



# Report of a Quality Audit

*of* The Chinese University  
of Hong Kong



October 2015  
Quality Assurance Council



**Quality Assurance Council  
Second Audit Cycle**

**Report of a Quality Audit of  
The Chinese University  
of Hong Kong**

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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.

## **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 some 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
- the promotion of quality assurance and enhancement and the spread of good practice

The QAC's approach to quality audit is based on the principle of 'fitness for purpose'. Audit Panels assess the extent to which institutions are fulfilling their stated mission and purpose and confirm the procedures in place for assuring the quality of the learning opportunities offered to students and the academic standards by which students' level of performance and capability are assessed and reported. The QAC audit also examines the effectiveness of an institution's quality systems and considers the evidence used to demonstrate that these systems meet the expectations of stakeholders.

Full details of the audit procedures, including the methodology and scope of the audit, are provided in the QAC Audit Manual Second Audit Cycle which is available at <http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/doc/qac/manual/auditmanual2.pdf>.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This is the report of a quality audit of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) by an Audit Panel appointed by, and acting on behalf of, the Quality Assurance Council (QAC). The report presents the findings of the quality audit, supported by detailed analysis and commentary on the following areas:

- the setting and maintaining of academic standards
- the quality of student learning opportunities
- student achievement
- postgraduate provision
- quality enhancement

The audit findings are identified as features of good practice, recommendations for further consideration by the institution, and affirmation of progress with actions already in place as a result of its self-review. The report also provides a commentary on the Audit Themes: Enhancing the student learning experience; and Global engagements: strategies and current developments.

### **Summary of the principal findings of the Audit Panel**

- (a) It was apparent to the Audit Panel that the University has been committed to addressing the QAC concerns raised during the first cycle of quality audits in 2008. The progress CUHK has made in responding to the commendations, affirmations and recommendations which resulted from the 2008 QAC Quality Audit are discussed under the relevant headings of the 2015 report.
- (b) CUHK has established an organisational structure for setting and maintaining standards for different curriculum components that is devolved yet integrated. The Audit Panel confirmed that the University has in place effective mechanisms for setting and maintaining academic standards and found evidence that CUHK has strengthened some of these mechanisms recently. For example, the external examiner system is gradually being replaced with the new system of visiting committees of senior international professors, which ensures that academic standards are subject to international referencing as an integral part of programme review and broader School/Department review. The Audit Panel proposes that the University build on the success of the first cycle of the visiting committee system by undertaking a formal evaluation to ensure that its policy, procedures and terminology concerning visiting committees are communicated effectively and applied systematically across the institution. The report notes too that the University would benefit from paying greater attention to the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework as a significant external reference point, particularly in relation to its enriched bachelor degree programmes. The Audit Panel found evidence that CUHK has responded positively to previous recommendations concerning academic

standards, for example by developing a wide-ranging assessment policy. Attention is drawn to the need to review and revise the policy, however, and develop it as a statement to provide clear University-wide direction on a number of significant assessment issues.

- (c) Much evidence was found that the University has successfully planned, implemented and embedded substantial changes to the undergraduate student learning experience since the last QAC Quality Audit. The report notes the rich and integrative learning experience CUHK provides, from which significant numbers of undergraduate students can and do benefit, together with the overwhelming support for its approach, both on and off campus, from a variety of stakeholders. The Audit Panel also found evidence that CUHK has responded to the recommendation of the 2008 QAC Quality Audit that it should strengthen alignment between the various student support units, to enable students to make the most of the learning opportunities available to them. The report comments on the extensive, co-ordinated support provided to students and highlights the distinctive and enduring contribution of the Colleges in this respect. Despite substantial investment in people, hardware and software in response to the previous recommendation concerning e-learning, the Audit Panel found limited evidence of pedagogical, curricular or technological innovation adopted by staff, and limited evidence of the impact of such development on learners. The report prompts CUHK to develop definitions, a framework and a pedagogical strategy for e-learning, combined with a clear timeframe for implementation, with appropriate monitoring of progress.
- (d) It was clear to the Audit Panel that the academic environment of CUHK produces graduates who are highly valued by employers and/or who pursue careers in academic research. The report draws attention to CUHK's comprehensive records of student achievement in a wide range of formal and informal settings that are well aligned with the University's mission, vision, purposes and goals. The I•CARE framework provides a competency-based structure that encompasses the full range of relevant student achievement. The report welcomes the 2015 *English across the curriculum* initiative, which is designed to improve the English language speaking and writing competencies of CUHK students as reflected in the relatively low International English Language Testing System (IELTS) sub-scores against other sub-scores of the test. The Audit Panel suggests that the University continue experimenting to find effective means of meeting its vision to provide a bilingual education that meets standards of excellence.
- (e) CUHK recognises that quality enhancement is a long-term activity that is evidence-based, uses student and external inputs, requires staff buy-in and that motivates and fosters good practice. The Audit Panel found evidence that the University has invested time and effort into gathering and analysing quantitative and qualitative data to effect improvements in the quality of

learning and teaching. The Audit Panel noted the work of Centre for Learning Enhancement And Research in analysing student feedback, undertaking meta-analyses of programme review reports and pro-actively supporting programmes with less than satisfactory reports, with a view to further enhancing performance. Given that the interval between programme reviews is to become six years, the report draws attention to the need to identify clear lines of responsibility and a mechanism for ensuring that enhancement measures can be taken in a systematic and timely manner, across the institution. The Audit Panel also encourages the University to streamline its quality enhancement processes in relation to its administrative processes.

- (f) The Audit Panel found evidence that the University adopts a rigorous approach to the quality assurance of its research postgraduate and taught postgraduate programmes. Students are well supported, feedback is largely positive and the University has responded positively to suggestions for improvements. Although postgraduate students are not part of the College system, there are ample opportunities for them to acquire soft skills through their academic programmes and extra-curricular provision offered by the Independent Learning Centre, Office of Student Affairs, Graduate School and other units. Research postgraduate students receive training for their duties as graduate teaching assistants. In light of CUHK's investigations into inconsistent practices between Faculties and Departments following a decade of rapid growth, the report urges CUHK to press on with its initiative to strengthen its institutional policy and quality assurance framework for self-financed taught postgraduate programmes and expedite the timeline for the completion, implementation and evaluation of this manual.
- (g) The Audit Themes of *Enhancing the student learning experience* and *Global engagements: strategies and current developments* afforded the Audit Panel the opportunity to focus more closely on these cross-cutting lines of enquiry. In considering the theme of *Enhancing the student learning experience*, the Audit Panel noted that the University places a premium on inclusivity and sustainability and emphasises the need for holistic plans at all levels, accompanied by concrete teaching and learning plans. Much evidence was found of CUHK's commitment to enhancing teaching and both formal and informal learning through student and other surveys, staff induction, development and appraisal and through initiatives such as I•CARE and the General Education Foundation Programme. It was noted that enhancement activity at institutional, departmental and programme levels could be better aligned, ensuring a more holistic implementation of initiatives such as e-learning and the assessment policy. Attention is drawn to the need for CUHK(SZ) to systematise its approach to gathering and responding to feedback from students and other stakeholders, recognising that the institution is going through a rapid, focused establishment process.

- (h) In considering the theme of *Global engagements: strategies and current developments*, the Audit Panel noted that the University has put in place the necessary structures and processes for the development and implementation of its internationalisation strategy. A significant number of students are benefiting from a wide range of international exchange and short-term experiential opportunities, both in the Mainland China and further afield and CUHK is subjecting this activity to thorough evaluation. There were issues raised in comments by students concerning tutorials and course selection, as well as general issues of integration of local, Mainland and overseas students on campus. Furthermore, it is not clear that all units across CUHK are aligning their development plans with the institution's overarching trend towards internationalisation. The report encourages the University to address this issue.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### **Explanation of the audit methodology**

1.1 This is the report of a quality audit of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) 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 CUHK following a period of self-review and submitted to QAC on 29 December 2014. A one-day Institutional Briefing and Initial Meeting of Panel members was held on 5 February 2015 to discuss the detailed arrangements for the audit visit.

1.2 The Audit Panel visited CUHK from 24 to 26 March 2015 and met the Vice-Chancellor/President and senior managers of both CUHK and CUHK(SZ); deans; chairmen of departments; College staff; chairs of the sub-groups of the Steering Committee on Internationalisation; teaching staff from both CUHK and CUHK(SZ), including those responsible for supervision of research postgraduate students; academic support staff from both CUHK and CUHK(SZ); a wide range of students, including undergraduates, taught postgraduates and research postgraduates from both CUHK and CUHK(SZ); employers and alumni. The Audit Panel evaluates:

- the setting and maintaining of academic standards
- the quality of student learning opportunities
- student achievement
- postgraduate provision
- quality enhancement

and identifies its audit findings, including features of good practice, recommendations for further consideration by the institution, and affirmation of progress with actions already in place as a result of its self-review. The Audit Panel provides a commentary on the Audit Themes: Enhancing the student learning experience; and Global engagements: strategies and current developments.

### **Introduction to the institution and its role and mission**

1.3 CUHK was established in 1963 on a federal model, amalgamating three colleges. Although its structure became more unitary in 1976, the collegiate system and ethos have been preserved and extended adding one college in 1986 and five new and smaller colleges in 2006 and 2007. With nine colleges, CUHK offers undergraduate students Hong Kong's only experience of college-based higher education. Its mission is:

*to assist in the preservation, creation, application and dissemination of knowledge by teaching, research, and public service in a comprehensive*

*range of disciplines, thereby serving the needs and enhancing the wellbeing of the citizens of Hong Kong, China as a whole, and the wider world community.*

Of CUHK's 18 742 students, 15 889 are undergraduate, 1 062 taught postgraduate and 1 791 research postgraduate students. It employs 1 350 faculty members.

CUHK's vision is to be acknowledged locally, nationally and internationally as a first-class comprehensive research university whose bilingual and multicultural dimensions of student education, scholarly output and contribution to the community consistently meet standards of excellence.

## **2. THE SETTING AND MAINTAINING OF ACADEMIC STANDARDS**

### **Programme design and approval, monitoring and review**

- 2.1 The University aspires to meet standards of excellence in its educational programmes as encapsulated in the University vision. Description of standards is also contained within the Strategic Plan. Admission requirements are clearly stipulated which are above minimum standards. Graduate attributes encompass basic cognitive skills, attitudinal qualities and communication and intercultural competencies.
- 2.2 The University has set clear requirements for the structure of programme elements such as the core and majors and has a structured and hierarchical system of committees for the approval of new programmes. The maintaining of academic standards through programme monitoring and review has shifted from reliance on external examiners to a system of visiting committees with a broader focus incorporating strategy and research alongside programme review.
- 2.3 The Audit Panel tested the operation of the standards encapsulated in the programme design, approval, monitoring and review processes by talking to teaching staff and management, examining policies and examples of programme reviews, light reviews and visiting committee reports. The Audit Panel requested and studied a detailed audit trail relating to the operation of two visiting committees.
- 2.4 The University's policies and procedures for programme approval, monitoring and review are published on the University website and in their Quality Manual, within which there is a comprehensive process and templates for programme development and review. The standards are controlled by the Senate, the Senate Committees, Graduate Council and Faculty Boards. The Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning (SCTL) updates the Quality

Manual. The graduate attributes for undergraduate, taught and research postgraduate programmes are set out in the Quality Manual. The University states that reference is made to the seven-level Qualifications Framework launched in Hong Kong in 2008 to ensure that these generic level descriptors are subsumed under the University's graduate attributes.

- 2.5 The visiting committee system, adopted in 2009-10, has completed its first cycle and is moving into a second, longer cycle to align with QAC quality audits. A number of professionally-oriented programmes are also subject to external accreditation by professional bodies.
- 2.6 The Audit Panel found evidence that the general quality assurance policies and procedures and committee structures for programme design, approval, monitoring and review are well known. Admission standards are high and the University takes in a highly qualified cohort of students. It found that CUHK's policies on programme requirements were followed in relation to structures such as cores, majors and the volume of learning. There was very limited knowledge, however, that CUHK has subsumed the generic level descriptors of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) within its graduate attributes. Some staff were also unaware that the HKQF constitutes a significant external reference point for a self-accrediting institution, particularly in relation to the design of programmes that include units of study at different qualification levels. The University has implemented a number of elite programmes, for example in Engineering and Chemistry, where there is an enriched bachelor degree programme with a greater volume of work at a higher level including postgraduate courses. It is not clear that the University has made full use of the HKQF as an external reference point in establishing these programmes. The Audit Panel therefore encourages the University to ensure that staff involved in programme design and review are aware of the relationship between the framework and CUHK's graduate attributes and recommends that the University review its existing elite programmes in terms of the level and volume of work required, using the HKQF as the external reference point.
- 2.7 The University consistently expresses the view that the visiting committee system is an improvement on the previous external examiner system. The Audit Panel agreed *prima facie* that the broader approach with international assessors provides a more rounded monitoring and evaluation procedure, and that the alignment of the second cycle of the visiting committees with QAC audits is a sensible and pragmatic approach. The Audit Panel heard evidence of the positive impact of the visiting committees which adopted an approach which was broader than the programme level to consider research and strategic directions. The Audit Panel commends the University for developing the visiting committee system which utilises appropriate international expertise and adopts a broader approach to the international referencing of standards than the simple system of programme reviews.

- 2.8 The Audit Panel found that the evaluation of the first cycle of the visiting committee system focused on process (particularly timing) rather than on lasting academic impact or how the system is functioning as a whole. Evaluations occurred at the individual programme level through visiting committee reports and programmes' responses, which are examined through the Committee systems and Provost's office, and then feed into the planning process. The visiting committee process is only just beginning for the taught postgraduate programmes, despite their significant growth and with a two-year timeframe for implementation. The Audit Panel was advised that the visiting committee system will be implemented at CUHK(SZ), but in this first year of operation the external examiner process is in place as it is too early for a broader review. The external examiner process also remains in place for programmes where this is required by external professional accrediting bodies. The Audit Panel encourages CUHK to develop the visiting committee approach across all its programmes.
- 2.9 The Audit Panel found some confusion among staff about terminology and a lack of clarity about the role played by external examiners and/or members of visiting committees in an advisory capacity between visits of the visiting committees. Furthermore, one of the audit trails examined identified management issues which appear to call for the strengthening of the mechanism for follow-up and possible rectification. Therefore the Audit Panel recommends that the University ensure that its policy, procedures and terminology concerning visiting committees are communicated effectively and applied systematically across the range of programmes within the institution.
- 2.10 Overall, the Audit Panel concluded that the setting and maintaining of academic standards through programme design, approval, monitoring and review is working effectively as a process and through the University's committee structures. The Audit Panel noted the effective articulation of academic standards in the University's mission, programme and admission requirements and graduate attributes. The Audit Panel also welcomed the introduction of the visiting committee system, noting it has run a full cycle for undergraduate programmes but is in various stages of adoption for taught postgraduate programmes and at CUHK(SZ). The Audit Panel encourages the University increase awareness among staff about the way in which CUHK has subsumed the standards of the HKQF under its graduate attributes and the value of the framework as an external reference point for self-accrediting institutions. In respect of visiting committees, the Audit Panel considers that CUHK needs to systematise both communication with staff and implementation across the institution.

## **Academic assessment**

- 2.11 The assessment policy was developed in response to the 2008 QAC Quality Audit which recommended an ‘assessment policy for all taught programmes, to be applied across all Faculties and Departments, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels’. This policy was formally approved by SCTL and Senate in 2010. The transition to outcome-based learning and teaching and an outcome-based approach (OBA) has been in progress across Hong Kong since 2006.
- 2.12 The Audit Panel reviewed the assessment policy and consulted academic staff and management about its implementation; particular attention was paid to how the grade distribution guidelines meshed with outcome-based assessment.
- 2.13 The CUHK assessment policy is in essence a discussion paper rather than a policy statement, based on an SCTL framework document from 2007. It leaves many aspects of assessment to the discretion of the programme team, including assessment of group work, number of assessments and turnaround times. The grade distribution guidelines, on the other hand, are well known and staff adhere to them.
- 2.14 The assessment policy in general does not seem to be well known or well adhered to, with the exception of the grade distribution guidelines. Its 2007 origins are obvious in the way it refers to forward actions for criterion referencing and its recommendation that the design of the marking scheme should relate to the learning outcomes. Assessment in some programme reviews is noted as a matter of teacher’s choice and not necessarily related to learning outcomes. Clear policy or guidelines on turnaround time for assessments are lacking. Programme reviews make mention of a department’s or programme’s assessment policy rather than the University’s. One programme review area stated that the discipline was deciding its own policy on group assessment and grading and that there was no University policy regarding anonymous marking or moderation.
- 2.15 Assessment and marking criteria are areas identified as relatively weaker than the overall high satisfaction levels in the learning dimension in the International Student Barometer (ISB) report. The Audit Panel therefore recommends that CUHK review and revise the assessment policy urgently, with reference to external international expertise, and develop it as a policy statement to provide clear University-wide direction on a number of significant assessment issues (as listed above) which are currently decided at varying levels in the institution.
- 2.16 A major and significant issue with CUHK’s approach to assessment is the inconsistency of combining outcome-based assessment with the widespread utilisation of grade distribution guidelines including at CUHK(SZ). The

grade distribution guidelines essentially use a norm-referenced ‘curve’ rather than a criterion-referenced approach, which assesses the successful completion of learning outcomes. The UGC has advocated outcome-based learning and assessment since 2006. The tension between the grade distribution guidelines and the UGC sector’s approach to the OBA was manifested both in the policy document itself and in a number of interviews with staff who expressed their frustration with the contradictions and inconsistencies. While the University defends its use of the grade distribution guidelines as a safeguard against grade inflation, and has a practice of discounting the guidelines with small cohorts (under 20), it is arguable that they are in fact disadvantaging their high-achieving intake by then ranking their outcomes on a bell curve assuming a normal distribution of ability. By the time of the audit, approximately 40% of programmes had defined grade descriptors in 75% of their courses. In view of this limited and uneven progress since the last audit and the promotion of the UGC, the Audit Panel recommends the introduction of full OBA; criterion-referencing of marks; and a clear policy that rescinds the grade distribution guidelines applicable to all taught programmes as a matter of urgency. The revised assessment policy should also make explicit mention of the standards of the HKQF (see paragraph 2.6 above).

- 2.17 Overall the Audit Panel concluded that the assessment policy the University developed in response to the previous UGC audit is significantly lacking in guidance to academic staff in a number of key areas. Furthermore decision-making is occurring at a variety of levels from the individual teacher upwards. CUHK has not, therefore, successfully implemented the requirement from the previous UGC audit for a University-wide assessment policy and this needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.
- 2.18 Assessment is a key element of the maintenance of academic standards. It should be designed to test the achievement of course learning outcomes, which in combination satisfy programme learning outcomes. Academic staff need clear guidance about how various assessment items can best be achieved, including the marking of group work. A number of assessment issues, including the appropriate amount of assessment in relation to the volume of learning, and the level of the course as defined by the HKQF still need to be addressed by CUHK.
- 2.19 Furthermore, assessment in the twenty-first century must test the achievement of learning outcomes rather than the ranking of students. In outcome-based education, there is no expectation that assessment grades will follow a normal curve, especially where the quality of the intake is demonstrably above average, as in the elite programmes developed for Mathematics, Chemistry and Engineering. CUHK has to make significant policy and cultural change to embrace and implement outcome-based assessment.

### **3. THE QUALITY OF LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES**

- 3.1 The University explicitly combines formal and non-formal learning opportunities as a distinguishing feature of its formative approach to undergraduate education, which is centred on the students' whole-person development. For reasons of clarity and specificity this section of the Audit Report will address the quality of learning opportunities provided by CUHK in two distinct parts focussing on Formal Learning and Informal/Experiential Learning respectively.

#### **Formal Learning**

- 3.2 Following the 2008 QAC Quality Audit, the University has initiated significant change to the undergraduate student learning experience. In part this is the result of the Hong Kong-wide implementation of a new, four-year undergraduate curriculum structure, and in part it is a further expansion of the University's objective to provide students with a wide range of learning opportunities intended to consistently meet standards of excellence, as stated in CUHK's vision. The University has incorporated a compulsory general education component in the curriculum. This consists of three elements comprising 17% of the undergraduate programme: a General Education Foundation (GEF) programme, a set of University general education courses spanning four areas (culture, science, humanities, self), and College General Education (CGE). In line with the overall educational approach implemented by CUHK, this general education component has been developed using the OBA and encompasses a variety of learning activities. A research/capstone component will also form part of the new programme structure but, given the stage the implementation of the new curriculum has reached, evaluation on outcomes is not yet available. An e-learning strategy has been adopted by CUHK since the last audit in response to a recommendation and affirmation to this effect. It has been further developed for the forthcoming triennium. However, despite significant investment, the implementation of e-learning is still in progress across the institution, for example in the development of micro-modules.
- 3.3 The 2008 QAC Quality Audit recommended strengthening alignment of CUHK's various student support units to enable students to make the most of the learning opportunities provided. The University has responded to this in a number of ways. Structured plans to align activities have been developed by the library and the Information Technology Services Centre with the overall aim of further improving the learning environment. A special team of 27 lecturers has been created to deliver the GEF programme, with undergraduate general education being delivered through the Departments and the CGE through the Colleges. Co-ordination is provided via the Senate Committee on General Education (SCGE) supported by the Office of University General Education. A two-tier academic advisory system was introduced in 2012-13,

supported by the SCTL, the Office of Student Affairs (OSA) and by the Chinese University Student Information System in terms of data administration. SCTL monitors its implementation. Further support to students is provided through the Independent Learning Centre (ILC) and OSA.

- 3.4 The Audit Panel thoroughly investigated the status of e-learning within CUHK by discussing it with senior managers, deans, chairmen of departments, teaching staff and undergraduate students. In these meetings, the Audit Panel heard that the University's HK\$30 million investment in e-learning had essentially been spent on supporting infrastructure, including Wi-Fi, studios, hardware and software, as well as teaching development grants to support staff developing e-learning courses. The University stated that there is a top-down approach with the provision of some training through the Centre for Learning Enhancement And Research (CLEAR) and the bringing-in of some external expertise. This is combined with a bottom-up approach from interested staff who can obtain grants and teaching relief to develop e-learning courses.
- 3.5 The institutional documents provided to the Audit Panel and the discussions with staff and students confirm the success of the further alignment of the student support structure at CUHK. Student perceptions vary as to the value of the different elements of general education, which is perhaps unsurprising given its stage of development. The students whom the Audit Panel met during both the Institutional Briefing and the Audit Visit were mostly positive in their appraisal. Significant overall positive responses, however, were provided with respect to the GEF programme. As evidenced by recent student evaluations, the newly introduced academic support structure is still relatively unknown to students. In relation to e-learning, many staff particularly mentioned the videoing of lectures, as well as the flipped classroom and the development of micro-modules, which may feature, for example a short lecture, a demonstration, hands-on activity or, most frequently, small video snippets which can be used in multiple contexts. The main feature of e-learning appears to be the recording of lectures, giving the possibility of more engaged and interactive learning during traditional lecture times. Changes in pedagogy were ill-defined, however. Aspects of e-learning that were often quoted included the use of plagiarism software (Veriguide) which facilitates the matching of text; and the development of Massive Open Online Courses, aimed predominantly at an external audience for reasons of international reputation. The Audit Panel did not get the impression that students are exposed to significant innovations in terms of e-learning, nor that these are high on the agenda of the academic staff whom the Audit Panel met. According to the University, the development trajectory adopted for its e-learning strategy is one of building up confidence and creating a culture of acceptance. CUHK recognises that this has taken significant time, but is generally comfortable with what has been achieved and considers progress to be satisfactory.

- 3.6 Overall the Audit Panel concluded that CUHK continues to place strong emphasis and value on the further improvement of student learning opportunities and commends the extensive, co-ordinated support structure that the University has developed. External inputs are actively sought and acted upon, for example through interaction with employers and alumni. The younger cohort starting the new four-year undergraduate degree is monitored carefully by the University to ensure that support is delivered when necessary, thereby reinforcing the University's commitment to excellent formal learning opportunities.
- 3.7 The Audit Panel concluded that e-learning is, as yet, ill-defined within the institution and relatively unsystematic, with limited evidence of technical, pedagogical or curricular innovation. Staff are at present developing courses in isolation and would benefit from clear guidelines on the structure of the Virtual Learning Environment (Blackboard) sites, as well as appropriate cutting-edge teaching, learning and assessment methods which are fit for purpose for the digital age. This will enable the University to maximise the benefits of the investments made and will provide CUHK students with an experience in keeping with the best of their international peers. The Audit Panel therefore recommends that CUHK develop definitions, a framework and a pedagogical strategy for e-learning, combined with a clear timeframe for implementation, with appropriate monitoring of progress.

### **Informal Learning**

- 3.8 The University places strong emphasis on integrating formal and informal learning to provide its students with an excellent university experience. A central role with respect to integrating formal and non-formal learning is played by the CUHK's college system, which is unique in Hong Kong. While this has been a distinctive feature of CUHK since its foundation, the College system has recently been expanded significantly. The crucial role played by the Colleges in the implementation of the integrative framework, known as I•CARE, which CUHK has gone to great lengths to design, ensures that students' informal learning opportunities are a distinctive feature of the University's provision. The I•CARE framework is supplemented by an electronic student development portfolio (SDP) which students can use to record their extra-curricular activities. This is discussed below under the heading Student Achievement (see paragraph 4.9). Student support throughout the undergraduate journey is provided through a range of units, including the OSA as the lead unit at University level and the Colleges leading at the local level. As indicated above (see paragraph 3.3) the support structure for students is all-encompassing.
- 3.9 While the complexity of the support structure is recognised by CUHK, the Audit Panel found that in practice the system is working very well. Different parties are providing different support to the students and overlap and

duplication is avoided through effective co-ordination. In accordance with the decentralised nature of CUHK, a diverse activity pattern can be discerned across the Colleges in line with their individual identities and plans. The younger Colleges are actively supported in their development by the older Colleges, as well as by alumni, particularly in their role as college fellows. The support provided to students extends to their participation in community engagement, both locally and internationally and involves a wide range of institutional actors within and outside the Colleges. Increasingly, web-based support is available to inform students about the experiential learning activities available and enable them to reflect on and record their experiences.

- 3.10 The Audit Panel found evidence to suggest that the diversity in provision between Colleges and support units is valued and that students are able to take advantage of a variety of experiences, often with financial support. One inequality raised with the Panel was the language barrier, which can at times prevent non-local students engaging with the full spectrum of activities provided. The Audit Panel encourages the University and its constituent Colleges and the Student Associations to continue in their efforts to address the language barriers that may have a negative impact on the range of opportunities available to some non-local students.
- 3.11 Overall the Audit Panel concluded that the way in which CUHK goes about stimulating non-formal/experiential learning, providing facilities, and integrating informal activities with the more formal components of the educational experience is highly successful. Large numbers of students actively engage with these activities and consider the experience one of the valuable aspects of the CUHK experience. This is complemented by equally positive community feedback and media coverage. Although an indirect indicator, graduate employment and salary data compare well with other local universities, and as such can be said to attest to the quality of the CUHK student learning experience.
- 3.12 Across the board CUHK has put in place structured monitoring, evaluation and action plans in respect of the non-formal/experiential learning programmes and experiences it provides for its students, which are based on clearly articulated long term objectives. There was evidence that both academic and support staff are fully engaged with and enthusiastic about non-formal learning activities as a core aspect of the CUHK experience. Given the overwhelming support for its approach, both on and off campus, from a variety of stakeholders, the Audit Panel commends the University for the ways in which it provides its students with a rich and integrative learning experience.

#### **4. STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

- 4.1 The University has a clearly articulated mission and vision to serve the needs of Hong Kong and beyond, and continues to build on its ‘tradition to promote all-round education and whole-person development’. The year 2012 prompted a major revision to the undergraduate curriculum, including a broad first year curriculum, a common core, increased opportunities for experiential learning and a greater volume of general education. The overall aim is to provide CUHK graduates not just with cognitive skills, but also to prioritise the values, attitudes and communication and intercultural competencies needed to equip graduates for employment and life-long learning. The 2006 Strategic Plan and other institutional documents emphasise the bilingual tradition of CUHK and the objective of a ‘high level of bilingual proficiency’.
- 4.2 The Audit Panel read extensive documentation provided about the achievements of students at CUHK, covering employment, English language competencies, publications, conference participation, competitions, awards and event participation. They read documents on the development of student competencies that are enunciated in the University’s Mission and Vision statements and elsewhere, and were able to talk to employers, alumni, faculty, and college staff about their roles in both university and student development.
- 4.3 The Audit Panel found evidence for a wide variety of external inputs to help quality enhancement and to evaluate whether the achievements of its graduates meet the expectations of the community. Amongst these are advisory boards, visiting committees, accreditation bodies as well as alumni and employer feedback mechanisms. The University adopts a number of different approaches to benchmarking student outcomes, including some formal benchmarking studies. Staff gave varying accounts of what constitutes international benchmarking, with selection criteria cited ranging from peer to aspirational partners. This issue is taken up in a later section of this Report.
- 4.4 The Audit Panel heard first hand reports of strong and supportive relationships with alumni and employers that allow the University to assess how well their graduates are meeting the requirements of employers.
- 4.5 There was evidence of strong support provided for student development during their studies by the University’s central offices, the colleges and students themselves. The decentralised activities of CUHK in this regard – for example, placements, practicums, overseas exchanges, the general education programme and the college programmes, which are reported on elsewhere – are evidence of the depth to which the whole-person educational goal is embedded within the culture of the University, at least at the undergraduate level. For both taught and research postgraduates, the goals are less clear, with statements that ‘whole person development is not part of the formal education objective for most postgraduate programmes’, sitting

awkwardly alongside the personal/social competency goals of leadership and communication.

- 4.6 The University compiles comprehensive records of student achievements, across a range of areas, from listings that are perhaps more appropriately described as experiences and activities, to outstanding achievements, some of which are publicised in the CUHK and unit newsletters. The Audit Panel noted the wide range and breadth of these achievements, which are well aligned with the mission and strategic directions of the University. There is data on English language competency levels, employment records, sports awards, conference participation, and innovations and entrepreneurship successes. Another census of participation in conferences, events and competitions co-ordinated by Faculties or Departments is particularly detailed, providing evidence for significant positive trends over time (an increase of 17% over the last two years for undergraduates, and 68% for postgraduates). The range of these non-formal participation figures is extensive – over 2 500 in a year for undergraduates and over 3 500 for postgraduates. The data is provided as a demonstration of the attainment of learning outcomes; mapping onto the 2011 I•CARE descriptors would be further valuable evidence of good alignment of goals, objectives and outcomes.
- 4.7 The Student Experience Questionnaire surveys conducted by CLEAR reveal positive trends across time in the self-reports of competency development, albeit through indirect measurement. The University has made very good strides in raising the low self-reports by undergraduates of their communications skills and interpersonal skills or group-work in recent years. Critical thinking continues to be the competency (amongst those surveyed) that produces the most satisfactory self-reports. For postgraduates, the trends across time are less significant. The analyses of this data by CLEAR are very useful to faculties.
- 4.8 Benchmarking takes place, *inter alia*, through the Education Bureau (EDB) surveys, the Universum survey and the ISB survey. Many of the benchmarking results reported in documentation read by the Audit Panel employ local universities as their comparators, and, in this regard, employment rates, salary levels and civil service positions filled compare well with most other local universities, although the student responses regarding ‘learning that specifically targets getting a good job’, as reflected in the ISB survey benchmarking results, are less positive.
- 4.9 Students are afforded the opportunity to use the SDP system to list their achievements for future use in seeking employment or to chart their personal development progress. This is a computer-based system and website, providing a service to students, as well as assisting the University and Faculties to coordinate their activities. Underlying the SDP is the well-developed and well-funded I•CARE framework, which is a competency-

based structuring of five key areas of personal growth. It is described as a priority area and can help to drive much of the non-formal learning activities of the University beyond community engagement. The alignment between the I•CARE framework and the ‘tradition to promote all-round education and whole-person development’ referred to above is clear. Although the Panel was provided with the numbers of students accessing the system, which have increased through the two years of its operation so far, there was little evidence from the meetings with students that it was being used extensively. The Audit Panel encourages the University to continue to develop usage of the system by students, if evaluation of the impact of the SDP is positive.

- 4.10 The 2006 Strategic Plan referred to the refinement and re-articulation of CUHK’s language policy for the coming decades. The University analyses the English language competencies assessed through International English Language Testing System (IELTS), and these analyses show evidence of improvement overall, as well as in both Reading and Listening. However the Speaking and Writing sub-scores are lower, (albeit slightly higher than the UGC-funded institutional averages), and show no improvement over time from 2002 until 2013. The Audit Panel also noted the low self-reports of English language competencies from the alumni and graduate surveys (with the exception in the latter case of the Faculties of Medicine and Law). The introduction of the *English across the curriculum* initiative in 2015 was noted as a positive step that may help to address this issue. The Audit Panel recommends that the University continue experimenting to find effective means of meeting the University’s vision to provide a bilingual education that meets standards of excellence.
- 4.11 Overall the Audit Panel concluded that the University is clear about the competencies and values expected of its graduates, built on the tradition it has developed over the past half century. The University’s Vision statement focuses on the goal whereby the ‘bilingual and multicultural dimensions of student education, scholarly output and contribution to the community consistently meet standards of excellence’, while documents presented refer to the institution’s ‘tradition to promote all-round education and whole-person development’. The Audit Panel noted the University’s commitment to providing an educational environment that goes well beyond formal education and makes use of a wide variety of external inputs and data to monitor and evaluate the achievements of students in these respects. They also found the extent of activities and achievements of CUHK students worthy of note, while observing that some sub-scores on the English language competency tests were less in line with the University’s Vision statement above. The I•CARE framework, a competency-based structure for guiding aspects of the educational provision and encompassing much of what is special about CUHK graduates, was particularly noteworthy and contributes to the commendation in paragraph 3.12, above. There was less evidence, however, that students use the SDP generated from this framework and the Audit Panel

encourages the University to address this by prompting students to reflect upon their own learning and take ownership of their personal development.

## **5. QUALITY ENHANCEMENT**

- 5.1 CUHK recognises that quality enhancement is a long-term activity that is evidence-based, uses student and external inputs, requires staff buy-in and that motivates and fosters good practice. Student feedback is collected through a variety of ways at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Programme reviews are initiated on a regular basis with action plans that are monitored. The key body within CUHK for the overall monitoring of quality and quality enhancement is the SCTL, supported by CLEAR. A central place in CUHK's approach to quality enhancement is taken by the Integrated Framework for Curriculum Development and Review.
- 5.2 Quality enhancement at CUHK takes place through an integrated set of quality assurance mechanisms and instruments, comprising standardised course and programme questionnaires with ensuing action plans and review by visiting committees.
- 5.3 The overall quality enhancement process is monitored by SCTL, which is considered the key committee in relation to quality enhancement. CLEAR also engages pro-actively with programmes that demonstrate less than satisfactory outcomes, thus further strengthening quality enhancement. The Audit Panel commends the work done by CLEAR in initiating, conducting and disseminating data analyses of the various surveys, completing meta-analyses of programme review reports and supporting programmes with less than satisfactory reports for enhancement purposes.
- 5.4 CUHK is in the process of transitioning from an external examiner system to a visiting committee structure, as described above under the heading of Academic Standards (see paragraph 2.7). These committees are comprised of leading international experts in their respective fields. It is CUHK's intention that with this transition, a six-year quality cycle will become the new standard.
- 5.5 CUHK was commended for its strong quality assurance culture in the 2008 QAC Quality Audit. The Audit Panel noted that the University continues to take a robust approach to quality assurance and enhancement. Throughout the documentation provided for the audit and in meetings with academic and support staff, the Audit Panel found strong evidence of a vibrant quality culture, including the systematic adoption of good practice across the institution. Student evaluations demonstrate steadily increasing student satisfaction over the years. Across the University there is evidence of continuous quality enhancement following the identification of issues, indicating that monitoring and follow up actions are a working part of the quality cycle.

- 5.6 While the central administration is very clear and cohesive in its understanding of the role of visiting committees and international benchmarking, the Audit Panel witnessed some confusion among academic staff about visiting committees (see paragraphs 2.8 and 2.10 above). Practice in addressing recommendations of programme review exercises currently varies between programmes. Given that programme reviews under the visiting committee system are to be conducted every 6 years, the Audit Panel formed the view that a mechanism is necessary to ensure efficient and timely follow up at programme level. The current practice of revisiting issues during subsequent programme review exercises, with remedial support provided by CLEAR if required, may not be fit for this purpose. The Audit Panel therefore recommends that the University explicitly specify lines of responsibility for the identification of enhancement opportunities; implementation of enhancement measures; and for providing assurance to the University that recommendations from programme review reports are being followed through. The Audit Panel further encourages the University to consider ways in which it might harness the visiting committee process to promote quality enhancement.
- 5.7 Some staff suggested that administrative processes requiring paper-based signatures can frustrate attempts to provide agile responses to issues that require dedicated prompt action. The Audit Panel encourages the University to consider how it might streamline its quality enhancement processes in relation to its administrative processes and structures. Furthermore, the University has numerous committees at various levels, none of which include self-review or external review of their operations and effectiveness within their terms of reference. The Audit Panel considers that quality enhancement at CUHK would be improved by regular review of the operation and effectiveness of committees.
- 5.8 Overall the Audit Panel concluded that CUHK has in place a comprehensive quality enhancement system that is effective and appropriate for the University. The undergraduate programme review process contains a financial incentive mechanism, by which funds can be withheld from programmes and/or departments to stimulate action. This mechanism operates on a discretionary basis, rather than as a system of automatic sanctions and penalties and thus appropriately reflects the decentralised nature of the University. However, this decentralised approach may have an impact upon transparency in reporting, thereby leaving it open whether the ‘quality loop’ has indeed been closed. CLEAR has been identified by the University as the prime actor in addressing this matter.
- 5.9 Student evaluations play an important role in the quality enhancement cycle at CUHK and the results are taken seriously and acted upon as indicated above. The Audit Panel noted comments made by some students that they would welcome more structured feedback on what actions have or have not resulted

from their comments and suggestions. Clearly there is a temporal issue here with students moving on in their studies and action taken by the University benefiting subsequent cohorts. Nevertheless the Audit Panel encourages CUHK to establish appropriate mechanisms whereby students are routinely provided with evidence that their voice is and has been heard.

## **6. POSTGRADUATE PROVISION**

- 6.1 The provision of postgraduate education at CUHK is designed to nurture graduates ‘to embark on careers to enable them to become world leaders’. The goals and graduate attributes of both taught and research postgraduate students are clearly defined. Consultations with students and surveys are employed to collect postgraduate student feedback and CLEAR conducts meta-analysis of programme review reports which are valued by Faculties and Schools (see para 4.7 above).
- 6.2 The Audit Panel interviewed taught and research postgraduate students meeting both local and non-local students. They also met deans, chairmen of departments, teaching staff including supervisors and academic support staff with responsibility for taught and research postgraduate programmes. They scrutinised relevant documents including: findings from student feedback surveys, employment rate studies; CUHK’s Academic Development Proposal; the terms of reference and summary of decisions of the Committee on Re-approval of Self-financed Taught Postgraduate Programmes (the Re-approval Committee); sample programme review reports; the framework for MPhil and PhD programmes and an audit trail tracing the development of the CUHK(SZ) campus.
- 6.3 Course teaching evaluations for both taught and research postgraduate students scored well. The student feedback survey reflects that teaching/supervision is satisfactory for all postgraduate students, while indicating the need for greater support in developing language competency, additional library and laboratory facilities, and increased career guidance. The University has been responsive to student feedback and improvements have been made. There are ample opportunities to build up soft skills through assessments and ILC.

### **Taught postgraduate students**

- 6.4 All but six of CUHK’s taught postgraduate programmes are self-financed. There has been a continuous increase in enrolment for these self-financed programmes – 7 121 in 2008, 7 566 in 2009 and 8 304 in 2010. This reflects both an increase in demand and an intention on the part of CUHK to expand this area of provision. With the establishment of CUHK(SZ) campus, it is anticipated that additional taught postgraduate programmes will be offered by CUHK(SZ).

- 6.5 Quality assurance processes generally follow the undergraduate model. Although review of taught postgraduate programmes falls within the remit of the visiting committee system, this process has only just started and the Audit Panel encourages the University to ensure that this provision is scheduled into the next cycle and monitored discretely (see paragraph 2.8 above). A six-yearly re-approval cycle for taught postgraduate programmes was introduced in response to a recommendation made by the 2008 QAC Quality Audit. The Re-approval Committee works under clear terms of reference and is guided by a set of approval criteria. These include: alignment with division/department/faculty strategic goals; availability of resources; the principle of avoiding cross-subsidy from UGC-funded provision; programme review recommendations and their implementation; and societal demand evidenced by enrolment and application numbers. Programmes that fall short of the required standard may be terminated or given a shorter period of validity.
- 6.6 In a period that has seen and envisages further rapid growth, the University regards the development and implementation of coherent institutional arrangements for self-financed taught postgraduate programmes as a priority area. The recommendations of two committees established in 2012 to address the issues, form the basis of CUHK's current initiative to strengthen both institutional policy and the quality assurance framework for taught postgraduate programmes by developing a dedicated Manual on the Management of Self-financed Taught Postgraduate Programmes. It was noted, however, that CUHK had only completed six months of the two-year projected timeline at the time of the Audit Visit and therefore the Audit Panel affirms the action taken to date and recommends that the University expedite the timeline for the completion, implementation and evaluation of this manual.
- 6.7 In general taught postgraduate students spoke positively about their experiences of studying at CUHK. Potential improvements they identified included a more diversified assessment regime, with less emphasis on examinations; fewer evening and more daytime classes for full-time students; greater flexibility in the scheduling of courses; and increased informal learning opportunities.
- 6.8 Overall the Audit Panel concluded that CUHK is responding appropriately to the trend of increasing demand for and provision of taught postgraduate programmes in recent years. Further expansion is envisaged as CUHK(SZ) develops. A dedicated re-approval mechanism has been introduced and two committees were established in 2012 to strengthen institutional policy and quality assurance framework for these programmes. The Audit Panel notes the work undertaken to date but urges the University to expedite the completion, implementation and evaluation of the quality manual on the management for taught postgraduate programmes.

## **Research postgraduate students**

- 6.9 The Audit Panel commends the University for the high quality of its support for research postgraduate students which includes: preparation for teaching assistant positions; opportunities to build up research skills through research method courses; funding for conferences; opportunities for interdisciplinary research; and regular supervision reports. Supervisors and departments are aware of student needs and provide support including regular checks of student progress; a range of support measures are available for students who are at risk or experiencing workload issues; Faculties or Departments facilitate interdisciplinary research; and formal and informal channels enable the University to collect student feedback. Students respond to these support mechanisms positively and find their learning experience at CUHK stimulating.
- 6.10 While there are regular annual supervision reports summarising the progress of research postgraduate students, the Audit Panel formed the view that support could be strengthened further by more frequent regular reporting. The use of e-forms for student reports could also be considered to improve work efficiency.
- 6.11 Overall the Audit Panel concluded that CUHK provides high quality support, both formal and informal, for its research postgraduate students, which includes identification of students at risk.

### **7a. AUDIT THEME: ENHANCING THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE**

- 7.1 The University places a premium on inclusivity and sustainability and emphasises the need for holistic plans at all levels, accompanied by concrete teaching and learning plans. It has in place a process for strategic planning which includes the systematic collection of data and analysis, identifying key areas or questions to be addressed and guiding Departments and Faculties to formulate their strategic plan through the use of a workbook. This process is intended to achieve alignment between University level and department or programme level in relation to teaching and learning initiatives.
- 7.2 The Audit Panel met with teaching staff, units and staff offering support for student learning and staff professional development opportunities. Documents examined included: programme review reports; documents from an audit trail focusing on visiting committees; the academic advising scheme; documents relating to the implementation of the assessment policy; student achievement data; employment rates; staff induction provision; and data about sabbatical leave of staff.

- 7.3 At University level, the committee structure and regulations for teaching and learning are well organised. The SCTL deals with teaching and learning matters and updates the Quality Manual. SCTL works with a number of related committees including the SCGE, Senate Committee on Language Enhancement, Senate Committee on Physical Education, and Academic IT Steering Committee. Non-formal undergraduate and postgraduate learning activities are overseen by OSA. College activities are governed by the relevant assembly of fellows while CGE is also overseen by SCGE. There are clear, regular processes for programme review which now fall within the remit of the visiting committee system and suggestions from committee members are taken up by their respective programmes. The student support system and learning environment cover academic-related support, learning resources and facilities, career planning and development, and student affairs.
- 7.4 CUHK's staff-student ratio compares well with other local universities. A number of student learning support initiatives are in place, including for example the general education framework, I•CARE, e-learning, capstone projects and postgraduate teaching. Academic advising is in place for both undergraduate and postgraduate students, with a particular emphasis on at-risk students. The staff induction scheme is comprehensive and further staff development opportunities are offered by CLEAR, the Personnel Office, and Faculties. Provision is made for academics, teaching assistants and research postgraduate students, and the content covers the background of the University, teaching and supervision.
- 7.5 The University has invested effort into analysing responses from the student experience questionnaire, the graduate capabilities questionnaire, and the alumni questionnaire, undertaking detailed analysis including longitudinal, cohort and value-added studies. The Audit Panel noted the plethora of student and other surveys conducted in the first six months of operation at CUHK(SZ) and encourages the University to assist CUHK(SZ) in systematising its approach to gathering and responding to feedback from students and other stakeholders, recognising that the institution is going through a rapid, focused establishment process.
- 7.6 Departments and Faculties have duly completed planning workbooks and gone through the visiting committee process. Improvement measures and strategies for enhancing teaching and learning are evidenced in the programme review report samples provided.
- 7.7 CUHK states that the use of planning workbooks by Departments and Faculties ensures that teaching and learning initiatives are aligned between the different levels of the University. It was not clear to the Audit Panel, however, how or whether this happens in practice. Minutes of departmental retreats do not provide evidence of attention paid to University-wide teaching and learning initiatives. The Audit Panel therefore recommends that the

University develop a coherent strategic approach to the enhancement of the student learning experience that encompasses University, department and programme levels. Such an approach would help to disseminate and embed teaching and learning initiatives like e-learning and the implementation of the assessment policy.

- 7.8 Overall the Audit Panel concluded that the University has a range of strategies and support in place to enhance student learning and the learning environment. Apart from support related to career development, and whole-person development, efforts are made in supporting at risk students at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Support for teaching is available for staff at different levels including academics and teaching assistants. However, the Audit Panel encourages CUHK better to align important teaching and learning initiatives.

**7b. AUDIT THEME: GLOBAL ENGAGEMENTS: STRATEGIES AND CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS**

- 7.9 The University's undergraduates are 'expected to have a deep understanding of Chinese culture and with it a sense of national identity and pride; they should also have an appreciation of other cultures, and with that appreciation also a high degree of inter-cultural sensitivity, tolerance and a global perspective'. Cultivation of a global perspective is one of the objectives for both taught and research postgraduate education. The establishment of CUHK(SZ) in 2014 may be seen as a significant initiative to enhance the University's global engagement strategy and its broader profile in teaching and learning.
- 7.10 The Audit Panel read a wealth of documentation on various activities within the global engagement audit theme, including student mobility opportunities and monitoring, recruitment and integration of non-local students and internationalisation of the curriculum. They were able to raise questions regarding the global theme in many of the meetings with senior management, faculty staff and students.
- 7.11 Many of the structures and processes for the development of the University's internationalisation strategy have been put in place. The Committee on Academic Links, the Office for Academic Links, and documents relating to partnerships, support for non-local students, exchange students, and integration of students all constitute evidence for this. The commitment of senior management to global engagement is further evidenced by the recent setting up in 2012 of a senior Steering Committee for Internationalisation of Higher Education and Engagement with Mainland China (henceforth, the "Steering Committee"), with subcommittees responsible for different aspects of the institution's global strategy. Funding support of HK\$15.7 million is available over five years to support its initiatives.

- 7.12 The number of outgoing exchange and short-term experiential opportunities provided to students is high, both in terms of numbers and the proportion of the undergraduate population taking advantage of these opportunities, as well as in the number of exchange partner institutions (358). The Panel commends the University for its extensive work on developing a wide range of such exchange and other student mobility opportunities, in the Mainland China as well as overseas, together with its initiative in developing a new survey for evaluating undergraduate exchange programmes. The iMPACT initiative is a welcome step formally to evaluate and benchmark an area that is becoming increasingly important in tertiary education. The Task Force on Student Exchange provides for CUHK a comprehensive, strategic review and monitoring of exchanges.
- 7.13 The commitment of Faculties and Departments to internationalisation in documentation read by the Audit Panel was not as convincing as was the conversation with University's senior management. References to any focus on global engagement at the unit level were rarely evident, either in the 'light review' self-evaluation documents or in the teaching and learning plans seen by the Audit Panel, except in the case of disciplines that focus on regional or cross-cultural content. However, the Audit Panel noted that broad internationalisation plans are now being requested of all units in their workbook submissions to the University Planning Office, as CUHK develops its 2016 Strategic Plan. As a result, the Audit Panel has seen evidence of an emerging attention to this area of development in documents provided. The Audit Panel concurs with the view of CUHK that a decade between Strategic Plans is very long time considering particularly the massive and rapid changes since the 2006 Strategic Plan in international higher education worldwide, as well as in Hong Kong. In light of this, the preparation work already in place for a new Strategic Plan 2016 is considered a timely development.
- 7.14 As has been noted elsewhere in this report (see paragraph 7.12), the Audit Panel notes the significant number of mobility opportunities provided for, and taken up by, students. Evidence has also been provided concerning the internationalisation of curriculum content. The Audit Panel did, however, hear about difficulties of non-local students in the areas of tutorials and course selection. In this connection, it was also noted from the ISB results that Multicultural (aspects of learning) produced the lowest score of all the survey questions seen by the Audit Panel. The Audit Panel therefore encourages the University to consider the further development of the concept of 'internationalisation at home', that is, creating a pervasive international environment on the CUHK campus, encouraging students and staff from all origins to learn from each other, and responding to the values or expectations that non-local students bring to the teaching and learning environment, facilitating the international atmosphere of the campus as well as furthering the development of students' global astuteness without leaving Hong Kong. The Audit Panel noted that the Steering Committee's subcommittee on Global

Policy Impact and Social Mission is charged with responsibilities to develop the area of international community engagement.

- 7.15 The Audit Panel heard in its meetings with senior and faculty staff about a variety of approaches to institutional benchmarking. Most often, within the documents provided, benchmarking takes place locally against other institutions in Hong Kong, using data provided by UGC, EDB or Joint University Programmes Admissions System amongst others, although the international rankings and the networks to which CUHK belongs provide regional or global opportunities for formal and informal benchmarking respectively. The Audit Panel also heard reference to the value of visiting committees, external examiners and accreditation reviews in this regard. Units of CUHK have, however, been invited to go through benchmarking exercises from 2006 onwards, and there was some diversity in current responses to this, as evidenced from the Audit Panel's meetings. Some further clarification of how benchmarking partners should be selected, and the goals and mechanisms of a broad range of benchmarking exercises would be valuable.
- 7.16 Integration of local and non-local students has been a focus of UGC's work in recent years, and is particularly important when only 3% of CUHK undergraduates are from outside Hong Kong and the Mainland China. The Audit Panel heard about a number of initiatives for integration, and about discrete, international events on campus. Despite these and the activities of the Taskforce for Enhancing International Bonding of Campus, the Panel heard views that there remain integration issues for non-local students, often based on language barriers.
- 7.17 Overall the Audit Panel concluded that the University is committed to providing a large number of global learning opportunities outside Hong Kong, as part of its stated mission to graduate students with a high degree of inter-cultural sensitivity, tolerance and a global perspective. Exchanges are the focus for a new instrument, iMPACT, to evaluate the success, as far as students' self-perceptions are concerned, in achieving these institutional aims. The Audit Panel noted that there are varying approaches to international benchmarking, despite this being considered important by the institution and suggests a further clarification of the value and mechanisms of benchmarking for programmes and other units. The University is clearly taking the issue of integration of local, Mainland and overseas students seriously, through a variety of activities to promote this, but the Audit Panel heard reports from a number of students at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels that this was work-in-progress, and encourages the University to continue to make efforts on this issue.

## **8. CONCLUSIONS**

- 8.1 CUHK has been established since 1963 with a distinctive mission as a comprehensive research university with a collegiate structure, unique in Hong Kong, which provides significant support and (predominantly informal) learning experiences to its resident students. The University maintains its distinctive focus on links with Mainland China and an understanding of Chinese culture, and emphasises bilingual competence as well as multicultural perspectives as graduate outcomes for its students. CUHK benchmarks its activities internationally and is justly proud of its achievements in teaching, research and international outreach.
- 8.2 The higher education system in Hong Kong has undergone major changes, in particular the four-year curriculum and the introduction of the OBA, since the first cycle of QAC audits. The University has also adopted a successful formalised approach to whole-person development through the I•CARE framework. CUHK has responded to the recommendations of the earlier audit in many ways including in assessment policy and e-learning initiatives. These areas can be further developed in line with the OBA and international best practice.
- 8.3 The University has developed its internal and external quality assurance frameworks, in particular through the use of visiting committees of international experts. The internal quality assurance and quality enhancement processes are supported by data, evidence and stakeholder feedback. The effective use of national and international benchmarking and quality enhancement processes is particularly relevant to the University's aspirations.

## **APPENDIX A: THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG (CUHK)**

### **History**

CUHK is a self-governing institution incorporated by Ordinance in 1963 by amalgamating three original Colleges: New Asia, Chung Chi and United (founded in 1949, 1951 and 1956 respectively). With CUHK Ordinance 1976, the structure became more unitary. Shaw College was added in 1986. With five new Colleges approved in 2006 and 2007, there are now nine Colleges in CUHK.

### **Vision and Mission of the University**

CUHK's aspirations as a leading institution of higher education are formally expressed in its Mission and Vision statements –

#### *Vision*

To be acknowledged locally, nationally and internationally as a first-class comprehensive research university whose bilingual and multicultural dimensions of student education, scholarly output and contribution to the community consistently meet standards of excellence.

#### *Mission*

To assist in the preservation, creation, application and dissemination of knowledge by teaching, research and public service in a comprehensive range of disciplines, thereby serving the needs and enhancing the well-being of the citizens of Hong Kong, China as a whole, and the wider world community.

### **Role Statement**

CUHK:

- (a) offers a range of programmes leading to the award of first degrees and postgraduate qualifications in subject areas including Arts, Science, Social Sciences and Business Administration;
- (b) incorporates professional schools such as Medicine, Architecture, Engineering and Education;
- (c) pursues the delivery of teaching at an internationally competitive level in all the taught programmes that it offers;
- (d) offers research postgraduate programmes for a significant number of students in selected subject areas;
- (e) aims at being internationally competitive in its areas of research strength;
- (f) contributes to the development of Hong Kong, China as a whole, and the region through quality education, research, engagement and service, in all the disciplines it offers;

- (g) pursues actively deep collaboration in its areas of strength with other higher education institutions in Hong Kong or the region or more widely so as to enhance the Hong Kong higher education system;
- (h) encourages academic staff to be engaged in public service, consultancy and collaborative work with the private sector in areas where they have special expertise, as part of the institution's general collaboration with government, business and industry; and
- (i) manages in the most effective and efficient way the public and private resources bestowed upon the institution, employing collaboration whenever it is of value.

## **Governance and Management**

The University is governed by the Council. The Vice-Chancellor is the chief academic and administrative officer, assisted by a cabinet comprising the Provost, Pro-Vice-Chancellors and Associate Vice-Presidents, in overseeing all units and offices at large.

The Senate is the University's highest academic authority, which oversees instruction, education and research, and is advised by the Senate Academic Planning Committee, the Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning, the Undergraduate Examinations Board and the Graduate Council.

## **Academic Organisation and Programmes of Study**

The University has eight Faculties comprising a total of 58 academic Departments/Schools, and nine Colleges. Each teacher and each undergraduate student is affiliated to both a Faculty and a College. The University offers a total of 58 disciplinary undergraduate programmes under the three-year curriculum and 69 under the four-year curriculum, 150 taught postgraduate programmes and 101 research postgraduate programmes at doctoral and masters' levels. The University also offers four offshore postgraduate programmes. The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen (CUHK(SZ)), was established in March 2014 jointly with Shenzhen University and separately incorporated. CUHK is responsible for academic quality assurance, including accreditation of degree programmes and degree awards of CUHK(SZ).

## **Staff and Students Numbers**

In 2013/14, the University had 15 889 undergraduate and 2 853 postgraduate students in UGC-funded programmes. Enrolments in self-financed postgraduate programmes accounted for a further 9 984 students. The teaching staff comprises 1 022 regular and 328 visiting and short-term staff to give a total of 1 350. 84.2% of teaching staff members have doctorates.

## **Revenue and Estate**

Consolidated income for the year ending 30 June 2014 was HK\$8,073 million of which HK\$4,200 million (52%) came from government subvention and HK\$1,968 million (24%) from tuition, programmes and other fees.

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

The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) wishes to express its gratitude to the QAC for conducting the second round quality assurance audit and the compilation of this very detailed and comprehensive audit report for the University. The QAC Audit has provided a good opportunity for the University to self-reflect on the quality of its teaching and learning activities and initiatives on all levels. This audit report has confirmed that the University aspires to meet standards of excellence in its educational programmes as encapsulated in the University's vision and has in place effective mechanisms for setting and maintaining academic standards.

The University is glad to receive the Panel's commendations that the setting and maintaining of academic standards of the University is working effectively through its programme design, approval, monitoring and rigorous review, both internal by a programme review process, and external by the Visiting Committee system. The Panel has confirmed that the University has committed to addressing the suggestions raised by the QAC Panel in the last Audit, and has successfully planned, implemented and embedded substantial changes to the undergraduate student learning experience since the last Audit. The University is also gratified with the Panel's commendation for its rigorous approach to the quality assurance of its research postgraduate and taught postgraduate programmes.

With regard to the two Audit Themes of *Enhancing the student learning experience* and *Global engagements: strategies and current developments*, the University is pleased to note the Panel's confirmation of CUHK's commitment to enhancing teaching as well as both formal and informal learning through various means and initiatives. The latter include I•CARE, the General Education Foundation Programme, the distinctive and enduring contribution of the Colleges in the provision of extensive and co-ordinated support for students, and the gathering and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data for further quality enhancements. The University's effort in establishing the necessary structures and processes for the development and implementation of its internationalisation strategy is also well recognised.

The University is committed to keeping its momentum for continuous improvement and through its self-reflection has identified priority areas for further enhancement in the Action Plan. The Panel's suggestions for improvements have reinforced the initiatives of the University to further advance its teaching and learning quality. Such initiatives include building on the success of its Visiting Committee system to ensure that its policy, procedures and terminology are communicated effectively and applied systematically across the institution, advancing e-learning and implementing related policies at institutional level, strengthening its institutional policy and quality assurance framework for self-financed taught postgraduate programmes, as well as implementing a comprehensive strategy of internationalisation.

The University has noted the Panel's comments on the assessment policy and the adherence to the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF). In response to the recommendations of the last Audit, the University has developed, as part of a formal policy, an overall framework for assessment of student learning in taught programmes at institutional level. The University has also taken into account the generic level descriptors of the HKQF in its programme design, which are embedded in the University-wide graduate attributes of the undergraduate, master and PhD levels. The University will consider the Panel's suggestions to review the assessment policy and external referencing to the HKQF to ensure a more holistic implementation.

The University is grateful to the Audit Panel for the comprehensive review and the positive report reaffirming the strategies and efforts for continuous enhancement of teaching and learning quality at CUHK. The University will take heed of the Panel's advice to strive for further improvements.

June 2015

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

CGE	College General Education
CLEAR	Centre for Learning Enhancement And Research
CUHK	The Chinese University of Hong Kong
CUHK(SZ)	The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen
EDB	Education Bureau of the HKSAR Government
GEF programme	General Education Foundation programme
HKQF	Hong Kong Qualifications Framework
I•CARE	I = Integrity and moral development; C = Creativity and intellectual development; A = Appreciation of life and aesthetic development; R = Relationships and social development; E = Energy and wellness
ILC	Independent Learning Centre
ISB	International Student Barometer
MPhil	The Master of Philosophy
OBA	Outcome-based approach
OSA	Office of Student Affairs
PhD	The degree of Doctor of Philosophy or a programme leading to that degree
QAC	Quality Assurance Council
SCGE	Senate Committee on General Education
SCTL	Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning
SDP	Student Development Portfolio
The Re-approval Committee	The Committee on Re-approval of Self-financed Taught Postgraduate Programmes
UGC	University Grants Committee

## **APPENDIX D: CUHK AUDIT PANEL**

The Audit Panel comprised the following:

Professor Hilary Winchester (Panel Chair)  
Provost, CQUniversity, Australia

Professor May Cheng May-hung  
Associate Vice President (Academic Affairs), Registrar and Chair Professor of  
Teacher Education, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, The Hong Kong  
Institute of Education

Professor Leo Goedegebuure  
Director, LH Martin Institute for Tertiary Education Leadership and Management,  
The University of Melbourne

Professor John Spinks  
Senior Advisor to the President, The University of Hong Kong

### **Audit Coordinator**

Dr Melinda Drowley  
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 April 2015)

Mr Lincoln LEONG Kwok-kuen, JP (Chairman) Chief Executive Officer, MTR Corporation Limited

Mr Roger Thomas BEST, JP Former Partner, Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu

Professor Adrian K DIXON Master of Peterhouse and Emeritus Professor of Radiology, University of Cambridge, UK

Dr Judith EATON President, Council for Higher Education Accreditation, USA

Mr Paul SHIEH Wing-tai, SC Senior Counsel, Temple Chambers

Dr Michael SPENCE Vice-Chancellor and Principal, The University of Sydney, Australia

Professor Amy TSUI Bik-may Chair Professor of Language and Education, The University of Hong Kong

Professor Kenneth YOUNG Master of CW Chu College, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

**Ex-officio Member**

Dr Richard ARMOUR, JP Secretary-General, UGC

**Secretary**

Ms Eva YAM Deputy Secretary-General (1), UGC