

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



November 2009

Quality Assurance Council



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The University of Hong Kong**

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## QAC Audit Report Number 3

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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 The University of Hong Kong (HKU) 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 HKU provides a high quality student learning experience underpinned by good and effective support to students, both centrally and in Departments and Faculties. There are examples of good practices in teaching and learning throughout the University; and scope for harnessing and evaluating these more systematically to enhance further the quality of student learning. Implementation of the QAC's recommendations will therefore assist the University in taking forward its clear commitment to the enhancement of teaching and learning quality.

### Commendations

1. The QAC commends HKU for enhancing the central leadership in the planning of major educational initiatives and quality enhancement, particularly through the creation of the post of Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching & Learning). *[Page 6]*
2. The QAC commends HKU for its extensive use of academics and professionals who are external to the University in assuring the quality of HKU's programmes and the standards of its awards. *[Page 8]*
3. The QAC commends HKU for its serious consideration of student feedback through the Staff-Student Consultative Committees and Departmental/Faculty mechanisms. *[Page 13]*
4. The QAC commends HKU for a robust process of academic reviews to evaluate a Faculty's or unit's fitness for purpose, which includes teaching and learning. *[Page 15]*
5. The QAC commends HKU's approach to providing a range of co- and extra-curricular learning activities which are welcomed by students, in particular the opportunities for overseas experience. *[Page 21]*
6. The QAC commends the Centre for the Advancement of University Teaching (CAUT) for offering successful staff educational development programmes and for its work with Faculties in promoting high quality teaching and learning, and innovations in pedagogy. *[Page 26]*



7. The QAC commends HKU for its system of Teaching and Supervisor Awards. *[Page 27]*

8 The QAC commends HKU for the comprehensive codification and application of its policies and procedures for research student training, supervision and management, and its support of research students. *[Page 31]*

## **Affirmations**

1. The QAC affirms HKU's recognition of the need to develop and monitor University-wide policies and the use of devolved processes and structures responsible for their consistent application across the institution. *[Page 6]*

2. The QAC affirms HKU's recognition of the need to consider how central oversight of taught postgraduate programmes can be improved, to ensure that institutional policies in teaching, learning and assessment are aligned across all taught provision, where deemed appropriate; and to ensure that the good practices and policies arising from undergraduate curriculum reform are applied to taught postgraduate programmes. *[Page 7]*

3. The QAC affirms HKU's strategy for engaging and encouraging staff to develop and take forward new initiatives in teaching and learning, such as the outcomes-based approach to student learning that is an integral part of the new undergraduate curriculum reform. *[Page 10]*

4. The QAC affirms HKU's revision of the Student Evaluation of Teaching form and process, and the planned use for teaching and learning enhancement; and reinforces the need to monitor the effectiveness of revisions for teaching and learning outcomes. *[Page 14]*

5. The QAC affirms HKU's plans to develop University policies and guidelines on programme review and to introduce the systematic review of all taught programmes in 2009-10. *[Page 15]*

6. The QAC affirms HKU's approach to curriculum design and development; its enabling curriculum structure for all undergraduate curricula in 2012 and for the transitional period between 2010-2012; and its plans to adopt common curriculum structures and credit unit systems for undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes. *[Page 18]*

7. The QAC affirms HKU's recognition of the need to develop and implement an institutional e-Learning strategy as part of curriculum reform. *[Page 19]*

8. The QAC affirms HKU's use of a wide range of academic and non-academic support services for students and the development of an academic advising system for the new 4-year curriculum, to support students in making more informed course selection. *[Page 20]*

9. The QAC affirms HKU's approach to improving the integration of non-local students as it further internationalises its campus. *[Page 21]*

10. The QAC affirms HKU's intent to implement an Action Plan to take forward the outcomes of its self-review; and suggests its expansion to (a) include the findings of the Audit Report and (b) identify targets, milestones, performance indicators and the individuals responsible for implementing the various actions, to facilitate institutional monitoring of the Plan. *[Page 31]*

## **Recommendations**

1. The QAC recommends that HKU define the data, including Key Performance Indicators, that should be used regularly and systematically by Heads of Department, Deans, Senior Management and relevant committees, to monitor the quality of student learning and the standards of the University's awards. *[Page 7]*
2. The QAC recommends that HKU review the central, Faculty and Departmental committee structures, and their inter-relationships, to streamline decision-making and ensure University oversight of the implementation of central policies across all Faculties and Departments. *[Page 8]*
3. The QAC recommends that HKU consider introducing templates for course and programme design and approval across the University, as a means of ensuring that new provision is geared to delivery of the University's over-arching educational aims. *[Page 12]*
4. The QAC recommends that, in regard to the on-going quality assurance of programmes delivered at partner institutions which lead to HKU awards, the University (a) clearly document the roles and responsibilities of HKU and each partner, and (b) consider appointing the same External Examiner(s) where programmes of the same or similar title and/or nature are offered by HKU and at a partner institution. *[Page 16]*
5. The QAC recommends that HKU consider how research can inform teaching in taught programmes as a means of establishing a clear teaching-research nexus. *[Page 18]*
6. The QAC recommends that HKU implement an assessment policy for all taught programmes as a matter of urgency, to be applied across all Faculties and Departments, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels; and that it is effectively communicated to staff and students. *[Page 23]*
7. The QAC recommends that HKU ensure that its policy on academic appeals is communicated to all staff and students and applied consistently across the University. *[Page 24]*
8. The QAC recommends that HKU develop a strategy to identify, evaluate, disseminate and monitor good practices in teaching and learning across the University, to continually enhance the quality of student learning. *[Page 27]*
9. The QAC recommends that HKU develop a policy on the allocation of teaching and assessment responsibilities to, and the training requirements of, those who are not members of the academic staff, including research students, to ensure that all those who teach and assess students are qualified to do so, and that academic standards are maintained. *[Page 28]*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This is the report of an audit of the quality of the student learning experience at The University of Hong Kong (HKU) 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 HKU following a period of self-review and submitted to the QAC on 23 January 2009. A one-day Initial Meeting of the Audit Panel was held on 19 February 2009 to discuss the Submission. The Panel Chair and Audit Co-ordinator visited HKU on 9 March 2009 to discuss and agree the detailed arrangements for the audit visit.
- 1.2 The Audit Panel visited HKU from 20 – 23 April 2009 and met over 110 staff and 48 students from across the University, as well as a number of external stakeholders, including lay members of the HKU Council, local employers and graduates of HKU.
- 1.3 HKU is one of eight institutions in Hong Kong funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC), with over 1450 full- and part-time teaching staff. Over 22,000 students (headcount) were enrolled on programmes at first degree level or above in 2007/08 (12,031 at undergraduate level; 7,683 at taught postgraduate level; and 2376 research students) in ten Faculties, 46 Departments and 22 independent sub-divisions of studies and learning. In addition, 900 students were enrolled on five degree programmes delivered outside Hong Kong that lead to a HKU taught postgraduate degree. A profile of HKU 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, acronyms and definitions used in the Audit Report is provided in Appendix C. Details of the Audit Panel are provided in Appendix D. The QAC's Mission, Terms of Reference and Membership are provided in Appendix E.
- 1.5 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; and how these relate to the achievement of an institution's educational objectives. 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 Manual<sup>1</sup> and covers the audit focus areas. The Report's structure is generally based on the format of HKU's Institutional Submission.
- 1.7 The QAC and the Audit Panel are grateful to HKU for the University's exemplary co-operation throughout the audit process.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/qac/index.htm>

## **2. OVERVIEW OF HKU'S TEACHING AND LEARNING QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT SYSTEM**

### **Leadership and Management**

- 2.1 Traditionally, HKU has adopted a “bottom-up” approach to its activities, with responsibility for teaching and learning, including its quality assurance and enhancement, resting primarily with Faculties and Departments. While this approach was recognised as a strength in the second Teaching and Learning Quality Process Review exercise<sup>2</sup>, HKU has acknowledged that the variation resulting from bottom-up initiatives could be reduced with greater centralisation and standardisation. The Institutional Submission indicates that an “executive-led” management structure was implemented following an internal review in 2003. Centralised policy decisions overlay the diverse and well-developed faculty operation, and Faculty Executive Deans have been appointed.

#### **Affirmation 1**

**The QAC affirms HKU's recognition of the need to develop and monitor University-wide policies and the use of devolved processes and structures responsible for their consistent application across the institution.**

- 2.2 A key decision in recognising teaching and learning as central to HKU's Mission was the creation of the post of Pro-Vice-Chancellor (PVC) dedicated to teaching and learning in 2007. The PVC (T&L) has enhanced the central leadership in the planning and implementation of major new initiatives, such as a new four-year normative undergraduate curriculum, to be introduced in 2012<sup>3</sup>, moving towards an outcomes-based approach to student learning (OBASL); and promoting the scholarship of teaching. Good and effective communication is crucial in this type of structure, and the PVC (T&L) clearly has had a very positive impact on the drive for quality enhancement and taking forward these new initiatives throughout the University. The PVC (T&L), working with others, is striving to ensure “buy-in” of centrally-driven initiatives by involving the Faculties and Departments, and students, in shaping the future curriculum and in adopting new approaches to teaching and learning.

#### **Commendation 1**

**The QAC commends HKU for enhancing the central leadership in the planning of major educational initiatives and quality enhancement, particularly through the creation of the post of Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching & Learning).**

- 2.3 A recurring theme of this audit report is the importance of achieving a balance between executive leadership and devolved responsibilities, to ensure maintenance of a consistent approach in teaching and learning activities across the University – paragraph 2.1 refers. The Panel also suggests that the University strengthen the identification, evaluation and dissemination of good practice and the monitoring of teaching and learning performance using appropriate key performance indicators. Paragraph 4.8 also refers.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.hku.hk/tlqpr>

<sup>3</sup> Also known in Hong Kong as preparing for “3+3+4”

## **Recommendation 1**

**The QAC recommends that HKU define the data, including Key Performance Indicators, that should be used regularly and systematically by Heads of Department, Deans, Senior Management and relevant committees, to monitor the quality of student learning and the standards of the University's awards.**

### **Committees and QA/QE Mechanisms**

- 2.4 The Senate is the principal authority for academic matters. A number of sub-committees of the Senate have responsibility for assuring and enhancing the quality of student learning, on behalf of the Senate; and for submitting recommendations to the Senate for formal endorsement, as appropriate. These include the Teaching and Learning Quality Committee; the Academic Development Committee; and the Committee on Academic Reviews. Postgraduate matters are the responsibility of the Policy Board of Postgraduate Education and its sub-committees, which include the Board of Graduate Studies. In accordance with the "executive-led" management system (paragraph 2.1 above), the Chairs of these committees, who are often at PVC level, are charged with the day-to-day responsibility for the work of the committees.
- 2.5 The Working Group on the new 4-year Curriculum oversees the curriculum, infrastructure and human resources for implementation in 2012. The Steering Committee on 4-year Curriculum, supported by eight sub-committees and a working group, oversees curriculum policies and design. As a consequence of planning for 2012, the existing curriculum is being aligned with the outcome-based approach and a new 3-year curriculum will be implemented in 2010. Paragraphs 3.3 and 7.6 refer. While this focus on the new undergraduate curriculum is understandable, it has led, possibly inadvertently, to the Senate Committee on Curriculum Development seemingly being in abeyance.
- 2.6 The remit of the Committee on Curriculum Development relates to undergraduate provision. There is no equivalent committee that maintains central oversight of taught postgraduate (TPg) curricula. TPg programmes are Faculty-based, and curriculum structures have developed in a variety of directions. HKU may therefore wish to consider how the appropriate alignment of structures and policies across all taught provision can be achieved.

## **Affirmation 2**

**The QAC affirms HKU's recognition of the need to consider how central oversight of taught postgraduate programmes can be improved, to ensure that institutional policies in teaching, learning and assessment are aligned across all taught provision, where deemed appropriate; and to ensure that the good practices and policies arising from undergraduate curriculum reform are applied to taught postgraduate programmes.**

- 2.7 It is also important to identify the quality assurance and quality enhancement roles and responsibilities of management at all levels (Centre; Faculty; Department; Programme) within a large and diverse structure, to avoid the potential for confusion, duplication and oversight, as well as, crucially, ensuring that all students are treated equitably across the

institution in receiving a quality learning experience. With the transformation to OBASL and preparing for 3+3+4 outlined in paragraph 2.2, and the move to appoint Deans (paragraph 2.1), it is important that the developing role of Deans is clearly defined and that Deans are supported and inducted appropriately in fulfilling their roles. The sharing of successful practice and activities between Deans and other managers should also be encouraged. This should ensure achievement of an appropriate balance between devolved and central responsibilities. The Panel also believes there is scope to streamline the committee structure. One example of the possible merging of two committees already identified by HKU is given in paragraph 13.3; and the Panel was informed of proposals to change the committee structure.

## **Recommendation 2**

**The QAC recommends that HKU review the central, Faculty and Departmental committee structures, and their inter-relationships, to streamline decision-making and ensure University oversight of the implementation of central policies across all Faculties and Departments.**

## **External Input**

- 2.8 A key component of HKU's quality assurance framework is the use of senior academics and professionals who are external to the University in the programme design, development and monitoring processes, and in Faculty reviews. An External Examiner system is also a key feature of the assessment process. This use of external input is good practice, and is outlined further in relevant sections below. Some use is also made of international benchmarking, to inform developments and assess progress in teaching and learning. In doing so, care must be taken to identify appropriate benchmarks, and to use the results judiciously.

## **Commendation 2**

**The QAC commends HKU for its extensive use of academics and professionals who are external to the University in assuring the quality of HKU's programmes and the standards of its awards.**

## **Student Participation**

- 2.9 Student feedback on their courses and teaching is obtained on a regular basis through the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) exercise. This is under review: further details are provided in Section 6 which, together with Section 12, outlines the other opportunities for student participation and involvement in the quality assurance of teaching and learning.

## **Faculties and Faculty Reviews**

- 2.10 Faculties play a primary role in assuring the quality of student learning in their Departments, and there are numerous committees and structures in place to meet the requirements of individual Faculties. Comprehensive and holistic academic reviews of Faculties, and of research centres and other independent units, are undertaken by the Committee on Academic Reviews: these are considered further in Section 6.

## **Staff Policies and Development**

- 2.11 The performance management of staff is based around the annual Performance Review and Development process which is described in Section 11. This process is underpinned by a range of staff development opportunities that are driven by CAUT (the Centre for the Advancement of University Teaching), and delivered centrally and locally within Faculties.

## **3. ARTICULATION OF APPROPRIATE OBJECTIVES**

### **Educational Aims and OBASL**

- 3.1 HKU has taken the opportunity to identify six broad educational aims to underpin the development of the new four-year undergraduate curriculum. These aims were endorsed by the Senate after two years of development, consultation and iteration, involving numerous meetings and retreats for staff and students from across the University. For full achievement of the six educational aims, HKU must ensure that they can be delivered and assessed through credit-bearing provision. Paragraph 7.5 refers.
- 3.2 The University's educational aims are driving the development of the new undergraduate curriculum through an outcomes-based approach to student learning (OBASL – paragraph 2.2 refers) and the alignment of learning outcomes with pedagogy and assessment. The effectiveness of HKU's communication strategy in working with staff to develop and take forward new initiatives (paragraph 2.2 refers) is evident by an encouraging and widespread awareness among staff of this paradigm shift in approach to teaching and learning. In taking this forward, it is important that HKU ensure a common understanding of the outcomes-based approach across the University, and how outcomes will be measured. Course outcome performance indicators, student learning profiles and systematic graduate achievement surveys are some measures which the Panel believes would strengthen OBASL implementation.
- 3.3 The students seen by the Panel were made aware of the expected learning outcomes of their programmes. However, they were generally unaware of the educational aims of the new curriculum. This is not altogether surprising, and HKU is striving to ensure that the quality of current student learning is harmonised with the new educational philosophy and aims. This is being achieved partly by planning to introduce elements of the new four-year curriculum into the (3-year) curriculum for those entering in 2010. This will allow aspects of the new curriculum to be evaluated and, if necessary, fine-tuned before 2012. Importantly, it will also ensure that students entering prior to 2012 can benefit from changes in pedagogy and curriculum structures. The University will need to consider ways of ensuring that its educational aims are continually communicated to students, in its course and programme literature and also to external stakeholders, as these aims become embedded in the curriculum.
- 3.4 The incorporation of an outcomes-based approach to student learning as an integral part of the new (undergraduate) curriculum reform is enabling strategies for curriculum objectives to become embedded. Learning outcomes at all levels (University; Programme; Course), pedagogy and assessment are becoming aligned. This is good practice. HKU must also ensure that the curriculum development and related processes become aligned with the stated educational objectives of postgraduate students (paragraph 2.6 also refers). The Panel was informed that the application of the six educational aims

(see paragraph 3.1) to TPg programmes is very much on HKU's agenda (paragraphs 2.6 and 7.8 also refer); and that the outcomes-based approach is being applied to TPg course outlines, and to programmes offered by HKU SPACE<sup>4</sup>, including those that come under the ambit of QAC quality audits.

### **Affirmation 3**

**The QAC affirms HKU's strategy for engaging and encouraging staff to develop and take forward new initiatives in teaching and learning, such as the outcomes-based approach to student learning that is an integral part of the new undergraduate curriculum reform.**

## **4. MANAGEMENT, PLANNING AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

- 4.1 Senate has oversight of a number of University-level committees, as indicated in paragraph 2.4. Teaching and learning policies are developed by these central committees, which oversee their implementation on behalf of the Senate.
- 4.2 At the Faculty level, the Faculty Boards have ultimate responsibility for ensuring that Departments assure and enhance the teaching and learning quality of programmes, and implement University policies. This approach also allows flexibility in the delivery of University policies to meet the different needs of disciplines and their organisational structures.
- 4.3 The Panel concurs with HKU's approach and with its recognition, in the Institutional Submission, of the need to maintain a balance between devolution and centralisation. The executive-led management structure (paragraph 2.1) and the continual engagement with staff and students are key factors in strengthening centralisation and ensuring that University policies are implemented by Faculties and Departments, to ensure that the quality of student learning is consistent across the institution. Affirmation 1 and paragraph 2.7 also refer. Regular engagement with staff should ensure that alignment with central policies is not achieved at the expense of staff ownership and autonomy. Care should be taken, however, to ensure that Faculty and Departmental committees have clear and distinct remits, and that the devolved structures are not unwieldy and bureaucratic.
- 4.4 The new four-year curriculum, understandably, is a major focus in terms of planning; and its management and implementation are being driven and overseen centrally. However, it is important not to overlook the needs of current students, and those who will embark on the three-year curriculum in the next few years. HKU has recognised and is responding to this potential concern (paragraph 3.3 and Section 7 refer).
- 4.5 Several policies and practices that are being developed and implemented for the new four-year curriculum (*e.g.* in regard to OBASL, programme approval and assessment) will apply equally to taught postgraduate (TPg) provision. Implementation of the initiative mentioned in Affirmation 2 should ensure that the benefits of initiatives arising from the development of the new undergraduate curriculum, and good practices in general, can be translated to current and future taught postgraduate students and their programmes. Paragraphs 2.6, 6.12 and 7.8 also refer.

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<sup>4</sup> School of Professional and Continuing Education



## **Strategic Development and Planning**

- 4.6 The Council has played a lead role in developing HKU's teaching and learning vision and implementation strategy, for example through the recent changes in management structure and approach outlined in paragraphs 2.1 and 2.2. It has also identified four strategic areas as a priority in its 5-year Strategic Development Plan. These areas form a framework for annual Faculty Development Plans (FDPs) which drive resource allocation and inform the University's (triennial) Academic Development Proposal. The annual FDPs play a significant role in strategic planning and reviewing Faculty progress. Paragraphs 4.9 and 4.10 also refer.
- 4.7 The Panel scrutinised several Faculty Development Plans. While varying in approach, the FDPs provide evidence of the planning process reflecting a top-down overview that steers and guides institutional development with a bottom-up approach of Faculty priorities and initiatives. FDPs also include an update on the previous year's deliverables, which allow central monitoring of implementation.

## **Management Information**

- 4.8 The Panel was provided with several examples of management information which is available via a web-based executive information system. The University also has a comprehensive set of Profile Indicators – paragraph 4.10 refers. However, the regular and systematic use of management information, by senior management, Deans, Heads of Department and relevant committees (except the Budget and Resources Committee – see paragraph 4.10) is not apparent. The Panel noted that HKU is purchasing new IT systems in view of 3+3+4, which should improve the type and availability of management information. The Panel urges HKU to take this opportunity to identify key data that should be used regularly at various levels within the University, to allow appropriate monitoring of teaching and learning quality, and to inform change. Recommendation 1 refers.

## **Resource Allocation**

- 4.9 Resources are allocated to Faculties on the basis of Faculty Development Plans rather than on an individual programme basis *per se*. This flexible model allows movement of resources within the overall Faculty budget to meet variations in student demand for courses, for example in the broad BA and BSc programmes which offer greater student choice. The annual FDP exercise also provides a means of monitoring the resourcing of new TPg programmes that are introduced during a tri-ennium.
- 4.10 The current funding model allows about 5% of the budget to be shifted for new strategic developments. Resource allocation, by Faculty bidding, is informed by a range of Profile Indicators. The Budget and Resources Committee has developed 122 such Profile Indicators (PIs) to support its holistic assessment of Faculties. The PIs relate to teaching, research, and community and professional interaction and impact; 55 are quantifiable.

## **New Developments**

- 4.11 The University has committed significant resource to the new curriculum. A major new campus, the Centennial Campus, will include Learning Commons (see also Section 8)

and other facilities geared towards changes in pedagogy and new approaches to teaching and learning in the four-year curriculum. The University has also channelled a substantial proportion of the University Development Fund, incorporating University funding which exceeds the UGC's Teaching Development Grant, to support innovative initiatives in curriculum reform and developments in teaching and learning, and a student-centred learning environment. See also paragraph 11.12.

## **5. PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT AND APPROVAL PROCESSES**

- 5.1 Teaching Departments and Faculties drive academic development. External academic comment on new programme proposals and their benchmarking against similar programmes offered by internationally comparable universities are mandatory. All concerns raised by external advisers must be addressed, and the Panel saw several examples from across the University of this policy in practice. Commendation 2 refers.
- 5.2 The Academic Development Committee (ADC) provides Faculties with broad guidelines on the preparation of academic proposals, which include the requirement to submit a financial plan for self-funded programmes. Proposals must be endorsed by the relevant Faculty Board before submission to the ADC for review prior to consideration and approval by the Senate. New UGC-funded programmes must first receive the UGC's endorsement. The Panel saw clear evidence that the approval process was iterative, with the ADC having to be satisfied that Faculties and Departments had addressed any concerns raised either by external advisers and/or by the ADC before referral to the Senate.
- 5.3 The Panel noted several examples of how HKU's educational aims are being mapped onto programme and course learning outcomes. A template for mapping course teaching and learning methods and assessment to educational aims, programme learning outcomes and course learning outcomes has been designed in one Faculty, and is good practice.
- 5.4 HKU has recognised that some standardisation of curriculum structure (and grading) needs to be introduced for TPg programmes: the template approach to mapping outcomes with delivery and assessment could help in this regard (paragraph 5.3 above refers). In general, the programme development and approval processes reflect good practice.

### **Recommendation 3**

**The QAC recommends that HKU consider introducing templates for course and programme design and approval across the University, as a means of ensuring that new provision is geared to delivery of the University's over-arching educational aims.**

- 5.5 All resource implications are considered by the Academic Development Committee as part of the programme approval process, which is good practice. There is comprehensive input from the Library which is evident in the well-resourced library support for student learning. The Panel believes a comparable process for the systematic consideration of IT requirements for new programmes and courses should be developed. Paragraphs 8.4 and 8.5 also refer.

## **6. PROGRAMME REVIEW AND MONITORING**

### **Student Evaluation of Teaching**

- 6.1 Students' perceptions of the quality of courses and teaching are monitored through the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET), a standard questionnaire administered by Departments and processed centrally. Heads of Department/Deans receive reports on all teachers and courses under their jurisdiction, while individual teachers receive a report for each course they teach. The latter informs the annual Performance and Development Review (Section 11 refers).
- 6.2 SET scores on general course items are reviewed by Faculty Teaching and Learning Quality Committees, which submit an annual report to the (Senate) TLQC on programme scores and associated items, including actions taken to address any problems identified, difficulties encountered, and good practices. The latter could be used as part of an institutional quality enhancement strategy – paragraph 11.13 and Recommendation 8 refer.
- 6.3 The TLQC has recently initiated a major review of the SET. The form has been redesigned to place emphasis on student learning, and a new Student Evaluation of Teaching and Learning (SETL) form was being piloted at the time of the audit visit. The Panel concurs with this change of focus; and with the use of the form to monitor the impact of the adoption of OBASL on students' learning experiences in the formal curriculum, as evidence of achieving the University's educational aims. Affirmation 4 below refers.

### **Staff-Student Consultative Committees**

- 6.4 The establishment of a Staff-Student Consultative Committee (SSCC) in each department is mandatory and their role to discuss academic matters, including SET scores, is appropriate. Many positive comments were received on the role of the SSCCs and Departmental/Faculty mechanisms. There is clear evidence that this structure addresses students' concerns and provides an important arena for considering student responses. The Panel endorses HKU's intention to use SSCCs to provide more feedback to students on the changes that have taken place as a result of their comments.

### **Commendation 3**

**The QAC commends HKU for its serious consideration of student feedback through the Staff-Student Consultative Committees and Departmental/Faculty mechanisms.**

- 6.5 Departments and Faculties operate varying mechanisms for relaying SSCC decisions to students. Some place SSCC minutes on Departmental Noticeboards; others place the responsibility on the student representatives to inform their peers (*e.g.* by email); others use the web. One Faculty communicates with students via an Interactive Learning Network (ILN), which is also used for online interactive teaching, learning, discussion and collaboration work. The ILN is appreciated by students and is a good means of providing feedback to students on the SET and SSCC outcomes. It also provides a forum for debate between students, and between students and staff.

- 6.6 Notwithstanding the above good practices, at present there is no central pathway to identify and disseminate these practices and to ensure consistency across the University. Some concern was expressed in regard to the lack of feedback to students. The Panel believes that students should be informed systematically of changes to courses (and programmes) that are made as a direct consequence of their feedback. The Panel noted that the Senate had recently endorsed a list of recommendations on the use and administration of the SETL form (paragraph 6.3 above refers). These included mechanisms for student feedback and the use of the SETL to improve teaching and learning.

#### **Affirmation 4**

**The QAC affirms HKU's revision of the Student Evaluation of Teaching form and process, and the planned use for teaching and learning enhancements; and reinforces the need to monitor the effectiveness of revisions for teaching and learning outcomes.**

#### **Academic Faculty Review**

- 6.7 The holistic and regular review of Departments was extended to comprehensive academic reviews of Faculties in 1999. The Committee on Academic Reviews appoints Panels to undertake the reviews on its behalf. Academic reviews have also covered research centres and other independent units since 2006.
- 6.8 All Faculties were reviewed between 1999 and 2003, with the intention that further reviews would be conducted on a five-yearly cycle. However, no Faculty reviews were conducted between 2003 and 2008, although reviews of other sub-divisions of studies and learning were conducted between 2002 and 2007. The second round of Faculty reviews commenced in 2009.
- 6.9 The reviews evaluate the Faculties'/units' mission and goals in regard to HKU's Vision and Mission, their fitness for purpose, and their success in accomplishing their stated mission and goals. A self-evaluation document is submitted with reference to a range of Profile Indicators, including those relating to the delivery and quality assurance of teaching and learning (paragraph 4.10 refers).
- 6.10 The Audit Panel considers the academic review process to be robust. Panels, which include external expertise, visit the Faculty/unit under review for up to three days. They meet a wide range of staff, and undergraduate and postgraduate (taught and research) students. The Faculty/unit responds to the Panel's Report, and there follows an iteration between the Committee on Academic Reviews and the Faculty/unit under review in regard to the Panel's recommendations and how these will be taken forward. The review recommendations, with commentary from the Committee on Academic Reviews and the Faculty's/unit's response, are submitted to the Senate and the Council. The process requires Faculties/units to submit a development plan for implementation and monitoring; and provides for regular progress reports to be considered by the Committee on Academic Reviews and the Senate. Academic Reviews have resulted in major structural changes, motivated by enhancement of curricular coherence and integration, and interdisciplinary collaboration in teaching and research.

#### **Commendation 4**

**The QAC commends HKU for a robust process of academic reviews to evaluate a Faculty's or unit's fitness for purpose, which includes teaching and learning.**

#### **Programme Reviews**

- 6.11 Elements of programme review take place each year as Faculties prepare their Faculty Development Plans. Faculties also undertake reviews for purposes of curriculum development, teaching and learning enhancement and budget allocation. The regular accreditation of undergraduate and taught postgraduate professional programmes ensures that these programmes are continually updated to satisfy professional subject requirements.
- 6.12 As acknowledged by HKU in its Institutional Submission, review processes specifically focused on programmes are not systematic and explicit. The Teaching and Learning Quality Committee is therefore formulating policies and guidelines on programme reviews that will standardise the monitoring and review of programmes across the University. These policies are likely to ensure that taught programmes are reviewed normally at least once every six years. This should include undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes, those offered by HKU SPACE, and programmes offered non-locally that lead to a HKU award: paragraphs 6.15 and 6.16 refer.

#### **Affirmation 5**

**The QAC affirms HKU's plans to develop University policies and guidelines on programme review and to introduce the systematic review of all taught programmes in 2009-10.**

- 6.13 In developing its programme review procedures, HKU is invited to consider the merits of aligning these reviews with the academic Faculty/unit reviews. For example, appropriate scheduling could allow the outcome of programme reviews to be incorporated into a Faculty's self-evaluation for its academic review, as one component of the review of Faculties. This would allow the academic review Panel to comment on programme review outcomes in the context of the more holistic review of a Faculty.

#### **Institutional Surveys, External Indicators and External Input**

- 6.14 The University undertakes a number of internal surveys of the student experience, and there is some use of externally-benchmarked data to monitor performance: the latter include IELTS<sup>5</sup> results and the Government's Employers Surveys. The surveys are being aligned to allow the monitoring of student attainment of the University's educational aims. Employers, alumni and other external stakeholders are also used, in addition to External Examiners (Section 10 refers), to inform curriculum development and review, and to elicit feedback on HKU's programmes and graduates. External stakeholders often serve on Departmental Advisory Boards, although these do not operate in all Departments. While those seen by the Panel were generally satisfied with the quality of HKU graduates, the University may wish to consider how it can demonstrate the added-value of a HKU education, given the quality of the student intake. Graduate

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<sup>5</sup> International English Language Testing System.

surveys are also an important performance indicator for OBASL, and the Panel encourages their systematic use throughout HKU.

### **Non-local Programmes**

- 6.15 The University has formal agreements with partner institutions to offer six programmes (including one to be offered in 2009) outside Hong Kong that lead to a HKU taught postgraduate degree – paragraph 1.3 also refers. The development and approval process is the same for these programmes as for those delivered in Hong Kong. The appointment of External Examiners (by HKU), the use of the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) questionnaire, and the establishment of a Board of Examiners are mandatory for non-local programmes. The Panel reviewed the formal agreements; and considered SET scores and extracts of External Examiners' comments for several of these programmes. It also met staff who teach on one of the non-local programmes; and considered student feedback.
- 6.16 Although some variation in HKU's normal English language requirements is permitted in some off-campus programmes, overall the Panel considers that HKU's processes to assure the quality of student learning and the standards of the awards for non-local programmes are sufficient, and are comparable with those for programmes delivered in Hong Kong. The Panel believes, however, that the quality and standards of the non-local programmes could be enhanced by HKU clearly documenting the respective roles and responsibilities of the partners in regard to the on-going monitoring and review of these programmes, to complement the existing formal agreements. The documentation recently developed for a non-local programme to be offered in 2009 could be used as a model for codifying the on-going quality assurance arrangements for existing non-local programmes. In addition, the Panel invites HKU to consider appointing the same External Examiner(s) where it offers programmes of a similar nature and title both locally and non-locally: this would be good practice in assuring the equivalence of standards of these programmes and awards.

### **Recommendation 4**

**The QAC recommends that, in regard to the on-going quality assurance of programmes delivered at partner institutions which lead to HKU awards, the University (a) clearly document the roles and responsibilities of HKU and each partner, and (b) consider appointing the same External Examiner(s) where programmes of the same or similar title and/or nature are offered by HKU and at a partner institution.**

## **7. CURRICULUM DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT**

### **Curriculum Reform**

- 7.1 Curriculum reform has led to significant developments at HKU during the past decade. A credit-based and semesterised curriculum framework mandating a common broadening, IT and language enhancement component of about 10% was introduced following a reform of the undergraduate curriculum in 1998/99. Up to 90% of the three-year curriculum comprises courses in a student's chosen discipline(s).

- 7.2 The development of curricula is informed by internal and external factors. The former include the academic staff, the outcomes of internal reviews, and feedback from students via the Student Evaluation of Teaching and from Staff Student Consultative Committees. The latter include feedback from External Examiners, professional bodies, and aspects of international best practice. Commendation 2 refers.
- 7.3 Two major developments of the BA and BSc curricula have produced more integrated, yet flexible, curricula that allow students to declare a second major or minor(s) in other Faculties. These changes have resulted in good practices in academic advising, which could lead to institutional enhancement in this area. Paragraph 8.8 and Affirmation 8 refer.

### **Enabling Curriculum Structure**

- 7.4 Preparation for the four-year curriculum has been on-going since 2005. HKU defines the curriculum as the totality of experiences that are afforded to students to achieve the six educational aims of undergraduate education (paragraph 3.1 refers).
- 7.5 An “enabling” curriculum framework provides flexibility for students to design their own combination of disciplinary majors, minors and electives outside the Common Core Curriculum of compulsory University courses. A credit unit policy is being developed to standardise the annual study load of major and minor disciplinary programmes as well as a single course. This will provide the framework to create time for students to participate in non-credit-bearing co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. As many of these non-credit-bearing opportunities are optional, it is essential that the University ensure that its six broad educational aims can be achieved through credit-bearing provision – the mapping of course and programme learning outcomes to the University’s educational aims should assist in this regard. Paragraph 5.3 and Recommendation 3 refer.
- 7.6 A credit-unit system and curriculum structure will be implemented for the three-year curriculum during the 2010 to 2012 transitional period. This is a sound approach to curriculum development: it will allow students entering three-year programmes up to 2012 to benefit from the changes in pedagogical approach and flexible structures that will apply to the four-year programmes from 2012; and it will provide the opportunity for HKU to review and fine-tune its processes and curriculum structures before the first cohort embark on the new four-year curriculum.
- 7.7 HKU has recognised that the existing undergraduate curriculum structures differ considerably as a consequence of a variety of Faculty and Departmental initiatives. This has made it difficult for students to move beyond the relatively narrow focus of their chosen disciplines. The enabling structures for the new curriculum from 2012, and for the transitional period between 2010-2012, will address these problems. The Panel considers this to be a positive and pro-active approach to curriculum design and development.
- 7.8 HKU has also recognised the benefits of establishing some uniformity in curriculum structure for TPg programmes, to provide parity among TPg provision across the University. The Senate TLQC will therefore consider adopting credit unit policies and those policies which relate to an outcomes based approach to undergraduate student learning as the basis for introducing similar policies for TPg programmes. The Panel concurs with this approach, and considers that it should extend to all aspects of quality assurance, including assessment (Section 10 refers).

### **Affirmation 6**

**The QAC affirms HKU's approach to curriculum design and development; its enabling curriculum structure for all undergraduate curricula in 2012 and for the transitional period between 2010-2012; and its plans to adopt common curriculum structures and credit unit systems for undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes.**

### **Teaching-Research Nexus**

- 7.9 The Institutional Submission acknowledges the tension between research and teaching in terms of staff time and indicates that HKU considers there to be evidence of a teaching-research nexus in some Faculties. Although the Panel noted examples of how HKU believes research impacts on teaching, including the integration of research projects in some undergraduate programmes, it formed the impression that this is not widespread. In addition, to the extent that it does exist, it appears to result more from the initiative of individual staff members than from central strategic direction. The Panel believe that HKU, as a research-intensive University, should have a clear position on the teaching-research nexus. In spite of the inevitable tensions between teaching and research, the new curriculum should afford greater opportunity for research to inform teaching in undergraduate programmes. Paragraphs 11.7 and 11.8 refer.

### **Recommendation 5**

**The QAC recommends that HKU consider how research can inform teaching in taught programmes as a means of establishing a clear teaching-research nexus.**

## **8. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

### **Learning Spaces and Learning Communities**

- 8.1 HKU conceptualises the curriculum as the total learning space afforded to students – see paragraph 7.4. Learning Commons are being planned for the new Centennial Campus (necessitated by the increase in student numbers from 2012) and will reflect innovative thinking in the design of space for teaching and the fostering of learning communities. The Learning Commons will provide a variety of formal and informal learning spaces, and will include IT and other support services.
- 8.2 Current students and programmes have benefited from an upgrading of centrally-managed classrooms in 2003. Future upgrading of existing facilities will reflect the current approach to the link between the curricula, physical resources, and teaching and learning resources.

### **Library Facilities**

- 8.3 The students seen by the Panel were generally positive about the library services. Students are asked to complete a biennial user satisfaction survey, the recent results of which reflect this positive attitude. Space, generally, is a constraining factor in Hong Kong and HKU: that for library provision is no exception. A major renovation of the



Library is planned. And current thinking is that the Learning Commons could help to reduce the stress on library facilities by providing more, and flexible, opportunities for student learning.

### **Information Technology and e-Learning**

- 8.4 Several of the students seen by the Panel had taken advantage of the Student Notebook PC Programme which was introduced in 1998/99 to promote the use of IT in learning. Since then, over 23,000 students have purchased notebook computers at discounted rates. A compulsory IT course, or a proficiency test in lieu, have been a graduation requirement since the 1998/99 curriculum reform. These are all good initiatives.
- 8.5 The use of IT to support teaching and learning, and course management, is evident across the University. WebCT is the most commonly used platform, with over 1400 WebCT courses having been mounted in recent years. Paragraph 11.12 also refers. However, a University-wide IT/e-Learning strategy to support teaching and learning is not in place and the students expressed some frustration with the present system. The Panel was informed that a strategy is being developed and that a paper was being prepared for senior management. The benefits of the Interactive Learning Network (paragraph 6.5) should be evaluated as part of any review of current platforms.

### **Affirmation 7**

**The QAC affirms HKU's recognition of the need to develop and implement an institutional e-Learning strategy as part of curriculum reform.**

### **Student Support**

- 8.6 There is a wide range of student support services, both academic and non-academic, as can be expected of an institution of the size of HKU. Generally students are very satisfied with the quality of their learning experience, which includes student support services, as evidenced by comments from students and by the results of various student learning experience and other student surveys. Positive comments were received on student induction; academic advising; the clarity and extent of course and programme information; the library; an international and friendly campus; and on overseas exchange experiences. Students' views are taken seriously (see Commendation 3). And Section 12 outlines the various opportunities for student participation.
- 8.7 CEDARS (Centre of Development and Resources for Students) was identified as being particularly supportive of students through the range of activities and services it provides. It was also clear to the Panel that the Faculty and Departmental Offices play a key role in supporting students (and staff), and often are the first port of call for enquiries.

### **Academic Advising**

- 8.8 Although there is no University-wide system of academic advising or personal tutoring, the Panel noted a range of mechanisms to provide academic support to students at the local level. The Arts and Science Faculties are piloting student academic advisory systems funded by Teaching Development Grants (see also paragraph 11.12), and some good practices are emerging. It is important that HKU builds on the outcomes of these projects, and identifies other good practices in academic advising. The University has

recognised that a comprehensive and coherent system of academic advising will be required, given the greater flexibility and student choice to be available within the new curriculum; and the development of academic advising systems is embedded within plans for the 4-year curriculum. The Panel believes that the training of staff in the advising role will be essential for the successful implementation of academic advising. Section 11 also refers.

### **Affirmation 8**

**The QAC affirms HKU's use of a wide range of academic and non-academic support services for students and the development of an academic advising system for the new 4-year curriculum, to support students in making more informed course selection.**

### **Induction**

- 8.9 Induction arrangements for new students are organised centrally (by CEDARS and the Registry) and by Faculties and Departments. Students consider these to be appropriate and beneficial. A number of measures are in place to assist non-local students in adapting to Hong Kong and the HKU learning environment, which are appreciated by the students concerned.

### **Language Support**

- 8.10 The University has recognised the need to provide support if students are to reap the full benefit from HKU's English-medium instruction. Undergraduates are required to take two 3-credit English enhancement courses, which will be doubled in the new four-year curriculum.
- 8.11 The University acknowledges that the Senate endorsement of English as the *lingua franca* on campus poses a considerable challenge, particularly as HKU aims to increase its proportion of international students. English is increasingly being used in student activities organised by CEDARS, student associations and halls of residence. HKU will also need to carefully assess the English Language ability of its teachers as it further internationalises its staff. This extends to research students and other staff who teach students, to ensure that undergraduates fully understand, and benefit from, the teaching they receive.
- 8.12 Compulsory 3-credit courses are offered by the School of Chinese to the majority of first year undergraduates; non-compulsory courses in Putonghua and Cantonese are also available. Chinese will be taken in the penultimate or final year of the new curriculum to prepare students for the workplace.

## **9. EXPERIENTIAL AND OTHER "OUT-OF-CLASSROOM" LEARNING**

- 9.1 HKU views experiential learning as central to the curriculum and is promoting it as a distinctive feature of the new four-year curriculum. It is also a key component of the current undergraduate curriculum. The main providers of co-curricular non-credit-bearing learning activities are CEDARS and the General Education Unit, which offer complementary activities.

- 9.2 HKU centrally organise a successful Worldwide Student Exchange Programme with over 180 partner institutions in 25 countries. Overseas exchanges and other international learning experiences are organised at Faculty level. Almost 3000 students have undertaken outgoing exchanges in the last four years. These experiences are welcomed by students and the University hopes to increase the number of such opportunities, subject to identifying resource.
- 9.3 Awarding credit for outgoing student exchanges towards HKU degrees is possible but is not guaranteed. Without credit transfer, students generally accept that they will have to extend the normal duration of their studies. This is an area that HKU may wish to review as it promotes the expansion of student exchange opportunities, but the Panel recognises the difficulties in awarding credit for off-campus study.
- 9.4 Incoming exchange students contribute to internationalising the campus, and the University is aware that language issues need to be addressed to ensure that international students gain the maximum benefit from their time at HKU. Paragraphs 8.10 – 8.12 refer. Each Hall assigns, on average, about 30% of its places to non-local students to facilitate cultural and intellectual exchange. Steps are being taken to improve the integration of non-local students in Halls, *e.g.* by extending induction activities. The Panel received positive comments from students, including international students, about their Hall's experience.

#### **Affirmation 9**

**The QAC affirms HKU's approach to improving the integration of non-local students as it further internationalises its campus.**

- 9.5 A successful University-wide mentorship scheme has been in place since 1998 whereby students are paired with a mentor (70% of whom are HKU alumni) to share experiences on a one-to-one basis.
- 9.6 While the University routinely seeks students' feedback on their co-and extra-curricular experiences, HKU has recognised the need for more systematic monitoring and evaluation. Hall education will also be monitored systematically. The University is also considering how student effort in non-credit-bearing courses can be recognised to reflect achievement of the core educational aims. These actions demonstrate HKU's commitment to experiential and other "out of classroom" learning, and are to be encouraged.

#### **Commendation 5**

**The QAC commends HKU's approach to providing a range of co-and extra-curricular learning activities which are welcomed by students, in particular the opportunities for overseas experience.**

## **10. ASSESSMENT**

### **External Examiners**

- 10.1 The University regulates a range of assessment practices: these include the appointment, role and duties of examiners; the conduct of examinations; and the terms of reference of Boards of Examiners. The adoption of an External Examiner system is a key feature

of HKU's strategy for assuring the academic standards of its awards and for seeking external input into curriculum design to assist benchmarking. This practice is exemplary. Commendation 2 refers.

- 10.2 The External Examiners' Reports seen by the Panel from a cross-section of programmes were extremely detailed. External Examiners clearly take their roles seriously, and provide helpful feedback to the University. There is a clear process for Departments to respond to External Examiners' comments, and the Panel saw evidence of this in practice.

### **Policies and Practices**

- 10.3 Faculties are required to produce detailed "examination procedures" for each programme offered. These incorporate, *inter alia*, the criteria governing grading, progression of studies and course failures; and the honours classification scheme. The documents seen by the Panel varied in the extent of the information provided, and highlighted some variation in practice between Faculties (*e.g.* in determining honours classification – paragraphs 10.5 and 10.7 below refer).
- 10.4 Syllabi and course outlines specify assessment modes and their ratio within the course grade. A University policy on these assessment components is not in place: thus, variation in practice occurs, *e.g.* in the maximum percentage that might be accorded to class participation or peer assessment. Although there are examples of good practices in some areas, assessment requirements are not always readily transparent: for example, a course outline indicating 100% continuous assessment does not indicate the nature and number of items of assessment. While students are normally informed of the latter at the first lecture of a course, this is generally too late to influence course selection by students.
- 10.5 Some Faculties provide programme and grade descriptors to students; and some, but not all, students are informed about assessment standards. The latter are benchmarked externally and internationally by External Examiners (see paragraph 10.1), who generally comment favourably on standards. Nevertheless, HKU acknowledges that disciplinary differences have resulted in some variation in assessment practices and considerable variation in assessment standards across the University.
- 10.6 Students expressed concern regarding the lack of transparency of assessment grading and criteria in some Faculties; the grading of students' work by tutors; and the variability of feedback on assessments (although the Panel did note some very good examples of the latter). There was also variable understanding of the appeals process. These matters are considered further below. Recommendations 6 and 7 also refer.

### **Norm- and Criterion-Referencing**

- 10.7 Several Faculties use norm-referenced assessment; others adopt partial or full standards (criterion)-referencing through the use of explicit grade descriptors. The present policy leads to different expectations of students and variability of academic standards. HKU's Institutional Submission acknowledges that the adoption of an outcomes-based approach to student learning, which entails standards-referenced assessment, will pose a challenge to standardisation, particularly in honours classification.

- 10.8 Although External Examiners provide a measure of assurance of standards in individual disciplines, Faculty variation in assessment practices are clearly a concern. These are exacerbated for students who take interdisciplinary degrees and double majors or double degrees that span more than one Faculty. The Panel considers it is essential that HKU address this issue before the new four-year curriculum is introduced, in which students will have greater choice and flexibility to take courses offered by different Faculties.

### **Feedback to Students**

- 10.9 Providing timely and useful feedback to students on summative assessments can serve a formative function in helping students learn and develop. While assessment *of* learning predominates at HKU, emerging good practices have been identified in some Faculties in assessment *for* learning. HKU recognises that these good practices need to be promulgated across the University: this will be taken forward by the Assessment Sub-Committee of the Steering Committee on the 4-Year Curriculum, as part of its review of assessment practices across the University. The intention is to propose guidelines for consistency and transparency in assessment practices across all programmes; and a task force will be formed to review assessment standards across the University. The Panel believes that a policy, rather than guidelines, is essential to address the variations in practice that currently exist.

### **Assessment Policy**

- 10.10 The Audit Panel concurs with HKU's plans for assessment and suggests that an assessment policy should cover a range of items. Examples of areas that might be covered by an assessment policy, which should be made known to staff and students, include the following: the various modes and weighting of course assessments; marking policies such as "blind" double-marking (where two examiners mark an assessment without knowing one-another's marks) and anonymous marking (where the examiners do not know the identity of candidates); moderation of marks by senior examiners and/or External Examiners (*e.g.* for those new to teaching or to the University); the timing of, and mechanisms for, the provision of feedback to students; the use of formative assessment; common grade descriptors (and any differences between levels (years) of study); how the marks for components of assessment are aggregated to determine overall course grades; the criteria for determining honours classification (in both single and double majors/degrees); and the information that should be provided routinely to students about their assessments. These items should also apply to taught postgraduate programmes and students. Some of the above practices are already operated by some Faculties – the Panel believes they should be evaluated by HKU and incorporated into an institution-wide assessment policy, where deemed appropriate.

### **Recommendation 6**

**The QAC recommends that HKU implement an assessment policy for all taught programmes as a matter of urgency, to be applied across all Faculties and Departments, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels; and that it is effectively communicated to staff and students.**

## **Academic Appeals and Grievances**

- 10.11 There are formal procedures for students to follow if they have a grievance. The formal position in regard to appeals against grades awarded is that appeals are not permitted and that Board of Examiners' decisions on examination results are final. Nevertheless, the Panel found clear evidence that this policy was not applied uniformly across the University. In probing this matter, the Panel understands that work can be re-marked and grades changed on account of possible miscalculation of marks or errors in procedure. But some students were apparently invited to seek a review of grades on occasions; others had their work re-marked. Course documentation reviewed by the Panel cites the procedures for students to appeal against assessment results. And the staff position on whether students can appeal was inconsistent.
- 10.12 The Panel accepts that some confusion may be apparent to students when they seek feedback on their assessments as a means of improving their future performance – this is a formative process and is not an appeal: marks are not changed. Yet the Panel was left with the firm view that variations in practice exist between Faculties and Departments, and the institutional policy does not appear to be applied rigidly.
- 10.13 The Panel believes that HKU has sufficiently robust procedures in place to clearly state that appeals against academic judgement will not be permitted. Such procedures include double-marking and/or moderation of marks, either internally or by an External Examiner. The Panel found several examples of both of these practices. The introduction of an unambiguous University assessment policy (Recommendation 6 refers) will further strengthen this position. Academic appeals should therefore be confined to grounds of procedural irregularity (*e.g.* in the miscalculation of marks) or bias. HKU's policy of students being identified in examinations by candidate number helps to militate against the latter as a potential ground of appeal.

### **Recommendation 7**

**The QAC recommends that HKU ensure that its policy on academic appeals is communicated to all staff and students and applied consistently across the University.**

## **Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty**

- 10.14 There are clear policies for dealing with allegations of plagiarism, and the penalties if found proven can be severe. An in-house booklet on how to avoid plagiarism is widely available: courses on this topic are also available. The undergraduate, taught postgraduate and research students seen by the Panel were aware of the booklet, the policy and the potential penalties.
- 10.15 Staff were also aware of the policy and booklet; and plagiarism detection software is used in many, but not all, areas of the University. The software is also applied to research student theses on a sample basis. The Panel endorses HKU's approach to dealing with plagiarism and suggests that the assessment policy in Recommendation 8 specify the requirements placed on Departments in the use of plagiarism detection software. There should also be a clear policy on whether students are required to submit electronic copies of assignments (to facilitate use of the detection software).

- 10.16 Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty, such as cheating in examinations, are academic offences and are governed by the University's Regulations Governing Conduct at Examinations. Suspected cases are referred to the Vice-Chancellor, who may decide to refer matters to the University's Disciplinary Committee. The regular monitoring of academic offences, and in particular plagiarism, should be undertaken as a means of safeguarding academic standards and identifying trends such as by discipline or cohort.

### **Assessment of Work by Non-Academic Staff and Research Students**

- 10.17 HKU engages several categories of Teaching Staff who are not at the level of Assistant Professor or above: these non-academic staff include Instructors, Tutors, Teaching Fellows and Demonstrators as well as a large number of Honorary staff. The majority of the latter are practitioners. Research students are also required to teach undergraduates - paragraph 11.14 refers. The Panel received conflicting views on whether these categories of Teaching Staff and Research Students assess undergraduate work. Where they are required to do so, HKU should ensure that appropriate training is provided and that assessment policies and practices are applied so that academic standards are maintained. Recommendation 9 also refers. The Panel was informed that some course co-ordinators provide detailed guidance notes, model answers or a marking pro-forma for those who mark. Double-marking or other forms of moderation by academic staff also occurs in some areas. These good practices are to be encouraged.

## **11. TEACHING QUALITY AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT**

### **Staff Educational Development and Support**

- 11.1 Staff educational development and support is provided by the Centre for the Advancement of University Teaching (CAUT). Development programmes are organised centrally for both professoriate and non-professoriate staff; and seminars are organised in conjunction with the Steering Committee on 4-Year Undergraduate Curriculum.
- 11.2 Induction programmes for new staff are offered by CAUT and complement Faculty induction and mentoring arrangements. The Panel noted several good practices such as junior staff being assigned mentors; peer observation of teaching; and the recording of lectures with peer feedback. From 1 July 2009, all newly appointed teachers are required to attend a one-day induction programme offering knowledge and strategies on teaching at HKU; and a three day teaching and learning course is compulsory for newly appointed Assistant Professors with less than two years teaching experience. The latter focuses on OBASL and is also open to more experienced teachers interested in curriculum renewal. Very positive evaluations have been received for CAUT programmes.
- 11.3 The professional development of teachers supported by CAUT is increasingly Faculty-based. This will allow CAUT to tailor its provision to meet disciplinary needs while maintaining central co-ordination and delivery of more general development opportunities, particularly those relating to the new curriculum. Staff seen by the Panel were highly complimentary of CAUT. Being rooted within Faculties will help to raise the profile of what the Panel believes to be a key, and very effective, resource.

## **Commendation 6**

**The QAC commends the Centre for the Advancement of University Teaching (CAUT) for offering successful staff educational development programmes and for its work with Faculties in promoting high quality teaching and learning, and innovations in pedagogy.**

### **Performance Review and Development Scheme**

- 11.4 The annual Performance Review and Development (PRD) Scheme informs personnel decisions, *e.g.* in regard to promotion, contract renewal and substantiation. Teaching, research and service are the three aspects assessed, and there are clear guidelines for staff in regard to the relative weightings to be applied.
- 11.5 A key feature of the PRD is the submission of a web-based Academic Portfolio of Achievement (APA): in essence a comprehensive record of an individual's major scholarly activities, achievements and service. The APA is linked to the system for recording SET scores (paragraph 6.1 refers) so that these, and student comments, are automatically recorded on the APA. A key outcome of the PRD is an individual Development Plan.
- 11.6 Staff seen by the Panel were supportive of the PRD; and the Panel found evidence of how its outcomes had been used positively to enhance teaching performance. Staff were also aware of the criteria for promotion.

### **Recognition of Good Teaching**

- 11.7 While teaching can be accorded the same relative weighting as research and scholarly activity, HKU acknowledges that on-going attention is required to personnel decisions and to staff perceptions of their outcomes, to ensure that teaching achievements are accorded due importance in relation to research. This relates to the tension between research and teaching in terms of staff time that is almost inevitable in research-intensive universities. The Panel believes that the University has yet to achieve a balance between teaching and research in terms of staff development and recognition, and how excellent teachers can have a progressive career structure.
- 11.8 While it could be expected that research should inform teaching in a majority of programmes in research-intensive institutions, HKU has only found evidence of what it perceives as a teaching-research nexus in some Faculties (paragraph 7.9 refers). Encouraging this nexus, with appropriate recognition, would be one way of promoting and rewarding good teaching while reducing this tension.

### **Teaching Awards**

- 11.9 The University Teaching Fellowship scheme was introduced in 1996 to recognise good teaching. This has recently been replaced by Teaching Excellence Awards, of which there are two categories: Outstanding Teacher Awards and University Distinguished Teaching Awards, each with clearly defined criteria. The distinction between the two awards is to encourage participation by professoriate and non-professoriate staff. The award amounts are now closer to the Outstanding Researcher Awards, and are not insubstantial. There is also a Best Supervisor (of research students) Award.



- 11.10 The Panel found the selection process for these Awards to be rigorous, with external assessors included on the Panel. Awardees are expected to contribute to HKU's teaching and learning initiatives, including sharing their work and participating in the work of the four-year curriculum reform. Some award winners work with CAUT in delivering Workshops.
- 11.11 Eight Faculties administer their own teaching award schemes, and those not currently participating will be encouraged to do so. Better articulation between teaching awards at University and Faculty-levels, and the adoption of a common framework for awards, will be explored. The Panel encourages the University to give priority to this exploration. In particular, it suggests that HKU consider how good practices in teaching and learning arising from the scheme, and from Teaching Development Grant projects (see paragraph 11.12 below) can be evaluated for possible cross-Faculty dissemination. The Panel encourages HKU to consider whether those who are identified as excellent teachers or Supervisors through the various University and Faculty schemes can be used as a more regular resource, *e.g.* by working with CAUT as champions of good teaching and learning practice within Departments and Faculties.

### **Teaching Development Grants**

- 11.12 Teaching Development Grants are a major contributor to quality enhancement in teaching and learning at HKU. The University invests significant sums in addition to those received from the UGC – this clearly signals HKU's commitment and encouragement to support improvements to curricula and teaching. Paragraph 8.5 refers. Resource has, understandably, shifted focus recently to take forward curriculum reform initiatives, including the outcomes-based approach to student learning. Reporting requirements for TDG projects require that good practice arising from the outcomes is disseminated. CAUT reviews TDG outcomes to identify good practices.

### **Commendation 7**

**The QAC commends HKU for its system of Teaching and Supervisor Awards.**

### **Quality Enhancement**

- 11.13 The Panel believes that developing a strategy to systematically identify and evaluate the many examples of good practices in teaching and learning, whether they arise from TDG projects, Teaching or Supervisor Award winners, Faculties or individuals, could ensure that quality enhancement is optimised: and invites HKU to develop such a strategy.

### **Recommendation 8**

**The QAC recommends that HKU develop a strategy to identify, evaluate, disseminate and monitor good practices in teaching and learning across the University, to continually enhance the quality of student learning.**

## **Teaching by Research Students and Tutors *et al***

- 11.14 Paragraph 10.17 refers to the range of Teaching Staff employed by HKU who teach students, in addition to academic staff. Faculties are responsible for ensuring that these staff are inducted in relevant teaching and learning, including assessment, policies. Research students are also expected to undertake undergraduate teaching duties, *e.g.* as laboratory demonstrators or tutors for tutorials, as a condition of their Research Studentships, up to a specified maximum number of hours per week. Those seen by the Panel did not teach for the maximum hours, which they did not consider excessive. Two certificate courses on planning classes and interactive teaching are offered to prepare postgraduate research students for undergraduate teaching duties at HKU and for future teaching careers in higher education (Section 13 also refers).
- 11.15 The Panel learned of one instance whereby a tutor, whom students believed was not a member of the academic staff, appeared to be fully responsible for a course, even though the tutor was not the designated Course Co-ordinator. Research students could also be asked to tutor at honours level (*i.e.* to second and final year students). These observations pose the question as to how HKU ensures that those whom it engages to teach undergraduates and who are not members of the academic staff are qualified to teach a course/subject at a particular level.

### **Recommendation 9**

**The QAC recommends that HKU develop a policy on the allocation of teaching and assessment responsibilities to, and the training requirements of, those who are not members of the academic staff, including research students, to ensure that all those who teach and assess students are qualified to do so, and that academic standards are maintained.**

## **12. STUDENT PARTICIPATION**

- 12.1 Student representation is widespread, with over 100 students serving on 37 HKU committees. Although students sit on the Senate (and Council), there is no representation on either the Senate Teaching and Learning Quality Committee (TLQC) or the Policy Board of Postgraduate Education. The Panel found this surprising, but there did not appear to be any groundswell of pressure from students to be members of these two, key, committees. This may be explained by student participation in decision-making and consultation on the curriculum and teaching and learning matters through their membership of, *inter alia*, the Senate, Faculty Boards, Faculty TLQCs, Boards of Studies, the Board of Graduate Studies and Staff Student Consultative Committees.
- 12.2 Student input into the development of co-curricular and student support activities is secured through undergraduate and postgraduate students serving on all of the committees related to the work of the General Education Unit and the Centre of Development and Resources for Students (CEDARS), and on the library and computer committees. There is also active student representation on Halls' Executive Committees.

- 12.3 The students seen by the Panel were very positive about their role on University and Faculty committees. They informed the Panel that there are many opportunities for students to communicate with the University and they believe that students' views are taken seriously by HKU. Paragraph 6.4 and Commendation 3 refer.
- 12.4 The Institutional Submission acknowledges that induction programmes should be organised for new student representatives, so that both the student body and the University can take full advantage of effective student input into the work of the committees on which students serve. The University may also wish to consider how committee business can be structured to encourage active student input and participation.

### **13. ACTIVITIES SPECIFIC TO RESEARCH DEGREES**

#### **Committees and Management Structure**

- 13.1 The Policy Board of Postgraduate Education (PBPE) determines the policies and guidelines for research postgraduate (RPg) education. It is supported by the Board of Graduate Studies and the Board of Examination for Graduate Studies in administrative and examination matters, respectively.
- 13.2 The Graduate School oversees the day-to-day implementation of RPg policies and regulations. It works closely with Faculty Higher Degrees Committees and Departmental Research Postgraduate Committees to administer the studies of RPg students.
- 13.3 The communication paths between the Graduate School, Faculties, Departments and Supervisors appear complex. The Panel gained the impression of an overly bureaucratic and unwieldy committee structure and invites HKU to consider reviewing the roles of the various bodies concerned, with a view to streamlining the management of RPg students' studies and their programmes. The Panel learned that the merger of the two sub-committees of the PBPE was being considered in view of the effectiveness of their operations, and endorses this proposal.

#### **Policies and Procedures**

- 13.4 Notwithstanding the above comments, the Panel was impressed with the codification of policies and practices that underpin RPg training and education. The Graduate School web-site contains much useful information and includes, *inter alia*, Good Practices for Research Postgraduate Students and for Supervisors. These set out the various roles and responsibilities, and expectations, of students and (Principal- and Co-) Supervisors; and outline the supervisory relationship (including the frequency of meetings), and the progress and monitoring requirements and procedures.
- 13.5 All research students are distributed the *Graduate School Handbook* on registration. It is a comprehensive guide, which includes the regulations for MPhil and PhD degree programmes. It provides a mine of information, including the above Good Practice documents; information on the RPg student induction and orientation programme; details of the range of academic and financial support available to research students; and information on plagiarism. Research students also receive a copy of the Graduate School's publication *Plagiarism and How to Avoid It – A guide for MPhil and PhD students*.

- 13.6 There are clear rules concerning eligibility to be sole (Principal) Supervisor of a research student; and a system of Co-supervisors either to jointly supervise a student where the differing expertise of two supervisors would assist a student, or to guide a “new” supervisor in undertaking supervisory responsibilities. Students are also made aware of how to seek a change of supervisor, if deemed necessary.
- 13.7 The Panel read Minutes relating to a discussion of, and ultimate decision not to have, a University policy on the maximum number of research students per supervisor, which is left to individual Faculties to determine. The Panel understands the rationale for this decision, although HKU may wish to reconsider the position if there is a significant expansion in RPg student numbers.
- 13.8 The research students and supervisors seen by the Panel were clear about their respective roles, and held regular supervisory meetings. Research students had good access to their supervisors; and were aware of the support available from their supervisors and CEDARS (paragraph 8.7 refers). They were also clear about the requirements for confirmation of their candidacy.

### **Training and Support**

- 13.9 Those new to supervisory responsibilities attend relevant courses offered by CAUT (paragraph 11.1 refers). They also co-supervise students in the first instance and receive monitoring from an experienced supervisor (paragraph 13.6 above refers).
- 13.10 A number of courses for Research students are jointly offered by CAUT and the Graduate School, for which formal student feedback is very positive. A Graduate School course in Ethics and Research will be compulsory in 2009/10; and General University English courses will be offered, to enhance the English Language skills of RPg students. The Panel invites HKU to consider the relative merits of including these courses in a structured, and compulsory, generic skills training programme for research students. Such a programme could be supplemented by Faculty/disciplinary courses, as appropriate.
- 13.11 Research students are required to attend CAUT courses prior to undertaking teaching duties – paragraph 11.14 refers. Further training and support are provided through a policy of sponsoring research students to attend up to two overseas conferences during their studies.

### **Monitoring of Progress and Courses**

- 13.12 Biannual progress reports indicating a student’s self evaluation of his/her progress, with supervisor feedback, are considered by Departmental and Faculty committees before a summary report is considered by the Board of Graduate Studies. The research students and supervisors seen by the Panel consider this process to be rigorous, although the Panel wonders if it could be streamlined – paragraph 13.3 refers.
- 13.13 Students’ feedback on RPg coursework is obtained via an evaluation questionnaire. The data and students’ comments are considered by the Board of Graduate Studies. RPg students also complete an exit questionnaire giving feedback on supervision, coursework, programme structure, facilities and other aspects of their studies: the outcomes are taken forward by the Board of Graduate Studies.

## **Management Information**

- 13.14 In addition to the student feedback mentioned above, University and Faculty committees receive data on RPg student attrition and completion rates. The Panel suggests that this data could be used systematically to monitor the effectiveness of RPg education; and could become a Key Performance Indicator (Recommendation 1 and paragraph 4.8 refer).

## **RPg Enhancements**

- 13.15 The Institutional Submission identifies a number of aspects of RPg education that it plans to strengthen from 2009/10. These include basic knowledge in a student's research field(s) and raising students' awareness of and establishing mechanisms to stop infringement of plagiarism, in addition to those indicated in paragraph 13.10. The random checking of theses using plagiarism detection software was introduced in January 2009 (paragraph 10.15 refers).

## **Commendation 8**

**The QAC commends HKU for the comprehensive codification and application of its policies and procedures for research student training, supervision and management, and its support of research students.**

## **14. TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTION PLAN**

- 14.1 The Institutional Submission outlines an action plan for teaching and learning which includes existing plans and those that emerged from the audit self-review. Areas on which the Audit Panel has commented in Sections of this Audit Report, and on which the Panel concurs with HKU's position, include programme review (Section 6); the re-designed Student Evaluation of Teaching questionnaire (Section 6); TPg programme administration (Sections 6 and 7); the integration of local and non-local students (Section 8); assessment (Section 10); professional development for newly-appointed teachers (Section 11); and research student education (Section 13).
- 14.2 The Institutional Submission, and the University's full engagement with the audit panel and process, indicates that HKU is prepared to follow objectives with a proactive Action Plan (that was endorsed by the Senate in January 2009). The Action Plan provides HKU with a template to take forward the outcomes of the University's self-review, and to respond to the recommendations and suggestions in this audit report. As the Action Plan is developed, the Panel suggests that it is expanded to identify clear targets for completion with interim milestones, the timeframe for achieving those targets, and the individual(s) and/or committee(s) responsible for implementation and for monitoring progress.

## **Affirmation 10**

**The QAC affirms HKU's intent to implement an Action Plan to take forward the outcomes of its self-review; and suggests its expansion to (a) include the findings of the Audit Report and (b) identify targets, milestones, performance indicators and the individuals responsible for implementing the various actions, to facilitate institutional monitoring of the Plan.**

## **15. CONCLUSION**

- 15.1 In conclusion, the Panel found that the University of Hong Kong was responding positively to the educational challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including changes in the higher education landscape in Hong Kong. The Panel congratulates HKU on the way it has embraced the opportunity of the new curriculum, and the audit self-review, to review and enhance its strategy, educational aims, objectives and operations. HKU's commitment to the enhancement of teaching and learning quality, demonstrated from the Council through to the teaching and support staff at the coalface, carries with it the need to address some issues, as highlighted above. The Panel believes that HKU is well placed to manage the inevitable tensions that will arise as 2012 approaches; and hopes that the Panel's findings will assist the University in this regard.

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

### **[Extracted from the Institutional Submission]**

#### **History**

The University of Hong Kong was incorporated as a self-accrediting institution by the University Ordinance of 1911 which was repealed and replaced by the University of Hong Kong Ordinance in 1964. HKU has grown from three Faculties with only 23 graduates at its first Congregation to ten Faculties with an enrolment of 22,000 students.

#### **Vision, Mission, Strategy and Role**

The Vision, Mission and Role statements articulate HKU's position as an English-medium, research-led institution, providing a campus-based education at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in a comprehensive range of academic disciplines

##### *Vision*

The University of Hong Kong, as a pre-eminent international university in Asia, seeks to sustain and enhance its excellence as an institution of higher learning through outstanding teaching and world-class research so as to produce well-rounded graduates with lifelong abilities to provide leadership within the societies they serve.

##### *Mission*

The University of Hong Kong's Mission includes the endeavour to advance constantly the bounds of scholarship, building upon its proud traditions and strengths; to provide a comprehensive education, developing fully the intellectual and personal strengths of its students while developing and extending lifelong learning opportunities for the community; and to produce graduates of distinction committed to lifelong learning, integrity and professionalism, capable of being responsive leaders and communicators in their fields.

##### *Role Statement*

The University of Hong Kong:

- (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 and Economics;
- (b) incorporates professional schools such as Medicine, Dentistry, Architecture, Education, Engineering and Law;
- (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) as an English-medium University, supports a knowledge-based society and economy through its engagement in cutting-edge research, pedagogical developments, and lifelong learning; in particular, emphasizes whole person education and interdisciplinarity;
- (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.

### *Strategy*

HKU aims for its academic pursuits to be globally competitive and regionally engaged and has identified four priority strategic areas: (i) enhancing academic excellence; (ii) raising global presence and visibility; (iii) partnering with society and serving the community; and (iv) developing and supporting “the University family”.

### **Structure**

HKU's governance is effected through the Court, the Council, the Senate and Boards of Faculties. The implementation of the recommendations of the *Fit for Purpose* report of 2003 has resulted in an “executive-led” management system, appointed Faculty Executive Deans, smaller Council and Senate and a more streamlined committee structure.

There are ten Faculties (Architecture, Arts, Business and Economics, Dentistry, Education, Engineering, Law, Medicine, Science, Social Sciences), 46 Departments and 22 independent sub-divisions of studies and learning offering 54 undergraduate programmes, 97 taught postgraduate programmes (of which six are taught totally or partially outside HKU) and five research degrees.

### **Student and Staff Numbers**

22,090 students (headcount) were enrolled in 2007-08 (12,031 undergraduates; 7683 taught postgraduates; 2376 research postgraduates), of whom 13,558 were following UGC-funded programmes. There were 1,453 Full- and Part-time teaching staff and 1,738 Visiting and Honorary teaching staff, as at 31 December 2007.

### **Revenue and Estate**

HKU's annual revenue for 2007-08 was HK\$6,076 million of which 47.3% came from government subvention and 28.6% from tuition, programme and other fees.

The University's estate totals about 50 *ha*. The Main Campus is in Bonham Road/Pokfulam Road on Hong Kong Island.



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

The University of Hong Kong welcomes the Report from the QAC Audit Panel which acknowledges HKU's high quality student learning experience which is underpinned by good and effective support to students, both centrally and in Departments and Faculties, and our proactive approach in meeting the challenges of the impending changes in higher education in Hong Kong.

We are gratified by the very encouraging comments made about the University's overarching strategies and policies in teaching and learning quality assurance and enhancement. The main text of the report reflects a good understanding of our strengths and our strong commitment to teaching and learning, affirms the strategic direction that we have taken, and helps us to further identify and strengthen areas that we have critically examined and resolved to make more robust.

The Report reinforces the University's strategies for enhancement of teaching and learning through:

- strategically strengthening leadership in teaching and learning (Commendation 1);
- an optimum balance of "top-down" and "bottom-up" management processes which provide strategic central leadership while encouraging bottom-up initiatives and innovations at Faculty level (Affirmations 1 and 2);
- the centrality given to student learning experience through rigorous monitoring and serious consideration of student feedback (Commendation 3, Affirmation 4 and paragraph 12.3), and active involvement of students in teaching and learning matters (paragraphs 6.4 and 12.1);
- provision of extensive learning opportunities locally and overseas (Commendation 5), integration of local and international students (Affirmation 9), and ensuring that students are adequately supported in both academic and non-academic matters (Affirmation 8);
- extensive international benchmarking (Commendation 2) and solicitation of external input from professionals and employers;
- critical self-reflection and continuous improvement through regular academic reviews of Faculties (Commendation 4) and regular reviews of programmes (Affirmation 5);
- academic staff development policies and strategies and recognition of teaching excellence and innovation (Commendations 6 and 7); and
- strong institution-wide and significant resource commitment to enhancing all aspects of teaching and learning (paragraph 2 of Executive Summary, paragraphs 4.11, 11.12, and 15.1).

In the past few years, the University has been proactively responding to the impending 4-year undergraduate curriculum reform by widely engaging staff in the planning and design of the new curriculum, integrating outcome-based learning in the new curriculum as well as converting existing courses to this approach, and adapting these policies to fit a newly designed 3-year undergraduate curriculum to be launched in 2010 to benefit earlier cohorts. We are pleased that these efforts have been recognized by the Audit Panel (Affirmations 3 and 6, paragraph 7.7). These learning experiences will be further enhanced through the development of an e-learning strategy which is currently underway (Affirmation 7). As a research-intensive institution, we are particularly pleased that the Audit Panel has commended our research postgraduate education and the comprehensive support currently being given to students (Commendation 8).

What is perhaps most gratifying is that the Audit Panel, through its meetings with diverse groups of students of all levels and with external stakeholders, has reaffirmed a high level of student satisfaction with their learning experience and the academic support services and facilities provided at the University. This is consistent with the findings of our various student surveys, as well as our stakeholders' general satisfaction with the quality of our graduates.

In the spirit of quality enhancement, the University has, in its Institutional Submission and Action Plan, identified areas for further improvement and has in fact already set in train initiatives which will take our teaching and learning in undergraduate and postgraduate education to new heights. Therefore, the University is appreciative of the Audit Panel's suggestions for improvement which will help us to further focus our efforts.

In line with the "top-down" and "bottom-up" management model, the University has recently completed a review of central committee structures for teaching and learning and the structures have been streamlined. Further alignment between University central and Faculty and departmental levels will be carried out (Affirmation 1 and Recommendation 2).

To enhance informed academic decision-making at all levels, the University has included data on various surveys of student learning experiences as additional Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to monitor teaching and learning quality. We have been working closely with individual Faculties to facilitate more meaningful and useful interpretation of their respective student survey data for the purposes of Faculty planning and curriculum development. The University will ensure that these KPIs are publicized more widely at Faculty and departmental levels (Recommendation 1).

We are happy to see that the Audit Panel was appreciative of the strong evidence of our administrative rigor in scrutinizing and approving new academic programmes and ensuring high standards in teaching and learning quality (paragraphs 5.2 and 5.4). In line with our schedule for implementing outcomes-based education, we have developed templates for course and programme design to ensure alignment of the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment to achieve the University's overarching educational aims (Recommendation 3).

While each Faculty has an assessment policy derived from central procedures and regulations, the University recognizes the importance of an institutional assessment policy. A draft policy document was discussed by staff and students at our annual curriculum reform retreat in June 2009. Further discussion and consultation will take place in the coming academic year, as outlined in our Action Plan. The document covers, amongst other aspects, assessment principles, policies, grading and appeals mechanisms and procedures, and external examining. Measures will be taken to ensure consistent application across the board and wide dissemination across the university (Recommendations 4, 6 and 7).

As a research-intensive university, the teaching-research nexus is very much our concern. We believe all teaching should be informed by research and we also encourage staff to conduct research on their teaching. Indeed scholarship of teaching is one of the requirements for all TDG applications. The meaning of scholarship of teaching is still being debated internationally and we will continue to explore how this should be realized (Recommendation 5).

The quality of teaching staff is critical to students' learning experience. To enhance teacher quality, dissemination of good practices is strategically embedded in ongoing teaching and learning activities through promoting and funding interdisciplinary and cross-Faculty project collaboration in teaching development. In addition to seminars and workshops, teaching and learning conferences will be organized (Recommendation 8). Our Centre for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (CETL) currently offers training courses for postgraduate teaching assistants and other non-professoriate instructors. While these courses have been highly evaluated and well-subscribed, CETL will be working with Faculties to agree minimum requirements to be reached before research students can be assigned teaching duties (Recommendation 9).

Having leveraged on the QAC Audit to consolidate established good practices and to critically examine other existing practices which need to be updated, the University will certainly take on board the Audit Report's findings when developing and enhancing the quality of our taught curricula (Affirmation 10).

The University would like to re-iterate its gratitude to the Audit Panel for its very supportive and encouraging report which reaffirms the strategies and continuous processes of quality enhancement currently underway at HKU. We also thank the Panel for its confidence that HKU is well-placed to meet the educational challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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

3+3+4	The Hong Kong educational system (to be implemented in schools in 2009), with 3 years of junior secondary, 3 years of senior secondary, 4 years of undergraduate study; also generally used in Hong Kong to mean the transition to this new framework with the first cohort entering universities in 2012.
ADC	Academic Development Committee
ADP	Academic Development Proposal
APA	Academic Portfolio of Achievement
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BSc	Bachelor of Science
CAUT	Centre for the Advancement of University Teaching
CEDARS	Centre of Development and Resources for Students
FDP	Faculty Development Plan
FTLQC	Faculty Teaching and Learning Quality Committee
HK	Hong Kong
HKU	The University of Hong Kong
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
ILN	Interactive Learning Network
IT	Information Technology
MPhil	Master of Philosophy
OBASL	Outcomes-based Approach to Student Learning
PBPE	Policy Board of Postgraduate Education
PC	Personal Computer
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PI	Profile Indicator
PRD	Performance Review and Development
PVC	Pro-Vice-Chancellor
QA	Quality Assurance
QAC	Quality Assurance Council

QE	Quality Enhancement
RPg	Research Postgraduate
SET	Student Evaluation of Teaching
SPACE	School of Professional and Continuing Education
SSCC	Staff-Student Consultative Committee
T&L	Teaching and Learning
TDG	Teaching Development Grant
TLQC	Teaching and Learning Quality Committee
TPg	Taught Postgraduate
Ug	Undergraduate
UGC	University Grants Committee

## **APPENDIX D: HKU AUDIT PANEL**

### **Audit Panel**

The HKU Audit Panel comprised the following:

Professor Brian Robinson (Panel Chair)  
Emeritus Research Professor (Chemistry), University of Otago, New Zealand

Professor Robert Harris  
Assistant Director, QAAHE (UK) and Emeritus Professor, University of Hull

Professor Kerry Kennedy  
Chair Professor of Curriculum Studies, Dean, Faculty of Professional and Early Childhood Education and Associate Vice-President (Quality Assurance), The Hong Kong Institute of Education

Mr Lo Wing-hung  
Group Chief Executive Officer, Sing Tao News Corporation Limited, Hong Kong

Professor T C Pong  
Associate Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Professor of Computer Science and Engineering, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

### **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 2009)

Mr Philip CHEN Nan-lok, SBS, JP (Chairman)	Chairman, John Swire & Sons (China) Limited, Hong Kong
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Professor Richard HO Yan-ki	Professor (Chair) of Finance, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong
Sir Colin LUCAS	Chairman, The British Library, United Kingdom
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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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