Program Quality Assurance Manual

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REVISIONS TABLE

Version	Date	Description
2.7	May 30, 2017	Modifications in manual to reflect the PQA Roles and Responsibilities document.
2.8	June 13, 2017	Modifications to the external review and site visit section to reflect the External Review Nomination Form document.
2.9	July 18, 2017	Annual review and update of the document
3.0	October 17, 2017	Finalizing updates
4.0	July 27, 2018	Annual review and update of the document
5.0	March 8, 2022	Added AQR section

QUALITY ASSURANCE AT SAIT

The program quality assurance manual that follows, as referred to in SAIT's Program Quality Assurance (PQA) policy, is intended to provide an overview of the requirements for cyclical review at SAIT.

Background

It is the policy of the Board of Governors that SAIT maintains a PQA process that ensures programs align with SAIT's strategic direction and with internal, external, and industry requirements. Program Quality Assurance is an evidence-based process used to ensure programs are working towards their goals in alignment with SAIT's strategic plans, and that focuses on assessing and improving the merit or the worth of an enhancement or its compliance with given standards.

Students, alumni, government, post-secondary partners, and employers must be confident that SAIT has done what is necessary to ensure that graduates have met program goals and learning outcomes and have been engaged in a high-quality learning experience along the way.

The SAIT Board of Governors approved the PQA policy and procedure in May, 2016 *(AC.2.19, 2016; AC.2.19.1, 2016).* The review process supports SAIT's commitment to its strategic plans. In January of 2022, the policy was reviewed to reflect the improvements on quality processes at SAIT.

Resources

Further information on quality assurance at SAIT is housed on SharePoint and SAITNOW.

SAIT's quality assurance lens makes certain that SAIT programs are reviewed holistically. SAIT recognizes that a program goes beyond its curriculum to the human, financial, physical, and technological resources that contribute to student success. Regular monitoring of the effectiveness and efficient use of these resources is foundational to quality assurance.

The theoretical framework for SAIT's quality assurance process rests primarily within the discipline of program evaluation. Michael Quinn Patton, a recognized expert in the field, suggests that **program evaluation** is the systematic collection and analysis of information about program activities, characteristics, and outcomes to make judgments about the program, to improve program effectiveness and/or to inform decisions about future programming (Patton, 1997).

Program evaluation is an evolving academic discipline and offers a variety of approaches to evaluation. Theoretical approaches to program evaluation have to be applicable to the environment in which they are situated. At SAIT, action-oriented thinking is integral to the institution's system and when embedded in its people, will support a culture shift to an evaluative mindset and an evidence-based culture of decision-making.

According to policy and procedure, there are two quality processes (PQA cycle and AQR). All degree programs are to complete the Program Quality Assurance cycle.

PROGRAM QUALITY ASSURANCE OVERVIEW

At SAIT, the quality culture is in development. Well-defined policies/procedures/processes, evidence-based decision-making, engaged stakeholders, and effective communication will help SAIT achieve this shared vision.

Program Quality Assurance provides SAIT programs with the opportunity to tell their quality story - and to make sure that they are engaging in the right activities to meet the promise to students and partners. The process ensures that SAIT programs engage with the appropriate **stakeholders to** and make informed adjustments based on feedback from a range of inputs and a multitude of data sources.

The Program Quality Assurance Cycle requires:

- Well-defined key performance indicators that are monitored regularly
- Regular analysis of stakeholder feedback for decision-making
- Constancy in the use of environmental scanning to stay relevant and competitive
- Foresight, vision and effective strategic planning.

Procedure AC.2.19.1 Program Quality Assurance states:

A prescribed curriculum leading to a SAIT credential. A program is divided into a number of courses. For the purposes of this procedure, a program includes credit programs, apprenticeship programs, and non-credit programs (AC.2.19.1, 2022).

The quality assurance process applies to programs as defined in the procedure (see above). It is a mandatory activity for all SAIT programs in scope.

Procedure AC.2.19.1 Program Quality Assurance states:

The program quality assurance process is a five-year to seven-year cycle, unless modified as described below for accreditation requirements, apprenticeship requirements or external requirements. This cycle starts with a review year, which is then followed by several self-assessment years. (AC.2.19.1, 2022).

Effort is made to ensure that the PQA processes and external **accreditation** processes are complementary, and redundancies are limited.

![SAIT logo]

The SAIT Program Quality Assurance (PQA) System

Procedure AC.2.19.1 Program Quality Assurance states:

The program's academic chair/coordinator, faculty, support staff and CADI work together to complete a self-study, whereby the program gathers and analyses feedback from stakeholders and service/resource areas (individuals and groups directly and indirectly involved with the program). This may include students, industry, alumni, program staff, instructors, program advisory committees, etc. b) The program goes through an external review, whereby the external reviewers review the self-study, may participate in a site visit to SAIT and submit a final report to the dean of the school. (AC.2.19.1, 2022).

Program quality assurance follows a continuous improvement cycle with key phases and associated processes:
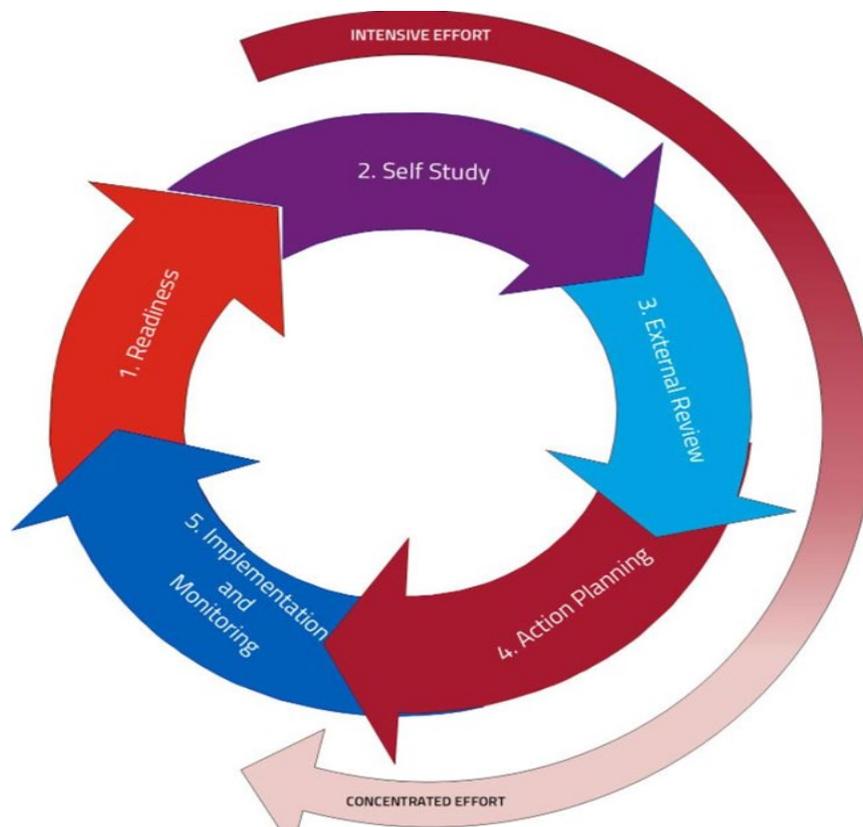
1. Programs are assessed based on SAIT's quality standards.

2. There are five phases to Program Quality Assurance (PQA) process including: readiness, the self-study, external review and completion of the comprehensive self-study report, action plan development and approval, and implementation and monitoring of the action plan.

3. PQA action planning follows the completion of the comprehensive self-study report or, in some cases, following the action plan. During this phase, the program identifies the program goals and the actions which will result in the continuous improvement of the program.

4. Implementation of the action plan is monitored by the program academic chair and dean until the program enters the quality cycle again. The program implements the PQA action plan over a four-year time frame.

5. The annual self-assessment of progress is provided to the vice president, academic.

6. The quality assurance process relies on input from numerous stakeholders, internal and external.

7. Processes and templates support the PQA policy and procedure *(AC.2.19, 2022; AC.2.19.1, 2022)*.

8. Documentation to guide and support the PQA cycle is located on SharePoint and SAITNOW.

Following the readiness phase, programs enter the quality assurance system:

SAIT QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

Program Quality Assurance Cycle Initiated

Conduct Self Study

Conduct External Review

Create Program Action Plan

Action Plan Reviewed by Academic Quality Council

Action Plan Approved by VP Academic

Implement the Program Action Plan

Monitor and Report Program Progress Annually

SAIT's institutional review schedule determines when programs enter the program quality assurance cycle.

Key outputs of the PQA cycle include:

- Program information portfolio

- Comprehensive self-study report
- PQA action plan
- Annual progress reports

> **Procedure AC.2.19.1 Program Quality Assurance states:**
>
> *The program quality assurance process is a five-year cycle, unless modified as described above for accreditation requirements, apprenticeship requirements, or external requirements. This cycle starts with a review year, which is then followed by several self-assessment years (AC.2.19.1, 2022)*

THE SELF-STUDY PHASE

Procedure AC.2.19.1 Program Quality Assurance states:

As part of the program quality assurance cycle, a systematic, structured examination of program quality criteria in relation to the program's internal, external and industry requirements (AC.2.19.1, 2022).

Why a Self-Study?

The self-study process requires the program to consider how well the program is meeting its goals and aligning with SAIT's strategic direction and education plan goals.

The self-study is guided by the **PQA Inquiry Framework**, which is organized into **five quality standards**. The five standards include:

- **Quality Management**

    The program engages in regular quality review as per SAIT policy AC.2.19 and procedure AC.2.19.1 that involves faculty, students, industry representatives and other potential stakeholders to ensure continual improvement and enhancement.

- **Program Goals**

    The program results in employment in a specific field and provides the graduate with the opportunity for career advancement and further learning. The program serves students, industry and SAIT.

- **Educational Design**

    The program's educational design, including critical factors such as curriculum, instructional methods, and faculty qualifications, ensures that students meet expected goals and outcomes. These elements impact what happens in the learning environment among learners and faculty.

- **Educational Experience**

    The student's experience is successful and leads to the possibility of lifelong learning and career progression. This includes the program learning experience, SAIT experience, academic relationships and industry application of learning.

- **Program Resources (Technological, Physical, Financial and Time)**

    The existing technological resources, physical resources, financial resources and time are used effectively and appropriately given the program's anticipated goals and outcomes. This category includes learning materials, library materials, equipment, computer hardware, and other tools, specifically as they are used by and affect the program.

The program quality standards provide structure for the self-study. The inquiry framework ensures that each program is assessed against established criteria and creates consistency within the review process. Each quality

standard is supported by **enabling questions** which help participants create findings and recommendations related to each standard. The standards require those involved in the evaluation to demonstrate responsiveness and judgment specific to the evaluation context (Caruthers, Hopson, Shulha, & Yarbrough, 2011)

What is a Self-Study?

The self-study is a systematic and structured analysis of program data to produce a self-critical reflection of how well the program meets SAIT's quality standards.

Who is Involved?

Program quality assurance relies heavily on active engagement from program faculty, the academic chair, and the school and/or SAIT stakeholders. The self-study process uses participatory evaluation values and approaches.

The purpose of stakeholder engagement in the process is to seek feedback on the content of the report and engage all program stakeholders in the process. Feedback is generally gathered during facilitated meetings or through a virtual process. Stakeholders are asked to think of providing feedback as a response to the findings and recommendations.

Self-study projects are carried out with the support of the Centre for Academic Development and Innovation (CADI), in collaboration with the school responsible for the program.

EXTERNAL REVIEW PHASE

Procedure AC.2.19.1 Program Quality Assurance states:
As part of the program quality assurance cycle, it is a program review conducted by at least two reviewers who are external to the program's school/department and/or SAIT. Detailed information governing the selection of the reviewers and their roles and responsibilities is set out in the Program Quality Assurance Manual. (AC.2.19.1, 2022).

Why an External Review?

An external review is an essential phase in the quality assurance system process and supports academic integrity. The external review provides an independent and objective assessment of the program/unit under review, assesses the quality of the program/unit in a broader academic and industry context, and provides new insights into how well the program/unit is meeting its goals. The review is considered to be at "arm's length" to reduce the potential for conflict of interest between the reviewers and SAIT. The external review process supports continuous improvement.

What is an External Review?

When the self-study report is complete, the program is ready for the next phase in the cycle: the external review. The self-study report is distributed to the external review team four weeks before the external reviewers are scheduled to conduct the external review site visit at SAIT.

Several potential academic and industry reviewers are nominated by the program and school to complete the external review. The Centre for Academic Development and Innovation (CADI) and the school/program works with the program to interview the nominees for the review, at minimum selecting one academic reviewer and one industry reviewer to participate in the external review. The department works with the program to set the agenda and to plan the external review site visit or virtual external review. During the visit, team members have conversations with key individuals (students, faculty, staff, PAC) involved with the program. The site visit may require one or two days, depending on the needs of the program.

Following the site visit, the external reviewers report their findings to the Centre for Academic Development and Innovation (CADI) within four weeks of the site visit.

External Reviewers

The external reviewers normally consist of one academic reviewer and one industry reviewer.

To maintain the integrity of the process, external reviewers should not:

- Have served as a member of any SAIT Program Advisory Committee (PAC) in the past five years.
- Be employed by, or have been employed by SAIT.
- Have received a SAIT credential the same as or closely related to the program or unit under review.
- Have served as a mentor, supervisor, research collaborator, co-author, department member or external examiner to program faculty or the academic chair or school leadership.
- Be in a close family relationship with a member of the program or unit under review.
- Be or have been a Master's or Doctoral supervisor of anyone in the program or unit under review.
- Usually be a resident of Canada.

External Academic Reviewers	External Industry Reviewers
To maintain the integrity of the process, external academic reviewers should:	To maintain the integrity of the process, external industry reviewers should:
• Be full professors/instructors (where possible), or associate professors/instructors or adjunct faculty from another post-secondary institution.	• Have a recognized credential and/or certification in an industry area or discipline that is the same as, or closely related to, the program or unit under review.
• Have doctoral degrees or the highest possible credential in a discipline that is the same as, or closely related to, the program or unit under review.	• Actively employed in a relevant industry position
• Usually be from a post-secondary institution comparable in size to SAIT.	• Have academic credentials that may enhance the review

ACTION PLANNING PHASE

Procedure AC.2.19.1 Program Quality Assurance states:

The program's academic chair/coordinator, faculty and support staff work together to develop an action plan in response to the self-study and the external review. The action plan contains specific recommendations for program improvement and enhancement. (AC.2.19.1, 2022)

Why Action Planning?

The action plan is one of the products of SAIT's program quality assurance cycle. The plan describes the program's goals for the next 4-5 years based on the findings and recommendations in the comprehensive self-study. It is future-oriented and outlines how the program will achieve its goals, as well as the goals of the organization.

The action plan is a response to the gaps identified through the self-study. It addressed the question: "Where are we now and where do we want to be?" The specifics in the action plan provide a framework for moving the program forward, making evidence-based decisions, and staying aligned with SAIT's and the school's strategic direction.

What is an Action Plan?

The action planning process starts immediately after the site visit with the goal of receiving action plan approval by the vice president, academic (VPA) within six months of the external review site visit.

A SAIT Program Quality Assurance Action Plan describes how recommendations for improvement and enhancement identified during the self-study and external review will be acted upon. The plan (including executive summary, detailed action plan table, and annual progress summary) describes long-term program goals, time-phased actions or projects, measurable indicators of success, and the rationale behind the development of the plan.

The plan's executive summary is the link between the comprehensive self-study report and the action plan itself. It explains what the program wants to accomplish in response to the self-study and what changes are required. The first step in developing an action plan is to identify program goals. Recommendations developed during the PQA self-study and external review transition into program goals that guide action planning. Measures are identified to answer the question, "How will we know that we have made progress toward the achievement of the goals?" The requirement to identify goals and measures supports the link between the action plan and the next quality assurance cycle and strengthens continuity in the quality system.

Actions/projects are outlined in the Detailed Action Plan table. The table describes the intended outcomes of actions/projects and how the effect of an action/project will be determined. The table is also used to identify responsibilities, timeframes and strategic alignment for actions/projects. Resources and responsible individuals are determined -- they are central to an action plan that is achievable. Tactical plans may be used to support the achievement of the plan's actions/projects but are not developed during action planning.

When all components of the action plan are completed, stakeholders and school leadership provide feedback. The action plan is considered final when approval is received from the vice president, academic following a review by SAIT Academic Quality Council.

![SAIT logo]

Who is Academic Quality Council?

The development and approval of the action plan involves a number of key individuals. Refer to PQA roles and responsibilities documentation for the responsibilities of the roles listed below

Procedure AC.2.19.1 Program Quality Assurance states:

Specific to quality processes, AQC reviews the program action (AQC) plans and creates recommendations to school leadership and the vice president, academic regarding program projects and improvements. Detailed information governing the council and its roles and responsibilities is found on SAITNOW. (AC.2.19.1, 2022).

SAIT's Academic Quality Council reviews the program's action plan and provides recommendations to SAIT's vice president, academic regarding implementation and approval of the action plan.

In terms of quality assurance, the council's responsibility is to carry out activities as per the provisions of policy AC.2.19 Program Quality Assurance *(AC.2.19, 2022),* its accompanying procedure and accompanying processes. The Academic Quality Council Terms of Reference *(Terms of Reference, 2016)* provides more detail about the council's membership and responsibilities.

IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING PHASE

Procedure AC.2.19.1 Program Quality Assurance states:

During subsequent self-assessment years, the program's academic chair/coordinator, faculty and support staff work together to conduct an action plan progress report. An update will then be provided to the program's dean and the Office of the Vice President Academic, including an update on the progress that the program has made towards the goals identified in its action plan. (AC.2.19.1, 2022).

An annual check-in on the program and the progress towards the goals identified through the PQA process is completed during non-self-study years. SAIT's review process emphasizes continual improvement based on reflection and assessment of educational quality. All programs conduct an annual self-assessment on the anniversary of their action plan approval date, which supports ongoing reflection and planning and serves as a resource for programs when they undertake comprehensive review.

The completion of the annual program report is the responsibility of the dean; the academic chair administers the ongoing review and improvement process outlined in the action plan.

ANNUAL QUALITY REVIEW (AQR)

Why an AQR?

As part of SAIT's commitment to continuous improvement, programs complete program quality activities throughout the year. One of the two quality processes at SAIT is the Annual Quality Review (AQR) cycle according to policy and procedure.

Who Completes an AQR?

All non-degree programs complete AQR reports. Apprenticeship programs are expected to complete the AQR process.

Who needs to complete an AQR?

Should my program complete an AQR report?
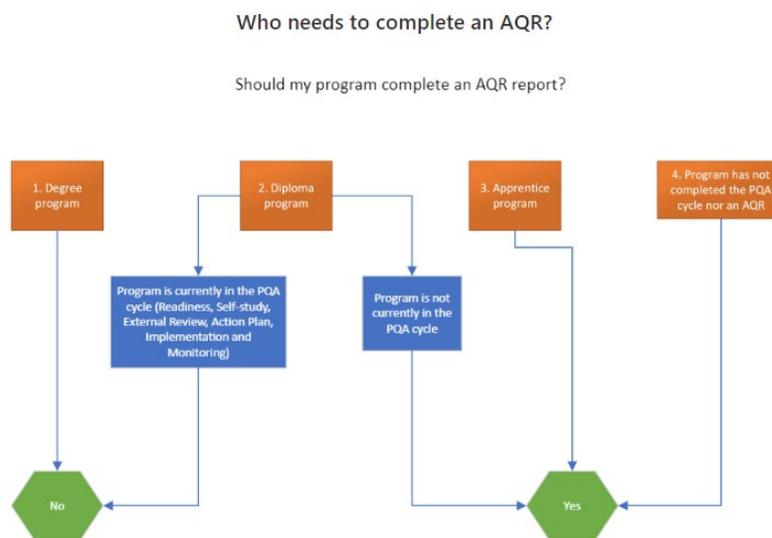
What is an AQR?

The AQR is a yearly program report completed by all non-degree programs. There are 3 phases to the AQR cycle: Create + Initiate; Implementation and Check + Reflect. It includes a self-reflection designed for programs to review the quality of their program and encourages stakeholder engagement with a focus on continuous improvement.
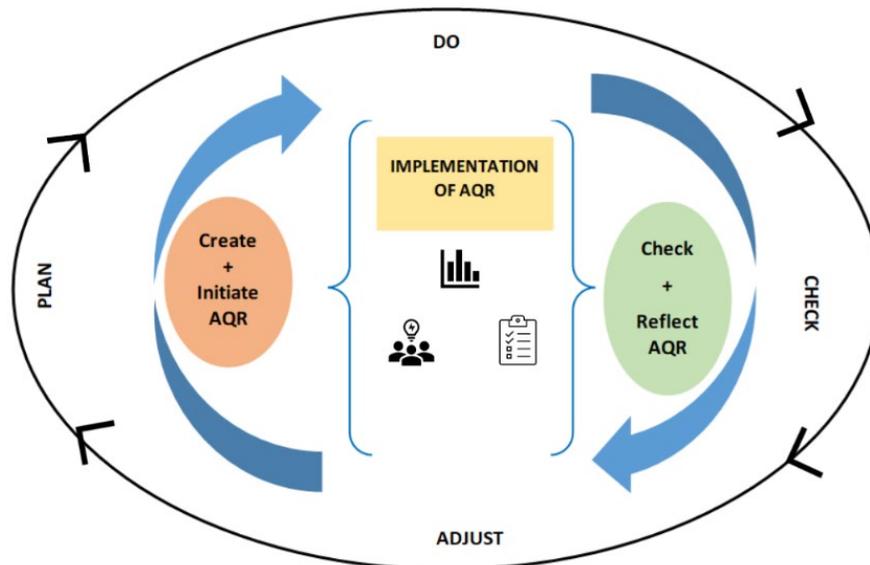
Procedure AC.2.19.1 Program Quality Assurance states:
A yearly program report including a self-reflection designed for programs to review the quality of their program, with a focus on continuous improvement. (AC.2.19.1, 2022).

Who is Involved?

The academic chair of the program is responsible for the development and upkeep of the AQR. The stakeholders who provide input are the advisory committee, faculty, leadership and any other applicable representative of the program. The dean/designate is the final approver of the AQR and provides their feedback throughout the year.

Procedure AC.2.19.1 Program Quality Assurance states:
1.a) The academic chair completes the AQR on an annual basis, using an approach similar to that set out in paragraph A.4.a of this procedure.
b) The program's dean/designate is accountable for approving the AQR.
c). At the end of each academic year, the academic chair works with the dean/designate to complete the reflective section of the AQR describing the progress that the program has made towards the program goals. (AC.2.19.1, 2022).

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