

Teaching and Learning Quality-process Review: The Hong Kong Programme

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Abstract

To assure value for money in the higher education sector, the Hong Kong University Grants Committee has embarked on a programme of teaching and learning quality-process reviews (TLQPRs). Such reviews are known as 'audits' in other countries. This paper describes the Committee's approach. After a brief introduction, the paper contrasts the three main types of quality assurance mechanisms used in higher education: accreditation, assessment, and audit. It goes on to describe the factors audited by the TLQPR Panel. These include curriculum design, pedagogical design, implementation quality, outcome assessment, and resource provision. The paper concludes by describing the review process as refined by using experience gained during the first four audits.

Long considered an intangible concept, quality is now being talked about as something that can be 'measured', 'monitored', and 'managed.' The concept of quality is not foreign to higher education. In fact, colleges and universities have long concerned themselves with quality (Dill 1992; 1982; Astin 1991; Ewell 1991; Dinham and Evans 1991; Kimball 1986; Webster 1986; 1983; Cameron 1985; Ben-David 1972; Crawford 1991; The Higher Education Funding Council of England 1994; Higher Education Quality Council 1994a, 1995). Until recently, most attempts at quality assurance have focused on the reduction of variance both in inputs and outputs (Dill 1992). In the United States, institutions have relied primarily upon market forces to minimise variance. However, it now is widely recognised that market forces alone cannot effectively police postsecondary educational quality.

Ideas about assuring educational quality are rooted in the business quality movement. Examples include: Deming methods, championed recently by David Dill (1995; 1992), who focuses specifically on 'social capital', or social networks and horizontal mechanisms of communication; the (U. S.) Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, which has focused business on quality and quality assurance methods and which now is being extended to non-profit enterprises including higher education (Seymour 1994; Garvin 1991); process re-engineering, which holds that the biggest obstacles to needed change are the reluctance of many in higher education to accept the notion of customers, the failure of most institutions to produce measurable outputs, and the lack of collegiality necessary to facilitate discussions about re-engineering (Massy & Wilger 1994; Kidwell & O'Brien 1995; Hammer 1990); and the 'lean enterprise', as described by Womack and Jones (1994) as a group of individuals, functions, and separate organisations that come together to analyse and focus on a particular process to perfect it.

These approaches have in common certain fundamental characteristics including a focus on the customer, employee empowerment, a focus on process, the development of information systems, and an attempt to provide for continuous improvement. In the U.S., a recent Education Commission of the States (ECS) report, *Making Quality Count in Higher Education* (1995) attempts to map quality assurance principles to academic processes in order to improve undergraduate education. The authors stress the importance of the organisational culture, a well-designed, coherent curriculum, and adequate feedback mechanisms. Recommended policy mechanisms include fiscal incentives such as performance and categorical funding and accountability mechanisms such as mandated assessment or quality-process review.

This paper's main purpose is to describe quality-process review as it has been developed and implemented in Hong Kong. First, however, the broader issues associated with higher education quality assurance and accountability are considered.

Quality Assurance and Accountability

Experience shows that accountability, either from the marketplace or through some kind of assessment or process review, is very important for assuring quality. Without account-

ability, even those with the best intentions will begin to cut corners sooner or later as other priorities come to impinge on their commitment. In colleges and universities, the accountability for educational quality must reach all the way to the department or teaching group. Otherwise the alternative demands on professors' time—most notably for research and scholarship—will erode the effort devoted to instructional tasks.

Quality management principles imply that quality assurance has to be an integral part of the teaching and learning process, and that quality cannot be 'inspected in' at the end. For example, (Harvey 1996, p. 12) lists four requirements for an effective quality assurance and improvement programme: (a) facilitate and ensure the process of continuous quality improvement (CQI) rather than bureaucratic accountability; (b) facilitate bottom-up empowerment of those people who can actually effect improvement; (c) enable top-down audit of the CQI process; and (d) ensure that the whole process is non-burdensome, rational, and effective.

Quality must be the responsibility of the teaching staff. However, contrary to the conventional culture in most institutions (Massy & Wilger 1995), quality must be a group responsibility rather than an individual one. (External and institution-level bodies cannot by themselves assure quality, though they can and should promulgate the necessary conditions for quality assurance.) Teams provide the most effective work setting for launching good quality assurance and improvement programmes. Moreover, peer pressure provides the best way to police the performance of individual professors—indeed, it is the *only* way when dealing with the fine structure of professional activities. The peer pressure must come from informed and involved colleagues who share a common stake in the outcome.

That educational quality is difficult for the market to judge is well known. While the possibility of effective market action cannot be ruled out, markets cannot provide the needed discipline without assistance. In other words, one needs some kind of organised assessment or process review process, not just attention to market signals. America's so-called 'assessment movement' was initiated by a series of reports in the mid-1980s describing the shortcomings of the market as buttressed only by conventional accreditation (Erwin & Knight, 1995; NIE 1984; AAC, 1985; Bennett, 1984; Courts and McInerney, 1993; Ewell 1991, 1988; Heywood, 1989). However, efforts by the states to mandate assessment have not been successful, perhaps because the methods were viewed by institutions and teaching staff as too intrusive and lacking in validity.

Another approach focuses on the development of 'performance indicators' (cf., Gaither 1996). These include measures of inputs (for example, number of enrollments, number of faculty, revenues, expenditures), outputs (credits and degrees granted, research publications), and overt measures of quality (admissions selectivity, fellowships and prizes won, peer or press evaluations). While helpful in providing an overarching quantitative perspective, such measures are too crude to serve as the primary vehicle for achieving accountability. In fact, an over-reliance on input measures such as expenditures per student can drive up costs and distort one's view of quality (Zemsky & Massy 1995).

More fine-grained techniques are needed. These would appear to fall into one of three categories: accreditation, assessment (European style), and process review (also called 'quality-process audit'). European-style assessment, described below, generally takes a broader approach than is typically described in the U.S. literature. Accreditation tends to be similar across national boundaries. The quality-process review described in this paper is a relatively recent phenomenon, and no generalisable pattern of adoption is yet apparent.

Accreditation and Assessment

Accreditation, as the term is used in the United States, determines whether an institution or a programme meets threshold quality criteria. The methodology generally utilises a combination of performance indicators, self-study, and peer review. As described above, performance indicators provide quantitative data on resources and performance. Self-studies represent an institution's evaluation of its own performance in relation to standards and its own particular aspirations based on both performance indicators and subjective factors. Peer review relies on the experience of outside experts who visit the campus and form their own opinions about performance in relation to standards. The general characteristics of U.S.-style accreditation are as follows.

- Accreditation deals exclusively with education, either at the institutional or programme level. Programme-level accreditation is most common in professional fields like accounting, business, law, and engineering and for institutions offering degrees below the bachelors' level. Institutional accreditation is most common for general undergraduate programmes.
- Accreditation is criterion-referenced. That is, it compares observed performance against pre-set standards usually determined by the accrediting agency. Accreditation evaluates whether an institution's objectives are appropriate for the degree level in question as well as its implementation of the objectives. Typical implementation questions include whether sufficient resources are available to meet the objectives and whether the resources are used effectively to produce the desired outcomes.
- Because accreditation performs a certification function, it must be performed by an agency external to the institution itself: for example, an arm of government or a professional association, a consortium of higher education institutions, or a free standing entity.

Accreditation assures stakeholders that minimum standards are being met and allows parties not otherwise familiar with the institution to evaluate the efficacy of credits and degrees against a known baseline. However, most systems have tried to graft an improvement agenda on to the traditional certification function. Whether the two can coexist effectively is open to debate. Cycle times represent one potential problem. Accreditation cycles are typically long (ten years for U.S. institutional accreditation) unless serious problems are uncovered. While long cycle times are consistent with quality certification, they may be longer than optimal for stimulating improvement. Indeed, they may be

dysfunctional for improvement in that, once accredited, an institution may sigh with relief and be content to continue the *status quo* until the next accreditation looms.

Publication presents another problem. The final outcome of accreditation—whether or not the institution meets threshold standards—is always published. Such publication is necessary for accreditation to perform its certification function. However, the report itself is often withheld to avoid institutional embarrassment, to minimize any incentive to withhold information in future accreditation rounds, and to avoid adversarial second-guessing. The U. S. institutional accreditation agencies have traditionally opposed full disclosure, but critics increasingly argue that disclosure is necessary because confidentiality undermines public accountability and prevents an institution's leadership from holding up informed public sentiment as a reason for improvement.

Assessment, as the term is used in Europe, normally evaluates the quality of specific educational activities. In other words, assessment goes beyond accreditation's binary rulings about certification to make graded judgments about levels of academic quality that fall above threshold standards. Assessment generally follows accreditation in using a combination of performance indicators, self study, and peer review. Some assessment systems have been criticised for relying too heavily on performance indicators and insufficiently on site visits by peer reviewers.

The general characteristics of assessment are as follows:

- Assessment generally operates at the subject or programme level. The United Kingdom makes separate subject-level assessments for teaching and research (Davies, 1995; Massy & El-Khawas, 1996; HEFCE, 1992a, 1992b). It is hard to see how one can make effective institution-level quality assessments without first assessing the individual programmes.
- Assessment can be organised by an external agency (such as government), an institutional consortium, or by the institutions themselves.
- Assessment tends not to be as strongly linked to external criteria as is accreditation. For example, in Britain and Hong Kong teaching quality is defined relative to an institution's mission, not according to some 'gold standard' of academic excellence. However, the UK's research assessment methodology has been criticised for overemphasising peer-reviewed publication rather than applied research that is more consistent with some institutions' missions.

Accountability generally provides the proximate motivation for externally-organised assessment, while improvement provides the motivation for institutionally-initiated assessment. However, accountability goals generally include improvement as an indirect benefit and internal assessment processes can be used an element of accountability (see below).

Accountability generally requires that the results of assessment be published, and that the

assessment results be expressed in a way that permits comparisons among institutions. Media interest leads to the production and publication of league tables, whether or not these were originally contemplated by the assessment agency. These considerations tend to work against externally-driven assessment's improvement goals. Many commentators believe that teaching assessment scores should not be used as *direct* inputs to the funding process. It is argued, for example, that direct utilisation motivates institutions to view the process adversarially, perhaps to the point of withholding data. (This problem is less severe for research assessments, since most research output already is in the public domain.) However, most people believe that the assessment results should inform funding judgments indirectly—if for no other reason that funding agencies have an obligation to take all available information into account when making decisions.

Externally-organised assessment cycle times tend to be in the range of five to ten years. They tend to be somewhat shorter than accreditation cycle times, but arguably too long to instill a culture of continuous improvement. Assessment's long cycle times are dictated by the cost of site visits and the large number of assessment units (which can approach the number of subjects times the number of institutions). Assessments organised by the institutions themselves are less affected by such limitations, so their cycle times can be shorter.

Quality-Process Review

As implemented in the UK, Hong Kong, The Netherlands, and in a few other countries, the quality-process review is an externally-driven meta-analysis of internal quality assurance, assessment, and improvement systems. Unlike assessment, these reviews do not evaluate quality itself. Instead, they focus on the processes that are believed to produce quality and the methods by which institutions, faculties, and departments assure themselves that quality has been attained. (See HEQC 1994 and 1994b for a comprehensive description of how the process is being implemented in the UK.)

Quality-process reviews are founded on the principle that good people working with sufficient resources and according to good processes will produce good results, but that faulty processes will prevent even good people and plentiful resources from producing optimal outcomes. Quality-process reviews generally take place at the institutional level, though there is nothing to prevent subject-level audits. In fact, The Netherlands Higher Education Inspectorate follows up on the implementation of institutionally-organised subject-level assessment results with what could be argued are quality-process reviews. Quality-process reviews are inherently less demanding than assessment, for the following reasons:

- one can determine what teachers do and how they do it more easily than one can determine the actual quality of teaching and learning outcomes;
- most assessments include the evaluation of both process and outcome, which

multiplies the dimensions of complexity;

- adopting the quality-process review sidesteps the need to predetermine output measures and standards; instead, ones asks whether the institution has done so and whether the institution's choices appear reasonable in light of its mission.

Whereas output standards may well differ across institutions, the standards for judging processes appear to be much less variable. Indeed, core process attributes like customer focus, effective performance feedback, and collegial consideration of improvement possibilities would seem to be universally desirable. Furthermore, process review cycle times can be significantly less than those for assessment because the reviews are inherently simpler. The process-review reports should always be made public. However, details based on self-studies, internally-initiated assessments, and plans for improvements need not be disclosed.

Some institution-level quality-process reviews focus mainly on the formalities of quality assurance: for example, on policy statements, rules and procedures, guidance notes, and meeting minutes. This is consistent with the 'audit' terminology which is still in use in the UK. It also provokes the main criticism of the audit approach: that it is bureaucratic rather than substantive. However, an emphasis on formalities is no means necessary. Although an institution may perceive such an emphasis if it has not internalised the quality culture, this may not reflect the truth. In fact, quality process reviews can and should concentrate upon the vitally important questions of what teachers do, how they do it, and how they acquire the performance feedback needed for continuous improvement. By following audit trails to look at school and departmental records and interviewing small groups of teachers and students, quality-process reviewers can evaluate the important informal dimensions of quality assurance—and at the same time determine whether the staff have internalised the institution's quality improvement and assurance processes.

Trade-offs Between Accountability and Improvement

Considerable tension exists between the accountability and improvement goals of external quality assurance programmes. The problem arises mainly in assessment, although it can arise with process reviews as well. The nature of the conflict is illuminated by the following polar scenarios. (The scenarios are somewhat overdrawn in order to highlight the nature of the conflict; however, readers may recognize elements of reality.)

Accountability is dominant; improvement is ineffectual

- 1) Assessment is performed directly by a government unit: peers are not involved or are not sufficiently involved to provide credibility; points of view from outside the academy dominate.
- 2) The system relies heavily on performance indicators, which may raise but do not answer, quality questions.

- 3) Institutions are concerned that some performance indicators and assessors' judgments do not reflect academic values and the realities of academic performance—or, worse, that they reflect political and ideological positions.
- 4) Everything is published; 'sunshine rules' (rules promulgated by political entities requiring that meetings and documents be open to the public) prohibit private communication between assessors and institutions.
- 5) There is a formulaic linkage to funding, with little opportunity for institutions to discuss and interpret outcomes.
- 6) The resulting 'compliance culture' will reflect a 'we-they' attitude, rather than a joint ownership of quality assurance and improvement. Information will be withheld so far as possible, and efforts will be made to 'maximise the indicators' while defending the *status quo* rather than seeking improvement.
- 7) Ironically, the attempt to maximise accountability actually reduces the amount of real accountability in the system. The effects on improvement are disastrous.

Improvement is dominant; accountability is suppressed

- 1) Assessment has been captured by institutions; peers are dominant; few points of view from outside the academy are considered.
- 2) Performance indicators are eschewed on the ground that nothing of importance can be measured quantitatively.
- 3) Judgments reflect traditional academic values as interpreted by a small group of peers—all of whom have 'made it' according to the traditional criteria.
- 4) Nothing is published, ostensibly to avoid the problem of data withholding; all communications between assessors and the institution, other than (perhaps) whether the assessment has produced a passing grade, are confidential.
- 5) There is no linkage between the assessment results and funding, or with anything else of value to the institution.
- 6) The resulting highly collegial process may well be praised for its sensitivity to academic values. Participants will own the process, and they may try to affect change incrementally—without challenging the conventional wisdom. However, such highly collegial processes fail to produce a sense of urgency. They may inhibit efforts to identify problems and search for solutions that may challenge established norms. Indeed, such processes may actually reduce accountability by periodically certifying the effectiveness of the *status quo*.

Ironically, the attempt to maximise improvement fails to elicit change outside the narrow band of conventional wisdom. It can actually inhibit improvement and undermine accountability.

Anchoring the two ends of the accountability-improvement spectrum makes clear that a trade-off between the two is required. The idea of a trade-off suggests that one does not have to make an unequivocal choice between the two goals: one can select a portfolio of quality-assurance process elements which, when combined into an overall system, balances the advantages and risks associated with each goal. That is what the Hong Kong University Grants Committee has been working to accomplish.

The Hong Kong Quality-process Reviews

To assure value for money in the higher education sector, the Hong Kong University Grants Committee (HKUGC) has embarked on a programme of quality-process reviews. This section describes the HKUGC's 'Teaching and Learning Quality-process Reviews' (TLQPRs), as conducted during 1996 at The Hong Kong University, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, the Hong Kong Baptist University, and Lingnan College. Similar reviews are being conducted at the City University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, and the Hong Kong Institute of Education will be reviewed in January 1999.

The goals of the TLQPRs are to focus attention on teaching and learning, to assist institutions in their efforts to improve teaching and learning quality, and to enable the HKUGC and the institutions to discharge their obligation to maintain accountability for quality. These goals are shared by the HKUGC and the institutions. The TLQPR programme follows the implementation of a performance-based funding model and a Research Assessment Exercise during 1994. The reviews are conducted by a TLQPR Panel consisting of eight HKUGC members, fourteen members from the seven HKUGC institutions, and two overseas experts on higher education quality assurance. All members participate in all the Panel's activities, including visits to their own institutions.

Methods of the TLQPR

The TLQPR begins with a preliminary visit by the Panel to each institution for the purposes of familiarising staff with the purposes and methods of the review, and the preparation by the institution of a twenty-page document describing its quality improvement and assurance processes. The review visit lasts one and a half days, which are utilised as follows:

- The first half day is devoted to three meetings: with the institution's senior leadership, with the leadership plus academic staff associated with the quality improvement and assurance programme, and with students.**

- The second half day involves meetings at the faculty level or with academic departments or quality programme support units. The Panel divides itself into six sub-groups for this purpose. Each subgroup meets with academic staff, students, and the leadership from two operating units, which allows visits to twelve units in all.
- The third half-day begins with a private session where the Panel formulated its preliminary impressions about the visit. The visit ends with a final meeting with the leadership and staff involved in quality assurance, where the preliminary impressions can be conveyed and discussed.

Report preparation proceeds in several stages. First, the institution's self-analysis and discussion notes from the early plenary sessions are scrutinised for emergent themes and examples of exemplary and questionable practice. (The self-analysis published as an Annex to the Panel's report.) The subgroup reports are similarly scrutinised, and a summary is prepared. The draft is reviewed by the Panel, and then informally by the institution for factual accuracy before submission to the HKUGC's Quality Subcommittee. For the first two schools, the 'Areas for Improvement' section was not included in the initial draft reviewed by the institution. This procedure was changed so that the school can review the whole report, including the 'Areas for Improvement' section, before it is considered by the Quality Subcommittee and the HKUGC. The institutions have committed to make the final reports public along with a statement describing the actions they plan to take by way of improvement.

TLQPR Dimensions

The Panel views teaching and learning quality from two different perspectives. First, the teaching and learning processes themselves: that is, the activities performed by academic and support-unit staff in performing their mainline duties. Second, the methods by which institutions, faculties, departments, and similar units work to continuously improve teaching quality and assure themselves that the mainline activities are maximally appropriate and well executed.

The Review Panel believes strongly that decisions with respect to both quality perspectives must be made by the institutions themselves, and that variety among and within institutions is necessary for an effective tertiary sector. The Panel's fundamental standard, therefore, lies not in specifying any particular approaches to the actual delivery of teaching and learning quality (the first perspective), but rather in asking whether institutions and academic staff have given careful thought to both of the quality dimensions and whether they can articulate and defend the choices made (the second perspective). This answers the sometimes-heard complaint by institutional staff that the TLQPR process is 'intrusive' and a threat to institutional autonomy. It is hard to imagine a less intrusive process, unless one believes that autonomy means no accountability—that no funding

body should ever question an institution's teaching and learning quality processes.

Teaching and Learning Processes

Teaching and learning processes can be described in terms of the following five sub-processes, which form one dimension of the Panel's inquiry. Each sub-process is illustrated by questions which might be asked of an institution, a faculty, a department, or an individual staff member. However, the questions are presented by way of example only. The Panel does not presume that all the questions, or indeed any of them, are applicable in any particular situation. However, institutions are asked to organize their documentation in terms of the five sub-processes.

1. *Curriculum design*: by what processes are curricula designed, reviewed, and improved?
 - a. Do faculty supplement design inputs from the academic disciplines with those from employers, current outcomes assessments, past students, professional bodies (where applicable), and other data dealing with 'fitness for use'?
 - b. How are the various design inputs integrated? How are controversies resolved?
 - c. What review mechanisms operate at the school and institutional level? How do they work?
 - d. Are internal processes supplemented with external review mechanisms such as visiting committees? Do the external reviewers include a cross-section of stakeholders, or are they mainly academics from other institutions?
2. *Pedagogical design*: by what process are the methods of teaching and learning decided and improved?
 - a. To what extent are pedagogical methods the subject of active consideration by professors, departments, schools, etc.? Do staff spend quality time working together on these matters?
 - b. How broad is the definition of 'pedagogical method'? For example, does it focus on learning as well as teaching? Does it integrate feedback about learning attainment with the delivery of academic content?
 - c. Have pedagogical methods been the subject of innovation? Have they been changed over time (e.g., to incorporate more active as opposed to passive learning)? Do they take sufficient advantage of information technology?

- 3 *Implementation quality: how well do faculty member perform their teaching duties?*
 - a. How broad is the definition of ‘teaching’? Does it include out-of-class student contact (including advising) and student assessment (including feedback about the assessments) as well as in-class contact?
 - b. What are the incentives for good teaching? What are the disincentives? (It is important to consider staff perceptions as well as the programmes themselves.)
 - c. How is teaching performance evaluated? (Possible mechanisms include self-evaluation, student evaluation, and peer evaluation.)
 - d. How are teaching evaluations utilised? For example, are they used in evaluation reviews? Are they shared among faculty as part of a mutual-improvement process? Do they result in specific self-improvement efforts, such as utilization of teaching development centres?
- 4 *Outcomes assessment: how do staff, departments, schools, and the institution monitor student outcomes and link outcomes assessments to the improvement of teaching and learning processes?*
 - a. To what extent do academic units use traditional types of assessment methods (for example, normed examinations, external examiners) to evaluate the performance of teaching and learning programmes?
 - b. To what extent do academic units use non-traditional assessment methods (for example, student satisfaction as expressed in exit conferences, feedback from past students and their employers, statistical measures of success in the job market)?
 - c. Do academic units feel responsible for promptly making changes identified by assessment as needed?
- 5 *Resource provision: are the human, technical, and financial resources needed for quality made available when and where needed?*
 - a. Are the activities needed to achieve and assure teaching and learning quality given an appropriately high priority in the institution’s resource allocation process?
 - b. How do staff recruitment processes promote and safeguard the quality of teaching and learning?
 - c. How does the institution’s incentive and reward environment further its teaching and learning quality agenda?
 - d. To what extent does the institution offer technical assistance and training to staff who wish to improve the quality of their teaching? To what extent are these resources utilised by staff?

Quality Improvement and Assurance

The questions given above are used to provide an organising paradigm for the Panel's inquiries and report, and for conveying examples of potentially useful quality assurance and improvement methods. They are *not* a template for judging an institution's quality programme. Nonetheless, the Panel does believe that, to be fully effective, the assurance and continuous improvement of quality require a degree of self-consciousness and articulation, which should be observable in the Review documents and site visit. Conducting a dialogue built around these questions affords an opportunity for determining the extent to which an institution and its teaching staff have internalized the criteria for quality assurance and improvement.

In addition to looking at the processes and subprocesses described above, the Panel has found it useful to consider four cross-cutting 'meta-areas' that pertain to the institution's quality assurance and improvement environment. Questions relating to these areas provide additional insight about the institution's efforts to embed quality-process principles into its organizational culture.

- 1) *Quality-programme framework*: do the institution and its schools, departments, and other operating units have well-articulated written mission, vision, and policy statements pertaining to quality and quality assurance? Do teachers and administrators know the content of these statements, and can they describe how they implement their content?
- 2) *Formal quality programme activities*: do the institution and its schools, departments, and other operating units have formal programmes to assure quality levels and spur continuous teaching and learning quality improvement?
- 3) *Quality-programme support*: does the institution fund projects and activities undertaken by special teaching development or similar units organised to aid main-line teaching and administrative staff in performing their duties? Does it fund special projects outside the teaching development centre?
- 4) *Values and incentives*: does the institution's motivational environment—its intrinsic and extrinsic reward structure—further the assurance and improvement of teaching and learning quality?

Sample Approaches

Figure 1 presents some exemplary examples that illustrate that the TLQPR Panel has come to call a 'culture of quality'. The Figure also shows how the four meta-areas intersect the five teaching and learning processes and subprocesses described earlier. The examples should be familiar to most readers and their relations to the row and column heads should

be apparent. For instance, the creation of a written statement about the balance of teaching and research can improve implementation quality, and a policy requiring the use of teaching development units under specified circumstances can do likewise. Student-teacher consultative committees (a formal quality programme activity) also can improve implementation quality, as can the inclusion of teaching evaluations as inputs to teacher reviews and promotion committees (values and incentives).

The Panel observed most of the practices in at least one of the institutions we visited. Some were the result of central administrative initiative, others occurred at level of a school, department, or similar operating unit. The examples illuminate the kinds of things the Panel has looked for in the TLQPR review, but the list itself is not intended to be definitive or prescriptive. Rather, the figure should be viewed as a source of ideas, and as the beginning of a benchmarking process that, we hope, will eventually propagate best practices across the Hong Kong higher education sector.

Conclusions

The Hong Kong Teaching and Learning Quality-process Review still represents a work in process. However, sufficient experience has been gained for the HKUGC to be confident that the methodology is achieving the desired objectives. As hoped, progress on the institutions' self-improvement agenda provides an important initial benefit. The TLQPR also will provide the HKUGC with a set of priorities to guide its discussions with institutions about teaching and learning quality. The institutions' leadership and staff are expected to vigorously pursue the same quality goals as the HKUGC. However, should problems arise, the HKUGC will be in a better position to promulgate its accountability agenda than it would have been without the TLQPR.

In general, the Panel was satisfied that sufficient improvement and assurance processes are in place and in prospect in the first two institutions visited to warrant a satisfactory degree of confidence about the delivered quality of teaching and learning in Hong Kong. Particularly satisfying were the initiatives put in place by the institutions given the prospect of the TLQPR. The event of an impending review provided an impetus for increased or in some situations *de nova* attention to elements of the teaching- and learning-quality paradigm described above. Given proper follow-up, such initiatives are expected to produce significant behavior changes. And while such behavior shifts do not guarantee desired changes in the academic culture, they represent a good starting point. The Panel also identified a significant number of areas where improvement is needed. The lacuna were particularly apparent when we looked at the degree of understanding, buy-in, and follow-through on institutional initiatives at the faculty and departmental level. (The Panel found a great deal to commend at the faculty and departmental levels, however.) Bringing these slippages in accountability to the attention of the institutions' leadership and staff represents the necessary first step toward improvement.

In summary, it can safely be said that Hong Kong's first teaching and learning quality-process review is off to a successful start. By focusing on substance instead of formalities,

the TLQPR Panel has mitigated the criticisms leveled against the UK's quality-process audits. The initial response to the visits has been good, and the reviews appear to be meeting the HKUGC's short- and long-term goals. The Panel will update and adapt the review programme as experience is gained and conditions change. Only time will tell how much the TLQPR will spur improvement and enable accountability, but the Panel and the HKUGC are optimistic about the prospects.

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Figure 1. Exemplary Practices that Illustrate a ‘Culture of Quality’

	Quality programme framework	Formal quality programme activities	Quality programme support	Values and incentives
Curriculum design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • programme-level mission and vision statements • course goal statements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • curriculum review committees • departmental reviews • external examiners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • visiting scholars, practitioners, consultants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intrinsic values based on ‘fitness for use’ as well as academic disciplines • accreditation rules
Pedagogical design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vision and goal statements favoring continuous improvement of teaching and learning methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teaching method councils or review committees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • workshops and individual consultations • organized teaching-method development projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • personal convictions about how to achieve learning productivity • desires to save time or money
Implementation quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • written statements on teaching quality and the balance between teaching and research • policies regarding student feedback on teaching quality • teaching and learning quality assurance committees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • student course evaluation questionnaires • student-teacher consultative committees • peer review of teaching • required participation in teaching development activities under specified circumstances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • active and well-funded teaching development units • expert assistance on the design and processing of teaching evaluation questionnaires • expert advice on teaching and learning quality processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • professional pride and caring about students • teaching awards at institutional and school level • inclusion of teaching evaluation in staff reviews and promotion committees • peer pressure
Outcomes assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • external advisory councils at school, department, and programme levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tracer studies of graduates • organized discussions with employers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research projects dealing with student outcomes • expert advice on outcomes assessment methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intrinsic desires to learn about one’s former students
Resource provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • planning processes associated with resource allocation stress teaching and learning quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • budgets based in part on student enrollments (“market forces”) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • special funds to encourage teaching and learning innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • desires to maintain or enhance staff size • teaching evaluation at the time of appointment