

# THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

## PROGRESS REPORT ON QUALITY ASSURANCE COUNCIL SECOND AUDIT CYCLE

March 2017

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) is grateful to the Quality Assurance Council (QAC) for conducting the second round quality assurance (QA) audit. The QAC Audit has provided a good opportunity for the University to reflect on the quality of its teaching and learning (T&L) activities and initiatives on all levels, and identified areas that call for further enhancements.
- 1.2 In response to the outcomes of the quality audit conducted in March 2015, the University has drawn up an Action Plan to address the recommendations of the Audit Report published in October 2015, for submission to the QAC in January 2016. While most of the items are to be dealt with by existing committees/ units as described in detail in the Action Plan attached, new task forces have been established under the auspices of the University's Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning (SCTL) to specifically work on issues identified in the Audit Report, such as the University-wide assessment policy, development of eLearning initiatives, review of the impact of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) on programmes offered by the University, and academic QA of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen (CUHK(SZ)). The SCTL has taken the lead and coordinated among respective committees/ units/ task forces to regularly monitor the progress of the action items. With the concerted efforts of the respective committees/ units/ task forces, the University is making good progress on the implementation and monitoring of all the action items for further enhancement of the educational quality and environment for its students.
- 1.3 An updated version of the Action Plan summarizing the latest progress of the various action items is in the Annex. While many action items are still ongoing, plans for further improvement have been formulated in some areas. The detailed development and progress of the major issues pertaining to HKQF, assessment, eLearning and CUHK(SZ) as identified in the Audit Report and specifically dealt with by the University by establishing new task forces are highlighted in this report in the same order of appearance as that in the Audit Report.

### 2. The HKQF as a Significant External Reference Point

- 2.1 The QAC Audit Panel encouraged the University "to ensure that staff involved in programme design and review are aware of the relationship between the framework and CUHK's graduate attributes", and recommended that the University "review its existing elite programmes in terms of the level and volume of work required, using the HKQF as the external reference point" (paragraph 2.6 of *Report of a Quality Audit of The Chinese University of Hong Kong 2015*).

- 2.2 As an external reference to the HKQF, the University has taken into account in its programme design the Generic Level Descriptors (GLDs) (Levels 5, 6 and 7) of the HKQF, which are embedded in the University-wide graduate attributes of undergraduate (Ug), master and PhD levels. University policies are also in place on the curriculum structure for Ug and postgraduate (Pg) levels, and for course sharing between Ugs and Pgs that stipulate respectively the volume of work (e.g. total course load, major requirement units), and the level of work for Ug and Pg programmes. All programmes, including the enrichment/ elite ones, are required to comply with these University policies.
- 2.3 In light of the QAC's recommendations, a Task Force on Review of External Referencing to HKQF was established under the SCTL to review the impact of HKQF on the requirements of all programmes, including the enrichment/ elite programmes, in relation to both the level and volume of work, and to come up with proposals.
- 2.4 A review of the curriculum structures of existing enrichment/ elite programmes was conducted by the Task Force with reference to HKQF and the guidelines from the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ), as well as the graduate attributes of the University. Like all other Ug programmes/ streams offered by the University, the Enrichment Stream of the Chemistry Programme under the Faculty of Science and the Engineering Leadership, Innovation, Technology and Entrepreneurship Stream (ELITE Stream) under the Faculty of Engineering for its nine major programmes are in compliance with the University's curriculum structure. The study schemes of these enrichment/ elite streams were also thoroughly reviewed and refined to better reflect the levels of works of these streams and to ensure that students have the option to graduate without taking Pg courses.
- 2.5 The opportunity was also taken by the Task Force to review and revise the University's policy "Course Sharing between Undergraduates and Postgraduates and Guidelines for Assignment of Level of Course Code" with regard to the current requirement of a Stream or other variants regarding Ug students taking Pg courses, such that Ug students of a Stream or other variants who cannot fulfill the Pg course requirements can still be able to graduate in his/ her own Major Programme without the Stream.
- 2.6 To enhance staff awareness of the relationship between HKQF and CUHK's graduate attributes, a mapping of CUHK's graduate attributes with reference to the GLDs of HKQF for Ug and Pg respectively was conducted by the Centre for Learning Enhancement And Research (CLEAR) and the Graduate School (GS).
- 2.7 Based on these findings, a "Policy on External Referencing to Hong Kong Qualifications Framework", which comprises an overall framework for external referencing to the HKQF at CUHK and constitutes the mapping of the University-wide graduate attributes with reference to the GLDs of the HKQF Levels 5-7, has been developed by the Task Force, endorsed by the SCTL in November 2016 and approved by the Senate in December 2016. As required by the policy, the learning outcomes of all programmes have to be designed to support the development of graduate attributes, and make reference to the GLDs of HKQF. The policy is at [Appendix 1](#).

- 2.8 Plans for further improvement: The use of external reference points and benchmarking, including HKQF, in setting academic standards and assessing the achievements of students, is included as one of the focus areas of the new cycle of programme reviews commenced in 2016.

### 3. Academic Assessment

- 3.1 The QAC Audit Panel recommended that the University should pay attention to the need to review and revise its existing Assessment Policy, which was approved by the Senate at its Fourth Meeting (2009-10), and to “develop clear University-wide direction on a number of significant assessment issues” (paragraph (b) of Executive Summary, *Report of a Quality Audit of The Chinese University of Hong Kong 2015*). The Panel also recommended the implementation of criterion-referencing of marks, a clear policy that rescinds grade distribution guidelines with reference to the standards of the HKQF, significant policy and cultural change to embrace and implement outcomes-based assessment, as well as a clear guidance to academic staff on a number of assessment issues, including but not limited to the marking of group work, amount of assessment in relation to the volume of learning, and the level of the course as defined by HKQF (paragraphs 2.15 - 2.19 of *Report of a Quality Audit of The Chinese University of Hong Kong 2015*).

- 3.2 In light of these comments given by the QAC, and the recent developments in the higher education sector, including the 3+3+4 new academic structure, which have called for debates on the implications of the introduction of outcomes-based approach (OBA) for criterion-referenced *vis-à-vis* norm-referenced assessments, a Task Force was established under the SCTL to review the University’s Assessment Policy, as well as the existing assessment practices including grade distribution and honours classification.

- 3.3 Having reviewed a number of issues relating to the University’s existing Assessment Policy and practices, the Task Force recommended a number of revisions to the Assessment Policy. In order to enhance teachers’ ownership of the revised policy, several rounds of consultations have been conducted. The first draft of the revised Assessment Policy was first discussed and endorsed by the SCTL at its Second Meeting (2015-16) and also subsequently via Circular in June 2016, followed by deliberations by the Deans’ Committee in August 2016 and a formal consultation among Faculties in September 2016. The further revised version was then endorsed by the SCTL in November 2016 after thorough deliberations, and approved by the Senate in December 2016 for implementation with effect from 2017-18.

- 3.4 The revised Assessment Policy is at [Appendix 2](#).

- 3.5 The major changes to the Assessment Policy are summarized as follows:

(a) OBA versus grade distribution guidelines

In view of the QAC’s comments, the Task Force has reinforced the spirit of OBA in assessment, which emphasizes the alignment of content, learning activities and

assessment tasks with the desired learning outcomes as defined in the design of courses. As OBA is intrinsically linked with criterion-referenced assessment, grade descriptors should be clearly defined at course level as the basis driving the whole assessment flow, including the forms of assessment, expectations with respect to student achievement, scale of grading student performance, determination of results of assessment etc.

To ensure that assessment is conducted in a fair and transparent manner, grade descriptors should be clearly stated and included in the course outline available for students' information before their registration of courses.

In following the spirit of OBA and the implementation of criterion-referencing in assessment, a "Policy on External Referencing to Hong Kong Qualifications Framework" (Section 2 of this report and [Appendix 1](#)) has been implemented, which, together with the revised Assessment Policy, serve to provide a set of clear guidelines to all teachers regarding the assessment task.

(b) Formalization of the recommended code of practices as policies

The Task Force reviewed the statistics on implementation of the recommended code of practice in the current Assessment Policy at Ug and Pg levels, as well as for University Core Requirement (UCR) courses, and found evidence that almost all suggestions in the code of practice had become widely implemented in Faculties/ programmes. The Task Force recommended to formalize such practices as policies to be applied across the board, including:

- establishment of an assessment panel with clearly stated terms of reference for each programme;
- adoption of fair and effective assessment tools for evaluation of both concerted work and individual efforts in group projects;
- formulation of clearly defined guidelines for implementation of peer assessment; and
- setting of reasonable turnaround time in accordance with the nature and complexity of assignments.

(c) Student anonymity

The need for student anonymity in marking is reiterated. As a variety of assessment methods are being used in various disciplines, each programme is required to formulate its own policy on "blind marking and grading" that best fits the purposes of the different assessment approaches that the programme adopts, and such policy should be publicized on the respective Faculty's or programme's website and be brought to the attention of students, Visiting Committees (VComs) and Programme Review Panels.

(d) Distribution percentages for degree honours classification

The Task Force has also reviewed the mechanism for determining honours classifications on the basis of outcomes in terms of the levels of minimum major

GPA and minimum overall GPA for different classes of honours. There is a distribution guideline that is applicable broadly to faculty but not individual programme level. The mechanism also allows flexibility under which Faculty Boards can submit cases with valid academic grounds but deviating from the distribution percentages to the Undergraduate Examinations Board for consideration/ approval. Since the mechanism was formulated in 2012 following thorough study that included benchmarking with honour classification practices and results of sister institutions, and has been announced to existing students, the Task Force agreed that the existing guidelines on honours classification would be further examined when the statistics on the distribution of honours classification for the first cohort of graduates from the new curriculum is available.

- 3.6 Plans for further improvement: CLEAR will organize workshops to provide coaching for colleagues on the implementation of the revised Assessment Policy, including the drafting of grade descriptors. The progress of the implementation of the revised Assessment Policy is monitored by the new cycle of programme reviews commenced in 2016.

#### **4. Development and Implementation of eLearning**

- 4.1 The QAC Audit Panel recommended that CUHK “develop definitions, a framework and a pedagogical strategy for e-learning, combined with a clear timeframe for implementation, with appropriate monitoring of progress” (paragraph 3.7 of *Report of a Quality Audit of The Chinese University of Hong Kong 2015*).
- 4.2 To keep abreast of the growing trend of eLearning across higher education institutions worldwide, CUHK has built up its capacity since the last decade by strengthening the technological infrastructure for T&L and the learning environment. As put forth in the University’s Academic Development Proposals (ADP) for the 2016-2019 triennium, institutional advancement in eLearning is one of the milestones for development, and the construction of micro-module to support flipped-classroom pedagogy is widely promoted.
- 4.3 An eLearning Policy Task Force under SCTL was set up in November 2014 to work out a framework for assuring the quality of eLearning and technology-enhanced T&L activities so as to facilitate system-level advancement across the University. Moreover, a holistic eLearning Strategic and Action Plan was developed by a Steering Group established in May 2015 that was chaired by the Vice-Chancellor. The Framework for eLearning development includes six key areas, each with a set of enabling strategies. The six areas are: (i) degree course and programme, (ii) Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), (iii) pedagogy research, (iv) theme-based research, (v) infrastructure and teacher support, and (vi) policy and QA. An Action Plan with a clear timeline for implementation had been formulated in 2015-16 and implemented under the supervision of the Provost. The Plan was presented to UGC members visiting the University in September 2015 and received very positive comments.
- 4.4 Major initiatives in the Plan are in good progress. Three schemes of Micro-Module Courseware Development (MMCD) grants were set up in 2015-16 for three consecutive years to develop exemplary examples for micro-module production and

flipped-classroom implementation, to promote the use of eLearning and eLearning studies in foundation courses with large number of enrolment and multiple sessions, and to build capacity for pedagogy research on eLearning. A series of MOOCs have been offered via Coursera<sup>1</sup> and more courses will be launched via CNMOOC<sup>2</sup> starting from April 2017. A number of eLearning research projects have been designed, many of them have adopted an interdisciplinary approach and have engaged teachers from different faculties to work together with a view to ensuring validity and generalizability and enhancing impact. The Centre for eLearning Innovation and Technology (ELITE) was established in 2016 to provide support for eLearning projects. The Centre provides not only hardware but also pedagogical supports to teachers. A pilot scheme on eLearning Policy was devised and implemented in the fall of 2015, providing clear guidelines on course approval and evaluation as well as copyright considerations.

4.5 To further align and strengthen the University's efforts in the development and implementation of eLearning, a new Task Force on eLearning was set up in August 2016, continued to be chaired by the University's Vice-Chancellor, to take up the role of the previous eLearning Steering Group and eLearning Policy Task Force in spearheading the eLearning development across the board in the University, with wider representations from teachers, students and support units. The Task Force plays an important role in monitoring progress of various initiatives and can better ensure a holistic implementation of the University's eLearning developments. A review had been conducted by the Task Force on the progress of the Action Plan and identified several dimensions as follows for further improvement.

4.6 Plans for further improvement:

(a) The training programme is consolidated and experts from the Faculty of Education together with early adopters of eLearning in different faculties have been engaged to offer trainings together with CLEAR and other units. The series of training programmes consist of three parts: (1) faculty-based sessions focusing on disciplinary practices; (2) professional development courses focusing on pedagogies; and (3) workshops focusing on eLearning tools.

(b) Faculties are encouraged to use a more structured approach to consolidate the development of Micro-Module for Campus-Wide Use (MMCWU) with a view to achieving system-level advancement with high impact. Training programmes and the micro-module grant schemes have been adapted to align with this direction of development.

(c) As a result of the review conducted by the Task Force on the Pilot Scheme on eLearning Policy, the University's eLearning Policy has been drawn up to give a clear guidance and direction for the University-wide implementation of eLearning. It presents the University's vision and the proposed rubrics, i.e. the general course design and selection, as well as evaluation of online and blended courses, and sets

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.coursera.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cnmooc.org/home/index.mooc>

out the approval procedures and resources available to teachers and researchers. A set of criteria has also been worked out and included in the eLearning Policy for evaluation of eLearning courses. Regular evaluation will be conducted by Faculty Boards for reporting to the eLearning Task Force. The Policy was endorsed by the eLearning Task Force in February 2017, and approved by the Senate in March 2017. The eLearning Policy is at [Appendix 3](#).

- (d) To support long-term development, a comprehensive, empirical, evaluative study will be conducted by CLEAR to identify the feasibility, levels of acceptance and educational values of eLearning as implemented at CUHK so as to ascertain the effectiveness of our strategies.

## **5. Institutional Review on Academic Processes of CUHK(SZ)**

- 5.1 The QAC Audit Panel noted the “plethora of student and other surveys conducted in the first six months of operation at CUHK(SZ)” and encouraged CUHK “to assist CUHK(SZ) in systematising its approach to gathering and responding to feedback from students and other stakeholders, recognising that the institution is going through a rapid, focused establishment process” (paragraph 7.5 of *Report of a Quality Audit of The Chinese University of Hong Kong 2015*). Also as stated in SM2.02 of CUHK’s *Institutional Submission* for the second cycle QAC Audit, to ensure that programmes offered by CUHK(SZ) meet the appropriate academic standards, CUHK will conduct a review on academic processes in CUHK(SZ) and help CUHK(SZ) develop its QA system to ensure quality T&L.
- 5.2 In this connection, a Task Force on QA Support to CUHK(SZ) was formed in October 2015 under the SCTL to help CUHK(SZ) in planning for its institutional review on the academic processes and developing a QA system to ensure its quality T&L.
- 5.3 Details of the institutional review and the QA system at CUHK(SZ) was approved by the SCTL in May 2016.

### **(a) Institutional review of CUHK(SZ)**

A Review Panel consisting of six senior staff members of CUHK, including members from the relevant disciplines, the Graduate Council and those who are familiar with T&L quality was appointed by the Vice-Chancellor of CUHK in consultation with CUHK(SZ). The composition and terms of reference of the Review Panel is in [Appendix 4](#).

A review visit to CUHK(SZ) was conducted by the Review Panel on 26 November 2016 to review the academic processes in CUHK(SZ) and to give recommendations for future developments. Reference is made to the first round of Quality Audit conducted by the QAC for CUHK in 2008, which focused on processes and procedures, for better alignment with the QA standard of CUHK, and the Approach-Deployment-Results-Improvement (ADRI) methodology is adopted for this institutional review for CUHK(SZ) .

As part of its preparation for the institutional review, CUHK(SZ) has reviewed all of its operations which contribute to the standards and quality of student learning and submitted a self-evaluation document to the CUHK Review Panel on 4 November 2016. Following the review meetings, a report on the major findings and recommendations on the institution's academic processes, in form of "Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations", has just been compiled by the Review Panel.

As for the QAC's comment regarding the need to systematize CUHK(SZ)'s approach to gathering and responding to students' feedback, the CUHK Review Panel noted during the institutional review for CUHK(SZ) that a holistic and systematic collection of students' feedback has been planned for Student Experience Questionnaire (SEQ), Graduate Capabilities Questionnaire (GCQ) and Alumni Questionnaire (AQ), and encouraged CUHK(SZ) to extend its plan to better capture students' feedback on the non-formal learning dimension. In view of the efforts made by CUHK(SZ) for globalization and internationalization, CUHK(SZ) is also encouraged by the Review Panel to undertake outgoing and incoming exchange student surveys in a more holistic and systematic manner, so that information collected can be used to improve the entire operation.

(b) QA System at CUHK(SZ)

As stated in CUHK's *Institutional Submission* for the second cycle QAC Audit, the overall philosophy guiding the establishment of the QA system of CUHK(SZ) is that it must maintain the CUHK standards, and must have clearly designed outcomes and mechanisms for effective deployment, monitoring, review and improvement. To this end, CUHK(SZ) relies, at least at its initial stage of development, and, to the extent possible, on the existing CUHK system for the QA of its academic standards. In principle, the QA procedures and standards in CUHK will be broadly adopted in CUHK(SZ), with only minor changes to reflect local circumstances.

Apart from the institutional review as detailed in Section 5.3(a) above, CUHK has helped CUHK(SZ) produce a Quality Manual to serve as a consolidated QA reference for CUHK(SZ) Ug programmes. A similar Quality Manual or Handbook for Pg studies is being developed.

The CLEAR of CUHK has also supported the CUHK(SZ) campus in conducting professional development course for teaching staff, and nurturing the development of Entry Class Questionnaire (ECQ), to systematize its approach to gathering and responding to feedback from students and other stakeholders. A dedicated office/unit for T&L enhancement, CLEAR, has been set up in CUHK(SZ). CUHK will also help CUHK(SZ) in setting up its own programme review processes for implementation before graduation of the first cohort of students in 2018.

- 5.4 Plans for further improvement: CUHK(SZ) will be requested to compile a response to the Report of the Institutional Review, which should include an action plan for further improvement with concrete timeline, via its Provisional Academic Board to the



CUHK SCTL for consideration and then to the CUHK Senate for approval. CUHK(SZ) will also be requested to report the progress of its action plan to CUHK in its annual report submitted to CUHK Senate.

## **6. Priorities for Future Development: Strategic Plan 2016-2020**

- 6.1 The University launched its Strategic Plan for 2016-2020<sup>3</sup> in 2016. The Plan consists of three strategic themes: education, research and engagement, and two sets of enabling strategies: resources and infrastructure. The strategies for education aim to enrich the learning experience for students as well as enhance their language proficiency to develop self-learning skills, lifelong learning commitment and competencies that will make them both innovative and entrepreneurial to flourish in – and contribute to – a globally competitive and rapidly changing environment. A summary of the strategies on education is given in Appendix 5. Specific action items relevant to the QAC audit are given in the Annex with highlights given in previous sections.

## **7. Conclusion**

- 7.1 The University will continue to monitor and evaluate regularly the implementation of the action items and to review the impact of developments and the effectiveness of all items in the Action Plan for quality enhancement of T&L.

Notes: The annex and appendices in the original submission are not attached. Those who are interested in reading these documents can approach the relevant units of the University.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/strategicplan/2016/en/>