

## **PUSA ALERT (September 2014)**

### **Issue No.1a**

#### **Item 1 PUSA's concern on the assessment results of the 2013/14 Staffing Exercise for Academic Staff on Contract Terms and Regular Terms**

PUSA regrets to announce that after numerous rounds of formal and informal dialogue with the Senior Management since this August concerning the captioned issue, communication has come to a complete deadlock. The attachment in this mail (Attachment of 1a) provides a detailed account of the issues and requests raised by PUSA in the form of a letter addressed to the Senior Management via the PUSA Consultative Group, a formal PolyU body chaired by Professor Alex Wai (VPRD). On our meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> September, 2014, PUSA received a formal reply from Professor Wai, who represents the Senior Management. He had **rejected all our requests**. As the matter concerned has profound consequences on all academic staff on both contract and regular terms, **PUSA needs to consult and collect views from all academic/teaching staff** (members and non-members of PUSA) in the near future about pursuing this issue further. On the following pages, you will find a summary of our concerns that we raised, followed by a plan for action.

1. Since late June until the end of August, PUSA has been contacted by academic colleagues ranging from Lecturers to Associate Professors on the outcome of their Major Review or decision on their staffing arrangements. The nature of the cases involves: (1) those undergoing Major Review (the so-called 'Up or Out' exercise), (2) those choosing to gain promotion via the 'fast track', (3) those who have been granted an extended 'development period' and hence a delay to the Major Review exercise, and (4) those who have gone through an 'Internal Assessment' and received a result. After reviewing these cases, it became very clear to PUSA that the issues stemming from these cases not only affect the individual colleagues concerned, but they have strong implications for all academic staff who have to go through different assessments/reviews in the near future.
2. From what we have learned, there are five key concerns that we would like to alert academic staff about in the review/assessment process: (1) the role of USC in the decision-making process, (2) the unclear evaluation criteria, (3) the presence of an ineffective appeal mechanism, (4) the discredit given to committed colleagues who have served PolyU for a long time, and (5) the termination contract arrangement. In addition, we are shocked to learn that even a review/assessment case that had gained favorable support from all external reviewers and a majority/unanimous support from DSC and FSC was ultimately overturned by the USC.

3. The following highlights some scenarios that PUSA has difficulty in agreeing with:
  - 3.1. USC turned down the favorable assessment results of a case even when (a) all external reviewers fully supported the application, and then (b) DSC and (c) FSC unanimously/in a majority seconded the case.
  - 3.2. Colleagues who have received a Faculty/School Award for Research and Scholarly Activities or Teaching as well as a departmental award in teaching have ended up with a 'less than satisfactory' or at most 'good' evaluation in that award-winning area.
  - 3.3. In recognition of a staff member's contribution to the department, the DSC recommended the granting of a maximum 'development period' to the staff member. However, this was modified to a minimum 'development period' by the USC.
  - 3.4. The 'satisfactory' performance of a research track colleague on regular terms was downgraded to a negative assessment with superficial explanations provided by the USC. The colleague was then told to increase his/her teaching load substantially with immediate effect.
  - 3.5. Some departments have deprived eligible staff members from knowing the extended 'development period' mechanism and downplayed the heavy educational administrative work the department required earlier from the staff members, which could have affected the performance of the staff members in other areas.
  - 3.6. The 'Reconsideration Process' is to be assessed by the same authority that made the initial judgment of the case. This is discouraging as the authority would have to overthrow its own decision before passing the matter to another authority for re-assessment. So far, no 'reconsideration' case has been successful.
  - 3.7. The setup of the appeal mechanism is useless in a tautological sense: unless there are procedural irregularities, one cannot challenge the judgment decision of a Committee (usually the USC) even when one disagrees with the judgment assigned by it (examples given in points 3.1 to 3.4).
4. PUSA requests for (1) an independent panel to review debatable cases that PUSA has shortlisted from all cases that have come to our attention, (2) to offer staff members with a below-par performance in research but with good teaching performance a post in the Teaching Track, (3) to review the composition of the USC and the appeal mechanism, and (4) to respect discipline-related goal posts and reviewers' assessments.
5. The Senior Management responded to our concerns and requests as follows:
  - 5.1. The existing system is working well, and the USC has the absolute and final say on each individual case.
  - 5.2. None of the scenarios articulated in PUSA's point (3) is considered problematic, and all failure assessment results of the 2013/14 Staffing Exercise are fair and reasonable.

6. Based on the above, we hope you agree that there is a strong urgency for the University to rectify the current flaws in the Major Review/Internal Assessment policy rather than maintaining the status quo in the future. PUSA is now appealing to all academic/teaching staff to help us decide on the next course of action.
  
7. PUSA needs your input to follow up on the issues. PUSA will be calling for a meeting soon to solicit your views and to formulate an action plan. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to let us know your opinions or suggestions by emailing PUSA at [pusa@polyu.edu.hk](mailto:pusa@polyu.edu.hk).

Regards

Rodney Chu

On behalf of PUSA EXCO