

THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

Second Round Teaching and Learning Quality Process Reviews (TLQPRs)

Supplement to Self Evaluation Document

1. *Identification of exemplary accomplishments relating to quality assurance and improvement.*

(a) **Centre for Learning Enhancement and Research (CLEAR)**

In relation to teaching and learning quality assurance of CUHK over the past few years, CUHK would like to identify its CLEAR as one of its most prominent exemplary accomplishments.

The CLEAR was formerly known as the Teaching Development Unit (TDU), which was established in CUHK in 1994 as a formal structure for the creation of a supportive environment of excellence for teaching and learning, for teachers to reflect and exchange views on their teaching, and also for the organization of a series of teaching development programmes on a university-wide basis. After the first TLQPR visit, CUHK has fine-tuned the operation of the TDU for greater efficiency and effectiveness. Members of the University were already aware that the TDU would be playing a strategic role in providing service to the University community for the further improvement of their teaching and learning quality.

Following a Think Tank organized by the TDU in 1999 for senior members of the University to reflect on how best the University could adjust its teaching and learning activities, the TDU was further fine-tuned and evolved to become the CLEAR, with a new Director appointed, reporting to the Registrar. Two new academic staff, in professorial rank, were appointed to the CLEAR in early 2002, and have expanded the Centre's efforts to encourage quality enhancement initiatives at Faculty, Department or course levels.

The mission of the CLEAR is 'to contribute to the University's mission by advancing excellence and scholarship in teaching and learning', and its vision is 'to contribute significantly to the development of a teaching culture and learning environment in the University so that graduates are better equipped to work in and provide leadership for a knowledge-based economy'. Heading towards these stated mission and vision, the CLEAR has evolved from the service-oriented TDU to the present centre with the double roles that are academic and service in nature. A proactive strategy has been adopted by the CLEAR, for the establishment of collaborative initiatives that address Departmental and Faculty priorities, and for conducting research into adult education so that evidence related to learning outcomes is integral to on-going re-design in curriculum and adopted pedagogies. The strategy of CLEAR is to use the evidence of successful ventures of some teachers to encourage others to attempt similar initiatives. This has been proved to be very successful.

As seen from the 'talking papers' submitted by the CLEAR, its key strategies include: to build a network of contacts in most Departments of the University by level of opportunity presented; to initiate, lead and support a range of learning enhancement activities and related research; to provide support for new Teaching Assistants; and to facilitate and expand a series of evaluation activities regarding how web-enhanced teaching supports student learning. All these initiatives are major areas for the further improvements of the University's teaching and learning quality. Other details of the endeavours of the CLEAR are in the CLEAR's talking paper and its appendices.

(b) **Teaching performance as an independent assessment criterion for staffing decisions**

Given that teachers' quality is an indispensable factor for teaching and learning quality, it has all along been the University's avowed policy that teaching is one of the most important areas for assessment in various personnel reviews, viz. recruitment, substantiation, crossing of efficiency bar, promotion, contract renewal and staff performance reviews. For periodic reports completed yearly on teachers on probation, performance in teaching will be appraised as a matter of course and feedback will be given to the teachers as appropriate. Apart from staff reviews, course and teaching evaluation data on teachers are collected through Annual Departmental Records (ADR) and/or Appraisal Reports (AR) each academic year. As a University-wide policy, starting from 1997, information on activities undertaken by individual Departments to enhance teaching and learning quality and curriculum development, problems encountered in teaching and suggested ways to tackle such problems have to be included as a compulsory item in the ADRs submitted to the University's Vice-Chancellor. The University may make reference to information related to teaching in ADR/AR as it sees fit when initiating any staff reviews.

The University has never diluted its efforts towards providing high quality teaching to its students. A clear message to that effect is sent across to all teaching staff members from time to time on occasions like call for annual appraisals, and call for submissions for review for promotion and extension of service beyond retirement. In a recent Personnel Circular announcing the implementation of the new *progression scheme for non-clinical teachers*, an elaborated set of criteria for appointment and promotion has been disseminated to all teaching staff for reference. Staff recruitment is initiated at the Department level and all new appointments are made in line with the strategic planning of the Department concerned. Shortlisting and interviewing of candidates are conducted by Departments' Standing Selection Committees, whose membership has been approved by the Department Executive Committees. Recommendations for appointments are then considered by the Selection Committees of the Faculty concerned and further approved by the Administrative and Planning Committee (AAPC) of the University. The new practice of making initial appointments only on contract terms will enable the University to observe and evaluate a teacher's capacity including ability to deliver quality teaching during the initial years of appointment. Where applicable, external experts will also be invited to comment on candidates' teaching when evaluating them for appointment or promotion.

For those whose teaching performance is in need of improvement, the University will advise them to solicit professional assistance from CLEAR where deemed appropriate. Review panels may also be formed to monitor and set targets for the teacher concerned, and require of him sustained improvement efforts.

Recognizing the importance of teaching, the University has at certain junctures examined the assessment mechanism of teaching performance. In particular, the University has since 1999 decided to request teachers who present themselves for staff reviews to provide on an optional basis a portfolio of documents attesting to achievements in teaching, which may include course materials, evidence of innovative teaching methods, publications on teaching methodology, etc. In addition to reviewing the portfolio of documents provided, the University will also consider the course and teaching evaluation results of a teacher for the past five years. These are geared towards a more comprehensive review of the teaching performance of a teacher.

2. *Identification of policies or areas of activity that are most in need of improvement.*

(a) **Insufficient resource**

As stated in Section 5 ‘Commitment of Resources to Education Quality Work’ of CUHK’s Self-Evaluation Document for second round TLQPRs submitted to the UGC, ‘Given the paramount importance of education quality work...considerable resources have been directed by Faculties and Departments to the implementation of various activities for the further enhancement of education quality work’. It should be noted that although all Departments and Faculties have made concerted efforts to maximize the utilization of their resources allocated under the one-line budget system for maintaining the standard of the programmes they offer, and supporting new endeavours for the further enhancement of teaching and learning quality, the lack of resources is always the biggest problem facing the Departments and Faculties. The situation has been much deteriorated by the budget cut for UGC-funded institutions initiated by the Government in the past few years. Under such circumstances, Departments and Faculties which would like to launch any new endeavours for the further enhancement of their teaching and learning quality are left with no other alternative but to obtain resources from other sources, which is often not easy. For the Faculty of Business Administration, about HK\$330,000 was spent in 2000-01 on undergraduate student activities, half of which was from the Faculty’s private fund.

Apart from the impact on the support for new endeavours relating to teaching and learning quality, the lack of sufficient funding from the Government has in fact adversely affected the day-to-day running of programmes offered by the University. Without sufficient resources, the University cannot afford to appoint enough teachers to teach courses, as a result of which a number of elective and yet worthy courses cannot be offered as planned or can only be offered in alternate years, thus limiting the choice of students in taking courses.

Another adverse impact of insufficient resource is the increase in class size. For instance, for English language courses offered by the University’s English Language Teaching Unit, and for Chinese language proficiency courses, the class size has been increased from under 20 to 22 and 24 respectively over the past few years. This is contrary to the UGC’s efforts on the improvement of teaching and learning quality in tertiary institutions.

(b) Problem areas of research postgraduate education

- (i) Good practices are not yet uniform. A survey on best practices across Divisions has been conducted and will form the basis of policy changes to be encouraged or mandated.
- (ii) Further efforts are needed to develop a more uniform pattern of course requirements for programmes to follow.
- (iii) Need to gradually improve the culture of RPg supervision: to bring student research closer to faculty research, and yet to allow students sufficient independence to grow, and not operate as research assistants.