

APPENDIX B: INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE TO THE AUDIT FINDINGS

The University of Hong Kong is very appreciative of the opportunity afforded by the second round of quality audits conducted by the Quality Assurance Council to undertake a self-critical review with the aim of further enhancing teaching and learning and the student learning experience. We are gratified by the many commendations and positive comments in the Audit Report, and remain firmly committed both to upholding the highest academic standards, and to making continuous improvement in all aspects of teaching and learning befitting the University's international status.

We are extremely pleased that the Audit Panel commended the University's "high academic standards, as evidenced by external examiners' reports, professional accreditation and Faculty and curriculum reviews, graduate destinations, and employer surveys" (para. 2.10). The Panel also commended "the University's comprehensive and effective quality assurance and quality enhancement processes that include a meticulous approach to curriculum and Faculty review and draw upon external input" (para. 3.3). It is clear from the Audit Report that the University's quality assurance and quality enhancement mechanisms are well-established, evidence-based and robust, and that its teaching and learning framework is operating at a high international standard.

Enhancing the student learning experience, which is one of the two audit themes in this exercise, is integral to the University's strategic development as acknowledged by the Panel. Since the last quality audit, the University has been widely engaging staff at all levels to respond to the challenges presented by the curriculum reform. Our 4-year undergraduate curriculum is defined as the totality of learning experiences both inside and outside the classroom, on- and off-campus, in the University and in the community, and in Hong Kong and outside. This is made possible by the enabling curriculum structure which allows students to select their own combination of majors, minors and electives. The common learning experiences in the enabling structure are designed to facilitate student achievement of the University's educational aims, and cultivation of core moral values and dispositions essential for engaged global citizens. The University's innovations and hard work in the past few years have borne fruit, leading to a transformation of the student learning experience. Our common learning experiences are predicated upon the Common Core Curriculum, first year experience and academic induction, academic advising, experiential learning, global experience, internationalised learning environment, capstone experience, advanced information technology and e-learning. The Panel commended "the Common Core Curriculum which has had significant impact on intellectual, social and ethical development of undergraduates across the University" (para. 5.9). Given the effort we have devoted to developing more than 150 courses and making the Common Core Curriculum central to the University's undergraduate curriculum, we are particularly pleased with this recognition. Our formal curriculum is complemented by co-/extra-curricular activities both inside and outside of Hong Kong, residential education and student

activities. In this regard, the Audit Panel commended “the wide range of formal and informal learning opportunities routinely made available to a significant and increasing proportion of the student population, which is carefully designed to enable students to achieve the various learning outcomes” (para. 7.2).

Also, the Panel “found evidence of widespread engagement with the extensive experiential and co-curricular activities offered by various units. Examination of evaluative documentary evidence was supported by the meeting with UG students who indicated that these activities are rated highly and viewed as adding considerable value to the formal learning experiences associated with their academic programme”. The Panel therefore commended “the creative and proactive approach adopted by the University’s integrated network of student services to developing and managing this range of activities and to supporting students and promoting their holistic development” (para. 7.3). The Panel’s findings are consistent not only with the results of our own student surveys, but also with those of external stakeholders, attesting to their high satisfaction with the quality of our graduates.

The University places great emphasis on its taught postgraduate provision, which adopts the same robust quality assurance and quality enhancement processes as those applicable to the undergraduate curriculum. This resonates with the view of the Panel: “External examiners’ reports, surveys of graduate destinations and the comments made by employers and alumni whom the Audit Panel met all indicate that the University’s TPg programmes are achieving a high academic standard” (para. 6.15). Our guidelines for review of taught postgraduate programmes, “which provide a robust quality enhancement process”, were commended by the Panel (para. 6.12). The introduction of the capstone requirement in all Master’s curricula fully demonstrates the University’s commitment in strengthening the teaching-research nexus and in promoting academic excellence. The University’s cosmopolitan and multicultural campus and its highly internationalised staff and students have further enhanced the student learning experience, and we will endeavour to continue to enrich their experience.

The University has also made substantial enhancements to its research postgraduate provision, and welcomes the Panel’s view that “the calibre of successful applicants, reports from external examiners and associations with top research institutes worldwide attest to the high quality of the RPg programme at HKU” (para. 6.9). In particular, the Panel commended the development of the biannual system of monitoring and review, which “tracks the progress of all RPg student throughout their studies” and “which serves both to support individual student learning and achievement and to identify enhancement opportunities for RPg provision as a whole” (para. 6.8). Further, it commended the formulation of the research postgraduate handbook “which provides clear guidance on good practice, procedures, and roles and responsibilities for students, staff and Faculty committees” (para. 6.6).

On the second audit theme of global engagement, “the University’s well-articulated aims for international engagement, supported by a comprehensive range of strategies,

support services and funding” received a commendation from the Panel (para. 7.41). Internationalisation is embedded in every facet of HKU life encompassing impactful research, quality teaching and learning, innovative curriculum design and development, global recruitment of outstanding students and world-class scholars, and inbound and outbound student mobility programmes. It is one of the core strategies set out in the University’s Academic Development Proposal for 2016-19. On this front, the Panel recognised the University’s considerable progress towards achieving its student mobility targets, and commended the University “for the provision of international learning experiences to a large and increasing number of students” (para. 7.20). Nevertheless, the University is not complacent about the achievements made thus far, and will strive to develop an even stronger global network to offer more enrichment opportunities to our students.

The Audit Report acknowledged the University’s strength in attracting many of the highest achieving students to its undergraduate curriculum, and the highly selective admissions to its taught and research postgraduate curricula (para. 2.9). It “found evidence that HKU graduates enjoy considerable success in the workplace and/or progress to careers in academic research in high-ranking universities around the world” (para. 4.6). The University is immensely proud of its students and all their achievements, in relation to which the Panel made a succinct and apt comment: “Employers, alumni and representatives of professional bodies whom the Audit Panel met attribute this success to the academic achievements and broader graduate characteristics that distinguish HKU graduates” (para. 4.6). The Audit Panel was of the view that “the University is committed to adding value to the high achieving students it attracts, and is actively taking steps to ensure that all are enabled to gain the maximum benefit from the curricular and co-/extra-curricular activities it provides” (para. 4.10). Certainly, we will continue to explore effective and meaningful ways in which more value can be added to our education provision.

Alongside the commendations, the University greatly appreciates the recommendations for further consideration made by the Panel. In particular, we will move quickly in three key areas outlined in the Audit Report, viz. articulation and promulgation of an overarching strategic approach to setting the academic standards of our awards (para. 2.12), continued development of a conceptual framework to capture student achievement across the spectrum (para. 4.8), and broadening of our strategy for internationalisation of the student learning environment (para. 7.42). The University is starting now to prepare an action plan with details of how the Panel’s recommendations will be addressed within a clear timeframe.

Overall, the Audit Panel concluded that “the University sets and maintains high academic standards through a variety of effective mechanisms, with due regard to external expertise and comparator institutions” (para. 2.12), and that “the University has a strong and widespread commitment to the quality of learning opportunities and has put in place an appropriate and comprehensive quality assurance and quality enhancement system that supports its over-arching strategic goal to be a leading international institution of higher learning. Dialogue between the Audit Panel and

staff and students of the University revealed a reflective academic community committed to attaining world-class academic standards and an enhanced student experience” (para. 3.8).

We would like to reiterate our gratitude to the Audit Panel for its valuable advice and suggestions. We are very pleased with the positive and constructive outcomes of the audit exercise, and will take on board all the recommendations made by the Panel in reviewing our teaching and learning strategy and action plan. As a leading global university, we will continue to work concertedly to make further contributions to Hong Kong and the international academic arena. We are confident that we will be able to meet all the challenges that come our way.

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