

PUSA ALERT
Issue No. 9 (July 2016)

SUMMARY

In this issue, we are going to capture the main activities of PUSA from March to June 2016. First, we will recapitulate the staff forums organised by PUSA in May, followed by a report on the referendum held in March and the subsequent events that led to the LegCo hearing in June. We will then express our stance on the issue of institutional autonomy and academic freedom in the higher education sector, and capture latest EXCO movements. In the last item, we will conclude with some announcements regarding benefits offered to PUSA members and all PolyU staff.

1. FORUMS organised by PUSA in May

In response to two HRO emails issued to all full-time staff members on 22nd April on “Review of the Salary Review and Reward System (SRRS)” and the “Strict Compliance with the Regulation Governing Conflict of Interest (RCI) and Regulation Governing Outside Activities and Consultancy Work (ROC)”, PUSA organised two forums on 3rd May and 6th May respectively to collect staff views on both policies. A total of 78 staff counts from 26 unit/department counts turned up in these forums. The second forum was also attended by some senior staff members from HRO, who gave on-the-spot answers to questions raised therein.

Numerous views and opinions shared in the forums are summarised as follows.

On SRRS –

- a) The current SRRS appraisal model is a top-down way of appraising and gives no room for a two-way evaluation, let alone the annual appraising requirement has brought all stakeholders into a heavy administrative cycle of form-filling and reflections/comments-repeating exercise when a staff member (as well as the appraiser/DSC/HoD) faces the annual appraisal, contract renewal process and/or the major review exercise in one year;
- b) The transparency and fairness of the appraisal system vary in departments/units; what is good or bad is not clearly stated out, and non-academic units are facing very arbitrary definitions of assessment grades. All these have caused a certain degree of mistrust, ill-feelings and sense of inferiority among colleagues, particularly between staff of the two tracks – the Senior Management should not belittle this kind of implementation shortfalls, which may cause serious morale issue.

On ROC –

- a) Sometimes, although unwillingly, colleagues have to begin working for one’s department before an official contract is issued, but warning letters from HRO are still issued in the same tone; if the duty is a second contract within the University (most likely for the same department), this is based on needs of the department, and so why should this be considered as OA, and why could the system itself could not have generated a record of its own in light of the demand from within?
- b) HRO has been unfriendly when implementing the policy as if staff members are deliberately hiding their Outside Activities (OA) from the University, but without

empathetic understanding of the uncertainties that staff could be caught between the approval from immediate seniors and the urgency of the OA on the one hand, and the uncertainties with the honorarium amount on the latter;

- c) The entire reporting mechanism is unfriendly, and even for repeated OA the full data have to be filled in one more time, not to mention that in some aspects the reporting system is quite arbitrary (for instance there are two sets of Cost Recovery Charges (CRC) mechanism for reporting remunerations).

The responses given by HRO in relation to the above concerns are roughly highlighted below (the following only reflects the views captured by PUSA without consensus granted by HRO):

ON SRRS –

- a) HRO understands that the appraisal process has been seen as lengthy but this is for the sake of fulfilling check-and-balance purpose; a thorough review on SRRS could be conducted if deemed necessary, but in that case, it has to be after the 15/16 appraisal process which has been kicked off.
- b) Efforts spent on by staff members in appraisal and other staffing process such as contract renewal are noted and sometimes the procedures and data submitted are duplicated, but they are somewhat serving different purposes on staffing matters; HRO will explore with Senior Management and PUSA on how to minimise duplication of efforts.

ON ROC –

- a) The University has been requested by monitoring bodies to maintain an effective system in keeping track of outside activities undertaken by staff members, but the percentage of OA without prior approval has still been considered high. HRO noted that the wordings used in individual reminders might be ‘insensitive’ and too ‘template-like’. They will look into it in due course;
- b) A more user-friendly OA system will be developed to replace the existing one;
- c) For all those who have been reviewed with further information as warranted cases, HRO will rectify the record of the staff concerned.

PUSA has brought all the above concerns to the Senior Management in the PUSA Consultative Group Meeting chaired by Professor Alex Wai held in May. PUSA will follow up closely on all these issues.

2. FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY ON THE REFERENDUM IN MARCH

The launching of the referendum from 21st-23rd March by Staff Associations or related concerned groups from government-funded tertiary institutions led to the Press Conference on 6th April by the same organising bodies to announce the results of the referendum and follow-up action plans. One of the main achievements was the materialisation of the public hearing on Higher Education called by the Education Panel of LEGCO held on 18th June. Most of the organising bodies of the referendum, PUSA included, made use of this public hearing to voice out the issue of Higher Education sector in the last decade, making much reference to the Newby Report commissioned by UGC on “better governance of tertiary institutions” issued in March as an under-performed capture of existing issues, and linked up the referendum request of call of

ordinance amendment of various tertiary institutions as a way out. A related newspaper article was printed at the Forum of Ming Pao on 28th June (weblink).

3. PUSA STANCE ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY

In the last couple of months, PUSA was engaged in a concern wide spreading in local tertiary institutions on whether some lately appointed Council members of various institutions were intruding the academic freedom and institutional autonomy of the universities. PUSA was engaged in similar debates within PolyU, and after the issue of a public statement in the form of Big Character Letter on Democracy Wall on 21st April (weblink), a follow up newspaper article (weblink) was printed at the Discussion Forum of Ming Pao on 20th May to state clear the stance of PUSA on her position surrounding this debate: that all existing rules and regulations of the university must be respected, and that if there is to be any change, it must go through a vigorous transparent consultation process among all stake holders concerned. Such stance has been repeatedly expressed in the *last five* Council meetings since March 2015.

4. LATEST UPDATES ON PUSA EXCO

PUSA Chairman Rodney CHU of APSS was successfully re-elected into Council in May 2016 for a term of 2 years. He, together with PUSA Vice-Chair Jonathan Ming-yin CHAN, will continue to reflect views and concerns of all PolyU staff members into Council, the supreme governing body of the University. Please render your support to PUSA by joining as PUSA member and by considering to represent your department/unit and becoming an EXCO member if your department/unit has no PUSA representative hitherto.

Two of the most loyal PUSA supporters, Dr. CW CHAN of AMA and Dr. Jimmy CHANG of ITC retired from the University in June. Together, they have served the University for more than 65 years. PUSA would like to thank them for their immense contributions to PUSA, and wish them all the best in their retirement.

5. PUSA BENEFITS TO MEMBERS

On top of the latest promotion campaigns that have taken place in PUSA Office, PUSA is happy to announce that a couple of benefits to her members and/or all PolyU staff have been lined up, ranging from discount cards on petrol consumption (for PUSA members only), discount of nearby catering brands including coffee chain shops, and discount from Malls and hotels (for all university staff). Please refer to the latest information in the PUSA website (weblink) for details. During the summer, PUSA Office will remain open. Feel free to drop by for further information. You may also make an appoint to talk to one of our Officers. For enquiry or enrolment into PUSA as member (weblink for PUSA membership form), please do not feel hesitate to contact our Part-time staff Ms. Irene TANG at 27666990 from 1300-1700 during Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Executive Council
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University Staff Association