



Report of a Quality Audit *of* Hong Kong Baptist University



September 2009
Quality Assurance Council

**Report of a Quality Audit of
Hong Kong Baptist University**

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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: OVERVIEW OF THE AUDIT PROCESS

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. Audits are intended to assure the Hong Kong University Grants Committee (UGC) and the public that institutions 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 Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU) conducted in 2009. 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. When considered in the context of the Report, the QAC findings confirm that HKBU achieves its goal of providing undergraduate students with a liberal, holistic education through the concept of Whole Person Education; and that this ethos, which is delivered in a caring and supportive environment, is clearly appreciated by students. Postgraduate students are also well supported. There are examples of good practices at the local level which could be used to enhance the quality of the student learning experience by the more systematic co-ordination and embedding of processes throughout the institution. The University's quality assurance systems and the quality of teaching and learning will therefore be enhanced further by implementation of the QAC's recommendations.

Commendations

1. The QAC commends HKBU's Council for its dedication and commitment to the strategic planning process that underpins the University's teaching and learning provision; and the role of the local external members in supporting the teaching activities of HKBU, often through serving on Advisory Committees. *[Page 7]*
2. The QAC commends HKBU for its commitment to ensuring that students on programmes delivered outside Hong Kong that lead to a HKBU degree enjoy a quality learning experience and that the associated awards are of equivalent standard to those of similar programmes delivered at the University. *[Page 8]*
3. The QAC commends HKBU for providing teaching in a caring and supportive environment that results in students enjoying a quality learning experience. *[Page 8]*
4. The QAC commends HKBU for its serious consideration of, and response to, student feedback that leads to enhancements of teaching quality. *[Page 9]*
5. The QAC commends HKBU for the effective delivery of its Whole Person Education philosophy, which is a major contributor to providing undergraduate students with a liberal and holistic education which is part of the University's mission and role statement. *[Page 9]*
6. The QAC commends HKBU for its rigorous procedures for the accreditation of new programmes, which includes external input as a means of benchmarking new educational provision. *[Page 12]*

7. The QAC commends HKBU for implementing a rigorous and effective system of Academic Consultation Panels (ACP) for the periodic review of academic provision; and for requiring all ACP members to be external to HKBU, which ensures a robust process and provides for the continual external benchmarking of HKBU's academic provision. [Page 13]
8. The QAC commends HKBU for requiring the majority of its undergraduates to complete a final year Honours Project as a graduation requirement, and invites the University to consider expanding the project in the new four-year normative curriculum from 2012. [Page 15]
9. The QAC commends HKBU for its support of students through the academic mentoring scheme and invites the University to consider formally extending this support to students throughout their entire undergraduate studies. [Page 17]
10. The QAC commends HKBU for clearly defining plagiarism and the rules that apply to cases of suspected plagiarism, and for ensuring that these are promulgated and made known to students and staff. [Page 20]
11. The QAC commends HKBU for the extent of student representation on committees, and invites HKBU to consider how student representatives can be better supported in their roles. [Page 23]
12. The QAC commends HKBU for providing and implementing an effective framework for the supervision of research postgraduate students, underpinned by clear and appropriate policies; and for the co-ordination of research degree education by the Graduate School. [Page 24]

Affirmations

1. The QAC affirms HKBU's development of Graduate Attributes for all graduates as it adopts an outcomes-based approach to teaching and learning. [Page 10]
2. The QAC affirms HKBU's establishment of a General Education Committee to improve co-ordination of whole person education activities and related support. [Page 15]
3. The QAC affirms HKBU's commitment to raising the language and literacy skills of its graduates through a range of compulsory courses, more stringent exit requirements and other language enhancement activities. [Page 15]
4. The QAC affirms HKBU's development of an e-Learning strategy to improve IT services and facilities, and to enhance programme delivery where deemed appropriate; and recommends that this be explored within appropriate committee structures rather than an *ad hoc* task force, with clear reporting lines and accountability. [Page 16]
5. The QAC affirms HKBU's recognition of the need to consider criterion-based referencing of student assessment as it moves towards fully adopting an outcomes-based approach to student learning and assessment. [Page 18]
6. The QAC affirms HKBU's commitment to review the Teaching Evaluation (TE) exercise; and invites the University to consider expanding the TE questionnaire to elicit student feedback on a range of course, department and institution-wide elements of teaching, with the review outcomes being considered by a formally-constituted committee. [Page 20]

Recommendations

1. The QAC recommends that HKBU review its committee structure and identify a clear locus for the development, monitoring, review and general oversight of teaching and learning (including assessment) policies and procedures, to include quality assurance and quality enhancement; and that the University clearly identify where responsibility and accountability lie for the implementation of the University's teaching and learning policies and procedures, and for shaping and driving new developments. *[Page 11]*
2. The QAC recommends that HKBU identify (i) more targets, benchmarks and performance indicators as part of the strategic planning process, to help provide more effective and transparent management; and (ii) a series of standard data sets, to include external reference points (and Key Performance Indicators) where appropriate, for use by Senior Management, Deans and Heads of Department, and by appropriate committees, on a regular basis as a means of ensuring University oversight of the quality of student learning in the devolved structure. *[Page 11]*
3. The QAC recommends that HKBU develop a systematic process to assure the quality of its programmes between the six-yearly Academic Consultation Panel visits; and ensure that this is embedded into the roles of relevant committees and those individuals with responsibility for the quality assurance of teaching and learning. *[Page 14]*
4. The QAC recommends that HKBU develop a comprehensive institution-wide policy on student assessment and suggests that this should be informed by international best practice. *[Page 19]*
5. The QAC recommends that all academic and teaching staff be formally appraised annually in accordance with HKBU's personnel policy guidelines and procedures; and that the University's expectations of performance be linked effectively with the identification of staff development needs. *[Page 21]*
6. The QAC recommends that HKBU consider establishing a deliberative forum to identify, develop, deliver and support a range of staff educational development needs; and to provide an institutional framework for quality enhancement in teaching and learning, to include the identification and dissemination of good practices and to drive pedagogical development. *[Page 22]*

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This is the report of an audit of the quality of the student learning experience at Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU) undertaken by an Audit Panel appointed by, and acting on behalf of, the Quality Assurance Council (QAC). It is based on a key document, the Institutional Submission, which was prepared by HKBU following a period of self-review and submitted to the QAC on 15 October 2008. A one-day Initial Meeting of the Audit Panel was held on 7 November 2008 to discuss the Submission. The Panel Chair and Audit Co-ordinator visited HKBU on 24 November 2008 to discuss and agree the detailed arrangements for the audit visit.
- 1.2 A sub-set of the Audit Panel visited one of HKBU's partner institutions on 15 December 2008 and met with staff and students as part of auditing HKBU's arrangements for assuring the quality of student learning on programmes delivered outside Hong Kong that lead to a HKBU award at first degree level or above. The Audit Panel visited HKBU from 19 to 22 January 2009 and met over 125 staff and 55 students from across the University, as well as a number of external stakeholders, including lay members of the HKBU Council, local employers and graduates of HKBU.
- 1.3 HKBU is one of eight institutions in Hong Kong funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC), with almost 650 academic/teaching staff. Almost 8,000 students (headcount) were enrolled on programmes at first degree level or above as at March 2008 (5,117 at undergraduate level; 2,475 at taught postgraduate level; and 329 research students) in three Faculties (Arts; Science; Social Sciences), three Schools (Business; Chinese Medicine; Communication), or the Academy of Visual Arts¹. In addition, over 1,100 students were enrolled on degree programmes offered by the School of Continuing Education; and, by the start of the 2008/09 academic year, there were about 3,300 students registered on programmes delivered outside Hong Kong that lead to a HKBU degree. A profile of HKBU is provided in Appendix A. It includes the University's role statement as agreed with the UGC and brief details of its history, vision, mission, strategy and academic structures.
- 1.4 The Institutional Response to the Audit Report is provided in Appendix B. A list of abbreviations 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.
- 1.5 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 management, 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.
- 1.6 The Audit Report follows the general guidance provided in the QAC Audit Manual² and covers the audit focus areas. The Report's structure is generally based on the format of HKBU's Institutional Submission.
- 1.7 The QAC and the Audit Panel are grateful to HKBU for the University's exemplary co-operation throughout the audit process.

¹ The Faculties and Schools are headed by Deans and are considered equal in status within HKBU's management structure.

² <http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/qac/index.htm>

2. OVERVIEW OF HKBU'S TEACHING AND LEARNING QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

Committees

- 2.1 The Senate is the supreme academic body which regulates the academic affairs of HKBU as well as the welfare and discipline of students. The Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) is described by HKBU as the main body which sets and reviews all institutional policies and procedures on the quality of teaching and learning prior to consideration and approval by the Senate. It was established in 2006 following the merger of two previous Committees as part of a continual fine-tuning of HKBU's quality assurance processes. The QAC's terms of reference include the development and review of guidelines concerning programme approval and review; policies relating to international standards and the quality assurance of programmes; ensuring ownership of quality assurance processes; feedback mechanisms; and reporting to the Senate on academic standards and quality monitoring.
- 2.2 Other key standing committees of the Senate concerned with the quality assurance of teaching and learning include, *inter alia*, the Academic Development Committee (ADC); the Academic Regulations and Review Committee (ARRC); the Committee on Graduate Studies (CGS); the Complementary Studies Committee (CSC); and the Student Affairs Committee (SAC).
- 2.3 The Council is the supreme executive body of HKBU. It is advised by the Senior Executive Committee (SECO), which is chaired by the President and Vice-Chancellor and comprises all the University's senior academic and administrative officers. SECO is described by HKBU as primarily a strategy and planning body. In practice it appears also to be concerned with policy matters, including those concerned with teaching and learning.
- 2.4 It is HKBU's philosophy to encourage ownership of academic processes at the grass roots level. Responsibility for quality assurance in teaching and learning has been increasingly devolved to individual faculties, schools and departments. Oversight at the local level is the responsibility of Programme Management Committees (PMC) and by the respective Deans and Heads of Department.

External input and peer review

- 2.5 HKBU uses the expertise of members external to the University in several ways, *e.g.* through the lay members of Council; through employers and professionals from the local community serving on numerous Advisory Committees that cover the range of HKBU's academic provision (Section 7); through the use of External Examiners for some programmes (Section 10); and through strong reliance on external academic members in the University's programme accreditation and review processes (Sections 5 and 6 refer). The latter two processes, in particular, bring an element of international benchmarking to HKBU's programmes and are sound and robust.
- 2.6 There is clear evidence, from the Panels' discussions with senior management, with members of the Council and through relevant committee minutes, that the Council, and particularly the lay members, ensure that the strategic planning process is iterative, with the Strategic Plan 2006 having been developed and agreed after consultation. The Council also played a lead role in a recent review of HKBU's governance. There are numerous examples of Council lay members informing discussions on teaching and learning issues. The caring and supportive role of the Council is a prominent and positive feature of HKBU's governance.

- 2.7 The Panel is impressed by external involvement through, and the value provided by, the Advisory Committees (some of which include Council lay members). The employers of HKBU graduates whom the Panel met as members of Advisory Committees were highly supportive; and HKBU has formed good links with external employers and people from the business and professional communities. The University clearly takes on board comments from its external members and values their experience in the relevant disciplinary areas. Section 7 also refers.

Commendation 1

The QAC commends HKBU's Council for its dedication and commitment to the strategic planning process that underpins the University's teaching and learning provision; and the role of the local external members in supporting the teaching activities of HKBU, often through serving on Advisory Committees.

Student feedback and support

- 2.8 The primary mechanisms for obtaining students' views are via the Teaching Evaluation exercise (an on-line questionnaire on the quality of teaching completed at the end of individual courses each semester); and through exit questionnaires on graduation. Students are represented on committees at all levels. A key forum for seeking students' views is the Student-Teacher Consultative Committee operated by most academic programmes. Section 12 refers.
- 2.9 The students and graduates seen by the Panel were highly complimentary of the staff's commitment to providing high quality teaching and student support. These views were corroborated by a range of documentary evidence from across the institution, and by discussions with a wide range of staff. There are numerous examples of staff responding positively to student feedback; and for closing the feedback loop so that students are aware of changes made as a consequence of their views: the latter is particularly good practice.

Staffing matters

- 2.10 Performance management has been a feature of HKBU's systems for assuring teaching and learning quality for several years. It is underpinned by a number of staffing policies and practices. Teaching Evaluation outcomes contribute to staff performance management. Section 11 refers.
- 2.11 Several units provide staff educational development opportunities, of which there are good examples. These could be enhanced further by greater co-ordination – see Section 11.

Management Information and Benchmarking

- 2.12 HKBU generally relies on surveys to provide data to assure the relative efficacy of its teaching and learning processes. The Panel found little evidence of the systematic use of management information or key performance indicators to support the monitoring and development of teaching and learning provision. HKBU acknowledges the need for the more systematic collection and use of data for institutional management purposes. Section 4 refers.

Outside provision

- 2.13 HKBU has substantial provision at first degree level outside Hong Kong. The Panel reviewed documentation from several of these programmes; and a sub-set of the Panel met 47 staff and 12 students at a partner institution: paragraphs 1.2 and 1.3 refer. HKBU's quality assurance arrangements in terms of programme approval, monitoring and review are applied to outside programmes, including the use of the Teaching Evaluation questionnaire to elicit students' views. Comparability of the academic standards of the degrees awarded for programmes offered outside Hong Kong with those for equivalent or similar programmes offered at HKBU is largely assured through the examining system in which HKBU staff invariably act as external examiners. There is clear evidence that the University is aware of the quality assurance issues that concern outside programmes and is working hard to ensure the same quality and standards for these programmes as those taught at HKBU. Several examples of HKBU's quality assurance arrangements being put into practice were noted. The students seen by the Panel were very positive about their experiences. They were well supported, and staff were helpful. Students cited several instances of changes having been made to courses in response to their feedback. And they received timely and helpful feedback on their assignments.

Commendation 2

The QAC commends HKBU for its commitment to ensuring that students on programmes delivered outside Hong Kong that lead to a HKBU degree enjoy a quality learning experience and that the associated awards are of equivalent standard to those of similar programmes delivered at the University.

- 2.14 In some cases, first degree programmes delivered outside Hong Kong are of four years' duration compared with (currently) three years at HKBU. Although they have slightly different learning outcomes from equivalent/similar programmes delivered at HKBU, both programmes lead to the same HKBU award. Degree certificates for students on outside programmes do not indicate that a student has obtained a HKBU degree by undertaking a programme of study outside Hong Kong. The Panel therefore invites HKBU to continue the current practice of distinguishing HKBU programmes from most outside programmes by having a different title, to reflect the slightly different learning outcomes and student experience, and to extend the practice to all programmes.

Overall impressions

- 2.15 The Panel's overall impression is that there are many positive features and aspects of good practice at HKBU. These lead to effective teaching outcomes and good quality teaching, and this is valued by students. There is also good use of external members in shaping the curriculum and informing developments.

Commendation 3

The QAC commends HKBU for providing teaching in a caring and supportive environment that results in students enjoying a quality learning experience.

Commendation 4

The QAC commends HKBU for its serious consideration of, and response to, student feedback that leads to enhancements of teaching quality.

- 2.16 Several other commendable features are evident, as highlighted in the following sections. Nonetheless, the Panel's clear impression is that good practices have often resulted from dispersed and uncoordinated activities. The Panel believes that greater clarity of HKBU's structures, roles and responsibilities is required to ensure the continued assurance and enhancement of the quality of student learning. The Panel acknowledges that the University has identified a number of ways to develop its system for assuring teaching and learning quality as it prepares for the introduction of the four-year normative undergraduate curriculum in 2012³; and hopes that the affirmations and recommendations in the following sections, supported by the various commendations of good practice, will assist HKBU on this journey.

3. ARTICULATION OF APPROPRIATE OBJECTIVES

Whole Person Education

- 3.1 One of the key features of the objectives of HKBU is the concept of Whole Person Education (WPE). This encapsulates the institutional ethos of providing undergraduates with a liberal, holistic education which emphasises human values. The Panel is convinced of the value and effectiveness of the Whole Person Education philosophy which permeates the University's teaching and learning and which is a key component of HKBU's role statement as agreed with the UGC. This is delivered in a caring environment, with warm relationships and teamworking that provide strong support to students.
- 3.2 Whole Person Education is delivered through HKBU's Complementary Studies (CS) programme, which provides a broad and well-rounded education. Other whole-person attributes are developed through a great range of extra and co-curricular activities, including experiential learning and learning outside the classroom. The Panel congratulates the University on this generally and identifies several aspects as particularly worthy of mention. (Sections 7 and 9 refer).
- 3.3 The Panel agrees with HKBU's intention to improve co-ordination of Whole Person Education and student support through a General Education Committee, and encourages the University to consider bringing together the various service providers in a more coherent framework. The University's efforts to enhance language and literacy outcomes are outlined in the Strategic Plan 2006 and are beginning to show results. Section 7 refers.

Commendation 5

The QAC commends HKBU for the effective delivery of its Whole Person Education philosophy, which is a major contributor to providing undergraduate students with a liberal and holistic education which is part of the University's mission and role statement.

³ Also known in Hong Kong as preparing for "3+3+4".

Graduate Attributes and OBTL

- 3.4 An outcomes-based approach to student learning (OBTL) is being adopted in developing the four-year undergraduate curriculum for 2012. HKBU has therefore taken the opportunity to further elaborate its WPE concept to agree, after widespread consultation, more concrete and specific institutional learning outcomes in the form of a range of Graduate Attributes. These attributes are categorised as Knowledge, Transferable/Generic skills and Personal Attributes, each of which HKBU considers to be essential and equal components of WPE. At the time of the Audit Visit, the Graduate School was developing parallel sets of Attributes for research students and taught postgraduate students (Section 13 refers).

Affirmation 1

The QAC affirms HKBU's development of Graduate Attributes for all graduates as it adopts an outcomes-based approach to teaching and learning.

- 3.5 A series of seminars was held in 2008 to assist staff in aligning programme and course learning outcomes for the new four-year curriculum with HKBU's newly-developed Graduate Attributes. Mapping of attributes and outcomes has commenced, and will continue as courses and programmes are proposed.
- 3.6 The Institutional Submission highlights the Honours Project as a distinctive feature of the HKBU curriculum in that, while small-scale, it is a graduation requirement of most undergraduate programmes. Section 7 refers.

4. MANAGEMENT, PLANNING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- 4.1 Responsibility for the management and planning of teaching and learning rests primarily with individual departments and programmes. Teaching quality is internally monitored by the respective Programme Management Committees (PMCs) and Examination Boards. The latter monitors examination papers and the award of grades as part of ensuring that standards and equity are maintained within the relevant programmes. PMCs report to the relevant Faculty/School Board, which is accountable to the Senate. From a limited sampling of PMC Minutes, it is clear that PMCs discuss a range of issues relating to their programmes but the relevant Minutes do not always reflect the time that these committees devote to some issues or the discussion that takes place.
- 4.2 The Academic Development Committee (ADC) and the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) are two of the standing committees of the Senate with primary responsibility for overseeing the management and planning of the curriculum. Paragraphs 2.1 and 2.2 refer.
- 4.3 The Panel recognises that much good practice occurs at the local level, including closing the quality loop (paragraphs 2.9 and 12.1 refer). However, the Panel considers that the set of procedures for the newly-streamlined quality assurance and quality enhancement system has yet to be fully embraced by all units concerned to ensure comprehensive monitoring and reporting, with appropriate flow-through of information up and down the hierarchy from Programmes/Departments to Schools and Faculties, and to senior management and back down again. The current evaluations use a limited set of tools and there is insufficient evidence of systemic issues gleaned from evaluations being considered at higher levels.

- 4.4 The audit is particularly concerned with teaching quality and the Panel considers that the present scope of the Quality Assurance Committee and the University's many committees is insufficient to assume an overall responsibility for teaching quality and teaching policy. Although there is evidence of good practice, there is no authoritative deliberative forum for quality enhancement and for pedagogic development. Instead various ideas, such as e-learning, are pursued in different fora, through task forces, small units and individual efforts. The Panel is strongly of the view that the present structures are not serving the University to the best of its capacity and that there is apparently inconsistent perception among some senior staff about the specific roles and responsibilities of these committees. Some of these concerns are addressed in relevant sections below.

Recommendation 1

The QAC recommends that HKBU review its committee structure and identify a clear locus for the development, monitoring, review and general oversight of teaching and learning (including assessment) policies and procedures, to include quality assurance and quality enhancement; and that the University clearly identify where responsibility and accountability lie for the implementation of its teaching and learning policies and procedures, and for shaping and driving new developments.

- 4.5 There is little evidence of the systematic use of data to understand programme/Department and School/Faculty/Academy performance. This applies both to internal data and to externally-referenced information. The Panel urges the University to reconsider the way it uses management information for monitoring, reporting and benchmarking; and to review its extensive range of committees and their reporting relationships. The Panel notes that the Senior Executive Committee recognises the need for more data to underpin the Strategic Plan. Furthermore, the Council has recently discussed the usefulness of targets being set for the strategic actions set out in the Strategic Plan, with more quantifiable results including, *inter alia*, key reports to the Council.

Recommendation 2

The QAC recommends that HKBU identify (i) more targets, benchmarks and performance indicators as part of the strategic planning process, to help provide more effective and transparent management; and (ii) a series of standard data sets, to include external reference points (and Key Performance Indicators) where appropriate, for use by Senior Management, Deans and Heads of Department, and by appropriate committees, on a regular basis as a means of ensuring University oversight of the quality of student learning in the devolved structure.

5. PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT AND APPROVAL PROCESSES

Programme development

- 5.1 New provision is normally initiated by a Programme Planning Team. Programme learning outcomes are proposed and discussed by planning teams and take into account the University's objectives and appropriate external input. There are standard proposal forms and guidelines to support academic staff in documenting new programmes and courses. A summary proposal must be endorsed by the relevant

Faculty/School/Academy Board before approval by the Academic Development Committee (ADC). Programme Planning Teams are required to respond to the ADC's comments before an Accreditation Panel is appointed. There is clear evidence that this is a robust and iterative process.

Accreditation Panels

- 5.2 Accreditation Panels comprise internal and external members. The latter can be academics (local and overseas), professionals or practitioners. A postal (*i.e.* paper-based) accreditation is normally undertaken for new programmes if the discipline or area of study is not new to HKBU. In other cases, on-site accreditation occurs, with peer review visits normally lasting one and a half days. Accreditation Panel visits typically include meetings with senior management and the Programme Planning Team; and with students and graduates and the Advisory Committee and potential employers, as appropriate.
- 5.3 The Accreditation Panel's Report and the Programme Planning Team's response is deliberated by the Faculty/School Board, which then submits its recommendation to the Senate for final approval.
- 5.4 The above procedures are clearly specified and documented to ensure that proposed new programmes are aligned with HKBU's role and mission, are feasible and will be resourced appropriately, and are rigorously planned and developed. The accreditation processes are rigorous and effective, and use external input judiciously. This results in programmes that are well balanced and well received in the market place.

Commendation 6

The QAC commends HKBU for its rigorous procedures for the accreditation of new programmes, which includes external input as a means of benchmarking new educational provision.

Approval of Course Outlines and Changes

- 5.5 There are clear procedures for the approval of changes to existing programmes and courses. These require discussion by the relevant Programme Management Committee and endorsement by the Faculty/School/Academy Board before submission to the Quality Assurance Committee and Senate for approval.
- 5.6 There are numerous examples in different disciplines where recommended texts are dated. While seminal texts are acceptable, the number of texts that were published more than ten years ago appears relatively high. It is not clear which committee approves the recommended texts and references specified in course outlines; nor is the mechanism for ensuring that these are in the library (or, indeed, are currently in print). The Panel therefore invites HKBU to review the process of course outline approval to address these concerns.

6. PROGRAMME MONITORING AND REVIEW

Academic Consultation Panels

- 6.1 The main external mechanism for monitoring and assuring the quality of existing academic programmes is the Academic Consultation Panel (ACP) review, normally held once every six years. Panels consist of external members only, who are senior academics, professionals or practitioners with substantial relevant scholarly experience.

The objective of the ACP is to make an integrated, holistic assessment of all aspects of the academic unit under review, including academic, research and management standards, to ascertain the overall soundness of the unit. The terms of reference of ACP Panels include the review of an academic unit's activities, with particular attention given, *inter alia*, to assessment procedures and practices of student course work, examinations and projects – this is considered in Section 10 below.

- 6.2 The unit concerned is first required to submit a self-evaluation document to the Faculty/School Board for endorsement. The final self-evaluation document and other supplements are then submitted to the ACP. Following the ACP visit (which normally lasts for 2-3 days), an ACP Summary Report is prepared and forwarded to the unit for a written response. The report, together with the unit's response, is submitted to the Faculty/School for deliberation, which makes recommendations to the Senate.
- 6.3 The Audit Panel considers the ACP process *per se* to be rigorous and effective: the use of several members external to HKBU (with many being from outside of Hong Kong) is particularly good practice.

Commendation 7

The QAC commends HKBU for implementing a rigorous and effective system of Academic Consultation Panels (ACP) for the periodic review of academic provision; and for requiring all ACP members to be external to HKBU, which ensures a robust process and provides for the continual external benchmarking of HKBU's academic provision.

Possible enhancements to the Academic Consultation Panel (ACP) Review process

- 6.4 The size of the academic unit under review ranges from single programmes, to several programmes within a Department, to the extreme of an entire Faculty's taught provision (of 14 programmes in one case). In the latter case, two external members were appointed to the ACP for each of the five subjects offered by the Faculty, *i.e.* ten external members, which is laudable practice. However, the Audit Panel believes that HKBU's ACP procedures could result in reviews of unequal rigour when one review could cover, *inter alia*, 14 taught programmes and another review of the same duration and process could relate to a single programme. The Audit Panel is not suggesting that ACPs should always review individual programmes: indeed, there are merits in programmes being reviewed collectively. The Panel therefore invites HKBU to consider whether the procedures that underpin the ACP process might benefit from greater clarity and specification in cases where several programmes are reviewed as part of a single ACP visit, to ensure that, overall, all programmes are reviewed equally rigorously. The submission of data and other management information with appropriate self-critical analysis (which is not evident in the current process), and the clearer specification and use of evidence to support an academic unit's self-evaluation document that is submitted to ACP members, could help in this regard.
- 6.5 The period between ACP visits is currently six years. The Audit Panel considers this to be an appropriate period, provided that there is regular, systematic and rigorous interim monitoring, particularly in following-up the recommendations and actions identified in ACP Reports. There is evidence of an incipient system of annual reporting which does not occur systematically across the University and is in a range of formats. Some of these interim reports have more a marketing flavour than a rigorous self-assessment.

Recommendation 3

The QAC recommends that HKBU develop a systematic process to assure the quality of its programmes between the six-yearly Academic Consultation Panel visits; and ensure that this is embedded into the roles of relevant committees and those individuals with responsibility for the quality assurance of teaching and learning.

- 6.6 HKBU's Institutional Submission acknowledges the need to ensure that ACP recommendations are followed up by the units concerned; and identifies the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) to monitor the follow-up actions and progress after every ACP review, and report to the Senate. Whether the QAC is the most appropriate body to undertake this task will depend largely on the outcomes of any review arising from *Recommendation 1* above.
- 6.7 The Panel notes that several programmes/academic units have not yet been externally reviewed by the ACP process. It therefore invites HKBU to consider how the University can assure itself of the on-going quality of student learning on these programmes, having regard to the points made above.

Course evaluation

- 6.8 Another aspect of programme monitoring and review relates to the regular evaluation of a programme's constituent courses. HKBU students complete Teaching Evaluation (TE) questionnaires at the end of each course, which are used primarily for assessing teaching quality. The use of the TE exercise possibly to elicit students' views on more general elements of teaching and learning is considered in Section 11 below.

7. CURRICULUM DESIGN

Complementary Studies and General Education

- 7.1 The undergraduate curriculum comprises the academic major and the Complementary Studies (CS) programme. The "Core" component of CS emphasises language, IT and other transferable/generic skills, self-reflection and values consideration, physical education and engagement with University life itself. The "Distribution" requirements are designed to ensure that students are exposed to approaches to knowledge other than those of their chosen academic major. For example, a student majoring in the Natural Sciences would take Distribution courses in the Humanities and Social Sciences.
- 7.2 CS courses account for as much as 35% of the total credits required for graduation in order to ensure delivery and achievement of whole person education attributes and learning outcomes. The relative weighting of the academic major and CS programme was agreed by the Senate after widespread consultation, and is viewed by staff, students and graduates as appropriate.
- 7.3 With the advent of the normative four-year undergraduate curriculum in 2012, HKBU is taking the opportunity to review its arrangements for the co-ordination and delivery of the CS components of the curriculum and the student support that is particularly required for co- and extra-curricular activities. The CS programme will come under the ambit of General Education, and a General Education Committee will be established.

Affirmation 2

The QAC affirms HKBU's establishment of a General Education Committee to improve co-ordination of whole person education activities and related support.

Language Proficiency

- 7.4 First year undergraduates are required to take compulsory language courses in English and Chinese which focus on improving students' general proficiency in writing, speaking, reading and listening. These courses are supplemented by elective courses in English, Chinese and Putonghua.
- 7.5 English has been the official medium of instruction at HKBU since 2003. The English language proficiency of HKBU graduates is steadily increasing, as evidenced by CEPAS results (the Common English Proficiency Assessment Scheme in Hong Kong promoted by the Government, in which all the UGC-funded institutions participate).
- 7.6 Since 2007/08, undergraduates are required to attain a specified level of proficiency in Putonghua before graduation. This reflects HKBU's language objective in the Strategic Plan 2006 to 'sharpen students' language proficiency skills', which applies not only to English but to Putonghua and written Chinese.

Affirmation 3

The QAC affirms HKBU's commitment to raising the language and literacy skills of its graduates through a range of compulsory courses, more stringent exit requirements and other language enhancement activities.

Honours Project

- 7.7 The majority of undergraduates are required to complete an Honours Project as a graduation requirement, which HKBU believes is a unique feature in Hong Kong. The project normally comprises 3 or 6 credits out of a total of 96 for most three-year programmes. The Panel heard positive comments from students, graduates and employers about the Honours project, especially in terms of achieving graduate attributes. It also provides opportunities for research to inform teaching. In designing the new four-year curriculum, the Panel invites HKBU to reconsider the relative weighting of the Honours Project in some disciplines, in view of the workload and significance given to the project.

Commendation 8

The QAC commends HKBU for requiring the majority of its undergraduates to complete a final year Honours Project as a graduation requirement, and invites the University to consider expanding the project in the new four-year normative curriculum from 2012.

Advisory Committees

- 7.8 Most HKBU programmes and academic units have Advisory Committees comprising local experts, employers and other stakeholders with an interest in the quality of the relevant programmes and their curricula. The Panel was impressed with the

commitment and input provided by those members of Advisory Committees whom it met (including lay members of Council); and by the willingness of HKBU to engage with employers and other external professionals through the effective use of Advisory Committees as sounding boards for new developments in the curriculum design process. This brings valuable external and real world influence into the teaching programmes for HKBU's students. *Commendation 1 refers.*

8. PROGRAMME DELIVERY

Student Support

- 8.1 HKBU's relatively small size and favourable student:staff ratio lends itself to close contact between teachers and students. Discussions with staff, undergraduate and postgraduate students and graduates convinced the Panel that HKBU's programmes are delivered in a caring and supportive environment. There is a clear and strong sense of commitment by staff across the institution to providing academic and non-academic support. Student induction is effective, and includes specific support for Mainland entrants. *Commendation 3 and Section 9 also refer.*

Teaching facilities

- 8.2 HKBU departments regularly review their facilities to ensure that a high-quality learning environment is provided. Proposals for upgrades or expansions are submitted as required. The Panel noted several examples of improvements to teaching facilities; and was informed that resources had already been earmarked for projects within the campus expansion plan. Students confirmed that library and IT facilities and services are acceptable.

E-learning

- 8.3 HKBU acknowledges that e-Learning has played a relatively small supporting role in programme delivery to date. The Institutional Submission refers to a divide among staff, between those keen to use e-Learning to complement classroom teaching, and those who would prefer not to use e-Learning.
- 8.4 The current generation of students, generally, are highly IT and computer literate, which will continue to increase with future cohorts. Since e-Learning is currently largely uncoordinated at HKBU and is generally left to individual initiatives, the University has established a task force to develop a unified institution-wide e-Learning strategy. This will encompass the use of Learning Commons which will allow students, *inter alia*, to access integrated services to support their learning.

Affirmation 4

The QAC affirms HKBU's development of an e-Learning strategy to improve IT services and facilities, and to enhance programme delivery where deemed appropriate; and recommends that this be explored within appropriate committee structures rather than an *ad hoc* task force, with clear reporting lines and accountability.

9. EXPERIENTIAL AND OTHER OUT-OF-CLASSROOM LEARNING

Co-curricular learning (CCL)

- 9.1 HKBU's philosophy of Whole Person Education is encapsulated within and delivered through a wide array of experiential and out-of-classroom learning opportunities. Over 160 co-curricular learning activities are offered, from which students must choose at least eight. These attracted over 13,700 attendances in 2007. Many programmes include internship and other work-related opportunities, which students value. The Panel notes HKBU's plans to expand CCL activities, more specifically for senior students; and to integrate internships and work-related experiences into the new four-year curriculum.

Mentoring and Caring Culture

- 9.2 All first-year undergraduates are assigned an academic mentor by their Department, whose role is to guide and advise mentees on all matters related to their studies. The Panel observed wholehearted support for, and appreciation of, the system of academic mentoring, which informally continues in subsequent years of study.

Commendation 9

The QAC commends HKBU for its support of students through the academic mentoring scheme and invites the University to consider formally extending this support to students throughout their entire undergraduate studies.

- 9.3 A Peer Mentorship Scheme utilises senior students, who are trained by counsellors to support and guide first year mentees in adapting to life in their first three months at University. A Host Family Programme and Local Buddy Scheme help non-local students adjust to the local environment. Halls' support is provided by Resident Masters, Resident Co-ordinators and Resident Tutors (the latter being trained students). The Career Mentorship Programme aims to facilitate students' transition to the working environment. These further examples of support confirm HKBU's commitment to providing a caring culture: *Commendation 3 refers*.

Global Exposure

- 9.4 The International Office administers the Student Exchange Programmes and the Summer Programmes to enhance students' international and cross-cultural understanding. Students welcome these opportunities and gave positive feedback of their experiences, particularly of overseas study trips. The University's intention to produce better co-ordination of whole person education opportunities and student support through a General Education Committee should provide a more coherent framework for experiential activities: *Affirmation 2 refers*.

Other Opportunities

- 9.5 There are several further opportunities for experiential and other out-of-classroom learning that contribute to the achievement of HKBU's Graduate Attributes and the Whole Person Education philosophy. These include various leadership programmes offered by the Office of Student Affairs; courses and activities organised by the Centre for Holistic Teaching and Learning that promote art, cultural education and leadership; and Physical Education, which is a compulsory requirement of the Complementary Studies curriculum. All the activities and achievements attained by students through non-formal education and experiential learning can be recorded by students on-line via their Student

Development Portfolio, which complements a student's academic transcript.

Evaluation of Learning Opportunities

- 9.6 Most co-curricular learning (CCL) activities are organised by the Office of Student Affairs (SA), working with the Student Affairs and related committees. The SA conducts various surveys, including Student Satisfaction and Graduate Employment surveys, which contribute to the evaluation of the various experiential and other out-of-classroom learning opportunities. Obtaining such feedback is good practice, but it is not clear how the outcomes are used to inform future developments. For example, the 2007-08 Student Satisfaction Survey (returned by 24% of undergraduates, *i.e.* over 1200 students), indicates that a relatively high percentage of respondents had never or rarely participated in a range of co-curricular activities. This apparently negative impression does not appear to be corroborated by the impressive attendance on CCL activities recorded in 2007 (paragraph 9.1 refers). Some activities are perceived by students to be of less value than others. HKBU may therefore wish to consider how it takes forward evaluation surveys and other tools for obtaining student feedback as part of reviewing CCL opportunities, particularly in view of its plans to expand these (as outlined in paragraph 9.1).

10. ASSESSMENT

Assessment practices/Examination Boards

- 10.1 Examination Boards for each programme/department monitor assessment methods and results at the end of each Semester. Student results are norm-referenced against broad grade-range guidelines within which teachers are to operate. Justification must be provided for any grades reported outside the guidelines. The University recognises the need to consider moving to criterion-based referencing as programmes are developed using an outcomes-based approach to student learning in which assessment is aligned more specifically to the measurement of the specified learning outcomes. Although some discussion has taken place, this is in abeyance pending the formulation of an assessment policy (paragraph 10.2 below refers).

Affirmation 5

The QAC affirms HKBU's recognition of the need to consider criterion-based referencing of student assessment as it moves towards fully adopting an outcomes-based approach to student learning and assessment.

Assessment policy

- 10.2 Although several examples of good assessment practices are apparent, the Panel is concerned at the lack of an institutional assessment policy, without which variations in practices are clearly evident. HKBU acknowledges the lack of a comprehensive institution-wide assessment policy to cover aspects such as the frequency of assessment and marking practices, and plans to formulate such a policy. Examples of other components of an assessment policy would include double-marking and the moderation of marks; anonymous marking (where a candidate's name is not known to the marker); the weighting of different types of assessment; the frequency and format for providing feedback to students; the use of formative assessment. While some of these elements are adopted (*e.g.* the double-marking of Honours Projects in several Departments), they are not applied consistently across the University. There is much international best

practice on student assessment, and the Panel invites HKBU to review relevant literature as it develops its assessment policy. It remains unclear which committee within HKBU will undertake this task: the Panel suggests that it could be the committee with overall responsibility for teaching and learning (including assessment) policy that emerges from taking forward *Recommendation 1*.

Recommendation 4

The QAC recommends that HKBU develop a comprehensive institution-wide policy on student assessment and suggests that this should be informed by international best practice.

External benchmarking

- 10.3 The University no longer has a system of External Examining, except for new programmes. Responsibility for ensuring that HKBU's provision has international currency and is fairly assessed to meet the standards expected for HKBU awards has been devolved to Faculty/School Boards, which are required to conform with the standards and regulations upheld by the Quality Assurance Committee, the Academic Regulations and Review Committee and the Senate. The move to Academic Consultation Panel (ACP) visits by senior academics, professionals and practitioners external to HKBU will help provide the assurance that the devolution of responsibility is successful (paragraph 6.1 refers). Part of the ACP review relates to "assessment procedures and practices of student work, examinations and projects"; and the Panel notes that students' examination scripts are reviewed during ACP visits. However, ACPs only take place normally every six years. It is therefore imperative that HKBU's planned assessment policy addresses the question of equity and consistency of grading standards across the University to assure itself of the on-going maintenance and comparability of academic standards, rather than relying on ACPs to provide this assurance.
- 10.4 Some professional programmes are guided by professional accreditation procedures in setting standards: an institution-wide assessment policy should ensure that these standards are maintained. Other contributions to the benchmarking of standards are made by some HKBU staff serving as External Examiners elsewhere; by input from Advisory Committees (see paragraph 7.8); and by international faculty and guest lecturers.

Appeals

- 10.5 HKBU has clearly defined policies for students to appeal against the outcomes of their assessments, which appear to be understood by undergraduate and postgraduate students (and are documented in the University's Calendar/Bulletin). The Panel notes that in cases where a Head of Department does not agree with a teacher's recommendation after consideration of a student's appeal, sub-committees of Examination Boards adjudicate in most, but not all, Departments. The Panel therefore invites HKBU to review its current policy, to ensure that practices are applied consistently across the institution in such cases.
- 10.6 The Senate may require a student with poor academic results to repeat a year of study or be dismissed from the University. If a student appeals such a decision, an Appeal Panel may be convened; and if an appeal is successful, any recommendation of the Appeal Panel to revoke the Senate decision is subject to ratification by the Senate. Since the Chair of the Appeal Panel can be (and currently is) a member of the Senate, in theory s/he could hear and determine an appeal against the body which made the original decision and on which s/he had served (*i.e.* the Senate). The Audit Panel invites HKBU to consider whether this is appropriate; and whether the consideration of individual cases by

the whole Senate is an efficient use of staff time and resources.

Plagiarism

- 10.7 The Panel was impressed by an internal booklet entitled *Avoiding Plagiarism* which is distributed to all first year students and discussed during student orientation sessions. Undergraduate and postgraduate students are aware of the booklet, and of the University's procedures for governing student academic integrity, which are applied when academic dishonesty (including plagiarism) is suspected. Students are also clear about the penalties to be applied if an allegation of plagiarism is proved.

Commendation 10

The QAC commends HKBU for clearly defining plagiarism and the rules that apply to cases of suspected plagiarism, and for ensuring that these are promulgated and made known to students and staff.

11. TEACHING QUALITY AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Teaching and Course Evaluation

- 11.1 The Teaching Evaluation (TE) exercise is the main mechanism by which HKBU assesses the quality of its teaching. Students are asked to complete a standard questionnaire on-line at the end of each course (each Semester); students are also invited to provide free text comments.
- 11.2 The TE results are used by individual teachers, who are able to provide on-line responses to students (although less than 10% of staff choose to do so); and by Heads of Department, Deans and relevant Review Panels as part of performance management and the Annual Review/Promotion exercise (see paragraphs 11.5 and 11.6 below). TE response rates are declining, and are currently less than 50%. The entire TE system is under review by an *ad hoc* task force rather than a formally-constituted committee – Affirmations 4 and 6 refer.
- 11.3 Although the TE is used to elicit students' views on the teaching on a particular course, the Panel believes that it could also be used to seek student feedback on a range of generic contributors to the quality of a course. Examples include course organisation; clarity of expected learning outcomes, workload and assessment requirements; availability and appropriateness of resources and facilities (*e.g.* library, IT, laboratories, lecture theatres *etc.*). A carefully constructed questionnaire could provide feedback to the individual teacher and on a course/department in general, and the academic services and facilities that support course delivery. There is much literature on international best practice in student evaluations. The Panel acknowledges that HKBU is considering some of these items in its revision of the TE questionnaire.

Affirmation 6

The QAC affirms HKBU's commitment to review the Teaching Evaluation (TE) exercise; and invites the University to consider expanding the TE questionnaire to elicit student feedback on a range of course, department and institution-wide elements of teaching, with the review outcomes being considered by a formally-constituted committee.

Staff Induction, Development and Performance Management

- 11.4 HKBU has recognised the need to provide more support to those new to teaching in the basic concepts and strategies of good teaching, and there is widespread induction of new staff. The move to an outcomes-based approach to teaching and learning has also stimulated a series of seminars and workshops for all staff on this topic. Staff development courses on other topics are also available. The responsibility for the design and delivery of educational training and development resides in a number of different units within the University and there is no systematic approach to staff development. Although Teaching Evaluation outcomes are discussed by Heads of Department with individual teachers during an annual appraisal/review meeting, an explicit process for identifying staff development needs is not apparent. The Panel believes there is a need for greater attention to systematic staff development at all levels, ranging from the induction of Teaching Assistants to those with leadership roles. This should also include those who teach on HKBU's self-financed programmes, and part-time teachers.
- 11.5 Performance Management through a performance-based reward system has been in place for a decade and is underpinned by a series of personnel policy documents and guidelines. Academic/teaching staff are required to document their teaching performance in an Annual Activity Report. This should then be discussed with the Head of Department, who should provide feedback on continuous professional development. Although this formal review takes place annually across the University, discussion of an individual's Annual Activity Report does not appear to be effectively linked to the University's expectations of staff performance nor to identifying their development needs.
- 11.6 Policies and guidance exist for the annual promotions exercise, and staff appear to be clear about the criteria for promotion and the importance placed on good teaching performance. Policies and procedures also exist for the evaluation of staff's performance (including the use of TE results for academic/teaching staff) in connection with performance reviews, contract renewals, salary increments and substantiation of appointment. The Vice-Presidents are formally appraised every 1.5 years, and there is a formal major comprehensive and extensive review for the three-year contract renewal. Deans and Heads of Department are evaluated formally each year.

Recommendation 5

The QAC recommends that all academic and teaching staff be formally appraised annually in accordance with HKBU's personnel policy guidelines and procedures; and that the University's expectations of performance be linked effectively with the identification of staff development needs.

Teaching Development Grants and Quality Enhancement

- 11.7 Teaching Development Grants (TDGs) are seen by HKBU as one of the most important institutional efforts to promote teaching quality. TDGs are used to support initiatives by teaching staff to develop new approaches, methods or technologies in teaching, and new materials, software or course designs, with a maximum funding of HK\$200,000 per project.

- 11.8 Staff who have completed TDG projects are invited to share their findings and ideas at Teaching Enhancement Seminars, which have been organised annually or biannually since 2002/03. The final reports of TDG projects are made available on-line to help disseminate and share new teaching enhancement strategies developed from the projects. This is supplemented by the recent publication of a collection of 17 papers arising from TDG projects in the last decade.
- 11.9 All of the above mechanisms are good practice, and are to be encouraged. The Panel believes they could have greater impact if they were part of a co-ordinated approach to educational development and its promotion. *Recommendation 6* below refers.

Teaching Awards

- 11.10 The President's Award for Outstanding Performance in Teaching, Scholarly Work and Service was established in 2001. The scheme is designed to recognise outstanding performance, promote excellence and encourage staff to press on for greater achievements. Staff are nominated by Faculties and Schools, some of which make Faculty/School Awards.
- 11.11 While the principles underlying the President's and Faculty/School Awards are laudable, academic and teaching staff do not appear to be universally aware of these schemes. The Panel also believes there is merit in using recipients as "champions", to further promote the spread of good practices across the institution; and invites HKBU to consider this suggestion.

Co-ordination of educational development activities

- 11.12 Much good practice in providing educational development opportunities and enhancing teaching quality is evident at HKBU, as highlighted in the above paragraphs. The Panel believes that this could be further developed and improved if it were better harnessed and co-ordinated.

Recommendation 6

The QAC recommends that HKBU consider establishing a deliberative forum to identify, develop, deliver and support a range of staff educational development needs; and to provide an institutional framework for quality enhancement in teaching and learning, to include the identification and dissemination of good practices and to drive pedagogical development.

12. STUDENT PARTICIPATION

Student and graduate feedback

- 12.1 In addition to the Teaching Evaluation (TE) exercise (paragraphs 11.1 - 11.3), there are several effective means for students to provide formal and informal feedback: these include Student-Teacher Consultative Committees, academic mentors and formal student representation. Graduates provide feedback via exit surveys. Numerous examples were cited by students, staff, graduates and in the Institutional Submission of changes having been made in response to student feedback. Students are made aware of the impact of their feedback through a variety of means, including the Student-Teacher Consultative Committees: this is good practice.

Student representation

- 12.2 There are student representatives on all University committees concerned with teaching and learning, including the Council and Senate, and on all Faculty/School/Academy Boards and Departmental/Programme Management Committees. Apart from the Senate, which has substantial student representation, the number of student representatives on most University-level committees is limited to one or two. The reasons for this are understandable, but a single representative can often feel a lonely voice. In this regard, the Panel invites HKBU to consider the induction, training and support that new student representatives might require, to encourage their active engagement on committees at all levels.

Commendation 11

The QAC commends HKBU for the extent of student representation on committees, and invites HKBU to consider how student representatives can be better supported in their roles.

13. ACTIVITIES SPECIFIC TO RESEARCH DEGREES

Quality Assurance of RPg Programmes

- 13.1 The General Regulations and Procedures for research postgraduate students (RPgs) are clearly set out in the *Handbook for Research Postgraduate Students*. The procedures are comprehensive: they specify, *inter alia*, the requirements for appointing supervisors and their roles; and the monitoring of RPg student progress. The Examination requirements are also detailed. All RPg students and supervisors seen by the Panel were familiar with the various regulations and procedures. A Principal and Co-supervisor had been appointed for each student; and students and supervisors were aware of the distinction between the roles of categories of supervisors.

Graduate School

- 13.2 The Graduate School oversees HKBU's postgraduate programmes and research activities. The Graduate School and its Director, and the (Senate) Committee on Graduate Studies, are responsible for strategic planning and monitoring implementation to foster a vibrant research culture and enhance the quality of HKBU's postgraduate programmes. Fostering a research culture in a small institution with relatively small numbers of RPg students can be a challenge, and is one that is recognised by the Graduate School.
- 13.3 As noted in paragraph 3.4 above, the Graduate School is currently proposing Graduate Attributes for RPg students (and all taught postgraduates). *Affirmation 1* refers.

Supervision and Monitoring Student Progress

- 13.4 The academic progress of RPg students is closely monitored by supervisors through regular contact. Students are also required to submit annual reports to the Graduate School on their study progress.
- 13.5 In view of the relatively small size of HKBU's RPg provision, those new to supervision (and who are only appointed as Co-supervisors in the first instance) receive informal training in their role by the more experienced Principal Supervisors. This system appears to work well.

- 13.6 HKBU encourages RPg students to attend relevant conferences (and provides financial support to every student); and to publish their work as their studies progress. The Panel finds this support of RPg students praiseworthy.
- 13.7 RPg student completion and withdrawal rates are taken into consideration by the Committee on Graduate Studies when it allocates RPg places to Departments. It is not clear whether this Committee monitors these rates, or explores with the relevant Departments the reasons when non-completion rates are perceived to be relatively high (as appears to be the case in the last two years). The Panel suggests that relevant management information on RPg performance be provided routinely to appropriate committees, Heads of Department, Deans and other senior managers (*Recommendation 2* refers).
- 13.8 Overall HKBU has a sound supervisory and student monitoring process and policy framework with good co-ordination by the Graduate School, which could be a model for other areas to follow.

Commendation 12

The QAC commends HKBU for providing and implementing an effective framework for the supervision of research postgraduate students, underpinned by clear and appropriate policies; and for the co-ordination of research degree education by the Graduate School.

14. CONCLUSION

- 14.1 The Institutional Submission concludes by indicating that, from the outset, HKBU has approached the QAC audit in the spirit intended, *i.e.* as a collaborative effort with the QAC to help the University enhance its teaching and learning quality, and its Fitness for Purpose. The QAC's audit focus areas have served to draw HKBU's attention to a number of key issues, and HKBU as a whole has engaged in a prolonged period of self-review and evaluation, and a concerted effort for improvement and renewal.
- 14.2 The Audit Panel endorses the above statement, and acknowledges that HKBU has identified several ways to enhance further the quality of student learning, some of which are affirmed within this audit report. The Panel is very grateful for the privilege of being invited by HKBU to look closely into its operations and for the work and time expended by HKBU to ensure a truly collaborative audit. The Panel is particularly impressed with HKBU's commitment to Whole Person Education in producing well-rounded graduates; and believes that implementation of the Panel's recommendations, taking forward the affirmations and building on the commendations within the audit report will ensure that HKBU's commitment to quality student learning is sustained and enhanced.

APPENDIX A: HONG KONG BAPTIST UNIVERSITY (HKBU)

[Extracted from the Institutional Submission]

History

Hong Kong Baptist College (the precursor of HKBU) was founded in 1956 with the mission of providing quality higher education in a Christian environment for the young people of Hong Kong, combining a broad-based liberal education with academic and professional rigour.

In 1970, the College became the first institution to be recognized by the Hong Kong Government as an approved post-secondary college under the Post-Secondary College Ordinance (revised 1964). The Hong Kong Baptist College Ordinance was enacted by the Legislative Council in 1983, establishing HKBC as a statutory body and an autonomous institution. In the same year, the College became a fully government-funded institution within the ambit of the (then) University and Polytechnic Grants Committee (UPGC).

HKBC introduced its first degree programmes in 1986/87, followed by MPhil and PhD research postgraduate degrees in 1988/89 and 1991/92 respectively, and by taught postgraduate degrees in 1992/93.

Self-accrediting status was granted in September 1993, followed by the re-naming of the College as the **Hong Kong Baptist University** in November 1994.

Vision

HKBU aspires to be a premier institution of higher learning providing broad-based, creativity-inspiring education with distinctive contribution to the advancement of knowledge through research and scholarship.

Mission

HKBU is committed to academic excellence in teaching, research and service, and to the development of the whole person in all these endeavours built upon the heritage of Christian higher education.

Strategy

An updated Strategic Plan was agreed in 2006 as a further step towards realizing HKBU's mission and role.

Role Statement

In accordance with its role statement as agreed with the UGC, HKBU:-

- (a) offers a range of programmes leading to the award of first degrees in Arts, Business, Chinese Medicine, Communication Studies, Education, Science, and Social Sciences;⁴
- (b) pursues the delivery of teaching at an internationally competitive level in all the taught programmes that it offers;

⁴ And, from 2005, Visual Arts as well.

- (c) offers a number of taught postgraduate programmes and research postgraduate programmes in selected subject areas;
- (d) follows a holistic approach to higher education and emphasizes a broad-based creativity-inspiring undergraduate education, which inculcates in all who participate a sense of human values;
- (e) aims at being internationally competitive in its areas of research strength, and in particular in support of teaching;
- (f) maintains strong links with the community;
- (g) pursues actively deep collaboration in its areas of strength with other higher education institutions in Hong Kong or the region or more widely so as to enhance the Hong Kong higher education system;
- (h) encourages academic staff to be engaged in public service, consultancy and collaborative work with the private sector in areas where they have special expertise, as part of the institution's general collaboration with government, business and industry; and
- (i) manages in the most effective and efficient way the public and private resources bestowed upon the institution, employing collaboration whenever it is of value.

Programmes

HKBU offers close to 50 undergraduate programmes and over 50 taught postgraduate programmes and research programmes leading to the award of MPhil and PhD degrees, under its six faculties/schools and the Academy of Visual Arts. In addition, the School of Continuing Education offers self-financing programmes leading to the award of certificates and diplomas, and associate, undergraduate and higher degrees.

HKBU also offers two taught postgraduate joint degree programmes locally in collaboration with non-local universities; and it collaborates in two other taught postgraduate degree programmes offered outside Hong Kong. In 2005, the United International College (UIC) was founded in Zhuhai in joint partnership with the Beijing Normal University - the first full-scale co-operation in higher education between the Mainland and Hong Kong. At the time of HKBU's audit, about 3,000 students were registered at UIC on 14 programmes that lead to a HKBU first degree.

Student and Staff Numbers

As at March 2008, 9,224 students (head count) were enrolled at HKBU; and there were 491 full-time and 146 part-time academic/teaching staff.

The Campus

HKBU has three closely knit central campuses in Kowloon Tong: the Ho Sin Hang (HSH) Campus on Waterloo Road, the Shaw Campus on the adjacent Renfrew Road, and the Baptist University Road (BUR) Campus. In addition, there is a Kai Tak Campus which houses the Academy of Visual Arts, one at Shek Mun for the School of Continuing Education's Shek Mun Campus Centre, and a Zhuhai Campus which houses the HKBU-BNU United International College (UIC).

Organizational Structure

The Council is the supreme executive body of the University, and as such, may exercise all the powers conferred and perform all the duties imposed on the University by the HKBU Ordinance. Its Senior Executive Committee meets regularly to conduct strategic and long-term planning for the development of the University and to formulate an overall University corporate plan integrating coherently academic, administrative, financial and physical planning, as well as setting academic priorities.

The Court is the supreme advisory body of the University.

The Senate is the supreme academic body which regulates the academic affairs of the University as well as the welfare and discipline of the students. The Senate authorizes a number of Standing Committees to oversee various portfolios, including academic development, academic regulations and review, graduate studies, complementary studies, research, quality assurance, student affairs, student admissions, etc.

Apart from the Council, the Court and the Senate, the President and Vice-Chancellor is the head and chief executive of the University, and is assisted by three Vice-Presidents, in charge of Academic matters, Administration, and Research and Institutional Advancement (respectively), and two Associate Vice-Presidents with responsibility for special projects.

APPENDIX B: INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE TO THE AUDIT FINDINGS

HKBU wishes to express its deepest appreciation to the QAC Audit Panel for its report on the quality of teaching and learning at the institution. After months of intensive preparation on both sides, and four days of extensive interviews and meetings, it is gratifying to receive the Panel's endorsement and carefully considered findings on what is best and uniquely valuable in the HKBU education, as well as its highly constructive and helpful recommendations for continuous improvement.

The University is very pleased to receive the Panel's confirmation of its commitment and strengths in the mission to educate the younger generation. As highlighted in the report, the ethos of Whole Person Education which pervades HKBU has produced a learning environment which is not only liberal and holistic, but also (in the Panel's words) caring and supportive, resulting in a quality learning experience for the students. Of all the commendations of good practice, this has a special meaning for HKBU in that it captures the essence of what education is all about. Students are the ultimate arbiters of the quality and success of the education they have received, and the institution is most gratified to know that the diverse groups of students interviewed by the Panel have given such a spontaneous and positive account of their learning experience at HKBU.

Conducive to this positive learning experience is a uniquely warm and supportive student-staff relationship as fostered by the academic staff, whose dedication and professionalism have made them invaluable assets of the institution. The University is grateful for their contributions in the areas that are highly commended by the Panel. These include the Honours Project which enables all HKBU final-year students to conduct a substantial piece of research under the guidance of professors, the student mentoring system which provides individual attention to students, and the effective supervision of research postgraduate students.

The University is grateful for the steadfast support and collective wisdom of the external members of its Council and advisory committees whose commitment and contributions are duly noted and commended by the Panel. In particular, the University appreciates the Panel's recognition (in its words) of the Council's caring and supportive role as a prominent and positive feature of HKBU's governance, as well as the close relationship that HKBU has fostered with the local community.

The QAC Audit has provided a very good opportunity for serious reflection on all aspects of teaching and learning at HKBU, along the lines suggested by the audit's focus areas. A number of initiatives for improvement were going on at the time of the audit visit. The University appreciates the Panel's affirmations of these initiatives, including the development of a set of Graduate Attributes from an outcome-based elaboration of the concept of Whole Person Education. The Panel has also noted and affirmed HKBU's ongoing efforts to broaden its Complementary Studies curriculum, to strengthen the language skills of its students, to develop an e-Learning strategy, and to review its Teaching Evaluation system to provide a more comprehensive feedback on teaching quality and effectiveness.

Above all, HKBU is highly appreciative of this collaborative effort with the Panel to bring about continuous improvement, and the institution will seriously consider the Panel's recommendations and take follow-up actions. Among them are improvements to the committee structure to ensure the smooth operation of the existing chain of responsibility and accountability for quality assurance in a devolved structure. The University also concurs with the Panel's recommendations on the more systematic use of performance parameters and standard data sets to strengthen the process of strategic planning as well as the monitoring of the quality of student learning.

Regarding the devolved structure of quality assurance, the University introduced this measure in the academic year 2006-07 to encourage increased ownership and more meaningful participation at the Faculty/School level, subscribing to the view that academic quality is best guaranteed when the responsibility and ownership for it is situated as closely as possible to the site of teaching and learning. The Panel's recommendations come as a timely reminder of the need to strive for an optimal balance between devolution and centralization, and its sound advice on the review of committee structure to bolster responsibility and accountability for quality assurance is well taken.

Along this vein, the University will follow the Panel's advice to systematically monitor individual programme/department's progress in between the six-yearly cycles of the Academic Consultation Panel visits. The University will also actively consider the recommendations to formulate an institution-wide policy on student assessment, and to establish a deliberative forum to identify and discuss staff development needs.

The QAC Audit is, for HKBU, not so much the conclusion of a scrutiny as the beginning of new initiatives to make further improvement based on external peer-reviewed recommendations. In this undertaking, HKBU will continue to strike a balance between establishing a more effective and comprehensive chain of monitoring and accountability, as well as preserving the unique character of a medium-sized, closely-knit institution fully committed to the ideal of Whole Person Education. Truly, the University appreciates the dedication of the QAC Panel to the audit exercise at HKBU.

April 2009

APPENDIX C: ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS AND DEFINITIONS

ACP	Academic Consultation Panel
ADC	Academic Development Committee
AR	Academic Registry
ARRC	Academic Regulations and Review Committee
CCL	Co-Curricular Learning
CGS	Committee on Graduate Studies
CS	Complementary Studies
CSC	Complementary Studies Committee
EB	Examination Board
GA	Graduate Attributes
HKBU	Hong Kong Baptist University
IT	Information Technology
OBTL	Outcomes-Based approach to Teaching and Learning
PMC	Programme Management Committee
QAC	Quality Assurance Committee (of HKBU)
QAC	Quality Assurance Council (of the UGC)
RPg	Research Postgraduate
SECO	Senior Executive Committee
TDG	Teaching Development Grant
TE	Teaching Evaluation
UGC	University Grants Committee
WPE	Whole Person Education

APPENDIX D: HKBU AUDIT PANEL

Audit Panel

The HKBU Audit Panel comprised the following:

Professor Hilary Winchester (Panel Chair)

Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President, University of South Australia

Dr Anissa Chan

Principal, St. Paul's Co-educational College, Hong Kong

Professor Arthur Mak

Associate Vice-President In support of Academic Development, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Professor Diana Mak

Honorary Professor of the Department of Applied Social Sciences of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Member of the Hong Kong Advisory Council on AIDS. Former UGC member (1993-2000)

Emeritus Professor Gareth Roberts

Former Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Bangor University, Wales

Professor Andrew Walder

Professor of Sociology, Stanford University

Audit Co-ordinator

Dr Trevor Webb, Assistant Secretary-General (Quality Assurance), QAC Secretariat

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

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

Mission

The QAC's mission is:

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

Terms of Reference

The QAC has the following terms of reference:

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

Membership (as at 1 September 2008)

Mr Philip CHEN Nan-lok, SBS, JP (Chairman)	Chairman, John Swire & Sons (China) Limited, HK
Professor Richard HO Man-wui, JP	Honorary Professor, Department of Chinese Language and Literature of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, HK
Professor Richard HO Yan-ki	Provost and Professor (Chair) of Finance, City University of Hong Kong, HK
Sir Colin LUCAS	The Warden, Rhodes House, UK
Sir Howard NEWBY	Vice-Chancellor, University of Liverpool, United Kingdom
Professor dr Frans A van Vught	Member, Group of Social Policy Analysis of the European Commission and Member, Executive Board of the European University Association

Ex-officio Member

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

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