Report of a Quality Audit
of Sub-degree Operations
of **Lingnan University**

November 2019
Quality Assurance Council

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QAC Audit Report Number 23

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

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PREFACE

Background

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

UGC is committed to safeguarding and promoting the quality of UGC-funded universities and their activities. In view of universities' expansion of their activities and a growing public interest in quality issues, QAC was established to assist UGC in providing third-party oversight of the quality of the universities' educational provision. QAC aims to assist UGC in assuring the quality of programmes (however funded) offered by UGC-funded universities.

Since its establishment, QAC has conducted two rounds of quality audits, the first between 2008 and 2011 and the second between 2015 and 2016. By virtue of its mission, however, these audits conducted prior to end 2016 include only first degree level programmes and above offered by the UGC-funded universities.

In 2016, UGC has assumed the role of the overseeing body of the external quality audits on the sub-degree (SD) operations of the UGC-funded universities, with the involvement of QAC as the audit operator. The SD audit cycle commenced in end 2016 with the promulgation of the Audit Manual.

Conduct of QAC Quality Audits

Audits are undertaken by Audit Panels appointed by QAC from its Register of Auditors. The Audit Panel composes of three auditors who are either international or regional experts in higher education quality assurance, drawn from a higher education system based outside of Hong Kong. The Panel also includes at least two local members, at least one of whom should be drawn from another UGC-funded university.

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

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

QAC's approach to quality audit is based on the principle of 'fitness for purpose'. Audit Panels consider the nature and strength of those operations in terms of the vision, mission and goals of the university and the Sub-degree Providing Unit(s) (SDPU(s)) within it. The degree of alignment between the SDPU(s) and the university's vision, mission, goals and strategic priorities is also considered.

Full details of the audit procedures, including the methodology and scope of the audit, are provided in the QAC Audit Manual on Sub-degree Operations of UGC-funded Universities which is available at https://www.ugc.edu.hk/doc/eng/qac/manual/auditmanual_sub-degree.pdf.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the report of a quality audit of the sub-degree (SD) operations of Lingnan University (LU; the University) by an Audit Panel appointed by, and acting on behalf of, the Quality Assurance Council. The report presents the findings of the quality audit, supported by detailed analysis and commentary on the following Dimensions:

1. governance, management, university planning and accountability
2. approach to programme quality assurance
3. curriculum design, programme development and approval processes
4. programme delivery, including pedagogical approaches, learning environments and resources, scheduling
5. support for teaching quality, including pedagogical development
6. student learning assessment
7. student participation and student support services
8. systems for acting on quality assurance data to make ongoing enhancements to student learning

The audit findings are identified as features of good practice worthy of commendation, recommendations for further consideration by the University, and affirmation of progress with actions already in place as a result of its self-study.

Summary of the principal findings of the Audit Panel

1. Governance, management, university planning and accountability

LU has recently undertaken significant restructuring of its SD provision. The report draws attention to the positive attitude of the senior leadership of LU and Lingnan Institute of Further Education (LIFE) and the action they and members of governance groups are taking to address and resolve the consequences of the enrolment management issues that placed the University in difficulty, a few years ago. Both the governance bodies and senior leadership have done a great deal to place the SD operations on a more solid footing for the future. There are signs, however, that some governance and management arrangements between LU and LIFE are still in transition and further consideration of some ambiguities or inconsistencies related to responsibilities for academic governance matters would be beneficial.

The report proposes that the University examine and revise as necessary the governance relationships between LU Council, LU Senate and the Board of Governors of LIFE. The purpose of this exercise would be twofold: to ensure internal consistency between the Lingnan University Ordinance (Cap. 1165), LU Statutes and Academic Regulations; and to ensure that awards received by LIFE graduates are made with the full authority of LU Senate, as stipulated under the Lingnan University Ordinance (Cap. 1165).

The significant and multi-faceted roles played by the Supervisor of the Director of LIFE provide an important conduit between the governance and executive leadership of LIFE and the governance and executive leadership of the University. While such an arrangement might be expedient during a period of transition, the Audit Panel (the Panel) formed the view that inherent conflicts among the roles undermine its value as a permanent solution. The report suggests that the University reconsider and revise as necessary the governance and senior leadership positions that link LU and LIFE, to ensure that governance, leadership and management roles are clearly delineated and differentiated, and continue to facilitate effective channels of communication between the two entities.

Given the functions it is obliged to fulfil, and the limited human resources LIFE has at its disposal, the committee structure within LIFE is over-complicated. The report steers the institution towards a review of its committee structure, including terms of reference, membership and arrangements for evaluating effectiveness. The purpose of the review would be to ensure that LIFE's committees are able to discharge their deliberative and executive functions effectively, while being as economical with time and resources as possible.

LU and LIFE acknowledge that LIFE needs more specific key performance indicators (KPIs) and closer monitoring of performance. The report concurs with the view that a set of KPIs with sharper focus and more quantitative measures will enable both LU and LIFE to track their progress towards their stated strategic priorities. The work that has already been undertaken in this respect as part of the development of the new Strategic Plan for LU and LIFE is endorsed within the report.

2. *Approach to programme quality assurance*

The staff of LIFE put considerable effort into gathering data that speaks to programme quality. Essential elements, such as student evaluation surveys, annual programme reports and periodic reviews are in place. Work on implementing an Outcome-based Approach to Teaching and Learning (OBATL) across LIFE's programmes is underway. There are several areas, however, where further development is indicated. While there is widespread evidence that staff are employing the mechanics of curriculum mapping, including initial alignment of intended learning outcomes (ILOs) with assessment strategies, depth and breadth of understanding remains uneven, and there is still some distance to travel before OBATL could be considered fully implemented. Therefore, the report proposes that LU and LIFE develop a comprehensive plan to ensure that all teaching staff acquire a deep understanding of the conceptual base of OBATL. The plan should enable teaching staff to develop the expertise to design curriculum, pedagogy and assessment strategies that facilitate the tracking of student learning progress during programmes and also ensure that graduates have achieved all the ILOs at the point of graduation.

While there are good examples of engagement with external industry, professional and academic expertise in some of LIFE's programmes, the Panel formed the view that this positive feature could be strengthened and extended to ensure that students on all programmes benefit, by making such external engagement a matter of policy. The report therefore suggests that the University ensure that LIFE systematically embeds externality in its quality assurance (QA) and quality enhancement (QE) policies and procedures, including programme design, delivery, capstone assessment of student achievement of programme intended learning outcomes prior to graduation and ongoing programme evaluation.

Benchmarking at programme level is at a very early stage within LIFE. The report therefore suggests that the University ensure that LIFE produces a set of procedures to develop benchmarking relationships at programme level, both with peer institutions offering similar programmes and institutions that LIFE might hope to emulate in future.

3. *Curriculum design, programme development and approval processes*

LIFE aims to deliver quality vocational SD programmes, aligned with its Strategic Plan, to address the changing social and economic needs of Hong Kong. The University maintains high level strategic oversight of LIFE's portfolio development, while expecting that LIFE takes an active approach to putting forward new programme proposals and terminating those programmes that are no longer relevant or viable. Teaching and administrative staff discharge their responsibilities in alignment with the regulations to which they are subject.

A significant number of students find the requirements for English language proficiency challenging. The report highlights the way in which the Language Enhancement Programme (LEP) successfully delivers learning opportunities that not only enable students to achieve a minimum acceptable level of competence in English but also encourage and support the higher-level ambitions of more advanced students. In addition, the report suggests that utilisation of the expertise contained within LEP could be optimised through more systematic collaboration with mainstream teaching staff in the regular curriculum.

4. *Programme delivery, including pedagogical approaches, learning environments and resources, scheduling*

LIFE recognises the importance of providing suitable learning environments and resources to support and facilitate learning and teaching activities. Provision includes an e-learning platform or virtual learning environment and other online resources for programme delivery for teaching staff and students. However, e-learning remains at an early stage of development and there is no evidence of a systematic institutional approach to promoting and developing e-learning to extend the repertoire of pedagogical approaches used by teaching staff and

enhance student learning. Accordingly, the report prompts LIFE to develop a strategic and proactive approach to promoting, developing and embedding e-learning to enhance teaching and learning for both staff and students.

5. *Support for teaching quality, including pedagogical development*

Students at LIFE benefit from teaching and pastoral support staff who appreciate the challenges SD students face and are committed to helping them move on to the next stage of their careers. Both full-time and part-time staff enjoy strong collegial relationships that support peer-based learning. Therefore, the report highlights the quality of the teaching staff, which is characterised by openness, accessibility and a pervasive determination to help students achieve.

LIFE is committed to providing quality education for students through the recruitment of a team of qualified teaching staff, providing pedagogical development opportunities, monitoring teaching performance and recognising outstanding teachers. To ensure the quality of the educational provision, LIFE has in place recruitment policies, professional pedagogical development, mechanisms to monitor and enhance teaching performance and the Outstanding Teacher Award Scheme. LIFE adheres to its recruitment policies and implements its mechanisms to evaluate teaching performance and provide support to teachers. Professional development opportunities are organised, mostly in the form of occasional workshops and staff development days. Programme leaders carry out supervisory and peer observations of teaching, which teaching staff find useful.

Both full-time and part-time staff are encouraged, but not required, to participate in staff development activities. In addition, they are free to request help should they identify a developmental need. The Panel was keen to discern LIFE's overarching approach and strategic priorities in relation to pedagogical development but found neither documentary evidence nor an understanding that was shared across the institution. Therefore, the report proposes that LIFE articulate and promulgate such a strategic approach to teaching and learning, identifying institutional development priorities and concrete action plans to steer the professional development of teaching staff. Such an exercise would enable LIFE to undertake an analysis of the training needs of staff, to inform the content and format of professional development programmes and seek an appropriate balance between institutional priorities and the personal development needs of individuals. LIFE is further encouraged to make systematic use of support from LU's Teaching and Learning Centre and synergies with relevant Faculties of LU.

6. *Student learning assessment*

Staff across LIFE are making individual and collective efforts to implement criterion-referenced assessment (CRA) within all courses as an integral component of OBATL. Despite this commitment, accomplishing such a fundamental shift to student-centred, outcome-based assessment practices is going

to demand a greater depth and breadth of cultural change than has been achieved to date. Although student learning outcomes have been listed across all courses and programmes, the Panel found that both academic staff and students display uneven conceptual understanding of the ways in which students might potentially demonstrate what they know and can do. Making the transition to CRA was often described as producing a set of assessment rubrics for traditional forms of assessment such as examinations, tests and practicums, rather than a way of taking a more holistic and empowering approach to student learning and achievement. Documentary evidence also reveals variations in levels of understanding about what constitutes CRA and the purposes of curriculum mapping. Therefore, the report encourages LIFE to review its assessment policy and revise it as necessary, to ensure that it is up to date, fit for purpose and capable of providing a framework for the provision of systematic training and continuing support for staff and students on the implementation of CRA.

LIFE has the raw data it needs to conduct an inventory of current assessment practices but has not undertaken what would be a largely paper-based exercise. The report endorses the steps that LU and LIFE have already taken in developing a database of course information. It encourages LIFE to invest in further development of an online programme management system to support academic leaders in the management of academic standards, quality and enhancement.

7. *Student participation and student support services*

LIFE is committed to nurturing whole-person development of students to enhance their overall learning experience. This commitment is demonstrated in the requirement for students to attend the activities of the Life Enrichment and Appreciation Programme prior to graduation; the provision of LEP to enhance students' language ability, and the support services provided to students with special educational needs. Accordingly, the report draws attention to LIFE's extra-curricular and student development activities and support services, which are well designed to enhance whole-person development and are valued by students.

LU and LIFE senior leaders express a commitment to student participation in governance and the membership requirements of several committees at LIFE make provision for student representatives. Certain unresolved constitutional issues surrounding the election of student representatives mean that Academic Committee has been without student representative in 2018/19. The report endorses the actions the University and LIFE are taking to devise plans to secure the engagement and encourage the participation of LIFE students in the full range of governance activities.

8. *Systems for acting on quality assurance data to make ongoing enhancements to student learning*

LIFE describes its approach to QE as aiming to make use of evidence to inform decisions on action plans for improvement and to facilitate follow through and evaluation for effectiveness. It has taken some enhancement-orientated steps, including strengthening its student academic advisory system and taking a more ambitious approach to workplace learning through the provision of internships in all new, and some extant, Higher Diploma programmes. Nevertheless, the Panel found generally that QE in LIFE is quite narrowly focused on rectifying problems identified in a single source of QA data. Scope exists, therefore, for LIFE to develop a more integrated approach to the pursuit of ILOs, and to improve the effectiveness of its collection, analysis and utilisation of data deriving from multiple sources. In addition, LIFE has yet to achieve a holistic understanding of student learning and experience, and further work is needed to improve its analysis and utilisation of existing data sources and to put in place arrangements that capture the student experience as a whole. Therefore, the report proposes that the University ensure that LIFE both draws on and supplements all available data sources to enable it to achieve a systematic, coherent and enhancement-orientated understanding of all aspects of student learning.

INTRODUCTION

Explanation of the audit methodology

This is the report of a quality audit of the sub-degree (SD) operations of Lingnan University (LU; the University) by an Audit Panel appointed by, and acting on behalf of, the Quality Assurance Council (QAC). It is based on an Institutional Submission (IS) which was prepared by LU following a period of self-study and submitted to QAC on 17 September 2018. A Mutual Briefing was held on 27 November 2018 which provided an opportunity for LU to brief Members of the Audit Panel (the Panel) on the context of the University's SD operations.

The Panel visited LU from 22 to 24 January 2019. They met the Acting President and Vice-President with senior LU staff; Directorate of Lingnan Institute of Further Education (LIFE) and academic heads; programme leaders and subject leaders; teaching staff; full-time and part-time students; academic support services staff; members of academic governance bodies; and external stakeholders.

The Panel evaluates:

- governance, management, university planning and accountability
- approach to programme quality assurance
- curriculum design, programme development and approval processes
- programme delivery, including pedagogical approaches, learning environments and resources, scheduling
- support for teaching quality, including pedagogical development
- student learning assessment
- student participation and student support services
- systems for acting on quality assurance data to make ongoing enhancements to student learning

and identifies its audit findings, including features of good practice worthy of commendation, recommendations for further consideration by the University, and affirmation of progress with actions already in place as a result of its self-study.

Introduction to the University

Founded in 1999, LU is the youngest of the eight UGC-funded universities. It has a long history, however, which dates back to 1888, spanning both the Mainland and Hong Kong. It is the only liberal arts university within the UGC sector. A brief history of the University is provided at Appendix A.

LU provides SD programmes and lifelong learning programmes (LLPs) through its self-financing arm, LIFE. LIFE previously consisted of two academic units: Lingnan

Institute of Further Education which was set up in 2001 to provide full-time academic and part-time LLPs including Higher Diploma (HD), Diploma, Diploma Yi Jin, top-up degrees and other lifelong learning award-bearing programmes; and the Community College at Lingnan University (CCLU) which was established in 2003 to provide full-time Associate Degree (AD) programmes. Following significant downsizing, CCLU and LIFE were merged into one academic unit (retaining the name 'LIFE') in July 2017, with a view to consolidating and integrating their academic and administrative resources, as well as enhancing overall operational efficiency.

1.   GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT, UNIVERSITY PLANNING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

1.1   The IS states that the broad purpose for LIFE is to address the learning, vocational and professional needs of society. The objectives of LU's governance and management of LIFE are to set strategic directions in the context of the LU Strategic Plan; to appoint LIFE's Board of Governors; and to oversee LIFE's quality assurance (QA) systems.

1.2   The LU's 2016-2022 Strategic Plan identifies the offering of SDs as a key strategic area for LU and includes a sub-section related to SDs. LU Council carries overall governance responsibility for LIFE as an entity within the University. It established the Board of Governors of LIFE, on which several members of LU Council serve, to address more specific areas of governance for LIFE such as its strategic direction, budget and personnel matters. It is the University's intention to replicate, as far as possible and appropriate, the LU academic governance and QA policies, systems and structures within LIFE.

1.3   The merger of LIFE and CCLU in July 2017 was a major structural change which was carefully considered by the University. There remains evidence of this recent transition in the terminology used in various policy documents, as well as in the IS. Under the former dual structure of SD organisational units, oversight by LU Council was limited. The revised structure indicates a change in approach; strategic decision-making within LIFE is now more closely monitored by LU's Council and senior leadership team. New programmes are initiated by LIFE but under the direction of LU policies and systems. Current indications are that this change has helped place LIFE operations on a more robust economic platform and has strengthened strategic decision-making about the suite of programmes on offer and the management of enrolment.

1.4   The Panel commends the positive attitude of the senior leadership of LU and LIFE and the action they and members of governance groups are taking to address and resolve the consequences of the enrolment management issues that placed the University in difficulty, a few years ago. Much has been done to provide SD operations with a more solid economic base for the future.

1.5　The various descriptions of the governance relationship between LU Council and the Board of Governors of LIFE indicate, however, a need for greater conceptual clarity about the University's governance relationships. For example, the official statement of the powers and duties of the Board of Governors of LIFE describes it as the 'supreme governing body' of CCLU and LIFE (*sic*), yet LU Statute 6 stipulates that 'the Board of Governors shall be accountable to the University Council' and introduces an important caveat that the power of the Board of Governors as 'supreme governing body' is 'unless otherwise specified by the University Council'.

1.6　In order to evaluate the effectiveness of LU's approach to governance, management, university planning and accountability, the Panel read the extensive documentation related to governance and management structures and policies provided by LU. Perusal of the LIFE award parchments assisted the Panel in exploring more fine-grained issues regarding governance relationships between LU Council and the Board of Governors of LIFE. Additional documentation was requested by the Panel, including the Lingnan University Ordinance (Cap. 1165), LU Statutes, Academic Regulations for Sub-Degree Programmes and extracts from the minutes of the Academic Committee (AC) of LIFE and the LU Senate Sub-Committee on Academic Quality Assurance of Sub-degree Programmes (SCAQA).

1.7　LU senior leaders and members of academic governance bodies brought additional clarity to the relationships between LIFE and the University during the Mutual Briefing, assisting the Panel to understand the circumstances that led to the merger in July 2017 and the extent to which some positions, policies and nomenclature are indicative of how recently the transition took place. These issues were explored further during interviews with LU senior leaders during the Audit Visit. The Panel also explored with LU senior leaders the purpose, roles and projected longevity of the position of 'Supervisor of the Director of LIFE'.

1.8　By virtue of the Lingnan University Ordinance (Cap. 1165), the power to make academic awards rests with the University; power is delegated to LU Senate to make awards of the University from certificate to degree level. Prior to 2013, in keeping with its remit LU Senate determined the eligibility of candidates of CCLU and LIFE for awards of the University and approved them. In 2013, the LU Council transferred this responsibility to the Board of Governors of LIFE and changed LU Senate's role to one of noting rather than approving awards made to students of LIFE. Parchments for LIFE awards carry the signatures of the Chair of the Board of Governors and the Director of LIFE, the seal of LIFE, and the LU logo. This is in keeping with the relevant regulations, except for the LU logo, on which the regulation is silent.

1.9　The Panel formed the view that, while LU and LIFE are acting in accordance with the decisions made by LU Council in 2013, LU Senate is not fulfilling all

its responsibilities in relation to SD awards. The Examinations Committee (EC) of CCLU and LIFE (*sic*) reports to AC of LIFE and approval of the awards rests with the Board of Governors of LIFE. The only action taken by LU Senate is to note the decisions made by the Board of Governors. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the University examine and revise as necessary the governance relationships between LU Council, LU Senate and the Board of Governors of LIFE. The purpose of this would be first to ensure internal consistency between the Lingnan University Ordinance (Cap. 1165), LU Statutes and Academic Regulations; and second to ensure that awards received by LIFE graduates are made with the full authority of LU Senate, as stipulated under the Lingnan University Ordinance (Cap. 1165).

1.10   The significant and multi-faceted roles played by the individual who currently holds the position of Supervisor of the Director of LIFE provide an important conduit between the governance and executive leadership of LIFE and the governance and executive leadership of the University. While such an arrangement might be expedient during a period of transition, the Panel considers that inherent conflicts among the roles undermine its value as a permanent fixture within the management structure of LU and LIFE. The Panel therefore recommends that the University reconsider and revise as necessary the governance and senior leadership positions that link LU and LIFE, to ensure that governance, leadership and management roles are clearly delineated and differentiated, while continuing to facilitate effective channels of communication between the two entities.

1.11   As far as possible and appropriate, LIFE makes use of LU's established academic policies, procedures, governance structure and QA mechanisms. Operational plans, admission targets and an Executive Committee all provide management oversight. To address historical issues pertaining to over-ambitious recruitment projections, over-enrolment and consequent budget deficits within LIFE's predecessor units, LU has tightened its controls over LIFE's operational decision-making. The Panel noted that after significant recasting of enrolment projections, LIFE is now meeting most of its enrolment targets. The budget deficit has been reduced significantly. The Panel concluded that both AC of LIFE and SCAQA, which consider major changes in LIFE's academic policies, procedures and LIFE's HD and AD programmes, are providing an appropriate level of scrutiny over these important academic decisions. AC is the most senior academic committee within LIFE. It is chaired by the Director of LIFE, includes many LIFE staff and one LU staff member from LU Senate.

1.12   The Panel acknowledges that the University and LIFE have already noted the need to rethink some of LIFE's committees and recognises the value of maintaining a consistent approach to governance and management between the University and LIFE. However, the Panel also noted the small scale of LIFE, its limited human resources and the disproportionately large number of

committees within the current structure, with at least one additional committee planned. In light of this, the Panel recommends that the University and LIFE review LIFE's committee structure, including terms of reference, membership and arrangements for evaluating effectiveness of committees. The purpose of the review would be to ensure that LIFE's committees are able to discharge their deliberative and executive functions effectively, while being as economical as possible with time and resources. The Panel also formed the view that both teaching staff and academic support services staff within LIFE would benefit from closer connections with their counterparts in LU. LIFE staff are a small group who could benefit from developing closer collegial relationships both in terms of enriching the academic community and developing better understandings of the practical systems and resources held within LU.

1.13 While the current LU Strategic Plan includes a sub-section devoted to SD operations, University leaders acknowledge that further work is needed to strengthen the key performance indicators (KPIs) that measure LIFE's performance and progress towards its desired strategic priorities. The Panel affirms the work that has already been undertaken, as part of the development of the new Strategic Plan for LU and LIFE, to develop a set of KPIs with sharper focus and more quantitative measures that will enable both LU and LIFE to track their progress towards stated strategic priorities.

1.14 Much work remains to be done, however. The current Strategic Plan contains only two KPIs for LIFE, both of which concern curriculum development. While the KPIs describe desired outputs (new programmes), they do not specify quantitative measures by which performance can be evaluated. There is no alignment between the KPIs of LU and LIFE, nor are there any shared quantitative KPIs, making it impossible to track LIFE's contributions to the University's strategic objectives. Such evidence is notably lacking in relation to several of LU's strategic priorities including: benchmarking of academic standards, curricula, institutional performance and student profile with local and international partners; and full implementation of the Outcome-based Approach to Teaching and Learning (OBATL) by the commencement of the 2017/18 academic year. The merger of CCLU and LIFE foreshadowed in the 2016-2022 Strategic Plan has been achieved, however.

1.15 LU recognised the need to exert more control over the strategic and operational decisions within LIFE and took positive action to address problems of governance and management. Nevertheless, the Panel considers that systems for monitoring and enhancing the performance of LIFE need further development (see paragraph 1.10).

1.16 There is a significant volume of information relevant to LIFE's performance held in various databases, but systems for analysing, interpreting and utilising those data in the interests of ongoing enhancement are underdeveloped. More

coordinated data gathering and systematic data analysis would enable closer monitoring of programme quality and more stringent approaches to action planning and follow through (see paragraphs 2.17 and 8.8).

1.17   Overall, the Panel concluded that the approach taken by the senior leaders of the University and LIFE to address historical governance and management issues in LIFE's predecessor units is proving effective. While some transitional arrangements are still evident, LIFE's SD operations are now on a much stronger and more sustainable base. Further work is required to clarify the governance relationships between LU and LIFE and to ensure internal consistency across various levels of enabling policies, statutes and ordinances.

1.18   LIFE is a valued component of LU and has a clear place in the University's planning processes. LU's new Strategic Plan is intended to address the need for stronger KPIs to track LIFE's progress towards the institutions' strategic priorities. Data analytics should also play a greater role in the leadership and management of LIFE's quality enhancement (QE) in the future.

2.   APPROACH TO PROGRAMME QUALITY ASSURANCE

2.1   LU places considerable importance on the quality of programmes of LIFE. The University recognises that robust QA processes and systems are essential and has utilised similar (if not identical) processes for both SD and degree provision. All SD provision, including LLPs are subject to the same approach. To help staff understand the purpose and rationale of the various QA activities, LIFE prefaces its written policies and guidelines with clear statements about the goals they are intended to achieve, a practice that the Panel considers worthwhile.

2.2   To test the effectiveness of LIFE's approach to programme QA, the Panel first gained an overview by reading the IS and its many appendices, particularly those dealing with student feedback via Staff-Student Consultation Committees (SSCCs), course teaching and learning evaluation (CTLE) and the Graduate Survey; templates and guidelines for annual programme report (APR) and three/four-yearly periodic programme review (PPR). Following this, the Panel identified several areas for further investigation through audit trails, selecting a range of programmes as samples, to illustrate how LIFE's approach to programme QA is being applied in practice. The Panel also requested additional information, such as the Quality Assurance Manual, and scrutinised the minutes of meetings where relevant matters were discussed including, for example, follow through on APRs.

2.3   Dialogue with senior leaders of LU and LIFE at the Mutual Briefing answered the Panel's initial queries about the overall approach and deployment of QA mechanisms at the programme level. During the Audit Visit, the Panel explored several issues in greater depth with senior leaders of LIFE,

programme leaders, subject leaders, teaching staff and students, including the identification and management of underperforming programmes; changes to programme and course review; externality and benchmarking at programme level and the implementation of OBATL. Senior leaders, and full-time and part-time students discussed with the Panel the contribution students are able to make to the QA processes. Academic support services staff assisted the Panel in understanding how staff with QA responsibilities in LIFE relate to their counterparts in LU. External stakeholders, including external examiners (EEs), industry advisors and employers, provided the Panel with insights into the ways they experience and/or contribute to the QA of LIFE's SD programmes.

2.4   Within LIFE, three senior officers share responsibility for managing programme QA activities: the Assistant Director (Programme Development and Management); Assistant Director (Quality Assurance and Registry); and Head of Teaching Faculty.

2.5   LIFE has adapted LU's QA framework and policies to meet the needs of SD programmes. A comprehensive suite of policies guides the monitoring of programme quality in LIFE. Delegations from LU Senate via SCAQA to LIFE's AC are generally appropriate in scope, except for the matter noted above (see paragraph 1.9). LIFE's Sub-degree and Diploma Programme Management Committee monitors programme quality. LIFE's AC currently approves programme proposals at Level 3 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) while SCAQA considers quality in QF Level 4 programmes. SCAQA will soon extend its brief to include SD programmes at all levels. SCAQA also reviews major programme changes and considers new programme proposals, which it receives from LIFE's AC. The Panel noted LIFE's intention to establish a standing QA committee under AC to monitor all QA data. While supporting the desire to monitor these data carefully, and to follow through on the action plans that are produced to enhance programme quality, the Panel encourages LIFE to incorporate consideration of this plan within its response to the recommendation made in relation to the committee structure under Dimension 1 (see paragraph 1.12).

2.6   The Quality Assurance Manual has placeholders for external inputs to programme design, monitoring and review from, for example, employers and external stakeholders but contains little detail on how these inputs will be systematised. While LIFE employs EEs, whose primary focus is on examinations, there is no requirement for LIFE to follow LU in engaging external academic advisors (EAAs), with their wider advisory brief. The Panel did note, however, that the most recent templates for new programme proposals now include a section for external inputs. There are also good examples of external professional input to the design process and ongoing monitoring of the most recently implemented LIFE programmes but these appear to be more a reflection of personal professional networks than an outcome of LIFE's QA policies.

2.7   Overall, the Panel formed the view that LIFE's QA policies and procedures do not yet systematically capture the potentially valuable inputs to programme quality from external industry advisors, employers and academic stakeholders. Therefore, the Panel recommends that LIFE embed externality more systematically in its QA and QE policies and procedures, including programme design, delivery, capstone assessment of student achievement of programme intended learning outcomes (PILOs) prior to graduation, and ongoing programme evaluation.

2.8   At the programme level, LIFE's QA mechanisms include both APRs and more in-depth three/four-yearly PPRs. The first round of PPRs was conducted concurrently in 2015/16, with the second round due to commence in 2019/20. Guidelines for these reviews are appropriate. Given the need to consider these individual programme reports carefully and follow through on their associated action plans, the Panel suggests that LU and LIFE consider a staggered approach to scheduling, so that the review workload is more evenly spread over several years. LIFE is also considering introducing a formal periodic programme re-accreditation process. The Panel supports this development and suggests that it might be better to weave this into the existing PPR cycle, rather than introduce a separate (additional) process.

2.9   LIFE also plans to introduce free-standing biennial course reviews which will be limited in scale and internal in scope. The Panel considers that focusing on courses as stand-alone entities runs the risk of undermining LIFE's OBATL, since a key component of any judgement of course quality is the extent to which it is delivering the learning outcomes required by the programme design. It may therefore be more appropriate to consider embedding broad-based course evaluations within PPRs, while retaining the facility to undertake forensic scrutiny of individual courses any time that negative course data trends indicate it may be necessary.

2.10   Within LU, estimates of the amount of progress made on implementing OBATL, including criterion-referenced assessment (CRA), vary. Full implementation of OBATL is a long-term process, which requires a commitment both to the development of policies and procedures, and professional development of staff (see Dimensions 5 and 6). The Panel recognises that significant work has been done towards implementing OBATL. Staff whom the Panel met demonstrate some understanding of the mechanics of OBATL in programme design including articulating a set of PILOs; mapping PILOs to the course intended learning outcomes (CILOs) of the courses that comprise the programme; mapping CILOs against each of the assessment tasks set for students; and developing assessment rubrics for calibrating levels of student performance of those assessment tasks.

2.11   The Panel formed the view, however, that depth of understanding in LIFE about the profound impact of OBATL on curriculum design, pedagogy, student learning assessment and programme evaluation is variable. For example, in the audit trails and supplementary information, there are several examples of poorly worded intended learning outcomes (ILOs). In some cases, ILOs are not evident in course documentation beyond the mapping appendices and/or links between PILOs and CILOs, while the links between assessment strategies and ILOs are sometimes rudimentary. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the University and LIFE develop a comprehensive plan to ensure that teaching staff acquire a deep understanding of the conceptual base of OBATL. The plan should also enable teaching staff to develop the expertise to design curriculum, pedagogy and assessment strategies that facilitate the tracking of student learning progress during programmes and also ensure that graduates have achieved all the ILOs at the point of graduation.

2.12   The staff of LIFE put considerable effort into gathering data that speaks to programme quality. Essential elements, such as staff-student meetings, student evaluation surveys, APRs and PPRs are in place.

2.13   LIFE has an active system of SSCCs, with formal guidelines for its operation. Full-time students are very familiar with this means of providing feedback to staff and raising issues of concern. Records of these meetings demonstrate that issues raised in SSCCs are followed through and some changes have occurred as a result of student concerns.

2.14   LIFE utilises a paper-based CTLE questionnaire to gather data on student satisfaction at course level. This standard instrument is used at the end of every teaching period and alternate versions are available for lecturer use at mid-term. LIFE relies on this instrument to serve a multitude of purposes and has recently started to analyse CTLE data more robustly. However, data analytics in relation to CTLE are still at an early stage of development. Response rates are very high, as it is administered in the final class session. As LIFE moves to an online version of CTLE in future, careful planning will be needed to maintain viable response rates. Almost all courses are reported to be performing at an acceptable level, many with very positive results. Programme-level analysis of CTLE data suggests that student satisfaction indices for HD programmes in general are lower than those for AD programmes, but there was no evidence that a forensic analysis of programme data has yet been conducted to explore why this might be so.

2.15   The University has a policy and set of procedures to address underperforming programmes. In practice, CTLE data have been responsible for alerting LIFE to a small number of programmes with declining performance. Over recent years, several older programmes have been discontinued.

2.16   The Graduate Survey was reviewed and revised in 2015/16 to collect recent graduates' feedback on their overall learning experience. Results indicate that recent graduates are satisfied with their learning experience at LIFE. Alumni and recent graduates whom the Panel met attested to their positive experiences at LIFE and their readiness to recommend LIFE programmes to others.

2.17   LIFE intends to develop an alumni survey to seek the opinions of graduates after some years of experience in the workforce. This instrument is still under development, with a pilot version due to be trialed in 2019/20. Such data could be very valuable as LIFE develops more robust ways of determining the extent to which ILOs at the programme level have been achieved.

2.18   Links between data gathering at individual course level and aggregations of these data to speak to programme quality are still under development. Examples seen by the Panel include the comparison of early drop-out rates and causal factors for attrition across programmes; CTLE scores; and grade point averages (GPAs) across programmes. Data on student pass rates show high rates of student success, with an overall graduation rate of about 80%. However, some data suggest that academic probation rates are increasing in some programmes, despite dedicated support being provided to new students and others identified as being at risk (see paragraph 8.8). There is scope within LIFE for more sophisticated data aggregations with greater analytic power to form a comprehensive integrated picture of programme quality. For example, the Panel encourages LIFE to consider whether attrition data, both quantitative and qualitative, could be subjected to trend analysis to contribute usefully towards an overall picture of programme quality.

2.19   The University acknowledges the need to consolidate and improve its survey tools to collect feedback from students and the Panel concurs with this view. Although survey fatigue is not currently an issue at LIFE, there is a risk it may become so, if data collection tools are proliferated rather than streamlined. The Panel encourages LIFE to develop a survey register to ensure that the timetable for the administration of surveys is designed to mitigate against survey fatigue.

2.20   The template for APRs includes relevant standard data sets, pre-loaded by programme administrators. More could be done however to develop ways of amalgamating data from multiple sources to aid programme leaders to draw conclusions about programme quality and identify areas of risk. APR guidelines invite programme leaders to include external reference points, where appropriate, including changes in community needs; a summary of developments since the last review; and professional recognitions. The Panel takes the view that such external reference points are highly relevant to judgements of programme quality and encourages LIFE to ensure they form part of every APR. Guidelines for APR list some possible outcomes of APR but stop short of stating that one possible outcome for an underperforming programme might be programme closure. The Panel encourages LIFE to

ensure staff are aware that serious consequences may result from APRs, making them worthy of their time and attention.

2.21 The ability to compare programme design, content, delivery and student learning outcomes to similar programmes at other local, regional and institutional institutions has become an increasingly important component of academic QA approaches internationally. Benchmarking at programme level is at a very early stage within LIFE. Therefore, the Panel recommends that LIFE develop a set of procedures, which includes a range of external reference points, to develop benchmarking relationships at programme level, both with peer institutions offering similar programmes and institutions that LIFE might hope to emulate in future.

2.22 Both APRs and PPRs are followed through with associated action plans, which are then endorsed by programme management committees (PMCs). Action plans are discussed at PMCs, and actions arising are incorporated as part of the record. APRs and associated action plans provided to the Panel demonstrate that systematic follow up in the interests of programme enhancement occurs. The Panel noted, however, that the section of the template that invites comment on the extent of student achievement of ILOs relies only on GPAs and pass rates as indicators. This confirms the Panel's view that the depth of understanding of OBATL within LIFE is limited. Given that learning outcomes capture both knowledge and skills, and the ability to use both in practice, more robust strategies are needed for reaching judgements about the extent to which the programme is succeeding in producing graduates who have achieved all the ILOs.

2.23 Minutes of PMCs indicate that APR action plans and their follow through are of variable quality, while PPR action plans are more systematically followed through. Examination of the audit trails revealed, however, that longer term and more probing analysis of the results of such actions is not always conducted or noted in documentation. The quality cycle, where issues are tracked over time and with one cycle of improvements feeding into the subsequent cycle, may not always be complete. The Panel also noted that action plans and follow through activity associated with courses and programmes with higher than average academic probation rates tend to emphasise remediation of students, notably ways to help students perform better in examinations. The Panel encourages LIFE to maintain an appropriate balance between this approach and broader consideration of the appropriateness of the curriculum design or the pedagogical approaches utilised by teaching staff.

2.24 Overall, the Panel concluded that LIFE is committed to offering high quality SD programmes and that current students and graduates are generally well satisfied with the quality of their studies. Staff are making significant efforts to gather data on programme quality. Essential elements are in place and

significant work has been done towards implementing OBATL. Nonetheless, there are areas where further work is needed in the interests of ongoing QE. These include full implementation of OBATL; the development of LIFE's data warehouse, to facilitate greater efficiency and more sophisticated analytics on programme quality monitoring; and the introduction of benchmarking at programme level.

3. CURRICULUM DESIGN, PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT AND APPROVAL PROCESSES

3.1 LIFE aims to produce quality vocational SD programmes aligned with its Strategic Plan. This vocational orientation, which underpins most of its provision and distinguishes LIFE's approach from the liberal arts orientation of LU, aims to meet the growing vocational and professional needs of Hong Kong society. LU senior leaders stress that the relationship between liberal arts and vocational education is complementary. Just as LIFE is embedding vocational education within an integrated theory-practice framework, so is LU strengthening its approach to workplace learning in a liberal arts context.

3.2 LIFE's approach to curriculum design, programme development and approval is, like other aspects of its QA framework, aligned to that of LU, subject to minor adjustments as the University deems appropriate in light of LIFE's distinctive mission and the needs and characteristics of its students.

3.3 To test the effectiveness of LIFE's approach to curriculum design, programme development and approval processes, the Panel scrutinised a range of documents. These included procedures and flowcharts; templates for both initial and full programme proposals and programme initiation; and an informative example of a recently approved programme proposal. At the request of the Panel, LIFE provided documents illustrating how individual courses are mapped to PILOs and detailed supplementary information about articulation agreements, with associated student numbers and articulation rates.

3.4 In addition, the Panel engaged LU and LIFE senior leadership in discussion about the progress made in implementing OBATL across the institution. Members of academic governance bodies provided information about the establishment of articulation arrangements and the tracking of student success. Programme leaders and subject leaders participated in discussions about developing learning outcomes and described how LIFE typically goes about initiating a new programme proposal and identifying a workforce need in Hong Kong. Teaching staff talked with the Panel about their training and experience in curriculum design and the extent to which they can exercise flexibility in relation to the syllabus. Alumni, both recent and of longer standing, shared their experiences of articulation to LU and other universities.

3.5   The IS states that new programme proposals are usually initiated by the academic team. This was qualified significantly in discussion by LU senior leaders, who made it clear that since Hong Kong's needs will change over time, it will remain necessary for the University to maintain high-level strategic oversight of LIFE's portfolio development, and for LIFE to take an active approach to putting forward new programme proposals and terminating those that are no longer relevant. LU's stance is illustrated by its recent encouragement of, and support for, HD programmes in Early Childhood Education and Sports Coaching and Leadership.

3.6   LIFE's programme design and approval procedures, which are set forth clearly, require the academic team to submit an initial programme proposal to LIFE's Executive Committee, and thence to PMC and AC for review and endorsement. Once a proposal is endorsed, a programme planning team prepares a full programme proposal for deliberation and approval by AC (for proposals at or below QF Level 3) or by LU Senate (for proposals at QF Level 4) on receipt of advice from SCAQA. The Panel considers that templates for each stage of this process and a market analysis extracted from a recent successful programme proposal are fit for purpose and noted that procedures are competently executed by staff, who understand their roles and responsibilities.

3.7   Nevertheless, while LIFE has clear procedures for curriculum design, programme development and approval, the Panel endorses LU's decision to strengthen these procedures by requiring SCAQA to consider programme proposals at QF Level 3 or below, in addition to its current practice of considering those at QF Level 4 (see paragraph 2.5) and to implement a programme reapproval procedure (see paragraph 2.8). The Panel notes that the programme proposal template is largely predicated on OBATL principles, but urges LIFE to ensure that appropriate staff support and development opportunities are provided to facilitate the deeper understandings needed for effective implementation of OBATL (see paragraph 2.11). In addition, the Panel encourages LIFE to adopt a more structured approach to the involvement of industrial and professional practitioners at all phases of programme design, development and approval (see paragraphs 2.6 and 2.7).

3.8   LIFE's policy on the language of instruction, which has been the subject of detailed internal debate, is clear in expression and pragmatic in purpose. It specifies English as the language of instruction and assessment but makes provision for approved local variations. Staff whom the Panel met understood this policy. Student cohorts enter LIFE with mixed levels of prior academic achievement and English language proficiency, subject to an entry requirement of Level 2 in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination. LIFE is permitted, however, to make conditional offers to prospective students below this level.

3.9   Language development at LIFE is understood to be primarily the responsibility of the Language Enhancement Programme (LEP). The role of LEP is to foster students' interest in language learning, boost their confidence and improve their language proficiency. A range of services is provided, including a self-access language centre and remedial and progressive learning opportunities, which are made available to any SD student. When academic staff identify a student at risk because of poor language skills, they recommend that the student undertake a LEP. Prospective students, with scores below Level 2 are provided with an opportunity to undertake a 42-hour programme in order to secure conditional admission to LIFE programmes. LEP staff discharge their current responsibilities in an exemplary manner and quality assure their programmes conscientiously. The Panel therefore commends LEP which successfully delivers language development activities that not only enable students to achieve a minimum acceptable level of language competence but also encourage and support the higher-level ambitions of more advanced students. In addition, the Panel considers that utilisation of the expertise contained within LEP could be optimised through more systematic collaboration with mainstream teaching staff in the regular curriculum.

3.10   Graduates of LIFE's AD and HD programmes are eligible to apply for articulation to the senior year or top-up degree programmes offered by local universities or colleges without the need for specific articulation arrangements between institutions. In order to enhance the opportunities open to students of LIFE who aspire to proceed to degree-level study, LIFE has also entered into articulation partnership arrangements with six higher education institutions in Hong Kong and further afield.

3.11   LIFE gathers and analyses a modest range of data to measure the effectiveness of its approach to curriculum design, programme development and approval. Its claim that recently approved HD programmes in Early Childhood Education and Sports Coaching and Leadership reflect the current needs of Hong Kong society is supported by the solid recruitment figures of both these programmes. By the same token, a relaunched Diploma in College Foundation Studies admitted about 50 students in 2017/18, with over 90% of its diplomates articulating to LIFE's full-time SD programmes.

3.12   Staff within LEP report that the majority of the 'before and after' tests they administer show improvement. Testing is now being extended to individual workshops and is reportedly showing a 90% improvement rate. LEP attracted a positive rating of almost 80% in a 2016 consumer survey, and there is clear evidence that its activities are making significant contributions to students' language proficiency.

3.13   While there is wide variability across programmes, the data provided suggest that, as a totality, articulation rates to LU degree programmes are static.

3.14 LIFE's articulation partner institutions are a heterogenous group, with some individual arrangements as yet generating no LIFE student articulations into degree programmes. Of the six institutions, only three (of which two are private institutions in Hong Kong) admitted LIFE graduates over a two-year period. Of LIFE's international articulation partners, only the University of Stirling in the United Kingdom (the most active of all receiving institutions, with eight and 26 students respectively in the same two-year period) recruited any AD or HD students. Therefore, the Panel encourages LIFE to review the strategic selection of articulation partner institutions.

3.15 QA processes such as APR and PPR provide some evidence of ongoing programme viability and quality but they do not speak directly to the effectiveness of the process of curriculum design, programme development and approval. More robust approaches to the measurement of PILOs would enable more fine-grained forensic analysis to determine which aspects of curriculum design are working well and which might need to be reconsidered. Evaluating the effectiveness of the curriculum approval processes would need to consider the extent to which all stakeholders are involved; the ability of LU to respond to fast-emerging needs; the cost in terms of staff time; and the strategic merits and quality of the programmes approved. LU identifies as limitations under active review the unlimited duration of programme approval and, in consequence, the absence of arrangements for reapproval based on comprehensive academic, policy and financial analysis; the absence thus far of CRA; and the currently limited institutional review of programmes offered up to QF Level 3.

3.16 LEP's activity is reviewed annually to ensure that it is geared to students' developing needs as they approach graduation.

3.17 Overall, the Panel concluded that LIFE's existing policies and procedures for curriculum design, programme development and approval are broadly fit for purpose. There are, however, no mechanisms functioning directly and systematically to drive enhancement of this aspect of provision. More robust approaches to evaluating the effectiveness of these processes are required. Students of LIFE speak highly of the usefulness and relevance to their needs of the learning opportunities available to them, not least in terms of language proficiency. Articulation partnership arrangements could benefit from reconsideration of their strategic purposes and operational effectiveness.

4. PROGRAMME DELIVERY, INCLUDING PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES, LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AND RESOURCES, SCHEDULING

4.1 LIFE recognises the importance of providing suitable learning environments and resources to support and facilitate learning and teaching activities. To achieve its mission of providing quality SD programmes, LIFE aims to adopt

stringent QA mechanisms to monitor programme delivery, ensuring that pedagogical approaches align with the programme design and curriculum, and contribute to the achievement of PILOs. While the vocational focus of LIFE differentiates it from LU as a liberal arts university, LIFE shares a campus and key educational values with LU and has followed the University's lead in adopting OBATL. Learning environments and resources are intended to support and facilitate teaching and learning. The Panel formed the view, however, that LIFE currently lacks an overall institutional strategic approach in certain important respects including full implementation of OBATL (see paragraph 2.10); the development of a broader repertoire of pedagogical approaches (see paragraph 5.7); and the resourcing of a learning environment that facilitates e-learning.

4.2   In order to test the effectiveness of LIFE's approach to programme delivery, including pedagogical approaches, learning environments and resources, and scheduling, the Panel paid attention to reviewing documents that guide or support programme delivery such as the Quality Assurance Manual which includes sections on OBATL, programme delivery and monitoring, and campus facilities in support of the student learning experience; internal guidelines on maintaining the quality of teaching materials; guidelines for APR and PPR; examples of syllabus documents and teaching plans; guidelines for co-teaching and the template for the questionnaire evaluating courses using practicum as the major teaching/learning mode and an example of a completed summary report of responses.

4.3   With the senior leaders of LU and LIFE and a range of teaching staff, the Panel discussed LIFE's educational values; the challenges of implementing OBATL; the ways in which LIFE gathers feedback on the quality of learning environments; and the progress they are making in promoting and delivering e-learning. Programme leaders and subject leaders, teaching staff and academic support services staff provided information about access to learning resources for part-time students and the application of LIFE's policy on the language of instruction. A range of full-time and part-time students shared with the Panel their experiences of teaching and learning at LIFE, including class size, pedagogical approaches, learning resources and the challenges of adjusting to tertiary education.

4.4   LIFE adopted OBATL intending to achieve full implementation by 2018/19 for programme and course design and delivery, and related teaching, learning and assessment activities. The Panel noted that the OBATL section in the Quality Assurance Manual provides only a brief high-level policy statement, and that other OBATL-related documentation tends to focus on the mechanics of mapping PILOs, CILOs and assessment tasks rather than on programme delivery. The Academic Regulations make no reference to OBATL in the course assessment section. While staff have made significant efforts to

implement OBATL, this remains work-in-progress (see paragraphs 2.9 and 2.10).

4.5   LIFE also states that all its programmes are delivered with suitable pedagogical approaches, including small class teaching, project-based learning, practical learning and experiential learning. Current students and alumni whom the Panel met, attest to the educational value of the small size of classes at LIFE while students, employers and industry advisors comment favourably on the value of internships and practicums that provide opportunities for vocationally-orientated practical and experiential learning. Beyond these components, however, the Panel discerned that staff, though enthusiastic and open to innovation, are operating within a restricted pedagogical repertoire, still heavily dependent on lectures assessed through tests and examinations. This sits uncomfortably with the learning-centredness that normally characterises OBATL. Notwithstanding this, the Panel was provided with several examples of generally comprehensive syllabus documents and teaching plans.

4.6   Although LU identifies e-learning as a priority, it remains at an early stage of development within LIFE. The Panel could discern no evidence of a systematic institutional approach to promoting and developing e-learning to extend the repertoire of pedagogical approaches for teaching staff and enhance teaching and student learning. Discussions with staff and students about e-learning rarely went beyond use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) for academic administrative purposes and uploading of lectures, presentations and notes; plagiarism detection software; an online course on avoiding plagiarism; and the occasional use of YouTube videos. It was clear that e-learning activities that have entered the mainstream in other institutions remain unfamiliar to staff and students of LIFE. Accordingly, the Panel recommends that LIFE develop a strategic and proactive approach to promoting, developing and embedding e-learning to enhance teaching and learning for both staff and students.

4.7   LIFE occupies a dedicated building on the campus of the University. Its facilities include a learning resource centre and a self-access language centre. Full-time students and alumni of LIFE comment favourably on the value of having access to LU's facilities including the library, function rooms (for discussions), the canteen and sports facilities.

4.8   LIFE collects feedback from students on the quality of teaching and learning at SSCCs. Full-time students whom the Panel met are familiar with the system of class representatives. An audit trail demonstrates that consideration and follow through of issues raised by students are systematic and effective. Data on student perceptions of the effectiveness of teaching and learning are also gathered via CTLE. Recent CTLE scores demonstrate that students generally rate favourably the quality of teaching and learning, the performance of teachers and the effectiveness of courses and programmes. Full-time students

speak positively about their teachers' dedication and professionalism. Data from SSCCs and CTLE are routinely reported and analysed in APRs and PPRs.

4.9   LIFE is considering adding sections to CTLE and the Graduate Survey to gather quantitative data on physical learning environments as well as hardware and software learning resources, and subjecting the data to trend analysis over time. There is also a plan to gather qualitative and quantitative data on the e-learning environment, but this is restricted to utilisation of the VLE and plagiarism detection software, rather than a mechanism to evaluate the implementation of a broader-based strategy to foster pedagogical innovation. The Panel takes the view that these plans could be incorporated within the data streamlining process suggested under Dimension 2 (see paragraph 2.18).

4.10   APR and PPR are the main mechanisms for enhancing programme delivery within LIFE. APR provides an overall annual evaluation of programme delivery, while PPR examines the appropriateness and currency of the curriculum and programme design. PPR review panels comprise members of LU academic staff as well as external academic, professional, and industry experts. PPRs for AD programmes were conducted simultaneously in 2016 and HD programmes in 2015 to exploit potential synergies. The review panel commented that AD programmes were appropriately developed and programme delivery was of a good academic standard and quality. The review panel for HD programmes stated that students and graduates gave positive feedback on programme delivery. Recommendations for improvement are followed through by LIFE in PMC and AC meetings through action plans, though the Panel noted that PPRs are followed through more systematically than APRs (see paragraph 2.22).

4.11   Overall, the Panel concluded that programme delivery is sound. Teaching staff are enthusiastic and diligent, while students are appreciative of their commitment and the access LU provides to learning environments and resources. However, there is a need for LIFE to articulate more fully and promulgate proactively its approach and strategic priorities in respect of teaching and the student learning experience. Attention needs to be paid to fully implementing OBATL; broadening the repertoire of pedagogical approaches utilised by LIFE teaching staff; and resourcing, promoting and embedding e-learning in mainstream teaching and learning practices.

5.   SUPPORT FOR TEACHING QUALITY, INCLUDING PEDAGOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

5.1   LIFE is committed to providing quality education for students. Policies on recruitment of teaching staff, staff appraisal and staff development are modelled on those of LU. In view of the varied learning needs of SD students, LIFE is keen to recruit a caring and supportive teaching team. LIFE states that it supports and ensures teaching quality by providing professional and

pedagogical development opportunities, monitoring teaching performance and recognising outstanding teachers.

5.2   In order to test how effectively LIFE's approach to support for teaching quality, including pedagogical development, is working in practice, the Panel scrutinised documentation relevant to policies and practice on staff recruitment, induction, support for professional development and evaluation of teaching performance. These included appointment procedures, teaching grant schemes, guidelines on class observation, guidance on performance review and personnel actions, annual staff development plans, and the participation rate of LIFE staff in professional development workshops.

5.3   In addition, the Panel met with the senior leaders of LU and LIFE, programme leaders and subject leaders, and academic support services staff. During these meetings, the Panel explored with them LIFE's strategic priorities for continuing professional development of teaching staff; support for staff development; teaching QA policies and mechanisms; provision of professional and pedagogical development opportunities; and the Outstanding Teacher Award. The Panel also met with full-time and part-time students from a range of programmes to find out about their perceptions of the quality of teaching and learning they experience.

5.4   All teaching staff of LIFE are employed by LU via its Human Resources Office. As a self-funding entity, LIFE has established its own rank structure and salary scale which differs from that of LU. LIFE adheres to its comprehensive suite of recruitment policies and procedures, including appointment procedures, guidelines for recruitment panel composition and academic qualifications of appointees. Data show that all full-time and part-time teaching staff possess the required academic qualification of at least a master's degree.

5.5   LIFE is aware of the varied learning needs of SD students and is keen to recruit a caring and supportive teaching team. Owing to the vocation-orientated nature of its programmes, LIFE also recruits teachers with industrial experience and professional networks. Students whom the Panel met confirm that they have benefited from teaching and pastoral support staff who appreciate the challenges SD students face and are committed to helping them move on to the next stage of their careers. Both full-time and part-time staff enjoy strong collegial relationships that support peer-based learning. The Panel commends LIFE for the quality of its teaching staff, which is characterised by openness, accessibility and a pervasive determination to help students achieve.

5.6   LIFE teachers are not required to complete a mandatory professional development programme. Professional development opportunities, mostly in the form of occasional workshops and staff development days, are organised by LIFE or LU's Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC). Both full-time and part-time staff are encouraged, but not required, to participate in these activities.

They are also free to request help should they identify a developmental need. Teaching staff report that they find workshops on the VLE, OBATL and CRA useful. New teachers participate in an induction programme that includes information on curriculum design, OBATL, information technology and development of teaching plans, which they find helps them get to grips with teaching in a new setting. Full-time teaching staff can also access the support and service provided by LU's TLC, and attendance at seminars and conferences contributes to the overall indicator of professional development in each teacher's annual performance appraisal. Participation rates of LIFE staff at these workshops are not high, however, and part-time teaching staff are seldom available. Sharing of good pedagogical practices tends to occur informally at course level within LIFE and staff show no awareness of relatively recent innovations in pedagogical practice, such as the flipped classroom, which are now commonly embraced in other similar educational institutes.

5.7   Individual teachers whom the Panel met reported trying out different pedagogical approaches to enhance teaching and learning in the courses they teach. The Panel was keen, however, to discern LIFE's overarching approach and strategic priorities in relation to teaching quality and pedagogical development but found neither documentary evidence nor an understanding that was shared across the institution. Therefore, the Panel recommends that LIFE articulate and promulgate such a strategic approach, identifying institutional pedagogical development priorities and concrete action plans to steer the professional development of teaching staff. For example, there is a need to extend the professional development offering on OBATL, to assist staff in developing the deeper conceptual understandings needed to fully implement OBATL and CRA in student learning and assessment (see paragraph 2.11). Such an exercise would enable LIFE to undertake an analysis of the training needs of staff, to inform the content and format of professional training programmes and seek an appropriate balance between institutional priorities and the personal development needs of individuals. LIFE is further encouraged to make systematic use of support from LU's TLC, the roles and responsibilities of which are to steer and support innovative pedagogies, and to synergise with relevant Faculties of LU.

5.8   Programme leaders at LIFE play an important role in overseeing and encouraging teaching quality. Notwithstanding this, the Panel noted that they receive no direct support in relation to their academic leadership role and would welcome training geared towards SD leadership. LIFE is encouraged to make available more structured training and support for its academic leaders on supervision and QA of teaching and learning.

5.9   The Panel noted the positive measures LIFE is taking to support study time and conference attendance through two grant schemes and to recognise good teaching through the Outstanding Teacher Award Scheme, which is welcomed by teachers. In addition, the Panel encourages LIFE to consider making

available resources for teachers to engage in scholarship of teaching and learning in order to identify effective teaching approaches and encourage teaching staff to experiment with different pedagogies.

5.10   LIFE utilises CTLE and SSCCs to ascertain student perceptions of the quality of teaching. CTLE surveys gauge students' levels of satisfaction with teaching quality and the scores are taken as indicators of the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Trend analysis and aggregation of data according to programme type are conducted. Data show that students are generally satisfied with teacher performance. The mean scores for the CTLE item 'overall I am satisfied with the teacher's performance' from 2012/13 to 2016/17 range from 4.17 to 5.35 (out of 6) for AD, HD, and Diploma programmes. CTLE results for part-time teachers are slightly lower than those for full-time teachers. Feedback on teaching quality is also collected at SSCC meetings, which are held twice a year. Students whom the Panel met confirm that they are satisfied with the performance of their teachers and find them helpful and approachable.

5.11   LIFE makes effective, appropriate and systematic use of multiple means to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching including class observation, CTLE and APR. Procedures and documentation of class observation to support new teachers are fit for purpose. Programme leaders carry out supervisory and peer observations of teaching, which teaching staff find useful. CTLE is administered for every course and the results are followed through at various meetings at different levels of the institution. Teaching staff with a below average CTLE score have to complete an evaluation and follow-up report. Teaching performance is reviewed annually making use of CTLE scores and class observations. Appropriate guidelines on procedures and criteria of assessment are in place.

5.12   LIFE has made good use of the self-study it conducted in preparation for this audit and identified several potential institution-wide improvements to support teaching quality, including pedagogical development. These include setting minimum expectations for participation in continuing professional development activity and encouraging staff to take up opportunities; meeting the diverse professional development needs of its part-time teaching staff; strengthening collaboration with LU's TLC; extending the compulsory induction and training programme offered by LU's TLC to new staff of LIFE; and formalising the peer mentoring and observation schemes for new teachers. The Panel also noted the potential of several of LIFE's QA policies and mechanisms to lead to improvements at a local level, in relation to an individual course or programme or the practice of an individual member of teaching staff or a course team. The Panel formed the view, however, that LIFE has adopted a primarily remedial and reactive model of supporting teaching quality at the expense of one that could systematically drive the institution-wide enhancement LIFE needs if it is to realise the pedagogical approaches to which it aspires.

5.13 Overall, the Panel concluded that LIFE is taking seriously its commitment to supporting and ensuring teaching quality by providing professional and pedagogical development opportunities, monitoring teaching performance and recognising outstanding teachers. LIFE has succeeded in establishing a collegial, dedicated and enthusiastic teaching team that students find open and accessible. While individual teaching staff have tested out new pedagogical approaches, LIFE currently lacks an institution-wide strategic and enhancement-orientated approach, capable of identifying institutional pedagogical development priorities and systematically monitoring progress towards them.

6. STUDENT LEARNING ASSESSMENT

6.1 Student assessment in LIFE is governed by the Academic Regulations, which are modelled on the full-time programmes of LU and have been endorsed by LU Senate. Assessment practices aim to evaluate students' performance in a systematic manner, engage students in the learning process and inform them of their learning progress towards the completion of their academic programme. LIFE states that it has implemented CRA as an integral and final stage of implementing OBATL.

6.2 The Panel tested the effectiveness of LIFE's approach to assessment by examining a range of documents including the Academic Regulations; the Quality Assurance Manual; relevant extracts from the minutes of SSCC meetings, APRs, PPR reports and course documents; and templates for reports on internal and external moderation of examinations. The Panel also requested an audit trail of all available documentation relating to assessment of students from a cross-section of courses.

6.3 In addition, the Panel engaged the senior leadership of LU and LIFE in discussions about the implementation of CRA; monitoring of current practices in assessment; and preventing and detecting academic dishonesty. The senior leadership, and the programme leaders and subject leaders offered their views on the adequacy of LIFE's current assessment policies and procedures. Members of academic governance bodies and external stakeholders provided information about the roles of EEs, while programme leaders and subject leaders discussed the range of assessment modes staff are using. The Panel explored the challenges of adopting CRA with teaching staff and invited students to share their experiences of assessment.

6.4 LIFE is in the process of effecting a major cultural shift across the institution as it rolls out CRA as the final stage of its overall implementation of OBATL. Staff across LIFE are making individual and collective efforts to implement CRA within all courses as an integral component of OBATL. In 2017/18, staff mapped CILOs across all AD programmes against both the assessment tasks of individual courses and the PILOs. The task is now being replicated across HD

programmes. In a complementary exercise, staff are also developing assessment rubrics; each member of teaching staff wrote a set of rubrics for one of the courses he/she taught in 2017/18, as part of a pilot scheme. In 2018/19, all courses are required to have rubrics incorporated within the teaching plan from the outset. Staff whom the Panel met identified a range of challenges in implementing CRA, including the difficulty of applying it to examinations; the risk of assessing one's own teaching rather than student learning; the requirements for traditional testing made by some external stakeholders; the limitations of using CTLE (a student self-report) as a primary indicator of the achievement of learning outcomes; and the need for more peer support as well as professional development for teaching teams in writing rubrics and mapping the curriculum.

6.5   While recognising the commitment of teaching staff, the Panel formed the view that accomplishing such a fundamental shift to learning-centred, outcome-based assessment practices is going to demand a greater depth and breadth of cultural change than has been achieved so far. Although student learning outcomes have been articulated across all courses and programmes, the Panel found that both academic staff and students display variable conceptual understanding of the ways in which students might potentially demonstrate what they know and can do. Making the transition to CRA was often, though by no means always, described as producing a set of assessment rubrics for traditional forms of assessment such as examinations, tests and practicums, rather than a way of taking a more holistic and empowering approach to student learning and achievement. Minutes of SSCC meetings, extracts from APRs, PPR reports and course documents also reveal variations in levels of understanding about what constitutes CRA and the purposes of curriculum mapping.

6.6   The shift towards CRA is beginning to change assessment practices and create an interest in developing a greater range of assessment modes and tasks that could provide students with different opportunities to demonstrate their learning. The Panel concluded, however, that although more group work and project-based learning has been introduced in some LIFE courses, in others lectures remain the dominant pedagogy and tests or examinations remain the dominant assessment methodology. Furthermore, the new focus is not reflected in key QA documents. Policies guiding assessment practices appear to reflect a teaching and learning model that is now outdated, given LIFE's stated desire to support more learner-centered pedagogical approaches and the use of CRA strategies associated with OBATL. For example, the Quality Assurance Manual assumes there will be a final examination in all courses, and the Academic Regulations, which govern assessment at LIFE, are still heavily focused on traditional forms of examinations and testing. Both documents have little to say about the new forms of assessment practice that LIFE claims to espouse and are silent on CRA. Therefore, the Panel recommends that LIFE review its assessment policy and revise it as necessary, to ensure that it is up to

date, fit for purpose and capable of providing a framework for the provision of systematic training and continuing support for staff and students on the implementation of CRA.

6.7 Students report that they are provided with timely, constructive feedback on their assessment by teaching staff. The academic integrity process is outlined in the Academic Regulations and the Student Handbook. Students also have access to an online tutorial on plagiarism awareness on the webpage of LU's TLC and are obliged to submit all take-home essays via plagiarism detection software. While few of the students whom the Panel met knew how to go about making a grade appeal, most were confident that they could find out how to do so if necessary. Registry keeps records of grade appeals and academic integrity issues.

6.8 Arrangements for internal and external moderation are sound. All assessments undergo internal moderation by programme leaders and/or subject leaders as well as random checks by the QA team. Examination papers are routinely approved by EEs who also receive scripts for comment on recommended grades and sample scripts.

6.9 CTLE, which captures student perceptions of the quality of teaching and self-reports on the extent of their learning, is currently a main source of data on the student achievement of CILOs.

6.10 LIFE's EEs assure academic standards by commenting on examination questions, moderating assessed work and attending examination boards. Unlike LU, LIFE has not made the decision to utilise EAAs with an expanded role in relation to curriculum design, including the determination of ILOs and associated assessment strategies. The Panel encourages LIFE to consider the ways in which such appointments might assist in effecting the cultural shift to CRA as part of OBATL, for example by supporting the development of consistent standards across LIFE's programmes.

6.11 Course documents contain the data needed to take stock of current assessment practices but LIFE has not yet undertaken what would be a largely paper-based exercise to review the extent to which CRA is operating in practice. The Panel affirms the steps that LU and LIFE have already taken in developing a database of course information. It encourages LIFE to invest in further development of an online programme management system to support academic leaders in the management of academic standards, quality and enhancement.

6.12 Overall, the Panel concluded that the implementation of CRA is in its early stages and will take some time to embed within both policy and practice. Underpinning documentation needs to be aligned with the new direction LIFE is taking and attention needs to be paid to collecting and analysing data on assessment practices to drive enhancement.

7. STUDENT PARTICIPATION AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

7.1 LIFE shares LU's commitment to whole-person development of students. Alongside the formal curriculum and classroom teaching, LIFE provides various extra-curricular activities, student development and academic support services to help students achieve academic excellence, to facilitate personal growth and to prepare them for their careers. LIFE is also committed to student participation in governance, with student representation included in the membership requirements of several governance committees.

7.2 The Panel tested the effectiveness of LIFE's approach to student participation and student support services by reviewing a range of relevant documentation including the terms of reference and membership of various governance committees including Management Committee, Board of Governors of LIFE, and AC. As part of the process of evaluating student support services, the Panel scrutinised the 2016/17 annual reports of the Student Development Office (SDO), Life Enrichment and Appreciation Programme (LEAP) and LEP together with extracts from the minutes of SSCC meetings.

7.3 In addition, the Panel discussed with the senior leaders of LU how LEAP helps students acquire a global perspective through soft-skills development; levels of participation of LIFE students in extra-curricular activities and the efficacy of relationships between LIFE and LU student services. Programme leaders and subject leaders explained to the Panel how and when they identify students at risk, while academic support services staff described the services they offer and how they are operationalised. Full-time and part-time students shared with the Panel their experiences and views of the extra-curricular opportunities and support services LIFE provides.

7.4 LIFE understands the importance of student participation in governance and its documentation illustrates its commitment to operationalising this value. Board of Governors, Management Committee, AC and SSCCs all make provision for student representatives. However, certain unresolved constitutional issues mean that AC has been without student representative in 2018/19. Accordingly, the Panel affirms the actions the University and LIFE are taking to devise plans to secure the engagement and encourage the participation of LIFE students in all the various aspects of the governance of LIFE.

7.5 LIFE students benefit from the wide range of support services and extra-curricular and student development activities provided by the SDO of LIFE. Support services include student counselling, orientation activities, peer mentor support, career life planning and overseas service learning. LIFE students are able to participate with LU students as members of sport and cultural teams, and as non-resident members of LU's student hostels. Career services provided

by the LU Student Services Centre are also available to LIFE students. The Panel noted, however, that student uptake of service-learning tours is relatively low and encourages LIFE to find ways to increase participation in this type of meaningful activity.

7.6   LEP includes out-of-classroom language learning activities to help improve students' language skills and foster their interest in learning languages. LEAP is well designed to enhance students' all-round development and broaden their horizons. To increase the variety of LEAP activities, LIFE secured permission from LU Student Services Centre to include more of the University's credit-bearing Integrated Learning Programme activities within LEAP. Participation in LEAP activities is a graduation requirement for AD students, whereas HD and Diploma students are encouraged but not obliged to take part.

7.7   LIFE pays care and attention to the needs of non-local students and students with special educational needs (SEN). Non-local students benefit from a bespoke orientation programme, general academic advising and peer mentors. In addition, two members of teaching staff are assigned to support them throughout their study at LIFE. LIFE has secured external funding from the Quality Enhancement Support Scheme to provide SEN students with holistic support services.

7.8   Taking this range of student support together, the Panel commends LIFE's provision of extra-curricular and student development activities and support services which are well designed to enhance whole-person development and are valued by students.

7.9   SDO tracks participation rates in activities but provides no evaluative data. Student feedback on LEAP and LEP activities is gathered throughout the year; in 2016/17 results were generally positive for LEAP and very positive for students participating in LEP activities. However, participation rates in LEP are lower than desired and ambitious targets have been set. 'Before and after' testing for LEP has recently been strengthened (see paragraph 3.12). The Panel noted that the addition of comment sections in these feedback instruments would allow students to elaborate on their feedback.

7.10   LIFE also plans to develop a new survey instrument, a programme-level student learning experience survey (SLES), to capture levels of student satisfaction beyond the level of individual courses and improve the planning of student services (see paragraph 2.19).

7.11   Annual reports for the SDO, LEP and LEAP present analyses of the data gathered throughout the year with a view to enhancing the services provided. All language activity materials are comprehensively reviewed annually and randomly checked by responsible teachers.

7.12 Overall, the Panel concluded that LIFE is committed to student participation in governance and endorses the steps the University and LIFE are already taking to secure the engagement and encourage the participation of LIFE students in all the various aspects of the governance of LIFE. LIFE provides a rich diet of extra-curricular and student development activities and support services that are well designed to enhance whole-person development and overall learning experience of students.

8. SYSTEMS FOR ACTING ON QUALITY ASSURANCE DATA TO MAKE ONGOING ENHANCEMENTS TO STUDENT LEARNING

8.1 The IS describes LIFE's approach to QE as aiming to make use of evidence to inform decisions on action plans for improvement and to facilitate follow through and evaluation for effectiveness. As LIFE's stated approach makes no categorical distinction between remediation and systematic, evidence-based enhancement, the Panel drew the conclusion that QE is understood at LIFE as deriving from QA rather than being a related but distinct form of activity.

8.2 To test the effectiveness of LIFE's approach to acting upon QA data to make ongoing enhancements to student learning, the Panel scrutinised both the factual statements in the IS, several of which are expressed in tabular form, and a range of supporting documents. These included enhancement measures and initiatives; guidelines for, and detailed responses to, APRs and associated action plans of LIFE's AD and HD programmes; and guidelines and procedures for PPR. The Panel also tracked LIFE's progress on several identified enhancement measures. This entailed scrutiny of information on academic advising, academic probation and PILOs.

8.3 In addition, the Panel discussed with senior managers and members of academic governance bodies the rationale for introducing biennial course review, and more broadly, LIFE's strategic and educational approach. The Panel explored with academic support services staff issues concerning academic probation rates, and with senior teaching staff the mechanisms deployed for the administration and analysis of student surveys. Recent LIFE graduates advised the Panel of several benefits which had accrued to them during their period of study, positive observations which were broadly confirmed by the part-time and full-time students with whom the Panel discussed these matters.

8.4 The main vehicles for collecting information on the achievements and limitations of LIFE's educational provision are APRs and PPRs. APRs are an important component of the annual quality cycle of LIFE's programmes. They are compiled by programme heads and programme leaders on the basis of self-studies with the teaching team. It is reported that these usually include self-evaluation by the teachers and proposals for improvement plans to be implemented the following year. These are submitted ultimately to AC. PPRs,

which LIFE conducts every three years for QF Level 3 programmes and every four years for QF Level 4 programmes, are major events with an extensive remit, involving external panel membership. However, since programme approval is for indefinite periods, panels do not currently have the power to recommend suspension or termination (see paragraph 2.20).

8.5   LIFE submits overall academic results to the EC and AC. In respect of programmes identified as problematic (normally in relation to student performance) and where it deems careful monitoring to be required, the IS states that LIFE has strengthened its response by introducing several procedural and substantive enhancements. These include encouraging staff to reflect on and monitor more closely their educational approach, and putting in place a new academic advising procedure, with a view to reducing the number of students on academic probation.

8.6   The Panel considered LIFE's response to the recommendations resulting from the most recent round of four-yearly PPRs. These relate to market positioning, the wide-ranging implications of a vocational orientation, the possible benefits of a common first year, ensuring equity in marking, strengthening students' English language proficiency, strengthening PILOs, improving the articulation between ADs and LU's degree programmes, and improving the performance of a minority of external teaching staff. The Panel confirms that all recommendations have been considered by LIFE committees.

8.7   LIFE made a detailed response to the recommendation that more internship opportunities, practical learning and career support be introduced. As a result, discernible changes have been made to its programme portfolio, with all new HD programmes and some pre-existing ones now including an internship or practicum and a clearer focus on vocational preparation. LIFE has recently introduced three overarching PILOs for AD programmes, to be applied in all courses, though it is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of this development. Strengthened support measures have been introduced for students on academic probation (which is defined as a GPA below 1.67).

8.8   In respect of academic probation, LIFE provided two datasets containing information on the proportion of students affected. The first is collective, spanning the five academic years to 2016/17; the second is a programme-level table supplying data on seven programmes between 2015/16 and 2016/17. In each case, this brief analysis addresses only the consistently higher Term 1 data. The collective dataset for ADs shows no consistent trends in probation rates over the period, but considerable percentage variations and some year-on-year increases (the 9.62% mean conceals a range of 12.6%-6.8%). For HDs, at 9.3% the mean is similar but the range less volatile, and here the trend shows a small but generally steady increase in probation rates from 8.7% in 2012/13 to 10.5% in 2016/17. Conversely, the programme-based dataset shows a striking decline in probation rates from a mean of 30.06% in 2016/17 to 12.34% a year

later. Analysing the two together, the Panel notes, first, that LIFE is aware of the unevenness of the variation across programmes and is undertaking further examination and, second, that the 2016/17 baseline of over 30% was very high, so that anything other than a significant decline would be of concern. This being so, the Panel endorses LIFE's decision to implement a regular review of levels of academic probation in order to better understand the underlying factors and devise practical strategies to address them.

8.9   LIFE pays close attention to student evaluations, which it obtains mainly from CTLE and SSCCs together with a recently introduced survey to capture information relating to the needs of SEN students. At the same time, LIFE acknowledges the need to strengthen these arrangements by collecting additional data and developing a more structured approach to data analysis. It proposes to introduce a more generic SLES (see paragraph 7.10). This intention has in-principle approval from LU Senate and remains at the exploratory stage. Before further effort is invested in the development of this additional survey, the Panel encourages LU to consider the scheduling of the entire suite of student surveys and other logistical implications, in order to mitigate the risk of survey fatigue (see paragraph 2.19). The Panel concurs with LU's view that further work is necessary for LIFE to gain a holistic understanding of the student learning experience and to develop a strategic approach to enhancing it. Therefore, the Panel recommends that the University ensure that LIFE both draws on and supplements all available data sources to enable it to achieve a systematic, coherent and enhancement-orientated understanding of all aspects of student learning.

8.10   LIFE is considering supplementing APRs and PPRs with a regular (possibly biennial) course review, to provide a more granular approach to course design, content, delivery, assessment and outcome. The Panel learned that the proposal derived from the self-study, which concluded that the rather *ad hoc* nature of current arrangements would be ameliorated by a review involving an immediate retrospective analysis of each course. The Panel, while understanding the logic of this position, notes that it may be more appropriate and efficient to modify existing QA procedures so that courses identified as having quality issues undergo more finely-grained examination at any time, and course-level reviews are embedded within the PPRs (see paragraph 2.18).

8.11   LIFE has recently planned or embarked on several initiatives designed to improve the student experience on the basis of its QA data. These include an embryonic course review; SLES; inserting internships into extant programmes of study; programme reapprovals; and regularly reviewing academic probation levels, the causes and implications of which have yet to be fully understood. Initiatives currently under way include internships in all new HD programmes; introducing three overarching PILOs to all AD programmes; and belatedly implementing OBATL across the piece.

8.12 The Panel, while acknowledging and respecting both LIFE's institutional commitment to strengthening its provision and the dedication of its teaching staff to delivering sound, vocationally-orientated programmes, finds these planned developments piecemeal and in some cases reactive, rather than components of a coherent, fully costed and evidenced approach to QE, involving both direction from senior leaders and stakeholder involvement. The Panel is uncertain that the likely cumulative demands imposed by these innovations have been fully understood and addressed at the most senior levels of LIFE and LU.

8.13 Overall, the Panel concluded that while LIFE may not take an integrated or strategic approach to QE, it does take soundly based actions designed to rectify identified problems. Policies are appropriate in design and reliably implemented, although in some cases scope exists to strengthen them further. APRs are undertaken and their findings addressed, with priority assigned to programmes defined as problematic. PPRs are similarly competent. LIFE pays close attention to student evaluations. The two areas under consideration for development (course reviews and SLES) have become a focus for discussion only quite recently, and are likely to raise logistical and resource issues that have yet to be fully addressed.

9. CONCLUSIONS

9.1 The approach taken by the senior leadership of LU and LIFE to address historical governance and management issues in LIFE's predecessor units is proving effective. While some transitional arrangements are still evident, LIFE's SD operations are now on a much stronger and more sustainable base. Further work is required to clarify the governance relationships between LU and LIFE and to ensure internal consistency across various levels of enabling policies, statutes and ordinances.

9.2 LIFE is a valued component of LU and has a clear place in the University's planning processes. LU's new Strategic Plan is intended to address the need for stronger KPIs to track LIFE's progress towards the institutions' strategic priorities. Data analytics should also play a greater role in the leadership and management of LIFE's QE in the future.

9.3 LIFE is committed to offering high quality SD programmes. Both current students and recent graduates are generally well satisfied with the quality of their studies. Staff are making significant efforts to gather data on programme quality. Essential elements are in place and significant work has been done towards implementing OBATL. Nonetheless, there are areas where further work is needed in the interests of ongoing QE. These include full implementation of OBATL; the development of LIFE's data warehouse, to facilitate greater efficiency and more sophisticated analytics on programme quality monitoring; and the introduction of benchmarking at programme level.

9.4   Programme delivery is sound. Teaching staff are enthusiastic and diligent, while students are appreciative of their commitment and the access LU provides to learning environments and resources. However, LIFE needs to articulate more fully and promulgate effectively its approach and strategic priorities in respect of teaching and student learning experience. Attention needs to be paid to implementing OBATL fully; broadening the repertoire of pedagogical approaches utilised by LIFE teaching staff; and resourcing, promoting and embedding e-learning in mainstream teaching and learning practices.

9.5   LIFE is taking seriously its commitment to supporting and ensuring teaching quality by providing professional and pedagogical development opportunities, monitoring teaching performance and recognising outstanding teachers. LIFE has succeeded in establishing a collegial, dedicated and enthusiastic teaching team that students find open and accessible. While individual teaching staff have tested out new pedagogical approaches, LIFE currently lacks an institution-wide strategic and enhancement-orientated approach, capable of identifying institutional pedagogical development priorities and systematically monitoring progress towards them.

9.6   Implementation of CRA is in its early stages and will take some time to embed within both policy and practice. Underpinning documentation needs to be aligned with the new direction LIFE is taking and attention needs to be paid to collecting and analysing data on assessment practices to drive enhancement.

9.7   LIFE is committed to student participation and is already taking steps to secure the engagement and encourage the participation of LIFE students in all the various aspects of the governance of the institution. LIFE provides a rich diet of extra-curricular and student development activities and support services that are well designed to enhance whole-person development and overall learning experience of students.

9.8   LIFE does not take an integrated or strategic approach to QE, but it does take soundly based actions designed to rectify identified problems. Policies are appropriate in design and reliably implemented, although in some cases scope exists to strengthen them further. APRs are undertaken and their findings addressed, with priority assigned to programmes defined as problematic. PPRs are similarly competent. LIFE pays close attention to student evaluations. The two areas under consideration for development (course reviews and SLES) have become a focus for discussion only quite recently and are likely to raise logistical and resource issues that have yet to be fully addressed.

APPENDIX A: LINGNAN UNIVERSITY (LU)
[Information provided by the University]

History

Lingnan University (LU) is the liberal arts university in Hong Kong and it has the longest established tradition among the local institutions of higher education. Its history dates back to 1888, when its forerunner, the Christian College in China, was founded in Guangzhou, and to 1967, when the institution, as Lingnan College, was re-established in Hong Kong.

Lingnan Institute of Further Education (LIFE), set up in 2001, and Community College at Lingnan University (CCLU), set up in 2003, were merged into one academic unit (keeping the name "LIFE") on 1 July 2017. LIFE strives to meet the diverse learning and lifelong education needs of a knowledge-based society with evolving skills and human resources requirements.

Vision and Mission

Vision of LU

To excel as a leading Asian liberal arts university with international recognition, distinguished by outstanding teaching, learning, scholarship and community engagement.

Mission of LU

LU is committed to:
- providing quality whole-person education by combining the best of the Chinese and Western liberal arts traditions;
- nurturing students to achieve all-round excellence and imbuing them with its core values; and
- encouraging faculty and students to contribute to society through original research and knowledge transfer.

Vision of LIFE

To become a leading institution of professional and continuing education in meeting the changing learning needs of society and promoting excellence in teaching and learning.

Mission of LIFE

LIFE is committed to:

- providing high quality academic programmes to meet the diverse learning and professional development needs of society;
- preparing students for academic excellence, personal growth, career advancement, and contribution to society through a wide range of learning and student development activities;
- providing quality and diverse lifelong learning opportunities to facilitate the professional and personal development of learners; and
- collaborating with other education institutions, professional organisations and industry partners to offer quality programmes and provide practical learning experiences for students.

Role Statement

LU:

(a) offers a range of programmes leading to the award of first degrees in Arts, Business and Social Sciences;
(b) pursues the delivery of teaching at an internationally competitive level in all the taught programmes that it offers;
(c) offers a number of taught postgraduate programmes and research postgraduate programmes in selected fields within the subject areas of Arts, Business and Social Sciences;
(d) provides a general education programme which seeks to offer all students a broad educational perspective, distinguished by the best liberal arts tradition from both East and West, and enables its students to act responsibly in the changing circumstances of this century;
(e) aims at being internationally competitive in its areas of research strength, in particular in support of liberal arts programmes;
(f) maintains strong links with the community;
(g) pursues actively deep collaboration in its areas of strength with other higher education institutions in Hong Kong or the region or more widely so as to enhance the Hong Kong higher education system;
(h) encourages academic staff to be engaged in public service, consultancy and collaborative work with the private sector in areas where they have special expertise, as part of the institution's general collaboration with government, business and industry; and
(i) manages in the most effective and efficient way the public and private resources bestowed upon the institution, employing collaboration whenever it is of value.

Programmes of Study offered by Sub-degree Providing Unit

LIFE offers a range of comprehensive sub-degree programmes and life-long learning programmes at QF Level 4 or below including Associate Degree, Higher Diploma, Advanced Diploma, Professional Diploma, Diploma Yi Jin, Diploma and Certificate programmes.

Staff and Enrolment Numbers of Sub-degree Programmes

A breakdown of staff and programme enrolments in 2017/18 is as follows –

Sub-degree Providing Unit	Academic and Academic Supporting Staff Numbers		Programme Enrolment Numbers	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
LIFE	33	51	1 418	470

APPENDIX B: INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE TO THE AUDIT FINDINGS

Lingnan University (LU) would like to thank the Quality Assurance Council and the Audit Panel for conducting the quality audit on the sub-degree (SD) programmes offered by the Lingnan Institute of Further Education (LIFE), and for the valuable comments and suggestions made in the Audit Report. LU is committed to providing quality SD programmes and valuable learning experiences to students to help them meet their learning, vocational and professional development needs. The audit exercise has provided us with a precious opportunity to self-review and self-evaluate, in a critical way, the operation of LIFE and the quality of SD programmes we offer. We are pleased that the Audit Report has confirmed our good practices, affirmed the initiatives we are taking, and suggested areas for further improvement and enhancement of our SD programmes.

LU welcomes the Panel's recognition of the positive attitude and the proactive course of action we have taken. From addressing and resolving the enrolment management issue a few years ago to the steady progress we achieved in putting our SD operations on a financially more sustainable basis, we are confident that we have taken a crucial step in the right direction for future development. We are encouraged by the Panel's commendations of the quality of LIFE's teaching staff, who are characterised by openness, accessibility and determination to help students achieve. We are appreciative of the Panel's commendations that our extra-curricular and student development activities and support services are well designed and effective in enhancing whole-person development, and that the Language Enhancement Programme not only assists students in achieving an acceptable level of language competence but also encourages and supports the higher-level ambitions of more advanced students. We are also pleased that the Panel found existing LIFE policies and procedures for curriculum design and programme development and approval broadly fit for purpose, and the programme delivery sound.

We welcome the Panel's affirmation of the initiatives we have taken to develop a more sharply focused set of Key Performance Indicators and additional quantitative measures to track SD operations towards both the stated strategic priorities of LIFE and the University's strategic objectives. We are also thankful for the Panel's confirmation of our commitment to supporting and ensuring LIFE teaching quality by providing professional and pedagogical development opportunities, monitoring teaching performance, and recognising outstanding teachers. We are pleased that the Panel acknowledged our plan to encourage the engagement of LIFE students in all aspects of the governance of LIFE and our decision to consider programme proposals at QF Level 3 or below by the LU Senate and the implementation of a new programme re-approval procedure, in support of our undertaking to review LIFE's committee structure and to introduce programme-level student learning experience and alumni surveys. We will continue our efforts unswervingly in these directions and carry out the above initiatives to further enhance the quality assurance system, SD operations, and student learning.

We are in full agreement with the Panel's recommendations, in particular the need to examine and revise the governance relationships among LU Council, LU Senate and the Board of Governors of LIFE, as well as LIFE's management and link to LU. To this end, the University has decided to appoint an Associate Vice-President to oversee LIFE and to lead a taskforce to conduct a comprehensive review of its governance and management structures.

In addition, LIFE is committed to fully implementing the Outcome-based Approach to Teaching and Learning and Criterion Referenced Assessment. It will take steps to update its assessment policy and develop institutional pedagogical development priorities and action plans for professional development of teaching staff. Steps will also be taken to develop and implement plans to review LIFE's committee structure in view of its small scale and limited human resources, to embed external expert support more systematically, to develop e-learning for the enhancement of teaching and learning, to benchmark our programmes with similar programmes at other institutions, and to adopt a more integrated, coherent, and enhancement-oriented approach to collecting and analysing data, all for the sake of quality assurance and enhancement going forward.

Once again, we wish to express our sincere gratitude to the Audit Panel for this most meaningful exercise and its comprehensive and invaluable suggestions for quality enhancement in the development of our SD programmes.

APPENDIX C: ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMNS

AC	Academic Committee
AD	Associate degree
APR	Annual programme report
CCLU	Community College at Lingnan University
CILOs	Course intended learning outcomes
CRA	Criterion-referenced assessment
CTLE	Course teaching and learning evaluation
EAAs	External academic advisors
EC	Examinations Committee
EEs	External examiners
GPA	Grade point average
HD	Higher diploma
HKQF	Hong Kong Qualifications Framework
ILOs	Intended learning outcomes
IS	Institutional Submission
KPIs	Key performance indicators
LEAP	Life Enrichment and Appreciation Programme
LEP	Language Enhancement Programme
LIFE	Lingnan Institute of Further Education
LLPs	Lifelong learning programmes
LU	Lingnan University
OBATL	Outcome-based Approach to Teaching and Learning
PILOs	Programme intended learning outcomes
PMC	Programme management committee
PPR	Periodic programme review
QA	Quality assurance
QAC	Quality Assurance Council
QE	Quality enhancement
SCAQA	Sub-Committee on Academic Quality Assurance of Sub-degree Programmes
SD	Sub-degree
SDO	Student Development Office
SDPU	Sub-degree Providing Unit
SEN	Special educational needs
SLES	Student learning experience survey

SSCC	Staff-Student Consultation Committee
TLC	Teaching and Learning Centre
UGC	University Grants Committee
VLE	Virtual learning environment

APPENDIX D: LU AUDIT PANEL

The Audit Panel comprised the following:

Professor Sandra Vianne McLean A.M. (Panel Chair)
Emeritus Professor, Queensland University of Technology

Dr Sara Booth
Director, Academic, Peer Review Portal

Professor Cecilia KW Chun
Director of the Centre for Learning Enhancement and Research, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Professor Robert Harris
Emeritus Professor, University of Hull

Professor Michael CH Yam
Professor of the Department of Building and Real Estate, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Audit Co-ordinator

Dr Melinda Drowley
QAC Secretariat

APPENDIX E: QAC'S MISSION, TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP

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

Mission

QAC's mission is:

(a) To assure that the quality of educational experience in all programmes at the levels of sub-degree, first degree and above (however funded) offered in UGC-funded universities is sustained and improved, and is at an internationally competitive level; and

(b) To encourage universities to excel in this area of activity.

Terms of Reference

QAC has the following terms of reference:

(a) To advise 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 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.

Membership (as at October 2019)

Mr Lincoln LEONG Kwok-kuen, JP (Chairman)	Former Chief Executive Officer, MTR Corporation Limited
Professor Chetwyn CHAN Che-hin	Associate Vice President (Learning and Teaching), The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
Mrs Belinda GREER	Chief Executive Officer, English Schools Foundation
Professor Sir Chris HUSBANDS	Vice-Chancellor, Sheffield Hallam University
Professor Marilee LUDVIK	Professor of Postsecondary Educational Leadership, San Diego State University
Dr Kim MAK Kin-wah, BBS, JP	President, Caritas Institute of Higher Education and Caritas Bianchi College of Careers
Professor PONG Ting-chuen	Professor of Computer Science and Engineering, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
Professor Jan THOMAS	Vice-Chancellor, Massey University
Dr Don F WESTERHEIJDEN	Senior Research Associate, Center for Higher Education Policy Studies, University of Twente
Dr Carrie WILLIS, SBS, JP	Chairperson, Committee on Professional Development of Teachers and Principals

Ex-officio Member

Professor James TANG Tuck-hong	Secretary-General, UGC

Secretary

Miss Winnie WONG Ming-wai	Deputy Secretary-General (1), UGC