

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

September 2008



Quality Assurance Council

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

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QAC Audit Report Number 1

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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.

# CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
<b>PREFACE: OVERVIEW OF THE AUDIT PROCESS</b>	1
Background	1
Conduct of QAC Quality Audits	1
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	2
Commendations	2
Affirmations	3
Recommendations	4
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	5
<b>2. OVERVIEW OF CUHK'S TEACHING AND LEARNING QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM</b>	6
Committees	6
Integrated Framework	6
Other quality assurance mechanisms	7
<b>3. ARTICULATION OF APPROPRIATE OBJECTIVES</b>	8
University level ( <i>Graduate attributes</i> )	8
Programme level	9
Course level	9
Outcomes-based approach	9
Course selection	10
<b>4. MANAGEMENT, PLANNING AND APPROVAL PROCESS</b>	10
Academic and financial approval	10
Teaching and Learning policies	11
<b>5. PROGRAMME MONITORING AND REVIEW</b>	12
Integrated Framework	12
Programme Review	12
Course Review and Annual Progress Reports	13
Student feedback on courses	14
Non-local programmes	15
<b>6. CURRICULUM DESIGN</b>	15
Teaching-Research nexus	16
<b>7. PROGRAMME DELIVERY AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT</b>	17
Student Learning Environment	17
IT proficiency and e-Learning	17
Student support	18
Student complaints	20

<b>8. EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING</b>	20
Student exchanges and internships	20
Colleges	20
Other opportunities	21
<b>9. ASSESSMENT</b>	21
Quality enhancement	22
Assessment policy	23
Norm- and criterion-referencing	23
Plagiarism and Academic Appeals	23
Visiting Committees	24
<b>10. TEACHING QUALITY AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT</b>	25
Recognition and Reward of Good Teaching	25
Exemplary Teaching Awards	25
Appraisal and Staff development	26
Course and Teaching Evaluation	27
Student Engagement Questionnaire	28
Graduate Surveys	28
<b>11. STUDENT PARTICIPATION</b>	28
<b>12. GENERAL EDUCATION</b>	29
University GE	29
College GE	30
<b>13. LANGUAGE POLICY AND ENHANCEMENT</b>	30
<b>14. RESEARCH DEGREES</b>	31
Enhancements	33
Code of Practice	33
<b>15. CONCLUSION AND ACTION PLAN</b>	33
<b>APPENDICES</b>	
APPENDIX A: THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG (CUHK)	35
APPENDIX B: INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE TO THE AUDIT FINDINGS	37
APPENDIX C: ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS AND DEFINITIONS	39
APPENDIX D: CUHK AUDIT PANEL	41
APPENDIX E: QAC'S MISSION, TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP	42

# **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. The 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 Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) conducted in 2008. 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 CUHK is providing a high quality student learning experience that reflects its mission and role statement, underpinned by good quality assurance systems; and that these systems and the quality of teaching and learning will be enhanced further by implementation of the QAC's recommendations.

### Commendations

1. The QAC commends CUHK for its overall commitment to assuring and enhancing the quality of its taught programmes and especially the development and implementation of an *Integrated Framework for Curriculum Development and Review*. [page 7]
2. The QAC commends CUHK for articulating graduate attributes with the capacity to clearly differentiate CUHK graduates from those of other universities in Hong Kong and elsewhere; and its commitment to implementing the teaching and learning aspects of its Strategic Plan. [page 8]
3. The QAC commends CUHK's introduction of a rigorous system of Programme Reviews, and the use of review outcomes to inform funding decisions as a means both of rewarding good practices and of encouraging identified improvements. [page 13]
4. The QAC commends CUHK for its approach to curriculum design, which ensures the University's desired graduate attributes are reflected through the inclusion of major, minor, elective, general education and language courses. [page 15]
5. The QAC commends CUHK for requiring all students to pass a student IT Proficiency Test as a graduation requirement. [page 17]
6. The QAC commends CUHK for the level of academic support and pastoral care available to undergraduate students. [page 19]

7. The QAC commends CUHK for the variety and extent of experiential learning opportunities available to students, particularly the exchange and internship programmes, and its success in securing travel grants and other funding to enable students to participate in these various activities. [page 21]
8. The QAC commends CUHK for its clear commitment to recognising and rewarding good teaching through a variety of channels including the promotion threshold related to teaching, the transparency of the performance assessment system for merit increases and the systems of exemplary teaching awards. [page 26]
9. The QAC commends CUHK for its support of teaching staff, and for the compulsory staff development courses for new junior staff and Teaching Assistants. [page 26]
10. The QAC commends CUHK for its commitment to its bilingual policy and for the application of resources devoted to achieving desired language attributes at undergraduate level. [page 31]
11. The QAC commends CUHK for its overall approach to providing and assuring a quality experience for its research students. [page 33]

### **Affirmations**

1. The QAC affirms CUHK's plans to incorporate all components of the undergraduate curriculum (including majors, minors, electives, general education and language courses) into the undergraduate *Integrated Framework for Curriculum Development and Review*. [page 7]
2. The QAC affirms CUHK's production of "OBA roadmaps", to consolidate a number of initiatives for more efficient and effective curriculum development and to indicate how an outcomes-based approach (OBA) will be implemented in all programmes. [page 9]
3. The QAC affirms CUHK's move from elected to appointed Deans and the key role that these, and the Associate Deans (Education), will play in assuring and enhancing the quality of student learning at CUHK. [page 11]
4. The QAC affirms CUHK's continued study of the use of technology in student life and learning, with a view to using the outcomes to inform course delivery in the four-year normative curriculum. [page 17]
5. The QAC affirms CUHK's plans to re-examine the role of the Independent Learning Centre as part of its Action Plan. [page 19]
6. The QAC affirms CUHK's decision to implement the recommendations of the Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning Working Party on Assessment. [page 23]
7. The QAC affirms the use of Exemplary Teacher Award winners to disseminate good practice within their Departments and invites CUHK to consider how they could also be used for systematic dissemination of non-discipline-specific good practice across the institution. [page 26]
8. The QAC affirms CUHK's intent to implement the Action Plan that stemmed from its self-review as a means of continuing to assure and enhance the quality of student learning. [page 34]

## **Recommendations**

1. The QAC recommends that CUHK's graduate attributes at postgraduate level are more clearly and concisely articulated, particularly those relating to bilingual proficiency and whole-person development. *[page 8]*
2. The QAC recommends that CUHK considers introducing a mandatory, standard template for course outlines across the University that contains sufficient information for students to make informed decisions about course selection; and that this information is published well before the date of enrolment for a course. *[page 10]*
3. The QAC recommends that CUHK reviews its policy in regard to undergraduate and postgraduate students being taught together and specifies the maximum number of undergraduate course credit units that can contribute towards a taught postgraduate award. *[page 12]*
4. The QAC recommends that CUHK (a) identifies clear procedures, including lines of responsibility and accountability, for implementing the Action Plans arising from six-yearly Programme Reviews; (b) considers implementing annual programme and course monitoring driven by standard data sets presented in time series; and (c) more closely aligns the monitoring and review processes for undergraduate and taught postgraduate provision. *[page 14]*
5. The QAC recommends that CUHK considers ways to draw on its links with local employers and professional bodies, to gain more external input into curriculum development and to obtain external evaluation of the effectiveness of curricula in imparting desired graduate attributes. *[page 16]*
6. The QAC recommends that CUHK develops and implements an institutional e-Learning strategy as part of its preparation for the four year normative curriculum. *[page 18]*
7. The QAC recommends that CUHK clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the various academic and pastoral student support agencies including how they inter-relate, how they are accessed and how overall provision, as well as each component of provision, is evaluated. *[page 19]*
8. The QAC recommends that CUHK implements an assessment policy for all taught programmes, to be applied across all Faculties and Departments, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. *[page 23]*
9. The QAC recommends that CUHK considers (a) revising Course and Teaching Evaluation (CTE) to elicit student feedback on a broader range of institution-wide elements of teaching and (b) adopting University-wide procedures, informed by best practice, for administering the CTE. *[page 27]*
10. In affirming CUHK's adaptation of the annual progression form to allow research students to record any views and concerns about supervision, resources or other relevant matters, the QAC recommends that University-level processes are put in place to monitor and address any research student concerns. *[page 33]*
11. The QAC recommends that CUHK draws on international best practice to codify its policies and procedures in regard to research student training, supervision and management, and mandates their implementation across the University. *[page 33]*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This is the report of an audit of the quality of the student learning experience at The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) 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 CUHK following a period of self-review and submitted to the QAC on 21 January 2008. A one-day Initial Meeting of the Audit Panel was held on 20 February 2008 to discuss the Submission. The Panel Chair and Audit Co-ordinator then visited CUHK on 13 March 2008 to discuss and agree the detailed arrangements for the audit visit.
- 1.2 The Audit Panel visited CUHK from 21 to 25 April 2008 and met over 150 staff and 80 students from across the University, as well as a number of external stakeholders, including lay members of the CUHK Council, local employers and graduates of CUHK.
- 1.3 CUHK is one of eight institutions in Hong Kong funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC). It is a comprehensive research university with over 2,400 teaching and research staff. Over 17,600 full-time equivalent students were enrolled in 2007/08 (10,555 at undergraduate level; 5,151 at taught postgraduate level; and 1,936 research students). All teachers and undergraduate students belong to both a Faculty (with a few exceptions of teachers belonging to Research Institutes or Centres) and a College, with the College structure being a unique feature in Hong Kong. A brief profile of CUHK is provided in Appendix A. It includes the University's role statement as agreed with the UGC and brief details of its history, mission, vision, 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 planning and policy development, through programme design, approval and review, to teaching, assessment and student support. The QAC has selected a set of such activities, common to all institutions, as the 'focus areas' of audit. Each focus area is a significant contributor to student learning quality and is sufficiently generic that it can be interpreted in a way which is relevant to each institution's activities and practices. Taken together, the focus areas effectively define the scope of a QAC audit.
- 1.6 The Audit Report follows the general guidance provided in the QAC Audit Manual<sup>1</sup> and covers the audit 'focus areas', with its structure generally being based on the format of CUHK's Institutional Submission.
- 1.7 The QAC and the Audit Panel are grateful to CUHK 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 CUHK'S TEACHING AND LEARNING QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

### Committees

- 2.1 CUHK operates as a devolved structure within a framework whereby the University Council sets strategic directions and priorities for development. The University Senate supervises academic development and curriculum planning, and approves policies on all related academic matters, including the approval of academic regulations. The key committees concerned with academic development and financial approval are, respectively, the Senate Academic Planning Committee and the Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning, and the Resource Allocation Committee. Section 4 refers.

### Integrated Framework

- 2.2 CUHK's quality assurance of teaching and learning is underpinned by an *Integrated Framework for Curriculum Development and Review* (hereafter abbreviated to Integrated Framework). The Integrated Framework has been designed to take forward the outcomes of the UGC's second Teaching and Learning Quality Process Reviews<sup>2</sup>.
- 2.3 The main objective of the Integrated Framework is "to ensure that teachers and programmes engage in *reflection* about teaching and learning, that such reflection is rooted in *evidence* and leads to *action* for improvement, and that *incentives* are provided for such efforts". The Integrated Framework was introduced at undergraduate (Ug) level in 2004 and (in slightly modified form) at taught postgraduate (TPg) level in 2007 (See also paragraph 2.7).
- 2.4 The major components of the Integrated Framework are:-
- a set of integrated curriculum elements common to all courses, namely learning outcomes; content; learning activities; assessment; feedback for evaluation;
  - an outcomes-based approach (OBA) to programme and course design, whereby curriculum elements are aligned with desired learning outcomes (Sections 3 and 6 refer); and
  - a six-yearly cycle of Programme Reviews which, *inter alia*, ensure that the Integrated Framework is applied to each programme (Section 5 refers).
- 2.5 There is clear evidence that the Integrated Framework, as it is progressively implemented across all major Ug and TPg programmes, is an effective framework for quality assurance and enhancement. Various aspects of the Integrated Framework and its implementation are discussed in more detail in relevant sections of this report.

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<sup>2</sup> Education Quality Work: The Hong Kong Experience. A handbook of good practices in assuring and improving teaching and learning quality. Published in 2005 by an Editorial Committee, Chaired by Professor T P Leung, on behalf of the eight UGC-funded institutions, the Handbook encapsulates the experiences of the UGC-funded institutions as revealed by the 1997 and 2003 Teaching and Learning Quality Reviews (TLQPR).

## **Commendation 1**

**The QAC commends CUHK for its overall commitment to assuring and enhancing the quality of its taught programmes and especially the development and implementation of an *Integrated Framework for Curriculum Development and Review*.**

- 2.6 Notwithstanding the above, the Panel considers that elements of the Integrated Framework can be strengthened, as discussed later in this report. The Panel also considers that the speed at which Programme Review is implemented across the University should be increased. It appears to the Panel that CUHK's strong disciplinary and associated organisational structures sometimes militate against the establishment of consistent and best practices across the University in a number of important aspects of teaching and learning. There is also a relative paucity of university-wide data and management information for use in monitoring and as a means of identifying areas for improvement and supporting change. These aspects are considered further in relevant sections below.
- 2.7 The Panel notes that General Education courses are currently being brought within the Integrated Framework, with the first reviews under the Framework scheduled for later in 2008. The Panel also notes CUHK's plans to extend the Integrated Framework in a suitably adapted form to minor and elective courses in the next round of Programme Reviews, and to language courses; and concurs with these plans.

## **Affirmation 1**

**The QAC affirms CUHK's plans to incorporate all components of the undergraduate curriculum (including majors, minors, electives, general education and language courses) into the undergraduate *Integrated Framework for Curriculum Development and Review*.**

## **Other quality assurance mechanisms**

- 2.8 Other major quality assurance mechanisms include the following:-
- a system of annual reporting (Section 5 refers)
  - a system of External / Visiting Examiners (Section 9 refers)
  - a system of staff performance appraisal and management, including recognition and reward of good teaching (Section 10 refers)
  - the use of student feedback mechanisms (Sections 5 and 10 refer)
  - professional development opportunities (Section 10 refers)

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

#### **University level (*Graduate attributes*)**

- 3.1 CUHK's mission statement reflects CUHK's history and conveys a coherent vision for the future. Aspects of the mission clearly differentiate CUHK from other universities. The mission presents a vision for the future that is well aligned with the needs of Hong Kong in terms of an increasingly globalised environment and in providing a modern and international experience for students from Hong Kong and elsewhere.
- 3.2 CUHK's Strategic Plan was developed through a widely consultative process and with the active engagement of the Council in developing, approving and owning the plan. The educational components of the Strategic Plan are consistent with CUHK's mission and UGC role statement. The Panel saw clear evidence that CUHK is committed to implementing its Strategic Plan.
- 3.3 CUHK's graduate attributes are clearly articulated in the Strategic Plan and reflect the institution's educational objectives. The attributes are strongly aligned with CUHK's educational objectives at undergraduate level, but less clearly so at postgraduate level. Attributes arising from general education and whole-person development are, understandably, not a focus of postgraduate provision given the relative maturity and prior experience of postgraduate students, although postgraduates do have access to "broadening" opportunities.

#### **Commendation 2**

**The QAC commends CUHK for articulating graduate attributes with the capacity to clearly differentiate CUHK graduates from those of other universities in Hong Kong and elsewhere; and its commitment to implementing the teaching and learning aspects of its Strategic Plan.**

- 3.4 Graduate attributes relating to language proficiency and bilingualism seem less well defined at postgraduate level than at undergraduate level. The Panel encountered uncertainty about whether bilingual proficiency is a desired (and achieved) attribute of all postgraduate programmes for all students. CUHK may wish to consider whether its distinctive bilingual philosophy and "brand" should be reinforced by insisting on bilingual proficiency as an outcome of all postgraduate programmes (as it does with undergraduate programmes). Whatever the outcome of such consideration, the graduate attributes for postgraduate programmes should be more clearly articulated. (See also paragraph 13.5.)

#### **Recommendation 1**

**The QAC recommends that CUHK's graduate attributes at postgraduate level are more clearly and concisely articulated, particularly those relating to bilingual proficiency and whole-person development.**

### **Programme level**

- 3.5 The Panel concluded, through its review of documentation and discussions with staff, that the Integrated Framework provides a good mechanism for the alignment of programme outcomes with CUHK's broad educational objectives expressed through its graduate attributes. This alignment is clearly demonstrated in those programmes that have undergone Programme Review under the Integrated Framework. The evidence presented gave the Panel confidence that other programmes will demonstrate such clarity of alignment as they are progressively reviewed under the Integrated Framework.

### **Course level**

- 3.6 The Integrated Framework, through the course planning documents (*i.e.* the course outline templates and guidelines), provides a mechanism for the articulation of course outcomes that are aligned to programme outcomes. However, there is greater variability in alignment at the course/ programme level when compared with that at the programme/ University level. Mapping of course learning outcomes to programme learning outcomes exists in programmes which have undergone review under the Integrated Framework. Moreover, there are well articulated outcomes for courses which have been assisted in the course design process by the Centre for Learning Enhancement And Research (CLEAR) through its Course Planning and Review Service. The Panel considers CUHK would benefit from greater consistency in the use of external input (*e.g.* from employers and professional bodies) in the specification of learning outcomes; such input is presently variable across courses and programmes. See also Recommendation 5.

### **Outcomes-based approach**

- 3.7 While it was not within the Panel's brief to evaluate progress towards adopting an outcomes-based approach to student learning, the Panel noted that CUHK has recently moved through a number of phases in developing its current approach to quality assurance in teaching and learning along outcomes-based lines. Third round Teaching Development Grant (TDG) funding has been used since 2006/07 to support at least one major project with a clear OBA focus in each of the seven Faculties, the School of Law and General Education. These nine units are now producing their own "OBA road map" for the interpretation and implementation of an OBA into all programmes of the unit. The roadmaps will cover a number of elements, including: programme-level descriptions of desired student learning outcomes; an analysis of the strengths and challenges that the unit faces with respect to adopting OBA; how OBA has been built into the unit's 3+3+4 plans; and details of strategies to be applied and monitoring mechanisms to be used during the further implementation of an OBA until 2012. This will clearly take time to implement fully, the aim being the introduction of a four-year normative curriculum (3+3+4) in 2012 that stresses desired outcomes. Paragraphs 6.3 and 6.4 also refer.

### **Affirmation 2**

**The QAC affirms CUHK's production of "OBA roadmaps", to consolidate a number of initiatives for more efficient and effective curriculum development and to indicate how an outcomes-based approach (OBA) will be implemented in all programmes.**

## **Course selection**

- 3.8 Students often appear to select courses on the basis of rather limited information. In some cases, sufficient information on whether or not to choose a course, including course learning outcomes, is made available only at the first teaching session of a course. Although students can elect to “drop” a course and register for another one during the “add/drop” period, the Panel considers that students will benefit from receiving course information at an earlier stage. A course outline template is currently available (but its use is not mandatory across the University) and includes the following information: number of units /credits; course content and learning outcomes; pre-requisites; delivery modes; assessment details; key texts/references. Such a template, possibly including examples of how a course has been changed in light of feedback from previous student cohorts, could be used for course approval purposes and could be made generally available (*e.g.* on the Web) so that students (and prospective students) can make informed choices about course selection prior to registration.

### **Recommendation 2**

**The QAC recommends that CUHK considers introducing a mandatory, standard template for course outlines across the University that contains sufficient information for students to make informed decisions about course selection; and that this information is published well before the date of enrolment for a course.**

## **4. MANAGEMENT, PLANNING AND APPROVAL PROCESS**

### **Academic and financial approval**

- 4.1 The Senate has established a number of committees to manage and supervise academic programmes and provision. These include the Senate Academic Planning Committee (SAPC), effectively the executive committee of the Senate, with responsibility for University approval of new provision prior to referral to the Senate for formal endorsement; and the Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning (SCTL), which has responsibility for the development and oversight of teaching and learning, including student assessment and quality assurance.
- 4.2 The Chairs of the 62 Departments have devolved authority and responsibility for teaching and learning matters on a day-to-day basis. Graduate Divisions in each discipline report both to the relevant Department / Faculty and to the Graduate School, which is governed by the Graduate Council. Oversight rests with the Senate, especially through the SCTL, on matters relating to teaching and learning quality. Undergraduate provision is scrutinized initially at Departmental level, through the Departmental Board, reporting to the Faculty Board and then to the Senate Academic Planning Committee. Taught Postgraduate provision is developed through Graduate Divisions and referred to the relevant Departmental and Faculty Boards, and the Graduate Council, before referral to the Senate Academic Planning Committee and, ultimately, the Senate.
- 4.3 Programmes are developed only if they are within CUHK’s role and meet community needs. Those representing major new initiatives are generally planned top-down by a dedicated planning committee reporting directly to the Council through the

Vice-Chancellor. Undergraduate proposals are ultimately incorporated into CUHK's Academic Development Proposals submitted to the UGC on a triennial basis.

- 4.4 Resources for new provision are scrutinized and approved by the Resource Allocation Committee (RAC). Each new programme is therefore subject to both academic and financial scrutiny. UGC-funded programmes are approved ultimately on the allocation of UGC-funded places. Self-financed (mainly TPg) programmes are approved only after they are also checked for financial viability by the Committee on Self-financed TPg programmes, before consideration by the Graduate Council and the Senate. The RAC ensures that there is no cross-subsidy from public funds and that the proposed programme is viable. The Panel's investigation of this area confirmed the robust process for the allocation of sufficient resources for new provision.
- 4.5 Faculty Boards are delegated with the authority to approve revisions to existing programmes of study, including the addition and deletion of individual courses, within the framework approved by the Senate.
- 4.6 While the current system of devolved responsibility has served CUHK well, the Institutional Submission acknowledges that improvements are required as the University evolves. CUHK has plans to reorganise its senior management structure and considers the Senate too large for effective discussion of complex issues. CUHK is also in the process of moving from elected Deans to a system of appointed Deans, who will be required to assume a stronger leadership and accountability role on strategic issues, including teaching and learning.

### **Teaching and Learning policies**

- 4.7 The Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning (SCTL) has a major role, not only in developing teaching and learning policies and practices but also in monitoring implementation and driving change. The University has identified that Associate Deans (Education), who are members of the SCTL, will play a key role in taking forward the teaching and learning agenda and will serve as catalysts in the Faculties in this regard. Another key agent and major strategic resource is the expertise and services of CLEAR.

### **Affirmation 3**

**The QAC affirms CUHK's move from elected to appointed Deans and the key role that these, and the Associate Deans (Education), will play in assuring and enhancing the quality of student learning at CUHK.**

- 4.8 The Panel identified several areas that, in its view, will benefit from uniformity across the institution and the development of clear policies and practices. One such area is clarifying the distinction between undergraduate and postgraduate courses (in terms of expected levels of achievement) and the extent to which undergraduate and postgraduate students may take the same courses. CUHK's current policy is that, subject to the rules of each programme, individual courses may be open to both Ug and TPg students and that all students taking such courses will achieve the same learning outcomes and take the same assessment. Although the extent of the dual teaching of Ug and TPg students does not appear significant (with one exception identified by the Panel), it is nevertheless an area that CUHK should clarify. Specifically, the Panel believes that CUHK should set a maximum proportion of undergraduate course credit units that can contribute towards a taught postgraduate award (the Panel suggests this should be no more than about 15% in

order to maintain the standards of CUHK's postgraduate awards).

- 4.9 The Panel understands the rationale for the joint teaching of undergraduate and postgraduate students, e.g. in terms of efficiencies of delivery and to provide greater student choice. In the Panel's experience, such courses elsewhere are often modified so that postgraduate students have additional or different teaching sessions and/or take a different, postgraduate-level, assessment. This is perfectly acceptable practice and provides the basis for such courses to be dual coded at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, to reflect these differences while retaining a significant common element. The Panel therefore invites CUHK to consider adopting such practice.

### **Recommendation 3**

**The QAC recommends that CUHK reviews its policy in regard to undergraduate and postgraduate students being taught together and specifies the maximum number of undergraduate course credit units that can contribute towards a taught postgraduate award.**

## **5. PROGRAMME MONITORING AND REVIEW**

### **Integrated Framework**

- 5.1 The *Integrated Framework for Curriculum Development and Review (Integrated Framework)* guides CUHK's programme monitoring and review, with the most significant component being the six-yearly Programme Review cycle. This cycle was introduced at undergraduate level in 2005 and at taught postgraduate level in 2007.

### **Programme Review**

- 5.2 The cornerstone of the Integrated Framework is a six-yearly cycle of Programme Review. This is underpinned by an annual progress report on all matters related to a programme and a more comprehensive report in the third year following the review.
- 5.3 The starting point for Programme Review is preparation by the relevant Department of a self-evaluation document which is informed by student and graduate feedback. This is considered by a Review Panel appointed by the SCTL, which is chaired by a member of the SCTL and includes the programme's External /Visiting Examiner. The Panel produces a report after meeting with staff who teach on the programme and students. The relevant Department then produces a response and action plan. These are considered by the SCTL, which makes a judgement about the quality of the programme and comments on the adequacy of the action plan.
- 5.4 The outcomes of Programme Review can (and do) lead to the adjustment of resources to Departments. The SCTL makes recommendations to the Resource Allocation Committee (RAC) on budget adjustments (either positive or negative). Any budget adjustments are normally effective for the three years after the Programme Review. In the case of negative adjustments, the RAC may consider modifying the adjustment if the programme has developed firm plans to rectify any concerns to the satisfaction of the Panel on Rating of Programmes and the SCTL.

- 5.5 Programme Review also serves a quality enhancement purpose. A document entitled “Instances of good practice in teaching and learning noted in (ten) programme reviews 2005 and 2006” is disseminated to all programmes to assist them in preparing for Programme Review. It is also used in staff professional development activities.
- 5.6 CUHK’s commitment to instilling a robust and effective process is evidenced by the potential budget implications, and is to be applauded.

### **Commendation 3**

**The QAC commends CUHK’s introduction of a rigorous system of Programme Reviews, and the use of review outcomes to inform funding decisions as a means both of rewarding good practices and of encouraging identified improvements.**

- 5.7 The programme self-review (paragraph 5.3 above) relies heavily on student feedback, either from the annual Course and Teaching Evaluation (CTE) results or the Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ). Graduate surveys are also included, and the number of requests (to CLEAR) for graduate surveys tailored to a particular programme has increased.
- 5.8 The Programme Review process incorporates several instances of good practice. Examples are a de-briefing of programme staff by a member of CLEAR to explain the recommendations and discuss the formulation of an action plan, for which the programme team is responsible; the potential for impacting on budgets (paragraph 5.4 refers); and the use of student feedback (from questionnaires and meetings with a sample of the cohort). The process specifies that Panels should meet with teachers at different ranks and who teach on different courses; and should meet about five or six students from across all years of study. However, the Panel observed variation in practice, *e.g.* in the range of students who are asked to meet the Review Panel. Also, reviews of taught postgraduate programmes can be entirely paper-based, *i.e.* without the Review Panel meeting staff or students. The Audit Panel acknowledges that the Ug and TPg sectors are different, with different structures, but does not consider these differences are sufficient to warrant the different methodologies between the Ug and TPg Programme Review processes. The Panel therefore considers that the Programme Review process will benefit from more detailed guidance in a number of aspects, for example in clearly specifying the size and composition of Review Panels and ensuring that Panels meet students from across all years of study on the programme (and, where feasible, a larger number than the six currently specified). The Panel also considers there is merit in using external expertise on Programme Review Panels other than (and possibly instead of) that afforded by the programme’s External/Visiting Examiner; and that the same process should apply to both Ug and TPg programmes.

### **Course Review and Annual Progress Reports**

- 5.9 Under the Integrated Framework, courses are reviewed by the teacher(s) concerned and the relevant Department (or its Curriculum Committee) at least once every three years. Each Department also engages in at least one session of annual review on all matters related to the programme(s) it offers. Departments not involved in the first round of Programme Reviews submitted their own action plans to the SCTL in 2004/05, identifying strengths and aspects where attention was required.

- 5.10 A detailed progress report is prepared in the third year after Programme Review and is examined by the Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning, whose views are reported to the Resource Allocation Committee. Much shorter annual reports (typically one page) are produced by the Department in years 1, 2, 4 and 5 after a Programme Review.
- 5.11 The Integrated Framework is gradually embedding continual reflection on, and review of, course and programme offerings and clearly has had a positive impact on those areas that have undergone Programme Review. However, there is little evidence of robust annual monitoring of the Action Plans arising from Programme Review. Robust and regular monitoring should ensure that Action Plans are progressed between reviews and that change is brought about in a timely manner. It is also unclear where responsibility and accountability lies for the timely implementation and monitoring of the Action Plans. The Plans should clearly identify who is responsible for taking forward a particular recommendation, and in what time scale. Departmental Chairs should ensure that staff are given the resources to implement the recommendations. To strengthen the process, Deans /Associate Deans (Education) should be ultimately accountable to the SCTL for implementation of Action Plans. The SCTL would thus play an important and appropriate monitoring role in ensuring implementation of Programme Review recommendations.
- 5.12 Apart from the monitoring of Action Plans, the Panel considers that programmes and courses should be subject to annual monitoring. Such monitoring need not be burdensome if it is informed by university-defined data sets, including Key Performance Indicators. Routine course and programme monitoring between the six-yearly reviews should be data driven, with the same core data (provided centrally and including time series) being used across all courses and programmes. Anomalies in the data should lead to investigation and, if necessary, remedial action. The Panel therefore considers Programme and Course Review to be areas that will benefit from more systematic analysis of a broader range of data than is currently used, including time series to show trends. Examples of data include demand and admissions statistics (application and entry scores for a programme); elective course enrolments; completion and attrition rates; graduate destinations; individual course pass rates and grade distributions: this is an illustrative rather than exhaustive list. The same data, in time series, can be used to inform the six-yearly Programme Reviews.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**The QAC recommends that CUHK (a) identifies clear procedures, including lines of responsibility and accountability, for implementing the Action Plans arising from six-yearly Programme Reviews; (b) considers implementing annual programme and course monitoring driven by standard data sets presented in time series; and (c) more closely aligns the monitoring and review processes for undergraduate and taught postgraduate provision.**

#### **Student feedback on courses**

- 5.13 Students cited several examples of courses having been changed as a consequence of feedback provided through the Course and Teaching Evaluation (CTE) questionnaires, through their student representatives or by simply emailing their teachers about a particular concern. This is discussed further in Section 10. Paragraph 3.8 also refers.

## **Non-local programmes**

- 5.14 CUHK offers seven non-local programmes which together involve only a very small proportion of the total student population. Non-local programmes are governed by signed Agreements setting out each partner's roles and responsibilities. There is evidence that the University's standard procedures for the quality assurance of its on-campus programmes (including the criteria for student and staff recruitment, the appointment of External Examiners and the various components of the Integrated Framework) are applied equally to non-local programmes.
- 5.15 The Panel reviewed documentation including student feedback and met with staff who teach on one of the largest of the non-local programmes. As a result, the Panel was satisfied that CUHK has robust arrangements to assure the quality of student learning on these programmes and there was therefore no need to visit any of CUHK's non-local partners.

## **6. CURRICULUM DESIGN**

- 6.1 CUHK's portfolio of over 50 Ug majors has remained remarkably stable in recent years, with six major programmes introduced since 2004/05 and five withdrawn since 2002/03. In contrast, TPg programmes have increased rapidly in recent years, from 80 in 2003/04 to 148 in 2007/08. Each Ug major programme is overseen by a Curriculum Committee which monitors the balance between mandatory and elective courses. Professional programmes have Advisory Committees with external expertise.
- 6.2 The Integrated Framework facilitates the continual monitoring, reflection and refinement of curricula (but see the comments in Section 5 above concerning improved monitoring). There are several examples of curricula being modified in response to student evaluation and validated by subsequent evidence of effectiveness – examples which CUHK considers encourage other programmes to follow suit. The Panel also noted the use of overseas academics as Visiting Professors to teach on programmes and give advice on course development, as well as other instances of international external input in programme development.
- 6.3 The design of the current three year experience reflects the University's desired graduate attributes through the inclusion of major, minor, elective, General Education and language courses. CUHK's intention is to use the additional undergraduate year from 2012 to provide a largely common Faculty package of 9 units out of an expected total of 30 units in Year 1. Other components will include language enhancement and an extra 6-unit GE Foundation Course. Applying an outcomes-based approach to the curriculum design model will help CUHK to achieve its goals in implementing 3+3+4. Paragraph 3.7 and Affirmation 2 also refer.
- 6.4 There is also evidence of use of an outcomes-based approach to curriculum design where programmes have been reviewed.

### **Commendation 4**

**The QAC commends CUHK for its approach to curriculum design, which ensures the University's desired graduate attributes are reflected through the inclusion of major, minor, elective, general education and language courses.**

- 6.5 Many CUHK graduates remain in Hong Kong for employment or further study. The University is therefore in a privileged position of being able to foster close associations with employers of its graduates. Several instances of CUHK's good links with local employers are apparent. The Panel considers there is the potential for greater use of employer and other external input when updating or re-designing curricula in order to ensure that CUHK's programmes remain not only academically sound but also relevant to employers' needs.

#### **Recommendation 5**

**The QAC recommends that CUHK considers ways to draw on its links with local employers and professional bodies, to gain more external input into curriculum development and to obtain external evaluation of the effectiveness of curricula in imparting desired graduate attributes.**

- 6.6 CUHK has identified a number of initiatives in curriculum design related to 3+3+4, for which an outcomes-based approach will be a core design principle: these include an increase in the number of interdisciplinary programmes. The successful crossing of disciplinary boundaries requires co-operation and input from a number of disciplinary sources, bringing together different areas of knowledge, skills and approaches. The Panel considers that to achieve its objective of more interdisciplinary programmes CUHK will need to exploit vigorously its planned changes to its management structures, including the appointment (rather than election) of Deans and the greater empowerment of the Associate Deans (for Education and for Research). Affirmation 3 refers.

#### **Teaching-Research nexus**

- 6.7 The teaching-research nexus can be a key facilitator of interdisciplinary curriculum design. There are good examples of research informing teaching at CUHK and the Panel considers that CUHK will benefit from more strongly conceptualising this facet of curriculum design and adopting a more consistent and systematic approach to teaching-research linkages. A role for CLEAR in disseminating good practice in this area across the University, possibly working with the Associate Deans for Education and Research, would be consistent with its mission.
- 6.8 CUHK acknowledges that the quality assurance of its undergraduate provision sets the standard for higher level offerings and is one reason why the Integrated Framework for TPg programmes was not introduced until 2007. Until recently, quality assurance processes for TPg programmes have been relatively informal and have relied heavily on External Examiners. Although the TPg sector is largely self-financing and market driven, its size (currently 148 programmes on which over 5,000 fte students are enrolled) significantly affects the University's reputation. CUHK's principles of an aligned curriculum should therefore be applied equally to TPg programmes, in spite of their different nature (in terms of a much greater disciplinary focus and fewer opportunities or requirements for "broadening" in view of the shorter duration). Paragraph 5.8 and Recommendation 4 also refer in regard to common programme review procedures.

## **7. PROGRAMME DELIVERY AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

### **Student Learning Environment**

- 7.1 The Panel's overall impression is that CUHK students benefit from a strong commitment to teaching by staff and by the institution and from generally good learning facilities. Programmes employ a varied pattern of traditional approaches to delivery, interspersed with a range of opportunities for e-enhanced delivery and independent and group study.
- 7.2 The students seen by the Panel were generally content with the library and IT facilities. However, there is significant variation in knowledge of the library's services and facilities and of how to provide feedback on services. This is in spite of the Library running a Users' Group with student and Faculty representatives, and undertaking student surveys on a regular (and on-line) basis which have elicited good response rates. The University may therefore wish to consider the frequency and modes of communication by which students are informed of the various academic support services and how students can provide feedback if, for example, they have concerns with a service or if they require help in its use.

### **IT proficiency and e-Learning**

- 7.3 In line with CUHK's desired graduate attributes, all Ug and Pg students are required to pass an IT Proficiency Test as a graduation requirement. Support and training are provided, and the majority (c80%) of students pass the test in their first year. All four Colleges provide a variety of facilities to support IT learning.

#### **Commendation 5**

**The QAC commends CUHK for requiring all students to pass a student IT Proficiency Test as a graduation requirement.**

- 7.4 Students use a wide array of modern communication technologies. This is reflected in the preliminary findings of a CUHK survey investigating ways in which Year 1 students use technology in life and learning. This survey shows that expectations of technology use in education by Hong Kong students may be high. CUHK has recognised the opportunity to develop further its use of e-technologies in teaching and learning. It has also recognised the need to overcome a potential obstacle in teachers' lack of familiarity or comfort with many of the new technologies.

#### **Affirmation 4**

**The QAC affirms CUHK's continued study of the use of technology in student life and learning, with a view to using the outcomes to inform course delivery in the four-year normative curriculum.**

- 7.5 CUHK, consistent with its devolved structure, has adopted a loose framework within which decisions on whether and how to use e-Learning are made at Department and Faculty levels. With some exceptions, e-Learning is undertaken by individual enthusiasts and continuity is not assured. There is little sharing of good practice and no economies of scale. The Panel considers that the University would benefit from an institutional strategy which articulates how, and to what extent, CUHK will use e-Learning to enhance students' learning experience and how it will be resourced and

deployed. The strategy should also address staff support and development. CLEAR and the Information Technology Services Centre (ITSC) have already fostered several initiatives (*e.g.* an e-Learning Expo in 2007 and the identification of eLearning Liaison Persons (eLLPs) as eLearning contacts in a number of Departments) and could play a role in informing and developing such a strategy.

- 7.6 An institutional e-Learning strategy will need to address the potentially significant impact an expansion of e-Learning will have on the University's information technology and communication infrastructure while ensuring that discipline-specific requirements continue to be supported. Communication infrastructure will also be affected by the technologies referred to in paragraph 7.4 and Affirmation 4 above. As a small example, email download and storage capacity, already regarded as inadequate by students, will need to be expanded.

### **Recommendation 6**

**The QAC recommends that CUHK develops and implements an institutional e-Learning strategy as part of its preparation for the four year normative curriculum.**

#### **Student support**

- 7.7 CUHK has extensive student support systems. General support is provided by the Colleges (for undergraduate students) and the Office of Student Affairs. Associate Deans (Student Affairs) co-ordinate support at the Faculty level.
- 7.8 Orientation Camps (O'Camps) are organised by upper-year students for new undergraduates each August and are in two parts. "Big O", which lasts several days and is organised around Colleges, is devoted largely to exploration of informal learning opportunities and the building of camaraderie. Between 40-50% of the new intake attend. "Small O" is organised around programmes and is aimed at orientation to the formal curriculum. Attendance for this induction to the Department and programme is about 95% of the intake. Additionally, almost 100% of the new intake from the Mainland attends an orientation programme lasting 15-18 days.
- 7.9 The induction of new TPg students rests with the relevant Department and is less clearly articulated. The Graduate School organises an orientation programme for new RPg students.
- 7.10 Academic support is largely devolved to Departments. Year 1 students are assigned an Academic Advisor as part of an academic advising system which provides personalised support and advice. Although CUHK's Institutional Submission suggests this system is only for Year 1 students (and does not appear to be implemented uniformly across all programmes), students and advisors who met the Panel indicated that Advisors continue to provide support to students throughout their programme on a "need" basis.
- 7.11 Students in some Departments are assigned mentors (predominantly students from Year 2). Colleges also organise mentorship programmes through their alumni associations, to broaden student horizons and strengthen their social networks. Other support agencies include the Departmental and Faculty Offices and the Office of Registry Services. The Panel was informed that CUHK has a strong service culture and that staff take ownership of a student's concerns. This view was supported by the staff and students seen by the Panel during the Audit Visit.

- 7.12 A network of five Learning Enhancement Officers (LEOs) provides support across the University specifically for non-local (and in particular Mainland) students. The support is in terms of adjusting to a new environment as well as monitoring of progress and referral to specialist agencies, as appropriate. This ongoing relationship commences during the orientation programme (paragraph 7.8), when formal meetings are held with the students.
- 7.13 While research students receive academic guidance and support from their supervisors, there are no apparent mechanisms for providing pastoral support and for providing advice from someone other than their supervisors. This is considered further in Section 14 below.

#### **Commendation 6**

**The QAC commends CUHK for the level of academic support and pastoral care available to undergraduate students.**

- 7.14 Notwithstanding the above array of support mechanisms, CUHK has identified through Programme Reviews that the School-University transition can be difficult for some students. Although CUHK considers that the devolution of academic support services has served the University well, it recognises that a more streamlined service is needed as the student body increases in size and diversity. The Panel echoes this view: the extensive student support systems appear complex and multi-layered, and possibly lead to duplication in some cases. Student navigation through these services is not entirely clear. The Panel considers that comparative student feedback should be taken periodically to measure the effectiveness of individual support components and to evaluate these in terms of total service provision. The Panel therefore invites CUHK to develop a “road map” of student support services, to ensure that students (including postgraduates) are able to access quickly and efficiently the services appropriate to their needs.

#### **Recommendation 7**

**The QAC recommends that CUHK clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the various academic and pastoral student support agencies including how they inter-relate, how they are accessed and how overall provision, as well as each component of provision, is evaluated.**

- 7.15 There is no central unit responsible for providing general academic support for students, *e.g.* in regard to study skills or techniques. The Independent Learning Centre (ILC) focuses on language enhancement. CUHK plans to re-examine the role of the ILC as part of its Action Plan arising from its self-review (Section 15 refers), with a view to the ILC possibly providing more comprehensive learning support for students. The Panel endorses this proposed action.

#### **Affirmation 5**

**The QAC affirms CUHK’s plans to re-examine the role of the Independent Learning Centre as part of its Action Plan.**

## **Student complaints**

- 7.16 Although no instances of student complaints on non-academic matters were brought to the Panel's attention, CUHK may wish to consider codifying the informal and formal mechanisms for addressing complaints on non-academic matters as it takes forward Recommendation 7 above.

## **8. EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING**

- 8.1 CUHK's graduate attributes (Section 3 above) and educational philosophy place emphasis on whole-person development and stress the "all-round" graduate. This is effected by combining the academic outcomes related to a student's major subject with General Education (Section 12), language proficiency (Section 13) and a rich and diverse array of experiential learning opportunities. The Colleges play an important role in providing and facilitating these broadening opportunities, with each undergraduate being assigned to one of (currently) four Colleges.
- 8.2 The Panel was impressed by the range of experiential opportunities offered by CUHK. These are highly valued by students, who would indeed welcome more. This is clearly a major challenge for CUHK as it expands student numbers from 2012, but one which the Panel is confident CUHK will address.

### **Student exchanges and internships**

- 8.3 Student exchanges and internships are major contributors to experiential learning. Academic exchanges are co-ordinated by the Office of Academic Links. Other exchange opportunities and study tours are organised by the Colleges. Employers play a key role in providing internship opportunities that are co-ordinated by Colleges, the Office of Student Affairs and Departments and Faculties. The employers who met the Panel clearly value the internship relationship: a win-win position for all concerned. The list of internships is most impressive, with 3,111 students securing placements in Hong Kong, 241 in Greater China and 247 overseas in 2006/07.
- 8.4 In terms of student exchanges, CUHK's medium term goal is to provide an exchange experience to all who desire one; and to increase the number of incoming students to enrich the campus. In 2007/08, almost 640 students (22% of the cohort) participated in regular term-time academic exchange. These term-time exchanges, when combined with over 2000 short-term opportunities, resulted in 93% of the cohort participating in an exchange of one form or another in 2007/08. This range of opportunities is also impressive.

### **Colleges**

- 8.5 College life is a fundamental component of the undergraduate experience at CUHK and is geared towards supporting the broader development of students as whole persons. In addition to College General Education (Section 12), each of the four Colleges offers a range of co-curricular activities that contribute to student enjoyment and personal development. Approximately 50% of undergraduates reside in the Colleges. CUHK is currently planning the addition of five new Colleges by 2012 to meet the demands for hostel accommodation and broadening opportunities associated with the four year curriculum and increased student numbers.

- 8.6 The Colleges have been successful in securing donations for student travel grants, which are a major enabler of student participation in exchange opportunities. The overwhelming impression is that exchange opportunities are hugely beneficial to a student's development. As activities and demand grow, CUHK will seek further donations for student financial support.

### **Other opportunities**

- 8.7 Other contributors to broadening opportunities that provide experiential learning include a successful mentorship programme, organised by Colleges, Faculties and the Office of Student Affairs (over 1300 opportunities in 2007/08); a leadership development programme; and a variety of summer activities (enrolment >3100 in 2007), including a highly popular International Summer School (500 participants).
- 8.8 CUHK acknowledges the need for more systematic data collection (*e.g.* through a student Learning Portfolio) and is planning to evaluate these various learning opportunities to drive improvements and optimise the allocation of resources. The Panel endorses this way forward and suggests that the University should more clearly conceptualise what it is trying to achieve through experiential learning and consider how it can evaluate the effectiveness of the various elements.
- 8.9 Exchange opportunities are open to postgraduate students, who also have access to other such "broadening" activities (paragraphs 12.1 and 14.6 refer).

### **Commendation 7**

**The QAC commends CUHK for the variety and extent of experiential learning opportunities available to students, particularly the exchange and internship programmes, and its success in securing travel grants and other funding to enable students to participate in these various activities.**

## **9. ASSESSMENT**

- 9.1 Course outlines, which are disseminated to students at the beginning of a course, must specify the assessment scheme as approved by the Department or Programme Board. Overall course scores are converted to Grades according to a matrix (with minor variations between Ug and TPg courses). Grades are approved by examination panels under the relevant Department or Programme Board, so as to maintain consistency from year to year and comparability across different courses. The examination panels operate within University grade distribution guidelines. This norm-referencing of grades is justified on the basis of preventing grade inflation. Grades are then converted to a *grade point*, from which a *Grade Point Average* (GPA) is computed at various stages of a student's progress. Ug honours classification is recommended by the relevant Faculty / Programme Board according to University guidelines, which relate principally to a student's Major GPA. All classifications are subject to approval by the Undergraduate Examinations Board.

- 9.2 External benchmarking of standards is provided by a system of External or Visiting Examiners: the Examiners review course outlines, assessment schemes, question papers and students' scripts from a selection of courses each term, and provide feedback to the Department. Departments are required to respond to the External/Visiting Examiners' reports. Visiting Examiners visit in person once during their (normally three year) term of office to meet staff and students and to conduct an overall review of the curriculum and assessment. A summary report is then submitted to the Vice-Chancellor. The Vice-Chancellor (or his delegate) routinely meets Visiting Examiners, a practice considered by the Panel to be exemplary. Departmental responses are reviewed either by the Associate Dean (Education) for UG programmes or by the Dean of the Graduate School for TPg programmes.
- 9.3 The Audit Panel found the assessment system to be implemented as described above. There is clear evidence of External/ Visiting Examiners providing the external benchmarking of academic standards, and examples of External/ Visiting Examiners querying the decision to award particular grades (usually justified in the Departmental response). However, there does not seem to be a clear or consistent University-wide policy on the use of discretion when the External Examiner's advice is not followed by individual teachers. This should be addressed in the development of an assessment policy (paragraph 9.8 and Recommendation 8 below, refer).

### **Quality enhancement**

- 9.4 CUHK recognises that an important element of its QA system, underpinned by the Integrated Framework, is the identification, dissemination and promotion of good practice. Four recent projects on assessment, supported by Teaching Development Grants, demonstrate implementation of this philosophy.
- 9.5 Programme Reviews have revealed a number of areas for potential improvement which are being taken forward by a SCTL Working Group on Assessment. There are good examples of alignment of assessment with learning outcomes at various levels, mainly evidenced by those programmes reviewed under the Integrated Framework. CUHK has recognised that this practice is not yet evident across all programmes. The Panel considers robust implementation of the Integrated Framework, including the requirement to map assessment with course and programme learning outcomes, will result in clearer alignment in all programmes as the University fully embraces the outcomes-based approach to student learning.
- 9.6 Other areas being addressed by the Working Group on Assessment include the current (in some cases over-) reliance on traditional methods of assessment, with heavy weighting given to written examinations; the relative weighting of assessment items; variations between examination panels in implementing University guidelines for the norm-distribution of grades; variations in the extent of feedback given to students; and a lack of clarity among some teachers over the nature of various assessment policies.
- 9.7 Notwithstanding the above issues, Programme Reviews have revealed some good practices which the Working Group will use as a basis for quality enhancement in this area. The Panel also identified instances of good practice such as anonymous marking and an explicit policy in one Department of providing feedback to students within three weeks of an assessment. In another instance, Teaching Assistants are given guidance on marking standards, with double-marking by the course teacher in some cases. While exemplary, these practices are not applied universally across the institution and there appears to be no obvious mechanism for good practice to inform policy

development. The Panel encourages CUHK to bring together good practices already in place and consider these for general policy development (see paragraph 9.8 below).

### **Assessment policy**

- 9.8 Given the clear variation in practices, the Panel is firmly of the view that the University should introduce, as soon as practicable, a formal assessment policy that should apply to all taught provision. The policy should cover the issues identified by the Working Party on Assessment as well as specifying, *inter alia*, the following: the frequency of assessment; the University's requirements in regard to providing student feedback; the relationship between formative and summative assessment; marking practices (*e.g.* anonymous marking, sample double marking and the moderation of marks, including those awarded by Teaching Assistants and part-time teachers); and the mechanisms and rationale for deviating from the guidelines for awarding grades and passing a course. Such a policy, coupled with the external benchmarking and assurance of standards, will ensure accuracy, consistency and fairness in the assessment process across the University (see also paragraph 9.12).

### **Affirmation 6**

**The QAC affirms CUHK's decision to implement the recommendations of the Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning Working Party on Assessment.**

### **Recommendation 8**

**The QAC recommends that CUHK implements an assessment policy for all taught programmes, to be applied across all Faculties and Departments, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.**

### **Norm- and criterion-referencing**

- 9.9 The Working Party on Assessment considers that the achievement of specified learning outcomes can provide a rational basis for deviating from grade distribution guidelines. Similarly, the Panel recognises a possible tension between the University's policy of norm-referencing and the adoption of an outcomes-based approach (OBA) to student learning. As learning outcomes are more clearly and consistently articulated, and as curricula, delivery and assessment become more aligned to learning outcomes, there is little reason to expect that student performance will follow historic patterns of achievement. There is therefore an argument that criterion-referencing as opposed to norm-referencing is more consistent with OBA. The Panel encourages CUHK to engage with the pressure placed by OBA on norm-based grading and consider the place of criterion-based assessment and the measures which may be introduced, other than norm-referencing, to track and correct grade inflation. For example, grade inflation could be countered through clear specification of grade descriptors (*i.e.* levels of attainment required for award of a particular grade) and through continued use of External Examiners and/or the proposed Visiting Committees (see paragraphs 9.13 and 9.14).

### **Plagiarism and Academic Appeals**

- 9.10 Plagiarism is defined and appears to be well understood by staff and students at CUHK. Moreover, procedures for dealing with plagiarism appear to be implemented uniformly

across the University. However, the University's policy in regard to academic appeals is less clear. Students are aware that they can appeal to their teachers for a review of a course grade within two weeks of receiving the result: in essence, they can ask for an assessment to be re-marked. While this can be viewed as laudable practice, there appears to be no policy or mechanism to ensure consistency across the University (or, indeed, across individual Faculties and Departments) in the way in which such requests are handled. Moreover, students appear unaware of any mechanism to submit a formal appeal if they do not concur with their teacher's decision following a review of their marks.

- 9.11 It is common practice elsewhere that the academic judgement of the examiners cannot be questioned and that academic appeals will be considered only on matters of procedure, competency or prejudice. To adopt such a stance, institutions must follow assessment practices which ensure that marking has been fair, consistent and unbiased. There are several practices which, if followed uniformly across an institution, give legitimacy to a refusal to consider an appeal questioning academic judgement: these include anonymous marking (where candidates are not identified by name); double-marking of scripts / assignments (or sample double-marking); and moderation of marking by an external examiner.
- 9.12 The Panel therefore suggests that CUHK, as part of developing a university-wide assessment policy (Recommendation 8 above), considers introducing a formal policy on academic appeals, to clarify the position for students and staff. CUHK's Action Plan (Section 15 refers) highlights the need to develop and implement a "grievance policy" with respect to assessment grades: this could be incorporated into a broader academic appeals policy.

### **Visiting Committees**

- 9.13 It is no longer a statutory requirement for CUHK to appoint External Examiners for its programmes. The recent change in legislation allows the University, if it wishes, to move away from the current External/Visiting Examiner system to one of periodic consultations by Visiting Committees. One rationale for this change is the expectation that Visiting Committees will bring the benefit of a more holistic overview of a Department's activities, including research as well as teaching, learning and assessment. This is a very recent development and one which has not yet been fully implemented. A hybrid model is in place until the terms of offices of the current External and Visiting Examiners expire.
- 9.14 CUHK currently places heavily reliance on the External/Visiting Examiner system to assure the academic standards of its awards and the fairness of its assessment processes, on an annual basis. The Panel supports the move to a Visiting Committee model but also considers the current system has many positive benefits. It therefore advises CUHK to ensure that the strengths of the current system are retained in the move to periodic Visiting Committees. One concern of the Panel is the means by which a Department which elects to use the Visiting Committee system will assure the standards and fairness of the assessment process on an annual basis if there is no external input in those years between visits by the Visiting Committee. The Panel considers that CUHK should clarify this issue, and make available to all concerned the roles and responsibilities of External Examiners, Visiting Examiners and Visiting Committees, especially as these could all be operating in tandem in the immediate future.

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

- 10.1 In its own words, CUHK has a tradition, culture and ambience of valuing good teaching. However, despite an increased uptake and interest in professional development for teaching and learning across the University, CUHK considers there to be a general feeling that research counts more, both for promotion and career mobility. CUHK and the Panel recognise this view is a widespread challenge in higher education, but it is not one that was evident through the limited sampling and discussions undertaken with staff during the Audit Visit. On the contrary, the Panel saw clear evidence of support, recognition and reward for teaching and learning, with some excellent examples and practices.

### **Recognition and Reward of Good Teaching**

- 10.2 Institutional mechanisms for rewarding good teaching with tangible outcomes include substantiation (conversion from “fixed term” to long term employment), advancement (*i.e.* promotion) and biennial merit pay increases. Assessment arrangements for the above are codified, unified and recorded on a standard form which summarises an individual’s performance in regard to Teaching, Research and Service. This standard evaluation, which includes a numerical assessment supplemented with descriptive marks, has given more prominence to teaching performance.
- 10.3 The standardised assessment process has resulted in teaching being and, importantly, being seen as an important element of the decision processes for substantiation and advancement. Teaching is given equal weight to research in the biennial performance-based merit pay increase process for teaching staff and has an independent effect on the level of award.

### **Exemplary Teaching Awards**

- 10.4 Each Faculty gives several annual Exemplary Teaching Awards (ETA) based on student evaluations and peer observation. Departmental awards also exist in some disciplines. At least one ETA winner from each Faculty is nominated for the Vice-Chancellor’s Exemplary Teaching Award. An award for General Education is made as a separate category, resulting in 8-10 Vice-Chancellor’s Awards each year. This recognition has been in place since 1998, with over 100 teachers being recognised as exemplary teachers through the Departmental, Faculty and Vice-Chancellor’s Awards systems.
- 10.5 Discussions with recent award-holders highlighted the benefits the awards bring to the individuals and to their Departments in the sharing of experience and good practice with colleagues. The Panel is impressed with this system for recognising and utilising exemplary teaching, and for its potential to raise awareness of good teaching across the University. A set of principles for excellent teaching has been derived from the experienced Exemplary Teaching Award holders and is used by CLEAR in its professional development courses for new teachers. Similarly, the good practices of Teaching Assistants (TAs) have been encapsulated and used in shaping the development courses for new TAs.
- 10.6 The Panel considers that such a rich and diverse pool of exemplary teachers could be utilised more intensely to promote the spread of recognised good practice across the institution. The Panel accepts that some elements of good practice are discipline-specific, but invites the University to consider how the expertise available can be harnessed and used to greater institutional benefit. For example, consideration

could be given to Exemplary Teaching Award holders working more closely with CLEAR, possibly as agents of change within and across Faculties. This would extend the publication work already undertaken by CLEAR to a strategic change and action orientation.

### **Commendation 8**

**The QAC commends CUHK for its clear commitment to recognising and rewarding good teaching through a variety of channels including the promotion threshold related to teaching, the transparency of the performance assessment system for merit increases and the systems of exemplary teaching awards.**

### **Affirmation 7**

**The QAC affirms the use of Exemplary Teacher Award winners to disseminate good practice within their Departments and invites CUHK to consider how they could also be used for systematic dissemination of non-discipline-specific good practice across the institution.**

### **Appraisal and Staff development**

- 10.7 CUHK's criteria for promotion are well defined, with clear hurdles for teaching (as well as research and service). There is good evidence of implementation of the staff appraisal system, and examples of good practices to support new staff, *e.g.* through peer observation of teaching by Departmental Chairs and the provision of mentoring support. The Panel encourages the formalisation of such exemplary practices across the University. New junior teachers are further supported by a mandatory professional development course (PDC) entitled *Becoming an Excellent Teacher*. PDCs are one of a range of offerings and services provided by the Centre for Learning Enhancement And Research (CLEAR), to whom staff with less than satisfactory student evaluations are referred as one outcome of the annual appraisal. Other staff seek CLEAR's help to improve their teaching ability on a voluntary basis. It is less apparent that the staff appraisal process is used to identify training opportunities as part of the continuing professional development of experienced teachers. Since CLEAR is a good resource to provide such opportunities, the Panel invites CUHK to consider how useful educational development for experienced staff can be identified and effected. Two new services offered by CLEAR can help in this regard: the Teaching Consultation Service (to support teachers' continuous improvement in teaching) and the Innovative Learning Design Service (to assist in the re-design of aspects of the student learning experience, either in individual courses or as a strategy to be used in a number of courses).
- 10.8 Under the Integrated Framework, all Pg students who teach must receive appropriate training. This is offered by CLEAR in conjunction with Departments, with each PDC tailored for the type of teaching these Teaching Assistants will perform: this customisation is good practice.

### **Commendation 9**

**The QAC commends CUHK for its support of teaching staff, and for the compulsory staff development courses for new junior staff and Teaching Assistants.**

## **Course and Teaching Evaluation**

- 10.9 CUHK places heavy reliance on student feedback to measure teaching and teacher quality. Feedback is obtained primarily through the Course and Teaching Evaluation (CTE) of each course, the programme-level Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ) and various Graduate Surveys. Other sources of feedback, *e.g.* through focus groups and on-line forums, are also used in some courses.
- 10.10 Generally, courses are the sole responsibility of a single teacher, although occasionally two may be involved in delivery. Teaching Assistants (TAs) assist with some courses but students are not, routinely, asked to evaluate TA performance. Part-time teachers are contracted to teach on certain TPg programmes. CUHK acknowledges that formal monitoring and support for part-time teaching staff may need to be strengthened in some programmes.
- 10.11 A SCTL Working Group in 2004 affirmed the principle that CTE is best devolved to the Faculties, to reflect disciplinary differences. This has contributed to variations in practice in administering the questionnaire and in relaying the results to students: such variations appear to have no disciplinary basis. The Panel heard of one case in which a single administration of the CTE was used to elicit student evaluation of 17 teachers associated with a particular course. While this is probably an isolated case, it illustrates how lack of uniformity can lead to poor practice in administering student evaluations. There is a vast literature demonstrating good practice in obtaining student feedback, covering issues such as when to administer questionnaires (if used), how to avoid questionnaire fatigue, how to elicit feedback during a course so that changes can be made mid-course if deemed necessary, and how to seek feedback on multiple teachers on a course.
- 10.12 Critical student reflection can be encouraged by informing students how their feedback has been used. One way to convey this information is to include an appropriate section in course outlines, or in other information made available to students, indicating how a course has been changed in light of recent student feedback (and, possibly, indicating why certain student suggestions have not been adopted – paragraph 3.8 refers).
- 10.13 While the SCTL Working Group considered that the CTE should share common constructs, the CTE questionnaire in practice shares only two common summary questions. The Panel considers there is significant benefit to be gained by eliciting students' views on a range of institution-wide elements of teaching, in addition to discipline, Departmental or Faculty-specific aspects. For example, questions on the clarity of objectives, the usefulness of in-course assessment and the timeliness and usefulness of feedback, the overall quality of teaching, the availability of library and IT resources in support of a particular course *etc.*, all could provide institutional data on all courses for analysis by discipline, level of study, type of course (majors, minors, electives, language and GE) or any other dimension of interest.

### **Recommendation 9**

**The QAC recommends that CUHK considers (a) revising Course and Teaching Evaluation (CTE) to elicit student feedback on a broader range of institution-wide elements of teaching and (b) adopting University-wide procedures, informed by best practice, for administering the CTE.**

## **Student Engagement Questionnaire**

- 10.14 The Student Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ) is used for surveys of Ug programmes. Generally, it is administered annually to Year 1 and Year 3 students on about half of all programmes to gauge students' perception of their own development and of the quality of components of their programme, and their teaching and learning environment. SEQ aggregate data indicates that students perceive that the quality of the T&L environment has risen between 2005 and 2007: the data is viewed by CUHK as an indicator of student satisfaction with the overall teaching quality. Feedback is provided to Departments in the form of a graphic profile and student comments. An educational professional from CLEAR then meets with Departments' members to discuss the feedback. The outcome is an action plan. This feedback and production of an action plan is good practice.
- 10.15 There is no equivalent survey for TPg programmes, presumably because diagnostic aspects of the Ug SEQ depend on students' perception as it changes with time (*i.e.* over the three year period of their programme), which would not necessarily be applicable to one year programmes.

## **Graduate Surveys**

- 10.16 A Graduate Capabilities Questionnaire (GCQ) has recently been introduced with the intention that, by 2012, it will be possible to commence longitudinal tracking of perceptions of capability development. Ultimately perceptions will be monitored in Years 1 and 3 via the SEQ; and after six months and five years post-graduation via the GCQ. This development is to be encouraged, as is the growing use of outcomes-based initiatives and Programme Reviews to develop outcomes-based graduate questionnaires specific to the discipline or relevant profession (administered, where possible, in conjunction with the GCQ). An exit survey was introduced for TPg programmes in 2006, with the results being forwarded to the relevant Faculty Dean or unit Head for action as deemed appropriate.

## **11. STUDENT PARTICIPATION**

- 11.1 Students provide feedback on their courses and programmes in a variety of ways as described in Section 10 above (paragraph 5.13 also refers). Senior students organise Departmental orientation for new students at the programme level (paragraph 7.8). Moreover students are highly active within their Colleges and participate actively in the management of College activities (Section 12).
- 11.2 There is undergraduate student representation on most programme, Departmental, Faculty, College and University committees, except the Council.
- 11.3 Active engagement of students on committees, particularly those at University level, can be facilitated through a formal and structured induction process for new student representatives. Committee business can also be structured to encourage active input. The Panel invites CUHK to consider these mechanisms.
- 11.4 Postgraduate student representation is less widespread than undergraduate representation. Although the Postgraduate Student Association has recently been re-activated, there appears to be no postgraduate representation at Graduate Division, Graduate School, Graduate Council or Senate levels. CUHK may wish to consider

increasing postgraduate student representation across the University.

## **12. GENERAL EDUCATION**

- 12.1 General Education (GE) is a University-wide requirement at undergraduate level (15 units out of 99). It comprises University GE (9-12 units) and College GE (4-6 units). At least one University GE course is taken in each of four areas (Our Own Heritage; Nature, Technology and the Environment; Society and Culture; Self and Humanities) from over 200 courses options. Additionally, at College level, students are required to attend their respective College Assemblies (which are non-credit bearing) and are able to participate in a wide range of informal activities. Postgraduate students are not required to undertake GE courses and have access to other learning opportunities and activities more tailored to their needs.
- 12.2 GE policy decisions rest with the Senate Committee on General Education (SGCE) and its Standing Committee. The SCGE is responsible for monitoring the GE programme and ensuring close co-ordination between the University and College GE programmes.
- 12.3 University GE courses are provided by over 40 teaching Departments from all Faculties. Policy decisions are implemented by the Office of University GE which, *inter alia*, co-ordinates the various teaching Departments in the delivery of courses. College GE programmes are administered by the College GE Offices under the leadership of the respective Dean of College GE.
- 12.4 GE is a key component in undergraduates achieving the University's desired graduate attributes and a key differentiator of the CUHK experience and approach to education. While University GE is demonstrably directed to achieving University graduate attributes, College GE is less obviously so. The Panel observed variations in the extent to which College GE courses articulate learning outcomes, align them with the University's graduate attributes and assess them rigorously. Student perception of the importance of GE in developing a whole person perspective is variable.

### **University GE**

- 12.5 The quality assurance of University GE courses is sound and robust. New courses are approved through the Department/Faculty Boards, which ensure that course designs are in line with the GE objectives and meet the expected academic standards. Final approval rests with the SCGE, which undertakes a further scrutiny before approval. University GE courses are reviewed every three years by the SCGE Standing Committee based on archived course materials. The seriousness of the review is evidenced by the number of courses required either to undergo revision or to be withdrawn. An examination panel, chaired by the Director of University GE, monitors course assessment of all University GE courses in accordance with University guidelines.
- 12.6 The University has recognised the opportunity of the four year normative curriculum to expand University GE and is actively planning to do so. As part of the planning, the Panel invites CUHK to review the position where some major courses, or close derivatives, are also offered as GE courses. This is suggested primarily for two reasons. The first is that students who are not following the major programme may perceive the related GE course to be too academically demanding and thus be dissuaded from taking the GE course. This would be disappointing, as in many cases a course

modified to truly reflect the objectives of GE could be attractive to students. The second reason is perceived fairness: students may consider they are unlikely to perform as well as their counterparts who are taking the equivalent major course, which could adversely affect their GPA and, possibly, their degree classification.

- 12.7 In view of the importance of University GE and its direct association with Departments, the Panel affirms CUHK's plans to fully incorporate University GE into the Integrated Framework. (Affirmation 1 refers).

### **College GE**

- 12.8 Quality assurance of College GE relies on internal mechanisms within each College and is less obviously robust. The Panel considers that QA mechanisms for College GE should be more explicit and that processes should assure at least minimum standards of provision across the University. For example, there is variability in terms of load on students, type and rigour of assessment, engagement of Faculty in provision, and evaluation of effectiveness. It will be particularly important to agree University-wide QA processes for College GE before the planned introduction of the five new Colleges.
- 12.9 CUHK recognises these concerns and is planning enhancements to incorporate more external inputs and to put in place more explicit QA procedures for College GE. An external review of both University GE and College GE is planned for late 2008, and will be informed by relevant sections of this QAC Audit Report..

## **13. LANGUAGE POLICY AND ENHANCEMENT**

- 13.1 A founding principle of CUHK is its policy of bilingualism that officially recognises English and Chinese (Cantonese and Putonghua) as official languages of choice for teaching and learning. Bilingualism is one of CUHK's stated graduate attributes for first degree graduates – paragraph 13.5 below also refers. The Panel considers this to be a most laudable intention in terms of serving the community and being relevant to the modern world. It is also another key differentiator of the CUHK experience in which Chinese is accorded an official position in the curriculum. There is a compulsory non-credit-bearing introductory language course (Putonghua, Cantonese and English) for all undergraduate students; and there are other, compulsory but credit-bearing, Chinese and English language courses which are supplemented by elective language courses. Significant resources are allocated at undergraduate level to support this key component of the curriculum, which is directed towards developing language skills.
- 13.2 Each programme makes its own collective decision on the language to be used in any course, having regard to the subject and the learning environment. Programmes that admit non-local students must offer sufficient courses in a suitable language for these students to satisfy programme requirements. The medium of instruction (for lectures) must be made known before course selection. Although the Panel met only a small proportion of the non-local student population, it formed the impression that the above policy is adhered to: students are clear about the language of instruction and there appears to be sufficient choice by language within each programme.

## **Commendation 10**

**The QAC commends CUHK for its commitment to its bilingual policy and for the application of resources devoted to achieving desired language attributes at undergraduate level.**

- 13.3 All formal language programmes have a quality assurance mechanism which makes use of pre-tests, post-tests and student evaluations. As one of several enhancements in regard to language provision, CUHK plans to extend the Integrated Framework to include language courses as part of a more systematic QA framework involving more external input and peer review. The Panel fully supports this planned extension of the Integrated Framework in view of the importance and significance of CUHK's language policy; and encourages the University to develop an action plan to ensure that the other areas of improvement outlined in its Institutional Submission are addressed and implemented in a timely manner.
- 13.4 Undergraduates must satisfy programme/Faculty language requirements for graduation, defined in terms of passes in a specified number of units in specified languages. The University does not consider it necessary to introduce language exit tests in view of the language admission and graduation requirements, but plans to review this issue when the normative four-year curriculum is fully implemented. The Panel endorses this review, which should address how CUHK measures learning outcomes actually achieved in both Chinese and English. This need not necessarily be through standard exit tests (although those should not be discounted), but CUHK needs to measure and demonstrate the "value-added" its bilingual policy delivers. Such measures are already in place in some areas and could be mapped across provision more systematically to demonstrate gains in competence. The employers who met the Panel gave mixed impressions of the English and Putonghua abilities of CUHK's graduates, who nevertheless perform well relative to other Hong Kong graduates in the government's employers' survey (which includes English and Chinese proficiency) and the UGC-sponsored Common English Proficiency Assessment Scheme (CEPAS). Some form of measurement of proficiency on exit might therefore identify further areas for improvement.
- 13.5 The language requirements of postgraduate degrees vary to fit the objectives of each programme, which are either research or professionally oriented. During the audit visit the Panel encountered uncertainty about whether bilingual proficiency is a desired (and achieved) attribute of all postgraduate programmes for all students. However, there was general agreement among the employers who met the Panel that bilingual competence is equally important at postgraduate level. Recommendation 1 refers.

## **14. RESEARCH DEGREES**

- 14.1 Research degrees at CUHK are overseen by the Graduate Council, chaired by the Dean of the Graduate School. Curricula are approved by the Graduate Panels of the Graduate Divisions, and by the relevant Departmental and Faculty Boards. Departments are resourced for research postgraduate (RPg) student supervision and are required to provide facilities for research students.
- 14.2 The Institutional Submission outlines CUHK's procedures and criteria for appointing supervisors and external examiners, and for the on-going monitoring of RPg student progress.

- 14.3 The Panel, through its observations and discussions, identified several good examples of research student training and education. Taught courses have been a compulsory part of RPg programmes since 1995, with 6 to 12 units of taught courses being required for all MPhil and most PhD programmes, to provide basic training in the research area. In addition, research methodology and other modules, for example on research ethics and intellectual property, are embodied within the *Improving Postgraduate Learning Programme* (IPL), a series of complementary courses organised by the Graduate School and co-ordinated by CLEAR. The IPL prepares students for research studies, imparts research skills not specific to a particular discipline, and generally enriches the research student learning experience. Attendance is mandatory for courses on intellectual property (and on safety for those undertaking laboratory work). The IPL courses are well-received by postgraduate students, with 47 modules attracting 2,303 student participations in 2006/07.
- 14.4 The research students seen by the Panel confirmed having a research plan and being clear on their research goals and timetable for completion. This endorses CUHK's stated procedures whereby each student and supervisor discuss, agree on and record a student's expected milestones at the beginning of each academic year, with progress being reviewed against the planned milestones, and recorded at the end of the year. These records are forwarded to the Graduate School, with cases of unsatisfactory performance being put to the Graduate Council for attention and follow-up. This is good practice and enables the University to monitor research student progress and completion rates by Department and Faculty.
- 14.5 The Graduate School monitors completion and attrition rates for RPg students annually, with possible consequences for future allocations of RPg places to Graduate Divisions. However, it is not clear whether this data is used systematically as management information to identify areas for potential improvement, either at Graduate School, Graduate Division, Faculty or University level. For example, the part-time PhD attrition rates are relatively high, with correspondingly relatively low completion rates for this group of students. The Panel acknowledges that these rates could mask underlying contributing factors such as relatively low part-time student numbers overall. However, the Panel saw little evidence of mechanisms for routinely considering time series of data, with follow-up and remedy of any potential areas of concern as in the part-time PhD example. Similarly, the Panel saw no evidence that data on completions, graduate destinations or any other indicator of RPg performance is systematically used to benchmark against other research intensive universities. The Panel suggests that CUHK would benefit from the use of such external comparisons, both to demonstrate the quality of its RPg graduate outcomes and to identify areas of potential improvement.
- 14.6 CUHK's strong support for its research students to attend conferences or overseas academic activities is commendable. Over HKD2.5 million was allocated to 400 research students (out of 480 applications) in 2006/07. Overseas academic grants are well received by students, and CUHK continues to seek additional funds. A 'Global Scholarship Programme' has been launched in the current academic year to support RPg research in selected overseas partner universities for up to several months. This reflects CUHK's ethos of both increasing the experiential nature of a CUHK education and striving for excellence in research, through research student opportunities.

## **Commendation 11**

**The QAC commends CUHK for its overall approach to providing and assuring a quality experience for its research students.**

### **Enhancements**

- 14.7 CUHK's Institutional Submission identifies three policy enhancements for research students. One is an addition to the annual progression form to allow students to record their views and concerns, if any; this had been implemented by the time of the Audit Visit. The Panel suggests that in monitoring the effectiveness of this enhancement CUHK considers the purpose of such feedback, the route for processing the forms (to ensure that students do not feel inhibited in expressing their views), and how the feedback is used so that any matters raised are considered in an objective and meaningful way.

### **Recommendation 10**

**In affirming CUHK's adaptation of the annual progression form to allow research students to record any views and concerns about supervision, resources or other relevant matters, the QAC recommends that University-level processes are put in place to monitor and address any research student concerns.**

### **Code of Practice**

- 14.8 Notwithstanding the positive comments above, the Panel is firmly of the view that the quality of the research student experience will be enhanced by developing and codifying University-wide policies for the supervision and management of research students. Significant variations in practices currently exist among Faculties and Departments. *A Code of Practice for Research Student Education, Training and Supervision* (or similar title) will, in the Panel's view, assist not only research students but also supervisors, Heads of Graduate Division, the Graduate School and Graduate Council, and the University in further assuring the quality and standards of research degrees at CUHK. There are many examples of recognised international best practice in this area covering, *inter alia*, areas such as the roles, responsibilities and obligations of research students and supervisors; the planning/management of a research programme; the basic facilities that Departments should provide their research students to support their studies; and details of the support mechanisms, both academic and non-academic, available to research students..

### **Recommendation 11**

**The QAC recommends that CUHK draws on international best practice to codify its policies and procedures in regard to research student training, supervision and management, and mandates their implementation across the University.**

## **15. CONCLUSION AND ACTION PLAN**

- 15.1 Arising from its self-review, CUHK has identified numerous areas for improvement and included these at appropriate junctures in its Institutional Submission. In the Panel's

view, this demonstrates achievement of one of the key objectives of QAC quality audits: critical self-reflection leading, ultimately, to enhancement of the quality of student learning. This achievement was enabled by CUHK's willingness to be self-evaluative and to engage in dialogue with the Panel.

- 15.2 The key to success of the audit process will be CUHK's willingness to take forward the outcomes of its self-review in tandem with the audit findings. A good starting point is the development of the CUHK Action Plan, which is part of the Institutional Submission. The Action Plan encapsulates the areas for improvement identified by the self-review and proposes actions for consolidating or strengthening CUHK's mechanisms for assuring the quality of student learning. The Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning, working with the appointed Deans and the Associate Deans, will play a crucial role in ensuring successful and timely implementation of the Action Plan and of the Audit Report outcomes.

#### **Affirmation 8**

**The QAC affirms CUHK's intent to implement the Action Plan that stemmed from its self-review as a means of continuing to assure and enhance the quality of student learning.**

- 15.3 In conclusion, the Panel considers that CUHK has sound and robust quality assurance mechanisms that ensure the quality of student learning throughout the University and which promote, recognise and reward excellent teaching. CUHK has a strong commitment to enhancing further the quality of the student learning experience by continual self-reflection and self-review that will identify further areas for improvement. The identification of clear lines of accountability and responsibility, including those for regular monitoring of teaching and learning activities at the course and programme levels necessarily supported by improved data and other management information, will help ensure the continued high quality of student learning.

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

[Extracted from the Institutional Submission]

### **History**

The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) is a self-governing institution incorporated by Ordinance in 1963 by amalgamating three original Colleges: New Asia, Chung Chi and United (founded in 1949, 1951 and 1956, respectively). With the CUHK Ordinance 1976, the structure became more unitary. Shaw College was added in 1986. Five new and smaller Colleges, approved in 2006 and 2007, will become operational before 2012.

### **Mission, vision and strategy**

CUHK is a comprehensive research University and takes pride in its bilingual tradition and a collegiate structure unique in Hong Kong. The University's Mission and Vision statements, the more specific Ten-Year Vision Statement (2003) and the Strategic Plan (2006) set the agenda for a concerted effort for excellence as a leading University in China and the region. The Strategic Plan covers seven main areas: advancement of scholarship; quality of education; enrichment of student experience; preparation for a four-year curriculum; and, in support of these, development of physical infrastructure; development of financial resources; administrative measures. The expected graduate attributes drive all teaching and learning goals and actions. The University's broad plans are guided by the role statement agreed with the UGC in 2004.

### **Role Statement**

CUHK:

- (a) offers a range of programmes leading to the award of first degrees and postgraduate qualifications in subject areas including Arts, Science, Social Sciences and Business Administration;
- (b) incorporates professional schools such as Medicine, Architecture, Engineering and Education;
- (c) pursues the delivery of teaching at an internationally competitive level in all the taught programmes that it offers;
- (d) offers research postgraduate programmes for a significant number of students in selected subject areas;
- (e) aims at being internationally competitive in its areas of research strength;
- (f) contributes to the development of Hong Kong, China as a whole, and the region through quality education, research, engagement and service, in all the disciplines it offers;
- (g) pursues actively deep collaboration in its areas of strength with other higher education institutions in Hong Kong or the region or more widely so as to enhance the Hong Kong higher education system;
- (h) encourages academic staff to be engaged in public service, consultancy and collaborative

work with the private sector in areas where they have special expertise, as part of the institution's general collaboration with government, business and industry; and

- (i) manages in the most effective and efficient way the public and private resources bestowed upon the institution, employing collaboration whenever it is of value.

### **Academic structure and policy**

CUHK is a growing University offering a wide range of full-time and part-time programmes which lead to bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, and doctorates.

There are seven Faculties (Arts, Business Administration, Education, Engineering, Medicine, Science, and Social Science), a School of Law<sup>3</sup>, and 62 Departments offering 54 major programmes and 62 minor programmes for full-time undergraduate students, and two part-time undergraduate programmes for part-time students.

Postgraduate programmes including 26 MPhil-PhD programmes, 41 doctoral programmes, 156 master's programmes, and 28 postgraduate diploma programmes are offered by the Graduate School through its 62 graduate divisions.

The Senate has control over instruction and research. The faculties advise the Senate through the Faculty boards on the programmes of study recommended by the departments, who are responsible for subject-orientated teaching. The Colleges, in turn, are responsible for student-orientated teaching and the provision of residential accommodation. All teaching staff and full-time undergraduate students are assigned to different constituent Colleges.

### **Student and Staff Numbers**

As at 31 December 2007, 17642 full-time equivalent students were enrolled at CUHK, of whom 13320 were following UGC-funded programmes; and there were 1387 teaching staff and 1054 research staff.

### **Revenue and Estate**

Consolidated income for the year to 30 June 2007 totalled HK\$5435 million of which 54.8% came from government subvention and 19.8% from tuition, programme and other fees.

The main campus of 134 hectares is situated in Shatin.

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<sup>3</sup> Faculty of Law from 1 August 2008

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

The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) welcomes this Audit Report from the QAC. This report of an independent Panel confirms that CUHK is providing a high-quality student learning experience that reflects its mission and role, underpinned by good quality assurance systems; the Panel report also highlights CUHK's overall commitment to assuring and enhancing the quality of its taught programmes.

The University is particularly pleased with Commendations 1 to 4 on CUHK's QA mechanism for formal studies as embodied in the development and implementation of the *Integrated Framework for Curriculum Development and Review* ('Integrated Framework'). This framework also guides educational development and professional development activities, the implementation of which has also been commended in the Report, including the recognition, reward and support for good teaching at individual and programme levels (Commendations 3, 8 & 9). The variety and extent of experiential learning opportunities is recognized (Commendation 7), as is the level of academic support and pastoral care provided (Commendation 6). CUHK is pleased to see endorsement of its bilingual policy (Commendation 10). Employers find CUHK graduates not only knowledgeable in their disciplinary areas, but also well-trained in generic skills, and the IT Proficiency graduation requirement is one means to achieve this; the University is pleased to see this recognized (Commendation 5). As a research-intensive university, CUHK is gratified with the commendation of having a sound system for ensuring the quality of our research postgraduate programmes (Commendation 11).

CUHK believes that quality enhancement is a continuous process, and the opportunity to conduct an institutional self-review some 6-9 months before the audit visit, in accordance with the audit process as specified in the Audit Manual and culminating in the Institutional Submission to the QAC, provided the opportunity to identify areas or issues that have to be addressed in the light of changing circumstances. The University is pleased that the Panel, through the affirmations, recognizes the improvement measures already in train. At the heart of the continuous process of improvement is the Action Plan (Affirmation 8), and the Panel has also commented on other measures already in progress, including the incorporation of all undergraduate curriculum components into the Integrated Framework, the OBA roadmaps and specifications of outcomes for all programmes (Affirmations 1 & 2), internal organizational issues such as the roles of Associate Deans (Education) in T&L, of the Independent Learning Centre and of winners of the Vice-Chancellor's Exemplary Teaching Award (Affirmations 3, 5 & 7), use of technology and assessment (Affirmations 4 & 6).

The University is grateful for the identification of a number of areas for future attention, in most cases confirming the University's own assessments and plans. These will be addressed and a Progress Report will be submitted in March 2010. These recommendations will enable the University to focus effort in targeted areas and ensure that many of the items noted in the Action Plan (Affirmation 8) will have high priority. The recommendations cover natural extensions to the Integrated Framework (Recommendations 2 & 4), and enhancements of assessment (Recommendation 8) and mechanisms for course evaluation (Recommendation 9), in many cases for greater uniformity of practice. The University echoes the recommendations to streamline and better coordinate areas where there has been substantial work in recent years – e-Learning (Recommendation 6) and student support (Recommendation 7). The approaching 3+3+4 system naturally prompts further strengthening of external input to its programme advisory bodies (Recommendation 5). At the postgraduate level, in addition to articulating broader graduate attributes clearly (Recommendation 1), a number of procedural

enhancements will also be made, clarifying course credits that may straddle undergraduate and postgraduate offerings (Recommendation 3), and formalizing and strengthening some processes for research postgraduates (Recommendations 10 & 11). Overall, these recommendations will add to the rigour of quality processes in ways that will directly enhance student learning experience.

In sum, the University is grateful to the Audit Panel for its advice, and proud to have been the first UGC-funded institution to be audited by the QAC under this system. This report will reinforce the continuous enhancement of educational quality and environment for all CUHK students, and the University is pleased to share this QAC Audit Report and this response with all stakeholders including prospective students.

July 2008

## 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.
CLEAR	The Centre for Learning Enhancement And Research (of CUHK)
CTE	Course and Teaching Evaluation
CUHK	The Chinese University of Hong Kong
ETA	Exemplary Teaching Awards
fte	Full-time equivalent
GCQ	Graduate Capabilities Questionnaire
GE	General Education
GPA	Grade point average
Integrated Framework	<i>Integrated Framework for Curriculum Development and Review (of CUHK)</i>
ILC	Independent Learning Centre (of CUHK)
IPL	<i>Improving Postgraduate Learning</i> programme (of CUHK)
IT	Information Technology
ITSC	Information Technology Services Centre (of CUHK)
MPhil	The Degree of Master of Philosophy or a programme leading to that degree
Normative curriculum	The length of the undergraduate curriculum in UGC-funded institutions from 2012 will normally be four years

OBA	Outcomes-based approach (to student learning)
PDC	Professional development course
Pg	Postgraduate
PhD	The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy or a programme leading to that degree
QA	Quality Assurance
QAC	Quality Assurance Council (of the UGC)
RAC	Resource Allocation Committee (of CUHK)
RPg	Research postgraduate
SAPC	Senate Academic Planning Committee (of CUHK)
SCTL	Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning (of CUHK)
SEQ	Student Engagement Questionnaire
T&L	Teaching and learning
TAs	Teaching Assistants
TDG	Teaching Development Grants
TPg	Taught postgraduate
Ug	Undergraduate
UGC	University Grants Committee

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

### Audit Panel

The CUHK Audit Panel comprised the following :

Professor Andrew Lister (Panel Chair)

Consultant and Emeritus Professor, University of Queensland, Australia

Dr Anissa Chan

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

Professor T S Chan

Associate Vice-President (Administration and Planning), Lingnan University and Chairman of the Joint Quality Review Committee, Hong Kong

Professor Paul Lam

Acting Vice-President for Undergraduate Education, City University of Hong Kong

Dr Malcolm McVicar

Vice-Chancellor, University of Central Lancashire, United Kingdom

Professor Graham Webb

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Quality), Monash University, Australia

### 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 April 2008)

#### Chairman

Mr Philip CHEN Nan-lok, SBS, JP      Chairman, John Swire & Sons (China) Limited, HK

#### Members

Professor Richard HO Man-wui, JP      Honorary Professor, Department of Chinese Language and Literature of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, HK

Sir Colin LUCAS

The Warden, Rhodes House, UK

Sir Howard NEWBY

Vice-Chancellor, University of Liverpool, United Kingdom (from 1 September 2008)

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

**Secretary**

Mrs Dorothy MA

Deputy Secretary-General (1), UGC