THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

Visiting Committees

1.   Background

1.1   The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) is committed to quality education and research as the core of the University's mission. The University acknowledges that it has the responsibility of regular self-review and constant vigilance over quality standards and processes. Over the past decades, the University has grown significantly in size and complexity, and the need for more formal and rigorous processes has become particularly pronounced. As a result, the entire strategy and quality review framework has evolved rapidly in recent years and the University has matured to a point where a new system of Visiting Committees will be established to advise holistically the University through the Vice-Chancellor on various aspects of departmental strategy, planning and standards, research, as well as teaching and learning. The Visiting Committees are intended to allow the replacement of the External/ Visiting Examiners, who had a narrower brief restricted to examinations, standards and curricula.

2.   Objective

2.1   The objective of the Visiting Committee is to conduct a holistic review of all the activities of a Department or a cluster of cognate Departments. The Visiting Committee will conduct an in-depth assessment of the Department(s) on various aspects of strategy, planning and standards to give advice on the curriculum, education and research, with recommendations for future developments.

3.   Nature and Frequency

3.1   Visiting Committees will be established normally at the departmental level although they could also be set up for a cluster of cognate Departments, especially those that offer inter-departmental programmes, as advised by the Faculty Deans.

3.2   Visiting Committees will operate on a cycle that is the same as that of the Quality Assurance Council (QAC) audits on teaching and learning, which are currently conducted in 4-year cycles. A Visiting Committee will be appointed to visit the University once within a 4-year cycle. The frequency of the appointment of Visiting Committees is subject to review from time to time.

4.   Relationship with other QA Processes

4.1   For a number of years, the University has evolved two parallel systems for quality assurance (QA). The Visiting/ External Examiners, now abolished as a statutory requirement, were concerned largely with *standards* and the benchmarking of those standards to *external reference points*; this task is now subsumed under the Visiting Committees of external experts. Separately, the Programme Reviews focus mainly on teaching and learning (T&L) *processes*, the most important of which is a process of self-reflection, self-evaluation and improvement plans, monitored through review by a

panel that is largely internal; these reviews are designed under an overall Integrated Framework, and to a large extent mirrors the external process conducted by the QAC.

4.2 It is not possible to completely subsume the Programme Reviews under the Visiting Committee, because the Programme Reviews take a fairly long time (especially if a Department offers many programmes). It is also likely that the typical Visiting Committee will consist of top researchers, who do not necessarily have the expertise or the time for such a process.

4.3 On the other hand it is also not desirable to keep these as two separate processes, both because it adds to the onus on the Departments, and because the presence of two uncoordinated processes will undermine coherence.

4.4 Therefore the following arrangement is proposed. Within any cycle, each Department (or cluster of Departments) will start with a self-review covering all aspects of its work, including both research and T&L. The self-evaluation document for T&L should be prepared some months ahead of time (see Paragraph 7.3 below) according to the requirements of the Programme Review process, and presented to the Programme Review panel. The Programme Review outcome (in the form of a formal report) will then be presented to the Visiting Committee for scrutiny.

4.5 Thus the Visiting Committee will consider all matters other than T&L directly from the self-review, whereas for T&L processes it will rely principally on the Programme Review outcome – on which it can further comment and consider together with research etc. The overall situation is illustrated in Figure 1.
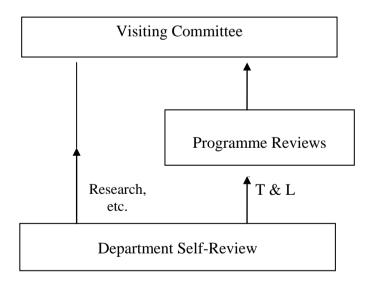

Figure 1: The relationship between different processes

4.6 For this arrangement to work smoothly, it is incumbent upon each Department to take on the responsibility to schedule the Programme Review(s) (more than one if there are multiple programmes under its purview, e.g., Ug and TPg) shortly before the Visiting Committee convenes. Under such arrangement, at least one member from the Visiting Committee can be invited to join the Programme Review Panel, after which the Programme Review report can then be submitted to the Visiting Committee for

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consideration. Failing this, the Visiting Committee would have to rely on the last available set of Programme Review results, and the progress reports since; however, this is not optimal, and should be avoided as far as possible.

4.7 Departments also may, if they so wish, arrange the Programme Review to take place immediately before the Visiting Committee, and ask one member of the Visiting Committee to come a few days earlier to join in that task. In this case, the Visiting Committee will most probably consider a draft rather than a final report.

4.8 Provided that the Visiting Committee is scheduled to come to CUHK within three months after the Programme Review, the Programme Review reports will be presented to the Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning only after receiving the comments of the Visiting Committee.

4.9 For those programmes that have retained External/Visiting Examiners, they will have their Programme Review as currently run, and their review reports should also be submitted to the Visiting Committee of the Department concerned if there is one.

4.10 For those professional programmes which are required to undergo accreditation by external professional bodies, the Departments concerned should take into account all these processes and come up with a schedule that best suits the interest of the department, by ensuring that the advice and inputs received from various review processes will be able to inform each other so as to achieve the optimal benefits.

4.11 The first cycle of the Visiting Committee shall commence in the 2009-10 academic year, with the Visiting/ External Examiners to be replaced by the Visiting Committees in phases during the transitional period from 2009-10 to 2012-13. The arrangements for undergraduate programmes during the transitional period are in Annex 1.

5. Terms of Reference

5.1 The Terms of Reference of the Visiting Committee were first considered and approved by the Senate at the Fourth Meeting (2004-05). They are further refined and elaborated below, especially in light of the coordination with Programme Reviews described above.

Terms of Reference of Visiting Committee

The Visiting Committee will review holistically the activities of the Department or a cluster of cognate Departments to provide external anchor on standards from a macro perspective.

Information

1. The Visiting Committee shall have access to and shall evaluate the following information:

(a) reports, including self-evaluation document provided by the Department on its research, scholarship and professional service;
(b) the outcomes of the current (or the latest) Programme Reviews in respect of its teaching and learning (T&L), with the Department's own self-evaluation

document on T&L being made separately available as supplementary material;

(c)   sample examination question papers, scripts and distribution of marks, as agreed beforehand with the Visiting Committee, being made separately available as supplementary material.

Process

2.   The Visiting Committee should be briefed by the Vice-Chancellor and/or the Provost and the Dean, and then meet teachers, students and alumni, and where appropriate also representatives of the profession, in order to come to understand the activities and quality; and where appropriate, also to consult academic staff in cognate Departments who also work in the same broadly defined academic fields.

Evaluation and advice

3.   The Visiting Committee should

(a)   advise on the **teaching and learning**, including: curriculum design, programme development, learning environment and outcomes, and student assessment; and to provide external input on the standards achieved, with reference to the international benchmarks; .

(b)   evaluate the **research and scholarship** in the Department, including the strengths and weaknesses and where appropriate also professional standards and relations with the profession, with a view to identifying areas for improvement and advising on emerging trends and directions to be pursued.

(c)   assist the Department in formulating a mid-term **development strategy** in order to achieve excellence as a leading Department for its academic disciplines in Asia; and

(d)   undertake **any special tasks** as commissioned; and

(e)   to **report to the Vice-Chancellor** on the above, and advise the University on the measures that need to be put in place, including the deployment of resources, in implementing such a strategy.

6.   Composition of the Visiting Committee

6.1   The Visiting Committee will consist of at least two to a maximum of four senior academics (and possibly more if the Visiting Committee deals with a broad area), with considerable experience in higher education and who have not been on the staff of CUHK for at least three years prior to the appointment. In some disciplines, the Visiting Committee may also include senior professionals who are practitioners of the relevant disciplines. The Chairperson and members of the Visiting Committee will be appointed for one review by the Vice-Chancellor, based on nominations sought from the Faculty Dean among others.

6.2   The respective Faculty Office will provide the secretarial and logistic support for servicing the Visiting Committee, including remunerative/ reimbursement arrangements for the review visit (Annex 2 – not attached).

7. Preparation

7.1 As part of its preparation for the visit, the Department is required to review all of its operations which contribute to the standards and quality of student learning and its research endeavours. This self-review is an opportunity for the Department to analyze and reflect on its objectives for student learning; on its procedures, standards and benchmarks; on its research strategy/ achievements; to check that it has appropriate outcome measures in place; and to reflect on those outcome measures and their trends. The Department should ask itself questions such as "What are we trying to do?", "How are we doing it?", "Are we effective?", "How do we know we are effective?", "How can we improve?" The self-evaluation document should be ready 10 weeks before the Visiting Committee convenes.

7.2 The self-evaluation document for the Visiting Committee is central to the review process and it provides the framework for the process. It is a document in which the Department articulates its strategy and research plan, desired outcomes, demonstrates the extent to which it achieves them, and describes its mechanisms for improvement. The document should also incorporate an evaluation of the perceived strengths and weaknesses and include all sections described in Annex 3.

7.3 The *initial* self-evaluation that deals with T&L should be prepared to meet the requirements of the Programme Reviews under the "Integrated Framework for Curriculum Development and Review" (specifications to be provided from time to time by the Senate Committee for Teaching and Learning) for each of the programmes under the purview of the Department concerned. This part should be ready in sufficient time for the Programme Reviews to be completed before the Visiting Committee convenes. The T&L section of the self-evaluation document for the Visiting Committee should consist of the Programme Review Reports, with the original self-evaluation document prepared for the Programme Review being made available as supplementary material.

7.4 Other related documentation and supporting evidence for the self-evaluation document for Visiting Committees may include the Annual Departmental Record, research reports, external examiner(s) reports (if still available), and reports from professional accreditation (if any). In the case of a review involving a cluster of Departments, the Dean of the relevant Faculty shall be responsible for co-ordinating the self-review document.

8. Visit

8.1 The duration of the visit will depend on the complexity of the Department(s) under review. Generally, each visit will last for 3 days, but may range from 2 to 5 days.

8.2 A detailed visit programme and a list of participants shall be drawn up by the Faculty Office concerned in consultation with the Department(s) under review 3 weeks before the dates of the visit. The programme for the visit shall normally include, among other things, the following key activities:

    (a)   preliminary private meeting of the Visiting Committee;
    (b)   meeting with the Vice-Chancellor and/or the Provost;
    (c)   meeting with the Faculty Dean and Associate Deans;

(d)	meeting with the Chairpersons of the University's Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning, and the Research Committee;
(e)	meeting with the Chairperson of the Department, and senior staff, including co-ordinators of committees, if any, on curriculum, programme, course design and on research;
(f)	meeting with academic and research staff at various levels;
(g)	meeting with current undergraduate, postgraduate and research students, at different levels of study;
(h)	meeting with graduates;
(i)	meeting with external stakeholders, such as employers and representatives of professional bodies;
(j)	tour of facilities;
(k)	inspecting student work, such as coursework and projects;
(l)	reviewing the examination materials, including examination papers and scripts, and honours classification;
(m)	reviewing research and other scholarly output;
(n)	private meetings of the Visiting Committee for reflection and review of its findings;
(o)	concluding private meeting of the Visiting Committee;
(p)	exit meeting with the Vice-Chancellor, Provost, Chairpersons of the Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning and the Research Committee, Faculty Dean, Associate Deans, Chairperson of the Department, and any other senior staff to give immediate feedback to the Department.

8.3 Meetings are normally scheduled in sessions of 1 to 2 hours. Private meetings of the Visiting Committee for reflection and refinement of its findings are dispersed between various meetings.

9. Report

9.1 Following the review meetings, a report on the Visiting Committee's major findings and recommendations will be compiled within one month after the visit. The report may be in any format the Visiting Committee sees fit, but should contain recommendations, at a macro-level, on the Department's strategic development, organisational and management structures, measures to enhance teaching and learning, research focus and directions, staff development plans, etc. The report will include a separate section on T&L that can be easily extracted and further considered in the Programme Review process by the Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning and RAC.

9.2 The Department(s) will need to formulate a response to the report in the form of an action plan, which should be duly endorsed by the Department Board(s) and Faculty Boards(s). The report together with the action plan will be submitted to the Vice-Chancellor (or her/his designate) who will then refer it to the appropriate University committees, including the Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning and the Research Committee. The Vice-Chancellor may also make recommendations to the Resource Allocation Committee as appropriate.

9.3   Any comments on the outcomes of the Programme Review should be separately recorded, and these will go to the Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning as it considers the Programme Review outcomes and necessary follow-up.

[Approved by the Senate at its Fourth meeting (2008-09) held on 10 June 2009.]

Transitional Arrangements for Visiting Committees

1.   The first cycle of the Visiting Committees shall commence in the 2009-10 academic year, with the External/ Visiting Examiners to be replaced by the Visiting Committees in phases during the transitional period from 2009-10 to 2012-13, in sync with the expiry of the terms of the current examiners (typically of 3 years' duration) which will expire in phases.   The following arrangements are proposed for undergraduate programmes during the transitional period from 2009-10 to 2012-13.

(a)   In the case of the 21 undergraduate programmes with the appointments of the Visiting Examiners expiring in 2008-09 (Attachment A), the Visiting Committees for Departments covering these undergraduate programmes are to be appointed by the Vice-Chancellor by June 2009 (unless approval is given to retain the Visiting Examiners under the existing examination arrangements), and the visits for these Departments shall be conducted by July 2012.

(b)   In the case of the remaining 30 undergraduate programmes with the appointments of the Visiting Examiners expiring in 2009-10 (Attachment B), the Visiting Committees for Departments covering these programmes are to be appointed by the Vice-Chancellor by June 2010 (unless approval is given to retain the Visiting Examiners under the existing examination arrangements), and the visits for these Departments shall be conducted by July 2013. The Visiting Examiners will participate in the first cycle of the internal Programme Reviews which will be completed in mid-2010 if the programme concerned still has not gone through the review process.

(c)   There will be a "light" Programme Review in a compressed cycle of two years starting from the fourth quarter of 2010 and in 2011, focusing on the new 3+3+4 curriculum and programme design, as well as the tracking of the action plans of programmes arising from the first-cycle round of reviews. As external input will not be required in the "light" Programme Reviews, the Visiting Committees for the first cycle from 2009-10 to 2012-13 will not be involved in the "light" Programme Review and will only scrutinize the latest outcomes and the reports of the Programme Reviews of the first cycle.

(d)   The Visiting Committees will be involved in the second cycle of full Programme Review which will resume in 2013-14 as the Faculty Deans may deem appropriate.

2   For the Faculty of Medicine, since its External Examiners need to visit and review the programmes more frequently due to the professional nature of the programmes, they may wish to retain their existing system. However, Visiting Committees should be established for the Faculty before the beginning of the 2010-11 academic year. Further consultations will be needed to ensure that there will not be any duplication of efforts.

3   For any new undergraduate programmes that have not produced at least three cohorts of graduates, the Departments/ programmes should retain the Visiting Examiners. In 2009-10, they include Chinese Studies, Law and Early Childhood Education (Part-time degree programme). However, Visiting Committees for these programmes should be established at a time to be determined.

4.   For those programmes that have retained External/Visiting Examiners, they will have their Programme Review as currently run, and their review reports should also be submitted to the Visiting Committee of the Department concerned if there is one.

Guide for Self-evaluation Document for Visiting Committees

Section 1: Introduction

(a)   Mission, objectives and strategic plans
- the Department's objectives, how they are derived from, and how they relate to, the University's mission and vision, and strategic plan
- strategic plan for future direction and developments

(b)   Organization and management
- effectiveness of organizational structures, including committees and lines of responsibility
- development and evaluation of management plans

Section 2: Teaching and Learning

(a)   A list of programmes offered

(b)   The Programme Review Reports
- where the Programme Reviews have just been completed with the participation of one member of the Visiting Committee, this can be replaced by a draft report

(c)   the self-evaluation document on T&L submitted to the Programme Review to be separately made available as supplementary material

(d)   sample examination papers and scripts, as well as mark distributions, as agreed beforehand with the Visiting Committee to be separately made available as supplementary material

Section 3: Overview of Research Activities

(a)   Research strategy and activities
- strengths and weaknesses of research activities and culture in the Department
- strategy to develop areas of research excellence
- strategic approach to building research capacity
- measures to monitor and benchmark research outcomes and quality
- adequate resources to support high quality research activities, e.g. external funding support
- sufficient infrastructure to support its research endeavours

- publications, especially in peer-reviewed journals
- research impact

(b) Collaboration and links with local industries or relevant communities
- policies and procedures in place to foster research collaboration and partnerships with other disciplines and institutions for knowledge transfer in terms of teaching, learning and research
- strategy to promote inter- and multi-disciplinary research, collaborative and team research
- support and resources for collaborative research activities

(c) Supervision of research postgraduate students
- adequate resources to supervise research postgraduate students
- monitoring the quality of supervision of research postgraduate students, including clarity of procedures for selection of supervisors and assessment of students' research work

(d) Other scholarly and professional activities
- policies and procedures for staff participation in other scholarly and professional services
- support and resources for provision of community and consultancy services

Section 4: Staff Development

(a) Academic staff profile
- staff qualification and curriculum vitae (name, degrees attained, discipline and research interests, research performance of the last 3 years, publications or other forms of scholarship, consultancy work, etc., – not more than 2 pages per staff member)
- policies and processes for recruitment, performance appraisal and promotion for academic staff
- support and recognition of good teaching, research and scholarship
- level of teaching, research and administrative workload

(b) Staff development policies and plans
- strategies for enhancing teaching quality for academic staff including provision of appropriate professional development
- provision of staff training appropriate to level of responsibility