

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Response to the Second Teaching and Learning Quality Process Review Report

Introduction

CUHK sincerely thanks the University Grants Committee (UGC) and its TLQPR Panel for conducting the second TLQPR review and preparing a report of the review. The process of self-evaluation and the TLQPR Panel's report have been particularly useful in CUHK's continuing efforts to realize in the most satisfactory manner its primary mission, i.e. the effective dissemination of knowledge supported by research, generalizable skills and professional, ethical attitudes amongst all members of the University.

This response summarizes how the UGC's valuable feedback confirms and supports the changes that CUHK has been working towards for years since the first TLQPR visit. New initiatives consistent with the recommendations of the report are specified. This is followed by a review on how these additional steps are congruent with the University's action plans that have been firmly in place during the recent years.

Additional Initiatives in Response to TLQPR Recommendations

CUHK agrees that it is now appropriate to expedite changes more widely. The University concurs that its Graduate School has effectively used a centralized framework for promoting the quality of postgraduate education. This model, which has been tried and tested, is one that we plan to adopt and operate across all teaching programmes.

The Graduate School, headed by a Dean with the Graduate Council as its policy arm for reporting to the Senate, has a clear management structure. Based on this model, the University is planning to turn its existing Task Force on Teaching and Learning Quality into a Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning Quality, headed by a Pro-Vice-Chancellor, to take responsibility for campus-wide teaching, learning and education quality work (EQW). The work of the committee will encompass the following:

- (i) In general, to strengthen and coordinate the University's existing policy on teaching and learning, so as to ensure that the University's programmes are consistent with Hong Kong's development into a knowledge-based society;
- (ii) to streamline and invigorate existing committees on teaching and learning at Department/Faculty levels, so as to produce a clearer structure for determining and implementing the University's policy on teaching and learning;
- (iii) to develop a system for identification, dissemination and utilization of the best practices in programme and course design, teaching approaches, assessment policies and evaluation strategies;
- (iv) to develop teaching and learning performance indicators, focusing on student-learning outcomes that are appropriate for influencing allocation of resources;
- (v) to identify appropriate incentives for teaching and learning enhancement, propose related policies to the University's Administrative and Planning Committee and advise the Resource Allocation Committee on resource allocation in parallel with these initiatives;
- (vi) to enhance the University's EQW as a whole by promoting the use of student feedback as a source of information not only on teaching performance, but also on student learning outcomes;
- (vii) to formulate appropriate monitoring procedures that focus on students' learning outcomes, e.g., the University's present Teaching Development Grant-funded 'Student Engagement Project' is being used to provide feedback, at the programme level, for all Faculties on the design and quality of student experiences in each teaching unit; and
- (viii) to determine ways to optimize the expertise in the Centre for Learning Enhancement and Research (CLEAR) in order to achieve these enumerated goals.

The University agrees with the TLQPR Panel's recommendation that CLEAR can play an administrative and supportive role in the University's initiatives for further enhancement of its teaching and learning quality.

The report indicates that CUHK has not adopted a sufficiently holistic approach for achieving wide-scale improvements throughout the campus and that there is a need for centralized, coordinated policies and procedures that overtly initiate, lead, support and reward the use of student learning outcomes as a means of effecting appropriate curriculum design, teaching performance and student assessments. The mandate and goals of the proposed Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning Quality are precisely there to address these concerns.

Learning Outcomes vs Learning Processes

In this respect, the University would like to draw the UGC's attention to the following fact. According to the results published in 2002 of a large-sample survey on the opinions of employers on major aspects of performance of Hong Kong's year 2000 graduates of UGC-funded institutions, conducted by the Government's Education and Manpower Bureau in 2001, CUHK graduates scored the highest in overall performance among those institutions, and came first in six of the eight major aspects of performance. The six aspects are: Chinese language proficiency, numerical competency, analytical and problem-solving abilities, work attitude, inter-personal skills and management skills. They came second and third in English language proficiency and information technology literacy respectively. Such outstanding outcomes could not be unrelated to our existing effective processes. If student learning outcomes of this type and at this level were still considered inadequate, CUHK would require solid evidence of the deficiency of its processes, as well as an assurance that any major departure from its existing practice would add value to and not adversely affect what has already been achieved.

Coherence of CUHK Strategic Planning and TLQPR Findings

The TLQPR Panel's conclusions are an important source of information as they complement and validate an existing database for decision-making in regard to CUHK's EQW. This database includes findings from more than two years of formative evaluations stemming from a 1998 strategic and action plan for effecting continuous quality improvements in teaching and learning. The TLQPR and CUHK data are in agreement as to areas of strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning and innovations that successfully produce desired goals.

Key components of these plans are now summarized and referenced to the TLQPR report, thereby showing the coherence of CUHK's ongoing strategies for achieving excellence in teaching and learning.

Step One – developing an effective strategy

Immediately following the first TLQPR visit, the University implemented several recommendations. The initial steps were in the direction of strengthening quality assurance (QA) - e.g. the use of common and standardized student feedback for systematically informing course evaluations and reviews of academic staff. The TLQPR Panel commends these initial changes in quality assurance.

Along with these QA efforts, the University's Institutional Development Plan updated in 1999 specified the actions required for shifting its focus on teaching and teaching performance to one on student learning objectives and outcomes. The means for identifying strengths, shortfalls and addressing identified needs were clearly enunciated. This plan was commended as sound and well developed in the 1999 UGC management review.

This shift of focus required teachers to understand and endorse their responsibility for developing how their students learn to learn.

Step Two – building a framework for change

To implement the action plans outlined in CUHK's Institutional Development Plan, the next step is to build an understanding and commitment to the new paradigm for teaching and learning. In early 2000, a top-level University Think Tank session was held by the then Teaching Development Unit, defining the type of graduates that Hong Kong would need in this Age of Information. Apart from being soundly grounded in the chosen area of study, the graduates also should be innovative, creative, adaptive and able to shift professional careers, given acquired life-long learning skills based on evidence-based methodology for distinguishing knowledge from information.

There was also unanimity at the meeting regarding CUHK's teaching and learning obligations and accountability: (i) to adjust to demands imposed by the Age of Information; (ii) to meet new expectations by employers; and (iii) to develop appropriate "learn how to learn" skills in its graduates so that they can survive in a rapidly changing professional and social environment.

The Think Tank concluded that the speed of change, the management of potential resistance and the tailoring to reflect past teaching and learning practices locally had to be addressed. Left unaccounted, a meaningful culture of student-centred teaching and learning could not successfully occur. The effective counter-balance rested on local evidence that could answer the question whether fundamental change in teaching and learning was indeed a necessity or simply a well-argued postulate.

Step Three – finding evidence to facilitate change

The next step in the action plan embarks on establishing the relevant evidence. Academic units that want to contribute are frequently those in which the Age of Information already has exerted great challenges on their graduates. That is, rapid developments within the discipline or at the level of practice quickly make previously-learned information irrelevant or factually inaccurate. These units (some of which were visited in this second round TLQPR) not only implemented changes to focus on student outcomes but also systematically gathered data for the evaluation of benefits, losses and means for effectively developing ownership and commitment when the changes were successful.

The changes that these units introduced were varied, enabling differential effects to be studied and established. The evidence established is comprehensive and objective. It is about what changes have worked, which student outcomes have been enhanced, whether previous measures of quality have been maintained, and how changes have been endorsed.

We are pleased that the TLQPR Panel regarded the above work as not only appropriate and effective but also exemplary in the aspects of the process of implementation and the use of comprehensive evidence for introducing innovations and changes.

Step Four - extending changes into additional teaching units

At the time of the TLQPR visit, these changes were being extended to other units prepared to use the same reasoned evidence-based approach. Their staff members now take responsibility for curriculum design changes and implementation.

This latter work is being facilitated by a revised centrally-based unit for supporting teaching and learning innovation - CLEAR. The unit is staffed by senior full-time academics, with internationally recognized competencies in adult learning and related research. The unit's mandate includes establishing the impact of change as additional teaching units develop their

models for student-centred learning. We are pleased that the TLQPR Panel regards both the establishment of CLEAR and its work commendable.

Conclusion

We are particularly pleased that the report endorses the use of the evidence that we have strategically developed as an appropriate source for dispensing the best practices university-wide. CUHK believes that the proposed Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning Quality will build on this foundation, and the mechanism for its implementation is already well under discussion. As the conclusions and recommendations in this TLQPR report are referenced to this same goal, CUHK is looking forward to receiving continuous support and guidance from the UGC at this most opportune time. CUHK is also confident that, with its university-wide strategies and initiatives properly in place, its teaching and learning processes will become even more effective, just as its learning outcomes will become even more outstanding.

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

August 2003