

I. Excellence in Quality Assurance

THE INNOVATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION IN TAIWAN

Shaw-Ren Lin

Dean of Office of Quality Assurance of HEEACT, Chinese Taipei

Chun-Chi Chih

Associate Researcher of HEEACT, Chinese Taipei

Abstract

This article focuses on the changes introduced into two cycle higher education institutional accreditation in Taiwan. The novelty of the research is not only in the introduction of evaluation indicators, but rather in the evaluation meaning that a professional evaluation agency wants to share with the universities undergoing evaluation.

It's not easy for the university to regard a mandatory evaluation as a supporting tool, but HEEACT tries its best to introduce some changes in order to make it happen. For instance, HEEACT uses PDCA quality circle procedure to emphasize the internal QA, which minimizes the data preparation load, classifies universities in order to evaluate them by their prior achievements, gives them flexibility to perform their functions. It is very important that the results of the evaluation are meant for the university development and are not used for the government sanctioned practices. These reforms make the universities understand that the second cycle institutional evaluation can in fact enhance the quality of their work, provided they realize and carry out self-evaluation before the external evaluation.

Introduction

In order to implement and improve quality assurance (QA) as well as quality enhancement (QE) of higher education in Taiwan, the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT) launched institutional accreditation in 2011, which aims to determine the place of a higher education institution, its role and features, strategies for its development, management and administration and establish internal self-evaluation mechanisms for quality improvement. A new accreditation procedure called the “second cycle institutional accreditation” has been launched in January 2017. The procedure partially reproduces the accreditation model from the previous years. We modified some questions and adapted suggestions from the dialogue, debate and meta-evaluation, which originally were focused mainly on the technique and details of the system, did not allow individual approach to a university, involved too much paper work and efforts, and imposed some other restrictions. However, the HEEACT tries to improve and modify the accreditation system and really hopes to help the universities become more autonomous, encourages their self-awareness in relation to consistent internal quality assurance.

Substantially speaking, the goals of the new cycle of institutional accreditation include:

1. Accreditation of university outcomes. It implies accreditation of the overall outcomes of universities/colleges including governance and administration, faculty and teaching, research, services, as well as student learning outcomes.
2. Evaluating the self-orientation and characteristics. It focuses on propelling the universities/colleges to analyze their own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) based on self-positioning or comparison with the world class universities.
3. Carrying out social responsibilities. It is to encourage the universities/colleges to demonstrate their performance or features of excellence in terms of cooperation with the industrial sector and fulfillment of their social responsibilities.
4. Providing recommendations for policymaking.

The results of accreditation are analyzed in order to make suggestions on the development of higher education to the policy makers.

Over the past five years HEEACT has collected extensive critical opinions and relevant information on the matter. At the same time, the Ministry of Education of Taiwan was proposing a new idea called “Evaluation 2.0” in order to meet the universities’ demand and social expectations. In short, the core value of “Evaluation 2.0” is focusing on “student learning outcomes”, “faculty teaching effectiveness” and “information disclosure”. Although some institutions and program leaders still believe that student learning outcomes are very controversial due to complexity of their assessment, and are not the main purpose and value of education. There is no doubt that the efforts on student learning outcomes will make us more focused on the students’ performance and faculty teaching effectiveness. The “Evaluation 2.0” encourages the higher education institutions to develop the assessment and strategies of how to find the evidences of student learning and faculty teaching outcomes which measure not only academic achievements and performance but also the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills, learning attitudes, self-concepts, world views, cooperation, communication abilities and behaviors affected in the teaching and learning process. We will focus on how student learning outcomes were used to improve the quality of pedagogy, how they will be collected by an institution and so on. The information openness means the accredited institutions provide the performance data on the web or other media that can be accessed by the public on a regular basis. In fact, some institutions have used the results of “Institutional research, IR” to make their performance results transparent, thus achieving our goals in this cycle. The “Evaluation 2.0” has the advantages and benefits for the first cycle accreditation, yet reflects the trends for change and practice needs.

The features of second cycle institutional accreditation

Based on the above descriptions of new cycle institutional accreditation, we can integrate the concepts into ten features as follows:

1. The universities should try to demonstrate the process of development and the outcomes of self-orientation and characteristics, on how to achieve the vision and goals through the effective planning and governance. It is not necessary to compare with others, especially the universities with a different background.

2. Focus on the teaching and learning support systems provided by the universities, including financial resources, material resources and human capital.

3. Emphasis on the evidence of students’ learning effectiveness and faculty teaching and research outcomes.

4. The accreditation standards should not be simplified into four major categories and 14 standards, but also universities should be encouraged to customize their own standards to fully demonstrate their characteristics and outcomes.

5. According to the different types of universities, the number of on-site reviewers, on-site visits, and the number of respondents should be adapted depending on the needs.

6. Reducing the paper work and data preparation. The basic information about a university will be provided to HEEACT from the Ministry of Education database. The universities will need to make sure the data are accurate and complete prior the on-site review.

7. The self-evaluation is the core work of the accreditation. Each university must carry out self-evaluation and submit their final reports to HEEACT. The back-up copies of the relevant information can be saved on a CD-ROM and provided to the reviewers for more information before the judgment.

8. Emphasizing the diversity of data .In order to ensure objectivity and credibility of on-site review, the relevant information will be collected in the form of briefings, on-site visits, staff interviews, questionnaires, and information reviews on the same day.

We try to help the universities check the quality of their performance in order to achieve the set learning and teaching outcomes, and ensure that the designed system can really play a substantive effect in reminding the educational institutions to create a sustained pursuit of excellence dur-

ing self evaluation and enhance social responsibility through internal and external quality assurance mechanisms.

The Connection and Innovation of two cycle Institutional Accreditation

The Connection of two cycle institutional accreditation

According to HEECAT's institutional accreditation philosophy, succeeding in cycle accreditation should have some connections with the initial cycle to assure the quality and improvement. And we can see through these from accreditation goals, process, decision making, etc.

1. The connection between the two cycles' main goals

The goals of the initial cycle is to ascertain whether each institution is operating well according to its mission and goals, and to assist the institution to identify itself, to find its strengths and weaknesses, to develop its features, and to engage in self-improvement. And the goals of the second cycle higher education institutional accreditation can be seen as an extension of those from the initial cycle: to ensure that higher education institutions enhance their practices for internal quality assurance and continuous improvements.

2. The professional accreditation process

The process of self-evaluation, as well as on-site visits of the external review panel, aim to ensure that an institution's operational practices support the realization of the institution's basic purpose and goals, while also demonstrating institutional effectiveness and social responsibility. And HEEACT guides the institutions in using the plan-do-check-act method in order to continuously improve and effectively raise institutional quality .

The innovation of the second cycle institutional accreditation

After the first cycle institutional accreditation, HEEACT implements meta-evaluation and holds several meetings for stakeholders' feedback. The feedback concerns the evaluation preparation, evaluation profession, too many evaluation projects implemented at the same time, standards and indicators reduction and so on.

In respect to these concerns, HEEACT conducts some innovations of the second cycle institutional accreditation, and they are divided into four parts: 1) an organized and precise institutional quality accreditation; 2) the division of institutions being evaluated and their on-site visit time; 3) adaptation of on-site visits; 4) simplification of accreditation standards and indicators.

1. An organized and precise institutional quality accreditation

In order to effectively reduce the administrative burden of data preparation, six other major evaluation projects conducted by various departments of the Ministry of Education, including "Promotion of Gender Equality Education," "Campus Environment Management," "University Trust Fund," "Traffic Safety Education," "Digital Learning Content and Certification," and "Physical Education Project" were incorporated into the first cycle of institutional accreditation based on their similarities to some of the key indicators. But the meta-evaluation done by the third party turned to have a different result. The stakeholders involved in accreditation hope that institutional accreditation shall be more organized and less complicated. HEEACT and the MOE followed these suggestions, excluded these evaluation projects and concentrated on evaluating what an institution should do and improve during the second cycle institutional accreditation.

2. The division of institutions being evaluated and their on-site visit time

In 2011 there were 81 institutions (including military, police, and open universities) undergoing the first cycle institutional accreditation. All the on-site visits took place over the span of one year. By organizing the work this way HEEACT had difficulties managing the staff workload and selecting evaluators. In respond to this experience, HEEACT divided the universities undergoing evaluation into two groups depending on their first cycle accreditation results. The ones which passed all 5 standards had one more year to prepare, otherwise the universities were to undergo the second cycle institutional accreditation in 2017.

Besides, institutions being evaluated will not undergo program accreditation or participate in a joint supervision project in the same semester to reduce the burden of the universities.

3. Adaptation of on-site visits

According to the multiple categories and depending on the size of a higher education institution

, HEEACT makes some revisions and gives more flexibility to the institutions: (1) involve students to decide on the number of Review Panel members, on-site visit days, the number of staff, teachers and students, and questionnaires. For example, the number of members in a Review Panel will depend on the number of student population at the institution. If the institution has fewer than 100 students, the evaluation panel will only be composed of 4 to 6 evaluators if the institution has 101-300 students, the evaluation panel will be composed of 6 to 8 evaluators; if the institution has 301-6,000 students, the evaluation panel will be composed of 10 to 12 evaluators; if the institution has over 6,000 students, the evaluation panel will be composed of 14 to 16 evaluators; (2) Evaluators are selected in accordance with the category of the University. We categorize institutions undergoing evaluation into three categories: top universities, self-accredited universities and others. The evaluation panel is composed with regard to this categorisation.

4. Simplification of accreditation standards and indicators

HEEACT takes the suggestions of the meta-evaluation of first cycle institutional accreditation and fits in with the evaluation policy needs, these changes are made as it is shown in table 1 below.

Simplification means reducing the burden of the institutions when they prepare for the accreditation. It's a simple job for the professional evaluation agency to reduce the number of standards and indicators, but it's difficult to teach the institution to be evaluated and to train the evaluators. And the more indicators become general, the more judgment tools we should have.

Table 1 Comparison of two cycle Institutional accreditation standards and indicators

	First cycle(2011)	Second cycle(2017-2018)
1.Standard Structure	Standards, Meaning of Standards, Best Practices, Recommend Indicators, Recommend references	Evaluation Structure Introduction, Standards, Meaning of Standards, Core Indicators
2.Number of Standards and Indicators	5 Standards,48 Recommend Indicators	4 Standards,14 Core Indicators
3.Indicator Flexibility	Not clearly mentioned	Clear mentioned two ways to increase indicators and perform characteristics
4.Collection of Institutional Basic Information	Another question forms to fill in	Use of Higher Education Institution database information

Conclusions

Every university and college is a unique institution of higher learning with its own distinct self-positioning and educational goals. In order to respect this, the evaluation indicators for the second cycle of institutional evaluation have been designed to allow a high degree of flexibility in terms of the practices that institutions use to demonstrate their distinct features. An institution can thus conduct its self-evaluation in a manner that appropriately shows its unique character.

Furthermore, the reduction of the loading and burdens in the evaluation process seems to be a reality that evaluation agencies implementing compulsory evaluations must seriously take into consideration. HEEACT has made great efforts to change the universities' idea on the meaning and the functions of evaluation by using PDCA quality circle procedure to emphasize the internal QA, minimize data preparation loadings, classify universities to be evaluated by their prior achievements, give them flexibility to perform their characteristics, and the most important of all is that the evaluation result is used exclusively for the development of a university, and not as the government sanctioned practice.

By doing so, every university should consider its development goals and how to plan and implement them. The institutional accreditation acts as a supporting tool to give universities insights and useful suggestions

References

1. *Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan(2010). The Institutional Accreditation Plan of 2010.*
2. *Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan(2016). The Institutional Accreditation Plan of 2017.*