

# QUALITY ASSURANCE COUNCIL

## **Audit Manual** **Third Audit Cycle**

Updated in May 2022

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 *Context for the Quality Audit*

1.1.1 The University Grants Committee (UGC) of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is an independent and non-statutory body that advises the Government on the funding needs and development of higher education institutions in Hong Kong.

1.1.2 The UGC is committed to safeguarding and promoting the quality of UGC-funded universities and their activities. In 2007, the UGC established the Quality Assurance Council (QAC), a semi-autonomous non-statutory body under its aegis, to assist it to discharge its responsibilities in quality assurance.

1.1.3 The QAC has the following terms of reference:

- (a) To advise the UGC 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 universities;
- (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.

1.1.4 The QAC Members are appointed by the Secretary for Education. The broad composition of the QAC is as follows:

- (a) A Chairman, who is a UGC member (or becomes a UGC member once appointed);
- (b) Non-local members;
- (c) Local academics members;
- (d) Local lay members;
- (e) Co-opted member(s) as necessary and recommended by the Council;
- (f) Cross-membership with the UGC: one is the QAC Chairman and the other(s) may belong to one of the above categories; and
- (g) The Secretary-General, UGC (*ex-officio*).

1.1.5 The QAC is supported by a full-time Secretariat, led by a Deputy Secretary-General, UGC, who serves as the Secretary of the Council, under the overall supervision of the Secretary-General, UGC.

1.1.6 Since its establishment, the QAC has conducted three rounds of quality audits, the first audit cycle between 2008 and 2011, the second audit cycle between 2015 and 2016 and the sub-degree audit cycle between 2017 and 2019. By virtue of the QAC's then mission, the first and second audit cycles included only first degree level programmes and above offered by the UGC-funded universities. Following the Government's recognition of the need for greater systematisation and externality in monitoring the quality of sub-degree level programmes, and the recommendations from a Working Group comprising representatives from the UGC, the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) and the Heads of Universities Committee, the Government gave policy support for and invited the UGC to be the overseeing body of the quality audits of UGC-funded universities' sub-degree operations with the QAC as the audit operator in 2016.

## 1.2 *Quality Assurance Developments in Hong Kong*

### 1.2.1 *Previous QAC audit cycles*

1.2.1.1 The previous rounds of audits demonstrated that the UGC-funded universities have developed appropriate quality assurance systems which enable the sector to be confident in the academic standards and quality of higher education. Audits of the first audit cycle established that the universities had in place effective quality assurance systems for the maintenance of provision at the level of faculties and programmes, and institutional oversight of the academic standards of higher education qualifications. The second audit cycle had a stronger focus on student learning and achievement, and the audit programme included a focus on two key themes: Enhancing the student learning experience; and Global engagements. It also sought to promote the enhancement of teaching and learning and the development of sector-wide improvements in the value and application of higher education provision.

1.2.1.2 Audits of the sub-degree audit cycle aimed to assure the quality of student learning in the sub-degree providing units (SDPUs) of UGC-funded universities. The sector has seen the embedding of significant changes in the higher education landscape, such as the four-year curriculum introduced in 2012, and the outcome-based approach to the design and delivery of higher education programmes.

## 1.2.2 *Learning from previous audit cycles*

1.2.2.1 Just as evaluation of the first audit cycle helped shape the development of quality audit in the second audit cycle, the approach to the third audit cycle has been appropriately influenced by information emerging from Overview Reports of both the second and the sub-degree audit cycles.

1.2.2.2 Audits of first degree level programmes and above emphasised a number of overall strengths across the UGC-funded universities, including:

- (a) The distinctive visions, missions and role statements of the universities and the common commitment to quality;
- (b) The successful transition to the four-year undergraduate degree programme;
- (c) The well-founded establishment of extensive and complementary programmes of academic, co- and extra-curricular learning opportunities;
- (d) Diverse, wide-ranging and mission-sensitive provision to support the professional development of staff;
- (e) Creative, proactive and integrated networks of student support services;
- (f) The development and effective communication of conceptual frameworks for student achievement;
- (g) Sophisticated mechanisms for ascertaining the extent to which students are actually achieving graduate attributes and programme intended learning outcomes; and
- (h) A strong strategic focus on internationalisation.

1.2.2.3 The audits in the second audit cycle also revealed a number of matters requiring further attention across the UGC sector as a whole. These included:

- (a) Achieving the right balance between ensuring central institutional oversight and respecting the autonomy of academic units;
- (b) Identifying opportunities for sector-wide collaborative enhancement in key areas where the quality and maturity of practice varies between universities;
- (c) Ensuring all universities have a clear pedagogical strategy for e-learning as an integral part of their approach to teaching, learning and assessment;
- (d) Encouraging all universities to explore means by which students could track their achievement across academic, co- and extra-curricular activities;

- (e) Identifying the ways in which some of the key benefits emerging from the four-year undergraduate programme could be extended to postgraduate students, while respecting the particular characteristics of the postgraduate student body; and
- (f) Promoting integration between local and non-local students at all levels.

1.2.2.4 Audits of sub-degree operations pointed to a number of overall strengths across the relevant sub-degree operations of the UGC-funded universities. These included:

- (a) SDPUs are generally well aligned strategically with the approach of their university proper;
- (b) Universities are maintaining sufficient consistency between their respective SDPUs to assure academic standards and quality;
- (c) Approaches to programme quality assurance are generally sound;
- (d) Well-developed links exist with staff in other institutions, employers and external stakeholders;
- (e) Common frameworks for programme approval are in place;
- (f) Professional development opportunities are available for full-time staff in the sub-degree sector; and
- (g) Students are playing a substantial role in key aspects of the governance of their SDPUs and university, as appropriate.

1.2.2.5 The audits in the sub-degree audit cycle also revealed a number of matters requiring further attention across the UGC sub-degree sector as a whole:

- (a) Responding flexibly and openly to the rapidly shifting external environment, with increased competition from private providers and more stringent government regulations, which is inevitably having an impact on university planning and accountability;
- (b) Making more systematic, precise and effective use of a wider range of data sources;
- (c) Systematically and consistently embedding an outcome-based approach to teaching and learning, and especially criterion-referenced assessment (CRA), and embracing the cultural shift that this approach embodies, as a matter of policy;
- (d) Strengthening and extending the sub-degree sector's repertoire of innovative teaching and learning practices incorporating a special focus on the development of a strategic approach to e-learning;

- (e) Providing appropriate professional development opportunities for part-time staff in the sub-degree sector, comparable to those provided for full-time staff;
- (f) Further strengthening and developing assessment policies, processes and procedures;
- (g) Embracing the work on programme outcome achievement that increasingly characterises undergraduate provision, to provide evidence on programme effectiveness and student performance in relation to programme learning outcomes; and
- (h) Addressing disparities between full-time and part-time students and between one SDPU and another in the same university in respect of access to student support services and facilities, as well as to co- and extra-curricular activities.

1.2.2.6 These outcomes have been comprehensively considered in the development of the quality audit for the third audit cycle.

### 1.2.3 *Universities' feedback on previous cycles*

1.2.3.1 UGC-funded universities were broadly positive about the second audit cycle, noting a clear purpose to audit which provides the impetus to assess approaches to quality assurance, identifies scope for improvements to teaching and learning, and promotes development of a quality culture. In turn, this promotes confidence for stakeholders. Audit has also promoted some data collection and analysis which has been used to evaluate learning and teaching initiatives.

1.2.3.2 The impact of audit for universities is evident in various initiatives including implementation of outcome-based teaching and learning, strengthening of continuing staff development policy, introduction of a systematic approach to disseminating best practices in teaching and learning, and enhancement of internationalisation.

1.2.3.3 However, universities also raised issues, particularly in terms of the time and effort that they devoted to the audit process, and advocated that a 'lighter touch' approach with reduced documentation requirements and fewer engagements would be preferable. In this context, and in terms of the scope of audit, universities were generally in favour of a 'combined' audit covering all levels and types of provision, including sub-degree operations. A single audit was seen as cost effective in terms of time, resource and effort.

- 1.2.3.4 Universities also noted the intrinsic challenge in providing data and information in varying formats for a range of UGC exercises, for example, the University Accountability Agreement (UAA) and the Planning Exercise, and suggested that these requirements could be streamlined and integrated (see Section 1.2.5).
- 1.2.3.5 Finally, universities sought a clearer audit format, for example, in having clearer definitions of, and distinctions between, the Recommendations and Affirmations made by Audit Panels for consideration by universities.
- 1.2.3.6 Feedback from universities has been fully considered in the design of the audit methodology for the third audit cycle.

#### 1.2.4 *Trends in other jurisdictions*

- 1.2.4.1 The design of the audit methodology for the third audit cycle has taken account of trends in audit design, development and implementation in other national jurisdictions. In many cases, it is evident that the UGC-funded universities are at a different level of maturity in comparison to other contexts where, for example, programme approval remains tied to institutional accreditation, where national review of universities has only recently been introduced, or where a decision has been made to move away from cyclical review. Other countries and areas are subject to regional or supra-national standards and guidelines against which academic standards and quality are calibrated and evaluated. Again, this does not apply in the Hong Kong context. However, consideration of those national jurisdictions which have moved to a lighter touch audit methodology has been instructive in informing the approach in this Manual to various issues including audit duration, evidence requirements and the focus of audit activity. As noted in Section 1.2.6, the Manual has also been revised in the light of experience from virtual audits conducted in other jurisdictions globally.

#### 1.2.5 *Institutional governance of UGC-funded universities*

- 1.2.5.1 The audit methodology for the third audit cycle has taken cognisance of ‘Governance in UGC-funded Higher Education Institutions in Hong Kong’ (the Governance Report), as endorsed by the Government and released in March 2016.
- 1.2.5.2 At the request of the Education Bureau, the UGC completed a consultancy study on governance of UGC-funded universities in 2015. The study sought to identify some international good practices in the governance of higher education universities, so

that pointers and advice could be drawn up to help enhance the effectiveness and transparency of the Councils of UGC-funded universities and to better prepare Council Members with the necessary knowledge, skills and protocol for proper discharge of their duties.

- 1.2.5.3 The UGC set up a task force to follow up on the implementation of the recommendations of the Governance Report, in particular the establishment of the UAA. The UAA aims to ensure an appropriate and sustainable balance between institutional autonomy and public accountability. As a feature of the UAA, universities submit Planning Exercise Proposals (PEPs).
- 1.2.5.4 Apart from setting out duties and responsibilities associated with public funding, the UAA also contains performance indicators which include sector-wide performance measures (PMs) and institution-specific key performance indicators (KPIs). The PMs cover five key domains. In the context of the relationship with the QAC third audit cycle, the most significant is the first, ‘the quality of the student experience of teaching and learning’ but others are relevant, and notably ‘enhanced internationalisation’. The UAA states that specific outcomes and outputs from periodic audit exercises are reflected as appropriate in the agreement, but the agreement is not intended to replicate or replace audit.
- 1.2.5.5 As noted, the activity domains and PMs required by the UAA include ‘quality of the student experience of teaching and learning’. The UAA states that the core components of this domain ‘are intended to demonstrate that an institution has effective strategies in place to deliver improvements in teaching quality, to enhance the effectiveness of the learning environment and to maximise student learning outcomes, particularly in relation to learning gain leading to appropriate employment or further study.’ The sector-wide PMs are:
  - (a) Undergraduate satisfaction with the quality and value which they have gained from their teaching and learning experience (derived from a standard question in each university’s student survey);
  - (b) Undergraduate satisfaction with their overall learning environment (derived from a standard question in each university’s student survey);
  - (c) Undergraduate employment success rate; and
  - (d) Employer satisfaction with graduates.
- 1.2.5.6 The sector-wide PMs are supplemented with up to four institution-specific KPIs.

1.2.5.7 As noted above, the UAA is not intended to replicate or replace the QAC audit. However, in line with the QAC's and universities' views regarding the value of aligning data and information submissions, the methodology for this audit cycle has considered how the outcomes of the UAA can be used in QAC audit. In particular, it is expected that, in line with the aim of the QAC that universities should be able to make use of the UAA as an opportunity for self-reflection and future-planning, they will indicate how UAA submissions relate to and shape their management of academic standards and quality.

#### 1.2.6 *The pandemic context*

1.2.6.1 In view of the COVID-19 pandemic and the fact that physical audits could be impracticable, the QAC commenced planning for possible virtual audits for the third audit cycle.

1.2.6.2 A study on the overall approach, management, and practical arrangements for the conduct of virtual audits in the higher educational sector in jurisdictions outside of Hong Kong was conducted, in the context of the QAC third audit cycle. Findings included the following:

- (a) Conducting audits face-to-face has significant benefits. In general, if the higher education sector and approach to quality assurance is more mature, the risk of moving audits entirely online is lower;
- (b) Extensive review of online and virtual approaches, both to site visits and meetings between expert panel members and higher education institutions, has been conducted globally;
- (c) Some challenges remain, such as arranging virtual audit schedules across time zones, and replicating some of the informal benefits of working face-to-face. However, substantial examples now exist of guidance and good practice, addressing many of the original concerns on virtual audits; and
- (d) Global research confirms that in the majority of contexts, virtual audits are fit for purpose and able to deliver credible outcomes in accordance with published guidance.

1.2.6.3 The study concluded that the QAC third audit cycle could successfully proceed using virtual audits. Where physical audits are impracticable, virtual audits permit quality audits to go ahead, allow both universities and Audit Panels to operate together in presenting and analysing evidence, and enable oversight bodies to have confidence about academic quality.

1.2.6.4 This version of the Manual has been updated to include the option of conducting the QAC third audit cycle virtually. The updates address two areas:

- (a) The Audit Criteria have been expanded to reflect overall changes, precipitated by the pandemic, in digital delivery, assessment and support for students across higher education; and
- (b) Using good practice from different jurisdictions, as practical guidance to universities, auditors, and Audit Co-ordinators engaging in virtual audits.

## **2. Guiding Principles for Audit**

2.1 The QAC, in developing the third audit cycle, has been attentive to the increasing maturity of UGC-funded universities as evidenced in the Overview Reports on previous rounds of audits. As explained, it has also taken account of universities' feedback on previous cycles, trends in other jurisdictions, and development in university governance. In this context, the QAC has identified the following guiding principles for the QAC audit:

- (a) The self-accrediting status of the UGC-funded universities is honoured;
- (b) The quality audit is again based on a 'Fitness for Purpose' approach whereby it provides confirmation that universities have appropriate procedures in place to meet their stated roles and missions and to secure the quality and academic standards of their academic programmes;
- (c) Audit should cover all programmes at the levels of sub-degree, first degree and above, however funded, leading to a qualification wholly or partly awarded by the UGC-funded universities;
- (d) The audit format should adopt the direction towards a lighter touch audit;
- (e) Through participation in the quality audit process, the quality culture within universities should be strengthened;
- (f) Audit Panels are composed of peer reviewers who have the expertise to comment on what happens within a university, based on their experience in other institutions and jurisdictions;
- (g) Audit should include theme(s) to enable investigation of non-core but significant topics; and
- (h) Audit should promote quality assurance and enhancement through the spread of good practice.

### **3. Aims of Audit**

3.1 The quality audits seek to safeguard the quality of the student learning experience and academic standards in the UGC-funded universities in Hong Kong. More specifically, they aim to:

- (a) Confirm that existing arrangements for quality assurance are fit for purpose and conform to the university's role and mission;
- (b) Provide assurance that the standards of higher education align with expectations in Hong Kong and can be compared to provision by similar institutions in other jurisdictions;
- (c) Ensure that students have access to appropriate learning opportunities in both physical and virtual environments through taught provision, private study and supported learning;
- (d) Promote and enhance high quality teaching and learning in both physical and virtual environments;
- (e) Confirm that students are fully supported in their academic and personal development in both physical and virtual environments;
- (f) Advance the highest possible levels of student achievement;
- (g) Encourage strategic developments which enrich the curriculum and enhance students' opportunities for employment and career development;
- (h) Provide public information, through Audit Reports and other documents, about the quality and academic standards of the educational provision of UGC-funded universities to assist prospective students, employers and other interested parties;
- (i) Demonstrate that the quality of education provision and academic standards are internationally comparable;
- (j) Exhibit that universities are committed to continuously improving the quality of their academic programmes, and students are well taught and well supported to ensure that they are able to achieve the expected academic standards; and
- (k) Provide independent, objective evidence of the quality of academic provision.

3.2 From its outset, quality audit has been designed to promote co-operation between universities, the QAC and Audit Panels. It has been intended that universities see it as an opportunity to reflect on their current practice and consider ways of improving what they do. The opportunity of external review has enabled universities to assess the effectiveness of strategies for quality enhancement and seek confirmation of proposed developments. The quality audit remains a process for quality improvement, beginning with a self-critical review by the university, the verifying of institutional policies and procedures through external review and the development of an action plan to address any outcomes.

3.3 However, the focus for the third audit cycle, reflecting the maturity of the UGC sector in Hong Kong, is less on description and evaluation of how the university manages academic quality and standards, and more about how it has reviewed and enhanced its approach since the last audit.

## **4. Scope of Audit**

- 4.1 For historical reasons relating to responsibility for oversight of sub-degree provision within Hong Kong, the first and second audit cycles covered only programmes at first degree and above level, while the sub-degree operations were audited in the sub-degree audit cycle. The third audit cycle will cover all programmes at the levels of sub-degree, first degree and above including programmes offered outside Hong Kong, however funded, leading to a qualification wholly or partly awarded by UGC-funded universities<sup>1</sup>.
- 4.2 While the third audit cycle specifies Audit Criteria that universities are required to address in their Self-Evaluation Reports (SERs), the methodology also identifies an Audit Theme which provides an opportunity for universities to reflect on their current policies and strategies in a selected area of development and to consider plans for future activity (see Section 8). The inclusion of the Audit Theme allows an orientation to enhancement, good practice and innovation which goes beyond the coverage of the Audit Criteria.

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<sup>1</sup> Including programmes that are aligned with Hong Kong Qualifications Framework Level 1 and above.

## **5. Audit Methodological Approach**

5.1 The audit format is designed to be proportionate and lighter touch to reflect the developing maturity of the eight UGC-funded universities while, at the same time, providing a vital safeguard to ensure the quality of educational experience of the UGC sector.

### *5.2 Fitness for Purpose*

5.2.1 In keeping with previous QAC audit cycles (see Section 2), the third audit cycle is based on a 'Fitness for Purpose' approach. It seeks to confirm that universities have procedures in place which enable them to meet their stated vision, mission and goals assuring the quality and academic standards of their academic provision.

5.2.2 Audit trail(s) (see Section 5.5) will be used by Audit Panels to investigate aspects of a university's quality assurance processes in depth, involving evidence from academic and/or student support areas. The trail(s), which may focus on a particular level of provision, or subject area, or substantive topic, allow Audit Panels to investigate the effectiveness of institutional policies and procedures in action.

### *5.3 Framework for Audit*

5.3.1 Frameworks for carrying out quality audits may take a variety of forms. In some jurisdictions, they comprise a set of external, often national or regional, reference points in the form of standards and guidelines for higher education. Alternatively, data on student outcomes may be employed to assess performance against peer institutions and/or aggregate data at a national or system level.

5.3.2 For the third audit cycle, the organising framework is captured in the Audit Criteria outlined in Section 7. The Audit Criteria will be used by universities in framing their self-evaluation and accompanying evidence, and by the Audit Panel as it conducts its analysis of the university's activities. They will also be used as the organising framework for the Audit Report.

### *5.4 Audit Methodology*

5.4.1 Previous audit cycles have adopted the Approach-Deployment-Results-Improvement (ADRI) method as a framework for assessment at institutional and programme level. It has been based on four questions:

<i>Approach</i>	What is the purpose that is being addressed?
<i>Deployment</i>	What strategies or actions are being applied to achieve that purpose?
<i>Results</i>	What evidence is there that progress is being made towards the achievement of that purpose?
<i>Improvement</i>	How is that evidence being used to inform ongoing improvements?

5.4.2 Building on the foundations of previous audit cycles, the primary focus of the third audit cycle is on the Improvement aspect of the ADRI model. The university will be expected to give accounts of the routine and special initiatives that it has undertaken in effecting enhancements to the quality of educational experience, as well as the impact of such initiatives on the quality of its provision, operations and outcomes.

5.4.3 Generally, the relevant questions that Audit Panels might raise include:

- (a) How does the university, at every level, know that its academic operations are working effectively?
- (b) How and when does the university, at every level, evaluate its academic operations?
- (c) What data is used and how?
- (d) How is the need for action and change identified and acted upon?
- (e) How is enhancement monitored?

5.4.4 Reflecting the maturity of the UGC sector, the focus will be on updating the Audit Panel with respect to how the university reviews and enhances its approach to the management of academic quality and standards to improve students' learning experience in both physical and virtual environments. While description and evidence on the existing arrangements will be inevitable, the aim should be to demonstrate how the university, from institutional to programme level, routinely evaluates the quality and standards of its provision, and acts on that evaluation to enhance academic quality.

## 5.5 *Audit Trail(s)*

5.5.1 As in the second audit cycle, Audit Panels of the third audit cycle will be able to make use of one or two audit trail(s) where the Panel considers evidence of selected quality processes in operation and seeks to review relevant documentation and discuss matters with appropriate staff and students. The size and scope of the trails will be a matter for discussion at each Initial Private Meeting of the Audit Panel, with the Audit Co-ordinator ensuring that the Panel is able to respond flexibly to the specific audit while also being guided to a consistent position.

- 5.5.2 The trails might focus on a particular level, for example, postgraduate research provision or sub-degree operations, a topic such as student integration, or a specific subject area or unit. However, while the Audit Panel's investigation may centre on an academic area, the audit trail will not take the form of a separate review of individual subject disciplines but will be used to test the effectiveness of a particular institutional policy or procedure.
- 5.5.3 The identification of any audit trails will begin during the desk-based analysis phase, when the Audit Panel is reviewing the university's SER and associated evidence. The programme for the Audit Visit and the personnel invited to meet with the Audit Panel will be influenced by the selection of the audit trail(s).
- 5.5.4 The university will be advised of the audit trail(s) selected during the Preparatory Meeting with the University and may be asked for advice on the identification of appropriate evidence or relevant staff and students for the Audit Panel to meet.

## 5.6 *Audit Theme*

- 5.6.1 The third audit cycle shall focus on quality enhancement and sector-wide improvement. The Audit Theme provides an opportunity for universities to reflect on their current policies and strategies in a selected area of development and to consider plans for future activity. Universities should include an account of their approach to the Audit Theme in their SERs. During the Audit Visit, Audit Panel Members will explore the extent to which the Theme is embedded in institutional practices and comment on plans for further strategic developments.
- 5.6.2 The purposes of the Audit Theme are to:
- (a) Support the strategic development of the UGC sector;
  - (b) Promote continuing improvement;
  - (c) Provide the opportunity for sharing between universities in the strategic development of key areas for quality enhancement; and
  - (d) Facilitate the dissemination of good practices and their wide adoption.
- 5.6.3 The selected Audit Theme for the third audit cycle is the Collection, Analysis and Usage of Data. Further information on the Audit Theme is provided in Section 8 of this Manual.

## **6. Core Aspects of Audit**

6.1 The following sections provide some background on key facets of the quality audit.

### 6.2 *Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF)*

6.2.1 The HKQF is a seven-level hierarchy of qualifications covering academic, vocational and continuing education in Hong Kong. The framework includes generic level descriptors to accommodate a wide range of qualifications and providers. Details of the HKQF can be found at <https://www.hkqf.gov.hk>.

### 6.3 *Academic Standards*

6.3.1 Each UGC-funded university is self-accrediting and responsible for setting and maintaining the academic standards of its higher education provision, and ensuring that students are provided with appropriate opportunities to achieve these standards. Academic standards are defined in terms of the expected levels of achievement of students that reflect the acquisition of knowledge, the development of capability and the exercise of intellectual skills by students. They apply across all disciplines and reflect the expectations established by universities as well as the academic requirements and competencies associated with individual courses and programmes.

6.3.2 The standards of academic awards are secured through the interaction of subject communities and through the expectations of employers and other stakeholders. In professional disciplines, the expected standards of achievement are linked to the skills and capabilities required of graduates to practise in the profession. Other academic disciplines may have a generally agreed set of curriculum content and expectations that define the nature of degree-level study.

6.3.3 The quality audit will consider the ways in which universities set and maintain their academic standards with reference to institutional mission and purpose; and the extent to which the appreciation of academic standards is applied consistently throughout the university and shared by the academic disciplines. However, the recognition and implementation of academic standards should also be developed within the context of an understanding of the standards of higher education in other, relevant institutions and in other jurisdictions. Audit Panels will be interested to see evidence of how universities are using external reference points and benchmarking to show that they are fulfilling these expectations. Examples of such reference points include:

- (a) Legislative and other regulatory requirements;
- (b) Accreditation or registration requirements of professional associations;
- (c) Requirements for graduate study in Hong Kong and elsewhere;
- (d) Current frameworks in other jurisdictions;
- (e) Benchmarking exercises with comparable institutions; and
- (f) Evidence from employers about the expectations for graduate employment.

## 6.4 *Academic Quality*

- 6.4.1 Academic quality is defined in terms of the learning experiences of students in both physical and virtual environments including all aspects of teaching and learning delivery, academic support and guidance, and the conduct of assessment. Quality focuses on the processes that enable students to achieve the academic standards that have been set for their awards. Universities have an obligation to ensure that students have the opportunity to achieve defined outcomes and the academic standards set for academic awards.
- 6.4.2 Learning opportunities include the quality of teaching and academic instruction provided by staff across different modes of delivery, the learning resources required to complete defined tasks and to support individual study, the support and guidance provided by staff to enable students to progress their studies and the opportunities more generally to participate in a vibrant, cohesive and self-critical academic community.
- 6.4.3 The quality audit looks for evidence for the promotion of learning opportunities and in particular how universities assure themselves that their academic staff are competent to deliver academic programmes across different modes of delivery, that high quality of teaching and learning is being maintained and that students are provided with all necessary resources to complete their studies effectively.
- 6.4.4 For the third audit cycle, Audit Panels will be particularly interested in how universities enhance the quality of their provision, operations and outcomes. That is, they will focus on how universities seek to routinely and systematically improve the quality of academic provision across different modes of delivery, and have policies, structures and processes in place to enable them to achieve such a goal.
- 6.4.5 Since the onset of the pandemic, the adoption of virtual teaching and learning has become more prevalent and accepted across universities. While the shift might have been precipitated by the challenges brought on by the pandemic, the implementation of virtual teaching and learning was also, on other occasions, initiated by universities seeking to enhance

learning accessibility and the overall academic experience. Regardless of the reasons behind this shift in mode of teaching and learning, it is of fundamental and paramount importance that the overall learning experience and opportunities offered virtually should not be compromised in comparison to that offered face-to-face. While there are clear distinctions between the two modes of teaching and learning, with learning experience in physical environment being more advantageous in some contexts and vice versa in others, a key to assuring academic quality is to make good use of the two complementary modes of teaching and learning and strive for enhancement in the overall learning experience against the circumstances.

## 7. Audit Criteria

7.1 In reaching conclusions about universities' assurance of academic standards and academic quality, Audit Panels will refer to the Audit Criteria listed in this Section. Universities will be expected to structure their SERs with attention to the Audit Criteria (see Section 10 for further guidance on the SER). In addition, Audit Reports will be largely structured around these Criteria.

7.2 As set out below, the Audit Criteria are designed to assist universities in drafting their SERs, and Audit Panel Members as they conduct their desk-based analysis and frame questions for meetings. The bullet points under each Audit Criterion are meant as a stimulus and guide only. It is not necessary for universities to address all of them or address each one individually.

7.3 Universities are reminded that while some description will be necessary, the focus in the third audit cycle should be on how the university reviews, evaluates and enhances its approaches to quality and standards.

7.4 It should also be noted that the quality audit is designed to cover all university provision including at different levels (for example, research postgraduate (RPg) students or sub-degree students) and programmes delivered in different modes, for instance work-based learning or provision delivered overseas. The Criteria below assume that universities will consider all relevant levels and modes of delivery.

### 7.5 **Criterion 1 – How effectively does the university review and enhance its framework for managing academic standards and academic quality?**

7.5.1 This criterion assesses the fitness for purpose of the ways in which universities review and oversee the suite of policies in place to manage academic standards and quality of the student academic experience. It therefore embraces the institutional context of university mission and strategy, academic governance, policy framework for quality and standards, and the setting of academic standards.

7.5.2 Matters to consider might include:

- (a) University mission, strategy and planning;
- (b) Academic governance and management at university, faculty, and programme level;
- (c) Strategies for monitoring performance;
- (d) The policy framework supporting quality assurance and promoting quality enhancement;
- (e) Setting and maintaining of academic standards, including through benchmarking with Hong Kong institutions and professions, and international norms; and
- (f) Policy and procedures for student admission.

**7.6 Criterion 2 – How effectively does the university review and enhance its arrangements for programme development and approval, monitoring and review?**

7.6.1 This criterion considers the means by which universities review and improve key quality assurance phases from initial programme design, development and approval, through regular monitoring across various levels, through to periodic review of academic provision.

7.6.2 Matters to consider might include:

- (a) Policies and procedures on curriculum design, programme development and approval, programme monitoring and periodic review;
- (b) Portfolio development;
- (c) Programme and course learning outcomes in curriculum design, including student assessment;
- (d) Employment of external regulatory reference points and international benchmarks and expertise in programme design and approval, monitoring and review;
- (e) Utilisation of data sources in programme design and approval, monitoring and review; and
- (f) Evidence of improvement emerging from monitoring and review.

**7.7 Criterion 3 – How effectively does the university review and enhance teaching and learning?**

7.7.1 This criterion assesses the means by which universities support the provision of effective, high-quality learning opportunities for all students. It applies to any learning opportunity, physical or virtual, that leads to the award of a sub-degree or above qualification or academic credit. Audit Panels will be interested in considering the extent to which teaching and learning enables students' achievement to be reliably evaluated through assessment, calibrated to relevant reference points.

7.7.2 Matters to consider might include:

- (a) Policies for physical and digital teaching and learning, including e-learning, as well as the complementarity of the two modes of teaching and learning in ensuring academic quality;
- (b) Policies and procedures for appointment, induction, development and recognition of teaching and relevant support staff;
- (c) Staff external engagement in relevant spheres;
- (d) Leadership and management development;

- (e) Quality and review of learning environments and resources, physical and virtual; and
- (f) Evaluation of teaching quality and research supervision in both physical and virtual environments, and relation to strategic development.

**7.8 Criterion 4 – How effectively does the university review and enhance student learning assessment?**

7.8.1 This criterion evaluates assessment activities both in terms of their role in the student learning experience across different modes of delivery, for example, as a source of feedback, but also in determining whether students have achieved programme learning outcomes and in judging and maintaining academic standards. Audit Panels will be interested in considering whether assessment processes, standards and any other criteria in both physical and virtual environments are applied consistently and equitably, with reliability, validity, security, and fairness, but also in how universities review and improve assessment.

7.8.2 Matters to consider might include:

- (a) Assessment policy and procedures;
- (b) Assessment design in both physical and virtual environments, including relationship to intended learning outcomes, academic standards and approach to CRA;
- (c) Assessment regulations and procedures, for example, with reference to examination boards, marking and moderation, digital security, and academic misconduct (in both physical and virtual environments);
- (d) Effectiveness of communications to students about intended learning outcomes, assessment tasks and criteria, and relevant assessment policies;
- (e) Policy and arrangements for providing feedback to students on assessment; and
- (f) Benchmarking assessment practice and outcomes against those in other institutions, regions and jurisdictions.

**7.9 Criterion 5 – How effectively does the university review and enhance its arrangement for supporting students?**

7.9.1 This criterion addresses how effectively universities support the academic, professional and personal development of students in both physical and virtual environments. It considers a number of areas across the student journey, from admission through to future employment or further study.

7.9.2 Matters to consider might include:

- (a) Student induction and progression;
- (b) Students' personal, academic and professional development, for example, graduate attributes and co- and extra-curricular activities;
- (c) Student support policy and services, such as academic skill development, language enhancement, career planning advice, promotion of employability, personal support, special educational needs support;
- (d) Student integration, including support for non-local students;
- (e) Student engagement and participation in governance; and
- (f) Policy on information for students and student feedback.

## 8. Audit Theme

8.1 The Audit Theme is intended to support the strategic development of key areas for quality enhancement and allow for the dissemination of current good practice. The use of Audit Theme allows universities to assess their practice in relevant areas of development and provide an opportunity for the sharing of experience between universities.

8.2 The Section below indicates areas that might be covered by universities in addressing the third audit cycle's Audit Theme, namely, the Collection, Analysis and Usage of Data, and the possible sources of evidence to demonstrate how universities have addressed the Theme, or precisely how they are planning to address it in the future.

### 8.3 *Audit Theme: Collection, Analysis and Usage of Data*

8.3.1 Across the global higher education sector, it is evident that both government agencies and higher education institutions are collecting a huge amount of data. The aim has been to identify effective data strategies which not only concern the systematic collection of data, but also the rigorous analysis and proactive usage of such data to enhance decision making and planning in higher education. The meaningful use of quality data may inform curriculum design and contribute to approaches to teaching and learning, as well as bring about potential benefits to students in terms of recruitment, retention, completion and employment.

8.3.2 Accordingly, Audit Panels will be interested in how universities collect, analyse and use data in their management of academic quality and standards, and make evidence-based decisions designed to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Evidence which might help universities to demonstrate how they analyse and harness data includes:

- (a) How the university creates and embeds data strategies, policies and implementation plans;
- (b) Use of data in developing and reviewing strategic plans and other strategies, for example, teaching and learning, employability, research;
- (c) Development, monitoring and review of academic KPIs;
- (d) Selection and use of internal and external (regional and international) benchmark data and external reference points in decision-making;
- (e) Information about policy and strategy for management information systems;
- (f) Utilisation of data to enhance course design, assessment, teaching provision and the student academic experience;
- (g) Monitoring and improvement of student achievement using data on recruitment, retention, achievement of intended learning outcomes, completion and employment;

- (h) Student and graduate survey data, their analysis and strategic and practical outcomes;
- (i) Gathering, analysing and responding to data on the student experience of learning at programme levels and across different modes of delivery;
- (j) Utilisation of data in monitoring and improving the performance of programmes, faculties and the university over time; and
- (k) Evidence of a systematic, comprehensive data-driven approach to enhancement.

## **9. Audit Panels**

### *9.1 Auditors*

- 9.1.1 An Audit Panel consists of four members drawn from the QAC's Register of Auditors (the Register), accompanied by an Audit Co-ordinator. The Panel has two local members with a background in the Hong Kong higher education system and two non-local members. One of the non-local members will be appointed as Panel Chair to preside over the Panel's activities with a degree of detachment from the UGC-funded universities. The QAC may appoint lay members to Audit Panels where it is deemed appropriate.
- 9.1.2 The Register includes senior staff or recent retirees from the higher education institutions in Hong Kong who have extensive experience of managing academic programmes and institutional level responsibilities for the quality of teaching and learning. They are generally peers who have the responsibility for overseeing the academic standards of awards and the quality of the learning opportunities in their own institution and hence are in a position to make judgments about arrangements in the university being audited. Recent retirees retain currency for the conduct of audits for a period of up to five years after leaving their positions.
- 9.1.3 The Register also includes non-local auditors with extensive and senior experience of quality and academic standards either from an institutional background or through working for a quality assurance agency or similar organisation. Non-local auditors bring an additional dimension to the Audit Panel and allow for comparison of practice and academic standards in the UGC-funded universities with comparable institutions in other jurisdictions.
- 9.1.4 The selection of Audit Panel Members will be carried out by the QAC approximately nine months before the Audit Visit. The university will be informed of the proposed membership and it may report any concerns about conflicts of interest or compatibility to the QAC. Although every effort will be made to try and ensure that the Audit Panel is appropriate for the university being audited, the final decision about Panel membership rests with the QAC.
- 9.1.5 In preparation for the audit programme, all selected Audit Panel Members will attend a preparation and briefing event either in Hong Kong or virtually to ensure that they are fully familiar with the current arrangements for QAC audit. They will be provided with a copy of this Audit Manual and additional briefing notes prior to receiving the SER and appended materials specific to an audit.

9.1.6 Audit meetings, whether face-to-face or virtual, provide an opportunity for an informed dialogue between the Audit Panel and representatives from the university. Each meeting will have an agenda and all Panel Members will be involved in asking relevant questions. The purpose of the meetings is to allow the Panel to assess the claims made in the SER and explore in greater depth any issues that emerge from their assessment of the evidence base. Meetings should in general involve no more than 10 representatives from the university.

## 9.2 *Audit Co-ordinators*

9.2.1 The QAC also will appoint two Audit Co-ordinators, one of whom will be responsible for the management and organisation of each individual audit. They will ensure that the audit is conducted in accordance with published guidance and be responsible for ensuring comparability and consistency across different Audit Panels, including through systematic moderation of reports and outcomes. In addition to managing each audit programme, the Audit Co-ordinator will devise the preparation workshop for auditors, record notes from meetings of the audit, liaise with the university, assess the Panel's findings against the Audit Criteria, co-ordinate the preparation of Audit Report based on contributions from members of the Audit Panel and present the Report to the QAC and, ultimately, the UGC.

9.2.2 The Audit Co-ordinators are not members of any Audit Panels. They will not contribute to the judgments of the Audit Panels, and do not share the collective responsibility for the findings of the audits.

9.2.3 See **Appendices A and B** for further information on Audit Panels, Audit Co-ordinators and management of conflict of interest.

## 10. Description of Process

### 10.1 *Preliminary QAC Activities*

10.1.1 The initial contact about the arrangements for the audit will come from the QAC. A letter will be sent by the Audit Co-ordinator outlining the proposed dates for the Preparatory Meeting with the University and the Audit Visit, as well as the mode for the pre-Audit activities, together with dates for the return of the SER, the core information and accompanying evidence, and the timescale for the publication of the Audit Report. An indicative timeline for the audit process is included as **Appendix D**.

10.1.2 At this stage the Audit Co-ordinator may ask for information about the university's recent developments and strategic priorities, and may ask for an update on off-campus and other relevant partnership activities.

10.1.3 Universities will also be asked to nominate Institutional Representative(s), including an appropriate member of staff, to act as the principal liaison for the audit programme. The QAC will organise suitable training for Institutional Representatives.

### 10.2 *Preliminary Preparations by the University*

10.2.1 In the 12 months leading up to the Audit Visit, the university will be expected to develop its SER and accompanying evidence, as set out in Section 10.3.

### 10.3 *Self-Evaluation Report (SER)*

10.3.1 The focal point for the audit is the production of a SER which forms the principal source of information submitted to the QAC and considered by the Audit Panel. The SER should comprise a critical self-review by the university of its current arrangements for the review and enhancement of academic quality and standards and an assessment of their effectiveness. The self-review should be based on evidence from the university's established quality systems. It needs to be self-critical and comprehensive, identifying the areas where a university does well and also those areas where there is scope for further development. It should focus on how universities review their arrangements to ensure that they remain fit for purpose and are continuously improved. The aim should be evaluation rather than description.

10.3.2 The Audit Panel will also be interested in how the university makes use of external reference points including benchmark data, for example,

against similar programmes and institutions, data on graduate success, employment rates, and employer satisfaction survey data. Universities will be expected to indicate how they make use of the PMs and KPIs provided for the UAA (see Section 1.2.5).

10.3.3 The SER should address each of the Audit Criteria set out in Section 7, and the Audit Theme described in Section 8. The SER should also indicate how effectively the policies, processes and structures relate to all types of provision including sub-degree, undergraduate, taught postgraduate (TPg) and RPg which are delivered physically or online. Further information on the necessary contents of the SER is provided below.

10.3.4 The production of the SER should be an inclusive process, embracing the views of various stakeholders including current and former students, senior management, teaching and support staff, and external representatives such as employers and professional bodies.

#### 10.3.5 *Indicative structure of the SER*

The SER should adhere to the following structure which will also be used in compiling the Audit Report. See Sections 7 and 8 of this Manual for further information on the Audit Criteria and the Audit Theme, respectively.

(a) **Introduction** – to include:

- (i) Factual information about the university, including history, mission, strategic aims, number and location of campuses;
- (ii) Key student and staff data, including the number of students by level of study, number of academic staff and support staff, and origins of students;
- (iii) List of programmes at the levels of sub-degree, first degree and above;
- (iv) Key institutional changes and developments of which the Audit Panel should be aware, including with respect to how any outcomes of the second audit cycle (and sub-degree audit cycle, if applicable) have been addressed since production of the Progress Report(s) as well as the impact of wider local and global circumstances;
- (v) Organisational structure (principal governance arrangements and academic faculties and departments); and
- (vi) A brief summary explanation of how the university's SER was conducted.

- (b) **Criterion 1** – How effectively does the university review and enhance its framework for managing academic standards and academic quality?
- (c) **Criterion 2** – How effectively does the university review and enhance its arrangements for programme development and approval, monitoring and review?
- (d) **Criterion 3** – How effectively does the university review and enhance teaching and learning?
- (e) **Criterion 4** – How effectively does the university review and enhance student learning assessment?
- (f) **Criterion 5** – How effectively does the university review and enhance its arrangement for supporting students?
- (g) **Audit Theme** – Collection, Analysis and Usage of Data.
- (h) **Index** of references and core information.

10.3.6 The SER itself should not exceed 12 000 words, excluding any relevant statistical appendices, charts and diagrams. Throughout the SER, appropriate reference should be made to relevant, extant institutional or external evidence all of which must be made available to the Audit Panel. The SER and other audit materials should be written in English, or an English translation should be provided for any materials written in other languages. Details of the format required for audit materials are included in Section 10.4.

10.3.7 The form of referencing (for example, footnotes or Harvard system) may be chosen by the university as long as it is used consistently and makes clear to Audit Panel Members where the information can be accessed. If hyperlinks are used, care will be needed to ensure copies of those documents are included in the online folder of audit materials made available to the Audit Panel (see Section 10.4).

## 10.4 *Information Requirements*

10.4.1 Audit is an evidence-based process and it is necessary to ensure that the Audit Panel has access to all the information that is required to fully assess the various issues under review. With the exception of the SER (see Section 10.3), the documents required for audit should already be available within the university, or from the UGC. It should not be necessary for universities to prepare documents specifically for the Audit Panel.

## 10.4.2 *Format of audit materials*

- 10.4.2.1 Universities should create a secure folder of audit information on their intranet (or other locations accessible through the Internet) and ensure that it is password protected. Members of the Audit Panel should be provided with passwords to enable them to access the materials in the secure folder. The Panel Members shall be able to download the entire collection of materials to their own devices. In addition, USB flash drives containing the materials should be provided to the QAC Secretariat for distribution to individual members of the Audit Panel as backup.
- 10.4.2.2 If hyperlinks are provided to referenced evidence in the SER, care will need to be taken to ensure these links work as intended. If the university wishes to direct Panel Members to live sites (*i.e.* outside of the secure folder), it will be important to ensure the Panel Members' passwords allow access to those sites.

## 10.4.3 *Core information*

- 10.4.3.1 The core information includes key documentation required from all universities to support the audit programme. These documents are in addition to the SER and should be made available to the Audit Panel at the same time as the SER is submitted. They should include:
- (a) The university quality manual (or equivalent document(s)) – this is likely to include information about:
    - (i) Policies and procedures for quality assurance;
    - (ii) Arrangements for the approval, monitoring and periodic review of academic programmes;
    - (iii) Regulations for the assessment of students;
    - (iv) Arrangements for assuring the quality of teaching; and
    - (v) Procedures for assessing the availability and adequacy of learning resources.
  - (b) Academic Regulations;
  - (c) University Strategic Plan;
  - (d) Most recent progress report on the implementation of the UAA, including the latest set of PMs and KPIs;
  - (e) Teaching and learning strategy (or equivalent document(s));
  - (f) Governance and organisational structure;

- (g) Committee structure and reporting lines;
- (h) The most recent institutional annual report;
- (i) Outcomes of the most recent surveys of student satisfaction and/or student exit; and
- (j) Outcomes of accreditation activity conducted by professional associations.

10.4.3.2 In addition, the Audit Panel will also have an interest in the information that universities publish about themselves to ensure that it is accurate, current, and of value to students and other stakeholders. This will include:

- (a) The university website; and
- (b) University prospectuses for undergraduate and postgraduate provision.

#### 10.4.4 *Additional documentation*

10.4.4.1 Universities may be asked to provide supplementary information at a number of points during the audit process. Additional materials may be requested by the Audit Panel:

- (a) After Panel Members have perused the SER and referenced evidence;
- (b) After the Initial Private Meeting of the Audit Panel (including for the audit trail(s)); and / or
- (c) Where necessary, during the Audit Visit.

10.4.4.2 For the benefit of both the university and the Panel Members themselves, the Audit Co-ordinator will aim to limit late requests for additional information.

10.4.4.3 All Panel Members' requests for additional information and the provision of the requested material to Panel Members must occur through the Audit Co-ordinator.

#### 10.5 *Preparatory Meeting with the University*

10.5.1 Eight weeks before the Audit Visit, the Audit Panel will hold its Initial Private Meeting which will take a full day, or an equivalent if the meeting is held virtually. It will involve a programme of training for the Panel Members. The meeting will also identify lines of enquiry from the SER and the evidence base, any audit trail(s) that will be explored, additional documentation requirements, participants for meetings, and the overall audit timeline. Outcomes and any queries arising will be covered at the Preparatory Meeting with the University (see below).

- 10.5.2 Usually one day after the Initial Private Meeting, the Preparatory Meeting with the University will be held either at the university or online. It will involve the Audit Co-ordinator, the Panel Chair and the QAC Secretariat representatives meeting with the university's Institutional Representative(s) and any other key staff involved in preparations. It is expected that the meeting will take a half day, or equivalent if the meeting is held virtually.
- 10.5.3 The purposes of the Preparatory Meeting with the University are to enable the university to provide the Audit Panel and the QAC with any information relevant to the Audit Visit; the Audit Co-ordinator to address any queries; and for both parties to confirm the arrangements for the Audit Visit. The Audit Co-ordinator will supply an agenda one week prior to the Preparatory Meeting with the University.
- 10.5.4 Following the Preparatory Meeting with the University, the Audit Co-ordinator will write to the university to provide the following information:
- (a) The draft programme for the Audit Visit identifying the number of meetings and their duration;
  - (b) A provisional list of the staff and students that the Audit Panel would like to meet at each meeting;
  - (c) Details of any further information requested by the Audit Panel; and
  - (d) Specific details of audit trail(s) identified, if any, and the reasons for their selection.

## 10.6 *Audit Visit*

- 10.6.1 The purpose of the Audit Visit, which may be held at the university or virtually, is to provide the Audit Panel with the opportunity to meet with staff, students and other stakeholders to discuss the matters identified in the SER and explore any selected lines of enquiry. The Audit Panel may wish to clarify its understanding of the institutional practices or seek varying perspectives on the operation of the institutional policies from different levels within the university. Audit Panel Members will also have a particular interest in the learning experience of students and how the university responds to their needs and expectations. Where evidence is already available from the SER or the supporting documentation, it will not be necessary for issues to be explored further in meetings.

10.6.2 The Audit Visit normally lasts three days and involves a maximum of 10 meetings with various representative groups if held at the university or an equivalent time over a longer period if held online. The Audit Panel is likely to meet:

- (a) The Head of University and other senior staff;
- (b) Staff with responsibility for the management of teaching and learning quality;
- (c) Staff with involvement in policies relating to the Audit Theme;
- (d) Academic managers such as faculty deans and heads of departments;
- (e) A range of teaching staff, both full- and part-time, from different academic disciplines, levels and length of service;
- (f) Academic support staff;
- (g) A representative range of students, both full- and part-time, from different academic disciplines, including sub-degree, undergraduate, TPg and RPg students; and
- (h) Other interested parties including employers, recent graduates and representatives of professional associations.

10.6.3 Considering the paramount importance of preserving consistency of the third audit cycle across eight universities, it is envisaged that once the first Audit Visit is conducted virtually, the remaining audits would likewise be conducted virtually notwithstanding changing circumstances. Similarly, if it is decided that the first Audit Visit is to be conducted face-to-face, such an arrangement would be followed for subsequent audits as far as practicable. Only in exceptional circumstances where it is no longer practicable to conduct face-to-face audit meetings, would the QAC consider the need to switch the conduct of audit meetings to virtual mode.

10.6.4 Meetings normally last for no more than one hour, with sufficient time before the meeting for the Audit Panel to make preparation and time afterwards to reflect on the discussion and record key points. The Audit Panel prepares an agenda for each meeting and agrees the management of questions. The Panel Chair may outline the topics to be discussed at the beginning of each meeting. Where there are specific topics or lines of enquiry that the Audit Panel wishes to explore in a particular meeting, the Audit Co-ordinator alerts the Institutional Representative(s) to ensure that the Panel is provided with the information requested. One or more staff members of the QAC Secretariat may be present as observer(s) during the Audit Visits to ensure the Panels' conclusions are fair and evidence-based. As government staff, they are bound by policies regarding non-disclosure and conflict of interest.

- 10.6.5 A final meeting with relevant senior staff is conducted to ensure that the Audit Panel has gathered all the information needed and to test any emerging conclusions about key issues. No indication of the overall outcomes or likely findings will be conveyed to the university at this stage. These will follow in a formal letter once the Panel has had the opportunity to reflect on its conclusions and test the judgments against the evidence assessed (see below).
- 10.6.6 The Audit Panel meets with the Audit Co-ordinator (physically or virtually) on the day following the conclusion of the Audit Visit to agree and confirm the principal findings of the audit. The main issues to be covered in the Audit Report and the evidence base to support the judgments will be discussed and tested at this meeting.
- 10.6.7 Indicative Audit Visit programmes for both physical and virtual audits are provided at **Appendix E**.
- 10.6.8 Guidance for all participants in virtual meetings in quality audits, both Audit Panel Members and university representatives attending online audit meetings is provided at **Appendix F**.

## 10.7 *Initial Reporting*

- 10.7.1 Two weeks after the Audit Visit, a letter of principal findings is provided to the Head of University. This letter is prepared by the Audit Co-ordinator, with input from the Chair and Members of the Audit Panel. The letter outlines the principal findings of the audit and provides a timeline for the publication of the final Audit Report.

## 10.8 *Audit Report*

- 10.8.1 The Audit Report provides a commentary on the university's management of the quality and academic standards of its higher education awards, at the levels of sub-degree, first degree and above, and presents the findings of the Audit Panel on the lines of enquiry against the Audit Criteria and the discussion of the Audit Theme. It is intended to provide feedback to the university to assist in the process of quality improvement as well as public information about the confidence that can be placed in the UGC sector.
- 10.8.2 The production of the Audit Report is the responsibility of the Audit Panel, facilitated and supported by the Audit Co-ordinator. It represents the judgments of the Audit Panel as a whole, and the Panel takes collective responsibility for the audit findings. Typically, Members of the Audit Panel share the responsibility of producing a draft of specific chapters, with the Audit Co-ordinator ensuring overall consistency and

a uniform writing style. The Audit Report is a QAC publication and the QAC has ownership of the text.

10.8.3 An Audit Report includes:

- (a) An Executive Summary;
- (b) An explanation of the audit methodology;
- (c) An introduction to the university and its role and mission;
- (d) An assessment of the fitness for purpose of the university's framework for managing academic standards and academic quality;
- (e) An evaluation of the university's approach to programme development and approval, monitoring and review;
- (f) An evaluation of the university's approach to teaching and learning;
- (g) An analysis of the university's approach to student learning assessment;
- (h) An assessment of the university's arrangements for supporting students;
- (i) A commentary on the Audit Theme; and
- (j) Conclusions about the overall outcomes of the audit.

10.8.4 In the course of its findings, the Audit Panel has the discretion to identify Recommended Actions, which are matters that necessitate further responses or actions by the university. Recommended Actions will be drafted to make clear to universities both the significance of the points identified and, if appropriate, the speed with which they should respond. The Audit Panel will also be able to make suggestions to universities on issues of less severity and it will be up to the universities to decide whether to act upon the suggestions.

10.8.5 The Audit Panel may also identify Features of Good Practice, which are matters that the Panel regards as making a particularly positive contribution to the university's management of academic standards and/or academic quality, and which are worthy of wider dissemination within and/or beyond the university.

10.8.6 A draft Audit Report will be provided to the university six weeks after the Audit Visit, with an invitation to comment in writing on any factual errors or misinterpretations. The Audit Co-ordinator and/or the Panel Chair may meet (face to face or virtually) with the university, on behalf of the Audit Panel, if any issues within the draft Report need to be clarified.

10.8.7 After this feedback is considered, a final version of the Audit Report will be produced by the Audit Co-ordinator, with the assistance of the Audit Panel. This final Audit Report will be sent to the university, with an

invitation to provide a written response (the ‘Institutional Response’) of maximum two pages which will be appended to the Audit Report.

10.8.8 The Audit Report and Institutional Response will be submitted to the QAC and the UGC. The Audit Report will then be published in both English and Chinese, in full, on the QAC website. Universities shall also make their Reports available on their own websites.

## 10.9 *Audit Follow-up*

10.9.1 If the UGC/QAC considers that any issues require immediate attention, the UGC/QAC may request the university to expedite an action and provide evidence of its early completion. Generally, however, within three months of the publication of the Audit Report, the university is requested to submit to the QAC an Action Plan to address the outcomes of the audit, including with reference to the Recommended Actions. It should also specify any proposed developments with the dissemination of the Features of Good Practice. The university should provide an explanation if no actions have been taken to address specific audit findings.

10.9.2 The Action Plan should be specific and measurable, and include information about those who will have responsibility for ensuring that actions are completed. It should also include a timeline for implementation. The university should confirm in its Action Plan that it has given due consideration to the outcomes of the audit programme and has instigated all necessary changes. Effective Action Plans are likely to be built-in to the university’s established procedures for reviewing progress and implementing academic developments. A template for the Action Plan is included at **Appendix G**.

10.9.3 The Action Plan forms the basis of the university’s Progress Report which should be submitted for consideration by the QAC within 18 months of the publication of the Audit Report. The Progress Report should include clear evidence about how the university has implemented its Action Plan, including the groups or individuals responsible for taking forward key areas of development and the dates by which these actions have been, or will be, completed. Wherever possible, universities should ensure that actions will have been completed prior to the preparation of the Progress Report (see below) so that impact can be assessed. It should also include information about how the university is assessing the effectiveness of these planned changes over time. Progress Reports may also cover any other related strategic and academic developments that have occurred since the audit. If progress has not met the expectations outlined in the Action Plan, an explanation and revised timeline should be submitted to the QAC.

- 10.9.4 The Progress Report is evaluated by the QAC and, if appropriate, comments are sent to the university. The QAC may ask for further information from the university and may consult with the Audit Co-ordinator and Panel Chair. The Progress Reports are published in both English and Chinese on the QAC website.
- 10.9.5 In the next audit cycle, the Action Plan and Progress Report will be made available to the new Audit Panel as part of the materials the QAC provides as background for the audit.

## **Appendix A**

### *Roles and Responsibilities of Audit Panel Members and Audit Co-ordinator*

#### **Audit Panel Members**

Audit Panel Members are selected on the basis of their expertise and experience in higher education. Experience at a senior institutional level with higher education quality assurance is an important consideration. A background in management of higher education is a desirable strength.

Audit Panel Members will receive written briefing materials in preparation for the audit and will participate in a briefing session provided by the QAC and led by the Audit Co-ordinator(s). The briefing session will include information on the audit methodology and current approaches to higher education provision in Hong Kong. Local members of the Audit Panel will be able to make a valuable contribution in helping non-local members better understand the Hong Kong higher education context.

#### **Principal Expectations of Audit Panel Members include:**

- (a) Thorough reading of materials on audit procedures provided by the QAC;
- (b) Thorough reading of audit materials submitted by the university;
- (c) A commitment to analysing information on the university in terms of the specifics of the Audit Manual and in the Hong Kong higher education context;
- (d) Utilising their expertise to make sound judgments about the university;
- (e) A commitment to showing respect to all those involved in the audit process, including fellow Members of the Audit Panel, staff and students in the university and staff of the QAC Secretariat;
- (f) Utilising their communication skills in focused questioning during meetings, in discussions with other Panel Members, and in producing written drafts of assigned sections of the Audit Report;
- (g) Demonstrating good teamwork in terms of responding to requests in a timely manner, and sharing responsibility for collective judgments; and
- (h) A commitment to respecting the confidentiality of the audit process.

#### **Audit Panel Chair**

The Audit Panel Chair is selected on the basis of his/her expertise in leadership in higher education, with extensive experience of quality assurance in universities. The Chair will need to have well-honed leadership skills in order to help the Panel reach consensus, and to act as the spokesperson for the Panel on all matters. In addition to the expectations of Audit Panel Members listed above, the Chair should meet the expectations detailed below.

### **Principal Expectations of the Audit Panel Chair include:**

- (a) Liaising with the Audit Co-ordinator in all phases of the audit process;
- (b) A commitment to ensuring that the Audit Panel conducts itself in a manner that upholds the values and reputation of the QAC/UGC;
- (c) Taking active leadership of meetings of the Audit Panel, to ensure all Members participate fully, and that necessary tasks are well understood and completed in a timely manner;
- (d) Ensuring that questions asked at meetings during the Audit Visit are relevant to the topic being pursued, and that the meetings remain on schedule;
- (e) Leading the Audit Panel towards consensus by brokering agreement, where necessary;
- (f) Communicating respectfully and clearly with university staff and students during audit meetings;
- (g) Working closely with the Audit Co-ordinator as documents and reports are being produced; and
- (h) Contributing to relevant discussion of the audit findings, and following up the relevant documents and reports at meetings of the QAC including providing comments on the university's Action Plan and Progress Report.

### **Audit Co-ordinator**

The role of the Audit Co-ordinator is to guide the Audit Panel and the university through all stages of the audit, ensuring that approved procedures are followed consistently. The Audit Co-ordinator is responsible for the logistics of the audit programme including liaising with the university (*via* the Institutional Representative(s)), confirming the programmes for the Preparatory Meeting with the University and the Audit Visit, keeping a record of all discussions and drafting the Audit Report. The Audit Co-ordinator will accompany Audit Panels throughout the visits to universities, whether physical or virtual. The Audit Co-ordinators will also present drafts of Audit Reports to the QAC and the UGC.

The Audit Co-ordinator also has a role to advise and guide the Audit Panel in its deliberations to ensure that judgments are securely based on evidence available and that each audit is conducted in a consistent manner. However, the Audit Co-ordinator is not a Member of the Audit Panel and does not share the Panel's responsibility for the collective findings of the audit.

It is expected that for the third audit cycle, the eight audits will be managed by two Audit Co-ordinators.

## **Appendix B**

### *Conflict of Interest*

To avoid perceptions of bias, and to ensure the integrity of the audit system, it is essential that conflicts of interest be avoided. The QAC requires auditors to declare any matters that could lead to a conflict of interest in being appointed to a particular Audit Panel, and universities are given the opportunity to object to a particular appointed auditor if they consider there may be a conflict of interest.

Circumstances in which a conflict of interest may exist or be perceived include, but are not limited to, the following:

- (a) The auditor is an employee of the university to be audited, or has been an employee within the last three years.
- (b) Any close relative of the auditor is an employee of the university.
- (c) The auditor is a failed applicant within the last three years, a current applicant or a prospect for a position at the university.
- (d) The auditor is a senior advisor or consultant to the university, or has/had been in the last three years.
- (e) The auditor, or any close relative, is a student at the university.
- (f) The auditor is a graduate of the university within the last three years.
- (g) There is kinship, close friendship or animosity between the auditor and any senior manager in the university.
- (h) The auditor is antipathetic to the mission, goals or ethos of the university.

Being an employee of another university in Hong Kong is not in itself regarded as a conflict of interest.

Auditors are asked to declare before appointment to a particular Audit Panel whether there are any circumstances, including but not limited to those above, which could lead to a conflict of interest. Similarly, universities are asked before an Audit Panel is finalised whether they object to any potential member of the Audit Panel on grounds of perceived conflict of interest or for any other material reason. The decision on appointment is made by the QAC after considering the information provided by the auditors and any objections raised by the university.

During the audits, Audit Panel Members should also avoid any situations that may lead to or involve a conflict of interest (actual or potential).

The Audit Co-ordinator is subject to the same policy and procedures on conflict of interest as Members of the Audit Panel.

## **Appendix C**

### *Privacy and Disclosure of Information*

An effective audit requires access to a considerable amount of information, some of which may be sensitive or confidential. The QAC has therefore developed policies and procedures to safeguard such information. Universities and their staff can be assured that confidential information disclosed during an audit will not be publicly released or used in an inappropriate manner.

The QAC's policy on privacy and disclosure of information is as follows:

- (a) Information provided by a university is used only for the purpose of audit.
- (b) Information marked by a university as confidential is not disclosed by the QAC or by individual Audit Panel Members, though it may be used to inform audit findings.
- (c) Staff, students or other stakeholders who are invited to provide information may elect to do so in confidence, in which case the information is treated in the same way as confidential information provided by the university.
- (d) Audit interviews are confidential in the sense that the Audit Panel does not reveal outside a session what is said by any individual, nor are individuals identified in the Audit Report. The university is encouraged to require the same degree of confidentiality from interviewees.
- (e) The QAC and Audit Panel Members must keep confidential information in a secure fashion.
- (f) Audit Panel Members are required to destroy materials relating to an audit, including the SER and any notes or annotations they have made, once an audit is completed.
- (g) Audit Panel Members make no media or other public comment on audits in which they participate. The only persons authorised to comment on an individual audit are the Secretaries and Chairmen of the QAC and the UGC.
- (h) The auditors (on appointment to an Audit Panel) sign a confidentiality agreement which binds them to follow the QAC procedures.

## Appendix D

### *Indicative Timeline for Audit*

<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>QAC</b>	<b>University</b>
12 months before the Audit Visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Confirm the dates for the Preparatory Meeting with the University and the Audit Visit.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Develop the SER and accompanying evidence.</li> <li>◆ Nominate Institutional Representative(s).</li> </ul>
9 months before the Audit Visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Select Audit Panel Chair and Members.</li> <li>◆ Check for conflict of interest with the university.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Develop the SER and accompanying evidence.</li> </ul>
Starting 4 months before the Audit Visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Audit Co-ordinator discusses logistical arrangements with the university, including arrangements for the Preparatory Meeting with the University.</li> <li>◆ Audit Panel reviews the SER and the supporting materials.</li> <li>◆ Audit Panel identifies issues requiring supplementary information.</li> <li>◆ Audit Panel begins consideration of potential audit trail(s).</li> <li>◆ Audit Panel's request for supplementary information forwarded to the university.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Provide the SER to the QAC, including supporting materials, and information on electronic access.</li> <li>◆ Submit supplementary materials as requested by Audit Panel.</li> </ul>
8 weeks before the Audit Visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Audit Co-ordinator confirms the logistical arrangements for the Audit Visit.</li> <li>◆ Audit Panel holds Initial Private Meeting to discuss key issues, further information to be requested, identify audit trail(s) and finalise schedule for the Audit Visit.</li> <li>◆ Audit Co-ordinator and Audit Panel Chair hold a Preparatory Meeting with the Institutional Representative(s) of the University, either at the university or virtually, to discuss arrangements for the Audit Visit and to address any queries for the university and/or the Audit Panel.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Institutional Representative(s) contributes to Preparatory Meeting with the University to be held at the university.</li> <li>◆ University responds to queries and advises on audit trail(s), documentation requests and participants in meetings, as necessary.</li> </ul>

<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>QAC</b>	<b>University</b>
2 - 3 weeks before the Audit Visit	◆ Audit Co-ordinator confirms the audit programme and outlines the agenda for each meeting.	◆ Submit information for audit trail(s) and the further information as requested by the Audit Panel.
Audit Visit occurs	-	-
1 day after the Audit Visit	◆ Audit Co-ordinator and Audit Panel confirm principal findings of the audit.	-
2 weeks after the Audit Visit	◆ Audit Co-ordinator issues a letter on principal findings to the university.	-
2-6 weeks after the Audit Visit	◆ Audit Panel Members draft sections of the Audit Report for editing by the Audit Co-ordinator.	-
6 weeks after the Audit Visit	◆ Audit Co-ordinator submits draft Audit Report to the university for correction of factual errors.	◆ Submit written comments on any factual errors and misinterpretations.
12 weeks after the Audit Visit	◆ The final Audit Report is provided to the university.	-
14 weeks after the Audit Visit	-	◆ Provide the Institutional Response for inclusion in the Audit Report to be published.
QAC and UGC meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ The QAC and the UGC review audit findings and raise any concerns with the university.</li> <li>◆ Audit Co-ordinator (and/or Audit Panel Chair, if necessary) joins the QAC discussion.</li> <li>◆ The Audit Report is published upon the QAC's endorsement.</li> </ul>	-
3 months after publication of Audit Report	-	◆ Submit the Action Plan to the QAC.
QAC meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ The QAC reviews the Action Plan and raises any matters of concern.</li> <li>◆ Audit Panel Chair and/or Audit Co-ordinator may be consulted on the Action Plan.</li> </ul>	-

<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>QAC</b>	<b>University</b>
18 months after the publication of Audit Report	-	◆ Submit the Progress Report to the QAC.
QAC and UGC meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ The QAC reviews the Progress Report and raise any matters of concern.</li> <li>◆ Audit Panel Chair and/or Audit Co-ordinator may be consulted on the Progress Report.</li> <li>◆ The Progress Report is published upon the QAC's endorsement.</li> </ul>	◆ Provide response to the QAC if any issues of concern have been raised.

## Appendix E

### *Indicative Programmes for Physical and Virtual Audit Visits*

#### (a) Indicative Programme for Physical Audit Visit

<b>Day 1</b>	<b>Participants and Focus</b>	<b>Duration</b>
<b>Meeting No.</b>		
1	Meeting with the Head of University and relevant senior staff including those responsible for the SER	60 mins
2	Meeting with a representative group of students on taught programmes	60 mins
3	Lunch and private meeting of the Audit Panel	60 mins
4	Meeting with a representative group of RPg students	45 mins
5	Meeting with group of academic managers (heads of departments/deans)	60 mins

<b>Day 2</b>	<b>Participants and Focus</b>	<b>Duration</b>
<b>Meeting No.</b>		
1	Meeting with teaching staff including programme leaders	60 mins
2	Meeting with RPg managers and supervisors	45 mins
3	Meeting with external stakeholders - alumni, employers, professional organisation representatives, external examiners, departmental advisors (may be held over lunch)	60 - 75 mins
4	Meeting with staff from academic support services	60 mins

<b>Day 3</b>	<b>Participants and Focus</b>	<b>Duration</b>
<b>Meeting No.</b>		
1	Private meeting of the Audit Panel	120 mins
2	Final meeting with relevant senior staff to clarify remaining questions or issues (the Institutional Representative(s) will be notified whom the Audit Panel wishes to meet by close of Day 2).	60 mins

**(b) Indicative Programme for Virtual Audit Visit**

*(the precise pattern of the meetings is subject to change having regard to the operating hours of participants from different time zones)*

<b>Day 1</b>	<b>Participants and Focus</b>	<b>Duration</b>
<b>Meeting No.</b>		
1	Meeting with the Head of University and relevant senior staff including those responsible for the SER	60 mins
2	Private meeting of the Audit Panel	30 mins
3	Meeting with a representative group of students on taught programmes	60 mins

<b>Day 2</b>	<b>Participants and Focus</b>	<b>Duration</b>
<b>Meeting No.</b>		
1	Meeting with a representative group of RPg students	45 mins
2	Private meeting of the Audit Panel	30 mins
3	Meeting with group of academic managers (heads of departments/deans)	60 mins

<b>Day 3</b>	<b>Participants and Focus</b>	<b>Duration</b>
<b>Meeting No.</b>		
1	Meeting with teaching staff including programme leaders	60 mins
2	Private meeting of the Audit Panel	30 mins
3	Meeting with RPg managers and supervisors	45 mins

<b>Day 4</b>	<b>Participants and Focus</b>	<b>Duration</b>
<b>Meeting No.</b>		
1	Meeting with staff from academic support services	60 mins
2	Private meeting of the Audit Panel	15 mins
3	Meeting with external stakeholders - alumni, employers, professional organisation representatives, external examiners, departmental advisors	60 mins

<b>Day 5</b>	<b>Participants and Focus</b>	<b>Duration</b>
<b>Meeting No.</b>		
1	Private meeting of the Audit Panel	90 mins
2	Final meeting with relevant senior staff to clarify remaining questions or issues (the Institutional Representative(s) will be notified whom the Audit Panel wishes to meet by close of Day 4).	60 mins
3	Private meeting of the Audit Panel	15 mins

<b>Day 6</b>	<b>Participants and Focus</b>	<b>Duration</b>
<b>Meeting No.</b>		
1	Private meeting of the Audit Panel	120 mins

Notes:

- ◆ In general, participants in all meetings should be limited to a maximum number of 10.
- ◆ Unless agreed with the Audit Co-ordinator, no university participant should attend more than one meeting.

## **Appendix F**

### *Guidance for Participants in Virtual Quality Audits*

This guidance is intended for all participants in virtual meetings in quality audits, and applies to Audit Panel Members and university staff attending online audit meetings.

Nearer to the Audit Visit, the guidance will be supplemented with specific technical information relating to the approved online platform.

#### **Setting Up Meetings**

All virtual meetings held during an audit, including formal and informal meetings of the Audit Panel, the Preparatory Meeting with the University, meetings during the Audit Visit, and any informal meetings between the Audit Co-ordinator and the university, will be hosted by the QAC Secretariat on the approved platform. Participants must ensure that they have access to the specified platform through their device.

Guidance, including joining instructions and background information, will be provided to each participant prior to any meeting.

#### **Meetings during the Audit Visit**

The programme for the Audit Visit will have been discussed and agreed between the Audit Co-ordinator and the Institutional Representative(s) of the university subject to audit. Each meeting with university representatives will be set up as a separate meeting at the time stated in the audit schedule. The names, titles, and roles of those involved in each meeting will be confirmed by the university in advance of the visit.

Meeting invitations will be sent to the Institutional Representative(s) for notifying university participants joining the meeting. The Audit Co-ordinator will liaise with the Institutional Representative(s) on the log-in arrangement to ensure good visual communication and avoid uncertainty as to who is speaking.

The Audit Panel should join the meeting five minutes before the official start to ensure any issues can be addressed and the meeting can start promptly.

University participants should be ready for admission a few minutes before the official start and will then be admitted to the meeting by the QAC Secretariat. For each meeting, checking will be made to ensure that the list of participants waiting in the waiting room matches the list of invited attendees before admitting them to the meeting. Where an uninvited participant seeks to join the meeting, the Audit Panel Chair will be alerted and asked to ascertain whether this person can be present before proceeding.

## **Meeting Format and Protocols**

Meetings will not be recorded in the online platform. As with onsite audits, the Audit Co-ordinator will be responsible for taking notes of the meeting which will be used as the official record for sharing not beyond the Audit Panel.

At the start of the virtual meeting, university participants will be placed in the waiting room of the online platform before being admitted to the meeting room.

Once admitted to the meeting room, all participants should begin with their video on and microphone off. Each participant may be asked to switch on their microphone in turn for any introductions, as directed by the Audit Panel Chair. After any introductions, all participants other than the Audit Panel Chair, should mute their microphones. Muting is particularly important to prevent potential background noise and audio interference during the meeting. Participants will be asked to keep their video on unless they are experiencing connectivity issues, when switching the camera off can help.

All participants will be reminded at the start of the virtual meeting that:

- (a) Microphones should be muted until invited to speak by the Audit Panel Chair;
- (b) The 'raise your hand' facility should be used to indicate when a person wishes to ask or answer a question;
- (c) Other electronic devices should be kept away from the microphone to minimise interference; and
- (d) The 'chat' facility should only be used for issues relating to meeting management – for example, notifying others of poor connection, audio issues or an intention to speak – rather than for posting answers to the questions raised. All answers to the questions posed by the Audit Panel should be made verbally.

The Audit Panel Chair will monitor turn-taking to avoid interruptions and, where necessary may take the lead in directing who should respond to particular questions. The Institutional Representative(s) may wish to guide the university team on who is best placed to contribute.

## **Other Matters**

In advance of the Audit Visit and other meetings, the Audit Co-ordinator and the Institutional Representative(s) will agree an additional means of communication – to help address any connectivity and other issues that may interfere with the smooth running of the meeting.

The schedule for a virtual audit will include less formal ‘catch-up’ meetings between the Audit Co-ordinator and the Institutional Representative(s), which will provide an opportunity for both parties to clarify any matters arising.

A virtual ‘base room’ that will remain open for the duration of the virtual Audit Visit will also be set up for the Audit Panel to facilitate informal communication of the team.



## **Appendix H**

### *Representations by Universities*

The QAC makes every effort to ensure that the audit procedures are conducted fairly and consistently, and that all universities are given the opportunity to demonstrate the effectiveness of their quality systems and procedures. If, however, there is reason to challenge the outcomes of the audit, universities may make a representation to the QAC. Representations will be considered on two grounds only, *viz*:

- (a) The university can present evidence that the audit procedures have not been properly followed; and
- (b) The university can demonstrate that the judgments of the Audit Panel were not based on existing evidence and were consequently unjustified.

The QAC's policy on handling representations from universities is as follows:

- (a) The QAC will investigate all representations made by universities.
- (b) The QAC does not investigate representations or complaints from individuals. Such representations should be made to the relevant university in the first instance.
- (c) Representations will be considered as quickly as possible following the receipt of information.
- (d) Representations will normally be made in writing and accompanied by the relevant evidence.
- (e) Representations should be sent to the Audit Co-ordinator, who will carry out an initial review of the submission and supporting evidence. If possible, the Audit Co-ordinator will seek to resolve matters directly with the university.
- (f) Representations that cannot be resolved by the Audit Co-ordinator will be passed to the Secretary of the QAC, and if still unresolved, to the Chairman of the QAC. The Chairman of the QAC, in consultation with other Members of the QAC if necessary, will determine what action, if any, should be taken. The decision of the Chairman of the QAC is final.
- (g) The QAC reserves the right to make public the outcomes of representations, if this is considered appropriate.

## **Appendix I**

### *Abbreviations and Acronyms*

ADRI	Approach-Deployment-Results-Improvement
CRA	Criterion-referenced assessment
HKCAAVQ	Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications
HKQF	Hong Kong Qualifications Framework
KPIs	Key performance indicators
PEPs	Planning Exercise Proposals
PMs	Performance measures
QAC	Quality Assurance Council
RPg	Research postgraduate
SDPU	Sub-degree providing unit
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
TPg	Taught postgraduate
UAA	University Accountability Agreement
UGC	University Grants Committee

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