The University of Hong Kong welcomes the Report from the QAC Audit Panel which acknowledges HKU’s high quality student learning experience which is underpinned by good and effective support to students, both centrally and in Departments and Faculties, and our proactive approach in meeting the challenges of the impending changes in higher education in Hong Kong.

We are gratified by the very encouraging comments made about the University’s overarching strategies and policies in teaching and learning quality assurance and enhancement. The main text of the report reflects a good understanding of our strengths and our strong commitment to teaching and learning, affirms the strategic direction that we have taken, and helps us to further identify and strengthen areas that we have critically examined and resolved to make more robust.

The Report reinforces the University’s strategies for enhancement of teaching and learning through:

- strategically strengthening leadership in teaching and learning (Commendation 1);
- an optimum balance of “top-down” and “bottom-up” management processes which provide strategic central leadership while encouraging bottom-up initiatives and innovations at Faculty level (Affirmations 1 and 2);
- the centrality given to student learning experience through rigorous monitoring and serious consideration of student feedback (Commendation 3, Affirmation 4 and paragraph 12.3), and active involvement of students in teaching and learning matters (paragraphs 6.4 and 12.1);
- provision of extensive learning opportunities locally and overseas (Commendation 5), integration of local and international students (Affirmation 9), and ensuring that students are adequately supported in both academic and non-academic matters (Affirmation 8);
- extensive international benchmarking (Commendation 2) and solicitation of external input from professionals and employers;
- critical self-reflection and continuous improvement through regular academic reviews of Faculties (Commendation 4) and regular reviews of programmes (Affirmation 5);
- academic staff development policies and strategies and recognition of teaching excellence and innovation (Commendations 6 and 7); and
- strong institution-wide and significant resource commitment to enhancing all aspects of teaching and learning (paragraph 2 of Executive Summary, paragraphs 4.11, 11.12, and 15.1).

In the past few years, the University has been proactively responding to the impending 4-year undergraduate curriculum reform by widely engaging staff in the planning and design of the new curriculum, integrating outcome-based learning in the new curriculum as well as converting existing courses to this approach, and adapting these policies to fit a newly designed 3-year undergraduate curriculum to be launched in 2010 to benefit earlier cohorts. We are pleased that these efforts have been recognized by the Audit Panel (Affirmations 3 and 6, paragraph 7.7). These learning experiences will be further enhanced through the development of an e-learning strategy which is currently underway (Affirmation 7). As a research-intensive institution, we are particularly pleased that the Audit Panel has commended our research postgraduate education and the comprehensive support currently being given to students (Commendation 8).
What is perhaps most gratifying is that the Audit Panel, through its meetings with diverse groups of students of all levels and with external stakeholders, has reaffirmed a high level of student satisfaction with their learning experience and the academic support services and facilities provided at the University. This is consistent with the findings of our various student surveys, as well as our stakeholders’ general satisfaction with the quality of our graduates.

In the spirit of quality enhancement, the University has, in its Institutional Submission and Action Plan, identified areas for further improvement and has in fact already set in train initiatives which will take our teaching and learning in undergraduate and postgraduate education to new heights. Therefore, the University is appreciative of the Audit Panel’s suggestions for improvement which will help us to further focus our efforts.

In line with the “top-down” and “bottom-up” management model, the University has recently completed a review of central committee structures for teaching and learning and the structures have been streamlined. Further alignment between University central and Faculty and departmental levels will be carried out (Affirmation 1 and Recommendation 2).

To enhance informed academic decision-making at all levels, the University has included data on various surveys of student learning experiences as additional Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to monitor teaching and learning quality. We have been working closely with individual Faculties to facilitate more meaningful and useful interpretation of their respective student survey data for the purposes of Faculty planning and curriculum development. The University will ensure that these KPIs are publicized more widely at Faculty and departmental levels (Recommendation 1).

We are happy to see that the Audit Panel was appreciative of the strong evidence of our administrative rigor in scrutinizing and approving new academic programmes and ensuring high standards in teaching and learning quality (paragraphs 5.2 and 5.4). In line with our schedule for implementing outcomes-based education, we have developed templates for course and programme design to ensure alignment of the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment to achieve the University’s overarching educational aims (Recommendation 3).

While each Faculty has an assessment policy derived from central procedures and regulations, the University recognizes the importance of an institutional assessment policy. A draft policy document was discussed by staff and students at our annual curriculum reform retreat in June 2009. Further discussion and consultation will take place in the coming academic year, as outlined in our Action Plan. The document covers, amongst other aspects, assessment principles, policies, grading and appeals mechanisms and procedures, and external examining. Measures will be taken to ensure consistent application across the board and wide dissemination across the university (Recommendations 4, 6 and 7).

As a research-intensive university, the teaching-research nexus is very much our concern. We believe all teaching should be informed by research and we also encourage staff to conduct research on their teaching. Indeed scholarship of teaching is one of the requirements for all TDG applications. The meaning of scholarship of teaching is still being debated internationally and we will continue to explore how this should be realized (Recommendation 5).

The quality of teaching staff is critical to students’ learning experience. To enhance teacher quality, dissemination of good practices is strategically embedded in ongoing teaching and learning activities through promoting and funding interdisciplinary and cross-Faculty project
collaboration in teaching development. In addition to seminars and workshops, teaching and learning conferences will be organized (Recommendation 8). Our Centre for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (CETL) currently offers training courses for postgraduate teaching assistants and other non-professoriate instructors. While these courses have been highly evaluated and well-subscribed, CETL will be working with Faculties to agree minimum requirements to be reached before research students can be assigned teaching duties (Recommendation 9).

Having leveraged on the QAC Audit to consolidate established good practices and to critically examine other existing practices which need to be updated, the University will certainly take on board the Audit Report’s findings when developing and enhancing the quality of our taught curricula (Affirmation 10).

The University would like to re-iterate its gratitude to the Audit Panel for its very supportive and encouraging report which reaffirms the strategies and continuous processes of quality enhancement currently underway at HKU. We also thank the Panel for its confidence that HKU is well-placed to meet the educational challenges of the 21st century.