

**Higher Education Institutional and Program Evaluations in Taiwan and the Emerging  
Roles of Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT)**

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Author Note

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### **Abstract**

Post-secondary education institutions in Taiwan are divided into two tracks, general higher education (HE) and technological and vocational education (TVE). The evaluation of all universities/colleges is mandated by the University Act. Higher education institutions receive mandated institutional evaluation every six years and program evaluation every five years. The purpose of this paper is to briefly introduce the status of higher education institutional and program evaluations in Taiwan as well as the emerging roles of the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT). Both institutional and program evaluations are accreditation-oriented, adopting the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle with an emphasis on institutional and program self-positioning, student learning outcome, and mechanism for continuous improvement. As the third-party planner and implementer of higher education institutional and program evaluations, HEEACT has conducted internal and external assessments as well as entrusted third-party meta-evaluation to assure its quality of work. Faced with the emerging challenges, such as the Ministry of Education's new policy on requiring some universities/colleges to implement self-conducted external evaluation in replacement of the third-party program evaluation, HEEACT has to alter its roles and becomes a Critical Friend of higher education institutions and programs, a Change Agent of higher education institutional and program evaluation, and an Effective Facilitator of the international exchanges and cooperation on quality assurance and mutual recognitions of national qualifications.

*Keywords: institutional evaluation, program evaluation, higher education, quality assurance,*

*Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT)*

## **Higher Education Institutional and Program Evaluations in Taiwan and the Emerging Roles of Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT)**

### **Evaluation Is Often Linked to the Metaphor of Mirror or Lens in Taiwan**

Located off the southeast coast of the Asian Continent and at the western edge of the Pacific Ocean, Taiwan has well embraced both Chinese traditional culture and western democracy and freedom. As a quality assurance measure, evaluation is spelled as “評鑑” and pronounced as “*ping jian*” in traditional Chinese. The two Chinese characters “評” (*ping*) and “鑑” (*jian*) originally mean “critique” and “mirror,” respectively. The second emperor of the Tang Dynasty, Shimin Lee (599-649), mentioned the mirror as follows:

Using a bronze plate as a mirror, we are able to tidy our dress; using history as a mirror, we are able to learn about the rise and fall of the state; using other persons as a mirror, we are able to tell the advantage and the disadvantage of ourselves.

Not only mirror, but also data and people can provide feedback to its users. Thus, Taiwanese often consider evaluation as a mirror and believe that the evidence of evaluation should be pursued from multiple sources such as people, data and thing. The magic mirror in the tale of Snow White is also valued because it always tells the truth.

In addition, a lens is somewhat similar to a mirror although in lens light passes right through the glass and reaches the other side. Taiwanese argue that “a microscope lens” should be used to assess if an institution (or a program) is “doing the thing right” and “a telescope lens” should be used to assess whether an institution (or a program) is “doing the right thing.” This paper aims to briefly introduce the status of higher education institutional and program evaluations in Taiwan, which reflect the metaphor of mirror and lens, as well as the emerging roles of the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT).

### **University Evaluation Is Mandated by the University Act**

The educational system in Taiwan includes 2 years of preschool, 6 years of elementary school, 3 years of lower-secondary school, 3 years of upper-secondary school, and 4 to 7 years of college or university, 1 to 4 years for a master's degree and 2 to 7 years for a doctoral degree. Beyond the 9-year compulsory education, including both primary and lower-secondary education, the educational system is mainly divided into two tracks, academic and vocational. At the post-secondary level, higher education institutions mainly recruit undergraduate students from academic-oriented senior high schools while technological and vocational institutions from vocational high schools. Universities/colleges and universities/colleges of technology are overseen by the Ministry of Education's two departments respectively – the Higher Education (HE) department and the Technological and Vocational Education (TVE) department. The evaluation of all universities/colleges is mandated by the University Act as follows:

Universities shall carry out self-evaluation on instruction, research, services, guidance, institutional administration, student participation and so forth regularly; regulations for the evaluation shall be formulated by the universities.

The Ministry of Education, in order to promote the development of universities, shall organize an Evaluation Committee, entrust academic communities or professional evaluation institutions to carry out regular evaluation on universities and publish the results as the reference for governmental subsidies and adjust the scale of development by universities; rules of evaluation shall be formulated by the Ministry of Education (Article 5).

At present, the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT) and the Taiwan Assessment and Evaluation Association (TWAEA) have been entrusted to conduct the institutional and program evaluations of the universities/colleges in HE and the universities/colleges of technology in TVE, respectively. However, the evaluation of medical schools and nursing programs is conducted by the Taiwan Medical Accreditation Council (TMAC) and the Taiwan Nursing Accreditation Council (TNAC), respectively.

Although affiliated to the HEEACT, both TMAC and TNAC remain as independent accreditation agencies to manifest the unique professional features of medical and nursing education. In addition, post-secondary educational institutions and programs may apply for exemption from the evaluation conducted by HEEACT and TWAEA if they voluntarily receive the evaluation conducted by other professional accreditors recognized by the Ministry of Education, such as the Institute of Engineering Education Taiwan (IEET), which has been involved in accreditation of engineering, computing, technical, and architectural education, as well as the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). All accredited programs are posted at the website - Taiwan Higher Education Institutions Accreditation Results (TWHEIAR; <http://twheiar.heeact.edu.tw/>), which is managed by HEEACT.

### **Higher Education Institutions Receive Mandated Accredited Evaluation Every Six Years**

The higher education institutional evaluation aims to induce universities/colleges to examine their competition environment, implement their strategic development plans as well as correct their development deviations, to accredit the university/college performing well in education and research, to recognize the excellence of university/college and set up the benchmark, and to make suggestions for higher education policymaking. As shown in Figure 1, the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle and five domains of evaluation are adopted in the newly completed institutional evaluation.

Launched in 2011, the newly completed higher education institutional evaluation includes the following five stages: preparation, self-evaluation, site visit, decision-making and follow-up. The review procedure of accreditation results is lengthy and mainly includes the activities as shown in Figure 2. The final results are categorized into three statuses: “accredited,” “accredited conditionally” or “denial.” In addition to raising objections to the HEEACT, the higher education

institution may submit an appeal to the HEEACT if it thinks that the evaluation report or accreditation result is “inconsistent with the fact” or “violating procedural due process.” The institutions that received “denial” or “accredited conditionally” results have to submit their “self-improvement plan and outcome” or “self-evaluation report” and get ready for the re-evaluation or follow-up evaluation (HEEACT, 2012).

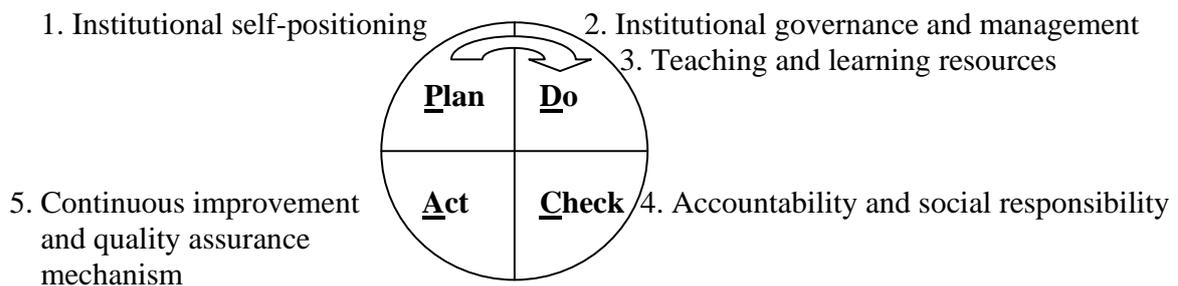


Figure 1. The PDCA cycle and the five domains adopted in the institutional evaluation.

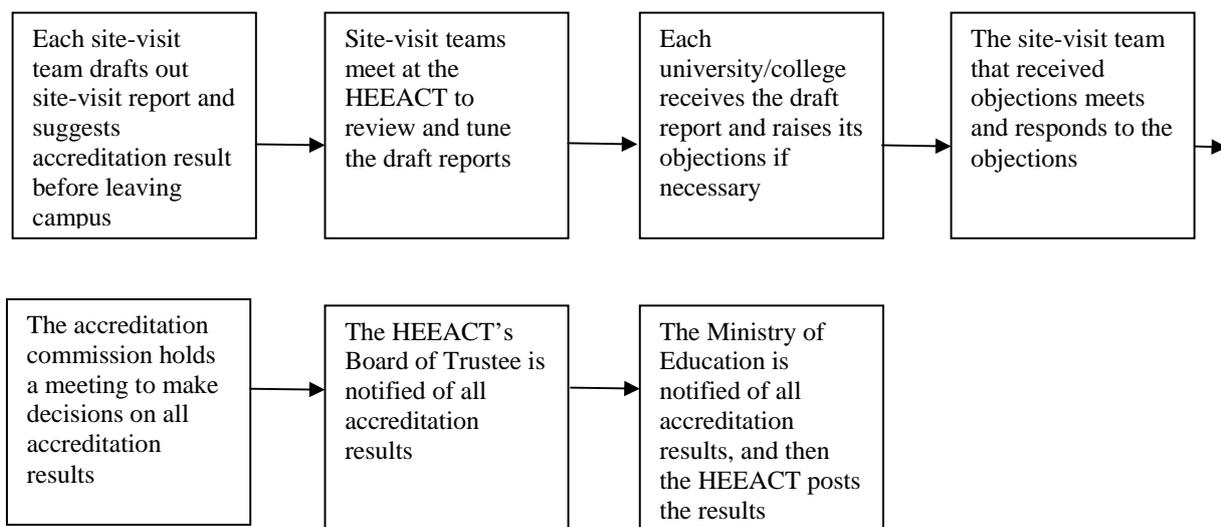


Figure 2. The review procedure of institutional accreditation.

**Higher Education Programs Receive Mandated Accredited Evaluation Every Five Years**

Focused on ensuring student learning outcome, the current evaluation of higher education

programs, including general education, aims to explore the mechanism and practice of each program in ensuring their student learning outcome, determine the accreditation status of each program in promoting student learning outcome, facilitate the quality improvement mechanism of programs, assist programs to develop their own educational features and move toward excellence, and provide the government with the evaluation results for their reference in mapping out their higher education policy. The PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle and the following five domains are adopted in the current program evaluation: (1) Rationale, goals, and features of program, (2) Curriculum planning and design, (3) Faculty qualifications and instructional quality, (4) Learning resources and environment, and (5) Organizational and administrative operations and self-improvement mechanism. Additionally, if a college/professional school selects whole college/school evaluation to replace its programs' evaluation, the domain "the integration of the entire development and resources of the college" will be added to the above five domains. The evaluation criteria for each domain include description, best practice and reference indicators. Considering the characteristics of each academic discipline, the committee on general education and other 49 academic discipline planning committee can adjust their own evaluation criteria. The programs to be evaluated are also allowed to set up its own evaluation indicators.

The review procedure of accreditation results mainly includes the activities as shown in Figure 3. The final results are categorized into three statuses: "accredited," "accredited conditionally" or "denial." In addition to raising objections to the HEEACT, the higher education program may submit an appeal to the HEEACT if it discovers that the evaluation report or accreditation result is "inconsistent with the fact" or "violating procedural due process." The programs that received "denial" or "accredited conditionally" results have to submit their

“self-improvement plan and outcome” or “self-evaluation report” and get ready for the re-evaluation or follow-up evaluation (HEEACT, 2012).

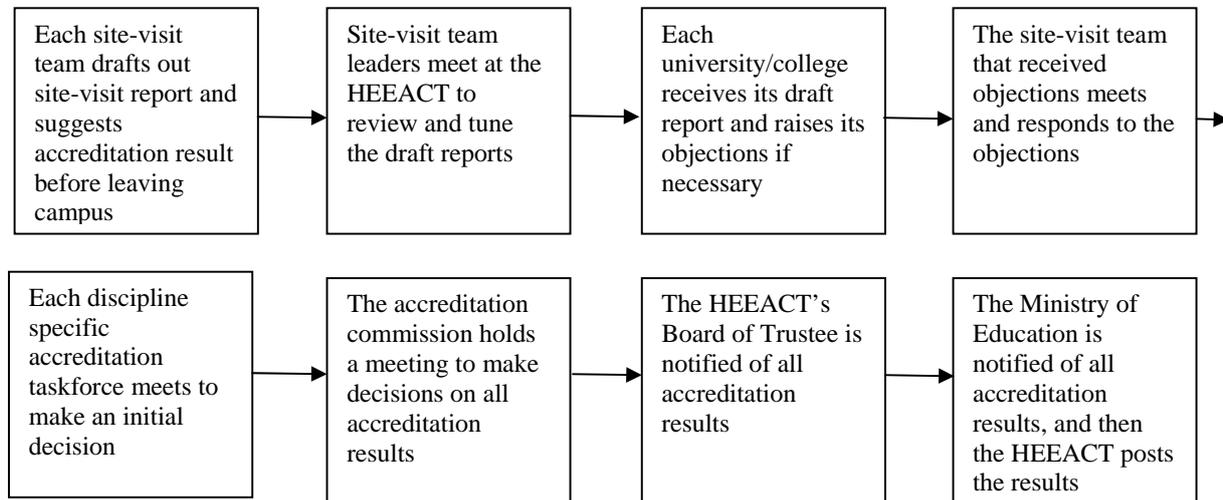


Figure 3. The review procedure of program accreditation.

To sum up, both higher education institutional and program evaluations in Taiwan are accreditation-oriented, adopting the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle with an emphasis on institutional and program self-positioning, student learning outcome, and mechanism for continuous improvement.

### The Emerging Roles of the HEEACT

As the third-party planner and implementer of higher education institutional and program evaluations, HEEACT has conducted internal and external evaluation on itself as well as entrusted third-party meta-evaluation to assure its quality of work. For example, HEEACT has been certified by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) and has received ISO 9001 and ISO/IEC 27001 certifications. The serial third-party meta-evaluation also showed that the HEEACT’s evaluation and accreditation enhanced the quality of higher education institutions and programs, help establishing quality culture within higher educational institutions, and

brought Taiwan's higher education toward excellence. However, HEEACT are at least confronted by the following three emerging challenges: (1) Faculty and staff of higher educational institutions feel overloaded due to the heavy burdens from a variety of evaluations and project competitions. Integrating various evaluations appropriately, adding the proactive assistance to the reactive evaluation, as well as identifying key evaluation criteria are thus highly recommended to the Ministry of Education. (2) The Ministry of Education has required 34 higher education institutions to try out self-conducted and external program evaluation. HEEACT has to simultaneously conduct the third-party program evaluation and assist the self-conducted external program evaluation through appropriate measures such as offering more reviewer training programs. (3) Continuously strengthening the qualifications, recruitment, selection, training and professional development of its reviewers are needed to enhance the quality of evaluation and accreditation.

Accordingly, the emerging roles of the HEEACT are as follows:

1. To become a Critical Friend of higher education institutions and programs

A critical friend is:

...a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend takes time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work. (Costa & Kallick, 1993)

HEEACT has to transform itself to become a critical friend of higher education institutions and programs.

2. To become a Change Agent of higher education institutional and program evaluation

A change agent is an organization or a person that acts as a catalyst for change. Facing the

emerging challenges mentioned above, HEEACT has to become a change agent of higher education institutional and program evaluation.

3. To become an Effective Facilitator of the exchanges and cooperation of international quality assurance measures and the mutual recognitions of international qualifications

In order to assist the higher education in Taiwan to meet world-class standards through evaluation and accreditation, HEEACT has to become an effective facilitator of international exchanges and cooperation of quality assurance and the mutual recognitions of national qualifications.

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