Report of a Quality Audit
of City University of Hong Kong

November 2010
Quality Assurance Council

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QAC Audit Report Number 6

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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.

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

Conduct of QAC Quality Audits

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

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

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

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

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

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

City University has a proactive approach to improving quality assurance and is in the process of developing institution-wide approaches to achieve greater consistency in implementing quality assurance policy and procedure. Major initiatives include the review of existing policies and key decision structures. The Panel concluded that the University has made good progress in establishing University-wide systems that drive continuous improvement in teaching and learning activities.

Commendations

1. The QAC commends City University for its proactive approach to improving quality assurance for teaching and learning through the development of institution-wide approaches to facilitate greater consistency in the implementation of quality assurance policy and procedures. *[Page 8]*

2. The QAC commends City University for its success in lifting the capability of individual students and preparing them for professional careers in several niche areas of practice. *[Page 10]*

3. The QAC commends City University for the establishment of the Institutional Analysis Group and its role in improving data collection, interpretation and use and contributing to the development of an evidence-based culture in the University. *[Page 14]*

4. The QAC commends City University for its proactive approach to supporting the integration of international and mainland students on campus. *[Page 19]*

5. The QAC commends City University for the widespread understanding in the academic community of the implications of academic honesty policy. *[Page 22]*

6. The QAC commends City University for the emphasis it gives to teaching and

learning as demonstrated in University policy and the strategy to acknowledge innovation through activities associated with the Teaching Excellence Awards scheme. *[Page 23]*

7.　　　The QAC commends City University for the extent to which it involves and supports student participation in University Committees. *[Page 27]*

8.　　　The QAC commends City University for the robust arrangements in place to support research students at off-shore locations and the quality of supervision and management of doctoral candidature. *[Page 28]*

Affirmations

1.　　　The QAC affirms the directions being taken by City University in reviewing the *Principles, Policies and Practices for Quality Education* (3Ps) policy and the structure of its academic committees. *[Page 8]*

2.　　　The QAC affirms the actions of City University in rebalancing the distribution of authority for quality assurance to a more appropriate mix of central and devolved responsibility for policy and its implementation. *[Page 11]*

3.　　　The QAC affirms the actions of City University in implementing its recent review of committees and urges it to ensure that committees are not being used as a substitute for effective line management. *[Page 12]*

4.　　　The QAC affirms the University's efforts to develop a rigorous set of performance indicators based on a confluence of top-down and bottom-up initiatives that effectively engage the academic community in progress towards institutional goals. *[Page 12]*

5.　　　The QAC affirms City University's work in institutional benchmarking which can be further developed by considering similarity of mission in the selection of potential benchmarking institutions and by implementing strategies to develop an overarching institutional approach to benchmarking. *[Page 13]*

6.　　　The QAC affirms the intent of the Graduate and Postgraduate Outcomes and advises the University to provide guidance on ways in which these may be operationalised and the graduates reliably assessed relative to their achievement of institutional outcomes. *[Page 18]*

7.　　　The QAC affirms the progress made by the University in implementing a comprehensive, progressive and forward-thinking criterion-referenced assessment policy for all taught programmes. *[Page 21]*

8.　　　The QAC affirms the actions of City University to introduce a student feedback survey that is attuned to Outcome Based Teaching and Learning and the significant effort invested in developing and piloting a suitable instrument. *[Page 24]*

9.　　　The QAC affirms the actions of City University in establishing the Office of Education Development and General Education (EDGE) to provide leadership in preparation for the implementation of the General Education component of the four-year degree programme. *[Page 25]*

Recommendations

1.   The QAC recommends that City University ensure that the positioning and leadership of the Quality Assurance Committee is appropriate to its overarching institutional role in quality assurance and that it is constituted with the necessary line structure and authority to discharge its role. *[Page 8]*

2.   The QAC recommends that City University clearly articulate the features which, when combined, distinguish the profile of the University and its students and use this as a reference point in grounding the University internally and promoting it externally. *[Page 10]*

3.   The QAC recommends that City University implement a programme of annual performance review that is linked to the performance indicators in the Strategic Plan and includes both the academic leaders and their individual academic units. *[Page 14]*

4.   The QAC recommends that City University implement a policy on review of programmes that ensures all programmes, including those not subject to accreditation by external bodies, are examined and revalidated on a regular cycle. *[Page 16]*

5.   The QAC recommends that City University examine the arrangements in place for managing student internships and develop protocols to minimise risk for students, industry partners and sponsors, and the University. *[Page 20]*

6.   The QAC recommends that when City University undertakes the planned review of the implementation of the Learning Experience Questionnaire it also consider the Teaching Feedback Questionnaire, re-consider the conceptual foundations of both instruments and determine their appropriate use in order to achieve the twin aims of evaluating teacher performance and ensuring teaching quality. *[Page 24]*

7.   The QAC recommends that City University explore the transforming effects of IT and articulate a policy that will inform the use of technology in curriculum development and pedagogical strategies as well as for course management. *[Page 25]*

8.   The QAC recommends that City University undertake a review of the composition of thesis examination panels to ensure that the University is in step with best practice at local and international level. *[Page 28]*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This is the report of an audit of the quality of the student learning experience at City University of Hong Kong (City University) by an Audit Panel appointed by, and acting on behalf of, the Quality Assurance Council (QAC). It is based on an Institutional Submission which was prepared by City University following a period of self-review and submitted to the QAC on 1 March 2010. A one-day Initial Meeting of the Audit Panel was held on 22 March 2010 to discuss the Submission. The Panel Chair and Audit Coordinator visited City University on 24 March 2010 to discuss the detailed arrangements for the audit visit.

1.2 The Audit Panel visited City University from 24-27 May 2010 and met over 90 staff and 110 students from across the University, as well as a number of external stakeholders, including the Chairman and lay members of the City University Council, local employers and graduates of City University.

1.3 City University is one of eight institutions in Hong Kong funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC). Established in 1984, by 2009/10 City University had approximately 12,000 undergraduate (Ug) students and over 800 postgraduate (Pg) research degree students enrolled in UGC-funded programmes with a further 5,000 in self-funded Pg programmes. Numbers of staff were equivalent to about 3,500 full-time staff and of those about 1,000 were engaged in teaching duties. The academic programmes are delivered through three colleges (Business; Humanities and Social Sciences; Science and Engineering) and three schools (Creative Media; Energy and Environment; Law).

1.4 A brief profile of City University is provided in Appendix A. It includes the University's role statement as agreed with the UGC and brief details of its history, mission, vision and organisational structure.

1.5 The Institutional Response to the Audit Report is provided in Appendix B. A list of abbreviations, acronyms and definitions used in the Audit Report is provided in Appendix C. Details of the Audit Panel are provided in Appendix D. The QAC's Mission, Terms of Reference and Membership are provided in Appendix E.

1.6 Since student learning is the focal point of the audit system, QAC audits examine all aspects of an institution's activities which contribute to the quality of student learning. These activities range from planning and policy development, through programme design, approval and review, to teaching, assessment and student support. The QAC has selected a set of such activities, common to all institutions, as the 'focus areas' of audit. Each focus area is a significant contributor to student learning quality and is sufficiently generic that it can be interpreted in a way which is relevant to each institution's activities and practices. Taken together, the focus areas effectively define the scope of a QAC audit.

1.7 The Audit Report follows the general guidance provided in the QAC Audit Manual[1] and covers the audit focus areas, with its structure generally being based on the format of City University's Institutional Submission.

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[1] http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/qac/index.htm

1.8   The QAC and the Audit Panel are grateful to City University for the University's prompt and efficient cooperation throughout the audit process.

2.   OVERVIEW OF THE TEACHING AND LEARNING QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

2.1   City University, like the other universities in Hong Kong, is operating in a context of change driven by external factors such as the introduction of a four-year undergraduate degree curriculum and outcomes-based approaches to education.   In addition, there are internal changes under way including the relatively recent appointment of a new President and a number of senior leadership positions in process of being filled.   The University is also in the process of re-balancing the extent of devolution of authority for implementation of policy and operations.   A further internal driver of change is the rigorous Internal Quality Audit (IQA) carried out with the assistance of external consultants in 2009 as part of a self-review in preparation for the QAC audit.   This exercise precipitated a number of significant changes and consultations.   A further driver of change to note is the programme of building to extend the capacity of a campus that is very constrained in terms of space.

Principles, Policies and Practices for Quality Education (3Ps)

2.2   City University's organisational framework for managing learning and teaching is based on the *Principles, Policies and Practices for Quality Education* (known as the 3Ps), which was approved by Senate in 2006.   The 3Ps statement offers a framework within which responsibility for day-to-day operational matters in quality assurance has been devolved to colleges/schools (hereafter *colleges*) and, in some areas, to departmental and programme level.   The scope of the 3Ps includes guidance on external benchmarking, use of External Academic Advisors (EAAs), curriculum development, assessment, staff development and evaluation of teaching.

2.3   The implementation of the policy appears to be primarily the responsibility of committees at University, college and departmental level although it was stated that the Provost was expected to monitor policy implementation.   The net result is a complex set of arrangements that in some cases makes it difficult to grasp the roles and responsibilities of the key players.   This is exacerbated by, firstly, variations in quality assurance arrangements at college and departmental level resulting from the historical devolution of authority within City University and, secondly, by the fact that both the committee structures and the 3Ps policy itself were under review and at a stage of significant change at the time of the audit visit.

2.4   The main intention behind the review of the 3Ps is to introduce more explicit references to the introduction of outcomes-based education (referred to as Outcomes-Based Teaching and Learning (OBTL) at City University).   It is also intended to accommodate the changes to academic structures flowing from the introduction of the four-year degree which will require the students to move beyond the confines of their home or primary academic department.

2.5   While the Panel welcomed the review of the 3Ps it was clear that there was some lack of clarity and shared understanding in the University's arrangements for quality

assurance at the time of the audit visit. As suggested above, this situation made it difficult at times for the Panel to get an accurate picture of what was happening day-to-day with aspects of quality assurance. Further, the Panel noted that this lack of clarity was shared by a number of City University staff, including relatively senior staff and committee members, who found it hard to explain the arrangements in simple terms. Nonetheless, the Panel judged that, when complete, the review of the 3Ps would bring greater consistency in quality assurance across the University. They considered the 3Ps to be a sound framework in the way it was originally conceived and in the freedom and ownership it gave to colleges and departments to institute local applications of quality measures. However, it was also clear that the extent of devolution of authority for quality assurance had, over a period of years, produced inconsistency in the measures used and the level of commitment to quality assurance generally even though some colleges and departments had maintained high levels of commitment throughout. The resulting shortfall in institutional perspective now is being addressed through the review with the introduction of several important institution-wide policies, for example, an assessment policy to underpin OBTL. The new policy is proposed to be called *Code of Practice for Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement*.

Committee Structures

2.6   The oversight of academic quality on behalf of Senate falls to Academic Policy Committee (APC) with its subcommittee on Undergraduate Studies (SCUS), the Board of Graduate Studies (BGS) with subcommittees for Taught Postgraduate Programmes (CTPP) and Research Degrees (CRDC). At college level the Validation and Monitoring Committees play an important role in quality enhancement.

2.7   The Senate also has an overarching Quality Assurance Committee. The Provost is responsible for reporting to Senate on behalf of the Quality Assurance Committee although the Chair of the Committee is an independent senior academic. The Quality Assurance Committee has played an important role in initiating and driving quality improvements including the development of new policies on assessment (section 10), measurement of student learning experiences (section 11), and oversight of Teaching Excellence Awards (section 11). The Panel heard that the independence of the Quality Assurance Committee is seen as a valuable dimension in the quality assurance arrangements but, on the other hand, the position of the Quality Assurance Committee in the committee and organisational structure of the University has, according to some interviewees, been something of a challenge because the Committee has no authority or direct line to effect change in areas where problems are apparent. The Panel noted that this difficulty is, inevitably, exacerbated by the variation noted above between colleges and departments in their effectiveness and commitment to quality assurance. A review of academic committees at City University, finalised in December 2009, proposes that the Quality Assurance Committee become a sub-committee of a reconstituted APC. The Panel considers this a potentially effective solution provided that the Chair (perhaps the Provost) has authority to effect action and ensure accountability for quality assurance throughout the University. This will be a matter for careful consideration.

Commendation 1

The QAC commends City University for its proactive approach to improving quality assurance for teaching and learning through the development of institution-wide approaches to facilitate greater consistency in the implementation of quality assurance policy and procedures.

Affirmation 1

The QAC affirms the directions being taken by City University in reviewing the *Principles, Policies and Practices for Quality Education* (3Ps) policy and the structure of its academic committees.

Recommendation 1

The QAC recommends that City University ensure that the positioning and leadership of the Quality Assurance Committee is appropriate to its overarching institutional role in quality assurance and that it is constituted with the necessary line structure and authority to discharge its role.

3. ARTICULATION OF APPROPRIATE OBJECTIVES

3.1   City University's mission as set out in the Strategic Plan (SP) 2010-2015 is *to nurture and develop the talents of students and to create applicable knowledge in order to support social and economic advancement.*   A vision statement in 2009 emphasises the University's goal to become *a global university, excelling in research and professional education.*

Distinctive Features of the University

3.2   The Panel noted the somewhat different emphases in the mission and vision statements and how these link to the suite of programmes provided by the University.   They formed the view that at a macro level there was scope for further exploiting and building on a combination of the features that were noted as characteristic of the University.   The aim would be to strengthen the image and statement of objectives that the University uses as a touchstone for its own activities and also to project itself to potential students and the community.

3.3   There are a number of features of City University which were highlighted as strengths by the Panel and which they considered, when combined, would offer opportunities for differentiating and promoting City University as a university of first choice for certain categories of student.   In summary, these include its focus on professional education and research, the development of the teaching-research nexus and especially its concept of value-addedness which provides a transformative experience for students who are first in their family to attend university.   These characteristics need to be expressed clearly and succinctly to provide an easy point of reference for all stakeholders.

3.4   City University, like a number of other institutions in Hong Kong, caters to many first-in-family students. These may not have the strongest academic credentials or English language competency at entry but for them the experience of a City University education adds value and is transformative thus providing them with the foundations for a worthwhile career.

3.5   The SP mentions the University's desire to enhance the diversity of its students and such an emphasis could serve to distinguish City University as well as make an important contribution to opening opportunities for students who would not otherwise have an opportunity to undertake university-level education.

3.6   The emphasis is on professional education, with some strong niche programmes, provided in consultation with industry and the professions. This link with industry is emphasised through the student internship programme. The University's goal is to substantially increase the number of internships in coming years and if successful, this can be a major feature of the University. The link between internships and employment – and the general employability of graduates – could be further emphasised.

3.7   The work being done, albeit at an early stage, to find strategies for enhancing the teaching-research nexus also offers opportunities for the University to define its research programmes as explicitly linked to the focus on industry and the professions with priority given to research that has observable and applicable links and measurable benefits to Hong Kong industry and community. In addition, the attractiveness of Hong Kong to international and mainland students offers the opportunity to enrol more high-achieving students from mainland and international sources although the capacity to cater for larger numbers is limited by the availability of hostel places.

3.8   The vision of the graduates operating in a globalised economy could be advanced by careful management of the University's international operations to ensure that, for example, partnerships and student exchange agreements are built around relationships with institutions with similar values and profiles. The Panel noted that the University has identified a number of benchmarking institutions but nonetheless believes that the University should examine the potential benefits of aligning itself with universities that have similar characteristics and connections to industry and the professions and similar student demographics. Some possibilities are University of Waterloo, Canada; Drexel University; City University London and the Australian Technology Network (ATN) institutions in Australia.

3.9   The Panel considers that being able to project the University's key features effectively to the wider community is only one of the benefits of highlighting a combination of distinguishing features. Perhaps, more importantly, it can give the University community itself a clear sense of the defining characteristics of City University. This can in turn provide the academic community with a well defined starting point for programme development and devising appropriate learning strategies for those students for whom City University is their first choice.

Commendation 2

The QAC commends City University for its success in lifting the capability of individual students and preparing them for professional careers in several niche areas of practice.

Recommendation 2

The QAC recommends that City University clearly articulate the features which, when combined, distinguish the profile of the University and its students and use this as a reference point in grounding the University internally and promoting it externally.

Learning and Teaching Objectives

3.10 City University's learning and teaching objectives are set for each five-year period using processes involving consultation with staff at different levels. The objectives are included in the SP that goes to Senate and, ultimately, Council for approval.

3.11 The deans, in consultation with heads of department, are responsible for setting local performance indicators aligned with the SP and for reporting to the Provost through their annual departmental reports (section 6).

3.12 City University's OBTL project was launched in 2005. Progress on the introduction of General Education courses and the four-year curriculum is monitored by the APC. The newly-constituted Office of Education Development and General Education (EDGE) is providing additional leadership for the development of the General Education courses (section 7).

3.13 The University has set out the Graduate Outcomes for the different levels of programme – Ug, taught postgraduate (TPg) and research postgraduate (RPg) outcomes. The Panel found that these generic statements, while consistent with the teaching and learning objectives of City University, did not seem to have much traction as a foundation for programme development in the colleges owing to their abstract generality. These are discussed further in section 7. The University has also established Key Outcome Areas (KOAs) in the 2009-2012 Academic Development Proposal (ADP) with four areas delineated for Ug and five KOAs outlined for Pg.

4. MANAGEMENT, PLANNING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

4.1 The hierarchy of accountability for teaching and learning is built from the grassroots on a system of course leaders and programme leaders who coordinate and monitor activities. In the colleges, the programme leaders report to the head of department while in schools where there are no departments they report to the dean of the school. The deans in turn report to the Provost.

4.2 Each college or school has a committee structure that reports to a Board and thence to Senate. Key committees reporting to a college or school board include Validation and Monitoring Committees; Graduate Studies Committees and Programme and

Departmental Committees.

Organisational Structure

4.3   As mentioned in section 2, the Panel is cognisant of the evolution in the way the institution operates.   In the early Polytechnic phase of the University there was centralised control of academic processes but this gradually gave way to a situation of devolved authority and responsibility for academic quality assurance.   The Panel recognises the positive benefits of devolved academic autonomy, in particular the sense of ownership of local policy and procedures this engenders, but also considers that this needs to be balanced by consistency in policy and practice.   It agrees with the University that the situation had become fragmented and considers that the institution is on the right track to bringing a degree of consistency which for some years, under devolution, was lacking in many areas.

> **Affirmation 2**
>
> **The QAC affirms the actions of City University in rebalancing the distribution of authority for quality assurance to a more appropriate mix of central and devolved responsibility for policy and its implementation.**

Committees and Line Management

4.4   Much of the impetus towards increased centralisation and standardisation of policy in process at City University at the time of the audit visit seemed to be occurring through committees.   Prior to the visit, the Panel had noted, with some concern, the large number of committees generally and the different layers of committees and was concerned that these committees were being used as a substitute for effective line management.   They concluded that it will be important for the University, when acting on the review of committees concluded in December 2009, to consider whether the numbers of committees and layers are necessary.   City University will need to evaluate carefully the potential for committees to drive and implement change.   And while it is crucial that the academic community continue to participate in policy making, in many areas the implementation of policy and procedure should not rely solely on the mechanism of Senate approval.   Such approval may well be a necessary condition, but sufficiency in implementation will require regular and rigorous follow-up by academic line management.

4.5   During the visit the Panel heard that Senate does not always actively engage in academic debate on issues before it, nor does it have high levels of participation and attendance, and some members mentioned that by the time academic issues come to Senate, debate has been exhausted at the committees leading-in to Senate.   The Panel was pleased therefore to hear that efforts to improve the effectiveness of Senate as a forum for active debate are in train with attention to improving the attendance rates.

Affirmation 3

The QAC affirms the actions of City University in implementing its recent review of committees and urges it to ensure that committees are not being used as a substitute for effective line management.

Strategic Plan 2010-2015

4.6   The SP 2010-2015 encapsulates the vision and mission of City University and sets out the actions to achieve the goals of the Plan.   As the document currently stands it shows a high level of abstract planning but without the indicators the Plan has limited utility as a planning tool.   The Panel heard about the collaborative work and extensive consultation which had gone into the framing of the SP and the intentions to integrate higher level *top-down* performance indicators (PIs) with *bottom-up* PIs that were being devised at lower levels by different organisational units at the time of the audit visit.

4.7   The PIs were described as covering areas including evaluation of individual staff and their teaching performance.   However this development is not yet mature enough to allow the Panel to gauge fitness for purpose.   Because the development of effective PIs is so crucial, the University is encouraged to continue applying the stringent approach it has hitherto adopted for evaluating PIs being proposed by schools and departments to ensure these are effective for tracking progress towards the goals of the SP, for allocating budgets with reference to performance rather than on the basis of student numbers alone, and for performance management of all staff.

Affirmation 4

The QAC affirms the University's efforts to develop a rigorous set of performance indicators based on a confluence of top-down and bottom-up initiatives that effectively engage the academic community in progress towards institutional goals.

4.8   Section 3 of this report sets out what the Panel saw as some of the defining characteristics of City University cohorts including the general academic and English language competency of entrants.   The Panel considered the evidence of the success of graduates in employment and positive feedback from employers which supported a conclusion that a City University education adds value to the capacities of students. While Strategic Area A in the SP is about students, the Panel believes there would be benefit in revisiting this section to consider placing more emphasis on the defining characteristics of the student body at the University and the particular strategies needed and already in place to add value to this type of student cohort such as internships (section 9).   This consideration of the SP will flow naturally from the clear articulation of City University's distinguishing features.   (See Recommendation 2.)

Benchmarking

4.9   In discussion with staff at college and departmental levels the Panel heard about collaborations between disciplinary groups and local and international colleagues. EAAs also provide links between City University and other institutions.   These collaborations are primarily based on the scholarly reputations of individuals and

programmes. In addition, the University has undertaken a comprehensive exercise to identify potential benchmarking partners with features such as size, discipline mix and international rankings such as the Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) lists. Cross-institution visits have been made and data about these institutions analysed although this appears to be mainly based on publicly available information at this stage.

4.10 While the Panel acknowledges the valuable work in commencing institutional benchmarking activities it concluded that several aspects of the exercise need further consideration. Firstly, it seems a key variable was overlooked as a criterion for identifying suitable partners namely, the mission of the university. The Panel believes strongly that similarity in mission should be a key driver in selecting benchmark partners with less emphasis, for example, on position in rankings even though aspirational targets can be important (section 3). Secondly, there needs to be more detailed exploration of how existing relationships between the University's discipline groups, departments and colleges with peers in other institutions can be linked and developed in a more integrated institutional approach to benchmarking. Finally, the University needs to clarify the technical requirements for successful benchmarking to take the task beyond simple comparison of data to effective use of data. This latter task requires attention to the definition of benchmarking, setting City University benchmarking standards in key areas, and associated processes to show clearly how the data will be used at City University in pursuit of improvements.

Affirmation 5

The QAC affirms City University's work in institutional benchmarking which can be further developed by considering similarity of mission in the selection of potential benchmarking institutions and by implementing strategies to develop an overarching institutional approach to benchmarking.

Performance Management

4.11 A further area for comment is the monitoring of performance of personnel at middle levels of the organisation. There is an annual staff appraisal system in place for individuals but it is not clear that the data submitted by individuals to their supervisor are aggregated in any way as a basis for planning, for example, for identifying staff development needs for a department as a whole. Nor is there a performance review system for academic managers, in their management role, since heads of units are evaluated as individual academics. Similarly, while departments provide annual reports these appear to focus mainly on describing departmental activities rather than on evaluation of departmental performance against the SP. It is acknowledged, however, that suitable PIs are still being formulated (section 4). The outcome of these shortfalls is that there is little clarity in the distinction between individual performance and the performance of the academic unit which leads to a blurring of accountability. These lines of accountability need to be drawn out and articulated to give clarity in the accountabilities of departments and heads of departments. Further, it needs to be clarified also that management, rather than committees, bears the responsibility for implementing academic policy, albeit with the advice of committees. The performance management system needs to be structured to take these distinctions into account.

Recommendation 3

The QAC recommends that City University implement a programme of annual performance review that is linked to the performance indicators in the Strategic Plan and includes both the academic leaders and their individual academic units.

Institutional Analysis Group (IAG)

4.12   The University has established an Institutional Analysis Group (IAG) which undertakes institutional fact-finding and research and seeks to facilitate the analysis and dissemination of performance data.   The Group has mapped the main internal data sources, the cycle of surveys and undertaken data gathering exercises.   It has also been involved in establishing benchmarking activities and laying the groundwork for strategic planning including framing potential University-level PIs. The Panel concluded that the IAG, although in the early stages of operation, is an effective support in the development of an evidence-based culture of operation in the University.

Commendation 3

The QAC commends City University for the establishment of the Institutional Analysis Group and its role in improving data collection, interpretation and use and contributing to the development of an evidence-based culture in the University.

5.   PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT AND APPROVAL PROCESS

5.1   Proposed new programmes follow a two-stage approval process.   At Stage One, approval in principle is sought, and at Stage Two the proposal is fully developed and submitted for final approval.   At annual budget hearings, deans make the case for additional resources they will require, including for proposed new programmes. External input is provided by stakeholders including employers and potential employers, alumni, students and EAAs.

5.2   The programme change process follows a similar pattern with the distinction between major and minor changes to Ug programmes defined in guidelines issued by SCUS and endorsed by college and school boards.   Changes to research degree programmes are considered by the Committee on Research Degrees Candidature (CRDC) and the BGS. The Panel noted the clear definition of the coursework doctorate from the PhD degree which was articulated both in writing and by the staff and students concerned.

5.3   The introduction of OBTL, the conversion to a four-year curriculum and General Education courses have necessitated the introduction of some special processes and templates with oversight and reporting on those initiatives through the University's committees to Senate.

5.4 The Panel sampled three programmes from the range offered at City University and tested the University's claims in regard to how the programme development and approval processes operate. It was clear from analysis of documentation and interviews with stakeholders that programmes and courses are shaped with input from employers, students and accrediting authorities. Some students expressed the view that they would like more opportunity to contribute their ideas formally, at course level, although they also indicated that generally their informal input and views were taken into account.

5.5 There are comments elsewhere in this report (section 4) about the reservations of the Panel about the number of committees at City University. It was evident nonetheless that the sequence of internal procedures for programme approval works effectively. A programme examined in depth by the Panel clearly progressed through both approval stages and the relevant committees in a timely fashion.

6. PROGRAMME MONITORING AND REVIEW

6.1 Colleges and schools require submission of annual programme reports, and provide aggregated annual reports to Senate. The BGS requires annual reports on all TPg programmes and it also reports to Senate. Annual reporting is part of the ADP process. These annual reports are seen as the major vehicle for monitoring and, effectively, revalidating programmes and include areas for improvement with checking the following year to ensure that action has occurred. The input of EAAs is an additional element in feedback to the colleges. In addition, the use of the Course Evaluation Form completed by students is a further source of feedback for those departments using it.

6.2 Heads of department report annually to the University's Management Board on three sets of activities including learning and teaching.

6.3 At University level, the Quality Assurance Committee undertakes an *internal quality audit* under the authority of Senate. Three such audits have been carried out since 1996 with the most recent providing a platform for reflection and preparation of the University community for the external QAC audit (section 2).

6.4 All collaborative TPg programmes are subject to review by the Committee for Taught Postgraduate Programmes (CTPP) and the BGS two years after implementation. Review reports are submitted to Senate for information. Departments submit annual programme reports to CTPP.

6.5 Some reviews occur in the context of professional accreditation, e.g. EQUIS, while other programmes are reviewed on a three- to five-year cycle with external reviewers. It was noted, however, that a number of programmes that are not subject to external accreditation authorities had not had a comprehensive review or revalidation process for many years although some, for example in the science area, have external advisory committees. During the audit visit, the University acknowledged a weakness in this aspect of quality assurance and has the intention to de-emphasise reliance on triggers from external bodies for initiation of full reviews of programmes.

Recommendation 4

The QAC recommends that City University implement a policy on review of programmes that ensures all programmes, including those not subject to accreditation by external bodies, are examined and revalidated on a regular cycle.

7.   CURRICULUM DESIGN

7.1   Part-time students and alumni reported that they were pleased with the preparation for the workplace provided through the curriculum. The students suggested that the development of generic skills such as teamwork, was equally as important to them as the course content.

7.2   The newly introduced Learning Experience Questionnaire (LEQ) seeks student feedback on curriculum matters such as the extent to which the learning outcomes of particular courses are clear and achievable, but it also asks questions that the students are not qualified to answer (such as *I gained a good knowledge of the subject matter*). (See section 11.)

7.3   The Panel was pleased to hear that the University is currently in the process of consolidating the overall number of programmes it offers in order to streamline administration and delivery.   For example, the College of Business is streamlining the structures of programmes around a core of studies with majors and student specialisation starting only in year 2 while in the Law area a similar strategy is being introduced and part-time studies phased out.

English Language

7.4   The University generally does not attract Ug students with high levels of English language skills apart from entrants to the City University niche courses.   Nonetheless, there is improvement in the language skills of graduates as measured when the students have completed their studies and according to employers who rate City University graduates well in terms of language skills.   The University's approach to language development is multilayered and based around the English Language Centre (ELC) and Language Clinic with six credit points in the General Studies component of the four-year degree assigned to English language studies.

The Four-Year Degree and OBTL

7.5   The work for introduction of the four-year curriculum is the responsibility of the Committee for the Four-Year Degree (CFYD) reporting to the APC. Piloting of a number of courses has already begun.   The strategy adopted to develop the General Studies component for the four-year curriculum is being progressed through the newly constituted Office of Education Development and General Studies known as EDGE (formerly Education Development Office (EDO)).   The strategy is impressive in its linkage of academics in the discipline areas with input from the teaching and learning specialists in EDGE through specialist advice and staff development activities.   EDGE is also in the process of developing a foundation course in General Education with the

title *Me and My University*. This is intended as a common first-year core to run over two semesters with the purpose of helping students with the transition from a secondary school to university learning environment. EDGE is further discussed in section 11.

7.6   The OBTL project for the launch of the four-year degree curriculum in 2012 is being driven by the OBTL Implementation Group which reports to the Quality Assurance Committee, and there are now OBTL Coordinators in place working with the college directors of teaching and learning. The Panel heard from some interviewees that they considered the conversion to OBTL to be complete while others, including the Quality Assurance Committee, saw a longer road ahead in terms of implementing OBTL particularly in programmes not subject to external accreditation requirements. The Panel saw evidence of this variation in course documentation and considers that the University needs to address this disparity in understanding of the complexity of what is to be achieved by 2012.

Graduate and Postgraduate Outcomes

7.7   As discussed in section 3, the University has articulated a set of graduate and postgraduate outcomes which, in turn, are expanded as Programme Intended Learning Outcomes (PILOs) and Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs). It was not clear the extent to which PILOs and CILOs have been specified across the University although the Panel saw examples of these in the sample of programmes examined in depth.

7.8   The Panel saw little evidence that the graduate outcome statements fully or rigorously inform curriculum development although they considered the outcomes in themselves to be reasonable and acceptable as a conceptual framework reflecting institutional values. The issue is that the statements do not seem to be concrete enough to be operationally useful for curriculum design and assessment. It was also considered that there is not a very clear distinction between the outcomes for the different levels of study – Ug, Pg and research degrees. Students interviewed by the Panel seemed unaware of the outcomes.

7.9   The departments and programmes seem to operate with reference to their own programme and discipline-specific outcomes with no obvious reference to the institutional outcomes. The issue for the Panel was that it was unable to see how the University-level Graduate and Postgraduate Outcomes, the PILOs and CILOs were linked to each other even though City University states that monitoring the alignment occurs in the context of course development/approval and programme monitoring/review processes. But even with the examination of PILOs and CILOs in this context there is no mechanism evident for ensuring these different levels of learning outcomes come together relative to the overarching outcomes to assure the University that all of its graduates meet institutional outcomes.

7.10   The assessment of whether the graduate and postgraduate outcomes are achieved appears to be carried out mainly by seeking the feedback of employers of graduates or individual supervisors of interns. As those approaches can be inconsistent in application, more reliable and replicable ways of assessment should be developed.

Affirmation 6

The QAC affirms the intent of the Graduate and Postgraduate Outcomes and advises the University to provide guidance on ways in which these may be operationalised and the graduates reliably assessed relative to their achievement of institutional outcomes.

8. PROGRAMME DELIVERY

8.1 Strategies for programme delivery are considered during programme planning and monitoring processes. The main support services areas (Library, Computing Services and Student Development Services) are represented at Senate and college and school boards to ensure effective communication and planning occurs.

8.2 The students interviewed were uniformly positive and reported that they are generally satisfied with their programmes and experiences at City University. They indicated that it is easy to contact staff. There is, however, at the current time a lack of comprehensive quantitative data on student satisfaction. The data reported by the University had relatively low means and presumably wide standard deviations which are indicative of there being pockets of dissatisfaction among the students.

8.3 A number of academics reported on initiatives they had taken to analyse the reasons for student success in their courses. This included discussions with high achievers and the students who had demonstrated the most improvement. Some analysis suggested that the students who were achieving well were those in their first choice of programme. There was also a suggestion that the students from the mainland are higher achievers than local students. These analyses are commendable activities but the Panel encourages the academics to also look at those who do *not* succeed in class as this can be very helpful in pinpointing areas of the teaching and learning process that might be better handled.

8.4 The introduction of a new complaints system to apply across the University is a positive development.

8.5 Student support mechanisms include the Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI) which began as a Teaching Development Grant (TDG) project to assist students develop essential skills for study success. While this was considered to be a good initiative, particularly for first year students, the case for its effectiveness was considered by the Panel to be somewhat overstated based on the quantitative data supplied. The scheme should nonetheless be continued and developed.

8.6 Some of the other initiatives to support students at City University, including the Language Clinic and ELC, were praised by students. Students reported that while English is invariably the language used in formal classroom presentations the discussion is sometimes in Cantonese and that this disadvantages mainland and international students. It was concluded that City University should more strongly encourage the use of English as the means of instruction given its aspirations to be a leading global University.

8.7 The PALSI (Peer-Assisted Learning) scheme and a range of orientation activities are also provided. The Student Success Advising Service acts as a one-stop shop for referral to various services within the ambit of Student Development Services (SDS).

8.8 On the whole, the range of services provided to students was impressive and there is clearly a proactive attitude to develop support mechanisms. Students are filtered when they enrol to identify students who are at risk in an emotional as well as academic sense. They are referred, as appropriate, to specialist advice such as counselling or to the buddy or mentoring schemes. Mentoring schemes in some of the sampled programmes were well-developed and highly regarded; at the Pg level learning circles provided useful peer discussion fora. The protocols developed by SDS for dealing with major student crises among non-local students and outbound exchange students are useful and comprehensive.

8.9 Mainland students and their families have orientation sessions in four or more mainland centres before they complete enrolment procedures. Mainland and international students are given priority in allocation of hostel places and reported in interviews that they felt well supported by City University. The Buddy Scheme is operated by the Mainland and External Affairs Office (MEAO) and was reported to be an effective mechanism for linking senior or local students to give assistance to new non-local students in settling in to the University and Hong Kong.

> **Commendation 4**
>
> **The QAC commends City University for its proactive approach to supporting the integration of international and mainland students on campus.**

8.10 The University indicated that it faces major space constraints particularly in light of an ambitious expansion programme flagged in the 2010-2015 SP. Several construction projects are in progress including additional hostels to ease the considerable pressure on existing accommodation. The students interviewed highlighted the need for more equipment although some specialist areas are well equipped. There was discussion of a request to extend opening hours for access to equipment and this is being considered taking health and safety concerns into account. The Library was reported as being very stretched in terms of seating for students.

8.11 The University's use of e-learning strategies is steadily increasing with 70% of courses using various platforms such as Blackboard but there is need to articulate a strategy to guide the future development of teaching and learning technologies (section 11).

9. EXPERIENTIAL AND OTHER OUT OF CLASS LEARNING

9.1 There was no evidence of an overarching University-wide policy on experiential learning but nonetheless the Panel saw evidence of a wide-range of opportunities for experiential learning. City University offers students a range of out-of-classroom activities, some credit-bearing and some non credit-bearing, including:

- exchange abroad
- field and study trips
- internships
- community service activities
- executive and professional mentoring schemes
- careers workshops and training
- summer schools

9.2 The CFYD is preparing a consolidated structure for out-of-classroom learning to ensure that the new four-year degree incorporates clear definition and assessment of learning outcomes in co-curricular activities.

9.3 Credit-bearing out-of-classroom activity is designed and evaluated along with curricular learning via the University's programme approval and monitoring processes described in section 5.   Credit-bearing activity is designed by the offering department. The University completed a study of out-of-classroom activities and concluded that there was room for improvement.   The SP sets a goal of increasing internships, service learning, career preparation and advising.

9.4 Students, employers and alumni reported positive experiences with different activities particularly with the growing student exchange programme for which subsidies are provided to students.   The University uses its sporting programme for team building and esprit de corps and has been successful in competitive sport despite its paucity of sporting facilities.   The alumni reported that they had received support from the academic staff for job searching and also attended career sessions organised by the University.   They also reported that internships they had undertaken had led to job offers.

9.5 As mentioned above, the University wishes to significantly increase the number of students undertaking internships.   Under current arrangements students undertake internships arranged by the Career and Internship Office, by their college/department or individually on their own initiative.   While the experiences were generally positive, some students reported problems with internships which they found variable in terms of the quality of experience regardless of how the individual internship had been arranged. The Panel noted that the protocols for internships are not well developed and believes there is risk to the students and the reputation of the University in the current situation. As this professional experience is a key point of City University's differentiation, the University is urged to examine the basis of arrangements for internships to ensure management of risk to the University, the hosts and the individual students.   The Panel also believes that the University needs to review whether the ambitious goal it has set itself for mandatory participation by 2015 is achievable in the specified time frame in terms of providing a quality experience for interns.

> **Recommendation 5**
>
> **The QAC recommends that City University examine the arrangements in place for managing student internships and develop protocols to minimise risk for students, industry partners and sponsors, and the University.**

10. ASSESSMENT

10.1 Three main sets of University regulations govern assessment practices - one each for taught programmes, research degrees and professional doctorates. As part of the preparation to implement OBTL the Senate, in 2006, approved the replacement of guidance regarding norm-referenced assessment with guidelines for criterion-referenced assessment. At the time of the audit visit the University was in process of implementing a suite of inter-related policies that will apply across the University to give a common foundation for assessment-related matters and including:

- revision of the code of conduct to disaggregate discipline and academic honesty matters;
- introduction of a new policy on academic honesty;
- revision of existing regulations on mitigation and academic appeals.

10.2 In addition, the University is engaged in the introduction of a major new institution-wide assessment policy that is planned for implementation in late 2010. The policy developed by the University's Quality Assurance Committee is comprehensive, progressive and forward thinking and will apply across the board to all taught programmes. It will provide the necessary foundation of consistency for implementation of the four-year degree in particular. The Panel examined the new policy in detail and concluded that while there are many strengths in the policy, there are also some areas of weakness as it now stands that will impede its implementation. The following matters should be considered in a review during the early implementation phase:

- The range of assessment tasks quoted seems restricted and to have come from a norm-referenced culture. Further guidance on best practice in assessment would be useful as would further work in promoting understanding of the implications of implementation of criterion-referenced assessment.
- The proposed assessment policy is criterion-referenced, which is an appropriate stance for OBTL, but the institution has a norm-referenced assessment culture which was evident in the interviews with some key academic managers who believe that there should be only certain percentages of As, Bs, and so on. In a criterion-referenced system it is possible, and even desirable, that most students exhibit mastery of the subject and as a result earn top grades. The University has not worked out its position on mastery learning and how its demands would align with the existing norm-referenced culture.

> **Affirmation 7**
>
> **The QAC affirms the progress made by the University in implementing a comprehensive, progressive and forward-thinking criterion-referenced assessment policy for all taught programmes.**

10.3 Course grades are considered by departmental Assessment Panels, and Examination Boards consider matters relating to academic standing and award recommendations. Prior to the implementation of the new assessment policy Academic Regulation 8 provided generic grading criteria at course level, and departments used their own discipline-specific grading rubrics. As the University implements the new assessment

policy, the Quality Assurance Committee and APC will need to monitor activities at departmental Assessment Panels and Examination Boards to comprehend the cultural and technical issues that will inevitably come with the comprehensive shift to criterion referencing, for example, how to deal with so-called 'grade inflation'.

Academic Honesty

10.4   Examiners report plagiarism cases to the head of department, who may refer serious cases to the Student Discipline Panel.   Transgressions during examinations are referred to heads of department, who may refer cases to the Student Discipline Committee.   The penalties for breaches of rules are appropriate.   The Panel spoke to students who were aware of plagiarism policies and the installation of Turnitin software as an aid to detecting and preventing plagiarism in student work, and of its use in a formative rather than a punitive sense.

> **Commendation 5**
>
> **The QAC commends City University for the widespread understanding in the academic community of the implications of academic honesty policy.**

External Academic Advisors (EAAs)

10.5   Colleges may appoint EAAs whose role is to assist with benchmarking of academic standards but the specific brief of an EAA is left to departmental discretion.   Some programme areas have continued to use EAAs in the role associated with the former External Examiner system, usually where this is a requirement of a professional accrediting body.   EAAs contribute to annual programme reports and issues raised are addressed by programme teams, whose responses are monitored by college or school Validation and Monitoring Committees.

11.   TEACHING QUALITY AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

11.1   The University states that teaching performance is given equal weight with research output in determining promotion.   Faculty members with poor teaching performance will not be considered for substantiation, promotion or contract renewal even if they are strong in research or other areas.   Staff interviewed provided examples of how the balance of teaching, research and community service is weighed in these processes and adapted, as necessary, for positions such as teaching fellows.   The Panel saw evidence of the commitment of staff to teaching and received favourable comments from students on the teaching staff.   The University is at an early stage of discussion of the teaching-research nexus although it was not clear what role, if any, the Chow Yei Ching School of Graduate Studies (SGS) would play in promoting policy in this area.

11.2   The Teaching Excellence Awards (TEA) scheme has been in operation since 1993 with generous support for staff development and innovations provided to the awardees. Awardees play an important role in promoting excellence in teaching and act as catalysts for encouraging innovation and spreading information about successful projects through the University.   There needs nonetheless to be some further efforts to

disseminate information across the University to overcome the current fragmentation resulting from the devolved organisational structure (section 4).

> **Commendation 6**
>
> **The QAC commends City University for the emphasis it gives to teaching and learning as demonstrated in University policy and the strategy to acknowledge innovation through activities associated with the Teaching Excellence Awards scheme.**

Teaching Quality

11.3 Formal evidence of effective teaching is gathered through a number of mechanisms including peer review of teaching and teaching portfolios as well as student survey instruments including the Teaching Feedback Questionnaire (TFQ) and the LEQ.

11.4 Peer review of teaching is, as yet, not systematised with approaches more likely to be ad hoc and based on departmental requests to senior staff to assist academic staff encountering problems. The University, through EDGE, should provide clear guidelines to ensure the process of peer review is rigorous and professionally conducted and that the range of complementary methods of teaching evaluation is extended. EDGE indicated that it had begun to explore this area with the assistance of the TEA awardees.

11.5 Teaching portfolios are being introduced in many areas, with an explicit focus on reflection on implementation of OBTL, and evidence of its impact on learning and teaching. Guidelines for the development of portfolios have been developed by the Quality Assurance Committee.

11.6 The main teaching evaluation tool has been the TFQ which has been adapted and used by departments across the University. Where TFQ scores are below average, some heads of department refer faculty to EDGE training sessions or peer mentoring to address the deficiencies.

11.7 As the TFQ does not give an institution-wide perspective (and response rates are relatively low) the University introduced the LEQ as a replacement for the TFQ after a significant period of trialling and discussion. The intention of the LEQ is to bring the focus onto gauging students' judgements on their learning in a course to provide information that will inform curriculum development. The TFQ continues nonetheless to be used by departments so there would be benefit in further work on this tool including attention to improving response rates.

11.8 The focus of the LEQ is consistent with the OBTL emphasis on course outcomes as opposed to evaluation of teachers which is the aim of the TFQ. The Panel acknowledges the significant effort expended on the development of the LEQ, including use of an external consultant in OBTL, and understands the pragmatic decision to proceed with implementation. They note, however, that the University intends to review some aspects of the LEQ at the end of the first year of implementation and urge the University to subject the instrument to close scrutiny. This scrutiny should cover:

- whether the instrument contains sufficient detail to be an effective diagnostic tool;
- the relationship between teacher performance and their contribution to student learning outcomes;
- the capacity of students to judge the extent of their learning in each of the items for example Item 9 which asks students to assess how well they can apply their newly acquired knowledge concepts and theories; and
- the relationship between the data from the LEQ and the Course Evaluation Form used by some course committees for redesign of courses.

11.9 The goal of this suggested review exercise is to align the various instruments to ensure that collectively these provide optimum data to the University without overlap and duplication. The review should consider the relationship of the instruments to each other and to other methods of teacher and teaching evaluation, including peer review and teaching portfolios. The review should also utilise the extensive literature on student evaluations of teaching and learning (e.g. relating to the US's National Survey of Student Engagement) to provide a sound theoretical basis for the instruments used at City University.

Affirmation 8

The QAC affirms the actions of City University to introduce a student feedback survey that is attuned to Outcome Based Teaching and Learning and the significant effort invested in developing and piloting a suitable instrument.

Recommendation 6

The QAC recommends that when City University undertakes the planned review of the implementation of the Learning Experience Questionnaire it also consider the Teaching Feedback Questionnaire, re-consider the conceptual foundations of both instruments and determine their appropriate use in order to achieve the twin aims of evaluating teacher performance and ensuring teaching quality.

11.10 The IAG, in 2009, initiated a project to rationalise all student-related surveys with a view to providing an integrated approach for all academic and service departments. This activity should go some way to lessening the survey fatigue, which some students attribute to the number of surveys conducted and the students' own inability to distinguish the different purposes of the various instruments.

11.11 Other mechanisms for obtaining student feedback on teaching quality include the Joint Staff/Student Consultative Committees (JSSCCs) and student representation on Programme Committees (section 12). Students reported some instances of improvements that had been made as a result of student feedback for example a teacher who habitually came late to class became prompt in arrival at the classroom.

11.12 As indicated in section 8, City University's use of e-learning strategies and information and communications technology (ICT) is steadily increasing. Nonetheless, no evidence was found of a comprehensive strategy for the development of e-learning or a University policy on the pedagogical foundations for the implementation of e-learning

strategies. The University is encouraged to explore the implications of the paradigm shift that has occurred in teaching and learning as a result of ICT and articulate its philosophy of the use of technology to ensure its effective use in teaching and learning strategies.

Recommendation 7

The QAC recommends that City University explore the transforming effects of IT and articulate a policy that will inform the use of technology in curriculum development and pedagogical strategies as well as for course management.

Office of Education Development and General Education (EDGE)

11.13 Shortly before the audit visit the University established EDGE which reports to the Provost. EDGE was built on the EDO which previously reported to the Vice President (Student Affairs) and which incorporated activities for both staff and students as well as provision of IT support. While the mandate to provide staff development in pursuit of teaching and learning excellence continues with the new Office, EDGE also has the task of steering the development of the General Studies component of the four-year degree ensuring that these are fully compliant with the demands of OBTL. The programme of activities is comprehensive and provides a useful unified approach to dealing with the issues around implementation of OBTL together with the new assessment policy (section 10). The separation of the IT function to the Chief Information Officer's section and the building of connections to IAG to facilitate information flow should pay dividends in terms of improvements in teaching and learning at the University.

Affirmation 9

The QAC affirms the actions of City University in establishing the Office of Education Development and General Education (EDGE) to provide leadership in preparation for the implementation of the General Education component of the four-year degree programme.

Staff Development

11.14 EDGE is responsible for developing teaching skills having inherited this function from the EDO. Activities in recent years have been focused on the introduction of OBTL focusing in particular on ILOs and teaching and learning activities through the Strategic Teaching Enhancement Programme.

11.15 EDGE is also responsible for orientation of new staff. The Panel was informed that this is provided once per year and suggests that induction should occur more frequently to accommodate the cycle of arrival of new staff particularly given that there is a global recruitment strategy to recruit significant numbers of new staff to supplement the current staff in delivering the four-year curriculum.

11.16 Some new staff are allocated a mentor and there are arrangements for them to have a free semester or a lighter teaching load in the semester following their arrival at City

University. City University is encouraged to be more consistent in its arrangements for new academic staff.

Evaluation of Teaching Performance

11.17 Each academic is required to complete an Annual Activity Report which is forwarded to the head of department. Staff with survey results or other data that fall outside the general pattern of results are referred to the departmental staff committee and from there, if agreed, to the college staff committee which can, as appropriate, recommend a bonus for good performance or a programme of remedial action for poor performance. The Panel was informed that the University was seeking ways to introduce stronger links between performance and financial reward.

12. STUDENT PARTICIPATION

12.1 Major institutional committees including Senate and a number of subcommittees of APC make provision for student representation. Many programmes and departments have JSSCCs, or equivalent. Others also make use of student representation on Programme Committees as a mechanism for facilitating student participation.

12.2 In addition to acting as mentors and buddies for new students the students also run peer-assisted tutoring, peer counselling and English language mentoring sessions such as the Language Clinic. They also volunteer for a range of activities.

12.3 The students interviewed reported that their voices are heard on University committees and cited examples of having been consulted on policy developments such as the new assessment policy (section 10). The President also has regular meetings with students and visits the hostels to gauge their views. At the departmental level, students involved in JSSCCs reported these to be effective channels of communication. Part-time students also commented favourably on the opportunities they have to communicate any concerns to their lecturers.

12.4 Students' Union representatives reported that they gather opinions through the Democracy Wall where students post views on all aspects of the University. The University Affairs Corner consists of a notice board in the main academic news or posters about forums and other university affairs with a view to encouraging student input.

12.5 SDS has a staff member dedicated to supporting student organisations and offers an impressive series of leadership development training sessions for newly-elected student leaders including members of the (undergraduate) Students' Union and the City University Postgraduate Association. The seven sessions cover a wide range of topics in project management designed to provide skills relevant to managing the student organisations' affairs and organising activities. Subsidies are offered to student leaders taking part in other leadership programmes or conferences off-campus.

Commendation 7

The QAC commends City University for the extent to which it involves and supports student participation in University Committees.

13. ACTIVITIES SPECIFIC TO RESEARCH DEGREES

13.1   Management of research degree programmes is organised through the SGS.   The BGS approves proposals for new research areas, which are submitted via college and school boards, and sets admission criteria.   The Regulations for the Research Degrees of Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy are supplemented by codes of practice and guidelines and are implemented institution-wide to ensure a consistent approach.

13.2   Departments appoint a research degrees co-ordinator to deal with student matters and the head of department is also available for consultation.   The new institution-wide student complaints procedure is available to all students including research students who may wish to use this process independently of their supervisors.

13.3   Doctoral research degree students are appointed as teaching assistants and attend orientation and staff development programmes offered by EDGE.   Students are supported to attend conferences and for research-related travel such as internships in overseas laboratories.   Those interviewed were positive about the quality of supervision and general support they were receiving such as access to library and laboratory resources.   They were unaware of their intellectual property rights.

13.4   New student supervisors are, effectively, apprenticed to experienced supervisors until the graduation of their first doctoral student.

13.5   City University offers a number of offshore collaborative PhD programmes.   The doctoral students on the Joint Collaboration Scheme with the University of Science and Technology of China are based in a research centre in Suzhou (approximately 160 students).   A further 25 PhD students are based in a research centre in the Shenzhen Virtual University Park.   Proposals for collaborative schemes are considered by the SGS in accordance with guidelines issued by the MEAO.   Programme approval follows the same route as for other City University programmes (see section 8).

13.6   The Panel met with alumni and supervisors from the Suzhou programme and confirmed that arrangements at Suzhou mirror the situation on the main Kowloon campus of City University.   The regulations governing individual candidature are a fusion of City University's and the partner's requirements.   Degrees are jointly awarded with one award certificate bearing the authority of both institutions.   These arrangements were considered to be satisfactory.

13.7   The coordinators of activities at Suzhou are Hong Kong residents and students must spend at least one year on the City University campus.   There is also movement of supervisors between the campuses to the benefit of students although the Suzhou community expressed a wish for more visits from high profile scholars.   Facilities at Suzhou are funded by both universities and by resources provided by the local

government for Suzhou.

Commendation 8

The QAC commends City University for the robust arrangements in place to support research students at off-shore locations and the quality of supervision and management of doctoral candidature.

13.8 The Panel explored the processes around examination of theses and noted that arrangements for research degrees and (taught) professional doctorate theses are aligned. Alumni reported that they felt well prepared for examination processes and welcomed the fact that, at least in some cases, all examiners including the international examiners were present in person at the examination.

13.9 There was a concern, however, that the balance of internal and external examiners seems to be too strongly weighted to internal examiners who may be regarded as less 'objective' than examiners from outside the University. The University is urged to examine the composition of doctoral examination panels and the role of supervisors on these panels against local and international practices. The aim is to ensure that the reputation of City University's programmes and doctoral graduates is not compromised.

Recommendation 8

The QAC recommends that City University undertake a review of the composition of thesis examination panels to ensure that the University is in step with best practice at local and international level.

14. CONCLUSION

14.1 The Panel concluded that City University has a proactive approach to improving quality assurance policy and procedures. This was evidenced by the many change initiatives for teaching and learning in progress at the time of the QAC audit and the clear commitment to implementing institution-wide policies to underpin quality assurance processes. Further improvement of quality assurance arrangements will be facilitated by the re-balancing of the historical devolution of authority and the clarification of lines of accountability which has been undertaken in recent times and which is ongoing.

14.2 It is anticipated that action on the suggestions for improvements made in this report as well as the formal *Recommendations* will support the efforts of City University in building a culture of quality underpinned by the careful use of data and evidence generally.

14.3 The Panel is grateful to the University for its collegial approach to the QAC audit and the enthusiasm with which the stakeholders engaged with the Panel during the audit visit.

APPENDIX A: CITY UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG (CITY UNIVERSITY)

History

City University celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2009, having opened as the City Polytechnic of Hong Kong in 1984 with 1,278 students. City Polytechnic graduated its first PhD in 1991 and three years later launched the School of Graduate Studies. In 1994 the Polytechnic acquired university status as City University of Hong Kong with independent degree-awarding powers.

Vision and Mission of the University

The City University vision is:

… to become a leading global university, excelling in research and professional education.

The mission, as defined in the Strategic Plan 2010-2015, is:

… to nurture and develop the talents of students and to create applicable knowledge in order to support social and economic advancement.

Role Statement

City University:

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

Organisational Structure

The organisation and management of City University is defined in its Ordinances and Statutes. The Council is the supreme governing body with authority to exercise all powers of the University. Senate is the supreme academic body responsible for planning academic programmes, directing and regulating teaching and research, and regulating admissions and examinations.

The academic structure is based around six academic units: College of Business; College of Humanities and Social Sciences; College of Science and Engineering; School of Creative Media; School of Law; and School of Energy and Environment. Two units provide service teaching: the English Language Centre (ELC) and Chinese Civilisation Centre (CCIV). The School of Graduate Studies (SGS) co-ordinates and offers strategic direction to City University's postgraduate provision.

Programmes of Study

City University offers a range of programmes with about 64% of students enrolled in Ug programmes; 27% in TPg programmes, including taught doctorates; and 5% are enrolled in RPg degrees. (The remaining 4% of students are enrolled in associate degrees).

Staff and Students Numbers

City University has a full-time staff of 3,554, with 1,029 involved in teaching. The current student population numbers approximately 18,500 students. About 160 PhD students are based in the joint City University/University of Science and Technology of China (USTC) Advanced Research Centre in the Higher Education Town in Suzhou.

Revenue and Estate

City University operates on a single campus in Kowloon Tong which was opened in 1986. City University's income in 2008-09 was approximately HK$2.3 billion of which about 60% came from government subventions and about 40% from tuition and other fees and other sources.

APPENDIX B: INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE TO THE AUDIT FINDINGS

City University of Hong Kong (City University) is pleased that the UGC Quality Assurance Council (QAC) has commended the quality of its teaching and learning activities in the key areas of its undergraduate and postgraduate provision. The quality of student learning at City University of Hong Kong is the focal point of our vision to become a leading global university, excelling in research and professional education. It is clear from the QAC findings and comments that we have made further significant progress towards these goals.

The QAC's commendation that City University takes "a proactive approach to improving quality assurance for teaching and learning through the development of institution-wide approaches to facilitate greater consistency in the implementation of quality assurance policy and procedures" demonstrates that the University places the quality of its educational provision as a major priority, and remains determined to rigorously apply principles of continuous quality improvement to all areas of its work. The proactive approach taken by City University is further evidenced by the Audit Panel's commendations for our successes "in lifting the capabilities of our students and preparing them for professional careers", "supporting the integration of international and mainland students on campus", "for the robust arrangements in place to support research students at off-shore locations", "the quality of supervision and management of doctoral candidature", "the emphasis we give to teaching and learning" and "the extent to which we involve and support student participation in University Committees". These commendations demonstrate the effectiveness of the student-centred approach to teaching and learning undertaken at City University which has developed a reputation for providing excellent student support. City University is also particularly pleased that the QAC recognised and commended the excellent work of the Institutional Analysis Group and its central role in improving data collection, interpretation and use which contributes to the further development of the evidence-based culture in the University. This is an area of great importance for the University and provides verifiable evidence and indicators of our progress to ensure that we achieve our strategic and academic goals and can identify further areas for future development.

City University is grateful for the QAC's affirmations of the future directions being taken in its wide-ranging review of the committee structure and quality assurance framework to ensure we continue to set even higher standards in terms of our mission to nurture and develop the talents of students, and to create applicable knowledge in order to support social and economic advancement. We are also heartened to receive the QAC's affirmations of our work in effectively engaging the academic community in developing rigorous performance indicators, benchmarking and "the progress made by the University in implementing a comprehensive, progressive and forward-thinking criterion-referenced assessment policy for all taught programmes". We will continue to develop all these areas as we approach the advent of the four-year degree structure in 2012. We will continue to exert efforts to improve our student feedback surveys and note with interest the UGC's separate intention to explore a sector-wide instrument(s) for this purpose. Given the affirmation from the QAC, City University's work in this area would clearly be of benefit to the Hong Kong Higher Education sector as a whole. City University is also pleased to note the support from the QAC for our establishment of an Office of Education Development and General Education (EDGE) which is providing leadership in preparation for the General Education component of the four-year degree. This acknowledgement together with the QAC's affirmation for our graduate and postgraduate outcomes, and their advice on the provision of further guidance on the operationalisation of these, is welcome and work is already advanced in this regard.

Over the past years City University has been restructuring and re-organising in preparation for the four-year degree in 2012. This transition has involved considerable change across the sector and within individual universities. Inevitably, some of the major reviews of policy and practice are ongoing and we are continuing to work towards the new system. We are grateful for the advice given by the QAC Panel in relation to some of these initiatives. The review of the committee structure at City University will shortly be completed and we will ensure that Quality Assurance functions are given priority going forward, and that this is reflected in the new structure. We agree that the line management structure is crucial in this regard and this is one reason why the review process has had to be thorough. The programme review process is being built into the new quality assurance framework document which will replace the 3P's document going forward. The consultation for the new quality assurance framework, including programme review processes is now underway and we anticipate completion and the start of implementation by the end of this year. This will ensure that the process will be in place and mature by the beginning of the four-year degree in Hong Kong. A new Information Technology strategy document was in preparation at the time of the QAC visit and this work is currently being advanced by EDGE and the office of the Chief Information Officer who will shortly put their proposals out for wider consultation prior to the committee approval process. The teaching and course feedback questionnaires are currently under review but this will have to be done in concert with the 2012-2015 Academic Development Proposals Exercise organised by the UGC because the UGC is clearly interested in introducing some sort of sector wide instrument(s). As indicated earlier, City University has much to offer in this regard and we will liaise accordingly. Since the QAC visit, the composition of thesis panels has been changed to reflect our own observations and those of the QAC Panel and to ensure we are now in step with best practice. The development of performance indicators using a top-down and bottom-up process was affirmed by the QAC and we are already working towards the relationship between these indicators and performance review for both individual academic leaders and their units as recommended. In the past 12 months, City University has been seeking to appoint a senior person to oversee risk assessment and management functions across the whole institution including those identified by the QAC as related to student internships. City University will continue to work hard on its image and profile, ensuring that our local profile is consistent with our fast-growing international reputation. As the QAC suggests, we will continue to project our distinct image and use this as a reference point for further internal and external development.

Finally, City University wishes to express its sincere thanks to the QAC Chair, members, and the UGC Audit Coordinator and colleagues for their professional and rigorous approach to the conduct and reporting of this audit exercise. City University's policy and culture of evidenced-based continuous quality enhancement was clearly recognised and shared by the QAC. In this spirit we will continue to look for areas of improvement as we move towards the challenges of the four-year degree.

APPENDIX C: ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMNS AND DEFINITIONS

3Ps	Principles, Policies and Practices for Quality Education
ADP	Academic Development Proposal
APC	Academic Policy Committee
BGS	Board of Graduate Studies
CCIV	Chinese Civilisation Centre
CFYD	Committee on the Four-Year Degree
CILO	Course Intended Learning Outcome
CVMC	College Validation and Monitoring Committee
CRDC	Committee on Research Degrees Candidature
CTPP	Committee on Taught Postgraduate Programmes
EAA	External Academic Advisor
EDGE	Office of Education Development and General Education
EDO	Education Development Office
ELC	English Language Centre
EQUIS	European Quality Improvement System
IAG	Institutional Analysis Group
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ILO	Intended Learning Outcome
IQA	Internal Quality Audit
JSSCC	Joint Staff/Student Consultative Committee
KOA	Key Outcome Area
LASSI	Learning and Study Strategies Inventory
LEQ	Learning Experience Questionnaire
MEAO	Mainland and External Affairs Office
OBTL	Outcomes-Based Teaching and Learning
PALSI	Peer-Assisted Learning (using Supplemental Instruction model) scheme
Pg	Postgraduate
PI	Performance Indicator
PILO	Programme Intended Learning Outcome
QAC	Quality Assurance Council
RPg	Research Postgraduate
SCUS	Sub-Committee for Undergraduate Studies
SDS	Student Development Services
SGS	Chow Yei Ching School of Graduate Studies
SP	Strategic Plan
TDG	Teaching Development Grant
TEA	Teaching Excellence Awards
TFQ	Teaching Feedback Questionnaire
TPg	Taught Postgraduate
UGC	University Grants Committee
Ug	Undergraduate

APPENDIX D: CITY UNIVERSITY AUDIT PANEL

The Audit Panel comprised the following:

Professor Hilary Winchester (Panel Chair)
Pro Vice Chancellor and Vice President, University of South Australia

Professor Suleyman Demokan
Dean, Faculty of Engineering, Bahcesehir University, Istanbul

Professor Frank Fu
Associate Vice-President, Hong Kong Baptist University

Professor Bill Massy
Consultant, Emeritus Professor and former Vice-President, Stanford University

Professor Frank Murray
President of the Teacher Education Accreditation Council and H. Rodney Sharp Professor in the School of Education and the Department of Psychology, University of Delaware

Mr Yau Chung Wan
Principal of Tsung Tsin Christian Academy and Council member of the Hong Kong Quality Assurance Agency

Audit Coordinator

Emeritus Professor Mairéad Browne
QAC Secretariat

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

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

Mission

The QAC's mission is:

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

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

Terms of Reference

The QAC has the following terms of reference:

(a) To advise the University Grants Committee on quality assurance matters in the higher education sector in Hong Kong and other related matters as requested by the Committee;

(b) To conduct audits and other reviews as requested by the UGC, and report on the quality assurance mechanisms and quality of the offerings of institutions;

(c) To promote quality assurance in the higher education sector in Hong Kong; and

(d) To facilitate the development and dissemination of good practices in quality assurance in higher education.

Membership (as at 15 September 2010)

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

Ex-officio Member

Mr Michael V STONE, JP	Secretary-General, UGC

Secretary

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