

PUSA Annual Report 2014

As the new Chair of PUSA taking the lead after the successful leadership of Joseph Lee all through the past years, and with the rising issues within the campus and beyond it, it has never been predicted as an easy task – eventually it is more than any person can prepare when looking back at this moment.

The year 2014 was marked by a campus-wide survey in collecting the views of all staff members on their work-life balance after the tragedy of a former CPA staff that took place last December. The survey questionnaire was distributed to all full-time staff members on 22nd January 2014 via email. In the end, PUSA received a total of 727 valid replies from staff, involving staff members from 62 out of 69 departments/units and two open forums (one in English and one in Cantonese) were held on 14 April to announce the findings of the survey, and the two elected members onto Council, myself and Vice-Chair Justin Law, also tabled the survey report in the Council Meeting in June. PUSA has made a few concrete recommendations, including an all-round degree appraisal model for a more transparent and accountable appraisal system to all ranks and files, establishment of a clear promotion framework for non-academic staff members, an immediate review on the teaching track route, and a critical review of the current assessment structure in the assessment process for greater transparency and representation. As a matter of fact, one of our PUSA Officers, Chun Wah Chan, was also invited to join into the Task Force on Work-Life Balance Review formed by the President in December to look into another work-life balance survey administered by the Senior Management, where he also expressed the views of PUSA there. To date, I have to say our focus is more on the structure of the current appraisal system on both the research and teaching track for academic staff, and the prospect of the non-academic staff that may lead to a distorted work-life balance. This stance, however, is not much echoed by the Senior Management. But PUSA will continue to fight for this cause.

In February 2014, the University was much caught in the news of the termination of contract with one of her Vice-Presidents (International and Executive Education) for reasons of good governance. Our stance was clear: a transparent, accountable and reachable leadership with fair judgment would be vital to the healthy development of the University, and this would always be the concern of PUSA. Simultaneously, PUSA was involved in the final input on the Proposed Salary Review and Reward System which was causing much debate and concerns among colleagues since the second half of 2013. PUSA did issue an open mail to the PolyU community showing

PUSA stances as early as June 2013. In the end, some of the important inputs that PUSA had raised were able to materialize, but because of the time lag of implementation of this System with the Appraisal System that had the first result announced earlier, PUSA had been receiving grave concerns from different rank and file staff members on their final salary review. On this, PUSA had communicated with the Senior Management, which has agreed to fine-tune the implementation this year.

I was re-elected into PolyU Council in June 2014 for another two-year term of office from August 2014, and then the entire EXCO stepped into a new round of busy schedule, expected and unexpected, to come. On the 'expected side', PUSA knew that the results of the 2013/14 Promotion and Staffing Exercise would be coinciding with the coming up of the first cohort of major review cases since the implementation of the 'up or out' exercise six years ago. Starting from mid-June onwards, and for the following two months, PUSA experienced a large number of help-seeking calls/emails on their review results. Unsurprisingly, what we detected from the Work-life survey data was somewhat witnessed in these cases, and after much deliberation, PUSA made a public statement in mid-September to show our concern to some of the problems of the 2013/14 Promotion and Staffing Exercise on contract term staff, as well as the Review Exercise on the regular term staff members. A formal appeal to the Senior Management was passed through the PUSA Consultative Group in September, and yet, to date, there is still no response from the Senior Management to our concerns. This will be one of the most important issues that PUSA will follow in December. Apart from the concern on Staffing Exercise, during the two summer months, another important agenda item of the Staff Consultative Group meeting was a follow up on the Framework for Career Progression and Promotion for Non-academic Staff that the Work Life Balance Survey of PUSA had addressed to. PUSA got the message that the framework would be consulted among staff members in the coming months. PUSA also put an input in clarifying the implementation details of the Language Proficiency Test that would affect executive/administrative staff at band 4 or above so much, as well as reflecting the adverse working environment of Phase Eight since colleagues had moved in one year ago.

On the 'unexpected side', like most of the Hong Kong people around, PUSA was to face with the rapid development of the whole Occupy Central Movement over the summer months which in the end turned up to the Umbrella Movement by end of September. As early as early July, PUSA issued a public statement to regret the arrest of civilians, including PolyU current students and retired staff in the midnight of 2nd

July at Chartered Road. On 27th September PUSA issued another public statement on our grave concern of arresting two PolyU students in the Civic Square. On 29th September 2014, PUSA and the HKPUSU announced a public statement to express the latest development over the weekend, after the use of tear gas by the Hong Kong Police Force. And both bodies, which was the first time in PUSA history, set up a Student-Staff Silent Protest Point opposite to the Democracy Wall from 30th September for staff and students to have another platform for expressing their views on the Umbrella Movement. The Point lasted for one month and closed on 31st October 2014. The future of the Movement is still to be known, but in the past months, PUSA has built up a very good rapport with the Student Union, albeit the fact that the current cabinet of the Student Union has stopped functioning since October. We believe that we have shown to the students that staff do care about them, and this is believed to be a good sign as 'staff' and 'students' are the most valuable assets of the university.

One of the main decisions made by the EXCO this year is that, in order to make the work of PUSA more transparent and accountable to the PolyU community, we introduce the electronic PUSA ALERT newsletter periodically to provide an update on the latest development of different issues. The first PUSA ALERT [Issue No. 1a and 1b] was issued on 19th and 22nd of September, covering six different topics that PUSA has been working on at then. In fact, the incidents captured above since the summer become inputs of the September issue.

What is more, September also marked the formal kick-off of a concern from PUSA on the Paper "Criteria for Evaluating Teaching Performance" produced by the Working Group on Teaching Evaluation Practices chaired by Associate VP (Learning and Teaching) Professor Chetwyn Chan. The latest information PUSA has secured from the Senior Management is that there will be campus-wide consultation on the Paper in early 2015, and this will be a main attention that PUSA will keep in close attention and hope to have constructive dialogues with the Senior Management on this issue. In addition, PUSA is also delighted to see the materialization of an increase in the amount of the medical benefit of retirees, and the extension of the free use of sport facilities to the spouse of the long serving retirees. PUSA has been and will continue to strive for more staff welfare for both current and retired staff members.

Lastly, as always, various PUSA officers and EXCO members have been diligently serving on other PolyU committees, e.g. the Grievance and Appeal Committee, Catering Committee, and the like. Justin and I myself as two elected Council

Members continue to sit in the Finance Committee and the Campus Development Committee, as well as the Board of Trustees. And as in past years, we have helped the Community Recycling Coop to arrange a two-day on-campus campaign this November to collect secondhand usable items from PolyU community for their sale at very cheap prices to low-income residents in Sham Shui Po. In addition, PUSA officers continued to involve in CFM matters, negotiating and mediating between CFM management and our CFM PUSA associate members. Needless to say, the relationship between PUSA and the Council members, in particularly the Council Chair, was kept good.

More challenges are waiting in front of us, and PUSA needs your support for every moment. The Association would like to thank all its members for their input and help.

Prepared by Rodney Chu and Linda Liu

For and on behalf of the Executive Council,
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University Staff Association (PUSA)

First draft on 25th November 2014; finalized on 8th December 2014