To Deans of Faculties  
Chairmen, Faculty Teaching and Learning Quality Committees

Review of the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET)

Thank you for your Faculty’s response to the consultation document (document 68/1008) of the Teaching and Learning Quality Committee (TLQC) concerning its recommendations for enhancing the current policy principles, guidelines and processes of Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET), and comments provided on the Committee’s revised SET questionnaire.

2. I am pleased to advise on progress on the following fronts:

(a) The TLQC has further refined the revised SET questionnaire to take on board Faculties’ comments (document 67/1008 re-amended: Appendix A), and renamed SET as Student Evaluation of Teaching and Learning (SETL) to more appropriately reflect its focus on student learning. While the core SETL items approved by the TLQC are compulsory, Faculty TLQCs can introduce Faculty-specific items, if necessary. The SETL questionnaire will be reviewed by the TLQC after one year. The Executive Director of CAUT would be happy to discuss further with Faculties any concern they might have about the applicability of individual core questionnaire items to their curricula. There was also general support at Senate for the SETL questionnaire to be adopted.

(b) The Committee’s recommendations on SET / SETL which have also been modified in light of Faculties’ concerns and comments were endorsed by Senate at its meeting on February 3, 2009. An extract of the relevant revised Senate minute is attached (Appendix B).

3. As the TLQC’s recommendations affect all teaching staff, I would request that this circular promulgating Senate’s resolutions be disseminated widely within the Faculty; the circular can be accessed via the Teaching and Learning website (http://tl.caut.hku.hk/student-evaluation-teaching-and-learning). The recommendations on SETL can essentially be grouped into the following categories:

(a) recommendations reiterating and reinforcing existing policy recommendations and guidelines which were approved by Senate in 1998¹;

(b) recommendations enhancing the approved policies and guidelines; and

(c) new recommendations which are very much based on formalizing existing good practices operating in some Faculties.

¹ Six policy recommendations and eighteen operational guidelines were approved by Senate in 1998 on the recommendation of the then Teaching Quality Committee. An updated SETL Operations Guide incorporating the 1998 recommendations and guidelines and the February 2009 Senate resolutions will be available next month from the SSRC webpage on SETL (http://www.ssrc.hku.hk/web/SET.htm).
I. Reinforcement of existing policy recommendations and guidelines

Accessibility of SETL Results to Students

4. Under Policy Recommendation 3 (viz. “Course Evaluation results must be shared with students.”), departments should share the course evaluation results with students via the Staff-Student Consultative Committee (SSCC) and that as a minimum, students should be shown summaries of all parts, except for the part on teacher evaluation. From the annual FTLQC reports on SET received to date by the TLQC, it is not apparent that all Faculties have followed this guideline.

5. Senate therefore resolved that Faculties make incremental changes to implement Policy Recommendation 3 by disseminating and publishing course evaluation summaries through one or more channels, as suggested in Table 1 under paragraph 12 below.

SETL Administration Procedures

6. The SSRC’s SET Handbook advises that SET questionnaires should be administered by the departmental office and not by the course teacher. Prior to the students completing the questionnaire, the course teacher should first explain the objective of the exercise, reassure the students of anonymity, advise them of the time available for completing the questionnaire and explain the completion of the front page of the questionnaire, before leaving the room. The collection of forms should be undertaken by a designated student who should mark the number of forms collected and return them in a sealed envelope to the departmental office. While most Faculties have been acting accordingly, students have expressed concern that there were occasions where these procedures were not followed.

7. To ensure that evaluations are conducted ethically, Senate has therefore agreed that:

(a) students need to be assured of the anonymity of results, and that the overall summative items and the open-ended results should not be returned to the department before the end of the examination process;

(b) the SETL questionnaire should not be administered by the course teacher;

(c) while SETL questionnaires will not be administered if course enrolments are fewer than five to safeguard students’ anonymity, SETL questionnaires for courses with small enrolments (of five or above) will still be processed even if the number of respondents to the questionnaire are below five, with the qualification that scores with low return rates should be interpreted judiciously;

(d) Faculties should review their current administration of SETL to ensure that the anonymity of students and confidentiality in the data collection processes are observed.

II. Enhancement of Approved Policies and Guidelines

Role of Students in SETL
8. Students have a central role to play in SETL; their responsiveness to SET and the quality of their response are crucial. Students are likely to be responsive if they are aware of how SETL results have been / will be used for improvement of teaching and learning. Policy Recommendation 6\(^2\) endorsed by Senate in 1998 stipulated that follow-up action must be taken to improve teaching. In order that follow-up actions indeed address the needs of the students, it is important to find out why students respond in the way they do through follow-up discussions in the SSCC or, if appropriate, focus group discussions with students.

9. As concerns have been expressed by students regarding their lack of knowledge of how evaluations results will be used, Senate has resolved that:

(a) a standard statement be included in SETL questionnaires to advise that the SETL evaluations will be used for improvement of teaching and learning;

(b) students be informed, through SSCC as well as other channels, how courses have been enhanced as a result of evaluations provided by the previous cohort(s) and how evaluations they provide will be used to improve teaching and learning for either themselves and/or for the following cohort; and

(c) Faculties and teachers carefully consult with students about the results of the SETL questionnaire, and subsequent follow-up discussions of SETL results be held at the SSCCs, or any student focus group discussions which may be organized.

III. New Policies

Accessibility of SETL Results in PRD Reviews

10. Under Policy Recommendation 5 endorsed by Senate 1998, teacher evaluation results remain confidential to the teacher and his / her Head of Department / Faculty Dean (the latter in the case of unitary Faculties). However, with the introduction of the PRD, it would be important for the reviewers to have online access to the overall teacher effectiveness scores of all courses taught by the reviewee in order for them to obtain an overview of the teaching performance of the latter and to provide formative and summative feedback to him or her. Individual items on teacher effectiveness provide useful information on specific aspects of teaching and are important for formative purposes. This should be provided to both the reviewee and his / her reviewers for formative feedback.

11. Moreover, Guideline 2 on the operation of SET endorsed by Senate 1998 states that team-taught courses may repeat the part on teacher items or pull out the items from that part to create a second questionnaire with a pre-assigned teacher identifier to produce a separate report. Guideline 3 states that a course jointly taught by departments or Faculties should inform SSRC in advance of the coordinating department so that reports can be returned to the head of that department who will arrange to send copies to heads of other contributing departments. These Guidelines have been largely adhered to by Faculties. In addition, when submitting course effectiveness scores for team-taught courses, most teachers indicate the names or numbers of

\(^2\) Policy recommendation 6 reads as follows: “Evaluation results must be used to improve teaching. The teachers and department must take follow-up action with necessary improvements within a reasonable time after students have rated the courses and teaching. This should be seen as an implicit contract with students in that their role is to provide honest feedback to assist teachers in continuous quality improvement.”
teachers involved in teaching the course. This is good practice and provides accurate and more useful information; it should be continued as standardized practice.

12. Having regard to these considerations, Senate therefore approved the following TLQC recommendations:

(a) that the overall teacher effectiveness scores of all courses taught by a teacher be made available online to his / her PRD reviewers;

(b) as teacher effectiveness scores are somewhat context-dependent, that the teacher be given the opportunity to provide an interpretation and explanation of the results, other evidence of teaching effectiveness and a statement of what he / she intends to do to improve teaching and learning;

(c) that for team-taught courses, Guidelines 2 and 3 be adhered to and that the existing practice of indicating the number and the names of teachers involved in team-taught courses when submitting course effectiveness scores be standardized across all courses; and

(d) that SETL results be made accessible and be disseminated as given in the following table:

Table 1: Summary of Dissemination and Accessibility of SETL Results
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part 1: Course Information</th>
<th>Level of Aggregation</th>
<th>Accessibility</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part 1(A): items on specific aspects of the course</td>
<td>Course and above</td>
<td>• publish course evaluation summaries through one or more channels, e.g. printed reports on course effectiveness placed in Faculty / departmental offices for staff’s and students’ perusal; data uploaded on the Faculty / departmental Webpage; etc. • Individual Teachers • PRD Reviewer(s)</td>
<td>Formative and summative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department or Faculty</td>
<td>FTLQC • Faculty Boards • TLQC</td>
<td>Formative and summative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 1(A): Overall course effectiveness</td>
<td>Course and above</td>
<td>same as items on specific aspects of the course</td>
<td>Summative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department or Faculty</td>
<td>FTLQC • Faculty Boards • TLQC</td>
<td>Summative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 1 (B): items on English as the Medium of Instruction</td>
<td>Course and above</td>
<td>same as items on specific aspects of the course</td>
<td>Formative and summative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department or Faculty</td>
<td>FTLQC • Faculty Boards • TLQC</td>
<td>Formative and summative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 1(C): Open-ended comments</td>
<td>Course</td>
<td>• Course teachers • Dept Head/Dean (in case of unitary Faculty)</td>
<td>Formative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 2: Individual teacher</td>
<td>Level of Aggregation</td>
<td>Accessibility</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Part 2 (A): items on specific aspects of teaching | Individual teacher | • Individual teacher  
• Dept Head/Dean (in case of unitary Faculty)  
• PRD reviewer(s) | Formative and summative |
| Department and Faculty | • FTLQC  
• Faculty Boards  
• TLQC | Formative and summative |
| Part 2 (A): Overall teacher effectiveness | Individual teacher | • Individual teacher  
• Dept Head/Dean (in case of unitary Faculty)  
• PRD reviewer(s) | Summative |
| Department and Faculty | • FTLQC  
• Faculty Boards  
• TLQC | Summative |
| Part 2 (B): Open-ended comments | Individual teacher | • Individual teacher  
• Dept Head/Dean (in case of unitary Faculty) | Formative |

13. In approving the recommendations in paragraph 12, Senate took note that as concern has been expressed by some staff about needing time to familiarize themselves with SETL, it has been agreed with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Staffing) that academic staff will be given a choice as to whether to include the SETL results of 2008-09 in their Academic Portfolio of Achievement for PRD purposes. Some Faculties adopted the revised questionnaire in the first semester, and the remaining Faculties will be using SETL this semester.

**Annual Reporting to TLQC on SETL and Report for 2007-08**

14. I am taking this opportunity to alert FTLQC Chairmen that consideration is now being given to consolidating annual reporting on SETL with the outcomes of the HKUSLEQ to provide more useful feedback to Faculties for enhancing teaching and learning. Proposals will be considered by the TLQC within this semester. It is planned that the new annual reporting format will be adopted for reporting on SETL in 2009-10.

15. In the meanwhile, Faculty TLQCs are now invited to submit, through the Faculty Board, the annual report (Appendix C: downloadable from [http://tl.caut.hku.hk/student-evaluation-teaching-and-learning](http://tl.caut.hku.hk/student-evaluation-teaching-and-learning)) on SET conducted during the academic year 2007-08, using the previous year’s format. The 2007-08 report should include:

   (a) confirmation on whether SETs were conducted in respect of all curricula offered in the Faculty for the academic year 2007-08; and if not, the reasons for not conducting SET;

   (b) the overall effectiveness of the courses as reflected by the SET results;

   (c) difficulties encountered, if any;
(d) mechanism(s) / procedure(s) for disseminating the SET course results within the Faculty / department and among students, and the follow-up actions taken;

(e) good practices (with elaboration); and

(f) suggestions for improvement, if any.

16. The Faculty’s SET report for 2007-08 should reach Mrs. T. Hui, Acting Secretary of the TLQC, by April 30, 2009.

Professor Amy B.M. Tsui  
Deputy Chairman, Teaching and Learning Quality Committee  
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) and Vice-President

March 13, 2009

c.c. Members, Teaching and Learning Quality Committee  
Associate Deans overseeing Teaching and Learning who are not TLQC members  
Executive Director, Centre for the Advancement of University Teaching  
Director, Social Sciences Research Centre  
Faculty Secretaries  
Assistant Registrar, Graduate School