

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Taught Programmes

1.1 General Conclusions

The Panel recognised that progress had been made by the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) since the first round of Teaching and Learning Quality Process Reviews (TLQPRs), and that efforts had been made to explicitly address the recommendations of the first round review. In particular, the Panel commends the following developments : -

- (a) Course and Teaching evaluation is implemented systematically on campus, and attention is paid to the results, especially in respect of personnel decisions.
- (b) The new Medical Curriculum, both in terms of its form and the processes via which it was developed.
- (c) The establishment of the Centre for Learning and Research (CLEAR).

At the same time, the Panel has material concerns about arrangements on campus for quality assurance and improvement (QA&I) relating to teaching and learning. There was significant variation in unit level activities relating to Education Quality Work (EQW), and insufficient evidence to suggest that there was a robust institutional EQW framework for shaping and assuring such activities. The following recommendations are designed to stimulate initiatives that might address these perceived weaknesses.

1.1.2 Recommendations

- (a) Act to develop a more systematic and holistic EQW framework at the institutional level. In particular, it would be useful to review the roles and functions of the various committees and bodies that have responsibilities for QA&I relating to teaching and learning. There is a need to identify office holders who have specific responsibilities for driving the required initiatives.
- (b) There is a need for more emphasis on *ongoing* curriculum development that is informed *primarily* by student learning outcomes (together with other relevant evaluation data).
- (c) Act to bring about a shift in perspective concerning teaching and learning: away from a *primary* focus on teaching, and toward an emphasis on student learning.
- (d) Broaden the framework for the evaluation of teaching performance, in line with (c) above.
- (e) Review the current external examiner system to assure that it has the capacity to handle a broadened EQW framework.

1.2 Research Postgraduate Education (RPgE)

In general, EQW arrangements for Research Postgraduate arrangements made a favourable impression on Panel members. The Graduate School is commended for its positive impact on the quality of RPgE, an impact that is evident in several ways that are identified in the main body of this report. The units that were visited were moving to enhance EQW with respect to RPgE, and were developing the capacity for achieving an appropriate balance between local freedom of practice, and shared approaches at the broader Faculty / Institutional level.

It is recommended that attention should be given to the following :-

- (a) The Panel endorses the intention of the Graduate School to use the information from the good practice survey to inform consideration / action with regard to a number of salient issues.
- (b) The Graduate School should consider ways of promoting a greater level of dialogue, university-wide, with a view to sharing good practices even further.
- (c) There is a need to ensure that awards of additional student places to units are sufficiently resourced in terms of accommodation and other required facilities.

1.3 School of Continuing Studies (SCS)

There is a need for further clarification regarding the role of the SCS within the overall mission of the University. Also, there are implications for further development that relate to the existent quality structures for award-bearing programmes. Currently, the SCS has in place very stringent quality assurance (QA) systems for its award-bearing programmes, and EQW is vigorously pursued in the two programmes that were reviewed.

It is recommended that the following actions should be taken :-

- (a) Review the role(s) to be played by SCS within the overall mission of the University: include in this review a consideration of the most appropriate structure for development and approval of programmes, together with other associated quality matters.
- (b) SCS should consider how it might broaden the ways in which it benchmarks the quality of its programmes.
- (c) Investigate ways in which sub-degree programmes can be articulated with opportunities for students to further advance their studies.

2. A BRIEF BACKGROUND TO THE SECOND ROUND OF TLQPRs

Over the period September 1995 to April 1997 the University Grants Committee (UGC) carried out a programme of TLQPRs in the then seven UGC-funded institutions. The reviews were carried out as part of the on-going activities of UGC designed to assure quality and value for money. The stated goals of the reviews were as follows :-

- To focus attention on teaching and learning as the primary mission of Hong Kong's tertiary institutions
- To assist institutions in their efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning
- To enable the UGC and the institutions to discharge their obligation to maintain accountability for the quality of teaching and learning

Following the completion of the reviews, UGC commissioned an independent evaluation of the exercise that was carried out by the Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS) of the University of Twente in the Netherlands. Two aims of the evaluation were :-

- To undertake an independent evaluation of the TLQPRs of the seven UGC-funded tertiary institutions in order to determine the extent to which the TLQPR process has achieved its stated goals.
- To recommend any improvements on the TLQPR process.

An evaluation report was published in September 1999. Broadly, it concluded that the TLQPRs had been successful in achieving the intended goals, and that "TLQPR was the right instrument at the right time". A further round of TLQPR, continuing to focus on quality *processes* was also recommended. Following this, a special meeting of the Consultative Committee on TLQPR was convened, at which it was agreed that a seminar would be organised as a follow-up to the CHEPS team's evaluation of the TLQPR exercise.

The seminar took place in April 2000, attended by a wide variety of UGC and UGC-funded institution representatives, together with invitees from other tertiary institutions and agencies in Hong Kong. The report of the seminar concluded that: "Participants at the seminar were positively disposed toward the prospect of a further round of TLQPR – which needs to be suitably modified and developed". Accordingly, it was decided that a further round of TLQPR would take place and the template for the current round was developed in a dialogue between UGC and the Consultative Committee on TLQPR.

The second round TLQPRs commenced in October 2001. Annex A outlines the methodology that underpins the current reviews, as carried out within the template structure.

REPORT ON TAUGHT PROGRAMMES

3. Major Overall Observations

3.1 General Conclusions

In the six years since the first round of TLQPRs the University has put in place a number of policies and procedures that have impacted favourably upon EQW on campus. The first TLQPR Panel reported as follows :-

“Our main concern is that there may be an undue reliance on implicit quality processes, and upon the University’s extant culture of quality in teaching and learning. The Panel fully endorses the principle that implicit processes must carry the main burden of quality improvement and assurance, and that a culture of quality is a prime requisite for effective teaching. However, we believe that a certain emphasis on explicit processes is essential to maintain the efficacy of implicit processes and cultural norms, and to adapt to changing circumstances”.

The University has responded to this statement as described in its Self-Evaluation Document (SED) (p.1):

“... CUHK has established a variety of policies and procedures, inducements and aids to monitor, maintain and assist quality in teaching delivery and learning outcomes”.

The Panel recognises the efforts that have been made in this direction, and commends the University for the steps that have been taken thus far. In particular, the panel was able to identify a number of areas of good practice, including the following :-

- (a) Course and Teaching Evaluation, mainly via student feedback, is now implemented systematically across the University and there is evidence that attention is paid to the results, particularly in relation to personnel decisions concerning substantiation, promotion, etc. Teaching staff are aware of the importance that is now attached to these measures of teaching effectiveness, and commitment to quality within personnel decision-making has been well established and appears to be well embedded in the culture of the University.
- (b) The new Medical Curriculum represents a significant and desirable initiative, both in terms of the outcomes and the implementation processes via which these are achieved.
- (c) The establishment of CLEAR is a positive move that has significant potential for stimulating and contributing to desirable EQW developments. Its new mandate and early activity clearly demonstrate this potential.
- (d) In addition to these broad aspects, a number of good practices were observed at unit level: these are referred to further in later sections.

While the Panel was able to identify clear evidence of progress since the last TLQPR and examples of good practices, it nevertheless has some material concerns about current arrangements on campus for QA&I relating to teaching and learning. These concerns are outlined in the following paragraphs of this section.

- 3.1.1 The Panel encountered significant variation in the adequacy of unit level activities concerning EQW arrangements, and felt that there is not yet a systematic and holistic EQW framework on campus that shapes and assures appropriate unit level activities. At the Faculty level too, similar significant variation was encountered. The Panel believes that sustained (and increased) energy at University level will be required to bring about the broader EQW framework that has been referred to. In this drive, CLEAR has the potential to play a significant supporting role. However, it cannot take the lead responsibility and the impetus must come from the top, via appropriately constituted and mandated structures that can address areas for improvement in teaching and learning as and when they are identified.
- 3.1.2 It was unclear to the Panel how the various quality assurance committees interacted, or what their specific contributions are to a properly integrated system of overall QA&I. The role of the Task Force on Teaching and Learning Quality vis a vis Faculty and unit level quality bodies is particularly unclear.
- 3.1.3 There is some concern that a “culture of compliance” is emerging, in which the primary university orientation to EQW is toward organising for external reviews, rather than building an effective, self-sustaining university-wide process for quality improvement. The Panel looked for evidence of commitment to EQW across the campus, but was unable to find good evidence for internalized efforts embedded in the culture of the institution. The panel was able to engage in informed discussions about teaching and learning with several units, but this was not the case in all units reviewed. Peer evaluation of teaching was not common, but could help in encouraging discussion and debate about best practices as well as innovations in teaching and learning.
- 3.1.4 The University’s ongoing commitment to EQW, while expressed verbally and publicly by the administration and evident in the work of a number of units, is not as visible in university-wide processes for assuring that units are clearly making progress in improving teaching and learning. There needs to be a more integrated approach to this, at a central level, with a more comprehensive strategy for EQW driven by key personnel in the institution.
- 3.1.5 The panel could not identify evidence to suggest that EQW is clearly linked to institutional strategic initiatives – for example through incentive schemes, systematic reporting and use of performance indicators, linking of funding to measures of EQW, etc.
- 3.1.6 While curricula across the University have generally articulated broad aims, in many cases these have not been translated and developed into clear learning outcomes that can guide teaching and assessment activities, and their evaluation. There is a particular gap at

the programme level, where it seems that sufficient attention is often not paid to the assessment of students' learning outcomes, so that there are clear linkages that go beyond the grades assigned to (largely) content-based examinations. The (laudable) emphasis on teaching performance within personnel decision-making may be inadvertently deflecting attention from the broader complexity of appropriate EQW structures, and emphases on student learning outcomes (See Section 3.2.3).

3.1.7 In summary, the first round TLQPR panel had the following comments.

“... the level of teaching quality at CUHK appears good, and progress has been made in stimulating improvement. Nevertheless the Panel believes that the University should implement explicit and integrated QA processes to maintain and improve teaching standards in the face of conflicting pressures and changing conditions. Our inquiries suggest that some departments and staff might welcome additional guidance – including guidance about how to develop workable explicit processes – in support of their efforts to sustain and enhance teaching and learning quality. Furthermore, institutional leaders at all levels should increase their efforts to ensure that operating units within their purview maintain their accountability for teaching and learning quality”.

While accepting that genuine progress has been made in addressing these issues, the current Panel would echo those comments of six years ago and suggest that the University could usefully continue to focus on moving much further in these directions. The next section contains some suggestions for stimulating further developments that would help to address the issues that have been identified.

3.2 Recommendations

3.2.1 The University needs to develop a more systematic and holistic EQW framework in order to -

- (a) build upon the good practices that already exist at unit level;
- (b) address the wide variation in EQW and QA&I activities across various units; and
- (c) ensure that there is ongoing, embedded effort to improve the quality of teaching and learning on campus.

In moving to develop that more systematic and holistic framework, the University could usefully review the roles and functions of the current range of committees and bodies on campus - at unit, Faculty and University levels - that have responsibilities for QA&I relating to teaching and learning. The University should consider identifying / appointing office holders with particular responsibilities for driving and championing various aspects of the total EQW effort on campus. CLEAR has a useful support and executive role to play in this drive, but it cannot be the main mover.

3.2.2 There is a need to focus more sharply on the development of curricula that reflect the essential and relevant elements of knowledge in a field, evidence that students are learning the core knowledge and skills in the curriculum, together with development of

effective processes that use evidence of student learning as a basis for improving teaching, the curriculum and the overall context of student learning. This process is admittedly complex, and like research, ongoing and never ending. However, this development is essential in a context of rapid change in terms of fields of knowledge and student cohort characteristics. Developing EQW of this kind is not a “one shot” effort. The University should review and develop its current structures and arrangements in relation to their capacity to support EQW in these terms. (The comments of 3.2.1 also relate to this point).

- 3.2.3 There is need for a paradigm shift in EQW, toward a focus on how students learn (and the outcomes of that learning) rather than a primary emphasis on teaching. This does not imply that teaching behaviours should be de-emphasised, but that they should be seen within a broader framework that stresses teaching as instrumental in helping to stimulate and assure appropriate student learning (There are examples where this is taking place, but there is considerable variation across units). This also implies that there should be a search for properly innovative teaching methods, and the evaluation of these according to the basic criterion of the extent to which they stimulate desirable student learning outcomes. There is a need to discuss such development on an ongoing basis across the whole institution, so that all staff can engage in such debate and contribute to, as well as learn from, such sharing.
- 3.2.4 Concurrent with the directions suggested in the last paragraphs, there needs to be a broadening of the framework for the evaluation of staff teaching performance. Directions could usefully include -
- (a) the development and appraisal of teaching portfolios; and
 - (b) peer review.
- 3.2.5 The University should review its current external examiner system in order to assure itself that the current arrangements have the capacity to handle the broadened EQW framework that has been described in earlier paragraphs.
- 3.2.6 In association with the recommendations made above, and the earlier discussion of Section 3.1, the panel believes that the following goals and foci will be critically important :-
- (a) The building of a new focus for EQW, based around authentic and clearly-articulated student learning outcomes.
 - (b) The evaluation of pedagogical initiatives, coupled with the dissemination of good practices within an overall University / Faculty level co-ordinated system.
 - (c) The development of an institutional reward structure that recognises and rewards evidence relating to the implementation of the broad EQW framework at the unit level.

4. Observations relating to the TLQPR Template domains

4.1 Design of Curricula

As described in 3.1.1 the Panel encountered significant variation in the extent to which different units were embracing EQW within their ongoing business. Certainly, this was so in the case of curriculum design. At one end of a notional spectrum there are units that are engaging in curriculum re-design in an energetic, systematic – and even exemplary – manner. Such units are generally aiming in the direction of more student-centred pedagogies, with Problem Based Learning as the predominant vehicle, and base developments on continuing critical scrutiny of the extent to which existing curricula are appropriate for current contexts. That scrutiny is in turn informed by evidence that is gathered regularly and systematically from a wide variety of stakeholders: students, employers, professional bodies, external examiners, alumni, etc. Benchmarking against well-regarded programmes in other institutions is also included as a design element. Finally, such units normally have clearly stated objectives and student learning outcomes, together with pedagogical and programme arrangements that are clearly aligned with these. Running through all of this is a unit level energy and commitment that serves as a driver for the gamut of initiatives.

At the other end of this notional spectrum, there are units that are almost entirely uncritical and unreflective with respect to their curricula. Here, the situation is that traditional disciplinary convention as to what should be in a curriculum is accepted uncritically. Externally imposed reviews (usually at quite lengthy intervals) are tolerated and accepted, but there is little or no internal drive at the unit level for EQW relating to curricula. There are some interesting developments in such units that were visited, but these are the result of isolated, individual initiatives rather than mainstream activity.

The Panel encountered some examples of best practice in curriculum design during its unit visits, and these are largely encapsulated in the broad description given in the first paragraph of this section. In summary the major features of that best practice include the following :-

- Systematic and ongoing critical reflection on curricular arrangements, informed by a variety of evidence from a wide range of stakeholders.
- Benchmarking against high quality programmes elsewhere
- Clear description of curriculum objectives and intended learning outcomes, and the alignment of learning environments, teaching and assessment with these.
- Energy and drive at unit level that translates into a culture of commitment to the new curriculum initiatives.

As stated above, there are units within the University that can serve as exemplars of best practice.

4.2 Design of Teaching and Learning Processes

Much the same can be said here that was said in the last paragraph – and it is not surprising that there is a strong correlation between “best practice” in EQW as it relates to the design of (a) curriculum, and (b) teaching and learning processes. A similar notional spectrum exists for the design of teaching and learning processes, with the commendable end characterised by co-ordinated and energetic efforts to implement evidence-based initiatives that aim to help students achieve the intended learning outcomes.

One source of data that is taken seriously in practically all units visited is the data from student feedback surveys, and there is evidence that this is used in one way or another in all units. Certainly, it is treated seriously in personnel decision-making. (See 3.1.(a)). In most cases too, seriously critical student feedback prompts action by the head of the department to counsel the staff member concerned, or take other appropriate action. What is much less common is to find unit-level structures that systematically utilise student feedback as an element in the ongoing design and development of teaching and learning processes.

While the teaching and learning methods on campus are generally fairly conventional (lectures, laboratories, tutorials, etc.) and teacher-centred, there are signs of the beginning of an institutional movement toward more active and student-centred pedagogies. In helping to promote and encourage this trend, thought needs to be given to -

- (a) appropriate staff development, to assist staff to engage in the different teaching behaviours that are demanded; and
- (b) evaluation of new initiatives and dissemination of information relating to this, across campus.

For both of these, CLEAR has a critical role to play within an appropriate institution-wide structure.

4.3 Design of Student Assessment and the Use of Assessment Results

The Panel encountered a wide variation relating to the extent that EQW has been embedded in units, and a similar strong correlation with stances to QA & I relating to curriculum, and teaching and learning.

There is a strong emphasis across campus on rigorous grading standards, the mechanics of grade allocation, and the establishment of reliable procedures to ensure that this is carried out fairly and properly. The current external examiner system is central to this emphasis, and there is good evidence for confidence in the standard of the grades and awards that are allocated to students.

Although there are notable exceptions, assessment methods on campus tend to be traditional, with a heavy emphasis on formal, written examinations. While this may be appropriate in particular settings, there is little evidence on campus to suggest that any kind of ongoing reflection about the appropriateness of predominant assessment methods is taking place. In particular, there does not seem to be much effort to align assessment methods with intended learning outcomes, especially those outcomes that focus on generic competences relating to communication, life-long learning, etc. As noted, there are exceptions, and examples relating to final year projects, oral assessment, simulation, role-playing, etc. were encountered as part of a portfolio of methods that are being developed in some units. These initiatives could usefully be evaluated and information disseminated. (See the concluding comments of 4.2).

The use of assessment results tends to focus almost exclusively on feedback to the individual student, and this is, of course, crucially important. But, at the same time there is potential for the use of assessment results of a cohort of students, in the ongoing development of curricula and teaching and learning methods, that is largely being ignored.

4.4 Implementation Quality

The standard course evaluation questionnaire was the most frequently cited source of information for assuring an appropriate quality of implementation of educational intentions. As already noted, the ways in which this is used at the unit level varies very significantly: at one extreme, the Panel found that it is only serious negative comment from students that triggers action; at the other, student feedback is utilised systematically across the unit in assurance and improvement procedures. Other sources of evidence, used to different degrees in different units, are derived from surveys of employers, alumni, etc. External examiners' reports are a significant source of evidence via which units can authenticate the standards of their graduates – but here too, there is considerable variation in the extent to which these are used to feed into quality enhancement initiatives.

The Panel encountered a similarly wide variation in the extent to which departmental Teaching and Learning Quality Committees and staff-student consultative committees were engaged. In some cases they were quite active, in others they appeared to not function at all.

The following further aspects were mentioned to the Panel by a number of units :-

- (a) The use of overseas academic visitors as advisers is common in some units, and has been useful.
- (b) There is a need to ensure that appropriate staff development is carried out in the unit, to ensure that new staff are appropriately prepared for their duties, and that established staff stay abreast of the requirements of changing teaching demands. Workshops organised by CLEAR were mentioned as useful in this respect.
- (c) Teaching Development Grants (TDGs) can be useful in helping to trial and develop new arrangements that are suggested by stakeholder feedback or benchmarking.

4.5 Commitment of Resources to Education Quality Work

This issue is tied very closely to unit level perspectives about how particular EQW activities are viewed and rewarded by the higher organisational levels, and the recommendation of 3.2.6 (c) is related. At the unit level per se, the following matters are relevant :-

- (a) The major resource in any unit is the staffing, and the time that is devoted to various aspects of the total academic effort. With a small number of notable exceptions, the Panel found no real evidence that significant time / resources are devoted to EQW at the unit level.
- (b) As mentioned in the last section, TDGs are thought by some staff to be very useful in stimulating staff effort relating to QA & I.
- (c) EQW involves staff development, and this involves time and effort by those involved. Both self development, and supported development via formal activities organised by CLEAR or other agencies are possible directions, and both of these obviously involve actual and opportunity costs.

REPORT ON RESEARCH POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION

5. Major Overall Observations

5.1 General Conclusions

The Graduate School was founded in 1966, and works with 54 Graduate Divisions in the various Departments. It is headed by a Dean, and its policy arm is the Graduate Council that meets once a year and reports to Senate. The terms of reference of the Graduate Council are to advise the Senate on all graduate programmes of studies; to co-ordinate the activities of the Divisions within the Graduate School; and to consider and deal with the recommendations of the Divisions on the content of programmes including details of course syllabuses. In practice the Graduate Council delegates its responsibilities to an Executive Committee that meets around six times a year. The Graduate School itself is the administrative base for research postgraduate students in the University.

5.1.1 The Graduate School works closely with Departments and with CLEAR to promote the quality of postgraduate education. The positive impact of the Graduate School on the quality of research postgraduate education is evident in the following elements :-

- (a) the introduction of clear university-wide policies, and a framework of practice for consistent standards in the admission of students, the appointment of supervisors, and arrangements for assessment and examination including the appointment of external examiners of theses;

- (b) facilitating with CLEAR to introduce a series of coursework modules within the framework ‘ Improving Postgraduate Learning’ ;
- (c) the allocation of research postgraduate student quotas, including the deployment of a central pool of reserve places that Divisions can bid for, on the basis of performance against quality indicators;
- (d) quantitative monitoring, with incentives, of the progress of students and the performance of Divisions in areas such as intake quality, completion and attrition rates, and average external examiners’ score of theses; and
- (e) qualitative monitoring, through sampling by the Dean, of theses and of external examiner reports, and occasional exercises such as good practice surveys.

5.1.2 The units visited worked within the framework of these activities but also gave independent attention to the quality of teaching and learning within the individual academic fields of the Divisions.

5.1.3 There appeared to be good relationships between the Graduate School, CLEAR and the Divisions, and respect for their respective roles and contribution to overall teaching and learning quality. There were also good relationships between staff and students.

5.1.4 The Panel found in all the units visited some degree of a sense of collective responsibility for research and the quality of postgraduate research education. All also showed, to some degree, a growing capability to deal with the balance between the freedom of practice of individual supervisors and a shared approach to teaching and learning.

5.1.5 One unit visited had set out a chart showing the flows of input and information in relation to programmes and monitoring of progress. The Panel recommends that the Graduate School or Executive Committee should consider whether this, or a similar expanded diagram, could be useful for wider discussion and dissemination (including dissemination to students).

5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1 The Panel endorses the intention of the Graduate School to use the good practice survey to look at issues such as the balance between diversity of student research topics in relation to the focus of Divisional expertise and research strengths.

5.2.2 The Panel also recommends that the Graduate School use this, and other opportunities, to pursue a university-wide qualitative dialogue about the teaching and learning process in research postgraduate education across all fields, in order to share best practice even further.

5.2.3 The Panel endorses the approach to providing incentives for good performance through increased allocation of student places from the central reserve pool, and also recommends that the policy of requiring all Graduate Divisions to certify the adequacy of facilities and space should continue to be vigorously pursued.

6. Observations relating to the TLQPR Template domains

6.1 Design of Curricula

The programmes at unit level are subject to consideration by the Graduate Panel of each Division, and recommendations go to the Departmental Board and the Graduate Council. While visiting units, we found evidence of thoughtful, collective review and revision of coursework programmes.

The ‘Improving Postgraduate Learning’ series was useful to students. This usefulness included the opportunity to enrol in modules that normally lie outside the immediate ambit of their specialist field, such as quantitative research methods. The Panel also commends the joint approach taken by some Divisions, in conjunction with CLEAR, in devising and / or delivering modules.

One unit visited had taken care to align their postgraduate programme with the departmental mission and with the framework for undergraduate programmes to gain coherence and consistency. This gave clarity and focus, and the Panel found that the students were able to identify this focus with their own aspirations for their studies, and their careers.

Recently introduced programmes include interdisciplinary programmes offered jointly by several departments, an approach that is to be commended.

6.2 Design of Teaching and Learning Process

We encountered an appropriate range of teaching and learning activities, both across the units visited, and to some extent within units. This applies particularly to the choice and balance between individual supervision and group teaching, and the frequency and duration of teaching and supervisions sessions. Some units are to be commended on also introducing activities such as news groups, online communities, and graduate seminars. One unit is considering re-introducing graduate seminars, which had lapsed several years ago. Students valued coursework, and programmes that helped them with thesis writing. One unit reported a problem with English thesis writing, and had addressed this jointly with CLEAR.

One unit had discussed (without coming to a consensus) whether there should be a common approach to the language of instruction, and if so which language that should be. The Panel notes that this is an academic issue, not just a matter of teaching and learning policy, in view of the relevance to the academic field.

In a number of matters of detail the Panel found variation across the units visited. This is not necessarily a criticism, but it does offer the opportunity for cross-unit reflection and action, in an effort to move to the best arrangements for promoting student learning outcomes. The following serve as examples :-

- (a) the Panel found variation in the priority given by units to group activity and quasi-social staff-student activities, perhaps relating to the nature of the research field;
- (b) the Graduate School lays down rules for the eligibility of supervisors, with provision for co-supervision and mentoring for inexperienced supervisors, and the Panel noted that in one unit students ‘negotiated’ with staff to find a supervisor after completing their coursework, and refining their research topic; and
- (c) in one unit there are clear rules for office hours in respect of graduate students who have departmental duties as an integral part of their studentship.

6.3 Design of Student Assessment and Use of Assessment Results

The Panel commends the practice of setting out student goals for the year, where they agree milestones with their tutors.

Monitoring includes completion and attrition rates, as well as average grades including the grades assigned by external examiners. There were examples in the units visited of substantial improvements in completion and attrition rates over the past few years. In others, staff felt that these rates were affected by external factors such as the job market and the career ambitions of students, and hence subject to a primarily external locus of influence.

6.4 Implementation Quality

Units reported increases in the quality of student intake, and commented on a variety of reasons for this, including ‘niche’ focus and employer satisfaction with CUHK research graduates.

The Graduate School, working with Divisions, has had commendable success in applying rigorous monitoring of a range of quality performance indicators. These focus particularly on input quality, and on outputs in terms of graduate results and efficiency. The performance monitoring is closely linked to incentives in terms of the ability of units to bid for additional places each year from the central pool. Over time, this has resulted in significant increases in the size of some units, giving a ‘critical mass’ of research postgraduate students even in relatively small Divisions. The Panel noted that Faculties are required to provide resources in recognition of such increase.

The Panel noted and commends the fact that Graduate Panels in the Divisions have, in some cases, demonstrated collective responsibility in - for example - revising coursework programmes, and addressing problems such as standards of English thesis writing.

The Panel further commends the following :-

- (a) the use of Teaching Enhancement Workshops;

- (b) the qualitative monitoring undertaken by Deans through sampling of 20% of theses, with a written report, and sampling of external examiners reports; and
- (c) the inclusion of coursework syllabuses and reading lists in Graduate Panel papers.

REPORT ON SCHOOL OF CONTINUING STUDIES (SCS)

7. Background

Established in 1965, SCS has had a rather modest growth until the last two to three years. As of 2001/2002, the total enrolment is about 36,000 and currently the School offers 108 award-bearing programmes which make up 30% of its total enrolment. The other 70% of the enrolment comes from about 1700 general short courses and about 130 corporate training courses. Courses are taught mainly by about 600 part-time instructors, who make up of over 85% of the staff complement.

The total revenue for 2001/2002 was HK\$128 million, a figure that has more than doubled over the past three years. Similarly, the number of full-time staff has almost doubled over the same three-year period to a total of 89 as of 2001/2002.

Currently, the University is contemplating the establishment of associate degree (AD) programmes.

7.1 General Observations

7.1.1 The SCS is receiving good support from the top management of the University. Under the strong leadership of the current Director, coupled with a firm vision for the School, enrolment has more than doubled over the past three years.

7.1.2 Many of the teaching and learning activities of the School are held off campus. Recently, another learning centre has been established in Hong Kong (located within the Bank of America Tower in Central) with 12 well-equipped classrooms. Given this new and strategically located centre, enrolments are likely to increase even further in future.

7.2 Areas for Commendation

7.2.1 The School has a stringent QA system for all its award-bearing programmes, and the approval mechanism is well integrated with the mainstream academic system. (However, the rather laborious process from conception to approval, requiring 5 levels of screening, vetting and approval, means that while these procedures normally take 2 to 3 months for a programme to be run by the SCS and awarded by CUHK, it may take up to 12 months or more before it is finally implemented: See 7.3.1 below)

7.2.2 The QA system for the award-bearing programmes has a high level of academic input and involvement. At the initial stages of the development, inputs are also obtained from

the industry and external bodies, for the design of the curricula, and the teaching and assessment methods to be used. The two programmes (the Advanced Diploma Programme in Leadership, Communication and Management (LCM) and the Security Studies Programme) that were used as a focus for discussion clearly demonstrated that EQW in the five TLQPR template domains was vigorously pursued. Programme Leaders and Directors are heavily involved in the implementation and management of the various programmes. They maintain close dialogue with students, through the website as well as having regular meetings (including social gatherings) with students.

- 7.2.3 Student feedback is taken seriously. For example, in the Security Studies Programme, the feedback obtained in the Security Studies programme helped administrators to re-design the curricula so as to reflect latest developments in the field. In addition, the School has developed a thorough and systematic mechanism for handling students' complaints.

7.3 Challenges and Areas for Improvement

- 7.3.1 The contradictory forces of the need for academic rigour in programme development on the one hand, and the demands of the market (including the need for self-financing) on the other, need to be addressed carefully in future, especially if SCS were to expand the number of programmes and student enrolments. The current approval process, while rigorous, may cause SCS to miss out on market opportunities. Moreover, the lack of a strong voice and representation from SCS at certain stages of the approval process means that its interests may not always be adequately promoted. The challenge is to fine-tune the current approval process, and develop an equally robust QA mechanism that allows SCS to respond to the market needs in a more timely fashion.
- 7.3.2 The University may wish to review and rationalise the role of SCS within its overall mission, taking into account the need to support the Hong Kong government's quest for life-long learning, and the establishment of community colleges.
- 7.3.3 SCS may also wish to seek other means of benchmarking the quality of its programmes. Seeking stronger international partners, and using external evaluators for its programmes, are possibilities that can be explored.
- 7.3.4 Students in Advanced Diploma Programmes in LCM and Security Studies who were interviewed by the Panel demonstrated a high degree of satisfaction with the way that the courses were conducted. At the same time however, all the students expressed a strong desire to have definitive recognition of the diplomas; not only recognition from their employers, but also in terms of opportunities for advancement into further higher education opportunities, such as degree programmes. This need for articulation of sub-degree programmes with further opportunities will remain a challenge for the School.

7.4 Conclusion

- 7.4.1 The development of continuing education in CUHK could be considered to be at a crossroads. CUHK has a well established and strong brand name that can generate market premium in continuing education. At the same time, the major concern of the institution is academic rigour and quality in its programmes, which manifests itself in the high involvement of academic staff in the approval of award-bearing programmes offered by SCS. This has a strong impact on the speed of development of SCS courses, and the ability of the School to respond promptly to emerging market needs. As a result, CUHK, despite its strong and long history as a tertiary institution in Hong Kong, could be considered a relative ‘laggard’ in continuing education.
- 7.4.2 The extensive investment in the newest SCS Learning Centre in Central District suggests that CUHK is intent on playing a more prominent role in the realm of continuing education in the tertiary sector. The challenge is to ensure that SCS can be more effective in responding to the needs of the market, without having to compromise on its existing robust QA processes and mechanisms. The School’s role within the overall context and mission of the University needs to be crystallised even further, to ensure that it plays a full and integrated role within the total University effort.