trend of QA, both institutional accreditation and the second cycle of program accreditation focused on the assessment of student learning outcomes. Starting in 2011, HEEACT conducted an institutional assessment of 81 national and private universities and also continued the second cycle program accreditation. HEEACT's handbook for the 2011 institutional accreditation emphasized that an institution would be evaluated and examined according to the PDCA (Plan–Do–Check–Act) model, and based on quantitative data such as faculty–student ratios, admission rates, research funding, and research output. This model concentrates three features. First, the institution should have a clear mission to state its institutional identity; second, it should have favorable governance to integrate and allocate resources; third, it should have an internal mechanism to assess student learning outcomes (HEEACT, 2012). HEEACT's five review standards included self-positioning; government and management; teaching and learning; accountability; and continuous quality improvement. Each institution was accredited by each standard respectively, meaning that the institution would be given five individual results for each standard. According to HEEACT, 47 institutions were fully accredited according to the five standards, with a pass rate of 69% (Chiang, 2015).



The second cycle of program accreditation focused on realizing the development and operation of student learning outcomes and its evaluation mechanisms within programs and disciplines. The new accreditation model has been adopted to assist universities in analyzing their strengths and weaknesses to facilitate successful student learning. The new standards for the second cycle of program accreditation are as follows: (1) educational goals, features, and curriculum design; (2) teaching quality and learning assessment; (3) student guidance and learning resources; (4) academic and professional performance; (5) alumni performance and self-improvement mechanism (HEEACT, 2012). Generally speaking, universities and programs were encouraged to develop measurable learning outcomes, to design a variety of assessment tools at course, program, and institutional level, and to establish whether the learning outcomes were being met. According to HEEACT, the pass rate of the second cycle program accreditation from 2011 to 2015 rose to 91% (HEEACT, 2015).

As soon as the second program accreditation was complete, the second cycle of institutional accreditation was undertaken from 2016 to 2017. Eighty-five universities put under review including police academies, and military and religious institutions. Considering the diversity and size of higher education providers, several changes were made in the second cycle of institutional accreditation, including number of standards, composition of panel, and selection of interviewees during onsite visits. There were 66 institutions fully accredited by four standards, with a pass rate of 85.7% (HEEACT, 2019) (Fig. 4.2).

In general, the core elements of HEEACT accreditation are university self-assessment, peer review, and onsite visits. Institutional accreditation and the HEEACT's program accreditation share similar processes through five main stages: (1) preparation; (2) document review; (3) onsite visits; (4) decision-making; and (5) follow-up. In the document review stage of both types of accreditation, HEIs should prepare and submit a self-assessment report (SAR) according to the established timelines, and the HEEACT will proceed with reviewer selection and training followed by an onsite visit (Table 4.1).

After two cycles of institutional and program accreditation, the Taiwan QA exercise has had positive and negative impacts on higher education since the national QA framework was built in 2005. A study by Hou (2018) showed that the accreditation results had a great impact on institutional governance and management. First, the QA system inspired universities to identify their mission and objectives. The institutions not only made a great effort to develop their distinctive features, but also



Fig. 4.2 Years of institutional and program accreditation timeline (Source HEEACT, 2019)

**Table 4.1** Institutional and program accreditation standards and indicators since 2016

Accreditation Type	Accreditation Standards and Indicators	
Institutional accreditation	Standard I: Governance and Management	1.1 Development plans and distinct features correspond with the institution’s self-positioning 1.2 Practices and mechanisms to ensure quality governance 1.3 Collaborative relationships with partners in academia, government, and industry, which are relevant to the institution’s self-positioning 1.4 Guarantee of equal access to educational opportunities; the institution demonstrates social responsibility
	Standard II: Resources and Support Systems	2.1 Resource plans to support development 2.2 Practices and mechanisms to support the development of academic careers and improve the teaching capability of the faculty 2.3 Practices and mechanisms to achieve student learning outcomes
	Standard III: Institutional Effectiveness	3.1 Institutional effectiveness demonstrated based on the institution’s self-positioning 3.2 Student learning outcomes achieved 3.3 Public accessibility of information to stakeholders
	Standard IV: Self-Improvement and Sustainability	4.1 Practices based on internal and external evaluation results for discussion, improvement, and implementation 4.2 Practices and plans for innovation and sustainable development 4.3 Practices to protect the rights and interests of faculty, staff, and students 4.4 Practices and mechanisms to ensure the institution’s financial sustainability

(continued)

**Table 4.1** (continued)

Accreditation Type	Accreditation Standards and Indicators	
Program accreditation	Standard I: Program Development, Operations, and Improvement	1.1 Goals, distinct features, and development plans 1.2 Curriculum planning and implementation 1.3 Operations and administration support 1.4 Self-analysis and continual improvement
	Standard II: Faculty and Teaching	2.1 Faculty composition and appointment of instructors for the program's educational goals, curriculum, and students' learning needs 2.2 Development of instructors' teaching capacity and related support systems 2.3 Development of instructors' academic careers and related support systems 2.4 Teaching, academic, and professional performance of faculty
	Standard III: Students and Learning	3.1 Management of student enrollment and retention 3.2 Course-related learning and support systems 3.3 Other forms of learning and support systems 3.4 Student/graduate learning outcomes and feedback

strengthened governance and management on resource allocation, program revitalization, curriculum reform, and staff recruitment. The other aspects are program survival and closure rate. In other words, two-thirds of the programs that were not accredited suffered closure. Generally speaking, institutions used the accreditation results to restructure institutional organization, staff hiring, and program mergers, or closure. Several concerns were raised by the public, including the problem of increased workloads, the reviewers' quality and qualifications, and the limited use of the evaluations by employers and students (Hou, Ince, Tasi, & Chiang, 2015). There was also a strong demand that the Taiwan QA needed to embrace society's needs and build public trust.

Overall, Taiwan's universities took a positive attitude to MOE QA policy and design under the "state control model." HEIs widely agreed that HEEACT institutional accreditation brought significant impacts, particularly in the areas of governance and management, as well as the quality of education. Moreover, universities continued to improve issues addressed in the accreditation report. QA was also widely

used by Taiwan's institutions to strengthen their internal quality mechanism, and to respond to the new challenges of a globally changing environment, which led to the development of a university-led governance model in Taiwan. To conclude, governmental QA policy in Taiwan is not only successfully implemented by universities, but also supports them to have internal QA regulations in place.

#### **4.5 Launch of Self-Accreditation Policy: From a State-Controlled to a University-Led QA Approach**

In order to respond to the call for state deregulation and institutional empowerment, a new practice of external quality assurance—self-accreditation—was proposed by the MOE in 2012. Self-accreditation is “a process or status that implies a degree of autonomy, on the part of an institution or individual, to make decisions about academic offerings or learning” (INQAAHE, 2019). Derived from accreditation, it is defined as the status accorded to a mature institution conducting its internal QA activities, and which is exempted from the process of external accreditation. A self-accrediting institution is fully authorized to invite its review panel to inspect institutional or program quality. With greater familiarity with the specific nature of the institution itself, ideally, self-accreditation can lead institutions to a more informed process of self-improvement (Hou et al., 2018; Kinser, 2011; Sanyal & Martin, 2007). By 2019, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Australia, and Taiwan have implemented this approach.

However, the 2012 MOE self-accreditation policy, conducted as a pilot study, only identified a limited number of institutions as eligible for self-accreditation status. The two goals of the policy are to deregulate the national higher education system and to enhance autonomy over institutional governance and management. In general, applicants for self-accrediting status engage in a two-stage review and approval process. In the first stage, the applicant is required to submit a proposal and related evidence demonstrating capacity to conduct an external review process. The proposal is then reviewed by the Accreditation Recognition Committee, organized by the MOE. In addition, applicants are required to comply with the designated eight standards (Hou et al., 2018; MOE, 2013). The second stage focuses on the QA implementation undertaken by self-accrediting institutions, and the review's outcomes and related documents should be submitted to HEEACT for approval. With HEEACT's approval, the MOE allows self-accrediting institutions to publish their program review decisions on their official website (Hou et al., 2018).

In early 2017, the government announced a new QA policy, indicating that program accreditation would change from a compulsory to a voluntary system. In particular, the self-accrediting policy likewise entered a new phase of development. Eligibility for self-accrediting institutional status was opened to all Taiwan higher education providers. This means that all HEIs are now eligible to undertake self-accreditation program reviews if capable of doing so according to the new quality

policy. As a protection mechanism, HEEACT still sets a minimum standard of at least an 80% pass rate of the previous cycle HEEACT program accreditation for applicants, in order to ensure that the university has sufficient capability to execute self-accreditation activities (HEEACT, 2018). Surprisingly, only 18 HEIs have applied for the recognition of self-accreditation up to present. Furthermore, several top research universities chose to apply for HEEACT's accreditation voluntarily, which meant that they gave up their self-accreditation status. Both accreditation paths will be funded partially by the government (HEEACT, 2019).

#### **4.6 Changing Roles of Quality Assurance Agencies and Accrediting Bodies**

In response to the new challenges in higher education and policy changes, QA agencies are expected to transform their traditional role and reposition the relationship with the government and higher education providers so as to maximize its full capacity. In most countries, QA is primarily used as a policy instrument to regulate the quality of higher education. A dilemma known as the principal-agent problem may likely exhibit in the states, where integrated QA into national education reform initiatives. Their roles and functions would be affected by governmental policy changes. In this sense, concern about whether the autonomy and independence of the QA agencies would be threatened or intervened emerged (Brown, 2013; Dill, 2011; Martin & Stella, 2007).

The 2017 MOE QA policy has slightly changed the QA ecosystem in Taiwan. QA agencies and accrediting bodies no longer have the mandate to undertake program accreditation, which has pressured them to think of multi-functions as an external QA agency, particularly HEEACT. In response to the MOE policy, HEEACT developed four major roles and responsibilities, including being a quality gatekeeper, serving as a governmental think tank, acting as an educational trainer for universities, and acting as an international mediator between Taiwan's universities and the globe. Furthermore, building a solid research capacity is a new trend fostered by HEEACT to strengthen professionalism, shifting the approach from a regulatory role into a policy advisor. These challenges are part of the impact that globalization is having on Taiwanese higher education.

Undoubtedly, the more that Taiwan's government concerns itself with maintaining the universities' competitive edge, as well as lifting academic autonomy by adopting voluntary program accreditation and launching a comprehensive self-accreditation policy, the more challenges QA agencies will face. In addition, the diversifying roles and functions arising from globalization and higher education policy change give QA agencies an opportunity to expand their strategic roles domestically and internationally. Although state policy and regulation over QA agencies still continue to increase, capacity building for international accreditation as a way to stabilize financial status

may become an increasingly important task for HEEACT in the future. These problems—which include professional training of reviewers, international capacity building of quality assurance and accrediting agencies, and self-accrediting institutions' commitment to quality self-improvement—will thus continue to challenge Taiwan's QA system and higher education. As Jamil Salmi states:

*I think that QA agencies can play multiple roles, especially in terms of promotion and enhancement of quality through capacity building activities. The important caveat is that the QA agency should not do anything that comprises its intellectual independence via government and the other higher education institutions (Personal communication, July 20, 2018).*

## 4.7 Concluding Remarks

Over the past decade, national QA systems have been established in Taiwan and have made great impacts on higher education providers. However, accountability, validity, and evidence-based approaches in QA remain major concerns. Quality assurance has been developed as a policy instrument in Taiwan. In addition to their regulatory role, QA agencies, are “responsible for monitoring institutional and program quality, are under pressure from multiple constituencies to address ever more complicated expectations” (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009, pp. 52–53). Concurrently, the HEEACT has begun to choose other governance models to fulfill its new obligations and to prove its accountability in a flexible manner, such as the university-led model and the market-driven model, although the effectiveness and objectivity of these approaches remain a major concern.

The national accreditor may seize the opportunity to transform its traditional role into a variety of functions—quality regulator, basic quality gatekeeper, or project convener—into new multi-roles of quality improvement instigator, capacity developer, international facilitator, and even future thinker. Hence, in response to the impacts and challenges brought on by the MOE's new QA policy, HEEACT has developed a new partnership with the government and universities, and is ready to adopt a new risk-based approach. If QA agencies wish to demonstrate accountability to higher education stakeholders domestically as well as internationally, “it is essential to provide the appropriate education and training program to the reviewers and agency staff who are involved in the review process and results” (Woodhouse, 2016, p. 3). Hence, it can be foreseen that professionalism and internationalization will be future manifestations of QA in Taiwanese higher education.

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