

# Report of a Quality Audit

*of* The Hong Kong Polytechnic University



June 2011

Quality Assurance Council

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The Hong Kong Polytechnic University**

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7/F, Shui On Centre  
6-8 Harbour Road  
Wanchai  
Hong Kong  
Tel: 2524 3987  
Fax: 2845 1596

[ugc@ugc.edu.hk](mailto:ugc@ugc.edu.hk)

<http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/qac/index.htm>

The Quality Assurance Council is a semi-autonomous non-statutory body under the aegis of the University Grants Committee of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China.

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# **PREFACE**

## **Background**

The Quality Assurance Council (QAC) was established in April 2007 as a semi-autonomous non-statutory body under the aegis of the University Grants Committee (UGC) of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China.

The UGC is committed to safeguarding and promoting the quality of UGC-funded institutions and their activities. In view of institutional expansion of their activities and a growing public interest in quality issues, the QAC was established to assist the UGC in providing third-party oversight of the quality of the institutions' educational provision. The QAC aims to assist the UGC in assuring the quality of programmes (however funded) at first-degree level and above offered by UGC-funded institutions. The QAC fulfils this task primarily by undertaking periodic quality audits of the institutions.

## **Conduct of QAC Quality Audits**

Audits are undertaken by Panels appointed by the QAC from its Register of Auditors. Audit Panels comprise local and overseas academics and, in most cases, a lay member from the local community. All auditors hold, or have held, senior positions within their professions. Overseas auditors are experienced in quality audit in higher education. The audit process is therefore one of peer review.

The QAC's core operational tasks derived from its terms of reference are:-

- the conduct of institutional quality audits; and
- the promotion of quality assurance and enhancement and the spread of good practice

The QAC's approach to quality audit stems from recognition that the higher education institutions in Hong Kong have distinct and varied roles and missions, reflecting the UGC's vision of a differentiated yet interlocking system. The QAC does not attempt to straitjacket institutions through a single set of standards or objectives, but recognises that each institution has objectives appropriate to its mission. The QAC defines quality in terms of 'Fitness for Purpose', where institutions have different purposes which reflect their missions and the role statements they have agreed with the UGC.

A QAC audit is not a review against a predefined set of standards. It does, however, require institutions to articulate and justify the standards they set for themselves, and demonstrate how the standards are achieved. Since student learning is the focal point of the QAC audit system, audits examine all aspects of an institution's activities which contribute to the quality of student learning. Full details of the audit procedures, including the methodology and scope of the audit, are provided in the QAC Audit Manual, which is available at: <http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/qac/index.htm>.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The quality of student learning is the focal point of Quality Assurance Council (QAC) quality audits. The audits are intended to assure the Hong Kong University Grants Committee (UGC) and the public that institutions have procedures in place to enable them to deliver on the promises they make in their role and mission statements in regard to their educational objectives. A QAC audit is therefore an audit of an institution's Fitness for Purpose in teaching and learning. The audit examines whether an institution has procedures in place appropriate for its stated purposes, whether it pursues activities and applies resources to achieve those purposes, and whether there is verifiable evidence to show that the purposes are being achieved.

This is the Executive Summary of a QAC quality audit of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) conducted in 2010. The report presents the QAC's findings as elicited by the QAC Audit Panel, supported by detailed analysis and commentary. The findings cover each of the audit focus areas as well as the institution as a whole. Where appropriate, the findings are expressed as **commendations** of good practice; **affirmations** which recognise improvements the institution is already making as a result of its self-review; and **recommendations** for improvement. These are listed below.

PolyU has demonstrated a long tradition of quality assurance based on a comprehensive system of reviews, accreditation processes and so on at many levels of the institution. The Panel concluded that the processes are robust and well-embedded and there is strong culture of quality assurance in the University. It is anticipated that further enhancements, including the use of data and monitoring of improvements, will result from implementation of the University's *Consolidated Teaching and Learning Enhancement Plan* and the recommendations in this Audit Report.

### Commendations

1. The QAC commends PolyU for the clear sense of its vision and mission that is widely supported by the Council, management, academic community and other stakeholders. *[Page 12]*
2. The QAC commends PolyU for the deep relationship with industry that it has sustained over a considerable period. *[Page 12]*
3. The QAC commends PolyU for its well-grounded conceptual approaches to implementing Outcomes Based Education (OBE) across its undergraduate programmes and for use of a strategy based on Learning Outcome Assessment Plans (LOAPs) to effectively engage stakeholders in the process. *[Page 14]*
4. The QAC commends PolyU for its approach to integrating Annual Programme Review Reports, Annual Business Plans and input from external advisers into Annual Quality Assurance Reports, and using this as a basis for workforce planning and development. *[Page 16]*
5. The QAC commends PolyU for the integration of professional practice in the design of its curricula with an appropriate balance of theoretical and practical knowledge. *[Page 17]*

6. The QAC commends PolyU for the synergistic relationship between the Library and the Office of Information Technology Service (ITS) and the leadership that these units are providing in enhancing services and extending the pedagogical options for curriculum delivery. *[Page 20]*

7. The QAC commends PolyU for its provision of student-centred, integrated support services and for the quality assurance activities they have initiated that will further improve the quality of their provision. *[Page 20]*

8. The QAC commends PolyU for the emphasis it gives to Work-Integrated Education (WIE) in developing student capacity for the application of theory to practice and for the carefully constructed policy and technical infrastructure implemented to support WIE placements. *[Page 23]*

9. The QAC commends PolyU for the effectiveness of the staff development activities available to academic staff through the Educational Development Centre (EDC). *[Page 27]*

### **Affirmations**

1. The QAC affirms the introduction at PolyU of a new management structure which has the goal of improving clarity in roles and responsibilities of senior executives and bolstering the capacity for policy development. *[Page 9]*

2. The QAC affirms PolyU's actions in strengthening Annual Programme Reviews by the inclusion of data on student attainment of programme learning outcomes. *[Page 17]*

3. The QAC affirms PolyU's attention in programme development to emerging trends in the disciplines and professions as well as region-specific content that will prepare students and graduates for professional practice beyond Hong Kong. *[Page 18]*

4. The QAC affirms the attention being paid by PolyU to the development of assessment processes that are consistent with objectives and intended learning outcomes. *[Page 24]*

### **Recommendations**

1. The QAC recommends that PolyU review the role and relationships of the Senate and the University quality assurance committees relative to the Academic Board and quality assurance committees in CPCE to ensure equivalence and appropriate oversight of those programmes delivered within CPCE for which the University grants a University award. *[Page 7]*

2. The QAC recommends that PolyU further develop and deepen its culture of critical self-review to ensure there is consistency in the University's commitment to continuous improvement within all parts of the institution. *[Page 8]*



3. The QAC recommends that PolyU clarify the roles and responsibilities of the CPCE Council relative to the University Council and explore the implications for academic governance in the CPCE as a whole. *[Page 8]*
4. The QAC recommends that PolyU develop an institution-wide strategy to ensure that key aspects of the University's operations including all academic programmes and those offered through CPCE, are benchmarked against carefully chosen local and international peer programmes and institutions. *[Page 10]*
5. The QAC recommends that PolyU review the performance indicators (PIs) currently in use to ensure that these are aligned with the desired outcomes of teaching and learning plans as well as the University's expectations of individual functional and academic units. *[Page 11]*
6. The QAC recommends that PolyU design and implement a comprehensive, integrated approach to fostering and assessing the achievement of the desired attributes sought for the graduates of the University. *[Page 13]*
7. The QAC recommends that PolyU implement a requirement for external input into the development and approval of all programmes leading to a University award whether or not a given programme is subject to professional accreditation. *[Page 16]*
8. The QAC recommends that PolyU ensure reliable and consistent monitoring of equivalence in standards across all programmes and locations. *[Page 26]*
9. The QAC recommends that PolyU explore strategies other than surveys to collect student feedback and institute reliable and systematic mechanisms to inform the students of improvements made as a result of their input through all feedback channels. *[Page 28]*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This is the report of an audit of the quality of the student learning experience at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) by an Audit Panel appointed by, and acting on behalf of, the Quality Assurance Council (QAC). It is based on an Institutional Submission which was prepared by PolyU following a period of self-review and submitted to the QAC on 19 July 2010. A one-day Initial Meeting of the Audit Panel was held on 11 August 2010 to discuss the Submission. The Panel Chair and Audit Coordinator visited PolyU on 13 August 2010 to discuss the detailed arrangements for the audit visit.
- 1.2 The Audit Panel visited PolyU from 11 to 14 October 2010 and met about 130 staff and 80 students from across the University, as well as a number of external stakeholders, including external members of the PolyU Council, local employers and graduates of PolyU.
- 1.3 PolyU is one of eight institutions in Hong Kong funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC).
- 1.4 A brief profile of PolyU is provided in Appendix A. It includes the University's role statement as agreed with the UGC and brief details of its history, mission, vision and organisational structure.
- 1.5 The Institutional Response to the Audit Report is provided in Appendix B. A list of abbreviations, acronyms and definitions used in the Audit Report is provided in Appendix C. Details of the Audit Panel are provided in Appendix D. The QAC's Mission, Terms of Reference and Membership are provided in Appendix E.
- 1.6 Since student learning is the focal point of the audit system, QAC audits examine all aspects of an institution's activities which contribute to the quality of student learning. These activities range from planning and policy development, through programme design, approval and review, to teaching, assessment and student support. The QAC has selected a set of such activities, common to all institutions, as the 'focus areas' of audit. Each focus area is a significant contributor to student learning quality and is sufficiently generic that it can be interpreted in a way which is relevant to each institution's activities and practices. Taken together, the focus areas effectively define the scope of a QAC audit.
- 1.7 The Audit Report follows the general guidance provided in the QAC Audit Manual<sup>1</sup> and covers the audit focus areas, with its structure generally being based on the format of PolyU's Institutional Submission.
- 1.8 The QAC and the Audit Panel are grateful to PolyU for the University's exemplary cooperation throughout the audit process.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/qac/index.htm>

## **2. OVERVIEW OF TEACHING AND LEARNING QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM**

- 2.1 The University framework for quality assurance of programmes operates at several levels. Programme Leaders oversee programme implementation of UGC and self-financed programmes offered in Hong Kong and in Mainland China. The Programme Leaders are responsible to the relevant head of department (HoD) and the Dean. Offshore programmes are offered in collaboration with universities in Mainland China and are subject to scrutiny by the Ministry of Education. School of Professional Education and Executive Development (SPEED) programmes also have Programme Leaders reporting to the Director of SPEED who is accountable to the Dean of College of Professional and Continuing Education (CPCE).
- 2.2 Within programmes, the quality of subject offerings is monitored by the relevant HoD, Programme Leader and chair of the Departmental Learning and Teaching Committee (DLTC). Oversight is also provided through the Subject Assessment Review Panel (SARP) system with feedback from students on subjects collected through the Student Feedback Questionnaire (SFQ).
- 2.3 In addition to being accountable for programme implementation and teaching and learning matters, HoDs are responsible more generally for all aspects of departmental activity. They are required to submit an Annual Business Plan and an annual Quality Assurance Report (QA Report) that incorporates Annual Programme Review Reports prepared by Programme Leaders. Each department in the mainstream structure of the University also operates a Departmental Academic Adviser (DAA) system and a Departmental Advisory Committee (DAC). Departmental Reviews (DR) and Departmental Assessments (DA) occur on a six-yearly cycle for academic and non-academic departments respectively.
- 2.4 At the faculty level, the Deans review quality reports, monitor implementation of improvement plans and provide a biennial report on departmental performance to the President and senior executives. A series of Learning and Teaching Committees (LTC) at faculty/school level build on the departmental DLTCs and focus on implementation and quality enhancement. The Panel heard that from mid-2010 the University was taking steps to strengthen management of teaching and learning at the faculty level by creating Associate Dean positions for leadership in teaching and learning matters.
- 2.5 Further up the chain of accountability, at the institutional level, the President receives reports from two parallel quality assurance committees. The Quality Assurance Committee (Academic Departments) which is referred to as the QAC(AD), oversees academic departments and non-academic units are monitored by the Quality Assurance Committee (Non-Academic Units) or QAC(NAU). These committees provide the overarching policy frameworks for the institution.
- 2.6 The Panel's view of the quality assurance system as a whole was that it had some notable strengths. Annual Business Plan and departmental QA Reports provide a good foundation for ensuring risks are managed and the capacity of academic units is maximised. DAAs were also seen as a strength with some advisers reported as spending several days each year in the departments formulating reports and recommendations which are then put into action.

- 2.7 The University indicated that risk of offshore operations is managed through a ‘rigorous QA system’. Apart from the role of Programme Leaders mentioned above, the involvement of the same academic staff in both Hong Kong and Mainland teaching, frequent reports and visits, including visits to offshore sites by the Senior Management executives aim to ensure parity. The Panel explored the arrangements in detail and satisfied itself that the quality assurance approach for offshore operations is satisfactory. On the other hand, there were some concerns about teaching and learning arrangements for SPEED and more generally for activities within CPCE.
- 2.8 While there are many similarities between the QA frameworks used in PolyU and SPEED, there are enough differences between QA processes in the University as a whole and SPEED to lead to a conclusion that quality assurance processes are not applied consistently for all PolyU awards, despite statements to the contrary. The bachelor awards for SPEED graduates are PolyU awards, although the parchment includes the phrase “School of Professional Education and Executive Development” to signify that the graduate has completed the studies in SPEED. Furthermore, the SPEED students were clearly of the view that the status of these awards is equivalent to the status of those completed within the mainstream structure of the University.
- 2.9 The Panel concluded that Senate needs to take a stronger role in ensuring there is greater consistency in the approach to quality underpinning its decisions to recommend the awarding of degrees across all sections of the institution. One example of the variation in arrangements is that the CPCE programmes resulting in PolyU bachelor degree awards do not provide ongoing reports to Senate comparable to those associated with other University programmes, even though the Senate is responsible for the bachelor degrees offered through SPEED. Further, while the CPCE Academic Board reports to the University Senate on its PolyU-SPEED programmes, it appears that there is no direct relationship between the CPCE Academic Planning and Quality Assurance Committee and the QAC(AD), or QAC(NAU) committees. Nor was there evidence of continuing dialogue or interaction between equivalent academic units in the University as a whole and CPCE academic units although individual PolyU academics serve on the CPCE College Council, Academic Board, Academic Planning and Quality Assurance Committee, and validation/revalidation panels for SPEED programmes.

### **Recommendation 1**

**The QAC recommends that PolyU review the role and relationships of the Senate and the University quality assurance committees relative to the Academic Board and quality assurance committees in CPCE to ensure equivalence and appropriate oversight of those programmes delivered within CPCE for which the University grants a University award.**

- 2.10 The University itself noted that its quality assurance system is very complex and that there is a desire to explore *how the QA systems can be made more efficient and less time-consuming for academic staff, striking a balance between accountability and workload*. The Panel agreed with this observation and, in addition, considers that the system needs to place more emphasis on self-reflection than it does at present. This conclusion was based on discussions at all levels of the University which failed to give sufficient reassurance that the attitude of critical self-review, which is fundamental to

quality assurance and audit, is sufficiently embedded in the institution.

- 2.11 The Panel believes that a self-critical attitude is highly indicative of a mature institution in the quality assurance sense. While the involvement of the University community in the logistical preparation for the QAC audit was apparent and it was clear that there was involvement by the various learning and teaching and quality committees over some 20 months prior to the QAC audit, the Council was not involved in the self-review process. Nor was the self-review referred to in many discussions with interview groups. More crucially, there was little obvious evidence of self-critical commentary in the documentation analysed. There was a valuable *Consolidated Teaching and Learning Enhancement Plan* provided in the documentation but this was more a plan for further review, rather than an action plan. It was therefore difficult to gauge the extent and effectiveness of the self-review process as a catalyst for quality improvement. Further, there were few examples provided of innovations in teaching and learning that could be traced back to the data and analyses stemming from general quality assurance activities and this added to the difficulty of assessing the institutional pervasiveness of a developmentally-oriented, self-critical attitude. There was a general impression, including at senior levels, of a tendency towards complacency with the status quo. In contrast, there was a strong sense of a culture of self-critical, continuous improvement among the support units which are well attuned to responding to user feedback and adapting their services to meet academic community requirements. The University is encouraged to build on this culture established within support units to ensure it is consistent across the institution.

#### **Recommendation 2**

**The QAC recommends that PolyU further develop and deepen its culture of critical self-review to ensure there is consistency in the University's commitment to continuous improvement within all parts of the institution.**

### **3. MANAGEMENT, PLANNING AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

#### **Governance**

- 3.1 The University Council is the supreme governing body for PolyU. The CPCE has a College Council with internal and local external members who oversee CPCE including SPEED. The University President is Chair of the CPCE Council but the nature of the formal relationships between the CPCE Council and the governing Council for PolyU as a whole was not clear. In light of the potential risk to the reputation of the University the Panel believes it important to clarify the roles and relationships of these two bodies.

#### **Recommendation 3**

**The QAC recommends that PolyU clarify the roles and responsibilities of the CPCE Council relative to the University Council and explore the implications for academic governance in the CPCE as a whole.**

- 3.2 The University Senate assumes ultimate responsibility for teaching and learning quality and is supported by 14 standing committees including the quality assurance committees referred to in section 2. Research postgraduate (RPg) education is overseen by Senate's Research Committee (RC) chaired by Vice President (Research Development) (VP(RD)).

### **Management**

- 3.3 The University has 27 academic departments/units under six faculties, and two independent schools. The Faculties are headed by Deans whilst the two independent schools are each overseen by a Vice President/Deputy President and Provost. These are the units charged with implementation of teaching and learning policies and it was noted that there is a desire to link the long-term academic directions of departments more closely with programme planning than at present.
- 3.4 The University has implemented a new management structure to support the President and this includes the team of senior executives (Deputy President and Vice Presidents), the President's Executive Committee and the Academic Council. The Academic Council was devised to advise the President on major policy matters. Advice is forwarded to the President and then, as appropriate, to Senate as proposals for consideration. The Panel formed the view that this evolving management structure will achieve its goal of providing greater clarity and better defined roles and responsibilities in the senior portfolios. Further, it believes the change is a positive step that is well understood by the University community and may be further developed to maximise the potential outcomes such a restructure can bring. The role of the new Academic Council was considered to be likely to ensure rigour and alignment in policy development at the University. It was noted that a review of the new structure was in progress at the time of the audit visit.

### **Affirmation 1**

**The QAC affirms the introduction at PolyU of a new management structure which has the goal of improving clarity in roles and responsibilities of senior executives and bolstering the capacity for policy development.**

- 3.5 The Panel had some questions about the way the sometimes conflicting interests of management and academic endeavours in any university are balanced at PolyU. It concluded that there are the appropriate checks and balances although the Senate did not appear to be a very strong body. An ongoing review of the University's committee structure has the purpose of achieving better efficiency and alignment in pursuing the University's strategic direction so it would be appropriate for the University to consider the question of balancing the sometimes conflicting interests. The University needs to ensure the potency of Senate as it goes through the process of streamlining and devolving authority for some functions currently carried out by the President.

## **Strategic Planning**

- 3.6 PolyU has a long history of conducting strategic planning exercises with the current Strategic Plan covering the period from 2008/09 to 2011/12. The latest plan is based on an institution-wide exercise involving internal and external stakeholders, including Council and Court members, and DAC chairs. Staff and students were consulted prior to the Plan being endorsed and approved by Senate and Council.

## **Benchmarking**

- 3.7 The University reported that it undertakes benchmarking of learning and teaching results over time and with reference, as appropriate, to other Hong Kong universities. It was noted that benchmarking with local institutions was being undertaken by support units across the University. While some accrediting bodies, such as in the engineering field, operate against international standards, the main external international benchmarking at PolyU occurs through the international experience and background of academics, the DAA/DR processes and the input of External Examiners (EEs) where these are in place. It was noted that SPEED lacks a number of these mechanisms.
- 3.8 The Panel noted the extent and quality of the professional accreditations that the University has achieved for its courses and concluded that these demonstrate high quality education and benefit the graduates from these programmes. The approach of the University to professional accreditation aligns well with a fitness for purpose approach and ensures effective contemporary benchmarking. Nonetheless, it was concluded that insufficient attention was being given to benchmarking with too much reliance placed on the benchmarking benefits of professional accreditation. This becomes an issue when it is considered that the standards required in accreditation can vary from one professional body to another and many academic areas are not professionally accredited at all including the programmes provided through CPCE and SPEED.
- 3.9 It was noted also that there is no strategy for benchmarking at the institutional level to allow analysis of PolyU performance against a full range of indicators at other universities. The University certainly has a number of international partners but none of these may be described as a benchmarking partner that engages in comprehensive exchange of data to allow systematic tracking of performance and learning from best practice in the institution as a whole. It was concluded that, in comparison to externally accredited professional programmes, academic benchmarking of non-accredited programmes is less developed. The Panel considers that there is need to extend external benchmarking strategies beyond the range of professional programmes into all academic activities of the University including those offered by SPEED.

## **Recommendation 4**

**The QAC recommends that PolyU develop an institution-wide strategy to ensure that key aspects of the University's operations including all academic programmes and those offered through CPCE, are benchmarked against carefully chosen local and international peer programmes and institutions.**

## **Performance Indicators**

- 3.10 Departmental performance is assessed against a set of stipulated Performance Indicators (PIs) for academic departments and there are requirements set for self-review and internal and external benchmarking. The University emphasised the importance of PIs in their quality assurance processes including for DRs. The support units follow the University's generic quality assurance framework and provide annual reports based on specified PIs. Feedback for each of the units from wide range of stakeholders and users is included in the annual QA Report submitted by individual units.
- 3.11 The Panel agrees that a PI-based approach to monitoring quality can be valuable but held concerns, however, regarding the selection and use of the PIs chosen by the University. These indicators were considered, in some instances, to lack depth. There appears to be a tendency to utilise data that are readily available and to use these as the primary focus for defining PIs. Panel members were of the view that useful PIs should be at a higher level than merely descriptive and should be driven by the concepts and constructs they are intended to measure rather than focused around the availability of relatively routine data. Numerous other PolyU reports of data such as levels of student satisfaction and the student experience were examined and it was considered that these were very helpful in understanding performance yet they were not incorporated in the main institutional list of PIs. It was concluded that these sources might be usefully reviewed for inclusion in quality reviews of departments and other areas.
- 3.12 The University's PIs should also be aligned with key strategic objectives, plans and goals in teaching and learning so that progress towards achievement of plans can be measured and provide the potential for setting rigorous continuous improvement targets. In addition, it was considered that the University should ensure that the PolyU community better understands the link between performance on PIs and internal budget allocations.

### **Recommendation 5**

**The QAC recommends that PolyU review the performance indicators (PIs) currently in use to ensure that these are aligned with the desired outcomes of teaching and learning plans as well as the University's expectations of individual functional and academic units.**

## **Risk Management**

- 3.13 The Panel was satisfied that there is a good understanding among senior managers of the necessity to manage risk. Academic risk and opportunity costs are recognised as are the implications of financial risk. Council members are fully cognisant of financial risk in particular and are working towards implementing more robust processes in the University's operations.



## **4. ARTICULATION OF INSTITUTIONAL OBJECTIVES**

- 4.1 The University positions itself as *an **applied** university dedicated to the provision of holistic and quality education with a professional focus, the creation of knowledge and innovation, and the practical application of the knowledge to support the business and professional community.*
- 4.2 The aspiration is to become the leading applied university in the region. This goal is viewed positively by all internal and external stakeholders and the Panel agrees with this judgment. It was noted that there was very broad understanding and support among stakeholders for the goals of PolyU. The Council of the University articulated a clear vision, mission, ethos and broad strategy consistent with the goals to strengthen the position of the University as an applied university catering to the particular circumstances of Hong Kong and the region.

### **Commendation 1**

**The QAC commends PolyU for the clear sense of its vision and mission that is widely supported by the Council, management, academic community and other stakeholders.**

- 4.3 The University has established good relationships with industry which have been fostered over a long period and demonstrated through a range of activities which are regularly evaluated and improved. These relationships have also been encouraged through the activities of Court which has forged links particularly with the manufacturing industries.

### **Commendation 2**

**The QAC commends PolyU for the deep relationship with industry that it has sustained over a considerable period.**

- 4.4 PolyU has had a long history as an institution, but remains relatively young for a University. It will be necessary for the University to continue to evolve so it can maximise its outcomes in a changing environment. In this context, the Panel noted that the non-academic units within the institution demonstrate an energetic and innovative culture. This culture could be spread more broadly to encourage creativity and drive to shape PolyU's future as the premier university providing applied education for the region. Part of this will need to include finding ways to encourage interdisciplinarity and innovation across the faculties/schools to ensure that the University is not limited in achieving its vision.

### **Graduate Attributes**

- 4.5 The University has stated, through its Strategic Plan, that it is committed to providing a holistic, outcomes-based education. The desired graduate attributes established for graduates are that they will be (a) Competent professionals; (b) Creative problem solvers; (c) Effective communicators; and (d) Educated global citizens. These have been translated into institutional student learning outcomes (section 4) with appropriate policies and guidelines for academic programmes and subjects.

- 4.6 The Self-Assessment of All-Round Development (SAARD) Questionnaire provides an assessment or measure of progress of students in meeting the desired graduate attributes over the duration of their education at PolyU. Individual initiatives such as the SAARD instrument contribute positively to understanding the success of activities to foster graduate skills. Likewise, the work of the Student Affairs Office (SAO), which links some activities to specific graduate outcomes, and the feedback sought from employers and alumni make valuable contributions. Nonetheless, it was evident that there was not a systematic institutional approach to the development and tracking of graduate outcomes in students. This gap was acknowledged by the University in relation to experiential learning and some institutional research is in progress as a basis for improvement. It was concluded by the Panel that this and other initiatives described above should be located within a larger University-wide framework and approach. To date, the responsibility has largely rested within separate subjects and programmes and with individual academic and non-academic units within the University. There is now a need to develop an integrated approach to the development and achievement of the desired generic skills throughout subjects and programmes, inside and outside the classroom. Section 10 discusses the assessment of graduate attributes in more detail.

#### **Recommendation 6**

**The QAC recommends that PolyU design and implement a comprehensive, integrated approach to fostering and assessing the achievement of the desired attributes sought for the graduates of the University.**

#### **Outcomes Based Education**

- 4.7 In pursuit of the goal of implementing outcomes based education (OBE), the University has developed institutional, programme and subject level student learning outcomes. In the process, the University considered the institutional mission and vision, the needs and expectations of local industry and community, professional accreditation requirements, and the expectations of the academic staff. The Panel concluded that the institutional learning outcomes expressed are appropriate for PolyU and effectively support an institution with an applied orientation.
- 4.8 Leadership for the introduction of OBE is provided by Vice President (Academic Development) (VP(AD)) and the Working Group on Outcome-Based Education (WGOBE) which includes the Chair of the DLTC for SPEED as an observer who can provide a link with the University and encourage the adoption of OBE in SPEED programmes. Implementation of the OBE model is based on four activities: (a) articulation of desired learning outcomes; (b) alignment of teaching, learning and assessment; (c) systematic collection of data on learning outcomes; and (d) continual improvement. The University has moved recently to make curriculum mapping a requirement for programme validation as a way of strengthening the alignment between programme and subject outcomes.
- 4.9 The efforts for the collection, review and use of outcomes data for continuous quality improvement are being driven by a system of two-tier institutional Learning Outcomes

Assessment Plans (LOAP). The undergraduate programme level LOAPs (P-LOAPs), introduced in 2009/10 are supplemented by learning outcomes assessment plans and activities at the institutional level. A recent interim report on progress with the introduction of LOAPs provides an overview of the situation and issues to be dealt with in the further implementation. A further assessment of P-LOAPs is scheduled for 2011/2012.

- 4.10 The Panel was impressed by the OBE and LOAP frameworks and the extent of buy-in by the academic community including at SPEED. The University has appointed a number of academic staff to take on roles as *OBE Champions* although SPEED does not have these positions. The Panel was also pleased with the widespread awareness and support for the application of learning outcomes within courses and programmes although it is important that the University ensures that understanding of OBE extends beyond simply setting Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) to a deeper understanding of the pedagogy. Naturally, the commitment to OBE was particularly evident amongst academic staff but was also observed more generally among support units and stakeholders. The *OBE Champions* noted, however, that changing the PolyU culture and promoting comprehensive and deep staff engagement and ownership of OBE approaches will take more time. This opinion was confirmed by the University itself in its *Consolidated Teaching and Learning Enhancement Plan* which outlines further work to embed OBE and extend student understanding of ILOs.

### **Commendation 3**

**The QAC commends PolyU for its well-grounded conceptual approaches to implementing Outcomes Based Education (OBE) across its undergraduate programmes and for use of a strategy based on Learning Outcome Assessment Plans (LOAPs) to effectively engage stakeholders in the process.**

- 4.11 Illustrations provided by the University relating to the implementation of OBE show a focus on the identification of the learning outcomes, assurance that these outcomes are being met, and collection of associated information. Measurement of institutional learning outcomes involves direct and indirect measures including an array of surveys. While PolyU suggests in its self reflection on institutional objectives that they have achieved these objectives, the data are presented as hard numbers without error bars, or other indications of statistical significance, and the results have been generalised in order to make the point of success. It may be that the data are statistically insignificant and do not really show much improvement or difference, which suggests that improved surveys or better data analysis are needed.
- 4.12 Generally speaking, collection of such data is useful but it is not clear that sufficient analysis of these data has been conducted to demonstrate ongoing trends over significant periods of time. Annual comparisons are insufficient and it is hoped that the survey instruments in use will be continued in current form so that helpful trend information over time can be identified. Essentially, the Panel was unable to discern how, in reality, the information being collected is being used to strengthen the educational offerings through a process of continuous quality improvement of the teaching and learning process. This aspect of implementation could usefully be made more explicit. The University is encouraged to pursue this aspect to demonstrate how

information is connected and integrated towards goals of improvement.

- 4.13 The development of LOAPs and individual subject ILOs are important steps towards the implementation of OBE. However, it was difficult to find clear evidence for how OBE or ILOs (or, indeed, data or feedback from other sources) had led to innovations in the delivery of education. The Panel considers that WGOBE might be an appropriate body to take up the challenge of ensuring that this major change to the way in which education and learning is viewed within PolyU is translated into appropriate developments in curriculum, pedagogy, delivery and assessments.

## **5. PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT AND APPROVAL PROCESSES**

- 5.1 The University has a two-stage process for planning and development and approval of new programmes. At the *planning approval stage*, the department is required to justify the community's need for the proposed programme and obtain the support of its DAC which mainly comprises external experts from the relevant industry or profession. Upon the endorsement of the relevant Faculty Board, the Initial Programme Proposal is considered by the Academic Planning Committee (APC) against a set of four criteria. In the case of self-financed programmes, APC also considers whether these comply with the relevant policy guidelines, and specify a minimum student intake to ensure their financial viability. Satisfactory proposals are recommended to Senate for planning approval.
- 5.2 The *Validation* stage for new programmes is, in the first instance, the responsibility of the Faculty Board and involves both external specialists and internal peers vetting the Definitive Programme Document prior to submission to Senate for final approval. All approved programmes are subject to annual review (section 6) but may also be required to undergo re-validation if considered necessary by the Faculty Dean concerned. In recent times some changes have been introduced into the processes and these have given some flexibility to Deans to decide, within the broad parameters of the institutional QA framework, how to streamline some of the validation processes. This has been reported as a successful innovation.
- 5.3 It was confirmed by the Panel that programme development and approval processes are clearly set out. It was clear from the range of documentation submitted by the University as well as interviews, that the procedures are robust and are consistently implemented in practice in the University for all programmes offered by the University. The Panel welcomes, as a positive feature, the University's embedding of this central quality assurance process in its standard operating procedures for both UGC-funded and self-financed study programmes.
- 5.4 SPEED uses the CPCE programme development and approval framework, modelled on the programme planning, validation and management mechanisms and processes adopted by the University itself. A significant difference is that the 'external' input to the validation process comes mainly from within PolyU rather than consistently from the wider academic and professional community except in cases where professional accreditation applies. It was noted, however, there was some external input in the validation/re-validation of several non-professionally accredited programmes in recent years. SPEED programmes are re-validated every five years and the panel for this is

made up of PolyU professors, CPCE staff, and external experts (where appropriate).

- 5.5 The University says that the *focus in validation is the rationale and coherence of the programme as a whole* which suggests that programme development and approval processes are centred exclusively on the curriculum although there are also some general statements about the need to consider staffing and facilities set out in the *Guidelines and Regulations for Programme Planning, Validation and Management*. The Panel concluded that resource planning and availability of staff and facilities are appropriately considered through these guidelines and the processes at APC of Senate and management forums.
- 5.6 As noted previously (section 3), external accreditation of programmes at PolyU is viewed positively by the Panel. For those programmes not covered through this mechanism it will be important for PolyU to consider external input into programme development and approval processes. This will be particularly important in the case of self-financed programmes across the University including CPCE.

#### **Recommendation 7**

**The QAC recommends that PolyU implement a requirement for external input into the development and approval of all programmes leading to a University award whether or not a given programme is subject to professional accreditation.**

## **6. PROGRAMME MONITORING AND REVIEW**

- 6.1 The programme monitoring review system outlined by the University includes a programme management structure, annual programme reviews, external benchmarking, channels for collecting student feedback, and development of improvement plans and actions to close the feedback loop.
- 6.2 Annual Programme Reviews are conducted by Programme Leaders and are used to facilitate communication between stakeholders. These reports are incorporated in departmental annual QA Reports, along with inputs from visits by DAAs, and form a base of evidence in the production of Annual Business Plans. The Business Plans include an indication of staffing requirements and staff development needs for the short and middle-long term.

#### **Commendation 4**

**The QAC commends PolyU for its approach to integrating Annual Programme Review Reports, Annual Business Plans and input from external advisers into Annual Quality Assurance Reports, and using this as a basis for workforce planning and development.**

- 6.3 It was also noted that the University is moving to include an examination of student attainment of programme learning outcomes as documented in the P-LOAPs in the annual QA Reports. Guidelines were issued in 2009 with a requirement for implementation in 2009/10. This action will contribute to the capacity of the

University in tracking the progress of students relative to the goals of OBE (section 3).

### **Affirmation 2**

**The QAC affirms PolyU's actions in strengthening Annual Programme Reviews by the inclusion of data on student attainment of programme learning outcomes.**

- 6.4 At six-year intervals, forward-looking DRs are the focus for longer-term review and planning. At faculty/school level, an annual consolidated report on the performance of all the programmes offered by the faculty is presented by the Dean to QAC(AD) for review at University level. It was concluded that these processes are robust and well embedded at the various levels of the institution and that there is appropriate monitoring of follow up actions required.
- 6.5 As mentioned in section 5, professionally oriented programmes undergo regular accreditation. The list of bodies that accredit professional programmes at the University impressed the Panel as ranging wide and aiming high. Some programmes appoint EEs in accordance with professional accreditation requirements.
- 6.6 Student feedback is solicited through the SFQ, staff-student consultative groups set up by departments, and through surveys which are specific to either subject, programme, or discipline (sections 11, 12).

## **7. CURRICULUM DESIGN**

- 7.1 The Panel noted the strong commitment to a practice-oriented profile for PolyU, its graduates and its teaching and research. The primary aim is to educate students to become competent professionals and, as a consequence, curriculum design is geared towards this aim. This is well understood and integrated into the curriculum to provide a fitting balance between practice and theory for students. There were several comments from students, alumni and employers that this was a major distinguishing feature of the PolyU curricula.

### **Commendation 5**

**The QAC commends PolyU for the integration of professional practice in the design of its curricula with an appropriate balance of theoretical and practical knowledge.**

- 7.2 The overarching objectives, credit requirements, curriculum structure and content of programmes at different award levels are specified in a policy document *Guidelines and Regulations for Programme Planning, Validation and Management*.
- 7.3 At the undergraduate level the curriculum structure is based around six components: Major study or programme; Practical training or WIE; Programme-specific language subjects; General language proficiency; General education; Minor, electives or optional second major. Structures are also set out for taught postgraduate programmes, up to and including doctoral level, and programmes must be aligned academically to these

components.

- 7.4 The Panel encourages the University to continue the use of the strategy that requires departmental self-reviews and academic plans to focus on emerging trends in the discipline as well as to take into account the broader perspective of needs in the region. The stated aim of lifting horizons beyond the needs of local industries and professions is in accord with a number of stakeholders who commented that the University could improve the preparation of students taking WIE or internships in the region but particularly in Mainland China. Employers, in particular, felt that this would greatly aid the attractiveness of these valuable programmes. The desire to include stronger than heretofore research trends in the underlying disciplines of study programmes is supported by the Panel but at the same time caution is advised lest the University lose sight of the PolyU mission and vision which is so strongly related to application of knowledge, and dedication to life-long learning through part-time study modes and support of mature age students.

### **Affirmation 3**

**The QAC affirms PolyU's attention in programme development to emerging trends in the disciplines and professions as well as region-specific content that will prepare students and graduates for professional practice beyond Hong Kong.**

- 7.5 Work is in progress for the introduction, in 2012, of the four-year undergraduate degree structure with one of the goals being to provide 'a more flexible, student centred, holistic professional education'. The Panel observed that introducing the four-year degree structure is a major challenge which will dominate the agenda at undergraduate level for some years to come. The overarching goal of the new degree is *to promote the all-round development of human potential ...for the professions*. The University advised that the programmes would leverage the opportunities afforded by the four-year degree structure to conduct appropriate curriculum review and design based around a set of three principles and 15 defining features.
- 7.6 It was noted that the new four-year undergraduate degree will allow the University to offer more combinations of majors and minors; double degrees, and so on, to give more student choice. Likewise, it was clear that there are plans to strengthen students' language competencies by emphasising reading and writing skills across the curriculum through intensive learning activities. The Panel was interested to hear of the University's plans to prescribe the introduction of capstone courses to integrate knowledge and skills in all programmes and considered that such a development would be very much in keeping with the mission and role of the University.
- 7.7 The Panel noted the importance of coordinating curricular and co-curricular efforts to achieve the University's graduate outcomes. In that regard, the response of interviewees was not entirely consistent in terms of where the responsibilities lay for ensuring that students met all of these outcomes. As indicated in section 9, the SAO presented the most coherent explanation of the various responsibilities and coordination arrangements.
- 7.8 The Panel noted the structural differences between the undergraduate programmes

offered by the University and those delivered through SPEED in the CPCE. The bachelor offerings at SPEED are effectively ‘top-up’ ordinary degree programmes of 1.5-year (full-time) and three-year (part-time) duration and are provided for graduates of sub-degree programmes. The main difference in curriculum structure is the lack of a capstone subject in SPEED. The CPCE does not anticipate it will need to make major changes to its ‘top-up’ structures as a result of the introduction of the four-year degree as the impact of this change will occur in pre-entry sub-degree level programmes. Nonetheless, SPEED will need to ensure that its programmes are consistent with the new degree structures in the University as a whole.

## **8. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND STUDENT SUPPORT**

- 8.1 The support units are responsible for delivery of services to all parts of the University including to offshore locations and University outposts such as at Hangzhou. Efforts are made to ensure equivalence in the services available to offshore students but many are delivered remotely. The Library service, for example, is accessed electronically. Such services are complemented by PolyU staff who are based at offshore locations and through frequent visits by Hong Kong-based staff.
- 8.2 The learning environment for students at PolyU is conceived as having three major components, the first being the physical component including laboratories, on-campus teaching clinics, a teaching restaurant (and a planned hotel) and the Industrial Centre. Communal space and student hostels provide for informal out-of-class learning activities. The Library has more than 2.3 million holdings and the building is being revitalised to create a more flexible study environment including rooms for group study. New campus developments including additional hostel accommodation are currently under construction.
- 8.3 Virtual facilities are a second component of the learning environment and are focused around *the pedagogical use of modern educational practices to support blended learning*. Services are provided through the Office of Information Technology Services (ITS) including the campus-wide eLearning platform (WebCT) which has been reviewed with the intention of finding a replacement Learning Management System. The eLearning Development and Support Section which is part of the EDC provides instructional design, evaluation and in-kind support for eLearning initiatives including workshops for staff.
- 8.4 The Panel was satisfied with what it read and heard about the University’s approaches to e-learning and blended learning. Evidence was presented of a level of use and awareness of e-learning and blended learning in curriculum and pedagogical design appropriate for the PolyU mission and role. The University is currently seeking ways to capitalise on the expertise involved in the operation of the CyberU which is part of CPCE. This link is encouraged as it should provide a basis for the University to take a more sophisticated approach to the use of ICT and avoid the dissipation of expertise in e-learning.
- 8.5 There is extensive collaboration leading to the innovation displayed in services provided by ITS and the Library and this has resulted in the provision of responsive and contemporary service provision for students and other users. It was concluded that



these services are providing considerable added value in terms of curriculum design and pedagogical possibilities. It was clear that the vision and leadership provided by these units is significant and the Panel commends the PolyU for its activities and developments in this area.

### **Commendation 6**

**The QAC commends PolyU for the synergistic relationship between the Library and the Office of Information Technology Service (ITS) and the leadership that these units are providing in enhancing services and extending the pedagogical options for curriculum delivery.**

- 8.6 Student Support makes up the third component of the learning environment and falls under the purview of the Dean of Students. The services provided by SAO assist students with personal development and transition to university life. The International Affairs Office (IAO) and the Chinese Mainland Affairs Office (CMAO) provide support to non-local students. (Section 9 outlines the role of SAO in experiential learning and co-curriculum.) The collaboration and integration of services provided for student support was noted as a strength of PolyU. The approach and delivery provide a seamless student-centred environment that is supportive and helpful for students. The University has plans for enhancing the first year students' experience and introducing a common orientation programme.
- 8.7 The University has an impressive range of mechanisms in place for student feedback on the range of support services and it was noted that there is an intention to further customise the survey mechanisms to provide more focused information for individual student support units. Instances of changes and improvements implemented as a result of student feedback through regular surveys and so on were reported in discussions. The evidence of responsiveness to student opinion was very clear.
- 8.8 Overall, the Panel was impressed by the commitment of the student support units, and by their conceptualisation and analysis of their roles in relation to the broader development of PolyU graduate attributes. The benchmarking activities of the IAO and CMAO are particularly noteworthy.

### **Commendation 7**

**The QAC commends PolyU for its provision of student-centred, integrated support services and for the quality assurance activities they have initiated that will further improve the quality of their provision.**

### **Language**

- 8.9 Programmes are conducted in English, apart from a few offshore programmes endorsed by the Senate to use English and Chinese to accommodate the demographic characteristics of a mature student group studying offshore. For students with weak language skills on entry, non-credit bearing language enhancement programmes in English and Chinese are offered by the two University language centres. Students are

also encouraged to make use of the facilities and resources at the Centre for Independent Language Learning to improve their English through supported self-study. The University has established a Task Force on Language Requirements for the introduction of the four-year curriculum in 2012 to explore the implications of the earlier entry to tertiary level study.

- 8.10 As a graduation requirement, students are required to take an exit test in English and in Chinese although student feedback suggests that some students and graduates do not see the value in this and believe that exemptions should be given in certain cases. The Panel noted that the University is currently reviewing the value of exit language tests generally.
- 8.11 The exit language text in use is the Graduating Students' Language Proficiency Assessment (GSLPA). The Panel was pleased to note the leadership demonstrated through the development and application of the GSLPA and concluded that GSLPA is an excellent and valuable exemplar of its kind which is of particular value to employers as it demonstrates capacity for communication in the workplace. The test provides information to employers in a way that is accessible and in tune with their needs. In relation to English, the GSLPA is more useful than the IELTS test which is more slanted to measuring English language capacity for academic studies, although the Panel understands that it does not have the wider acceptance of IELTS, and therefore may be less valuable from a benchmarking perspective at the moment.

## **9. EXPERIENTIAL AND OUT OF CLASSROOM LEARNING**

- 9.1 The University emphasis on learning by doing is achieved by integrating out-of-classroom experiences into the curriculum, and through a wide range of co-curricular activities organised by the academic support units or the students themselves.

### **Work-Integrated Education**

- 9.2 Work-related activities have a long history in the institution and this commitment was formalised in 2005/06 as the Work-Integrated Education (WIE) requirement. WIE represents a major educational undertaking for PolyU and aligns well with the mission and vision to produce graduates who can apply theories in practice. One of the goals is to build dedicated partnerships with business, industry and the professions. The Panel concluded that WIE is a good example of how curricular learning can be well integrated with applied learning and practice.
- 9.3 All full-time UGC-funded undergraduate programmes have had to complete a mandated WIE component since 2005/06. Each department has established its own departmental system to manage and support implementation and WIE opportunities are secured by the departments concerned or the students themselves. There are introductory courses in some departments that give a good orientation to the WIE requirements and expectations. There are also guidelines that help to provide a common understanding of expectations, although no evidence was seen by the Panel of a mechanism to systematically check at all levels that these expectations were being translated into practice.

- 9.4 While all but a very small proportion of students participate in external WIE activities, the capacity of the departments to provide WIE opportunities is occasionally stretched so alternative learning arrangements sometimes need to be provided such as service on a committee or hands-on training at PolyU's Industrial Centre. Some placement opportunities are also provided via the WIE Offshore Placement Scheme run by SAO, which helps students to develop, in addition to workplace skills, their global outlook and cultural awareness. More than 800 students undertook overseas placements in 2008/09 with close to 600 of them in Chinese Mainland cities. The Academic Exchange Programme fosters global outlook and cultural understanding through short-term studies at overseas universities. In 2008/09 there were over 550 inbound students with roughly the same number outbound placed in over 200 institutions in 24 countries. The students report interest in having more opportunities for international exposure which is in line with one of the strategic directions of the University.
- 9.5 While mainstream WIE activities form a core and fundamental feature of the PolyU experience for UGC-funded students, there is, at present, no requirement for SPEED students to undertake WIE or similar industrial experience although they do have some opportunities through, for example, voluntary summer placements and cultural exchange scholarships to gain exposure to the workplace. In addition, some SPEED programmes require students to undertake an industry practicum before graduation and many of the SPEED students already have practical experience when they enter programmes in CPCE. Nor are there WIE requirements in other self-funded undergraduate or taught postgraduate programmes offered by the University. The Panel is fully aware of the challenges of providing WIE opportunities for students but nonetheless encourages PolyU to consider extending work-integrated learning into all self-financed programmes where students are not already employed in their chosen fields to ensure a degree of consistency across PolyU degrees, and in keeping in line with the PolyU mission and vision for its graduates. A cross-department working group is currently examining the implementation of WIE with a view to recommending improvements and/or policy changes. This group is playing an important role in facilitating the sharing of good practice and raising the standards in units that are less experienced in WIE. It may be an appropriate group to explore approaches to more universal provision of WIE at the University.
- 9.6 Students' progress and performance in WIE is supervised and assessed by the departments with inputs from workplace supervisors and this forms part of the assessment of students' generic skills. Each host completes an assessment which is forwarded to the student's department. Employers considered that they were able to assess students adequately on the range of attributes they were expected to display and were enthusiastic about the students and the partnership arrangements.
- 9.7 The students complete a reflective journal and their feedback on their WIE experience is provided through a self-evaluation. There could be more formal feedback on WIE from PolyU to the employer and vice-versa although the WIE placements appear to be based on strong relationships that allow informal feedback to the University including through visits to workplace settings by the supervisors. This ensures good communication and understanding between the student, PolyU and the employer. The University is intending to implement a more systematic approach to evaluation of the learning outcomes of experiential learning.

- 9.8 The Panel concluded that WIE is well planned, implemented and supported both through personnel and systems including an impressive WIE Centralised Database System which provides effective coordination and tracking of students. There was also evidence of continuous evaluation and improvement over time. This institutional approach ensures the outcomes are positive for both students and employers.

### **Commendation 8**

**The QAC commends PolyU for the emphasis it gives to Work-Integrated Education (WIE) in developing student capacity for the application of theory to practice and for the carefully constructed policy and technical infrastructure implemented to support WIE placements.**

### **Co-curricular Activities**

- 9.9 The University provides a diverse programme of non-credit-bearing experiential co-curricular activities to complement the formal curriculum and these align well with the mission and vision of PolyU. The University made students' participation in non-credit-bearing co-curricular activities a graduation requirement for all full-time undergraduate students from 2005/06 onwards and a separate Co-curricular Achievement Transcript documenting individual students' achievements is issued on request. The SAO is also developing opportunities for students to compile an individual SPECIAL e-Portfolio for integrating records of learning inside and outside the classroom and for reflecting on their experiences. This is a worthwhile initiative which will bring benefits to the students in clarifying their thinking about the generic competencies they are acquiring. The Panel noted that student feedback reveals a low to moderate level of acknowledgement of the value of activities such as exchanges and hall activities in terms of benefits for academic studies and the development of generic competencies. These findings might be usefully reviewed by the SAO.
- 9.10 Examples of co-curricular activities and how they contribute to PolyU's desired graduate attributes include residential leadership and entrepreneurship development camps, cultural events and hall-based programmes. In addition there is a community service learning programme. As mentioned in section 8, the IAO and CMAO benchmark their activities and do this through collaborative activities with other universities in Hong Kong. It was noted that the University is considering a requirement for all students to participate in service learning. The Panel encourages the University to continue with this development since this is consistent with development of the desired attributes of PolyU graduates.
- 9.11 The conceptual framework developed by the SAO to underpin the offering of co-curricular activities is impressive as was the mapping of the co-curricular offerings against the generic student outcomes expected of PolyU graduates. There is also an appropriate assessment of students (pre- and post-) through the SAARD, despite the difficulties that lie with the interpretation of data from self-report surveys such as these.

## 10. ASSESSMENT

- 10.1 In 2005 the University adopted a criterion-referenced approach to assessment (CRA) in which students are graded according to pre-determined criteria and standards. To facilitate implementation, guidelines for implementing CRA were developed and disseminated to all staff via publications, web links and staff development activities. Nonetheless, there were cases noted where both subject and programme grades were merely verbal descriptors of a norm-referencing system although there were also cases where the principles of CRA were more appropriately applied. The Panel supports the University's intentions to review the application of CRA to ensure consistency in assessment with the theoretical foundations of CRA.

### **Assessment of Learning Outcomes**

- 10.2 As noted in section 4, it was clear that there is widespread awareness and support for the development and use of learning outcomes within subjects and programmes, not only among academic staff but more generally in the PolyU community. It was also noted that the descriptors used in course documentation to indicate ILOs were, on the whole, well linked to the level of the subject in question and range from *describe, know, and explain* to *understand, analyse and evaluate*. These descriptors form a sound foundation for design of assessment strategies and PolyU academics are expected to design appropriate assessment methods that align with the stated outcomes (section 4), make explicit the assessment criteria and standards to students and provide timely feedback to students. Varied assessment tools are used including multiple choice questions, projects, reports, case-studies, student presentations, and mid-term examinations, to suit the different learning outcomes expected of the subject elements. The norm is to include an examination in the mix of assessment strategies for each subject. The University should continue to focus on developing assessment strategies that match the now well-accepted learning objectives and ensure that assessment strategies focus on, and demonstrate, positive changes in student learning.

### **Affirmation 4**

**The QAC affirms the attention being paid by PolyU to the development of assessment processes that are consistent with objectives and intended learning outcomes.**

- 10.3 The appropriateness of examination questions and assessment tasks is ensured through internal moderation and there are arrangements for internal moderation of marks. Subject grades are ratified by the Subject Assessment Review Panels (SARP) and the decisions on award classifications of individual students and deregistration cases are made by the Board of Examiners (BoE) set up for each programme. The BoE has the authority to arrange for second marking if deemed appropriate. CPCE has similar and appropriate arrangements in place for internal oversight of standards.
- 10.4 The Panel heard a number of comments about delays in the turn-around times for assignments although some students indicated they often get informal oral feedback from their tutors. Stronger internal guidelines could be considered for setting minimum turn-around times. Students reported that if they decide to appeal against a grade they can approach the office of the relevant department but neither they, nor any

of their fellow students had, to their knowledge, lodged an appeal.

### **Assessment of Graduate Attributes**

- 10.5 As discussed in section 4, the University has a comprehensive list of desired student outcome descriptors to indicate the graduate outcomes, or attributes, expected of PolyU graduates. The Panel sought to understand the institutional approach to the assessment of these attributes and the extent to which there is an institutional approach that provides confidence to the University about the skills of its graduates. In examining the assessment of the attributes, it was noted, that in relation to formal classroom subjects the generic student competencies listed in the Desired Graduate Attributes were missing from the ILOs in a number of subjects examined, nor were they consistently included at the programme level. One exception was the reference to communication skills in a number of subjects where elements of the curriculum that address this particular competency were specified and assessed through, for example, student presentations. There are also language skills assessments, for example, at entry and exit that allow judgments on this particular generic competency (section 8.9). It was noted that the *Consolidated Teaching and Learning Enhancement Plan* refers to this matter and the Panel encourages the actions proposed.
- 10.6 In relation to experiential learning, as mentioned in section 9, some attributes are assessed by employers and by self-assessments of students through their reflections after completion of WIE activities. The involvement of WIE supervisors from PolyU in the work settings, and the frequent and close interactions with the employers, gives some assurance on the rigour of the assessment of some generic competencies. An example given of a direct assessment of the generic competencies of Attitude, Leadership Potential and Team Spirit was noted and while these are appropriate competencies for any graduate they are not entirely aligned with the competencies set down as expectations of PolyU graduates. Reference has been made in section 9 to the well-considered framework which has been developed by the SAO to show how co-curricular activities may be aligned with the desired graduate attributes and the Panel was impressed by what it heard about this.
- 10.7 On the other hand, and notwithstanding these strengths, the Panel was not convinced that when curricular and co-curricular components, as well as the WIE, are taken as a whole that there is an effective overall assessment framework within which all desired competencies may adequately be assessed by PolyU academic staff. Consequently, it was difficult to be confident that the University's graduates do, indeed, achieve the desired competencies. This conclusion accords to some extent with the view of the University which has identified a few problem areas including the need for more systematic evaluation of the impact of experiential learning on all-round development of students. There is as yet no plan to address this shortcoming and to develop an approach for a comprehensive assessment of graduate competencies. This is an area for attention by the University and is referred to in Recommendation 6 which deals with a number of aspects of graduate attributes.
- 10.8 It was noted that there was no reference to the achievement (or otherwise) of generic student outcomes in the annual QA Reports, even through the SAARD data that are available could provide a useful touchstone and this should be taken into account in devising an approach to monitoring the achievement of generic attributes.

## **Assurance of Standards**

- 10.9 The Panel examined comprehensive University guidelines on such matters as award classifications and progression requirements and was satisfied that these policies are applied with appropriate rigour. The role of SARP is to ensure academic standards while BoE assures the classification of grades thus providing internal quality assurance on standards.
- 10.10 For external benchmarking, the University uses a number of mechanisms to assure itself about standards. These include the DAA and EE systems, feedback from DRs and engagement of practitioners and professionals in assessing student capacity. A key strategy for assurance of standards of student learning is the professional accreditation of programmes which applies to some 72% of degrees. For those areas not covered by professional accreditation, external input to assure standards and benchmarking across other institutions, including those outside Hong Kong, is primarily provided by the DAAs. However, in at least one of the self-funded programmes, it was noted that there is no DAA (nor an EE), although it was also noted that such gaps are under review by the University. At CPCE, external examiners or advisers may be appointed for individual programmes if these are required by validation or re-validation panels, or if there is clear need for specific industry input. Consequently, at least some SPEED programmes do not currently employ either the DAA or EE systems, relying instead on PolyU colleagues who participate as ‘external’ members in validation/re-validation panels for SPEED and on internal moderation processes conducted by SPEED teaching staff. The Panel is concerned about the external evaluation of standards of student learning under such circumstances, and would advise that more attention needs to be paid in the short term to ensuring an equivalency of standards across all degree programmes of the University, however funded. The Panel was pleased to note that CPCE is aware that this is an area for attention and believes that the University review referred to should also include reference to practices in CPCE. There is a need to form a University-wide approach and policy in this regard, to extend across all locations and modes of delivery including programmes delivered through CPCE.

### **Recommendation 8**

**The QAC recommends that PolyU ensure reliable and consistent monitoring of equivalence in standards across all programmes and locations.**

## **Academic Integrity**

- 10.11 The main PolyU approach to academic integrity and plagiarism is to provide extensive education about what constitutes plagiarism. Guidelines on plagiarism are available and widely disseminated, student orientations make explicit reference to plagiarism and there are courses and workshops provided by the English Learning Centre and the Library on academic referencing conventions and how to avoid plagiarism. Turnitin software is available to staff and some students also make use of this. Students interviewed were able to speak knowledgeably about the issue and it was clear that programme documents include reference to plagiarism policy.

- 10.12 The University has conducted surveys to assess the incidence of different types of plagiarism. While results from surveys such as these have some difficulties in their interpretation, they nevertheless help to broaden the sensitivity of students to the issue, and provide some degree of longitudinal data on the issue.
- 10.13 The Panel concluded that attention to the problem of plagiarism is institutionally well-embedded in the PolyU culture, although the incidence of plagiarism evidenced by University surveys suggests that continual attention to the issue is required.

## **11. TEACHING QUALITY AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT**

- 11.1 Staff performance in teaching is monitored by departments via an annual Manpower Quality Review and a triennial staff appraisal exercise. Criteria for evaluating teaching have been developed by the LTC and guide this process. There is a mandatory Faculty-based SFQ.

### **Staff Development**

- 11.2 PolyU has a well-established institutional structure for promoting quality teaching and provides staff development programmes and activities to encourage academic staff to improve teaching and student learning. There is a three-tier LTC structure in place at University, faculty/school and departmental levels which provides encouragement for the introduction of innovative approaches to teaching and the exchange of ideas. There is also a LTC in CPCE.
- 11.3 Teaching development support services are provided through the EDC and assist with improvements in teaching performance. EDC has provided support for the academic staff in understanding and implementing the institutional learning outcomes as appropriate programme and subject learning outcomes. Activities have included workshops, guidebooks, resource materials and other training techniques.
- 11.4 Academic staff indicated that these activities, along with individual assistance from the EDC, are particularly helpful. The Panel was pleased to note the extent and impact that these initiatives were having across the University. In particular, the leadership role that EDC plays is well complemented by initiatives from within faculties along with the work of the OBE Champions and Teaching Award winners. Taken as a whole, these activities provide a range of opportunities for staff which have been well received and appreciated, and are leading to university-wide improvements. SPEED and its teaching personnel have equal access to EDC services.

### **Commendation 9**

**The QAC commends PolyU for the effectiveness of the staff development activities available to academic staff through the Educational Development Centre (EDC).**

- 11.5 Academic staff recruitment is based on established and clearly defined criteria and efforts are made to attract very high quality candidates to the institution. The



academic staff recruitment policies seem to be different for CPCE, and do not appear to be as rigorous.

- 11.6 Academic staff appraisal is conducted within the institutional *Quality Assurance Framework, Mechanisms and Processes*; guidelines and criteria set out by the University; criteria for teaching evaluation; and student assessment. Based on discussions with academic staff, there appears to be a reasonable consensus that all staff understand and support the approach to appraisal although a review of the system is in progress.
- 11.7 Motivation techniques include promotion prospects, cash awards, and institutional teaching awards. While the institution endeavours to promote quality teaching, there continues to be a reasonably wide perception that research activities will enhance promotion prospects more quickly and provide increased rewards rather than teaching.

### **Student Feedback**

- 11.8 Student workload and opinion on individual subjects is monitored through use of a mid-term review to identify desirable immediate adaptations to the subject delivery but the primary method for collecting student feedback is the SFQ previously mentioned. This collects views on learning experiences and the teaching quality of individual subject. Some departments also conduct programme-based surveys to gauge graduates' learning experience in their programmes. Students studying at offshore locations also complete a version of the SFQ and a mid-term review. Feedback from alumni on their learning experiences, workload and so on, has been collected for some years via an Alumni Survey which is currently under revision to align it with the University's institutional learning outcomes. It was noted that the University has plans to *rationalise* institutional surveys in the coming years.
- 11.9 Feedback collected from these various sources is considered in the annual Programme Review Report to *inform* improvement *actions*. There were reports that some students do not give the SFQs serious consideration as they had seen little evidence that the results of the SFQs were being used to improve the quality of teaching and learning. This view, however, was not universal as some other students indicated that aggregated student results and resultant changes had been communicated to them.
- 11.10 An area of concern was the level and extent of opportunities for students to provide feedback on the activities of the University beyond that of survey. We consider that the staff-student consultative groups should be consistently implemented across faculties with more frequent meetings to improve channels of communication. It was considered that students would feel more inclined to actively participate in the ongoing development of the institution if they are kept informed regarding actions taken as a result of their input through the SFQs.

### **Recommendation 9**

**The QAC recommends that PolyU explore strategies other than surveys to collect student feedback and institute reliable and systematic mechanisms to inform the students of improvements made as a result of their input through all feedback channels.**

## **12. STUDENT PARTICIPATION**

- 12.1 Student representatives serve on key university-level committees, such as the University Council, Senate, QAC(AD), QAC(NAU) and LTC. The President meets with representatives of the Students' Union (SU) and it was indicated that student representatives have also contributed to the University's strategic planning activities.
- 12.2 Further opportunities for informal feedback occur through student membership of Faculty Boards, FLTCs, DLTCs and programme committees. A range of students also reported that, whether or not there is a staff-student consultative committee, there are effective informal feedback mechanisms they can use (section 11). As mentioned earlier, the Panel encourages the University to require all departments to set up consultative groups that bring students and staff together on a more regular basis and keep records of the discussions and follow-up on recommendations emerging from the group.
- 12.3 Students also participate in activities offered by the SU which has 46 affiliated clubs and in which the students are directly involved in planning and organising the activities.
- 12.4 The University has recognised that student representatives need better access to information that will enhance their capacity to contribute to the deliberations of various committees. In this context, the *Consolidated Teaching and Learning Enhancement Plan* notes the University's intention to *support and empower student representatives to maximize their contribution to the committees on which they serve*. As a first step, the Dean of Students began in 2009/10 to brief student representatives prior to meetings to assist their active participation in the business of key University committees.

## **13. ACTIVITIES SPECIFIC TO RESEARCH DEGREES**

- 13.1 The Research Committee (RC), chaired by the VP(RD), along with Faculty Research Committees (FRC) oversee RPg education within the respective Faculties, while Departmental Research Committees (DRC) are responsible for managing and monitoring RPg programmes offered by departments.
- 13.2 RPg admissions are approved by DRCs based on applicants' academic credentials, the merit of their initial research proposal (if required), and relevance to the department's research focus and strength. The rigour of admission requirements for RPg programmes was confirmed with reference to qualifications of students the Panel met from a range of disciplines. With the exception of one student who had completed undergraduate and master degree studies at PolyU, the students interviewed had degrees from international universities.
- 13.3 The students reported satisfaction with the general facilities of the University including the Library collections and on-line portals. Customised facilities for research students include provision of space and facilities such as: workstations, computing facilities, and access to equipment and laboratories; English language enhancement programmes; Library workshops on information skills and workshops on managing research studies and training in basic teaching skills offered by EDC. Some students suggested that shortage for funds for purchase of equipment leads to delays in research projects but on

the whole, they were generally very pleased with the support provided including orientation, diagnostic testing in English and the design of coursework programmes to improve any weaknesses in capacity to perform their research.

- 13.4 One exception in the pattern of general satisfaction relates to concerns over the current shortage of accommodation which means that RPg students can stay in a hall of residence for one year only and then have to find accommodation elsewhere which is particularly difficult for international students. The University should consider giving a greater degree of priority to RPg students when the new hostel accommodation becomes available.
- 13.5 Integration of RPg students in the departments depends very much on individual departments, some providing opportunities on the academic side in a structured way such as provision of weekly lunch seminars while other departments concentrate on the social side and integrating the students into the academic community particularly those who might have culture shock.
- 13.6 Financial support is also provided. Each year the students receive an allowance to cover data collection and book purchases and other expenses. Studentships cover living expenses as students are not allowed to work except in the long vacation period. There was strong endorsement from students for the amount of conference funding provided to attend international conferences as this allows students to network with colleagues internationally. The University also offers six International Postgraduate Scholarships for PhD studies each year to attract academically strong applicants from overseas as a contribution to the internationalisation of RPg programmes.
- 13.7 Research supervisors are chosen on the basis of their qualifications and prior experience as successful research supervisors as well as their subject expertise. Supervisors with close relationships to industry provide access to real-life projects and research topics and this is valued by the students interviewed. New supervisors act in a co-supervisor role initially and they are offered the opportunity to attend workshops provided by EDC. But there appears to be no formal mandated training programme for supervisors other than for new supervisors and through apprenticeship to an experienced supervisor. The Panel encourages the University to initiate such a programme through EDC or, more appropriately, through a Graduate School if the PolyU proposal to establish a Graduate School eventuates.
- 13.8 For PhD students, annual progress reports are completed by both the supervisor and the student and feedback is also collected through the Research Degree Graduate Survey and staff-student consultative meetings. MPhil students have a similar system that accommodates their shorter period of candidacy. There was evidence from discussions with students of the use of aggregated data from these feedback sources being used to introduce changes such as an increase in research methods training and inclusion of qualitative research methods.
- 13.9 Student theses are assessed by BoEs specifically set up for each thesis examination and these Boards report directly to RC. Thesis examination protocols are set out in detail and were confirmed broadly by students who also had a good sense of what examination of their theses would entail.

13.10 The level of support to RPg students was judged to be well conceived and delivered. Arrangements for admission, supervision and examination of RPg students were also found to be satisfactory, the only suggestion being that the University might consider introducing a mandatory training and development programme for both experienced and new supervisors in line with international best practice.

## **14. CONCLUSION**

14.1 Based on a detailed examination of the extensive materials and information provided by the University, the Panel concluded that PolyU has a long-standing and firm commitment to quality assurance. This view was further confirmed through detailed discussions with a wide range of staff and students, external stakeholders, employer groups as well as the leaders of the University.

14.2 The efficiency and level of cooperation extended by PolyU throughout the audit process was appreciated and made it a rewarding experience for the Panel. The open approach to the audit has greatly assisted the formulation of advice to the University for the further development of its quality assurance systems.

## **APPENDIX A: THE HONG KONG POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY (PolyU)** **[Extracted from the Institutional Submission]**

### **History**

The origins of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) go back to 1937 when it was established as a small Government Trade School.

### **Vision and Mission**

The University positions itself as an *applied* university with the primary aim of educating students to become competent professionals and responsible individuals in society. The Vision is to become a *preferred university* offering *preferred programmes* and producing *preferred graduates*.

The Mission of the University is stated as:

*Academic Excellence in a Professional Context through:*

- *Programmes that are application-oriented and produce graduates who can apply theories in practice.*
- *Research of an applied nature relevant to industrial, commercial and community needs.*
- *Intellectual and comprehensive development of students within a caring environment.*
- *Dedicated partnerships with business, industry and the professions.*
- *Enabling mature learners to pursue lifelong learning.*

### **Role Statement**

PolyU:

- (a) offers a range of professionally oriented programmes leading to the award of first degrees, and a small number of sub-degree programmes;
- (b) pursues the delivery of teaching at an internationally competitive level in all the taught programmes that it offers;
- (c) offers a number of taught postgraduate programmes and research postgraduate programmes in selected subject areas particularly in professional and applied fields;
- (d) emphasises application-oriented teaching, professional education and applied research;
- (e) aims at being internationally competitive in its areas of research strength;
- (f) emphasises high value-added education, with a balanced approach leading to the development of all-round students with professional competence;
- (g) maintains strong links with business, industry, professional sectors, employers as well as the community;
- (h) pursues actively deep collaboration in its areas of strength with other higher education institutions in Hong Kong or the region or more widely so as to enhance the Hong Kong higher education system;
- (i) encourages academic staff to be engaged in public service, consultancy and collaborative work with the private sector in areas where they have special expertise, as part of the institution's general collaboration with government, business and industry; and
- (j) manages in the most effective and efficient way the public and private resources bestowed upon the institution, employing collaboration whenever it is of value.

## **Organisational Structure**

The University Council is the supreme governing body and the University Senate is the highest authority on all academic-related matters. The President is supported by a team of senior executives (Deputy President and Provost, Executive Vice President and Vice Presidents) and several senior management committees including the President's Executive Committee and the Academic Council. The University has 27 academic departments/units under six Faculties, and two independent Schools.

## **Programmes of Study**

Many of the University's programmes have obtained professional accreditation from relevant professional/statutory bodies.

The University offers UGC-funded programmes at bachelor and master levels. Research postgraduate (RPg) education is provided at PhD and MPhil levels. Most of the taught postgraduate (TPg) programmes, including professional doctorates, are offered on a self-financed basis and there are self-financed top-up undergraduate (Ug) honours degree programmes, mostly in the part-time mode.

The University offers 13 offshore programmes with partner institutions in the Chinese Mainland and Macau. Six TPg programmes are delivered primarily in web-based mode through CyberU. The School of Professional Education and Executive Development (SPEED), under the College of Professional and Continuing Education (CPCE) offers 15 self-financed top-up Ug programmes at the ordinary degree level, leading to PolyU SPEED awards.

## **Staff and Students Numbers**

PolyU is the largest tertiary institution in Hong Kong, with a total enrolment of 29,755 students (equivalent to 21,303 full-time students) in 2009/10. A further 1,827 students are enrolled on self-financed Ug programmes leading to PolyU SPEED awards. As of 31 December 2009, the University had 5,517 full-time staff, of which 1,547 (28.0%) were appointed at academic grades and 1,377 (24.96%) at research grades.

## **Revenue and Estate**

PolyU's annual revenue for 2008/09 was HK\$3,246.6 million with 73% of this expended on learning and research.

All programmes offered by the University in Hong Kong are located on its main campus in Kowloon. A number of programmes are delivered offshore with partner institutions in Hangzhou, Shenzhen, Xi'an, Tianjin, Beijing and Macau. Programmes offered by SPEED are delivered on the campuses in Hung Hom Bay and West Kowloon designated for CPCE programmes.

## **APPENDIX B: INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE TO THE AUDIT FINDINGS**

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) welcomes the Report from the QAC Audit Panel. We are extremely pleased to note the Panel's commendations on many of our good practices in teaching and learning, and its conclusion that "PolyU has a long-standing and firm commitment to quality assurance" (Paragraph 14.1) and that "there is strong culture of quality assurance in the University" (p.2). We are particularly delighted to see the Panel's confirmation that our professionally accredited programmes "demonstrate high quality education and benefit the graduates from these programmes" (Paragraph 3.8).

PolyU aspires to become the leading applied university in the region, and pledges to provide a holistic and quality education with a strong professional focus for our students. We are glad to note that this vision and mission have been widely supported by all our internal and external stakeholders, and reinforced by the Panel (Commendation 1).

As an applied university, in our programme development and delivery and assessment of student learning, we especially value input from and collaboration with industry and the professions. The Panel's commendation on the deep relationship we have cultivated with industry over a long period of time (Commendation 2) has confirmed our achievement in this area. We are pleased to note the Panel's acknowledgement that our strong commitment to a practice-oriented profile for teaching and research is well understood by staff, students and employers alike (Paragraph 7.1), and that there is effective integration of professional practice in the design of our curricula with an appropriate balance of theory and practice for students (Commendation 5). We are also greatly encouraged by the highly favourable comments made by the Panel regarding the emphasis we give to Work-Integrated Education (WIE) as an institutional strategy to foster students' capacity for applying theory to practice, as well as by the reference to our effective planning, implementation and support for WIE (Commendation 8). We also note that the appropriate and effective use of e-learning and blended learning in our curriculum and pedagogical design is acknowledged by the Panel (Paragraph 8.4).

PolyU is a pioneer among Hong Kong universities in implementing Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) and an institutional Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan (LOAP). We take much pride in the Panel's commendation on our well-grounded conceptual frameworks for implementing OBE and LOAP (Commendation 3), as well as the "extent of buy-in" and "widespread awareness and support" by the PolyU community for the development and use of learning outcomes within courses, programmes, and student support units (Paragraphs 4.10 and 10.2).

Much of our achievement can be attributed to our committed and enthusiastic staff who embrace quality and innovative teaching. As noted by the Panel, they are supported by our "well-established institutional structure for promoting quality teaching" (Paragraph 11.2) and a wide range of effective staff development activities offered by the Educational Development Centre (Commendation 9).

We are pleased that our endeavours in providing students with a "seamless student-centred environment" to enable them to succeed in learning have been praised by the Panel. These include: the innovative, responsive and contemporary services provided by the Library and the Office of Information Technology Service (Commendation 6); the student-centred, integrative support services provided by the Student Affairs Office, the International Affairs Office and the

Chinese Mainland Affairs Office (Commendation 7), as well as the wide range of co-curricular activities offered to students that are mapped against the generic learning outcomes expected of PolyU graduates (Paragraph 9.11). As a testimony to the quality of our Research Postgraduate (RPg) programmes, the Panel has judged our support to RPg students to be well conceived and delivered, and has been satisfied with our arrangements for the admission, supervision and examination of RPg students (Paragraph 13.10).

PolyU believes that quality is a continual journey, not a destination. Quality assurance is our institutional priority and, over time, we have developed elaborate QA frameworks and processes which are judged by the Panel to be robust, well-embedded, and consistently implemented for all the programmes we offer (Paragraphs 5.3 and 6.4, and Commendation 4). We welcome the Panel's affirmation of our efforts in developing an enhanced management structure for policy development, in strengthening the Annual Programme Reviews by including data on students' attainment of the intended learning outcomes, and in making our programmes more responsive to emerging trends in the disciplines and professions (Affirmations 1, 2 and 3). We are grateful to the Panel for identifying some areas for further attention in our continual effort in improving the QA system and processes. These include: deepening the culture of critical enquiry across campus (Recommendation 2), developing an institution-wide strategy for benchmarking our academic programmes (Recommendation 4), refining the existing Performance Indicators to align more closely with the desired learning outcomes (Recommendation 5), and exploring strategies other than surveys to collect student feedback and to inform students of the improvements made as a result of their feedback (Recommendation 9). We will act upon the valuable advice of the Panel and continue to refine our QA framework and processes to ensure their efficacy for assuring and enhancing quality.

The College of Professional and Continuing Education (CPCE) is an affiliate of PolyU set up to oversee the operations of three self-financed education units that provide application-oriented programmes at different levels to cater for learners with different needs. The CPCE adopts a QA framework that is modelled on the rigorous QA system and processes of PolyU, with some modifications to fit its purpose. We thank the Panel for drawing our attention to some areas for improvement, and are now in the process of reviewing the roles and relationships of the University Council, Senate and QA committees relative to the CPCE Council, Academic Board and QA committees (Recommendations 1 and 3). We are also exploring how to further strengthen external inputs into the development and approval of all CPCE programmes to ensure reliable monitoring of equivalence of standards across programmes (Recommendations 7 and 8).

We have been piloting for two years the implementation of an institutional LOAP whereby students' attainment of the intended learning outcomes are tracked at both the institutional and programme levels to inform quality improvement. We will continue to refine our institutional LOAP and our approach to assessing students' achievement of the desired graduate attributes based on our experiences gained from the pilot implementation and the advice of the Panel (Recommendation 6).

To conclude, we would like to thank the Panel for its commendations as well as its useful and constructive comments on our QA processes. We are impressed by its rigorous yet collegiate approach to conducting the Audit, and by the enormous efforts it has expended in the process. We welcome the opportunity afforded by this Audit exercise for us to engage in a dialogue with peers from the wider academic community, and believe that the Audit findings will make a valuable contribution to our continuous quest for quality assurance and enhancement at PolyU.



## **APPENDIX C: ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS AND DEFINITIONS**

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| APC       | Academic Planning Committee                                |
| BoE       | Board of Examiners   |
| CMAO      | Chinese Mainland Affairs Office                            |
| CPCE      | College of Professional and Continuing Education           |
| CRA       | Criterion-referenced approach                              |
| DAA       | Departmental Academic Adviser                              |
| DAC       | Departmental Advisory Committee                            |
| DLTC      | Departmental Learning and Teaching Committee               |
| DR        | Departmental Review  |
| DRC       | Departmental Research Committees                           |
| EDC       | Educational Development Centre                             |
| EE        | External Examiner  |
| FRC       | Faculty Research Committees                                |
| GSLPA     | Graduating Students' Language Proficiency Assessment       |
| HoD       | Head of Department   |
| IAO       | International Affairs Office                               |
| ICT       | Information and communication technologies                 |
| ILO       | Intended Learning Outcome                                  |
| ITS       | Office of Information Technology Services                  |
| LOAP      | Learning Outcomes Assessment Plans                         |
| LTC       | Learning and Teaching Committee                            |
| OBE       | Outcomes Based Education                                   |
| PI        | Performance Indicator                                      |
| P-LOAP    | Programme Learning Outcomes Assessment Plans               |
| PolyU     | The Hong Kong Polytechnic University                       |
| QA Report | Quality Assurance Report                                   |
| QAC       | Quality Assurance Council                                  |
| QAC(AD)   | Quality Assurance Committee (Academic Departments)         |
| QAC(NAU)  | Quality Assurance Committee (Non-Academic Units)           |
| RC        | Research Committee   |
| RPg       | Research Postgraduate                                      |
| SAARD     | Self-Assessment of All-Round Development                   |
| SAO       | Student Affairs Office                                     |
| SARP      | Subject Assessment Review Panel                            |
| SFQ       | Student Feedback Questionnaire                             |
| SPEED     | School of Professional Education and Executive Development |
| SU        | Students' Union  |
| UGC       | University Grants Committee                                |
| VP(AD)    | Vice President (Academic Development)                      |
| VP(RD)    | Vice President (Research Development)                      |
| WGOBE     | Working Group on Outcome-based Education                   |
| WIE       | Work-Integrated Education                                  |

## **APPENDIX D: PolyU AUDIT PANEL**

The Audit Panel comprised the following:

Professor Jan Thomas (Panel Chair)  
Deputy Vice Chancellor, Research and Quality  
The University of Notre Dame Australia

Dr Richard T Armour  
Senior Advisor to the President  
The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

Dr LS “Skip” Fletcher  
Regents Professor Emeritus and Thomas A Dietz Professor Emeritus  
Department of Mechanical Engineering  
Texas A&M University

Professor John A Spinks  
Senior Advisor to the Vice-Chancellor  
The University of Hong Kong

Dr Don Westerheijden  
Senior Research Associate  
Center for Higher Education Policy Studies  
University of Twente

Mr Wong Kwan Yu  
Principal, Fukien Secondary School and Member of the Education Commission

### **Audit Coordinator**

Emeritus Professor Mairéad Browne  
QAC Secretariat

## **APPENDIX E: QAC’S MISSION, TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP**

The QAC was formally established in April 2007 as a semi-autonomous non-statutory body under the aegis of the University Grants Committee of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

### **Mission**

The QAC’s mission is:

- (a) To assure that the quality of educational experience in all first degree level programmes and above, however funded, offered in UGC-funded institutions is sustained and improved, and is at an internationally competitive level; and
- (b) To encourage institutions to excel in this area of activity.

### **Terms of Reference**

The QAC has the following terms of reference:

- (a) To advise the University Grants Committee on quality assurance matters in the higher education sector in Hong Kong and other related matters as requested by the Committee;
- (b) To conduct audits and other reviews as requested by the UGC, and report on the quality assurance mechanisms and quality of the offerings of institutions;
- (c) To promote quality assurance in the higher education sector in Hong Kong; and
- (d) To facilitate the development and dissemination of good practices in quality assurance in higher education.

### **Membership** (as at 1 April 2011)

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Mr Philip CHEN Nan-lok, SBS, JP<br>(Chairman) | Managing Director, Hang Lung Group Limited and Hang Lung Properties Limited, Hong Kong                              |
| Mr Roger Thomas BEST, JP                      | Former Partner, Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu  |
| Dr Judith EATON                               | President, Council of Higher Education Accreditation, USA   |
| Professor Richard HO Man-wui, JP              | Honorary Professor, Department of Chinese Language and Literature of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong |
| Professor Richard HO Yan-ki                   | Professor (Chair) of Finance, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong   |
| Professor Edmond KO, BBS, JP                  | Adjunct Professor of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology      |
| Sir Colin LUCAS                               | Former Vice-Chancellor, University of Oxford, United Kingdom  |
| Sir Howard NEWBY                              | Vice-Chancellor, University of Liverpool, United Kingdom  |

### **Ex-officio Member**

|                        |                        |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| Mr Michael V STONE, JP | Secretary-General, UGC |
|------------------------|------------------------|

### **Secretary**

|                |                                   |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Mrs Dorothy MA | Deputy Secretary-General (1), UGC |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|