

Asia Pacific Accreditation and Certification Commission (APACC) Certification for TVET Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Today, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is increasingly recognized as an effective means of empowering young people to engage in productive and sustainable livelihoods. In order to ensure quality, it is essential to establish criteria and standards, subject to periodic review and evaluation, applying to all aspects of TVET. Many countries are initiating steps for the development of national standards keeping in view the provision of TVET. There are a number of models in place in different parts of the world, but cooperative regional work is also needed looking to the diversity in the region. Asia Pacific Accreditation and Certification Commission (APACC) is a regional accreditation and certification body established by Colombo Plan Staff College (CPSC) member governments, which recognize the need to cope with the rapid changes in the labor market and skills taught in TVET institutions. The system of evaluation will provide different levels of Institution Accreditation such as GOLD, SILVER and BRONZE. Already many Asia Pacific Countries have applied for APACC accreditation and many Institutions have received certification. In this paper, the history and benefits of APACC and the procedure to apply for APACC are also explained in detail.

Keywords: TVET, Accreditation, APACC, CPSC.

INTRODUCTION

The technological changes happening in the world drives TVET institutions to strive for excellence. They should be globally competitive in order to produce graduates who can compete in the international arena. In order to strengthen the position of TVET in each country, efforts will have to be made in order to standardize the quality of programs and services being offered. Accreditation in the context of TVET has been defined by some sources as a process of quality assurance, giving credit where it is due for some clearly visible and demonstrable strategies of academic activities and objective of the institution, known to be honestly pursued and efficiently achieved by the resources currently available with a potential for continuous improvement in quality for effective growth. Quality assurance is the activity of providing to all concerned the evidence needed to establish confidence that the quality function is being performed adequately.

The Colombo Plan Staff College (CPSC) is the center of excellence for human resources development in technical education and vocational training in Asia and the Pacific region. Since its inception to the present time, CPSC is the only institution that provides leadership and addresses Technical Education and Vocational Training (TVET)-related issues and problems arising within

the member countries. Currently, CPSC has 16 member countries including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Fiji, India, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

As inscribed in CPSC's Corporate Plan 2003–2008 (Goal 1, Strategy 1.2), CPSC aims “to assist and enhance TVET systems of member countries by facilitating capacity building to develop an Accreditation and Certification System in TVET for Asia and the Pacific”. True to this mandate, the College has been offering regional, in-country and customized programs as well as international conferences to advocate accreditation and certification for quality TVET system. Since then, most if not all the member countries have crafted and implemented their national accreditation and certification systems. Some may have achieved recognition of their programs or their institutions resulting to academic autonomy, direct and indirect funding, and some others.

At this moment though, there persists a serious lack of accreditation standards and processes that can apply mutually acceptable quality indicators on a regional level. CPSC, being an inter-governmental international organization, is in the best position to act as a regional accrediting body for TVET institutions. In her desire to be the glue that would bind the member countries even closer together, CPSC proposed the establishment of a uniform protocol to evaluate TVET systems via the APACC. CPSC strongly believes that APACC will open the doors for TVET institutions in the member countries not only for quality improvement but also increased opportunities for cooperation and collaboration.

In this respect APACC is seen as a “blue ocean strategy” (BOS) in creating breakthrough in value for both the TVET institutions (as its users) and CPSC through APACC as the institution by pursuing a different brand of service beyond the usual training and providing low cost alternative to institutions who are availing of similar services elsewhere.

APACC AS A REGIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISM

APACC is a regional accreditation and certification body established by CPSC member governments, which recognize the need to cope with the rapid changes in the labor market and skills, taught in TVET institutions.

The implementing agency for accreditation is currently housed under the CPSC whereby APACC is one of the explicit targets in the implementation of the CPSC Corporate Plan.

The formation of APACC was in an International Conference on Accreditation and Certification in December 2004 at Seoul, Korea. This was reinforced by a Regional Workshop on “Regional Accreditation Modeling and Accrediting the Accreditors” in August 2005 at CPSC, Manila, Philippines to fortify the APACC accreditation criteria and instruments. With the encouraging support and commitment of 16 member countries to the CPSC Seoul Declaration of 2004 in Seoul, Republic of Korea, and APACC aims to ensure that it is able to guide TVET institutions in equipping themselves with internationally recognized quality standards and systems. APACC accredits and certify the TVET institutions for human resources development through the standardization and harmonization of education and training systems. This will enable these institutions to produce workforce with greater mobility to move across borders and with regionally competitive qualification skills. Many countries have signed a Memorandum of Agreement with

APACC member countries (MCs) entered into the voluntary Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with APACC concerning mutual support to advance the core principles of accreditation and certification of TVET systems for human resource development (HRD) in Asia and the Pacific Region.

In signing the MOA, the parties agreed to:

1. Promote the objectives and goals of APACC as a mechanism to encourage TVET systems for HRD such as Polytechnic Colleges, Technical Colleges, Vocational Training Institutions, Tertiary and Secondary Schools, TVET Modules of Universities, and others, to undergo a self-study evaluation under APACC procedures and standards;
2. Identify opportunities for prescriptive directions towards encouraging TVET systems for HRD in member countries to undertake accreditation and certification by APACC;
3. Identify TVET systems for HRD under the purview of the MC to apply for accreditation and certification by APACC; and
4. Tap qualified local accreditors, in addition to already-identified National Coordinator for Accreditation (NCA) from the MC, who may be trained on APACC accreditation procedures as would-be accreditors for scheduled accreditation activities in the MC.

After undergoing through a series of regional consultations including conduct of pilot testing and refining the APACC instrument, the APACC documents such as Manual, Instrument, and Handbook were finalized through the Experts' Meetings. The APACC Accreditation Manual is used to guide the National Coordinators for Accreditation (NCA), TVET institutions in CPSC member countries, accreditors and consultants of APACC on the accreditation criteria, procedures and the system of evaluation. The Accreditation Instrument is designed to be used by the APACC accreditor/s for validation during the on-site visit. The Handbook for Accreditors gives a detailed description of the guides and procedures intended to help the Accreditors in undertaking an actual on-site visit.

Operationally, APACC accreditation is covering autonomous and affiliate colleges, constituent colleges, departments, training centers, or the whole university/college, which are engaged in offering TVET. It was prepared with reference to seven criteria so that the status of the institution can be ascertained vis-à-vis the regional standards laid down. The criteria that will serve as the basis of assessment procedures are as follows:

1. Governance and Management;
2. Teaching and Learning;
3. Faculty and Staff;
4. Research and Development;
5. Extension, Consultancy and Linkages;
6. Resources and
7. Support to Students.

The Institutions will send a request to APACC office. Once the applications have been found satisfactory, the institutions are asked to complete the Self-Study Guide as mentioned in the Figure.

1. The Self Study Guide is sent to the accreditors for them to study proceeding to the on-site visit. The evaluation will be done by accreditors and feedback will be given to the Institute. Based on the final points, the Institution will be awarded.

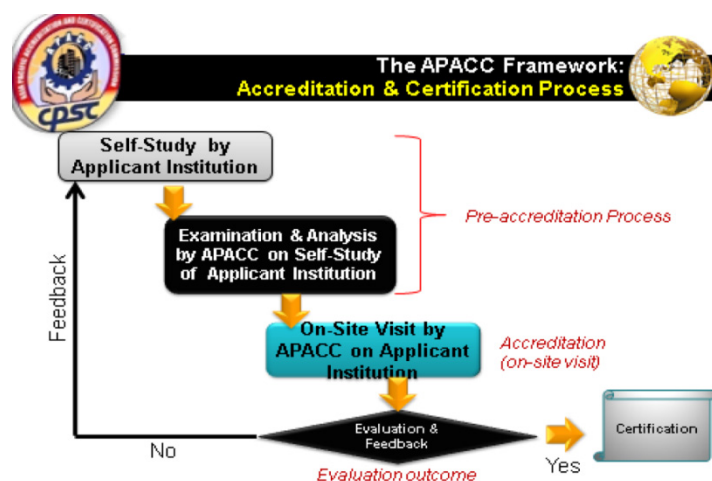


Fig. 1: APACC Accreditation & Certification Process

The status awarded to accredited institutions is categorized into three levels.

Under level I (Bronze), an institute is accredited for two years. It shows that it barely meets threshold of the standards with deficiencies, which can be improved within a period of two years. Under level II (Silver), an institute is accredited for three years. It shows that it meets standards considerably above the threshold with minor deficiencies, which can be improved within a period of one to two years. Under level III (Gold), an institute is accredited for four years. It shows that it meets standards significantly way above the threshold with minor deficiencies, which can be improved within a period of six months to one year.

The award of accreditation status as presented above is based on quantitative measures. To capture the qualitative flavor of the institution being evaluated, certain indicators are looked into; but this portion of the evaluation is not rated. These indicators of quality are Commendations, Affirmations and recommendations.

BENEFITS OF APACC ACCREDITATION TO TVET INSTITUTIONS

APACC accreditation is increasingly becoming an internationally recognized sign of quality for TVET institutions. Accredited institutions and stakeholders derive some of the following benefits:

1. Greater workforce mobility and mutual recognition of qualifications in Asia and the Pacific region;
2. Quality and employable workforce in member countries through APACC coordination among its network of institutions, agencies and other stakeholders;
3. Employer confidence on the selection of employees coming from accredited institutions. Accreditation status is important to employers when evaluating credentials of job applicants and when deciding to provide support for current employees seeking further education;
4. International recognition of the institutions' quality, accountability, and public trust;
5. Eligibility and reliability of TVET institutions for funding support from donors and other lending agencies;

6. Part of a regional network of quality institutions that expand schooling and learning opportunities for students; and
7. Transferability of credits earned by a student among educational institutions. viii. Receiving institutions take note of whether or not the credits a student needs to transfer have been earned from an accredited institution.

As of this date, APACC has accredited forty-two (42) institutions in the Asia Pacific Countries. APACC has received 102 applications from the different TVET institutions in APACC member countries in Asia Pacific region that have already signed an MOA with APACC.

APACC adopts a very careful process in selecting its accreditors. Drawing from the best of the academe may not be a guarantee of their fitness for purpose. Accreditation calls for special academic, technical and personal qualifications of the accreditors.

All the countries in the Asia Pacific Region call for to sign the MOA of APACC so that the cross border mobility can encompass the whole Asia Pacific Region. At the national government level, there is a need to set up clear policy guidelines amongst the TVET systems of the member countries regarding the acceptability of students from other countries and their transferability of credits. Finally, APACC can link up with other regional accreditation and quality networks with a view to improve its outreach and visibility in the region.

CONCLUSIONS

The concepts and processes of accreditation are diverse: program against institutional accreditation; voluntary or government prescribed; discrete against scaled-quantitative against quantitative. Despite these differences, accreditation should address its fundamental concern - to promote a culture of quality and to encourage trust on behalf of stakeholders, parents, employers, administrators and society. The accreditation process reveals whether or not an institution will hold the public trust and helps to ensure high quality education. Once an organization is accredited, it agrees to abide by the standards set forth and to be measured against those with periodic integrity and compliance reviews.

It is hoped that a significant number of TVET institutions in the member governments will adopt the APACC accreditation system and that APACC strengthens and continues with its operational activities through linkages and networking, and feedback systems. APACC may continue to face the challenges on several issues such as universalization, diversification, commercialization and internationalization. But as a blue ocean strategy, it aims to reconstruct market boundaries by creating a leap in user value at a reasonable cost. Purposive orientation, massive advocacy, and accreditation to different stakeholders and partners, APACC will prove that accreditation and certification can lead to quality in technical education.

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